



# ENVIRONMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

A million years is nothing. This planet lives and breathes on a much vaster scale. We can't imagine its slow and powerful rhythms, and we haven't got the humility to try. We've been residents here for the blink of an eye. If we're gone tomorrow, the earth will not miss us.

Michael Crichton





# Environmental Philosophy

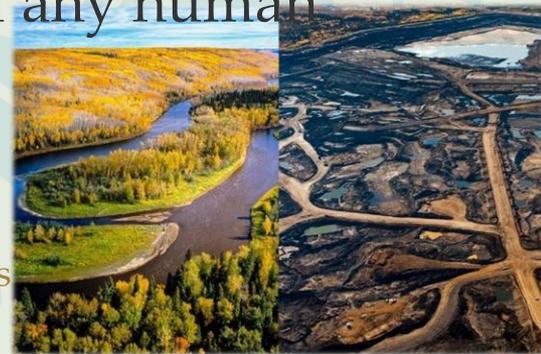
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The field of environmental philosophy concerns human beings' ethical relationship with the natural environment.

The job of environmental ethics is to outline our moral obligations in the face of environmental concerns: what duties do humans have with respect to the environment, and why?

In order to tackle what our obligations are, we must consider first *why* we have them. For example, do we have environmental obligations for the sake of human beings living in the world today, for humans living in the future, or for the sake of entities within the environment itself, irrespective of any human benefits?

Alberta Tar Sands  
mining project





# Environmental Philosophy

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Different philosophers have given quite different answers to this fundamental question which has led to the emergence of quite different environmental ethics. Environmental ethics differ on concepts such as:

- instrumental value vs. intrinsic value (non-instrumental value)
  - **instrumental value**: the value of things as *means* to further some other ends
  - **intrinsic value**: the value of things as *ends in themselves* regardless of whether they are also useful as means to other ends.
- **anthropocentrism**: belief that human beings are the central or most significant species on the planet (in the sense that they are considered to have a moral status or value higher than that of all other organisms)
- concepts of **Wilderness** (to be left undisturbed, pristine) vs. **The Garden** (to be tended, shaped, used)





# Judeo-Christian Philosophy

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- The works of mainstream Church Fathers and the Bible support the anthropocentric perspective that humans are the only things that matter on Earth. Consequently, they may utilize and consume everything else to their advantage without any injustice.
- Judeo-Christian thinking has encouraged the overexploitation of nature by maintaining the **superiority of humans** over all other forms of life on earth, and by depicting all of nature as created for **the use of humans**.
- Modern Western science was born out of Christian theology so that it too inherited the orthodox Christian arrogance toward nature.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

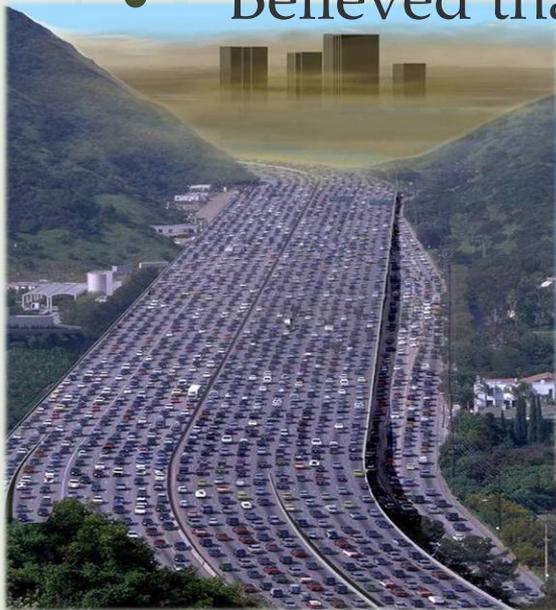
Genesis 2:15



# Jean Antoine Condorcet 1743-1794



- French philosopher, mathematician and early political scientist
- Predicted innovation, the resulting increased wealth and choice would provide food in the future and lead to fewer children per family.
- Believed that society was **perfectible**.



