

WITH PATRICK MOORE, RETIRED CO-FOUNDER OF GREENPEACE AND MODERN ENVIRONMENTALIST



Patrick Moore is from Winter Harbour, a logging community from the fjord region of northern Vancouver Island. He attended high school in Vancouver and went on to receive a PhD from the University of British Columbia. He was one of the founders of Greenpeace in 1971. In 1986 he left Greenpeace because he wanted to contribute to solutions, not just identify problems. He has spoken on environmental matters around the world and provides a pragmatic, refreshing, optimistic, and solutions-oriented view of the future through his books and website (www.greenspirit.com) Patrick Moore was interviewed by Robert Sopuck, Director of the Frontier Centre's Rural Renaissance Project in Brandon, Manitoba on January 15th, 2002.

Frontier Centre: What were the defining factors that caused you and your associates to found Greenpeace?

PM: Concern that nuclear war would be the ultimate destruction of both civilization and the environment.

FC: When and why did you start to question the motives and actions of Greenpeace?

PM: In the mid-1980s I became convinced that aquaculture offered some solutions to the depletion of world fish stocks. I tried to convince my Greenpeace colleagues to support sustainable aquaculture as a positive policy. I got nowhere and in fact Greenpeace has adopted a strong campaign against salmon farming. I thought if these guys are against farming fish, what on Earth are they in favour of?

FC: What, in your view, are the general characteristics of environmental activist groups?

PM: It's not good to generalize. Many of the larger groups, Greenpeace, Sierra Club, WWF etc., etc. have closed ranks around extremist policies that are counter-productive to environmental progress. Examples are the policy to reduce the use of wood, the zero-tolerance for GMOs, the anti-chlorine campaign, the anti-aquaculture campaign, and the anti-conventional agriculture campaign.

FC: Why do activist groups behave the way they do?

PM: Many factors including a lack of science education, a need to perpetuate themselves and "means justifies the end" thinking. The worst aspect is what I describe as the environmental movement has been hijacked by political activists who are using green rhetoric to cloak agendas that have more to do with anti-corporatism and class warfare than with ecology or the environment.

FC: Are the main environmental advocacy groups mixing too much politics into their science?

PM: Yes, not just politics but propaganda, misinformation, and sensationalism.

FC: What is your assessment of the current quality of the Earth's environment in general and Canada's in particular?

PM: Canada's environment is in excellent condition, healthy, green and growing. Problem areas include our excessive contribution to CO2 emissions due to high fossil fuel consumption and urban sprawl in major cities.

FC: What is the role of science and technology in environmental conservation?

PM: Science provides the analysis or information and technology provides the tools to mitigate or adapt to the

impacts of human civilization. Sustainability is about meeting the needs of 6 billion humans while at the same time reducing their negative impacts on the environment. Negative impacts are those that reduce the ability of the environment to provide for present and future human populations, and those impacts that we determine, through our institutions, to wrongly diminish biodiversity even though it has no bearing on our own survival. This is why it is impossible to have an absolute definition of negative impact - it is a relative term. One person's enhancement is another person's destruction. So science informs this discussion of values and technology can provide solutions that are generally satisfactory in allowing us to have our cake and eat it too.

FC: There has been much controversy around the issue of GMOs or genetically modified organisms. What is your view on the safety and advantages or disadvantages of GMOs, especially in agriculture?

PM: There is no evidence that GMO foods have any negative impact on human health. In fact, GMOs promise to bring about substantial improvements in nutrition and health. There are significant environmental and legal issues around GMOs but they are no more difficult to address than the issues presented by agriculture in general. On balance I believe there will be far more environmental benefit than harm from GMO used as food crops.

FC: What is the role for market-based incentives to enhance environmental conservation?

PM: Market-based incentives should be used wherever possible. Some things do need to be regulated, the speed limit on roads being a good example. The issue of endangered species offers a perfect opportunity for a market-based approach. Instead of punishing country people for having endangered species on their property or in their environment we should reward them for providing habitat for endangered species.

FC: You state that by using more wood we are in effect conserving and expanding forests. Could you please explain this apparent contradiction?

PM: The more wood we use the more incentive to plant trees and produce more wood. It is no different than tomatoes, if no one buys tomatoes no one will grow them, if the tomatoes sell out there will be more grown the next year. If no one buys wood the land will be cleared of forest to grow something else. Even in mountainous regions like BC we could clear vast areas of forest for sheep and other livestock, as they did in New Zealand and Scotland. So long

as demand for wood remains strong we will continue to reforest land after it is logged.

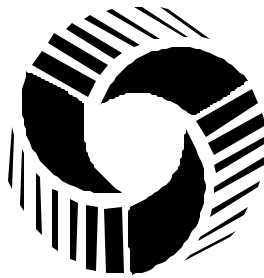
FC: How should rural communities, who are often the victims of environmental and animal rights activism, deal with these issues?

PM: The best way to deal with land use issues in the context of sustainability is to form community round tables and bring all parties together to present a common voice or at least to get everything on the table and discussed in a reasonable manner. Consensus process is a powerful tool to separate the wheat from the chaff.

FC: In terms of Canada's environmental future are you optimistic, pessimistic, or somewhere in between and could you explain why?

PM: I am very optimistic about the future of Canada's environment. Most of it is relatively inhospitable to large populations and much of the forestland is only suitable for forestry, so will remain forested. I am concerned about the fate of tropical developing regions in Latin America, Africa, and Asia where overpopulation, poverty and deforestation continue in a downward spiral towards environmental depletion and degradation.

FC: Thank you very much.



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