

# Rachel's Environment & Health News

## #406 - Anti-Environmental Myths Answered

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The anti-environmental movement is aggressively promoting false ideas and is having some success wherever the local economy is in decline.

Here, in reply to the 10 most popular anti-environmental myths, we offer responses prepared by the Environmental Working Group (EWG) in Washington, D.C.

**MYTH No. 1:** The public is fed up with extremist environmental regulations which deprive people of their private property rights, restrict recreational opportunities, and put animal rights before the welfare of people. The anti-environment movement is a genuine grass-roots response to over-zealous environmental regulation, representing millions of everyday voters and taxpayers.

**FACT:** The anti-environment movement is really a loose coalition of industry lobbies and other special interests that create storefronts to make themselves look like grass-roots groups. Their "roots" are about as deep as AstroTurf. The members and contributors more often resemble Fortune 500 companies --corporations who have, for decades, profited from the unbridled exploitation of resources and public lands --and the few (often wealthy) greedy individuals who have made their fortunes feeding at the public trough. The regulations they seek to eliminate and characterize as "extreme" are the very rules which protect the human rights considered fundamental by all Americans: the right to breathe clean air, drink clean water, and to protect their homes and property from the environmental onslaught of those who would profit at any price. Further, the anti-environment agenda betrays not only the broad public interest, but contradicts the goals of its own supporters. For example, shrimpers allegedly support the anti-environment agenda because of its opposition to endangered species protections. But the coalition's stated goal of undoing wetlands protection would wreak havoc on the livelihoods of shrimpers, whose catch is dependent on the survival of these critical ecosystems.

**MYTH No. 2:** Unbridled environmental regulation has resulted in the loss of thousands of jobs in forestry, mining, recreation, and other industries.

**FACT:** This is one of the anti-environment lobby's favorite fairy tales. Environmental regulation has taken the rap for jobs lost to everything from mechanization, exportation, and economic downturns, to downright corporate profiteering. In fact, environmental protection is a growth industry. Every year, the environmental industry grows by five to six percent and what is today a \$200 billion a year international industry, is projected to rise to a \$300 billion dollar a year industry by the end of the decade.

To remain globally competitive, U.S. firms must compete with international businesses that employ pollution prevention, energy conservation, and new technologies to more efficiently produce products. Environmental regulations will foster the innovation and investment required for a strong business future. (For example, see REHW #344.)

**MYTH No. 3:** For over 100 years, public lands have been available for grazing sheep and cattle. Now, preservationists are threatening to lock up the land and put family livestock operations out of business by increasing grazing fees.

**FACT:** Only two percent of all livestock operators graze their cattle on public lands. The government's cheap grazing fees give an unfair competitive advantage to corporations and wealthy individual operators over small family ranchers, who must pay the full cost of grazing their cattle on private lands. Meanwhile, livestock overgrazing has eroded soils and despoiled riparian [stream-side] areas, taking a huge toll on wildlife habitat, and the scenic, archaeological, and recreational values of public land that all Americans own.

**MYTH No. 4:** We don't need to save every endangered species and

subspecies, particularly when people's jobs are at stake. Extinction is a natural part of evolution. Using science, we can determine a balanced approach for protecting important species and jobs.

**FACT:** While extinction is a natural part of evolution, human activities have accelerated it 10,000 times. Natural selection is the process for strengthening biodiversity, while the unnatural selection prompted by people artificially robs the Earth of its most important genetic resources.

The genetic information inside one mouse would fill all 15 editions of the Encyclopedia Britannica published since 1768. It is this wealth of information which provides scientists with the key to new miracle cures like taxol (derived from the Pacific Yew tree), which benefits women suffering from ovarian and breast cancer, and digitalis (derived from the purple foxglove), a drug used to treat over three million Americans suffering from heart disease. The cure for diseases like AIDS may be hidden in one of the 100 species which become extinct every day. And many jobs rely on the health of species and ecosystems --from a billion dollar fishing industry to the pharmaceutical industry. The annual value of drugs derived from plants alone is over \$40 billion.

**MYTH No. 5:** Wetlands regulation has denied ordinary citizens opportunities to build homes and businesses. If protecting the environment is in the interest of "the public good," then the public ought to compensate individuals for the lost value of their property.

