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## THE ENVIRONMENT

### *Safe Space for Common Ground*

When it comes to global warming, everyone sees dimly. But the prognosis for God's creation isn't good.

## Caring for God's Creation

BY LORA STEINER

My mother thinks global warming is a farce. I, on the other hand, think it's already happening, that in forty years it will be a much more significant problem than Social Security. I wish that the U.S. government would utilize already-available technology and resources to do something about it. And after reading the various reports published on climate change, I, too, have woken "in the night at the least sound," as Wendell Berry writes in his poem, *The Peace of Wild Things*, wondering what my life will be like.

When it comes to predicting the effects of global warming, pollution and over-consumption, everyone sees dimly. No one can say with certainty what the effects of climate change will (or won't) be in forty years, if the polar bears will be extinct or how high the ocean levels will rise. At the same time, the prognosis for God's creation is gloomy: rising temperatures could lead to the extinction of certain species, a rise in infectious diseases like malaria and displacement of coastal populations.

Many Christians, however, are taking notice and beginning to act. In March, when the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) released a statement favoring action on global warming, others in the environmental movement viewed it warily. But Rich Cizik, Vice President for Governmental Affairs for the NAE, assured his support. "I don't think God is going to ask

us how he created the earth," said Cizik. "But he will ask us what we did with what he created."

The Reverend Jim Ball, who heads the Evangelical Environmental Network, cited the Gospels as his source of inspiration. He told a reporter, "Christ said, 'What you do to the least of these you do to me,' and so caring for the poor by reducing the threat of global warming is caring for Jesus Christ."

In this issue, we asked two outside writers for their perspectives on the environment, whose job it is to care for it and how to do that. Jim Alvarez and Wendell Wiebe-Powell write about these issues both within the context of global business practices and their faith. Other articles focus on the land and its use: Daryl Byler writes about landmines, Bethany Spicher shares about agricultural subsidies, while David Whettstone focuses on the sacredness of land in Native American culture.

My mother and I might not agree on everything, but she was the one who taught me to wash out and reuse Ziploc bags, to compost leftover food scraps, to buy ecologically-friendly detergent and to go out to the garden on hot days to weed the strawberries. It is my hope that whether we feel a sense of urgency and responsibility around environmental issues or not, we might still be able to learn from each other. The environment, after all, knows no borders; caring for God's creation is the responsibility of all Christians everywhere. ■

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BY J. DARYL BYLER

**Worldwide, landmines alone maim and kill 15,000 to 20,000 people a year, mostly children, farmers and other innocent civilians, according to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.**

## After the Guns Fall Silent

**W**ith daily reports of casualties in Iraq, it may be hard to imagine that some day the violence in Iraq will come to an end. Some day the United States and other nations will withdraw their troops. Some day the insurgency will fizzle out. That will be a day to celebrate!

But even when the fighting finally stops, Iraqis will face an additional violent obstacle: unexploded ordnance (UXO), specifically, landmines and cluster bombs—the collective residue of World War II, decades of internal conflicts, the Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf War (1991) and the current conflict in Iraq.

According to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, Iraq is a “severely mine-affected country”—with some 8 to 12 million mines.

The Iraqi army is responsible for laying many of the land mines in the Kurdish areas of northern Iraq. While there is no documented U.S. use of landmines in the current conflict with Iraq, the United States did use landmines in the 1991 Gulf War.

The United States and coalition forces also dropped cluster bombs on Iraq in both 1991 (between 24 and 30 million bomblets) and 2003 (another 2 million bomblets).

Human Rights Watch reports: “More than 1,600 Kuwaiti and Iraqi civilians have been killed, and another 2,500 injured by the estimated 1.2 million explosive cluster bomb duds left following the 1991 Gulf

War, which saw the most extensive use of cluster bombs in history.”

The cluster bomblet dud rate—those that don’t explode on contact and effectively become landmines—is between 2 and 30 percent.

Worldwide, landmines alone maim and kill 15,000 to 20,000 people a year, mostly children, farmers and other innocent civilians, according to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines.

In addition to this enormous human cost, landmines and cluster weapons have a high environmental cost. In their book, *After the Guns Fall Silent: The Enduring Legacy of Landmines*, Shawn Roberts and Jody Williams write: “Populations with mine-limited access to agricultural or grazing land are pushed onto increasingly fragile, marginal lands, furthering the land’s rapid degradation.”

