

Oklahoma Sierran

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Conservation in the City *by Paul Moore, Conservation Chair*

Somewhere I read a quote from Edward Abbey to the effect that a society couldn't have a great wilderness without having great cities. I think he meant that cities and buildings should be as exciting, organic and vital as the great wilderness areas—and that a society that can't appreciate one, won't appreciate the other. As an architect and a backpacker, I understand that proposition. These two environments should be equally fine counterpoints in our lives.

The uneasiness of this architect with his vision is based on familiarity with the destruction of the natural world caused by the construction of the city's buildings. It seems like you can't make an omelet without breaking some eggs—ore must be mined into steel, oil must be refined into vinyl and timber milled into cabinets. Wouldn't it be great if buildings could be as elegant as a tree, growing from nutrients into a space defining structure, hosting occupants

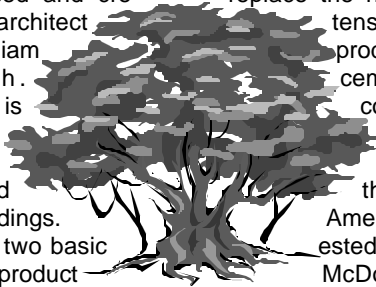
and when obsolete, decomposing into nutrients for their offspring?

Something like that is being proposed and created by an architect named William McDonough. His practice is focused on both building products and complete buildings. He envisions two basic systems of product recycling—one that is totally non-toxic and "mulchable" and the other reusable and recyclable. He and his chemist partner have invented fabrics that can be safely eaten, yet are still commercially useful.

One of their products is used for seat upholstery on Lufthansa airplanes. (The gag line is that if the food is bad, you can eat your seat cover.) When your carpet wears out, you can mulch your garden

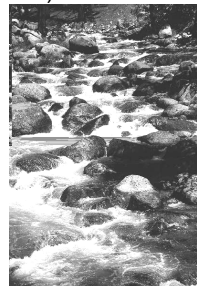
with the scraps. They are moving on to design other products such as a clay-based concrete that may eventually replace the highly energy intensive and CO₂ producing Portland cement concrete in common use today. The really good news is that corporate America is interested.

McDonough has designed "green" headquarters for Nike and Gap and is now engaged in the rehabilitation of the Ford Motor Company River Rouge Plant. This facility was the original site of Henry Ford's assembly line, a place where rail lines brought in raw ore and finished cars rolled off the other end of the site. It is a polluted and complex web of factory sheds and process equipment and Ford has hired McDonough to transform it. *(Continued on Page 3)*



2002 EPEC Campaign Continues *by Jeannine Hale*

Our main issues for Oklahoma's Environmental Public Education Campaign (EPEC) in 2002 are protecting Oklahoma streams and water supplies by stopping the water sale/new dams across SE Oklahoma, and by fighting the pollution caused by swine factory farms, poultry litter and excess nutrients across the state.



We won legislative approval of a 3-year moratorium on the water sale and managed to avoid a veto by the Governor, but still must remember this is

not a final victory. During the next months we will have a window of opportunity to educate the public about the values of natural stream ecosystems and the potential harm done by dams and massive water withdrawals. If we are successful, the term 'excess water' will be redefined to take into account minimum flows necessary for fish and wildlife and other water quality concerns.

We'd like to put together photos, slides and PowerPoint presentations to help the public

become familiar with Oklahoma streams that are threatened by the water sale/dams and pollution, including the Kiamichi, Little River, Glover, Mountain Fork, Clear/Muddy Boggy and Blue River. We will only succeed in protecting these streams (and our lakes) if more folks, including residents within the watersheds and our own members, care enough to adopt these streams, help with neighborhood cleanups, put pressure on polluters and make sure elected officials know the majority of Oklahomans want these *(Continued on Page 4)*

Chair's Corner

by Doug Hawkins

2002 Legislative Wrap-Up

by Wes Johnston, Legislative Chair

Late spring and early summer—for many, this is the grandest part of the year. Newness and rejuvenation abounds everywhere. The trees have filled out with lush new leaves. The flowers have started to bloom and the grass has become green and inviting. The weather is cooperating too; not too hot during the day and not too cold during the night.



This part of the year has brought some significant “newness” for me also. I became the Executive Committee Chairperson for the Chapter. I will admit, I have stumbled my way through the last three months, trying to learn the “ropes”. I know that I have not responded as rapidly or confidently to the many Emails and other communications as my predecessor, Chris Corbett, who was absolutely fantastic. However, because of the dedication, hard work and perseverance of many of the members of the Oklahoma Chapter of the Sierra Club, our Chapter has prospered. Thanks to all of **you** who helped bring our membership up, contributed to the phenomenal results of our March Window fundraising appeal, participated in and led outings, and provided grassroots support of our EPEC and legislative campaigns which were a big success.

