

The Ecologist's Calling

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The business of ecology is how the world works. At the moment, the world is not functioning properly. The continued growth of the human population inevitably creates problems with the availability of resources, including arable land, food, air, and water, and technological development expands the power of individuals to command and control resources. The space required for each individual grows, and new rules are required to assure equity in access to resources. More than that, the resources themselves are finite and require protection to avoid their ultimate depletion.

While there is a tendency to assume that any correction in global trends must be made at a global level, the fact is that global trends are the sum of local actions. Corrections lie in changing how we use each segment of the earth. It is the sum of those segments that make global trends. The total global human habitat can be improved only by improving its parts. It is this issue that couples the scientist who studies environment to public affairs.

Science has a lot to say about "what works" in maintaining the human habitat. That is our business in science, not merely conservation but the definition and redefinition of function as applied to human activities. As the issues grow, as they will in an ever tighter world, they will become the core purpose of government. Our job defines itself in this transition: what will work in the public interest and what will not? A central public purpose be-

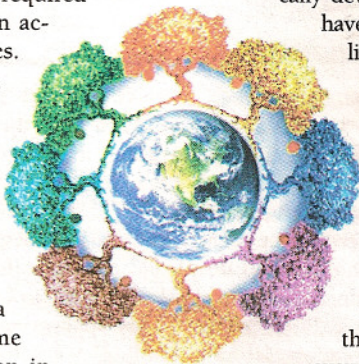
comes defining and re-defining the public interest.

Virtually every New England town feels the need to expand the built landscape at the expense of forests and land and water. The costs appear in diverse ways, economic, political, and environmental. The environmental losses are incremental, often obscure, and not immediately measurable. If we look, however, for examples of success in managing environmental resources, the successes are mixed, less conspicuous and partial, yet they do exist. Where they exist in the context of the modern, economically developed world, rules

have been provided for limiting growth to preserve the functional integrity of the landscape.

The fact is that success does require preserving the whole: the whole Amazon, the whole ocean, the whole land on every continent, and all

the species. There is no compromise. Saving species in parks is fine, but we save, not the species, but a fragment of it, the rest lost forever as we have lost already the unquestionably genetically specialized in-shore populations of cod of the New England coast and, probably, the off-shore populations of the Grand Banks which have never recovered in more than twenty years of protection. Required in survival is a reversal in perspective and philosophy to define a world of living systems that must be preserved at all costs, a green world that runs itself and in which we build a civilization as guests, one of perhaps 30-50 million species that together make the living world and keep it working as a habitat for all, including humans.



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