Conserving Biodiversity Seen as a Moral Cause

A growing partnership between religious and environmental groups is becoming a notable force for conservation.

Cases in point: a recent series of television and print ads, sponsored by the Evangelical Environmental Network, that ask, “What would Jesus drive?” Congressional lobbying by the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, pushing higher fuel efficiency standards and the preservation of the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge. And an April address by the head of the National Council of Churches urging religious communicators to portray environmental protection as the “care of creation – essentially a spiritual, moral and ethical issue.”

“We’re seeing people digging into deeper values to find solutions to problems that are not going to be solved by one law or another, or by one particular set of data or another,” says Jane Elder, who heads the Biodiversity Project, a non-profit organization based in Madison, Wis. Its mission is to help people understand why biodiversity is important, how it’s relevant to their lives, and what they can do to conserve and protect it.

“There are no scientific solutions to some of these issues – how six billion people can get along with the rest of life, having to deal with choices about distribution of resources, about the value of other life on the planet. These are ethical questions,” says Elder, who earned a master’s degree in the Nelson Institute’s Land Resources Program in 1991.

The Biodiversity Project recently published a book, *Ethics for a Small Planet*, designed to help scientists, activists, and educators “open a broader conversation with the public on the ethical issues related to protecting species, habitat, (and) ecosystems,” according to its preface.

“One of the primary goals for the publication of *Ethics for a Small Planet* was that the dialogue in the media doesn’t often enough include the ethical foundations for environmental protection,” says Erin Oliver, the project’s director of communications and a 2000 alumna of the Conservation Biology and Sustainable Development Program. “It ends up being a conversation about how many species there are or what the economy is like or what the science is behind it, and not about the deep-rooted feelings and values that make people interested in protecting the environment. The book was developed to open up the dialogue, which is starting to happen with things like the ‘What Would Jesus Drive’ campaign.”

But it hasn’t been easy. Religious and environmental groups have generally been on opposite sides of key social issues, including reproductive choice. While some have been able to set aside those differences, Elder says there’s still a cultural divide.

“We’ve been involved in work with the faith community, the spirituality and values aspect of environmental issues, since 1996,” she says. “Part of our role has been to help environmentalists get more comfortable in this realm. Religion is part of the richness of American culture, and if environmentalists can’t figure out how to communicate in those terms, we’re missing a real opportunity.”

One they can’t afford to miss, according to the Biodiversity Project’s own opinion research. Two polls, taken in 1996 and 2002, show a yawning gap in public understanding of the nature and importance of biological biodiversity.

“The tracking data from the first poll to the second poll tells us that awareness is up from about two in ten Americans to about three in ten,” says Elder. “Depending on how you do your math, that represents millions of people who know about biodiversity. But that still tells us that roughly 70 percent of the population doesn’t, so our work is cut out for us.”
Nelson Institute Feels Pinch of State Budget Crisis

The Nelson Institute faces a six percent budget cut as UW–Madison deals with an expected $100 million reduction in state funds over the next biennium, which begins July 1.

The belt-tightening comes in response to a state revenue shortfall of more than $3 billion. Governor Jim Doyle has proposed to cut $250 million across the University of Wisconsin System, with UW–Madison shouldering 40 percent of the burden. The university intends to make up the loss through a combination of program cuts and a significant boost in tuition, pending legislative approval.

For the Nelson Institute, the budget crisis translates into a loss of nearly $100,000 in the next biennium, following on the heels of an $11,000 cut in the current fiscal year. It means the immediate loss of a graduate student project assistantship; reduction from full to half-time of a currently vacant payroll and benefits specialist position; salary reductions for graduate program chairs; and a scaling down and consolidation of the institute’s library and computer lab, among other measures. Other cuts will be needed but can be deferred an additional year as a result of savings from faculty and staff departures and retirements.

In addition, all campus units have been told to reduce administration and improve efficiency; eliminate low-enrollment or duplicate courses; curtail all but vital travel; cut printing and postage costs (e.g., this newsletter is now entirely funded by contributions from alumni and friends); and delay replacement of aging computers and other equipment.