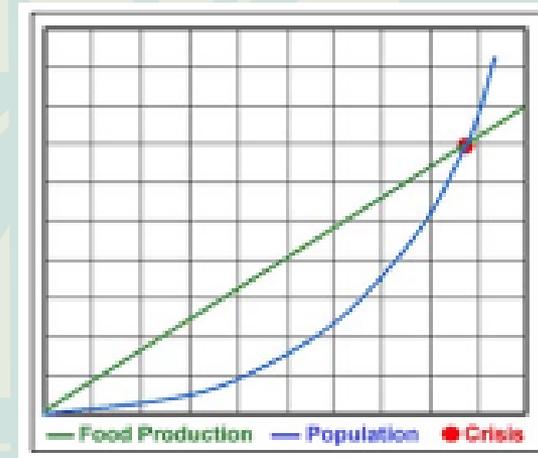


# Thomas Malthus

## 1766-1834



- English cleric and scholar, influential in the fields of political economy and demography
- *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798): responding to Condorcet, predicted population would outrun food supply, leading to a decrease in food per person
- Assumptions:
  - Populations grow **geometrically**.
  - Food supply grows **arithmetically**.
  - Food shortages, famine, war, and chaos **inevitable**.



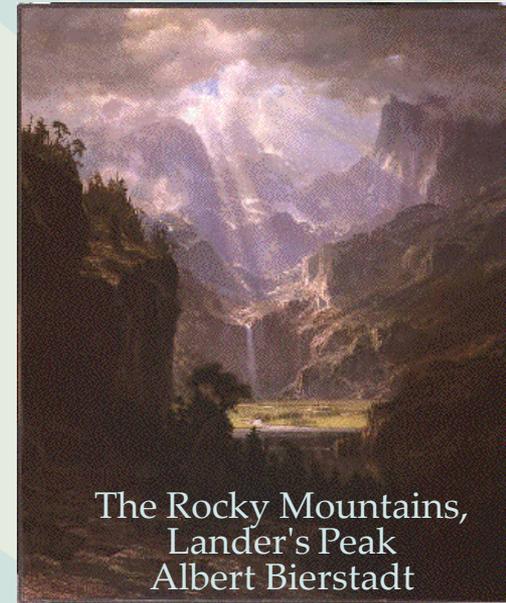
Food	Population
1	2
2	4
3	8
4	16



# Transcendentalism: Romantic Wilderness

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- philosophical movement that developed in the 1820s and 1830s in the eastern US
- believed in the inherent goodness of both people and nature, **that society and its institutions corrupted** the purity of the individual, and that people are at their best when self-reliant and independent
- Transcendentalists:
  - Ralph Waldo Emerson (1802-83)
  - Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-82)
  - Henry David Thoreau (1817-62)
- Love of the **wilderness** was born in American cities as industrial revolution bred revulsion to urban life.
- Artists, poets, philosophers saw the wilderness, particularly the untamed American wilderness, as salvation for the human soul.





