

Oklahoma Sierran

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Caught in the Undertow . . . Conservation in periods of crisis *by Paul Moore, Chapter Conservation Chair*

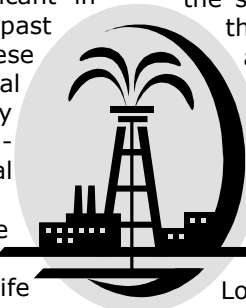
You may be experiencing the same feeling of disorientation that I am these days when it comes to doing something about conservation issues. The world seems caught in an undertow of human catastrophe that makes conservation of natural resources seem insignificant in comparison. Yet we know from past experience that it is during these times that danger to the natural world is highest, for almost any activity can be justified by appealing to our fear with irrational choices:

- Either we remain hostage to international big oil, or we drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

- Either we exempt Defense Department property from the Endangered Species Act, or are responsible for a poorly trained military.

There are other similar false choices that are presented every day to the American public. For instance, in our state there

are those who say that we must accept export of our water resources or condemn southeast Oklahoma to perpetual poverty. When people are disconcerted and fearful, it is much easier to convince them that clean air; water and land are expendable in the short term and can be restored in the long term. Unfortunately, once a natural system is destroyed there is really no way to take it back to its original condition. At best, damage is limited or mitigated to the degree that statistically it is considered reusable. But it isn't really restored to the pristine condition that was lost.



Love Canal is now considered habitable, but only because the toxic materials are isolated below a cap of clay and monitored by test wells, not because it has been cleaned up.

There are several ways to overcome the undertow:

One way is to spend time with others who are concerned *(Continued on Page 3)*

Inside this issue:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Chair's Corner | 2 |
| Legislative Update | 2 |
| An America without Farmers? | 3 |
| Caught in the Undertow (cont'd) | 3 |
| Connecting the Drops (cont'd) | 4 |
| Read the Big Book of Bush on the Web | 4 |
| Chapter Leadership Directory | 4 |

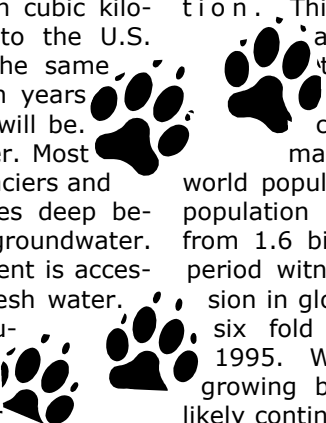
Connecting the Drops

What you need to know about population, water and wildlife

The Earth has 1.4 billion cubic kilometers of water according to the U.S. Geological Survey. This is the same amount that formed 4 billion years ago, and it is all there ever will be. Nearly all of that is salt water. Most fresh water is locked up in glaciers and permanent snow cover or lies deep beneath the Earth's surface as groundwater. Just three tenths of one percent is accessible to us as "renewable" fresh water. Falling as rain and then circulating through the planet's lakes, rivers and wetlands, this resource quenches our thirst, irrigates our crops, serves our industries, supplies electricity, absorbs our wastes and provides us with recrea-

tion. This same water supports all other aquatic and terrestrial species that share the planet.

This fixed supply is increasingly taxed by the demands of our rapidly growing world population. During the 20th century, population increased nearly four times, from 1.6 billion to 6.2 billion. That same period witnessed an even greater expansion in global freshwater consumption—a six fold increase between 1900 and 1995. World population is currently growing by 77 million a year and will likely continue to increase for decades. But our impacts on water are not only due to population growth. Expanding agricultural production and *(Continued on Page 4)*



Chair's Corner

Who the Hell is Tom Libby?

The other day a member of the Legislative Committee reported that a member had called to learn more about the calls, letters and e-mails they had received about the Sierra Club. At the end they asked, "And who the hell is Tom Libby?"

It reminded me that I often forget that not everyone knows everything that's being done in the Oklahoma Chapter. So I'll try to bring you up to date on the past couple of month's activities. I'm not certain I can answer the question in the title, but at least you won't be asking, "What the hell is going on?"