The Nelson Institute’s cuts were decided upon by a committee of faculty and staff. Acting director Erhard Joeres says they complied with university-wide guidelines, which included protecting student services and instruction, maintaining campus infrastructure, and addressing federal requirements under new homeland security provisions.

“We were not to do anything in response to a temporary budget shortfall that would cause permanent damage or be disproportionately expensive to compensate for later, and we were to try to protect gains made under the Madison Initiative, the cluster hiring of 150 new faculty,” he explains.

Joeres says he wanted to solve the budget problem before a permanent director is hired, probably later this year.

“We were given a short window in which to accomplish this; besides, this is not something we should leave for the new director. That is not a way to start a new job,” he says.

Graduate student representatives have been asked for input in determining how to reconfigure the library and computer lab to best meet student needs under the circumstances. Joeres says the key is to continue to provide work space and a place where students can gather and share ideas.

“What’s most important is that all of the Nelson Institute’s academic programs were protected,” he says.

Cuts in other campus colleges and programs ranged from zero to eight percent. Central administration took the largest cut, with the UW Medical School and the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences close behind at 6.5 percent. The Law School loses six percent, with the College of Engineering facing a 4.5 percent reduction. Programs for minority and disadvantaged students, among other essential services, will not be cut.

Letters

Dear friends:

I was so pleased to receive the Fall 2002 issue of In Common as it brought me memories of my days in Madison.

I studied at UW–Madison from 1992 to 1994. I got a master’s degree in Conservation Biology and Sustainable Development. Right after coming back to Nicaragua in 1994, I was employed by the Ministry of Natural Resources and worked in the area of environmental education, helping government institutions and local non-governmental organizations to come up with a national strategy on environmental education. I used to work at the decision-making level, in representation of the Ministry of Natural Resources.

Currently I am working for the Christian Children’s Fund of Canada, as the Field Director for Nicaragua. My work now is more in the social areas as we help poor communities to have better access to education, basic health, and better nutrition, and overall we do as much as possible to empower people so that they can move themselves to higher living standards.

I am so grateful for the opportunity I was given to study at UW–Madison. That experience has been the one that helped me to achieve my dreams of becoming a real social promoter. I still have many friends in Madison, and from time to time I visit them or they visit me in Managua. I consider Madison my second home!

Yours,
Jorge Luis Hernandez (M.S., CBSD 94)
herben@ibw.com
Joeres Becomes Interim Director of Nelson Institute

Erhard Joeres, a professor of civil and environmental engineering and environmental studies, became interim director of the Gaylord Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies upon the retirement of Tom Yuill in January.

Joeres, who is also the current chair of the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, will serve until a permanent replacement is chosen. A search and screen committee has selected four finalists for the position (see below).

“The Nelson Institute is a wonderful part of the UW–Madison campus,” Joeres says. “I look forward to the challenge of leading the institute and continuing the hard work put forth for so many years by Tom Yuill.”

Joeres joined the UW–Madison faculty in 1970, and has been associated with the Nelson Institute for more than two decades. He most recently chaired the institute’s academic programs, following earlier service as chair of its Water Resources Management, Land Resources and Air Resources Management programs. He is also on the program faculty of the Energy Analysis and Policy Program.

The Institute for Environmental Studies was created in 1970 to promote and enhance interdisciplinary environmental instruction, research and outreach. The institute was renamed last spring in honor of former Wisconsin governor and U.S. senator Gaylord Nelson, a lifelong champion of environmental stewardship and the founder of Earth Day. Approximately 150 professors from more than 50 UW–Madison departments are affiliated with the Nelson Institute, which administers several degree and certificate programs.

Three Finalists Named in Director Search

The University of Wisconsin–Madison has narrowed the field of candidates to three finalists for the position of director of the Gaylord Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies.

The list of unranked finalists was presented to Chancellor John Wiley in mid–April by a search and screen committee chaired by Brent McCown, a professor of horticulture and environmental studies, and made up of faculty, academic and classified staff, students and a representative from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Wiley will make the final decision.

Erhard Joeres, professor of civil and environmental engineering and environmental studies and chair of the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, has served as interim director of the Nelson Institute since Jan. 27, when former director Tom Yuill retired.