# Henry David Thoreau

## 1817-1862

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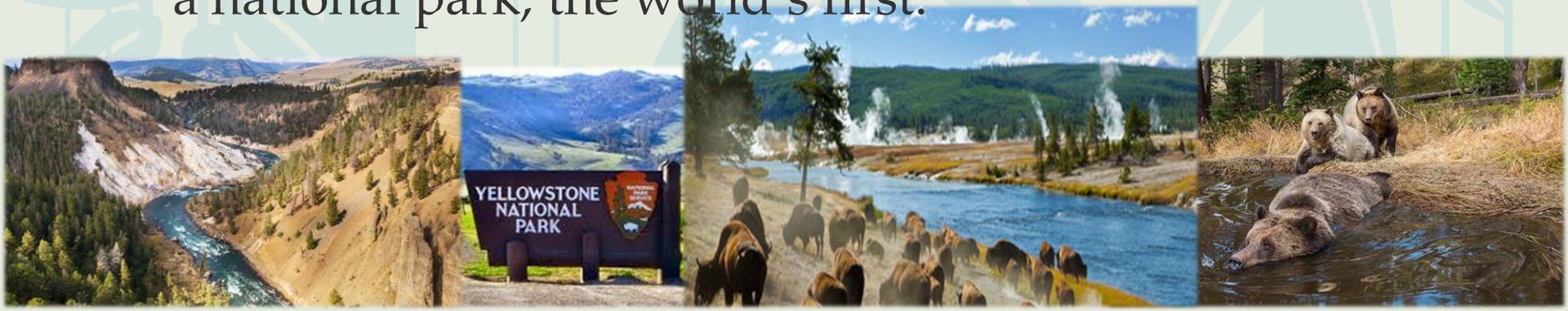
- *Walden* (1845): The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.
- On April 23, 1851 Henry David Thoreau, slight and stooped, ascended the lecture platform before the Concord Lyceum. "I wish," he began, "to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness." Thoreau promised his statement would be extreme in an effort to answer the numerous champions of civilization. "Let me live where I will," he declared. "On this side is the city, on that the wilderness. And ever I am leaving the city more and more, and withdrawing into the wilderness."
- Near the end of the address, Thoreau concentrated his message in eight words: **In Wildness is the preservation of the World.**



# Preservationist Philosophy



- Preservation seeks **protection of nature from use**.
- Nature is best when untouched by human hands.
- Some areas should be completely preserved in their natural state.
- National parks are a fundamental element of this philosophy. It is also an American invention.
- March 1, 1872: Ulysses S. Grant set aside Yellowstone as a national park, the world's first.





# John Muir

## 1838-1914

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- Born in Dunbar Scotland, moved to Wisconsin farm as a child.
- Award-winning inventor of clocks and machines as student at U. of Wisconsin. Eye-injury in 1867 changed his goals (regained sight a month later).
- After walking 1000 miles to the Gulf of Mexico, he traveled to California via Panama in 1868. Walked to the Sierras, across the Central Valley, and wandered for years.
- 1892: founded the **Sierra Club**
- 1901: published *Our National Parks*, getting attention of Teddy Roosevelt.
- 1901-1913: Led the Sierra Club in a campaign to protect the Hetch Hetchy Valley, a part of Yosemite National Park, from being filled by a reservoir. Was perhaps the first effort at what is now known as **grassroots lobbying**, getting individual citizens to contact elected officials in support of or opposition to legislation.



# John Muir

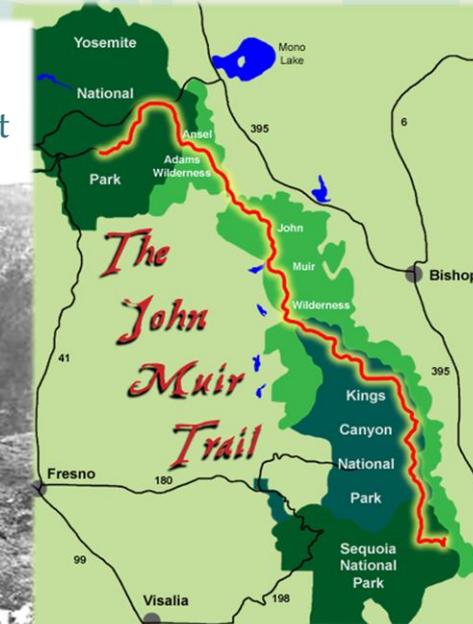
In God's wildness lies the hope of the world - the great fresh unblighted, unredeemed wilderness. The galling harness of civilization drops off, and wounds heal ere we are aware.

God never made an ugly landscape. All that the sun shines on is beautiful, so long as it is wild.

When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.



