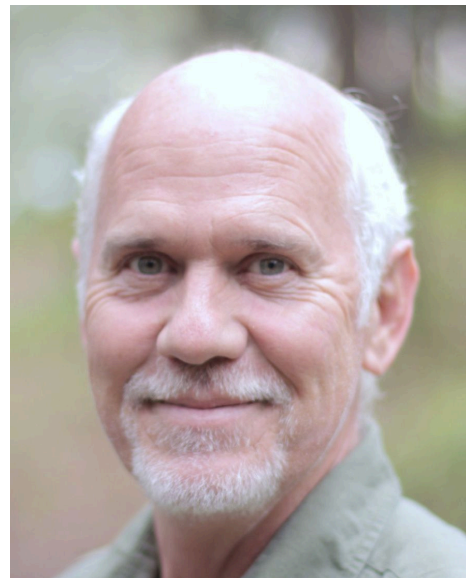
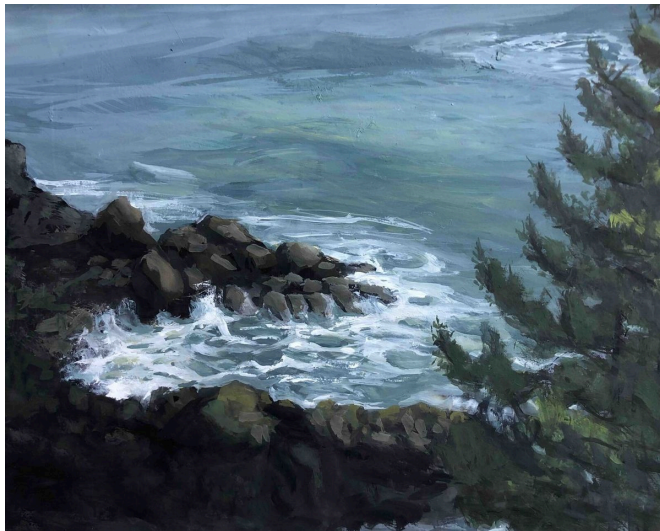


In My View: Every day is earth day!

May 4, 2024



Another Earth Day has come and gone. April 22 was the 54th anniversary of the first Earth Day and I felt kind of bad that I did not do anything special as I have in the past. Then I remembered the slogan, “Every day is Earth Day” and rationalized that I can always do something tomorrow. Today, I decided to write about Earth Day.

First Earth Day

The following are a few highlights of the history of Earth Day from earthday.org. The first Earth Day was started in 1970 by the junior senator from my home state of Wisconsin. Senator Gaylord Nelson had long been concerned about the deteriorating environment in the United States.

In January 1969, he and many others witnessed the ravages of a massive oil spill in Santa Barbara, California. Inspired by the student anti-war movement, Senator Nelson wanted to infuse the energy of student anti-war protests with an emerging public consciousness about air and water pollution.

Time For Action

Senator Nelson recruited Denis Hayes, a young activist, to organize campus teach-ins and to scale the idea to a broader public. They chose April 22, a weekday falling between Spring Break and Final Exams, to

maximize student participation. They called it Earth Day, and immediately sparked national attention.

Across the country, Earth Day inspired 20 million Americans to take to the streets, parks, and auditoriums to demonstrate against the impacts of 150 years of industrial development which had left a growing legacy of serious human health impacts.

Groups that had been fighting individually against oil spills, polluting factories and power plants, raw sewage, toxic dumps, pesticides, freeways, the loss of wilderness and the extinction of wildlife united on Earth Day around these shared common values.

Results Achieved

Earth Day 1970 achieved a rare political alignment, enlisting support from Republicans and Democrats, rich and poor, urban dwellers and farmers, business, and labor leaders. By the end of 1970, the first Earth Day led to the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency.

By Earth Day 1980, substantial US environmental legislation, had been adopted including the Occupational Safety and Health Act, Endangered Species Act, Marine Mammal Protection Act, Superfund, Toxic Substances Control Act, Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act.

These laws are still in effect and provide the bedrock of environmental protection in our country. Upon this strong foundation of successes, a movement has grown to ensure constant vigilance in the protection of our planet. I can credit many good things that have happened in my life to the first Earth Day.

Born Tree Hugger

I was thirteen and living in the rural northwoods of Wisconsin on the first Earth Day. Four years later I started college and studied environmental sciences at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. This was a new area of study, but I took every related science course I could find.

After college, I started working in Madison as a community organizer for a non-profit group called Citizens for a Better Environment (CBE). We went door to door to inform people about local issues and enlist their support for action. Through my work with this group I met my wife Jill who was working in the Minnesota CBE office.

In the eighties Jill and I moved to Los Angeles with jobs waiting for us at the LA CBE Office. In 1990, on the 20th anniversary of Earth Day, Jill and I were invited to perform a musical set on the main stage at a huge festival with thousands of people on Santa Monica Beach.

Government Job

In 1990 I took my first government job working as the Environmental Programs Manager for the City of West Hollywood. Government agencies were hiring staff to implement mandated recycling and other environmental programs. With my experience as an advocate, I was a good fit for this job.

During my time there I implemented a ban on styrofoam take out containers and rolled out a city-wide mandatory recycling program for all apartments and condominiums. This city had lots of money and was motivated to implement progressive environmental programs. I could hardly keep up.

This was a great job, but we really wanted to move out of LA after eight years. Then I saw the job notice for a job in Crescent City as Director of the newly created Del Norte Solid Waste Management Authority. Having passed through the area on vacation, we thought it would be a healthy place to raise a family, so I applied.

Escape From LA

Despite our diligent effort to improve the environment in Los Angeles, there were times when it seemed like a lost cause. I knew too much about the polluted air and water. A tipping point for me was study that said if we do all the right things now, in 20 years LA would have clean air. We did not want to expose our new baby to this.

When I was offered this job in 1993, I thought it would be more useful to help preserve an area that is still clean. While West Hollywood was progressive and wealthy, Del Norte is not so much. After I arrived several people warned me that local people will not recycle. My answer was always, "They will learn."

During the twenty years that I served our community as Director of this agency we cleaned up and closed down a leaking landfill, built a state-of-the-art Resource Recovery Facility and achieved a 50% recycling rate. Since I retired in 2013, this government agency continues to provide quality services.

After Life

After 23 years of working for government, I worked an additional 8 years as a consultant before fully retiring. My favorite gig was an 8-year contract for grant management in the Pacific Northwest with the Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment.

We awarded millions of dollars in grants for projects ranging from salmon habitat restoration to orca preservation. These funds came from restitution that polluters had to pay as a result of citizen suits that are empowered by the Clean Water Act adopted after the first Earth Day.

Yes, Earth Day has been good for me and our planet.

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