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Hard Choices: Environmentalists and the Forests

by Patrick Moore, Ph.D.

More than twenty years ago, I was one of a dozen or so activists who founded Greenpeace in the basement of the Unitarian Church in Vancouver. The Vietnam war was raging and nuclear holocaust seemed closer every day. We linked peace, ecology, and a talent for media communications and went on to build the world's largest environmental activist organization. By 1986, Greenpeace was established in 26 countries and had an annual income of over \$100 million.

More than twenty years ago, I was one of a dozen or so activists who founded Greenpeace in the basement of the Unitarian Church in Vancouver.

In 1986, the mainstream of western society was busy adopting an environmental agenda that was considered radical only fifteen years earlier. By 1989, the combined impact of Chernobyl, the Exxon Valdez, the threat of global warming, and the ozone hole clinched the debate. All but a handful of reactionaries joined the call for sustainable development and environmental protection.

Whereas previously the leaders of the environmental movement had found themselves on the outside railing at the gates of power, they were now invited to the table in boardrooms and caucuses around the world. For environmentalists, accustomed to the politics of confrontation, this new era of acceptance posed a challenge as great as any campaign to save the planet.

For me, Greenpeace is about ringing an ecological fire alarm, awakening mass consciousness to the true dimensions of our global predicament, pointing out the problems and defining their nature. Greenpeace doesn't necessarily have the solutions to those

problems and certainly isn't equipped to put solutions into practice. That requires the combined efforts of environmentalists, governments, public and private institutions, and corporations. This demands a high degree of cooperation and collaboration. The politics of blame and shame must be replaced with the politics of working together and win-win.

Collaboration versus Confrontation

It was no coincidence that a roundtable, consensus-based negotiation process was adopted by thousands of environmental leaders. It is the logical tool for working in the new spirit of green cooperation. It may not be a perfect system for decision-making, but like Winston Churchill said about democracy, "It's the worst form of government except for all the others." A collaborative approach promises to give environmental issues their fair consideration in relation to traditional economic and social priorities.

Some environmentalists didn't see it that way. Indeed, there had always been a minority of extremists who took a "No Compromise in Defense of Mother Nature" position. They were the monkey-wrenchers, tree-spikers, and boat scuttlers of the Earth First! and Paul Watson variety. Considered totally unacceptable by the largely pacifist intellectual mainstream of the movement, they were a colorful but renegade element.

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Since its founding in the late 1960s, the modern environmental movement had created a vision that was international in scope and had room for people of all political persuasions. We prided ourselves in subscribing to a philosophy that was "trans-political, trans-ideological, and trans-national" in character. For Greenpeace, the Cree legend "Warriors of the Rainbow" referred to people of all colors and creeds,

working together for a greener planet. The traditional sharp division between left and right was rendered meaningless by the common desire to protect our life support systems. Violence against people and property were the only taboos. Non-violent direct action and peaceful civil disobedience were the hallmarks of the movement. Truth mattered and science was respected for the knowledge it brought to the debate.

Now this broad-based vision is challenged by a new philosophy of radical environmentalism. In the name of "deep ecology," many environmentalists have taken a sharp turn to the ultra-left, ushering in a mood of extremism and intolerance. As a clear signal of this new agenda, in 1990 Greenpeace called for a "grassroots revolution against pragmatism and compromise."

As an environmentalist in the political center, I now find myself branded a traitor and a sellout by this new breed of saviors. My name appears in Greenpeace's "Guide to Anti-Environmental Organizations." Even fellow Greenpeace founder, Bob Hunter, refers to me as the "eco-Judas."

Yes, I am trying to help the Canadian forest industry improve its performance so we might be proud of it again. As chair of the Forest Practices Committee of the Forest Alliance of British Columbia, I have led the process of drafting and implementing the Principles of Sustainable Forestry that have been adopted by a majority of the industry. These Principles establish goals for environmental protection, forest management, and public involvement. They are providing a framework for dialogue and action toward improvements in forest practices. Why shouldn't I make a contribution to environmental reform in the industry in which my grandfather and father worked for over 90 years?