John Muir and Teddy Roosevelt





# The Importance of Wilderness

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- a place to enjoy
- a home for wildlife
- an economic engine and a way of life
- cleans our air and water
- a source of clean, renewable energy
- a natural laboratory
- an American legacy
- ours to protect
- [View benefits of wilderness infographic.](#)



# Conservationist Philosophy

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- Conservation seeks the proper use of nature.
- Should nature be preserved only because of its economic and practical benefits for humans or because it provides value beyond merely supplying natural resources?
- Humans belong in their environment as inhabitants and stewards.
- **ethic of caring for lands while simultaneously providing for a human population** – a diverse human population with a multitude of needs and multiple uses

Discover America's Story: The National Parks

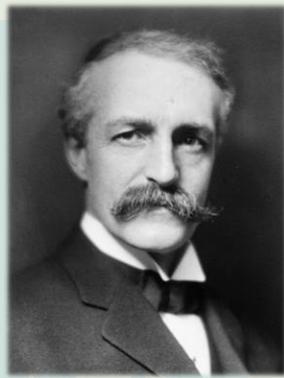




# Gifford Pinchot

## 1865-1946

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- American forester and first chief of the US Forest Service
- Known for reforming the management and development of forests in the US and for advocating the conservation of the nation's reserves by planned use and renewal. He called it "the art of producing from the forest whatever it can yield for the service of man."
- Coined the term **conservation ethic** as applied to natural resources. Put conservation of forests high on America's priority list
- Main contribution was leadership in promoting scientific forestry and emphasizing the controlled, profitable use of forests and other natural resources so they would be of **maximum benefit to mankind.**



# Theodore Roosevelt

## 1858-1919



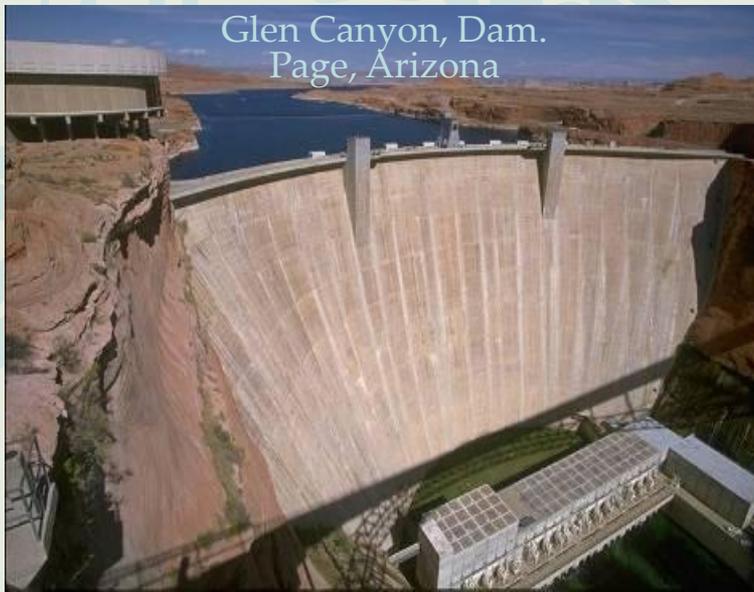
- Believed that wild lands were necessary for the healthy development of young men and for the economic future of the state.
  - Resources are not unlimited. We must conserve them so that there will always be a supply.
  - The conservation of natural resources is the fundamental problem. Unless we solve that problem it will avail us little to solve all others.
  - Use is acceptable, if reasonable and prudent.
  - Sometimes referred to as the **wise-use philosophy**.
- 1901-1908: Set aside approximately 230,000,000 acres (about 84,000 acres per day) as National Parks, National Forests, game and bird preserves, and other federal reservations.



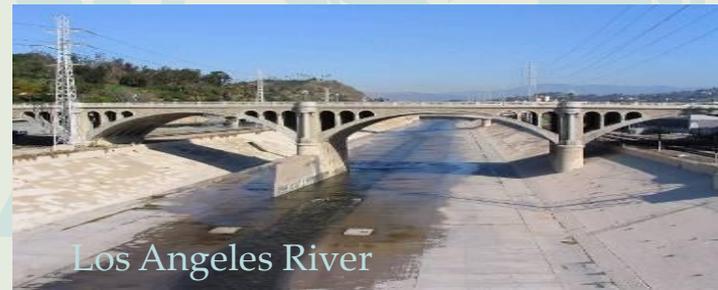


# Development Philosophy (18<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> Century)

- Forest Service
- **Floyd Dominy**, Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner (Colossus of Dams)
- Bureau of Land Management
- Army Corps of Engineers
- Nature is best when managed and improved upon by humans.
- **Nature can be improved**; it can and should be manipulated and mastered in order to make life less difficult for human beings.
- **Areas left untouched are ‘wasted’** because they can be put to better use to meet human needs. (Dominy: Water in a river does no good at all if isn't made available for people to use.)