**FACT:** The number of individuals who are denied the total use of their property from wetlands regulation are few and far between. In fact, over 98 percent of permit applications for building in wetlands are approved. Wetlands regulation protects millions of American property owners whose homes would be flooded and access to clean water disrupted by unregulated development. Not only do more than 40 percent of endangered species rely on wetlands habitat, wetlands support billion dollar commercial and recreational fishing industries.

**MYTH No. 6:** Much of the so-called "wetlands" acreage protected by the Clean Water Act are not really wetlands. Some areas aren't even wet.

**FACT:** It is true that not every wetland appears wet. But, does the inability to distinguish between a priceless diamond and a worthless piece of glass make the diamond any less valuable? In fact, scientists tell us that so-called "part-time" wetlands are among the most ecologically valuable in preventing floods, recharging groundwater and filtering out pollutants. Determining which wetlands merit protection requires competent scientific judgments, not political rhetoric driven by profit-hungry special interests.

**MYTH No. 7:** "Global warming" is a myth generated by scientists in the pockets of the environmental lobby; the extreme predictions of the past several years have not come true. This is the environmentalists' traditional Chicken Little approach to obstructing development and economic growth.

**FACT:** Global climate change has been established by credible scientists as a real threat to public health and safety. Natural factors, such as the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo, may temporarily mask the effect of global warming. Still, if left unchecked, global climate change could develop deserts where croplands now flourish, dramatic sea-level changes would flood low-lying areas, and shifting rainfall patterns would affect crops and fisheries. The industries who try to hide the inevitability of global warming distort the facts in order to protect short-term profits, but may be hurting themselves in the long run. Some foreign-owned companies have already responded to American consumers' demand for products that produce fewer greenhouse gases, while others are profiting from the technology used to cut emissions. By ignoring these trends, American businesses may be left in the dust in the race for global markets.

MYTH No. 8: All public lands should be managed for multiple use: mineral/hydrocarbon development, timber harvest, grazing, and public recreation. All these activities can be safely conducted in national parks and wilderness areas without destroying critical ecosystems.

mining; forests; timber industry; right-wing extremism; wildlife habitat; habitat destruction; multiple use; trees; christian philosophy;

FACT: The Federal Land Policy Management Act (P.L. 94-579) requires the federal government and the Secretary of the Interior to carry out "...a combination of balanced and diverse resource uses that takes into account the long-term needs of future generations for renewable and non-renewable resources including, but not limited, to recreation, range, timber, minerals, watershed, wildlife and fish and natural scenic, scientific and historical values; and harmonious and coordinated management of the various resources without permanent impairment of the productivity of the land and the quality of the environment with consideration being given to the relative values of the resources and not necessarily to the combination of uses that will give the greatest economic return of the greatest unit output."

"Balanced" and "multiple" use of resources are policies set down in law for the responsible management of public lands. Unfortunately, the environmental destruction lobby has adopted these as buzzwords to justify the dominant exploitative use of public lands at the expense of every other natural resource value --trees that prevent global warming, riparian areas critical to wildlife survival, and clean groundwater for human drinking water supplies.

MYTH No. 9: Environmentalists essentially practice pagan tree worship. Environmentalists are disconnected from what's important to people. They're anti-God and anti-American.

FACT: This argument is based in as little truth as the absurd McCarthy- era witch hunts of the 1950s with suspected "communists" lurking behind every door. Today, more than 80 percent of Americans consider themselves "environmentalists," and conservation is as patriotic as motherhood and apple pie.

The conservation ethic has its foundation in Judeo-Christian faiths. The Book of Genesis tells of God giving humankind dominion over his creation. Those who suggest destroying natural resources destroy not only God's gift, but the resources essential to the survival of humankind.

MYTH No. 10: Nature is a hierarchy, and humans are at the top of the heap. Science can achieve a balance between the needs of people and the environment, and can even improve on natural systems. Extreme environmentalists stand in the way of human progress and threaten the quality of human life.

FACT: The fate of the natural world and survival of humans are inextricably linked. The environmental movement has made great strides over the past twenty years to improve the quality of life for people -- from improving air and water quality by pressing for the Clean Water and Clean Air Acts, to warning communities about the danger of toxic releases from manufacturers. The naive belief that corporate scientists can replace what nature took thousands of years to create will deprive our children of natural resources.

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