



Anything That We Love Can Be Saved

BY PORTLAND COMMISSIONER ERIK STEN AND ANGELA WILSON

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. made his mark on history for his tireless efforts to ensure civil freedom and justice for African Americans, and for his principled — and all too costly — commitment to nonviolence as a moral obligation.

Several years before the end of his too-short life, however, Dr. King's strong commitment to environmental health became a major focus of his work. Said King, "all life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny."

His words are as true for us now as they were more than three decades ago. The environment is where we live, work and play. It is the foundation on which we build our families, communities and futures.

Our nation — and the world — are at a turning point. We have inescapable evidence that our short-sighted approach to transportation, housing, agriculture, manufacturing and other elements of modern life have left a heavy burden on our land, water, air and health. We have engaged in the destruction of the environment that provides the very air, food, water that sustains us and all the other species that share this planet Earth.

In Portland, we need only look at our waterways and the health of local fish species for an indicator of the need to rethink how we impact our environment.

On March 13, 1998, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) issued a rule to list steelhead trout — residing in a swath of waterways reaching from Longview, Washington to Hood River, Oregon — as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Portland is the largest municipality in the affected region.

For too long we have engaged in basic municipal activities with little re-

gard for or knowledge of their effects on fish and other residents of our shared environment. Some of these activities can be grouped optimistically under the heading of "We Didn't Know Any Better." In this category, we might put things like the use of lawn pesticides, the practice of putting streams in culverts that hamper fish passage, and the construction of a storm water system that treats rain like sewage.

In another, more complicated category are those unintended consequences of other programs — the problems that might be called "We Meant Well, But..." In Oregon, we have achieved a great deal of notoriety for our efforts to stop sprawl — but at this point the environmental benefits of "smart growth" come at some costs to our watersheds (The more we pave over the surfaces of our watersheds, the more the natural flow regime in our creeks is disrupted).

Here's another example" for more than a century, the city has taken water from the Bull Run watershed for municipal use. As a result, the Bull Run river has very low flows during the summer months, depriving the threatened species of habitat.

In May 1998, the Portland City Council committed to eliminating or modifying those Portland government operations that contribute to the destruction of steelhead habitat, and to increase our efforts in restoring the health of area waterways. Portland Mayor Vera Katz asked me to oversee our citywide



Commissioner Erik Sten

response to the ESA listing.

The City of Portland sees the Endangered Species Act as an opportunity to bring our operations in line with our values and our vision for our city; to make good on our stated desire to be responsible stewards of our environment for ourselves and for the future.

Our choice is both simple and vital. Each of us must be willing to look at our everyday actions and determine how to be constructive, not destructive; how to contribute to the health of our homes, neighborhoods and watershed and not degrade them.

Poet and novelist Alice Walker recently published a book entitled, *Anything That We Love Can Be Saved*. The sentiment contained in that title must permeate the work we do to reconstruct our relationship to our world. This is a tall order. But — like Dr. King — I also have "an audacious faith in the future." The challenge is enormous, and we will only be successful if our citizens become engaged in and ultimately committed to the cause.

NonViolence And The Environment

BY HANK WESSELMAN, PH.D.