Glen Canyon, Dam.  
Page, Arizona



Los Angeles River



# George Perkins Marsh

## 1801-1882

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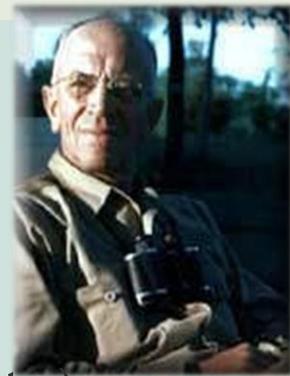


- Considered by many to be the **first environmentalist** and the precursor to the sustainability concept. Argued for careful use of land, showed that humanity could damage the earth.
- His book *Man and Nature* (1864) constituted an early work of ecology.
  - Argued that deforestation could lead to desertification, referring to the clearing of once-lush lands surrounding the Mediterranean which had become “a desolation almost as complete as that of the moon.”
  - Argued that welfare is secured as long as **man manages resources and keeps them in good condition.**
  - Resource scarcity comes from **unreasonable human action** rather than being determined by some absolute scarcity.



# Aldo Leopold

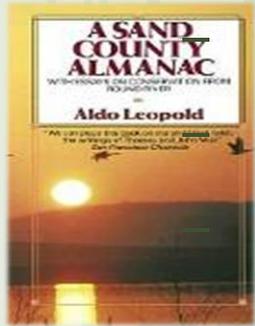
## 1887-1948



Famous for his concern about land conservation (soils, etc.).

*A Sand County Almanac*, 1949.

This collection of essays on the ecology of his Wisconsin farmland and forests is his most famous contribution.



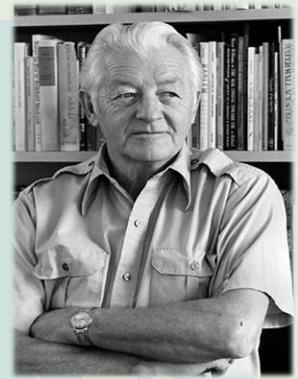
- **The Land Ethic:** We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.
  - Changes the role of man from **conqueror** of the biotic community (collection of different populations which reside in one place and interact with one other in many ways) to **member and citizen** of it.
  - A thing is right when it tends to **preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community**. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.



# Wallace Stegner

## 1909-1993

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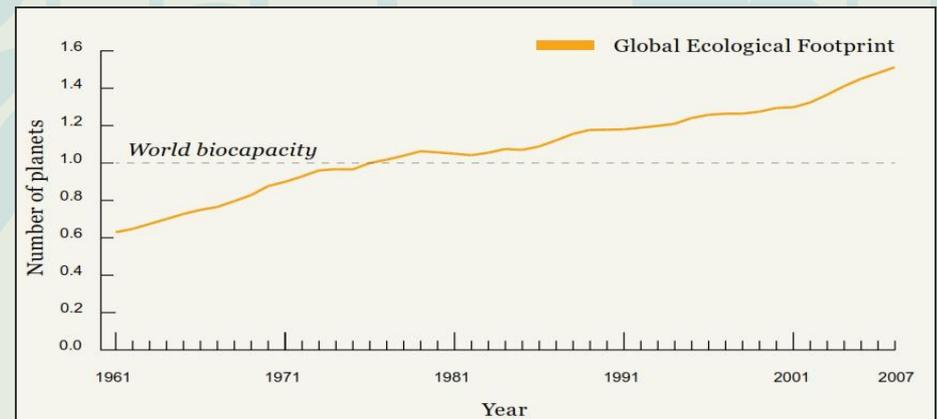
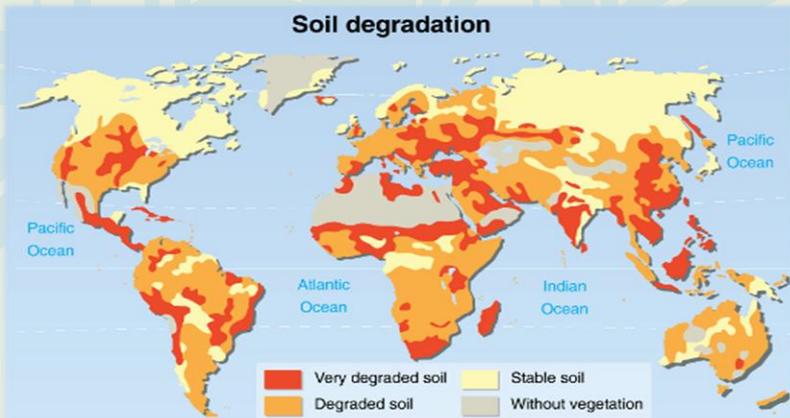