The finalists for director are:

- **Kevin McSweeney**, a professor in the Department of Soil Science and the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies at UW–Madison, is the director of the School of Natural Resources and associate director of the Wisconsin Agricultural Experiment Station. He is the former chair of the Land Resources Program at the Nelson Institute.

- **Steve Rayner**, a professor of science in society at Oxford University, is the director of the Programme on Science in Society of the Economic and Social Research Council. Prior to joining Oxford, he served as director of environment and public affairs at Columbia University. He has also led interdisciplinary environmental research teams at Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Washington and Oak Ridge National Laboratory in Tennessee.

- **Filomina Steady**, professor and chair of the Africana Studies Department at Wellesley College in Wellesley, Mass., is an honorary fellow and a former visiting professor and fellow at the Nelson Institute. She formerly served as director of the Women’s Studies Program and associate professor of anthropology at California State University in Sacramento. She has also held a variety of positions with the United Nations, including Special Advisor on Women, Environment and Development to the Secretary General of the 1992 Earth Summit.
Charlotte Zieve, who earned a Ph.D. in the Land Resources Program in 1986, has donated funds to the Nelson Institute to establish a new fellowship for students in land resources. The Zieve Award, which will be given annually, will cover the equivalent of one semester of in-state tuition. Halley MacNaughton has been named this year’s recipient.

Winners of the Nelson Institute’s other fellowships have also been named. They are: Carla Friedrich, Lawry International Travel Award; Diane Pansky, CBSD Summer Travel Award; Julia Wilcox, Cottam Fellowship; and Erik Steffens, Loucks Fellowship.

In addition, Doris Duke fellowships went to Colleen Corrigan, Kristen Patterson, Emily Steel and Jason Van Driesche.

New Transportation Certificate First of Its Kind

Relieving the growing congestion on Interstate highways and city streets will require more than simply building additional roads. Engineering is part of the solution, but economic, political, social and environmental considerations also determine what can and should be done.

That’s the concept behind a new interdisciplinary graduate-level certificate program offered by the Gaylord Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies.

The Transportation Management and Policy Program won approval from the university administration late last year and has begun accepting students.

Teresa Adams, a professor of civil and environmental engineering and environmental studies who spearheaded development of the program and is its first chair, says the idea arose in the Midwest Regional University Transportation Center, a federally funded research and education project based in UW–Madison’s Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering.

“We looked at educational needs in this area and discovered that they go beyond just civil engineering,” she says. “Technical issues are part of it, but the context in which we deliver transportation systems has changed dramatically, so now we’re concerned with the environment, social justice, political issues and the ‘not-in-my-back-yard’ syndrome.”

Adams says state and federal transportation agencies, as well as consulting firms, draw on a wide range of disciplines to attack these problems, but new employees must learn on the job.

“The state agencies hire people from business and policy and environmental backgrounds, but they don’t come in with a lot of understanding about transportation and associated issues. They learn it when they get there. We’re trying to provide that education so they’re more suitable for those jobs,” she explains.

The certificate program covers all modes of transportation, such as highways, mass transit, air, water, and rail. Students must complete at least 18 credits of recommended courses, including a one-credit internship with a transportation agency or business.

“The internship is much more experience based, where you work as part of a multidisciplinary team,” says Adams. “The writing component of the certificate requirement focuses on short documents like management memos, policy statements, and analysis summaries.”

The certificate program is geared toward students with academic backgrounds in business, economics, engineering, environmental studies, land management, public affairs, and/or urban and regional planning, but graduate students from any academic department at the university may apply. Those who complete the program will earn a certificate in transportation management and policy to supplement their graduate degree. In many cases, credits will be counted towards the requirements of both.

At least half a dozen students have already enrolled in the program.

“We’re attracting two types of people,” says Adams. “Students who want an interdisciplinary master’s degree through the Nelson Institute and those who wish to stay in a more traditional discipline but acquire expertise and experience in this team approach. One is just as important as the other.”

Adams and her colleagues looked elsewhere for models upon which to base the Transportation Management and Policy Program but found none.

“We don’t see another type of educational program like this anywhere in the country,” she says.

A Web site for the program will be available soon at www.ies.wisc.edu/tmp/.
The Biodiversity Project works like a marketing firm, developing strategies and testing the results through polls and focus groups. It offers handbooks, fact sheets and other communication tools to environmental organizations, zoos, teachers, and others who want to hone their message.

