

What Kind of Rules?

We humans craft our planet's destiny.

An environmental law that protects the Earth is a miraculous human creation. It basically says, "We humans will make rules to redirect our own behavior on behalf of those who cannot make rules."

For instance, through the Endangered Species Act (ESA), we Americans have promised not to dam, clearcut, build homes on, build roads through, or otherwise take the last piece of Earth on which some embattled, unique plant or animal can still happily live. In fact, through the ESA, we urge ourselves to repair parts of some critters' homes we've already dismantled. In the parlance of Christians who notice Earth as well as Heaven, the ESA is one rule for "creation care."

Through the National Environmental Policy Act, agency people have to give everyone a chance to suggest innovative ways to avoid unnecessary harm when our federal government is making plans that might damage us, plants, other animals, or our respective homes.

Through the Clean Air Act, we have decided not to poison the air we share with everyone; through the Clean Water Act not to poison rivers and drinking water; through the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to allow some rivers to run free through stunning country.

The necessity for environmental law extends beyond the borders of any one nation. Through the Montreal Protocol, for instance, the world's nations decided to jointly and individually figure out how to stop making and using certain toxic chemicals that float up to the stratosphere and destroy the ozone layer that protects all living beings on Earth.

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In the past 22 years, environmental law has been one of my best friends, an incessant task master, and a bringer of great surprises. Amazing humans I never met wrote and voted for such laws.

A few joyful memories: The day our region's federal Court of Appeals decided the National Environmental Policy Act required the Forest Service in Oregon and Washington to honestly consider whether the agency needed to aerially spray forests and rural communities with toxic chemicals in order to kill native plants that were supposedly competing with small commercial trees planted in clearcuts. The day Willamette National Forest in northeast Oregon decided that the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area Act means that native bighorn sheep should be allowed to live in Hells Canyon as breathing, leaping animals, instead of being repeatedly wiped out by pneumonia passed to them by a few private bands of domestic sheep. The day Tasmania's Parliament decided Australian environmental law didn't support building the world's largest chlorine-using (i.e., dioxin-producing) paper pulp mill in farmland near the oceanic Bass Strait.

Lately I've been waking in the night, and working hard by day trying to head off and work around withdrawal of a host of environmental laws and regulations that have helped protect our country's 155 National Forests from unlimited road-building; logging; off-road vehicles; cows; and oil, gas, coal and mineral extraction. Our current president's administration is saying that forest managers will now be allowed to boot native species off our national forests, make claims long proven false by science, refuse to consider any alternatives when they make fateful decisions to destroy species or ecosystem functions, and skip analyzing environmental consequences of those decisions. In other words, Bush's administrators are removing a host of environmental laws and regulations that have protected our national forests from being simply the playing and killing fields of an unlimited number of humans and corporations, from dirt bikers to international oil companies.

Inevitably our government's attack on environmental laws is part of a larger pattern of releasing us from care for others. For instance, the administration is also attacking laws protecting humans: various civil rights; all people's right to be free of torture by U.S. soldiers, and other employees and contractors; and long-standing laws that allow us to obtain information about what our government is doing.

Regardless of whether a law is protecting vulnerable humans or vulnerable Earth, the basic question is similar: Are we going to continue to make and live by rules for ourselves that require and encourage us to revere other's lives? In other words, are we going to continue to agree to live by Golden Rules?

Mary O'Brien of Eugene was one of the panelists at the Public Interest Environmental Law Conference last week. She can be reached at mob@efn.org



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

you fairly assess something from the outside looking in?" Or, maybe Doseone should follow his lead and collaborate with Linkin Park?

Abe Nielsen
Eugene

OVERBLOWN

I have to admit that anyone who can say (2/24), "With all concern and compassion, I must say that Lois Wadsworth's reviews are a great cultural disservice to our community and are as obscene as those pornographic ads that run towards the back of the *Weekly*" with a straight face has managed a remarkable feat. Exactly what that feat is, though, I don't know. "Most Ludicrously Overblown Criticism," perhaps?

I agree with Lois Wadsworth maybe 50-60 percent of the time (and I thought she missed the boat, so to speak, completely in her dismissal of *The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou* — an enjoyable, idiosyncratic movie, though hardly a work of genius). And I suspect I don't share many of her assumptions about what movies are or should be, but I have never once doubted her honesty and integrity. For the letter writer to put Ms. Wadsworth's work on a par with the women-for-hire ads in the classifieds shows an astonishing lack of perspective.

The letter-writer also needs to look up the meaning of "pornographic," a word which can't legitimately be used to describe those ads; and if she's worried about her own mind, or those of her children, being poisoned by such things, then for God's sake stop reading 'em. It's that simple.

Michael E. Stamm
Eugene

VOW OF TRUST

President Bush wants to break the promise of the Social Security Trust Fund. President Bush did not once mention "trust fund." For 22 years, the government has vowed to keep the promise Alan Greenspan and Ronald Reagan made to the American people: that if we paid more into the Social Security system than was needed, the surplus and its interest would be used to pay benefits when baby boomers retire. Bush and the Republicans do not think that promise needs to be kept.

Lee Lynch
Florence

NO SERVICE, NO PASS

Since LTD drivers are being forced into a strike, we have no need to purchase bus passes for March.

That will include employer group bus passes. Seems to me that group passes are an implied bargain between LTD and the employers — guaranteeing service for those employees. Am I wrong?

I am encouraging all members of our communities to stand on the sidewalks in support of our bus drivers starting March 7. A show of support in numbers will be a strong message. Thank you!

Christine Gherardi
Springfield

IN HER DEFENSE

It was with equal parts bemusement and confusion that I read Sabrina Siegel's (2/24) letter regarding Lois Wadsworth's film criticism. Maybe Siegel doesn't understand that

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