- American novelist, short story writer, environmentalist and historian
- *Wilderness Letter* (1960): nonfiction, one of the most eloquent statements about the environment
  - why we need wilderness and the importance of federal protection of wild places
  - used to introduce and help win passage of the **1964 US Wilderness Act**, the bill that established the National Wilderness Preservation System
  - We simply need that wild country available to us, even if we never do more than drive to its edge and look in. For it can be a means of reassuring ourselves of our sanity as creatures, a part of the geography of hope.
- “You don't go there to find something,” he once said about wilderness. “You go there to disappear.”



# Neo-Malthusians

- Modern neo-Malthusians are generally more concerned with environmental degradation and catastrophic famine than with poverty.
- Concerned that overpopulation may increase resource depletion or environmental degradation to a degree that is **not sustainable** with the potential of ecological collapse or other hazards.
- Argue that two factors make things more frightening today: medical technology and advancements have made population growth possible all over the world but not necessarily the development that lowers population, and population growth can outstrip resources in general (like oil) not just food supply.



Source: World Wildlife Fund. 2010. Living Planet Report.  
[http://wwf.panda.org/about\\_our\\_earth/all\\_publications/living\\_planet\\_report/2010\\_lpr/](http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/all_publications/living_planet_report/2010_lpr/)



# Rachel Carson

## 1907-1964

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- American marine biologist and conservationist who sounded the alarm on synthetic pollutants, particularly DDT, in *Silent Spring* (1962).
- Inspired a **grassroots environmental movement** that led to the creation of the **Environmental Protection Agency** (EPA) in 1970.
- Ironically, she died of complications from breast cancer, a disease some studies have linked to increased synthetic pollutants.

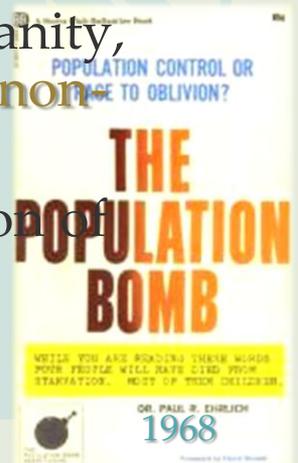
For the first time in the history of the world, every human being is now subjected to contact with dangerous chemicals, from the moment of conception until death.



# Paul R Ehrlich 1932-



- Overpopulation exists whenever people trying to produce food allow soil to erode faster than new soil can be generated, or drain aquifers faster than they can be recharged, or exterminate populations and species that are working parts of the ecosystems that support agriculture and fisheries faster than recolonization and speciation can reestablish them. *Today overpopulation prevails worldwide.*
- Humanity has already overshoot Earth's **carrying capacity** by a simple measure: no state is supporting its present population on *income* - that is, the sustainable flow of renewable resources. Instead, key renewable resources, the natural *capital* of humanity, **are being used so rapidly that they have become effectively non-renewable.**
- 300 million people have starved to death since the publication of *The Population Bomb*. On the other hand, life expectancy has increased by about four years.