I'm proud to announce that on April 1, 2004, the Sierra Club opened its first ever office in Oklahoma. The search, negotiations and bureaucratic red tape all took place while we did tabling events at the Oklahoma Sustainability Network's Conference in Norman, the Red River Progressive Alliance event in Oklahoma City, the Oklahoma Clean Lakes and Watersheds Association State Meeting in Altus and the OKAEE Environmental Education Expo in Tulsa.

Thanks to all of our volunteers who worked with conservation organizer Billie Brown to cover all of these events.

But that's not all; I have had the opportunity to speak to the Payne County Democratic Party and the Cleveland County Democratic Party about the Bush Administration's assault on the environment. I was also on the Carole Arnold Show on KOMA AM 1520 in Oklahoma City to talk about Oklahoma's water issues. And was interviewed for an Earth Day article in the Oklahoma Gazette.

Speaking of which, by the time you read this our Earth Day events will have come and gone, including a three day visit by National Board of Director's member Bernie Zaleha. Director Zaleha chose to come to Oklahoma for Earth Day to participate in a panel discussion at St. Paul's Cathedral on Wednesday, April 21, with Oklahoma's Secretary of the Environment, Miles Tolbert. The topic - "*Spiritualism and the Environment*".

Of course, all this takes money, and by now you should have received the annual fundraising request in the mail. A new feature this year is the ability to have your savings or checking account drafted monthly. (We had to change banks to get this done.) You can have as little as \$5 a month taken out of your account, but it will mean a BIG difference for Oklahoma's environment. I'm encouraging people to use the new account draft feature to give \$30 a month or a "Dollar A Day for the Environment."

We're doing more, lots more. And we can always use more help. To volunteer, call our new offices at 405/366-5694 or send me an e-mail at tomlibby@yahoo.com.

Legislative Committee Update

Recent water controversies have made it clear that Oklahoma needs a forward-looking plan for our water future. Parties standing to reap huge financial benefits have aggressively promoted large-scale transfers and out of state sales with no thought to the long-term consequences to our environment and other water values. Only quick action by the Legislature has halted these boondoggles.

This year's priority campaign at the State Capitol is finding a better approach to planning our statewide water plan. We believe the ideas for water planning embodied in HB 2440 have a much greater chance of success than the fragmented, unworkable structure of SB 903 that would just provoke more controversy.

Both bills have now passed the House and Senate, but since SB 903 had changes from the House that were unacceptable to the Senate and the title was still struck on HB 2440, they have been sent to a conference committee. (Current status of April 18, the day this article was written) No doubt they will be combined in some manner that will be acceptable to both houses, and hopefully, to us as well.

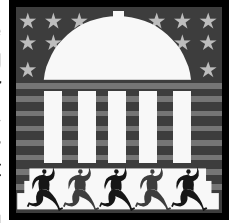
An alert was sent to our Oklahoma Alerts list earlier in the session for calls or emails to your legislators on these important bills. We asked you to make the following points in support of HB 2440:

- The existing moratorium on out of state water sales is extended while the plan is developed.
- All interested parties are represented on the Statewide Water Policy Planning Commission.
- Geographical representation on the Commission is provided for all areas of Oklahoma.
- The Commission conducts a comprehensive study. State agencies are directed to assist.

The alert also made the following points on why we did not like SB 903:

- Rather than one comprehensive study, 11 "regional" plans would be developed with no coordination between them.
- Local development authorities or councils of government (COGs) would be charged with organizing the regional studies. These bodies have no expertise or historical experience with water resources planning and no funding to conduct such a study.
- Conducting 11 regional studies will invariably lead to duplication of efforts. Eleven regional studies will cost much more to complete than one comprehensive statewide plan.
- By focusing on regional plans, the broader statewide public interest is lost. Conflict between regional plans is inevitable.
- Local development authorities are likely to substantially overestimate local water needs. An outlook that "if we build it they will come" is widespread.
- Lacking the needed expertise themselves, local authorities and COGs are likely to turn to consultants to develop the regional plans - the same consultants that would be in line to design and build the projects they decide are needed.
- The regional water planning group is required to have only 5 members, one of which is from state government. It is impossible to fairly represent all interests with such a small group.