Just as nature is calling us to come visit and be a part of this wonderful creation, I am calling to each member of the Sierra to come visit and be a part of our Club's creation on the group or state-wide level. Just as Nature renews and rededicates herself to us each day, let us renew and rededicate ourselves to her each day and stand tall to protect and preserve the wondrous outdoors. Have a great summer and enjoy it all!!!



This year at the Legislature was another hectic one. Construction on the new Capitol Dome made a mess, but it didn't keep the factory farms and other powerful interests from pushing their usual agendas. In addition, Oklahoma's natural environment faced an unprecedented challenge from the proposed sale of water to Texas. We encountered a few disappointments along the way, but all in all the Club enjoyed spectacular success in helping protect the environment. A few highlights follow.

- **The Water Sale.** The issue with the biggest potential impact on the environment was the proposed sale of water from streams and rivers in Southeast Oklahoma to Texas. As you may recall, this started as a secretly negotiated deal between state government and several Indian tribes. After the deal came under scrutiny, legislation was introduced by Rep. Debbie Blackburn of Oklahoma City to delay any such sale until the impact of the withdrawal of so much water could be studied. A study is important to make sure

that any withdrawals do not take out too much water and do not harm the beneficial uses of Oklahoma's streams, rivers and lakes. The Club supported this legislation along with some unlikely allies including the Farm Bureau and the Oklahoma Independent Petroleum Producers Association. The bill passed the House unanimously, but was bottled up in a Senate Committee. After a great struggle and some compromises that diluted it, the bill was finally brought to the floor of the Senate where it again passed by an overwhelming margin and was eventually signed into law by Gov. Keating. Rep. Blackburn deserves thanks from all of us for her determined efforts to pass this bill which also includes a three-year moratorium on out-of-state water sales. Senators Brad Henry and Kevin Easley also deserve much appreciation from the citizens of Oklahoma for fighting for this bill.

- **CAFO's.** This year we faced another bill to repeal the three mile setback provision. The setback provision keeps big pork producers from putting factory farms near parks and other areas. Just like last year, the bill passed both houses of the Legislature; but unlike last year the Governor signed the bill despite his promises tit.
- **Audit Privilege.** An “audit privilege” bill was introduced this session which would essentially allow corporations that caused pollution to keep quiet about the problem and avoid any fines or penalties if they took certain steps. This was a very bad bill like the similar ones we have faced in past sessions. Fortunately, we were able to defeat this bill once again.
- **Leaking Storage Tank Cleanup Fund.** The Corporation Commission maintains a fund which is used to help pay for cleanups of pollution from leaking underground storage tanks (at old abandoned service stations and such). Funding for the program comes from the gasoline tax. A bill was introduced to divert half of this tax to pay for projects at OU and OSU. While the state university projects were worthy, we opposed the bill because (Continued on Page 4)

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(Contact Doug at: 405/231-5173 or <dchhawk@aol.com>)

E.O. Wilson's "The Future of Life" . . . a brilliant economic lesson on the environment with a moral twist

Book Review by Shauna Lawyer Struby

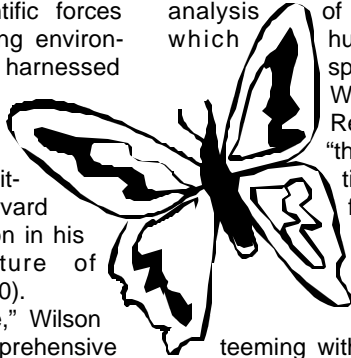
"An Armageddon is approaching at the beginning of the third millennium. But it is not the cosmic war and fiery collapse of mankind foretold in sacred scripture. It is the wreckage of the planet by an exuberantly plentiful and ingenious humanity. The race is now on between the techno scientific forces that are destroying the living environment and those that can be harnessed to save it. We are inside a bottleneck of overpopulation and wasteful consumption." So writes two-time Pulitzer Prize winner and Harvard professor, Edward O. Wilson in his latest book, "The Future of Life," (Alfred A. Knopf, \$22.00).

In "The Future of Life," Wilson delivers a logical and comprehensive state-of-the-natural-world address fusing scientific and economic analysis into a poignant epistle about the breathtaking beauty and diversity of earth. The prologue, fashioned as a casual yet eloquent letter to Henry David Thoreau, lays the groundwork for a trip the reader will likely never forget.