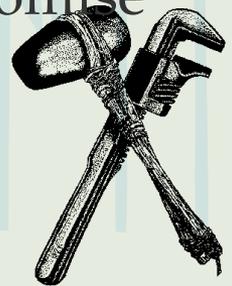


# Radical Environmentalism

- **Greenpeace:** promotes environmental sustainability rooted in social justice ... direct, non-violent, media-savvy action against commercial whaling operations, nuclear testing, etc ... [Greenpeace "About Us" Web Page](#)



- **Earth First:** guided by deep ecology philosophy, believe that life exists for its own sake ... direct action (tree-sitting, puke-in, flag burning, heckling, etc) to prevent logging, building of dams, and other forms of development ... No Compromise in Defense of Mother Earth! ... [Earth First! Journal](#)

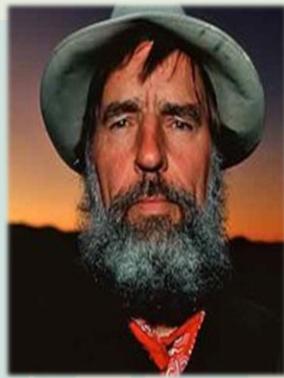




# Edward Abbey

## 1927-1989

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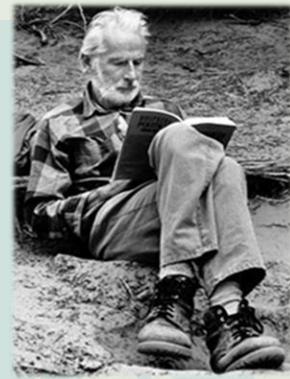
- American author and essayist noted for his advocacy of environmental issues and criticism of public land policies, worked as a seasonal ranger for the US National Park Service
- *Desert Solitaire* (1968): nonfiction, regarded as one of the finest nature narratives in American literature.
  - describes the physical landscapes of Southern Utah and recounts adventures in the canyon country and mountains
  - attacks the **industrial tourism** and resulting development in the national parks (national parking lots)
- *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975): fiction, “a sad, hilarious, exuberant, vulgar fairy tale ... It'll make you want to go out and blow up a dam.”
  - has been cited as an **inspiration by radical environmental groups**
  - Many think it inspired the creation of the radical environmental group Earth First.



# Arne Næss

## 1912-2009

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- Norwegian philosopher who coined the term **deep ecology** and was an important intellectual figure in the 20<sup>th</sup> century environmental movement
- Each person is more than just his body. Extended self-concern obliges humans not only to connect with and care about the other people who have made them what they are but also to care for the systems and beings on which continued human existence depends.
- The flourishing of all life, both human and nonhuman, has **value in its own right**. The distinguishing characteristics of the deep ecology movement are its recognition of the **inherent value** of all living beings and the use of this view in shaping environmental policies.
- The deep movement involves questioning down to fundamental causes and involves redesigning whole systems based on values and methods that truly preserve the ecological and cultural diversity of natural systems. [The short-term, shallow approach often promotes technological fixes (e.g. recycling, increased automotive efficiency) based on the same consumption-oriented values and methods of the industrial economy.]



# New Science And Social Science Concepts

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- Most scientists and social scientists now see the economy as a subsystem of the larger earth ecological system, although this view is not widespread yet in economics.
- Recent Concepts
  - **sustainable development**: development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the needs of the future
  - **carrying capacity**: the maximum population of a given organism which a particular environment can sustain without a tendency to decrease or increase
  - **overpopulation**: an increase in numbers of a population and levels of consumption beyond the natural renewable resource base





# Challenges Faced by Environmental Philosophy

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- How can we **overcome anthropocentrism**: the view which sees all of nature as serving human interests, and overlooks what has been called the 'intrinsic value' of nature?
- How do we define **our place in nature**: Are we to be regarded as equal to other natural beings, with no special privileges or rights, or do we have a higher role in shaping and managing nature?
- How do we **define moral status**, or what is sometimes called *moral considerability*, of animals and natural objects?





The End