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The Rise of Eco-Extremism

Two profound events triggered the split between those advocating a pragmatic or "liberal" approach to ecology and the new "zero-tolerance" attitude of the extremists. The first event, mentioned previously, was the widespread adoption of the environmental agenda by the mainstream of business and government. This left environmentalists with the choice of either being drawn into collaboration with their former "enemies" or of taking ever more extreme positions. Many environmentalists chose the latter route. They rejected the concept of "sustainable development" and took a strong anti-development stance.

Surprisingly enough, the second event that caused the environmental movement to veer to the left was the fall of the Berlin Wall. Suddenly the international peace movement had a lot less to do. Pro-Soviet groups in the West were discredited. Many of their members joined the environmental movement, bringing with them their eco-Marxism and pro-Sandinista sentiments.

These factors have contributed to a new variant of the environmental movement that is so extreme that many people, including myself, believe its agenda is a greater threat to the global environment than that posed by mainstream society. Some of the features of eco-extremism are:

✓ **Anti-human**

The new extremists characterize the human species as a “cancer” on the face of the earth. They perpetuate the belief that all human activity is negative whereas the rest of nature is good. This results in alienation from nature and subverts the most important lesson of ecology, that we are all part of nature and interdependent with it.

“Human intervention” is characterized as unnatural when, in fact, we are as much a part of nature and natural evolution as any other species.

This aspect of environmental extremism leads to disdain and disrespect for fellow humans and the belief that it would be good if a disease such as AIDS were to wipe out most of the population. In statements from Greenpeace it is clear that they are perpetuating this false dualism between humans and nature. “Human intervention” is characterized as unnatural

when, in fact, we are as much a part of nature and natural evolution as any other species.

✓ **Anti-technology and anti-science**

Eco-extremists dream of returning to some kind of technologically primitive society. Horse-logging is the only kind of forestry they can fully support. All large machines are seen as inherently destructive and “unnatural.” The Sierra Club’s recent book, *Clearcut: The Tragedy of Industrial Forestry*, is an excellent example of this perspective.¹

“Western industrial society” is rejected by eco-extremists in its entirety, as are nearly every known type of forestry, including shelterwood, seed tree, and small group selection. The word “nature” is capitalized every time it is used and we are encouraged to “find our place” in the world through “shamanic journeying” and “swaying with the trees.” Science is invoked only as a means of justifying the adoption of beliefs that have no basis in science to begin with.

✓ **Anti-organization**

Environmental extremists tend to expect the whole world to adopt anarchism as the model for individual behavior. This is expressed in their dislike of national governments, multinational corporations, and large institutions of all kinds. It would seem that this critique applies to all organizations except the environmental movement itself.

¹B. Devall, editor, *Clearcut: The Tragedy of Industrial Forestry* (San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books/Earth Island Press, 1993).

Corporations are criticized for taking profits made in one country and investing them in other countries, this being proof that they have no "allegiance" to local communities. Where is the international environmental movement's allegiance to local communities? How much of the money raised in the name of aboriginal peoples has been distributed to them? How much is dedicated to assisting loggers who were thrown out of work by environmental campaigns? How much to research forestry systems that are environmentally and economically superior? When it comes to accountability, it is the environmental movement that falls short of most other institutions in our society.

✓ *Anti-trade*

Eco-extremists are not only opposed to "free trade" but to international trade in general. This is based on the belief that each "bioregion" should be self-sufficient in all its material needs. If it's too cold to grow bananas, *too bad!*

Certainly anyone who studies ecology comes to realize the importance of natural geographic units such as watersheds, islands, and estuaries. As foolish as it is to ignore ecosystems, however, it is absurd to put fences around them as if they were independent of their neighbors. In its extreme version, bioregionalism is just another form of ultra-nationalism and gives rise to the same excesses of intolerance and xenophobia.

