
CREATION CALL

Interreligious Eco-Justice Network

Spring 2002

One swallow does not make the summer, but one skein of geese, cleaving the murk of a March thaw, is the spring. – Aldo Leopold

President Bush's First Year

An Environmental Disaster

By Kelly Benkert, ConnPIRG Field Organizer

Twelve months after President Bush was sworn into office, the worst fears of the environmental community have been confirmed. The environment has taken quite a beating under the President and his administration. From failing to enforce pro-environment rules and regulations to directly attacking the laws and provisions that protect the environment and human health, the administration has methodically chipped away at some of the most hard-fought victories of the environmental movement.

In a move that seems to epitomize his Presidency and angered much of the world, President Bush pulled the United States out of the 1997 Kyoto Treaty global warming agreement. This world-wide treaty, endorsed by more than 160 countries, seeks to reduce the emissions of the pollutants that cause global warming. As though pulling out of this agreement with the rest of the world wasn't enough, President Bush and his administration are threatening to roll back a key provision of the

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God, St. Francis, and Lawns

Imagine the conversation The Creator might have had with St. Francis on the subject of lawns

God: Francis, you know all about gardens and nature. What in the world is going on down there? What happened to the dandelions, violets, thistle and stuff I started eons ago? I had a perfect, no maintenance garden plan. Those plants grow in any type of soil, withstand drought and multiply with abandon. The nectar from the long lasting blossoms attracts butterflies, honey bees and flocks of songbirds. I expected to see a vast garden of colors by now. But all I see are these green rectangles.

St. Francis: It's the tribes that settled there, Lord. The Suburbanites. They started calling your flowers "weeds" and went to great lengths to kill them and replace them with grass.

God: Grass? But it's so boring. It's not colorful. It doesn't attract butterflies, birds, and bees, only grubs and sod worms. It's temperamental with temperatures. Do these Suburbanites really want all that grass growing there?

St. Francis: Apparently so, Lord. They go to great pains to grow it and keep it green...They begin each spring by fertilizing the grass and poisoning any other plants that crop up in the lawn. Lord, there is a subculture of the Suburbanites called Riparians, who are even more mysterious in their passion for grass. The Riparians go so far as to ignore the fact that their passion for grass also results in unwanted lake plants which, when they decompose, deprive fish of oxygen and cloud the water. Ironically the quality and beauty of their water, when unpolluted, is the largest reason for their being Riparians in the first place and by far the greatest factor in maintaining the worth of their homes.

God: The spring rains and warm weather probably make grass grow really fast. That must make the Suburbanites really happy.

St. Francis: Apparently not, Lord. As soon as it grows a little, they cut it sometimes twice a week.

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Clean Air Act known as the New Source Review. The New Source Review is one way which old and polluting power plants are held accountable for their emissions; it requires that plants upgrade to meet modern pollution standards if modifications are made to the facility. If the New Source Review is rolled back, thousands of extra tons of pollutants will fill our air, further threatening public health and the environment.

President Bush's egregious disregard for global warming and air quality was never more apparent than in the administration-backed energy bill that passed through the House of Representatives in August (HR 4.) Details continue to emerge about the closed-door dealings that went on between Vice President Cheney and the energy corporations, further confirming in the public eye that the bill was a raw deal for consumers and the environment. HR 4 is quite possibly one of the worst bills to have ever passed in the House. This legislation would give away \$38 billion in subsidies to the coal, oil, and nuclear energy industries, while opening environmentally sensitive areas like the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas drilling. The bill gives short shrift to clean and sustainable sources of energy, ignores significant increases in auto and appliance efficiency almost entirely, and would do virtually nothing to shield consumers from the problem of volatile prices. While the state PIRGs and many other environmental groups are working to ensure that a similar bill does not pass in the Senate, President Bush has made it obvious that he will not support energy legislation that does not fit his agenda.

Unfortunately, President Bush's anti-environment agenda does not stop at drilling in the Arctic or pouring taxpayer money into polluting industries. One of the biggest environmental victories in recent history is also on the administration's chopping block: 58.5 million acres of national forest that were protected from road building and logging on January 12, 2001 by President Clinton. Although the rule was finalized more than a year ago, it has yet to take effect. The timber and oil and gas industries and several western states have managed to tie up its implementation in court cases. Although Agriculture Secretary Veneman pledged to uphold the rule last May, the administration has failed to defend the plan in court, and has instead reopened the rule and moved toward undermining the national protection it offers.