We really appreciate everyone who helped our lobbyist, Keith Smith, by contacting their legislators. **Without your support, we are not a true and effective grassroots organization.** If you would like to sign up for our alert list serv, you may do so on our website www.oklahoma.sierraclub.org by clicking on Get Connected and list serv#3—Oklahoma-Alerts. You may also send your e-mail address to: Susie Shields, sshields@cox.net.



An America without Farmers?

Deborah E. Popper & Frank J. Popper, *Prairie Writers Circle*

In 1801, when Thomas Jefferson became president, 95 percent of Americans essentially made their full-time living from agriculture. By the turn of the 20th century, it was 45 percent, and by the turn of the 21st less than 2 percent. In 1993, the Census Bureau stopped counting the number of Americans who live on farms.

"Farm residence," it reported, "is no longer a reliable indication of whether or not someone is involved in farming. ... The cost of collecting and publishing statistics on farm residents and farmers in separate reports could no longer be justified."

Over the past two centuries, the nation became urban, then suburban, and now increasingly exurban. Farmers, especially those who are small-scale, full-time and living on their farms, have become politically and culturally distant to most Americans. We still have agriculture, but it is mostly large-scale agribusiness. There is little Jeffersonian farming, almost no "labor in the earth."

The desertion of the small family farm constitutes the largest population movement in American history. The small-farmer Diaspora, here and abroad, partly or wholly underlies other storied American population shifts: the development of cities and suburbs, the settlement of the West, the late 19th and early 20th century European immigrations to the United States, the post-1965 Latin American and Asian ones, the black migration from the rural South to the Northern ghetto, the rise of the Sunbelt, and even the growth of military bases around the country.

The family farm is one of the last homes of old-school American ethnicity and beliefs. In 1993 the Census Bureau found, for example, that farm residents were almost all white, half lived in the Midwest, and their households were 25 percent less likely than non-farm ones to be headed by a single woman. These differences from the rest of the nation have intensified over the past decade.

Many family farmers encourage their offspring to leave that life, and these perhaps unusually deferential children listen. Why they should move on is obvious. The United States is a nation whose metropolitan areas, despite all their evident problems, can offer better pay and more opportunity than most of its countryside. This imbalance has existed for the nation's entire life. But it was nowhere near as

large or visible in, say, 1960; much less 1880 or earlier pioneer periods.

American small farmers are victims of the same impersonal national and international economics that wipe out small banks, railroads, airlines, newspapers and stores here and elsewhere. Farmers, like the others, have responded to continued pressures for large-scale, homogenized production -- in farming's case, high per-acre output. Having only this aim, their success brings about the demise of most of them and their communities. American small farmers now appear to be at the far end of a vast economic shift that gives every promise of eliminating them.

A momentous transition looms. Although the United States and other First World nations have been heading toward it since at least the late 18th century, no nation of even modest size has ever explicitly chosen to navigate it. No one knows the full implications of a farmerless America -- or a farmerless France or Japan.

Are there really the links as Jefferson suggested between farming and virtue? Does a domestic population working the soil ensure a nation's social and physical health? What are the international and security consequences of the near-total disappearance of the farmer? What happens when the world's most powerful country no longer has those who work their own land?

These are at least nation-scale questions, ones whose answers turn the hinges of history. They obsess many farmers, their political representatives and their intellectual interpreters in this country and abroad. The suburban-exurban America hardly notices. In its Information Age world, the farmer has mostly been gone for generations.

Deborah and Frank Popper are authors of 'The Great Plains: From Dust to Dust' and 'The Buffalo Commons: Metaphor as Method.' Deborah Popper teaches at the College of Staten Island-City University of New York. Frank Popper teaches at Rutgers University.