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✓ *Anti-free enterprise*

Despite the fact that communism and state socialism have failed, eco-extremists are basically anti-business. They dislike "competition" and are definitely opposed to profits. Anyone engaging in private business, particularly if successful, is characterized as greedy and lacking in morality. The extremists do not seem to find it necessary to put forward an alternative system of organization that would prove efficient at meeting the material needs of society.

✓ *Anti-democratic*

This is perhaps the most dangerous aspect of radical environmentalism. The very foundation of our society, liberal representative democracy, is rejected as being too "human-centered." In the name of "speaking for the trees and other species," we are faced

with a movement that would usher in an era of eco-fascism. The “planetary police” would answer to no one but Mother Earth herself.

✓ **Anti-civilization**

In its essence, eco-extremism rejects virtually everything about modern civilization.² We are told that nothing short of returning to primitive tribal society can save the earth from ecological collapse. No more cities, no more airplanes, no more polyester suits. It is a naïve vision of a return to the Garden of Eden.

The challenge for all environmentalists is to resist the path of ever-increasing extremism, and to know when to talk rather than fight.

The challenge for all environmentalists is to resist the path of ever-increasing extremism, and to know when to talk rather than fight. To remain credible and effective they must reject the anti-human, anarchistic approach. This is made difficult by the fact that many individuals and their messengers, the media, are naturally attracted to confrontation and sensation. It isn't easy to

get excited about a committee meeting when you could be bringing the state to its knees at a blockade.

The best approach to our predicament is to recognize the validity of both the bioregional *and* the global visions for social and environmental sustainability. Issues such as overpopulation and sustainable forest practices require international discussion and resolution. Composting of food wastes and bicycle repairs are best accomplished locally. We must think and act both globally and locally, always cognizant of impacts at one level caused by actions at another. Extremism that rejects this approach will only bring disaster to all species, including humans.

The Forestry Debate

This critique of radical environmentalism is nowhere more appropriate than in the present debate over managing our forests and manufacturing forest products. Human management of forests is portrayed as being somehow “unnatural.”

²See the British journal, *The Ecologist*, for a multitude of articles in this vein.

The German branch of Greenpeace is now leading a campaign for a global ban on clearcutting in any forest. They want lumber and paper manufacturers to use a label that states their product is "clearcut free." Canada has been chosen as the target for consumer boycotts because it uses clearcutting in forestry. It doesn't matter that the world's most knowledgeable foresters believe that clearcutting is the most appropriate form of harvesting in many types of forest. It doesn't matter that most forestry in Germany is by the clearcut method. The eco-extremists want to boycott Canada anyway.

What matters most to the eco-extremists is that attacking clearcutting in Canada makes for good fundraising in Europe. I say this "clearcut free" slogan is nothing more than a slick advertising campaign for taking money from an uninformed public.

The public is unaware of the basic flaws in the Greenpeace campaign to end clearcutting worldwide. They do not realize that there is no clear definition of the term "clearcut" and that Greenpeace refuses to engage in a dialogue to determine the precise nature of what it is they are opposed to, or in favor of. It is also not widely realized that there is no such thing as a supply of pulp and paper that is "clearcut free." The practice of clearcutting is so widespread that it would be nearly impossible to obtain a supply of wood chips that came from forests where only single-tree selection forestry is practiced.

When considering the subject of clearcutting in forestry, it is necessary to begin with a broad overview of land use patterns. There are three main categories of human development on the land: urban and industrial, agriculture, and managed forests. The delineation between these types of land use is seen most sharply in regions of high population density such as western Europe and Asia.

