

an environmental conscience: Wal-Mart is Good for the Environment. The campaign puts environmentalists in a quandary. Yes, Wal-Mart sucks, they say, but isn't conservation by any means a good thing?

Leftie blogs buzzed about it. On www.dailykos.com, a progressive chat forum, a blogger named "chris at organicmatter" wrote, "I have my doubts about Wal-Mart's motives, [but] it's important to recognize when a company does something positive."

Another blogger, "fragamemnon," countered, "You can't pretty up a pig with lipstick ... Wal-Mart, through its demand for low-cost goods, has worsened the global environment by forcing suppliers to manufacture in countries with lax environmental policies."

Regardless, noted "christine in nj," the Acres for America contribution is a drop in the bucket of the company's revenue. The corporation pulls in roughly \$33 million in sales every hour. "Sorry," she wrote. "I can't get excited."

Wal-Mart is Good for the Environment

Hearing its spin doctors at work, you'd think Wal-Mart was the best thing that's happened for the environment since trees.

Spokeswoman Stewart says that in 2004, Wal-Mart Inc. recycled more than 2.8 million tons of waste. (She couldn't say how much waste Wal-Mart produces annually.) Since 2001, Wal-Mart has participated in the National Parks America Tour, a volunteer-driven initiative to put more than 10,000 work hours into park projects. (Wal-Mart contributes by encouraging its employees to participate — unpaid.) And Wal-Mart requires construction firms bidding on Wal-Mart contracts to certify their project managers in storm water management. (This is a smart move, given that Wal-Mart has spent millions of dollars to settle alleged Clean Water Act violations for polluted storm water runoff from its parking lots.) "We're excited to be able to say, 'Storm water is zero tolerance for us,'" she says.

Stewart paints a portrait of Wal-Mart in bright greens and gold dust, denying that the Acres for America campaign is a PR counter-attack to negative publicity. "The Acres for America program is designed ... to let people know that we care," she says cheerily. "We want folks to understand that Wal-Mart is good for the environment."

Wal-Mart is Bad for the Environment

In *The Case Against Wal-Mart*, Al Norman, founder of the national Wal-Mart ball-busting organization Sprawl Busters, unfurls a litany of Wal-Mart's environmental misdeeds. Among them: Pesticides and fertilizers stored on Wal-Mart parking lots across Connecticut created storm water runoff that polluted the state's streams and rivers, leading state officials to call Wal-Mart "a serious statewide polluter." In 2001, Wal-Mart settled charges of violating the Clean Air Act at construction sites in four Southwestern states, and in 2004, the company settled charges of illegally selling refrigerators with chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) at Sam's Clubs.

Wal-Mart's developers frequently choose to build on sensitive sites such as wetlands, lakes, Native American burial grounds and wildlife preserves, Norman says. Making matters worse is that much of the environmentally destructive development is for

nothing. Wal-Mart has a habit of closing its discount stores in order to build larger Supercenters that turn more profit, Norman says. Wal-Mart has abandoned about 356 U.S. buildings and their parking lots, totaling 52 million square feet, or more than 1,000 football fields, of unused space.

In that context, Norman says, the Acres for America is too little, too late. "This is like trying to cover up a smell with perfume," Norman tells *EW*. "I don't think it works too well with Wal-Mart, because the odor of bad ethics keeps coming through."

Norman compares the Acres for America campaign to Wal-Mart's other goodwill gestures — gifts to the Children's Miracle Network, college scholarships for African Americans, the Teacher of the Year Award. He calls it "cause-related marketing" or, more bluntly, "loud giving."

Still, Norman doesn't knock the Acres for America program itself. "If they're going to give some land anywhere, fine; we'll take it," he says. "It's like a war reparation. This is not a company that cares about the land or natural resources. They have one of the worst track records in terms of the environment of all the corporations in America."

Norman admits that Wal-Mart isn't the only bad guy; he says that other big box chains such as Target, Home Depot and Lowe's are also guilty of environmental crimes. The big box prototype, a sprawling single-level store that lays waste to open space, is an environmental disaster, he says. "The only thing that makes Wal-Mart the #1 offender is that they're putting up more buildings than any other company in America. The other companies are not exonerated; they're just Wal-Mart Lite."

American shoppers aren't off the hook, either. Consumption fuels the Wal-Mart beast. "There are two things Americans do in excess: Eat and shop," Norman says. "I relate excess consumption to empty lives. The more our communities are torn apart, the less we talk to our neighbors, the more we fill our shelves up with junk that ends up in the landfills. And Wal-Mart, with the support of the White House, is encouraging people to go out and shop."

Resistance in Oregon

An old Oregon motto is "Things look different here." Wal-Mart, with roots in Bentonville, Ark., has found that to be maddeningly true.

While Wal-Mart stores paved across the U.S. with little resistance for decades, the company is hitting road blocks in Oregon. Land-use laws enacted in the 1970s shield high-quality farmland and wilderness areas from rampant sprawl. Wal-Mart's 28 Oregon stores are far fewer per capita than in almost any other state, as *The Oregonian* noted ("Wal-Mart takes on Oregon the only way it can: It changes," 5/30).

Most major Oregon cities, including Eugene, have drawn urban growth boundaries that restrict development on high-quality soils. City Councils in Hillsboro, Hood River, Oregon City, Medford and Central Point have denied Wal-Mart proposals on the basis of land-use conflicts. In Beaverton and Gresham, Wal-Mart has made architectural concessions to tailor their store proposals to community standards.

In Eugene, anti-sprawl and pro-labor activists fought Wal-Mart's proposed expansion on West 11th, which will convert the existing 149,000 sq. ft. discount store to a 218,000 sq. ft. Supercenter by adding a grocery component. And in Bend, more than

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