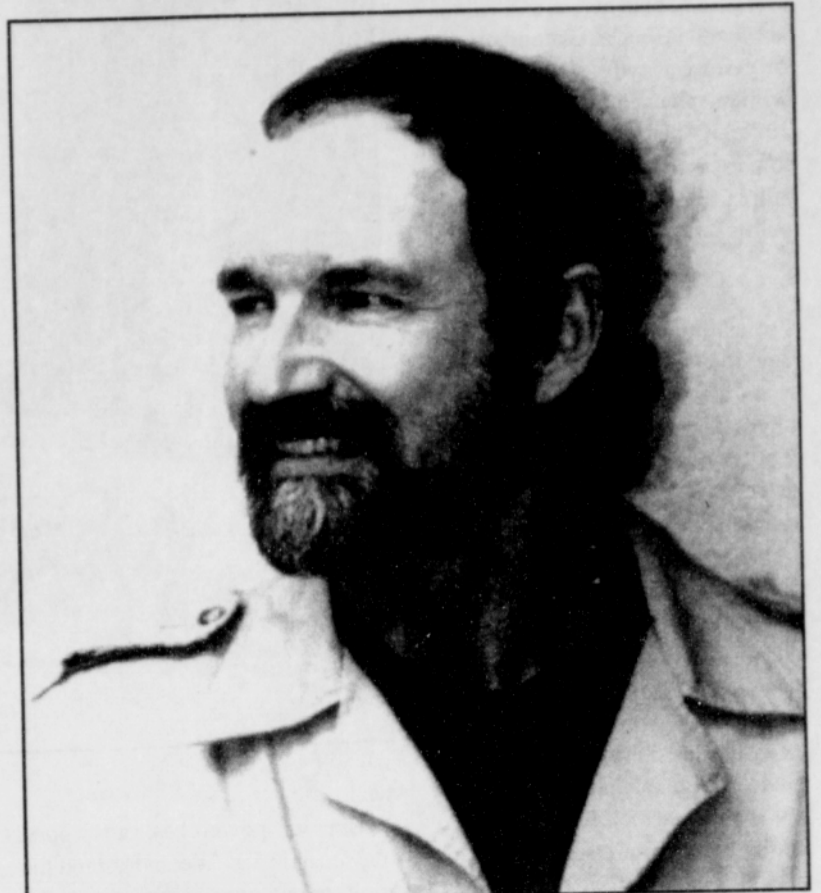
As a graduate student in anthropology back in the 1970's, I got to read the diaries of former missionaries and the fieldnotes of the early anthropologists who first came into contact with indigenous peoples. These Europeans had great faith in their own cultures' ability to conquer and control nature, and their writings about the traditionals' emphasis on living in harmony with their environment often reflect an attitude of condescension mixed with disdain.

After all, their God had given them dominion over the Earth and all its creatures, and the indigenous peoples' reverence for their land and the spirits that resided within it struck these Westerners as archaic, primitive and as superstitious.

Most well informed citizens today are aware that the environment which sustained the traditionals with such ease is under siege from a hundred fronts. Most also understand that the ultimate causes lie in the ever-escalating population explosion and the resulting overexploitation of the natural resource base.

This is easily seen in our prevailing mythologies which have tended to deify our 'founding fathers' while demonizing nature as an enemy to be overcome or conquered. As school children, we learned about the pilgrims getting through that first terrible winter and heard stories of the suffering pioneers surviving Donner Pass or being subjected to the attacks of hostile Indians.

Our God-given doctrine of manifest destiny prevailed, of course, and by the late 1800's, the West had been settled and 95% of the indigenous peoples of North America had been killed. But our ongoing preoccupation with nature as enemy prevails and can still be seen in the rash of recent disaster films focused on killer asteroids wiping out civilization or on tornadoes, volcanoes and earthquakes causing untold loss of life



Hank Wesselman

as well as staggering economic losses.

As the end of the millennium approaches, however, we seem to be taking stock of who we are, where we came from and where we are heading. This is a time of reflection — a time in which every established hypothesis is being challenged, from those of the sciences to those of religion.

The whole moral and ethical code of our society is under scrutiny as well, and the views we have of ourselves, our species as a whole, and the environment in which we live, are undergoing a profound paradigm shift in response.

We are becoming aware that we have traveled down a materialistic path as far removed from that of the indigenous peoples as it is possible to go. And we are coming to understand that

in achieving all our great technological miracles, we have treated the land with violence.

The looming spectre of global warming is a clear indicator that the abusive activities of industrialized man are steering us toward an environmental catastrophe of unprecedented proportions.

We are rediscovering something that the traditionals have always known. There are natural laws that have no concern for the legislated rights of special interest groups or for the corporate business man's profit margin. These laws are universal and supercede human statutes. They are non-negotiable.

The views of the indigenous peoples on land ownership are beginning to look a whole lot less like superstition and a whole lot more like wisdom.



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