It is important to recognize that most urban and agricultural land represents clearcuts that have not been reforested. The deforestation of land for urban and agricultural purposes must be clearly distinguished from the *reforestation* of land that occurs after clearcutting in forest management. Some environmental groups have taken to using the term deforestation as synonymous with clearcutting, even when the area is subsequently reforested with native trees. This leads to the impression that every area cut becomes a wasteland when, in fact, the record of successful reforestation in Canada is very impressive by world standards.

Ecology of Clearcutting

It is an ecological fact that many types of forest ecosystems function most successfully when they are periodically cleared and allowed to regenerate. This is understandable from an evolutionary perspective. Forested landscapes always have been subjected to periodic catastrophic disturbances from climate change (ice ages), volcanic eruptions, fire, windstorms, insect attacks, and disease. Indeed, many types of forest ecosystems, particularly in temperate climates such as ours, are more productive when they are periodically disturbed in a catastrophic manner and will slide into decline if not disturbed.

In particular, it is not generally recognized how significant the impact of forest fire control has been on what was the historical "natural" cycle of forest destruction and renewal before forest management became practiced over much of the landscape. Clearcutting, in many of the areas where it is practiced, has replaced fire as the dominant force for change in the forest, and to a considerable extent it mimics the impact of fire in the evolution and successional development of the forest.

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It is an often-repeated statement that if an old-growth forest is cut down it will never be the same again, that it will never return to its former splendor. This is entirely untrue, the only requirement being sufficient time for the successional processes of the forest to recreate the structures and functions that constitute the attributes of an old-growth forest. This does not, as we are also led to believe, require

250 to 500 years in the coastal British Columbian rainforest. All one has to do is visit second-growth forests in British Columbia to see that only 60 to 70 years is required to develop most of the features of old-growth forest in an area that was clearcut and left to regenerate naturally.

It is widely recognized among foresters that many species of trees do not grow well in the shade of other trees. In the case of these species it is desirable to create some form of opening or clearcut in order to achieve a successful regeneration of a new generation of trees. Many other species of trees, even though they are capable of growing in shade, are far more productive when they have access to the full sunlight provided by clearcutting. Two of British Columbia's most important coastal species, Western Red Cedar and Western Hemlock, are examples of such species that thrive in full sunlight even though they can tolerate shade.

A classic example of the benefits of clearcutting in some types of forest is provided by the extensive coastal rainforest of British Columbia, where Western Hemlock is the dominant species. In nearly all cases, very old-growth hemlock is infested with dwarf mistletoe, a parasitic plant that robs the tree of nutrition and causes stunting and deformity in the limbs. The mistletoe spreads to adjacent trees by shooting out its seeds, which settle and germinate on the branches of other trees lower in the canopy. If this type of forest is selectively harvested (that is, if many of the old trees are left standing), the new seedlings quickly become infected and the resulting new forest will be unhealthy and unproductive. When an old-growth hemlock stand is clearcut, as if it were completely blown down in a hurricane, the mistletoe infection is usually eliminated and the new forest is healthy and highly productive.

Some environmental groups have taken to using the term "destructive clearcutting" as if it were synonymous with the term "clearcutting." This is a highly propagandist use of

the language as it gives the impression that there is no such thing as sustainable clearcutting. If we employed the word "destructive" in a similar fashion when describing agriculture and fisheries, then all farming and fishing could be termed "destructive" because they result in the death of many plants and animals. Yet we know that farming and fishing—and forestry—can be conducted on a sustainable basis.

The real test of whether or not the use of a living resource is destructive should be sustainability. It is essential to distinguish between "destructive clearcutting" (and destructive forestry in general) and "clearcutting that is not destructive of the forest's ability to regenerate its biodiversity and produce another harvest of wood."

Greenpeace and Sierra Club on Clearcutting

In a speech prepared for the Second Global Conference on Paper and the Environment in April 1994 in Frankfurt, Christoph Theis of Greenpeace confirmed the fundamental error in its position on forest management. First he says we must have "nature-based forestry." So far so good: In British Columbia, we call this "ecologically based forestry." But then he goes on to deny that the basic forces of nature exist at all. Mr. Theis states that we must establish reference forests for every forest type and then we must manage the commercial forest according to the evolution of natural events in the reference forest.