Some 144 nations have joined the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty which bans the use, production, stockpile and transfer of anti-personnel landmines. An additional eight countries have signed the treaty but have not yet ratified it.

Only 42 nations, including the United States, Iran, Iraq, Israel, North Korea and Syria, have not yet joined the treaty.

The Bush administration says it has no plans to sign the mine ban treaty and reserves the option of using self-destructing land mines indefinitely.

According to Human Rights Watch, the United States plans to deploy a new remote-controlled system of Claymore mines in Iraq in 2005. The Claymore mines are not banned by the 1997 treaty.

God has ordained government to maintain order and punish wrongdoers (Romans 13:1–4; I Peter 2:13–14). This role certainly does not extend to killing and maiming innocents and despoiling the environment. For this reason, the use of land mines and cluster bombs must be banned. ■

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WASHINGTON MEMO is written by Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office staff. It interprets national legislation and policy, seeking to reflect biblical concerns for justice and peace as represented in the work and statements of MCC U.S. and Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches. All biblical quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

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# What the Land Might Tell Us

Our appreciation of land must profoundly reflect right relationship with fellow human beings, created in God's image, and ultimately with our God. This commitment is not detached from respecting people and history. It all speaks of justice.

From the outset, the majority culture of the United States has used the notion of westward expansion into primordial, uninhabited land to justify an official policy of oppression, forced removal, genocide, homesteading and falsehoods against First Nations people.

From 1838 to 1839, members of the Cherokee Nation were expelled from their lands east of the Mississippi River, forced to march The Trail of Tears to "Indian Territory" (Oklahoma). Thousands died. Consistently, massacres (like Sand Creek and Wounded Knee) and violence have punctuated the disenfranchisement of First Nations people from their land.

The General Allotment Act of 1887 (the "Dawes Act") opened more than 90 million acres, two-thirds of the established reservation land, to white settlers until 1934. More losses followed. Also, the U.S. government owes over \$130 billion to more than 300,000 First Nations people from trust revenues (from oil, mining, etc.) generated from their land.

In 1860, the U.S. government ordered military troops on the frontier to collect the skulls and other remains of First Nations people and ship them to Washington, D.C. for scientific study. It is questionable how

some university museums have acquired sacred artifacts, as well.

Sadly, throughout these historical mileposts, people of faith have been complicit or silent. One wonders if First Nations people have a place to rest amidst neighbors.

In 1990, Congress passed the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). It requires the return of human remains and sacred objects to Native American tribes and nations from whence they came. Many tribes believe that more money is needed for NAGPRA programs. With each congressional session, we can advocate for proper funding.

The Hebrew Scriptures demonstrate the importance of land as being an instrument of sacredness, memory and identity for a people. Joshua 24:32 attests to this: "The bones of Joseph, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem, in the portion of ground that Jacob had bought from the children of Hamor . . . it became an inheritance of the descendants of Joseph." As we have acquired and occupy land, we must think and act with right relationship to First Nations people. ■

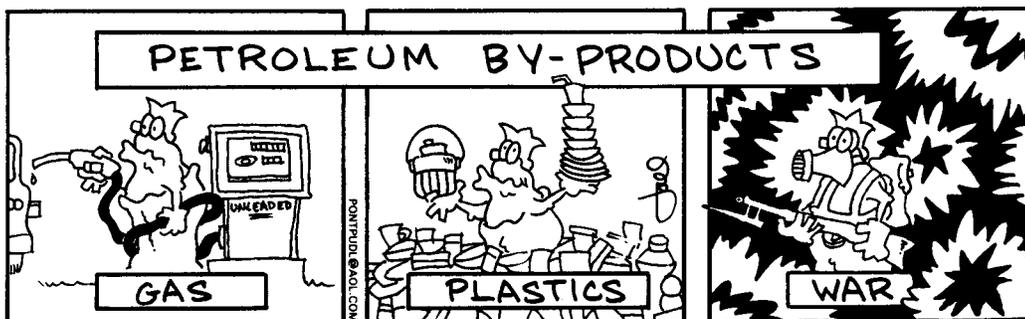
BY DAVID M. WHETTSTONE

In 1990, Congress passed the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, which requires the return of human remains and sacred objects to Native American tribes and nations from whence they came.