Most of the expertise in the environmental movement tends to be on policy and specific issues,” says Elder. “We have lots of people who understand legal issues, science and technology, politics, but there’s not a depth of expertise on communications, on how to cut through the clutter of our consumer culture and the messages people get every day. I’d like to think we’re a small but significant resource for the environmental movement.”

Information gleaned from the group’s opinion research can help activists target their appeals more effectively. For example, the project’s polls have found that people are turned off by the negativity that often defines environmental issues.

“When you look at the history of environmental communications, a lot of our messages have been wrapped in sacrifice, guilt, ‘it’s your fault,’ which put people off,” says Elder. “We look at the values that motivate people to care about the environment, and they’re pretty lofty. It’s about family, it’s about future, it’s about how we can live together on the planet, it’s about beauty, it’s about permanence. And when we can have the conversation on that level, then you can talk about solutions, you can talk about actions that people can take.”

The group has just published a new message kit, “Eastern Forests and Biodiversity.” A previous kit looked at “Making the Biodiversity-Sprawl Connection.” For more information about the Biodiversity Project and its publications, visit its Web site at www.biodiversityproject.org.

John Steinhart

John Steinhart, a founding faculty member of the Gaylord Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, died in early April in Albuquerque, N.M. He was 73.

Steinhart, who retired in 1991, came to UW–Madison in 1970 to help establish what was then IES. He was one of the institute’s most colorful and well-liked faculty members, and helped establish its Energy Analysis and Policy Program in 1979, which he chaired from 1983 until his retirement. He supervised the graduate studies of 31 students, most of whom obtained master’s degrees in land resources with an energy certificate, and he sat on the committees of an additional 32 students. His popular courses included Science and Government, Energy Resources, and the Future of Technology. The university recognized him with a Distinguished Teaching Award in 1991.

After earning a bachelor’s degree from Harvard in economics and English literature – and starring in varsity swimming – Steinhart served as a U.S. Navy pilot, then studied geology and geophysics at UW–Madison, completing a Ph.D. in 1960. During parts of the Johnson and Nixon administrations, he was on the staff of the White House science advisor, in charge of energy-related issues.

Steinhart coauthored three books on energy with Carol Steinhart. Upon his retirement, he moved to New Mexico to pursue his many interests, which included writing, music, and woodworking.

Word of Steinhart’s passing brought an outpouring of remembrances from alumni and friends.

“What a sorrow to lose this incredible man,” wrote Abram Kaplan (M.S., LR/EAP 89). “He was the single most influential mentor I ever had, and he encouraged me to pursue opportunities I would never have imagined without his persistence. He was gentle yet sharp, patient but insistent, lofty and amazingly precise all at once. John advised me with an elegance that I have sought to continue in my own academic career. I continue to feel his presence when I seek to help my students figure out their paths.”

Ken Conca (M.S., LR/EAP 85) also cites Steinhart as a guiding force.

“John was a giant, and an enormously important influence for me at an important time in my life,” he wrote. “I just learned a few days ago that I had won a teaching mentorship award, and it made me stop and think about who my own mentors were – with John at the front of the line, of course. I pulled his book Energy (1974) off the shelf and reread the last few pages. It’s amazing how his basic wisdom and insight ring truer than ever in these violent, misguided times.”

An informal memorial gathering of former colleagues, students and friends will be held on Saturday, June 21, at 3:00 in the Pyle Center on the UW–Madison campus. For more information, contact Sue Fafard, smfafard@wisc.edu or 608/263–4626.

Biodiversity as a Moral Cause

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John Steinhart

John Steinhart 1929 – 2003
Alumni News

Steve Blumenshine (B.S., Zoology/Environmental Studies 87) is currently an assistant professor in the Department of Biology at California State University-Fresno.

After his undergraduate studies at UW–Madison, Blumenshine received a master’s degree in environmental biology from George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, in 1992, and a Ph.D. at the University of Notre Dame in 1997. He then worked in a post-doctoral position at the University of Maryland’s Horn Point Laboratory.

Blumenshine lives in Fresno and can be reached via email at sblumens@csufresno.edu.