Does this mean that if the reference forest is knocked down by a hurricane, I must clearcut the entire commercial forest immediately? If a fire kills all the trees in the reference forest, must I light the commercial forest on fire? I submit that there is simply no understandable methodology in the Greenpeace policy, and that it is not acceptable as a guide for forest management.

Where I live on the north coast of Vancouver Island, on a single night in 1908, 30,000 hectares of natural forest were knocked down by a hurricane. This has been a regular natural occurrence for thousands of years. Also, in the drier parts of British Columbia, where the majority of our forests are growing, insect attacks followed by natural fires can kill every tree across more than 50,000 hectares.

The forest does not speak to us in English or German or any other human language. The challenge is to interpret the natural forces and processes so we can learn how to come into harmony with them. The relationship between humans and the other parts of nature is an evolving process and we are partly responsible for defining it. This requires long-term direct observation and experience; ecologists and local people living near the forest can learn from each other.

The thrust of the radical environmental position on forestry is greatly at odds with this vision of interaction between humans and forests. Many of the eco-extremists confuse

and equate an urban sense of aesthetics with the morality of forest practices. This is best summed up by a statement that forms the main thesis of the Sierra Club's recent publication, *Clearcut: The Tragedy of Industrial Forestry*. The statement reads:

Anyone can identify destructive forest practices. You don't have to be a professional forester to recognize bad forestry any more than you have to be a doctor to recognize ill health. If logging looks bad, it is bad. If a forest looks mismanaged, it is mismanaged.³

I suppose this means that we have among us a breed of wise environmentalists who have no need to practice safe sex because they can spot persons with HIV just by looking at them! It is ludicrous to take the position that the good or bad of a situation can be judged simply by looking at it.

Surely the phrase "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" applies equally as well to forestry as it does to art, human anatomy, food, etc. And it must be accepted that some things that look bad really *are* bad. But there are too many exceptions to these simple rules of thumb for them to be reliable guides to sound forestry practices. The rough and jumble of stumps and woody debris left behind by clearcutting just doesn't look very "neat and tidy" to people who are familiar with clean streets and perpendicular lines. As my friend and long-time Greenpeacer Jim Bohlen once said, "City people remind me of a cat trying to bury its excrement on a marble floor."

We should all go back and consult with one of the founders of modern environmentalism, Garrett Hardin. In 1968 he published a seminal essay on environmentalism and sustainability, titled "The Tragedy of the Commons," in which he explored the historical roots of environmental degradation of the land. One of the more enlightening passages in the paper noted:

the morality of an act cannot be determined from a photograph. One does not know whether a man killing an elephant or setting fire to a grassland is harming others until one knows the total system in which his act appears. It is tempting to ecologists, as it is to reformers in general, to try to persuade others via the photographic shortcut. But the guts of an argument can't be photographed: they must be presented rationally—in words.⁴

Clearly, Greenpeace and other groups have ignored this sage advice.

³B. Devall, *supra* note 1.

⁴Garret Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science* 162 (1968), pages 1243-1248.

Economics of Clearcutting

Perhaps the most cynical aspect of the Greenpeace campaign is its assertion that British Columbians are clearcutting their forests to make tissue paper and toilet paper for Americans, Europeans, and Asians. They use the slogan "When you blow your nose in Europe you are blowing away the ancient rainforests of Canada" to imply that Europeans could save Canadian forests if they would stop buying tissue made from Canadian pulp. Yet this slogan, too, is untrue.

Everyone who has studied Canadian forestry, including Greenpeace, knows that the pulp and paper industry in British Columbia is based entirely on the waste products of the sawmilling industry. The forests are harvested to supply high-value solid wood for furniture, interior woodwork, and construction. Only the wastes from making lumber and those logs that are unsuitable for sawmilling are made into pulp. If we did not make pulp from these wastes they would have to be burned or left to rot, as was the case in the past.