## RETURN TO THE EARTH

Currently over 110,000 remains cannot be identified as belonging to a particular tribe. Mennonite leader and Cheyenne Peace Chief Lawrence Hart is a former member of the NAGPRA Review Committee. He is providing leadership as MCC U.S. co-facilitates the Return to the Earth project, an effort to rightly intern the remains of First Nations ancestors. If you wish to know more and participate, see [www.rfpusa.org/returntotheearth](http://www.rfpusa.org/returntotheearth). Also see [www.cr.nps.gov/nagpra](http://www.cr.nps.gov/nagpra) for more NAGPRA information.

## Pontius' Puddle



# The Role of Government and Individuals In Caring for the Environment

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*In the United States, most people seem to agree that things can and should be done to help the environment, but there is more debate about how much should be done, and who should do it. Below, Jaime Alvarez and Wendell Wiebe-Powell continue our 2005 safe space dialogue series. See [www.mcc.org/us/washington/safespace](http://www.mcc.org/us/washington/safespace) for more information.*

**Washington Memo:** *What are the most pressing environmental issues today?*

**Jaime:** Resource depletion, contamination (air, land, water) and “global warming” are the three most pressing problems. However, more crucial is how countries prioritize and manage these. With good reason, the phrase “global warming” makes us think globally about the environment. The environmental problems are not just a problem for U.S. business people and practices.

Everyone must correctly understand the issues at hand, realizing that the world faces accelerating environmental challenges imposed by developed economies as well as developing economies such as China and India. Developing countries’ primary concern is alleviating poverty; in doing so they often use less environmentally—friendly technology and impose low regulatory oversight. Environmental challenges will increase exponentially, especially for the poor. The developing world is short on resources for investment in clean energy technology. Economists have shown that the environment will not be a priority in the developing world until its population achieves a certain level of economic and social well-being.

Within this global framework, environmental issues must be addressed at various levels. As individuals we must redefine “long term.” We cannot ignore the costs that our way of life impose on the environment. Until a majority of the population understands this and engages the political process with its votes, the environmental issues will remain improperly addressed as they are today.

**Wendell:** Respected scientists around the world have concluded that many of the earth’s life support systems are reaching the “tipping point,” beyond which it is very difficult to reverse. As Mark Hertsgarrd wrote in the *San Francisco Chronicle* earlier this year, “At the core of the global warming dilemma is a fact neither side of the debate likes to talk about: It is already too late to prevent global warming and the climate change it sets off. Environmentalists won’t say this for fear of sounding alarmist or defeatist. Politicians won’t say it because then they’d have to do something about it. The world’s top climate scientists have been sending this message, however, with increasing urgency for many years.”

In 2001, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, comprised of more than 2,000 scientific and technical experts, reported that human-caused global warming had already begun, and much sooner than expected. Last month, the panel’s chairman, Rajendra Pachauri, said, “We are risking the ability of the human race to survive.”

According to Martin Bender, who works with the Land Institute in Salina, Kan., the most pressing reversible environmental issue is human overpopulation. It contributes to nearly all the environmental problems we face, including energy overconsumption, which not only contributes to global warming but also is polluting the earth, is unsustainable and relies on controlling volatile regions of the world.

**WM:** *What should be done? What is the role of the United States government?*

**Wendell:** Personal lifestyle choices are important to a sustainable future but they must be coupled with economic and political structural change. We must make good on our belief that Christ is Lord of all areas of our lives. We need to advocate for regulations that hold businesses accountable around the world. We should be driving more efficient cars and trucks. We must support local independent businesses, especially those who are committed to social

Personal lifestyle choices are important to a sustainable future but they must be coupled with economic and political structural change. We must make good on our belief that Christ is Lord of all areas of our lives.

responsibility, environmental stewardship and profitability. Consumers must get behind this vision and vote with their dollars. We need to think of the marketing icons of the global economy as the Old Testament prophets spoke of the idols of their time and warned of not being seduced into going to bed with them.

Conservation, such as weatherizing existing buildings and environmentally-friendly designs for new buildings—not to mention energy efficient vehicles—could save much of the energy that we currently import from the Middle East.

The U.S. government should encourage wind and hydroelectric because they have large energy returns and few greenhouse emissions. Things like ethanol and bio-diesel are not as promising as the research literature has been suggesting, because we're already overtaxing our soils for food production and it is untenable to think that we can effectively "mine" the soil for energy as well.

**Jaime:** Within the United States, once a majority desires increased environmental quality then the U.S. government must seek international consensus and participation in environmental initiatives. This is a major challenge. Seeking and obtaining relevant global agreements that further the cause of environmental improvements will be extremely difficult but perhaps the most pressing environmental issue of our time.

