

Fact or Fiction?



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Is Environmentalism Dead?

An April 20, 2004 Gallup poll showed that only one percent of Americans believe the environment is the most important problem facing the nation today. That finding followed a 2000 poll reporting that 41 percent of Americans believe environmental activists are “extremists,” up from 32 percent in 1996.¹

A recent online report, *The Death of Environmentalism*, by Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus, offers some thoughts about the reasons for the American public’s declining support for environmental activism. They say activist groups today are too extremist, too polarizing, and too lacking in credibility to achieve the broad-based support of the American people. “The institutions that define what environmentalism means boast large professional staffs and receive tens of millions of dollars every year from foundations and individuals. Given these rewards, it’s no surprise that most environmental leaders neither craft nor support proposals that could be tagged ‘non-environmental.’ Doing otherwise would do more than threaten their status; it would undermine their brand.”²

In reviewing the report, Orson Aquilar agreed, “Environmentalists give ‘I Have A Nightmare’ speeches and offer technical proposals far removed from the lives of ordinary Americans.”³ Rick Johnson, executive director of the Idaho Conservation League, added, “While our movement does much good, and conservation measures actually did well in the recent elections, we should be mindful of our failings, be they real or perceptions increasingly held by the public. Environmentalists are often viewed as detached from the lives of regular people, and in a public interest movement, this is very bad news. Most people wake up in the morning trying to reduce what they have to worry about. Environmentalists wake up trying to increase it.”⁴

The Gallup results mentioned earlier closely tracked a BBC poll in Britain, where respondents ranked global warming last among a list of issues including health care, crime, and education.⁵ A tie-in with this is The Copenhagen Solution (Consensus) which was developed by Danish statistician Bjorn Lomborg. The Consensus is an attempt by leading economists (including three Nobelists) to set priorities for spending using traditional cost-benefit analysis. The group explored opportunities for addressing ten of the most serious challenges facing the world today: climate change, communicable diseases, conflicts, access to education, financial instability, governance and corruption, malnutrition and hunger, migration, sanitation and access to clean water, and subsidies and trade barriers. They were asked to address these challenge areas and answer the question, “What would be the best ways of advancing global welfare, and particularly the welfare of developing countries, supposing that an additional \$50 billion of resources were at governments’ disposal?” Challenge papers, commissioned from acknowledged authorities in each area of policy, set out more than 30 proposals in descending order of desirability. In ordering the proposals, the panel was guided predominantly by consideration of economic costs and benefits.⁶

The results? Compared to other opportunities such as communicable diseases, malnutrition and hunger, sanitation and water, and the rest, climate change ranked last on the list.⁷ Vernon Smith, Professor of Economics and Law at George Mason University, provided this summation, “It is clear from both the science and the economics of intervention that those of us who care about the environment are not well advised to favor initiating a costly attempt to reduce greenhouse gases build-up in the atmosphere in the near future based on available information. Although the

ultimate danger may turn out to prompt action, the current evidence indicates that it is much too soon to act *relative to the many other important and pressing opportunities that demand immediate attention.*”⁸ (Note, the italics are Smith’s, not mine.)

Back to *The Death of Environmentalism* report. As might be expected, this caused considerable uproar among the environmental movement community. Carl Pope, the Sierra Club’s executive director, was “deeply disturbed and angered by it.”⁹ Other leader of environmental groups also expressed varying degrees of dyspepsia over the fracas.⁵

An interesting point is that both Shellenberger and Nordhaus run consulting businesses that ‘strategize for foundations’ and ‘craft strategic initiatives aimed at reframing old debates.’ William Tucker notes, “It is not insignificant that *The Death of Environmentalism* was released at the retreat of the environmental Grantmakers Association in Kauai last October [2004]. What’s really at stake here is the millions of dollars that liberal foundations hand out each year in search of a cleaner environment. Far from re-examining the purposes of environmentalism, Shellenberger and Nordhaus are making their own pitch.”¹⁰ Here’s some of what they offer in the report:

“One tool we have to offer is the research we are doing as part of our Strategic Values Project, which is adapting corporate marketing research for use by the progressive community ... Readers of this report who are interested in learning more about Strategic Values Project ... should feel welcome to contact us.”¹¹

So is Environmentalism Dead?