To support Oklahoma's family farmers, join the Oklahoma Food Co-op. See more information on the web: www.oklahomafood.org

Caught in the Undertow

(Continued from Page 1)

about the environment. Now that the Oklahoma Chapter has an office (located at 575 University Blvd, Suite 200 in Norman), club members in Oklahoma City and Norman can easily spend some free time supporting one another and the Sierra Club through this dark era. Billie Brown, our Environmental Public Education Coordinator, will be more than willing to find a rewarding task for volunteers. And pizza is only a step away.

You can spend some time working to change the political context that controls conservation efforts. Sometimes it seems like environmental issues are not considered as important as economic and foreign policy issues during national elections. This year may not be any different in that regard, but an administration with a poor track record in all three areas needs to be held accountable for their environmental failures also. It might make the difference in 2004.

Maybe you enjoy spending time at the state capitol meeting with legislators. Unless they continue to hear from citizens with an interest in the environment they may believe that other priorities are more important at this historical moment. Perhaps they think difficult votes don't have to be cast. But extinction is forever, so there is no time to rest. The natural world does not deserve our ignorance.

Or, if you have a favorite issue that just doesn't seem to get the attention it deserves from the club or the media you can become the Issue Chair for that concern and spend some quality time making a difference on a specific front. The chapter has seven individuals who have stepped up so far and adopted their favorite issues.

However you might decide to participate you will find that the reward of action is self-fulfillment as much as enjoyment of successful results. The act is worthwhile in itself and, if well planned and executed, the ultimate prerogative of a citizen.





Explore,
enjoy and
protect
the planet



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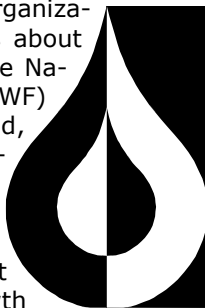
Read about the current administration's anti-environmental initiatives in the Big Book of Bush: <http://www.sierraclub.org/bush/>

Connecting the Drops (Continued from Page 1)

denser land use are straining local and regional water supplies and concentrating pollutants in our waterways. As a result, water quality and availability have become two of the primary natural resource concerns of our time.

Increasingly, government agencies and conservation organizations are sounding warnings about the water issue. In 2002, the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) produced a report titled, "Population, Water and Wildlife; Finding A Balance." It outlines how the availability and quality of water and the protection of wildlife habitat relate to population growth and human activity. After exploring current trends in water demands and usage, the report examines ten water-related issues and their links to population pressures and wildlife impacts. Case studies from around the world provide concrete examples.

The report discusses point and non-point source pollution by examining toxics in Lake Superior, industrial pollution in eastern Europe, and agricultural and urban runoff in the



Chesapeake Bay and the Chatahooche River basin. The challenges of storing and distributing water are illustrated by case studies of the Ogallala aquifer, the damming and alterations of the Snake and Lower Mississippi Rivers, and the debates over diversions from the Great Lakes. The report then describes sanitation problems on the US-Mexico border to highlight human health and social implications. Finally, it examines the possibilities of regional and local conflicts over water in the Middle East, Bolivia and the southeastern United States.

As Karen Krchnak, co-author and editor of the report states, "Given the importance of clean, plentiful and free-flowing waters to meeting the needs of both people and wildlife, the report amounts to a wake-up call on the urgency of action to protect freshwater systems."

To get an online copy go to: <http://www.nwf.org/population/online>. To see how serious the U.S. Congress is treating the water

issue, read the May 2003 report from the U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment hearing: "Water: Is it the 'Oil' of the 21st Century?" www.house.gov/transportation/water/05-2203/0522-03memo.html.

Source: Isaak Walton League of America Sustainability Education Project, January 2004 newsletter. Reprinted with permission.

Where Rivers Are Born: The Scientific Imperative for Defending Small Streams and Wetlands

With the future federal protection of small streams and wetlands in question, the Sierra Club and American Rivers asked eleven scientist to summarize the services wetlands and small streams provide society and the consequences of degrading these waters. The scientists used more than 235 scientific publications in preparing the document. Read a copy at: www.sierraclub.org/cleanwater/reports_factsheets/