We must recognize that attaining a cleaner environment is not free; economic arguments are valid. Increased U.S. regulations or forced decreased consumption will cost jobs. (As long as it is not our own, we tend to ignore the significance of this fact.) Governments wrestle with this balance of maintaining economic growth while regulating for a cleaner environment. The global economic context makes this increasingly complex. If the U.S. government imposes unilateral environmental regulations, it has made its economy less competitive.

Another important policy issue for the U.S. government is pursuing alternative energy sources. The creativity of our country's scientists and entrepreneurs with the correct government policy would lead us into developing renewable and clean energy sources.

**WM:** *What is the basis for your viewpoint?*

**Jaime:** The Bible directly addresses the environment and our role within. In Genesis 2:15, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till and keep it" (RSV). The phrase "keep it" implies sustainability, long term, keeping it through generations. Our current way of life does not lead us toward achieving this goal.

As a business person, one is conflicted in trying to assess the "right" balance between environmental sustainability and loss of economic potential. How to develop and implement policies that promote a sustainable environment while providing job opportunities for families? Business people are not just concerned about environmental issues. In the midst of a global competitive field there are ever-increasing societal expectations and government regulations compromising a firm's ability to compete and survive in the long run.

**Wendell:** The scriptures call us to choose life rather than death. We must be careful to avoid tunnel vision in our advocacy of life which can create blinders to the death—producing structures in which we are caught. The Hebrews' exodus out of slavery can be an empowering image for humanity caught in the grips of modern day systems that enslave us.

We may think it is just fine to make God's creation over according to our narrow understanding and to suit our narrow and short term purposes rather than "consulting the genius of the place," as Wes Jackson puts it. We rush ahead to change, develop and pave over without humbly considering what we are undoing in the process. ■

Jaime Alvarez directs the Family Business Program at Goshen College, Goshen, Ind. Wendell Wiebe-Powell is the director of Assets Elkhart County in Elkhart, Ind.

**As a business person, one is conflicted in trying to assess the "right" balance between environmental sustainability and loss of economic potential.**

# Subsidies for Some, Sweepings for Others

BY BETHANY SPICHER

*We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat (Amos 8:4–6).*

The government spent \$11.5 billion on commodity subsidies in 2003. Yet, according to the USDA, only eight percent of farmers receive 78 percent of the payments.

This spring, Congress passed a budget that slashes money for poverty programs, increases defense spending and cuts taxes for the wealthy, while actually increasing the deficit over the long term. To make room for the “tax relief,” congressional agriculture committees were directed to cut three billion dollars from nutrition, conservation and farm programs.

Of course, no one wants the cuts to come from their favorite programs. Anti-poverty advocates are calling on legislators to maintain food stamps for low-income families, school meals for kids, groceries for pregnant and nursing mothers and farmers’ market coupons for seniors. Small-scale farmers are concerned about rewards for conservation and incentives for rural development. Industrial-agriculture lobbyists, on the other hand, are seeking to keep commodity subsidies intact, arguing that nutrition and conservation programs are rife with “waste, fraud and abuse.”

However, the USDA recently reported to Congress that the percentage of food stamp benefits issued incorrectly is at the lowest in the program’s history. The majority of mistakes come from administrative errors in a vastly complex program, which nonetheless helps put food on the table for some 20 million individuals every day, many of them children, seniors or people with disabilities.

U.S. agriculture contributes to 70 percent of river pollution and 1.9 billion tons of soil erosion annually, according to the EPA. Incentives to protect waterways and rotate crops, estimated at \$2-3 billion per year, could make a big difference for the environment and small farmers. However, Congress continually denies promised funds, and this fall, took money from conservation programs to pay for disaster assistance.

Meanwhile, the government spent \$11.5 billion on commodity subsidies in 2003. Yet, according to the USDA, only eight percent of farmers receive 78 percent of the payments. Originally designed to help family farmers and rural communities, the majority of subsidies now go to agribusiness operations or absentee landowners for the production of just five crops: cotton, corn, soybeans, rice and wheat.

The out-of-balance subsidies contribute to overproduction, which requires overuse of marginal land and chemical fertilizers—depleting soil and contaminating water. In addition, surplus crops are often dumped on international markets, driving down prices for small farmers in the United States and around the world. U.S. cotton subsidies, for example, cost cotton-producing African countries almost \$400 million between 2001 and 2003, according to Oxfam.