The direct attacks on our environment and health by President Bush, the administration, and their allies in

Congress force the environmental community to be on the defensive. It is now more important than ever to be proactive to expose their schemes, counter the political pressure, and continue making the case for putting our environment and health ahead of narrow special interests. Our environment and our health depend on it. ♦

Kelly Benkert is the field organizer for ConnPIRG, the Connecticut Public Interest Research Group, a non-profit, non-partisan environmental and consumer protection organization with over 12,000 citizen members across the state.

A Sacred Trust

In October 2001, the Interreligious Eco-Justice Network presented *A Sacred Trust: A Forum on Religion and the Environment*. It was a huge success and participants left feeling invigorated and inspired. As a result, the Hartford Seminary and the Interreligious Eco-Justice Network decided to present another forum on April 15th, 2002 from 4PM to 9PM. Located at the Beth El Temple at 2626 Albany Avenue in West Hartford, the focus will be environmental justice and the featured speaker will be Damu Smith of the United Church of Christ. Formerly a Greenpeace organizer, Mr. Smith currently serves as the co-chair of the National Black Environmental Justice Network. He also founded the Black Voices for Peace in September in response to the September 11 terrorist attacks. Environmentalists nicknamed him "The Preacher" and his powerful, moving testimony to God and the earth is the reason why.

The panelists for this forum will be Rabbi James Rosen of Beth-El Temple and Ibrahim Ozdemir, a professor at the Ankara University Divinity School. Mr. Ozdemir is currently the visiting Islamic scholar at the Hartford Seminary and is one of the few in the nation to hold a Phd in Environmental Ethics.

After an organic meal, participants will be able to choose two workshops to attend. The workshops presented will be Climate Change Solution, A Walk in the Garden, Turn the Tide: A Program for Sustainable Living, Liturgical Resources for Clergy, Educators, and Worship Leaders, and Community Organizing and Advocacy.

Tickets cost \$20; the price includes dinner and advance registration is required. Please register early – the response for the last forum was wonderful and we anticipate a repeat performance. Call (860) 509-9512 for info. See you there! ♦

NEWSLETTER PRINTED ON NON-TREE PAPER

By Rev. Tom Carr

This edition of the newsletter has been produced on paper that comes from the kenaf plant. This is tree free paper, an alternative to paper produced from trees. There are spiritual values in forests and trees. There is something of a deep spiritual nature in trees. We have stated many times that we believe we ought to live what we believe so when we found this paper, produced by Vision Paper in Albuquerque, New Mexico, we decided to produce our newsletter on it. It costs more than the timber industry subsidized paper that comes from trees, but it is worth it. Below is a little bit about the kenaf plant and the process by which this paper is produced.

Kenaf is a 4,000 year old NEW crop with roots in ancient Africa. A member of the hibiscus family, it is related to cotton and okra, and grows well in many parts of the U.S. It offers a way to make paper without cutting trees. Kenaf grows quickly, rising to heights of 12-14 feet in as little as 4 to 5 months. Kenaf yields of 6 to 10 tons of dry fiber per acre per year are generally 3 to 5 times greater than the yield for Southern pine trees, which can take from 7 to 40 years to reach harvestable size.

Upon harvest, the whole kenaf plant is processed in a mechanical fiber separator, similar to a cotton gin. The separation of the two fibers of the kenaf plant allows for independent processing and provides raw materials for a growing number of products including paper, particle board, animal bedding and bioremediation aids. At the end of the growing season, the kenaf plant flowers. After blooming the flower drops off, leaving a seed pod behind. In almost all parts of the U.S. the seeds can never mature. Because of their African origin, they require an additional 60-90 days of frost free conditions to reach the point of germination. This means kenaf cannot run wild across the country like a weed.

Less chemicals and energy are used at the mill than in the process with trees and the pulp is totally chlorine free. No dioxins or other chlorine compounds are created or released in the manufacturing process. Because kenaf is grown for the fibrous stalk, and not the fruit or flower of the plant, insecticides are not required.

If you would like more information about paper and other products from the kenaf plant, contact Vision Paper, P.O. Box 20399, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87154-0399; ♦

God: They cut it? Do they bale it like hay?

St. Francis: Not exactly, Lord. Most of them rake it up and put it in bags.

God: They bag it? Why? Is it a cash crop? Do they sell it?

St. Francis: No, Sir. Just the opposite. They pay to throw it away.

God: Now let me get this straight. They fertilize grass so it will grow. And when it does grow, they cut it off and pay to throw it away?