Wilson begins with the big picture: a biosphere so thin it cannot be seen edgewise from a space shuttle, that exists from Mt. Everest's peak to the floor of the Mariana Trench, wherein all life is contained. As he zooms in to artfully describe individual examples of diversity, Wilson brilliantly illustrates not only the complexity of the natural world but also its fragility and enormity. Somewhere between 1.5 and 1.8 million species have been discovered, yet it is estimated that the true number of species could be as high as 100 million. We have no idea the depth of the gifts imbedded in our world's biodiversity, or

to what extent the human race may be dependent upon said gifts.

Next we visit the "the bottleneck," Wilson's name for the delicate position the natural life of the planet now finds itself, and the view becomes depressingly dim. After rendering statistical analysis of the astounding rate at which



humankind is destroying species and ecosystems, Wilson cites the People's Republic of China as "the paradigm of population stress," of the effects of ignoring humankind's environmental impact. Wilson says China is an early warning, a place teeming with people, with a finite amount of arable land, and an environment already appallingly befouled, deserving of close attention because it is "so far advanced along the path to which the rest of humanity seems inexorably headed."

In the inevitable next stop on the trip, "How Much is the Biosphere Worth?" Wilson uses economics to define the battle, a sort of ecologist's spreadsheet on the value of natural life. This is documentation every corporate CEO, government official, and legislator needs to examine thoroughly and soon, before taking another step.

The message is simple: Ecosystems have an economic value transcending industrialization. We can no longer pillage and plunder. Humanity is already being bitten by the short-term profits corporations seek at the expense of the environment. Wilson's gift to the reader is making the evidence of Mother Nature's bite abundantly clear, evidence

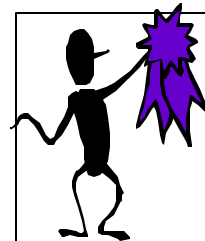
that only the most self-absorbed and greediest of those in power will be able to ignore.

Toward the end of the book, Wilson writes, "The issue, like all great decisions, is moral. Science and technology are what we can do; morality is what we agree we should or should not do." And, as he moves to proposing solutions, Wilson's message is tempered with hope. We do have a chance, if we can move beyond politics.

"It is a contest that will not be settled by partisan victory . . . The ethical solution is to diagnose and disconnect extraneous political ideology, then shed it in order to move toward the common ground where economic progress and conservation are treated as one and the same goal. The guiding principles of a united environmental movement must be, and eventually will be, chiefly long-term . . . a change of heart occurs when people look beyond themselves to others, and then to the rest of life."

In "The Future of Life," Wilson weaves a tapestry that tells a story of wonder and devastation, of disaster and hope, of humankind in the process of destroying its own nest, yet with the capability to arrest the approaching storm. But what Wilson shows us about ourselves is perhaps best paralleled in a more ancient story, where a devious serpent, a defiant woman named Eve, and a weak and spiritless man named Adam, slap at the hand of God and end up thrown out of Eden. When will we learn?

This review first appeared in the Oklahoma Gazette. Reprinted here with permission of Shauna Lawyer Struby.



Congratulations to **Emily McCauley**, former Oklahoma Assistant EPEC Coordinator and longtime Sierra Student Coalition (SSC) activist, for having a National SSC award

named after her. The following recently announced awards are the first awards to be given to by the SSC:

- The Emma McCauley Award to honor a SSC student environmentalist who has excelled in grassroots activism and leadership
- Adam Werbach Award to honor a SSC member who has founded or revived a SSC group with outstanding leadership

Conservation in the City (Continued from Page 1)

They envision the rehabilitation of the existing structures, purification of the existing soil and water through artificial wetlands, creation of new landscapes between and on the structures and the renovation of interior space into workshops lighted by natural light. No doubt the rooms will be carpeted and walls covered with the fabrics that McDonough has already created. Should Ford stay the course in this work, a remarkable experiment will be conducted. For about 90% of all the covered space ever built by man is in existence right now. It is probably more than we need. If a site such as River Rouge can be economically reconstructed into a healthy complex of buildings, the implications for renovation and rehabilitation of our cities is enormous. Perhaps it will lead to the end of the seemingly endless march of new sprawl into our natural world and, finally, cities worthy of our wildernesses.

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2002—Year of Clean Water

October 2002, deemed "Clean Water Month" by Gov. Keating, will mark the

30th anniversary of the enactment of the Clean Water Act (CWA). The CWA is the principal federal law protecting our nation's waters. Sierra Club will be joining many other government agencies, schools and groups during "The Year of Clean Water (YOCW)", to commemorate the anniversary of this crucial piece of legislation.