The truth is, British Columbia could shut down all 23 of its pulp and paper mills and not one less tree would be cut in the forests. The sawmilling industry is entirely profitable on its own without the pulp and paper industry.

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Conclusion

I have a great deal of respect for Greenpeace. Most of its campaigns are well-founded and deserve strong support. I refer to the campaigns to halt dumping of hazardous wastes in developing countries, to forbid dumping nuclear waste in the sea, to improve energy efficiency in industry, and to reduce toxic discharge from all sources, including the pulp and paper industry.

As I have stated, I have less respect for the positions Greenpeace is taking on some forestry issues, and I believe it should rethink the thrust of its policy. Greenpeace should be pressing for international agreements rather than threatening companies with consumer action based on false information. It should be demanding that more trees be planted to green the earth, and not only telling us we must stop logging in existing forests. For example, it is estimated that 30 to 40 percent of cleared agricultural land in western Europe is surplus to food production requirements. Environmentalists should focus their attention on reforesting these areas, as there are huge potential benefits for the environment and the economy from such a program.

But I also have little respect for companies in Germany and the United Kingdom that have given in to blackmail in order to protect or advance their own short-term interests. Under threat from Greenpeace, the German Magazine Publishers Association has signed a document promising to use "clearcut free paper" as soon as it becomes available. They don't actually have to do anything, because there is no supply of such paper and it is unlikely there ever will be. Scott Paper UK canceled an order of pulp from British Columbia after receiving threats of a consumer boycott from Greenpeace.

Everyone knows that the first to give in to blackmail is never the last. I say these companies must be shamed by their peers to tear up these documents and put back the contracts they have broken.

We now see that some companies are playing right into Greenpeace's hand in order to make commercial advantage of the public confusion about forestry. It was Bjorn Lingfeldt, I believe, of SCA in Sweden (one of the largest paper and pulp companies in the world), who recently told a Canadian newspaper reporter that Canada should surrender to Greenpeace. He said he knew from experience that it was impossible to win against Greenpeace. Of course, he didn't mention that SCA would be pleased to take the market share of pulp that Canada would give up. (Perhaps Mr. Lingfeldt was misquoted, but we have not heard his denial as yet.)

These self-interested reactions will not bring anything good in the end. There is only one solution for the forest industries. Forestry and forest products are international businesses and these issues must be solved by international cooperation. The international forest industries must work together to assist others in reaching international agreements on sustainable forestry worldwide.

Happily, this work is well advanced by those following up on the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and by the environmental non-governmental organizations called together by the Forest Stewardship Council. It is time industry became as well organized at the international level as these other sectors.

Patrick Moore is chairman of the Forest Practices Committee of the Forest Alliance of British Columbia. This *Heartland Policy Study* is a slightly edited version of his presentation at the Second Global Conference on Paper and the Environment, Frankfurt, Germany, April 26, 1994.

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SPOTTING THE ECO-EXTREMIST

In the mid-1980s, when business and government adopted a pro-environment agenda, many environmentalists responded by taking more extreme positions. Today, the eco-extremists are:

- ✓ **Anti-human:** They characterize the human species as a “cancer” on the face of the earth.
- ✓ **Anti-technology and anti-science:** They dream of returning to a technologically primitive society and invoke science only as a means of justifying the adoption of beliefs that have no basis in science to begin with.
- ✓ **Anti-free enterprise:** They dislike competition, are opposed to profits, and characterize anyone engaging in private business as greedy.

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Who opposes eco-extremism?

Patrick Moore, a co-founder of Greenpeace, contends that the eco-extremist agenda is the greatest threat facing the environment today. To find out why, order a copy of his *Heartland Policy Study*, "Hard Choices: Environmentalists and the Forests."

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