St. Francis: Yes, Sir.

God: These Suburbanites must be relieved in the summer when we cut back on the rain and turn up the heat. That surely slows the growth and saves them a lot of work.

St. Francis: You aren't going to believe this, Lord. When the grass stops growing so fast, they drag out hoses and pay more money to water it so they can continue to mow it and pay to get rid of it.

God: What nonsense. At least they kept some of the trees. That was a sheer stroke of genius, if I do say so myself. The trees grow leaves in the spring to provide beauty and shade in the summer. In the autumn they fall to the ground and form a natural blanket to keep moisture in the soil and protect the trees and bushes. Plus, as they rot, the leaves form compost to enhance the soil. It is the natural circle of life.

St. Francis: You better sit down, Lord. The Suburbanites have drawn a new circle. As soon as the leaves fall, they rake them in to great piles and pay to have them haled away.

God: No. What do they do to protect the shrub and tree roots in the winter and to keep the soil moist?

St. Francis: After throwing away the leaves, they go out and buy something which they call mulch. They haul it home and spread it around in place of the leaves.

God: And where do they get this mulch?

St. Francis: They cut down trees and grind them up to make the mulch.

God: Enough. I don't want to think about this anymore. St. Catherine, you're in charge of the arts. What movie have they scheduled for tonight?

St. Catherine: "Dumb and Dumber," Lord. It's a really stupid movie about....

God: Never mind, I think that I just heard the whole story from St. Francis. ♦

CALENDAR

MARCH

EARTH PRAYERS

Monday, March 11, 7:30PM
First Baptist Church of West Hartford
90 North Main St, West Hartford, CT
(860) 521-2433

APRIL

EARTH PRAYERS

Monday, April 8, 7:30PM
First Baptist Church of West Hartford
90 North Main St, West Hartford, CT
(860) 521-2433

TOXICS ACTION CENTER CONFERENCE

Saturday, April 13, 9AM – 5PM
First Baptist Church of West Hartford
90 North Main Street, West Hartford
(860) 233-7623

SAVE THE DATE!

A SACRED TRUST: A SPRINGTIME FORUM ON RELIGION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Monday, April 15, 4PM – 9PM
Beth El Temple
2626 Albany Avenue, West Hartford
(860) 509-9512

MAY

TREE PLANTING

Time and Date TBA
West Hartford Reservoir
Contact Mindy Shilansky – (860) 286-1085

EARTH PRAYERS

Monday, May 13, 7:30PM
First Baptist Church of West Hartford
90 North Main St, West Hartford, CT
(860) 521-2433

President Bush offers Kyoto alternative

A Valentine to the Power Industry

By Terri Eickel

On Thursday, Feb 14, President Bush unveiled a plan to combat global warming, a more lenient alternative to the Kyoto treaty that he abandoned last year. Consisting of a series of tax credits and other incentives, the president's plan is completely voluntary. It is aimed at cutting greenhouse gas intensity by 18 percent over the next 10 years. His use of greenhouse gas intensity alarmed environmentalists and United States allies alike. Greenhouse gas intensity is the ratio of greenhouse gas emission and economic output. This means that the United States will produce more greenhouse gas, not less, just at a lower rate.

Under a separate plan, called "Clear Skies Initiative," President Bush introduced a plan to reduce mercury, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen oxide. The requirements under this plan are mandatory, however, the plan allows the use of pollution credit trading to meet those goals. Pollution credit trading is a system where dirty companies can purchase "clean air credits" from cleaner companies, allowing them to meet regulation without reducing emissions.

President Bush's plan met with a frosty reception from the environmentalists, politicians and United States allies. Senator Jim Jeffords, an independent from Vermont, called it, "A love letter to the status quo and the polluting past." "Today's new climate policy is like delivering the final divorce papers to the public and the world," Jeffords said. "And it is divorced from the reality of global warming."

Allies had strong words as well, with Phillipe Meunier, head of an intergovernmental task force on global warming, calling the proposal "window dressing." Japan also criticized the plan as too lenient and reiterated its commitment to the Kyoto Treaty. Japan's participation in Kyoto is widely considered to be critical the treaty's success.

David Hawkins, the climate change policy director for the Natural Resource Defence Counsel, noted that the administration's weak stance on greenhouse gases was in line with the wishes of the coal, oil and fossil fuel industry – the main sources of carbon dioxide. "Every number, every date, are the numbers and dates they advocated," he said. ♦