The Rural America Preservation Act (S. 385, H.R. 1590) would decrease the \$360,000 existing subsidy cap to \$250,000 per recipient and close loopholes allowing large farms to receive payments exceeding one million dollars. The changes could save over two billion dollars, preventing cuts to food stamps, protecting land and water, and moving toward fairness for small farmers at home and abroad.

The prophet Amos promised judgment for those grain merchants who rigged their scales to profit from the poor. Those who benefit from unjust trade and deny food to the poor are not as easily identifiable in our globalized food and agriculture system, but the indictment stands. People of faith are still called to advocate on behalf of those who are getting the “sweepings of the wheat.” ■

# Take Action!

- **Explore** your natural environment. Learn more about the types of native plants and animals that thrive in your region. Trace your food back to its source. Study the effects of development or pollution in your area. How could these effects be changed?
- **Conserve.** Look for appliances with the Energy Star label on them, which indicates high energy efficiency. Encourage your congregation to become an Energy Start Congregation, part of a joint initiative between the National Council of Churches of Christ and the Environmental Protection Agency to make church buildings more energy efficient. Contact the NCC Energy Star Program for more information at 1-800-288-1346.
- **Consume less.** Figure out what your “ecological footprint” on the earth is, and resolve to make changes to have less of an impact. Excellent resources include the 28-day devotional *Trek: Venture into a World of Enough*, available from MCC at 1-800-563-4676, the book *Simpler Living, Compassionate Life: A Christian Perspective*, available from Earth Ministry (see back page), and the organization Alternatives for Simple Living at 1-800-821-6153 or [www.simplerliving.org](http://www.simplerliving.org). Also, consider the impact of your daily food choices with the *More-with-Less Cookbook* and the new *Simply in Season* cookbook, available from Herald Press at 1-800-245-7894.
- **Choose** the environmental issue that is your greatest passion. Get involved with organizations working on the issue, either locally or nationally. Write letters to your elected official, organize community events to raise awareness, hold prayer vigils, write letters to the editor.
- **Organize** a worship service that celebrates our Creator God. Include a time for confession of our exploitation of the environment, and empowerment to make alternative choices.
- **Learn more about environmental justice**—the disproportionate impact of environmental choices on poor persons and persons of color. Challenge corporations or government agencies that promote such practices.

Adapted from the MCC Washington Office Guide to the Environment written by Rachelle Lyndaker Schlabach, 2001.

O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures . . . When you send forth your breath, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground (Psalm 104:24, 30).

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

Read the following biblical texts. What is God’s message to Christians regarding care for creation? How should Christians respond?

Genesis 1–2	Matthew 6:28–30
Leviticus 25:18–24	John 1:1–5
Job 9, 26, 37–39	Romans 8:18–25
Psalms 8, 19, 24, 65, 96, 104	Colossians 1:15–23
Isaiah 41:17–20, 55:8–13	Revelation 21:1–7, 22:1–6

## CAPITAL QUOTES

“You can’t teach temperance from a bar stool.”

—Rep. Ed Markey (D-MA) describing why a proposed U.S. program to develop new nuclear weapons undermines U.S. efforts to halt the proliferation of nuclear weapons abroad.

“The issue of child care is a Washington-based issue. It is not an issue out in the states.”

—Sen. Rick Santorum (R-PA), during Senate Finance Committee welfare bill debate in March.

“You don’t stop in midstream on something that has been very effective.”

—Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice, on why the U.S. should continue funding anti-narcotics efforts in Colombia, even though government reports show that the amount of coca grown remained unchanged through record levels of fumigation in 2004.



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**SOUND THE TRUMPET!**

ISSUE	SUMMARY	ADVOCACY NEEDED
IMMIGRATION REFORM	The Secure America and Orderly Immigration Act (S. 1033, H.R. 2330) would provide opportunity for permanent residency for undocumented immigrants who work for six years and pay a \$2,000 fine, as well as for future workers and their families.	Encourage your senators and representative to cosponsor the bill, if they have not already done so, and to address militarization of the U.S./Mexico border, which leads to migrant deaths in the desert.
HUNGER IN THE UNITED STATES	The Hunger Free Communities Act (S. 1120, H.R. 2717) would protect nutrition program funding, establish grants to community-based organizations and require annual reports on progress to cut U.S. hunger in half by 2010.	Ask your legislators to cosponsor the bill, if they have not already done so, and to oppose budget cuts to the food stamp program.

**USEFUL ADDRESSES**



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