Ken Conca (M.S., LR/EAP 85) and Geoffrey Dabelko have co-authored a new book, Environmental Peacemaking, published by the Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Johns Hopkins University Press.

The book poses the question, Can environmental cooperation foster peace? The authors examine case studies in six regions: South Asia, Central Asia, the Baltic, Southern Africa, the Caucasus, and the U.S.-Mexico border.

While these areas vary dramatically, Conca and Dabelko suggest that these tense security situations all create opportunities for environmental cooperation to galvanize peacemaking.

Conca is an associate professor of government and politics at the University of Maryland and the director of the Harrison Program on the Future Global Agenda, and was recently named as a winner of a UMD teaching mentorship award. His email address is KCONCA@gvpt.umd.edu.

For more information about Conca and Dabelko’s book, visit the publisher’s Web site at www.press.jhu.edu.

Pat Connolly (M.S., LR 01) recently became a housing development manager for CommonBond Communities, Minnesota’s largest non-profit developer and manager of affordable housing. “CommonBond has developed 3,500 units of affordable housing all over the Twin Cities and Minnesota in the past 30 years, and in 2003 we will be aiming to build some projects in Wisconsin, including an adaptive reuse of a hospital in Hudson for senior housing, and an adaptable reuse of a warehouse in Milwaukee for apartments for low income families,” he explains. The organization’s Web site is www.commonbond.org.

“I’m also teaching a seminar on real estate development in the Urban Studies Program at the University of Minnesota this spring,” he writes. “I also set up a real estate consulting gig at home.”

Connolly predominantly consults with churches and religious non-profits. He can be emailed at pat@connollyadvisors.com.

Ross Freeman (M.S., CBSD 2000) is the staff scientist in the northwest office of American Rivers in Seattle.

“I do a variety of ecology and policy work,” he writes. “On the side, I’ve been writing for Conservation in Practice (a journal of the Society for Conservation Biology) and have had two stories in there so far: one on the Grand Canyon test floods five years back, and one on dam removals and toxins in the food chain of the Great Lakes region.

“Otherwise, I am slowly settling in to the big city life and trying to get used to all the folks who want to go where I do on weekends.”

Freeman lives in Seattle; his email address is rfreeman@americanrivers.org.

Scott Mernitz (Ph.D., LR 78) is an international minerals industry consultant with Behre Dolbear.

“We are a firm of mostly associates who consult as multidisciplinary teams to mining companies and banks, to evaluate the risks of new mine projects, expansions, mergers, divestitures and closures,” he writes. “Projects have taken me to Jordan, Suriname, Jamaica and Brazil, with desktop work in Greenland, Australia, Algeria and others.

“A key topic of my work is, of course, environmental, social, economic and governance aspects of project sustainability. Studies at (the Nelson Institute) in environmental conflict resolution prepared me well for a career as a third-party EIS project manager, agency negotiator and consultant advising on project impacts, mitigation and conflict resolution.”

New Alumni

Doctorate: Juzhar Jusoh, land resources.

Master’s Degrees: Alexis Eakright, Cynthia Harrington, Othelia Kiser, Peter Moreno and Rachel Veltman, conservation biology and sustainable development; John Davison, Sheila Haskins and Jeffrey Thomas, environmental monitoring; Sanober Durrani and Erica Howard, land resources.

Undergraduate Certificates: Neda Arabshahi, Sarah Atzen, Nicole Beau, Nina Bednariski, Johannes Beeby, Tricia Burgoyne, Kevin Colwin, Ann Crosby, Danielle Davis, Kara Felzien, Katherine Findley, Erin Fuller, Susan Haugen, Keith Hennings, Christopher Heppe, Sandra Holter, Bryan Huberty, Nicholas Josephs, Nicole Kluge, Nicholas Lehmann, Megan Meehan, Aaron Miiele, Sara Murphy, Lily Palmer, Mandy Schepper, Brian Schwingl, Joy Sriviver, Geoff Seufert, Mariah Silk, Megan Stansl, Julie Thayer, Sarah Thomas, Kelly Wagner, Gina Wadejko, Mark Wegne and Yuliana.
Prior to his position at Behre Dolbear, Mernitz worked for state environmental agencies in Wisconsin and Colorado and consulted on environmental engineering and science. He lives in Arvada, Colorado; Behre Dolbear is headquartered in Denver.

