

PUTTING NATURE FIRST

Environmentalists mark 30 years of Earth Days

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On, April 22, 1970, the first Earth Day, the modern American environmental movement leapt onto the national stage and called for sweeping changes. This social movement shaped the values and priorities of a generation and eventually altered American policies and politics.

Earth Day was born in 1969 as a proposal by Gaylord Nelson, then a United States Senator, for a nationwide "Environmental Teach-In." This teach-in, modeled on the anti-war teach-ins, was urged to be held on American College campuses the following spring. The idea was spread across the country, especially among young people.

A headquarters for the campaign was set up in cramped offices in Washington, DC. Senator Nelson named its board of director. Republican Representative Pete McCloskey was co-chair. Denis Hayes, a recent Stanford University graduate, was hired as National Coordinator. At its peak, the headquarters had a staff of 60 as well as several hundred, mostly-youthful volunteers.

Over the next several months, organizers spilled off college campuses and into communities, where they sought to receive support from business, labor, educators and civic organizations. The teach-in concept quickly transformed into Earth Day, as the national staff assembled communities in every major American city.

Hayes designed a strategy to win and retain broad middle class support. As the New York Times described the campaign: "Conservatives were for it. Liberals were for it. Democrats, Republicans and independents were for it. So were the ins, the outs, the Executive and Legislative branches of government."

There were an estimated 20 million people that took part in the first Earth Day. People listened to speeches, held seminars, and took practical action to clean up the community. Congress adjourned for a day. Students at several college formed barricades to keep cars off campus and from passing their schools gates. Citizens in West Virginia picked up five tons of garbage off the

highway and deposited it on the steps of the county courthouse. All three major networks televised the activities of the day, and devoted the entire daytime programming to Earth day coverage.

Earth Day's goal was to unite conservation organizations with younger groups focused on urban and industrial issues. The events of the next few years would demonstrate their political power. The Environmental Protection Agency was established later in 1970; the tough Clean Air Act of 1970 was passed; the military was forced to halt the use of mutagenic defoliants in Southeast Asia. Within the next three years, landmarks as the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act were passed.

As the 20th anniversary of Earth Day approached, the condition of the earth called for the attention of an international audience. Treats to the world's ocean, climate change, ozone depletion, and other issues were receiving media attention. A successful Earth Day could be instrumental in encouraging heads of state to attend the upcoming UN Summit in Brazil, and vote on behalf of important earth saving proposals.

Again Hayes and Senator Nelson were instrumental in leading the campaign. Christina Desser, Mark Dubois and Teresa McGlashin assisted them in the international outreach.

By April 1990, events had been organized in 141 countries. Estimates of participants around the world ranged as high as 200 million.

In many nations, Earth Day created an atmosphere in which political leaders felt compelled to attend the UN Summit in Rio de Janeiro. The Earth Summit was the largest collection of national political leaders ever to meet in one place. It made some important steps toward the problems of climate change and other issues. Several Eastern European nations responded to public demand by establishing new environmental protection agencies. Also top officials in New York passed the largest environmental bond act in the state's history, a \$2 billion package.

For 30 years the Earth Day campaign has been a worldwide alliance working to promote a healthy environment and a peaceful, just, sustainable world by organizing

events, activities and annual campaigns. It is the cause for many changes that have been brought about for the greater good of the world.

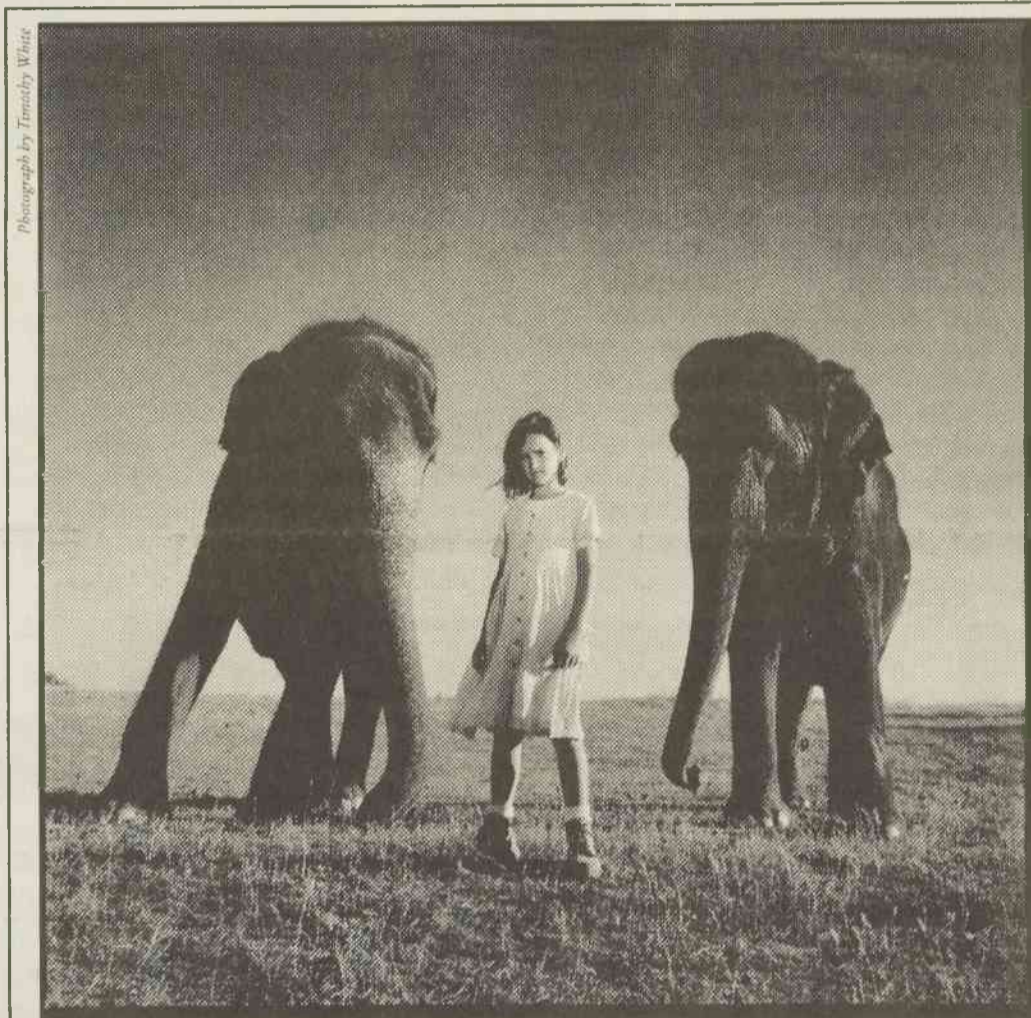
How to make a difference:

- Recycle your trash. Press campus officials for recycling bins for aluminum cans, glass and newspapers.

- Buy recycled products and products that use minimal packaging. Extra wrapping might look nice, but it's trash.

- Write to your legislators. Tell them to think about environmental issues.

- Park your car. Take the bus and push N.C. officials for a mass-transit system. Carpool or walk. Happy Earth Day.



Which one would you choose?

The elephants? The whales? The clean air we breathe? Maybe the choice isn't so clear. Maybe you'd like a way to keep them all. Now the world's leading environmental groups are working together. To find out how you can help, look for us at www.earthshare.org.

One environment. One simple way to care for it.



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