During October, all Sierra Club groups will be participating in monitoring their favorite Oklahoma streams and submitting data to the YOCW website, where a national "snapshot" of our nation's water quality will be available. Results will be posted on the YOCW website: <www.yearofcleanwater.org>.

Sierra Club, in partnership with the Clean Water Network, is also asking members throughout the state to work with their city or town to take a public stand for clean water by adopting a Clean Water Proclamation. If you are interested in working with your city council on our City Clean Water Proclamation Campaign, ideas for city council proclamation actions and a sample proclamation are available.

If you are interested in participating in Sierra Club's YOCW efforts, contact Jeannine Hale (918/227-2790 or <Jeannine.Hale@att.net>) or Susie Shields (<sshields@cox.net> or 405/297-0179.)

Blue Thumb, the water quality program offered by the Oklahoma Conservation Commission, is offering several workshops throughout the state to educate citizens on pollution prevention and stream monitoring. For more information, contact Cheryl Cheadle: (918) 280-1598 or <cherylc@okcc.state.ok.us>.



For local, sustainable and/or organic food opportunities in

Oklahoma, see Robert Waldrop's fantastic website: <www.oklahomafood.org> Robert will put up a webpage, free of charge, for any local producer who wants to sell sustainably produced Oklahoma food directly to the public.

Contact Robert at:
<rmwj@soonernet.com>

2002 EPEC Campaign

(Continued from Page 1)

streams protected. Do you care enough to adopt a stream? Contact Jeannine at: (Jeannine.Hale@att.net or 918/227-2790)

Soon, we will begin plans and work on another fall event – hopefully one that will be as successful as the TMDL hearing in 2001! This is the Year of Clean Water, and we'd like to use special water monitoring kits that will be available from the Oklahoma Water Resources Board to highlight the condition of some of our streams. Maybe your neighborhood or group knows of a stream that is a good candidate – if so, let us know. We'll all get a chance for some hands-on water quality sampling, 'investigative' experience (and maybe some wading?). Contact Susie (See YOCW article) or Jeannine to learn more about plans for this event.

Last but not least, we'll be continuing our work to make sure that the phosphorus standard is properly implemented for scenic rivers, monitor for newly proposed CAFOs and work to clean up the existing cesspools of shame. We're lucky that the Tulsa Group's Conservation Committee Chair has taken on agricultural issues, but more volunteers are needed to help us investigate and keep abreast of the many happenings related to animal feeding operations. Also, we need folks who are willing and available to 'bird-dog' or participate in state agency meetings. You know who to call.

One more thing . . . a big thanks to those of you who have helped with Earth Day and past events. Our successes are your successes because without the involvement of our members, Sierra Club would achieve nothing.

IRS Promotes Alternate Fuel Vehicles

The IRS rules now allow taxpayers who purchase the Insight, the Prius, and Honda's new hybrid Civic to qualify for a \$2,000 clean-vehicle tax deduction before Dec. 31, 2003. The deduction will be reduced during subsequent years, to \$1,500 for 2004, \$1,000 for 2005, \$500 for 2006 and zero in subsequent years, unless Congress extends the deduction.

A comprehensive energy bill under consideration by the House and Senate would provide a new set of consumer tax incentives up to \$4,000 for hybrids and fuel-cell vehicles, but it isn't clear that the bill will reach President Bush's desk this year.

2002 Legislative Wrap-Up

(Continued from Page 2)

it could leave the fund without enough money to finish cleanups at many sites. Despite our opposition, the bill passed due to the strong influence of university officials.

- Repeal of the Phosphorus Standard. One of the great achievements of the environmental community in recent years is Oklahoma's adoption of a numeric phosphorous water quality standard for scenic rivers. Phosphorous is one of the pollutants from Oklahoma and Arkansas poultry operations that threaten the Illinois River. Near the end of the Legislative session, a resolution was introduced to repeal the new standard. But as a result of the opposition of the Club and other groups, and a general lack of support, the resolution failed.

The great things we accomplished this year were due, in large part, to the efforts of our bill analyst, Jeannine Hale, and our lobbyist, Keith Smith. We all owe them a big pat on the back. And here's a big "thank you" to all of **YOU** who responded to the Legislative Action Alerts we sent out this year. Your letters, phone calls, and visits with legislators were all critical this year. Without your grassroots support, our folks at the Capitol wouldn't have a voice. Especially important was your support during the last few weeks of the session when there were several important bills – including the water sale bill – still hanging in the balance. Special thanks also to your Legislative Committee Co-Chair, Susie Shields, for all of her hard work this year and to Sandra Rose who worked so hard sending out Action Alerts and contacting legislators in person.

(Contact Wes at: (405) 528-4570 or <wes@wesjohnston.com>)