Michelle Miller (M.S., LR 93), who manages the Pesticide Use and Risk Reduction Project at UW–Madison’s Center for Integrated Agricultural Systems, was recently named a Donella Meadows Leadership Fellow for 2003–04 by the Sustainability Institute. Miller is one of 15 environmental and social leaders to form the inaugural class.

“Fellows will explore ways to apply systems thinking and organizational learning to sustainability challenges,” according to the Sustainability Institute. “They were selected for their ability to grapple effectively with multi-stakeholders around a specific issue in their current work, and for their potential to influence thinking in wide circles of people. Each Fellow employs an approach to sustainability that displays analytic clarity, systemic change and attention to spirit, values, and meaning.”

Miller works with researchers, farm organizations, and center staff on projects that reduce the risk and use of pesticides on Wisconsin farms.

For more information on Donella Meadows and the Sustainability Institute, go to http://sustainer.org.

Betsy Otto (M.S., WRM 99) recently became the director of a new program called Community Rivers for the advocacy group American Rivers.

“It’s basically an urban rivers program,” she says. “I’m putting together a casebook and development guidelines and design principles for more ecologically sound riverfront development. Very interesting stuff, and a nice mix of restoration science and policy, urban planning, and landscape design.”


Catherine Swanson (B.A., History/Environmental Studies, 2000) is serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Samoa.

“I am working as the project officer for a small non-governmental organization called the Women in Business Foundation (WIBF),” she reports. “Women in Business seeks to promote the economic and self-development of women, youth and their families in rural villages. Some of WIBF’s projects are the Fine Mat Revival Project, Organic Farming, Coconut Oil Production, and Micro Finance. I’m really proud to be working for Women in Business. They have steadily been gaining international and local recognition as a successful organization that helps strengthen rural economies in Samoa.”

“Although life as a Peace Corps Volunteer has many ups and downs, I am enjoying myself here in Samoa. When it’s not hurricane season, I paddle everyday on an outrigger canoe team. I am becoming fluent in the Samoan language and enjoy learning the Fa’aSamoa (the Samoan way of life). There are a lot of western influences here, but Samoa remains true to its rich and complex culture. I have been here for a year and a half, but continue to learn something new about Samoa each day. My time in Peace Corps Samoa has been a great experience.”

“This summer, I will head back home to Seattle and slowly readjust to a very different pace of life.”

Swanson lives on Apia in Western Samoa, and can be emailed at cathyin-samoa@yahoo.com.

Erika Van Wie Pollard (M.S., CBSD 2000) is the conservation director for the Nevada Wilderness Project.

“Our mission is the preservation of Nevada’s outstanding wildlands through their incorporation into the National Wilderness Preservation System,” she says. “We promote a positive message of wilderness values through our citizen’s inventory of potential wilderness on public lands, and we seek the establishment of an enduring grassroots commitment to Nevada wilderness.”

“We recently had success through the passage of federal legislation in October 2002, which was sponsored by the entire Nevada congressional delegation. Among other public land provisions, the legislation included protecting about 450,000 acres of new wilderness surrounding Las Vegas. Although this was not everything we were hoping to get protected in the bill, it’s a good start for southern Nevada and the increasing threats our public lands are experiencing from the area’s incredibly high rate of growth.”

Van Wie Pollard was married in the fall of 2001, and she and her husband bought a house a year later. They live in Soda Springs, California, in the Lake Tahoe area. Her email address is erika.vanwie@wildnevada.org.

Moving?

Please keep IES in mind when you fill out those postal change-of-address forms. Better yet, you can email us about recent or upcoming changes in your location. Send information to spomplun@facstaff.wisc.edu. Thanks!
Your gift... is needed and appreciated by the Gaylord Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies. Please consider a tax-deductible contribution to support special lectures, programs, travel and scholarship. You can contribute to the general IES Fund or to one of the special funds listed below.

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___ Conservation Biology & Sustainable Development Program  ___ Climate, People and Environment Program
___ Center for Sustainability and Global Environment

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