A famous quote of Mark Twain sums up my view. “The report of my death is greatly exaggerated.” I surely don’t think environmentalism is dead. The interna-

tional environmental movement is now a \$6 billion per year industry and it will not just fade away.¹²

The major upset for the movement at present is that global warming, to them the mother of all environmental scares, hasn't been taken more seriously. As *The Wall Street Journal* has noted, "Adopting the Kyoto Protocol to curb carbon dioxide emissions, for instance, might reduce warming to 6.1°C by the year 2300, compared with an anticipated 7.3° warming if nothing is done. This 'achievement'—a world that is on average 1.2 degrees cooler than it otherwise would be in 300 years—comes with a price tag of about \$94 trillion (in 1990 dollars). The benefits of tackling climate change are far into the future and the substantial costs are up front and immediate. The uncertainties associated with both the projections and the consequences of change cannot compete with other urgent issues we confront.¹³ Obviously, one could help a lot of hungry folks with poor sanitation for \$94 trillion 1990 dollars rather than spend it on something that may or may not be a problem many years down the road.

I'm encouraged that some folks in the movement seem open to change. Being green is no longer as simple as it used to be. Some major conservation groups are beginning to realize that the old hard-line protectionist approach simply doesn't work.¹⁴ One example: the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and Greenpeace apparently have reversed their long standing opposition to the use of DDT to fight malaria.¹⁵

Fred Pearce notes, "The WWF is just one among many science based environmental groups that are engaged in a savage reappraisal of their philosophy. In their self imposed task of saving everything from rainforests and medicinal plants to elephants and whales, they are coming to a heretical conclusion: conservation—at least in its hard line forms—is its own worst enemy. Far from saving endangered species and their habitats, it often accelerates their destruction, because it alienates local people and forces trade underground. You would never guess this upheaval was going on when you read the organization's promotional literature on the fight to preserve the planet's last wilderness. But the truth is they are beginning to think that banning hunting and fishing, erecting fences around the forests to keep out poachers, and outlawing trade in endangered species are about the least effective ways of saving threatened species. Sometimes the best way forward is to dismantle existing protection laws and start again."¹⁴ So, we get mixed messages from these organizations. I wish I could be more optimistic about the

directions of the environmental movement, but I still have a lot of doubt. Regardless, environmentalism isn't dead.

References

1. James M. Taylor, "Death of Environmentalism Essay Ignites Dissent," *Environment & Climate News*, 8, 13, June 2005.
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3. Orson Aquilar, "Why I am not an environmentalist," *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 19, 2005, Page B9.
4. Rick Johnson, "The Death of Environmentalism," ONEList online, December 7, 2004.
5. Steven F. Hayward, *Index of Leading Environmental Indicators 2005*, (San Francisco, Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy, 2005), 16.
6. *Global Crises, Global Solutions*, Bjorn Lomborg, Editor, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004), 605.
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8. *Global Crises, Global Solutions*, Bjorn Lomborg, Editor, 635.
9. www.sierraclub.org/pressroom/messages/2004december_pope.asp.
10. William Tucker, "Environmentalism's Nervous Breakdown," *The American Enterprise* online, www.taemag.com, April 19, 2005.

11. Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus, *The Death of Environmentalism*, 7.
12. Paul Driessen, *Eco-Imperialism*, (Bellevue, Washington, Free Enterprise Press, 2003), 134.
13. "The Copenhagen Solution," Opinion Journal from *The Wall Street Journal* editorial page, June 11, 2005.
14. Fred Pearce, "A greyer shade of green," *New Scientist*, 177, 41, June 2003.
15. Nicholas D. Kristof, "It's Time to Spray DDT," *New York Times*, January 8, 2005.

Answers to I.Q. Quiz #420

1. Subtract 32 from the Fahrenheit value and multiply by 5/9 (0.5555555555)
2. Divide by 9.29.
3. Divide by 0.929.
4. Divide by 7.49
5. Multiply by 0.1

IMPORTANT

NAMF LIFE INSURANCE PROGRAM MEMBERS

IF YOU ARE CURRENTLY ENROLLED IN THE NAMF SPONSORED LIFE INSURANCE PROGRAM, NAMF has terminated its relationship with Lawson Hawks Insurance Agency as the broker for the current life insurance program. We have contracted with a new brokerage firm Hayward Tilton & Rolapp Insurance Associates, Inc. who will collect all of the premiums and forward to AIG American General directly. Checks should be made payable to AIG, please reference policy G159972 and send to NAMF/AIG Insurance Trust c/o Hayward Tilton & Rolapp Insurance Associates, Inc., 888 South Disneyland Drive, Suite 400, Anaheim, CA 92802.

Lawson Hawks has not provided NAMF with a list of those involved with the life insurance program, so please send us a copy of your most recent invoice from Lawson Hawks Insurance Agency.

If you have any questions regarding the billing for this program please contact Adam Baillie or Paul Bronson at 714-905-1923.

NAMF plans to continue to provide our members with premium programs. We are looking to offer an enhanced menu of insurance programs. Even if you do not participate in this program it would be helpful if you could provide headquarters with a census consisting of each full time employee's date of birth and gender.

Please feel free to contact headquarters, at 202-457-8403, with any questions.