

## THE THIN BLUE LINE

### WHY I HAVE BECOME A CONSERVATIONIST AND NOT AN ENVIRONMENTALIST<sup>1</sup>

Several years ago, I wrote the following piece titled the thin blue line. It is an essay on the need for and justification of environmentalism. Since then I have begun to moderate my views and to question my original thoughts. In their extremism, it is not that I have left environmentalists, but environmentalists have left me. The original blue line is really an interesting thought. In moderation, it makes sense. However, it is easy to see that how unchecked environmentalism can become extreme and not in the interest of human habitation of this planet. It is easy to see how environmentalism has evolved in opposition to mankind and not in harmony with it. The following is *The Thin Blue Line*.

In law enforcement, the difference between law and order and crime is the police. Dressed in blue, police create a thin blue line of protection. For the public, the thin blue line is all that exists between order and disorder and between civilization and anarchy. The police are the thin blue line.

The earth is a large sphere encircled by its atmosphere. Looking at the earth from outer space, the atmosphere forms a thin blue line. It is a thin blue line of life between order and disorder. It provides protection between life on earth and the cold black darkness of the universe.

The motto of the police is to protect and serve. The role of the police is to protect the public from crime. Their role is to provide law and order. Like the police, the role of the environmentalist is to protect and serve. It is to serve mankind by creating an environment that favors mankind. As with the police, it is a three fold task of, to know, to protect, and to educate.

Traditionally, the first role of an environmentalist is that of a mechanic. It is knowing how the systems work so that they can tell when a system is broken and needs fixing or when it is operating correctly. It is the ability to create a safe habitat for mankind. Clean water, clean air, and an environment that is conducive to supporting life are part of creating this safe habitat. Although it may sound simple, it isn't. It is knowing how the system works and fixing it so that it works properly. It is like an automobile mechanic who knows conceptually how the car works so that he can tell what needs fixing on the car. Environmentalists need to know how the different systems work so that they can tell the difference between a system that is operating correctly and one that needs to be fixed.

The problem is knowing what needs to be fixed. And, do we have the power to fix it. Or, if we attempt to fix thing, do we only make matters worse. One new definition of political science is that it is science used for political purposes. This definition represents the misuse of science to achieve politically correct purposes or to use unproven science to affect public policy. Global warming is a good example of the new political science. Then there is junk science. Regardless of this misuse of science that has, unfortunately, often threatened the credibility of the movement, the environmentalist needs to rely upon the use of good science to improve the habitat of humans on the planet.

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<sup>1</sup> Presentation by Robert B. Kauffman at the Earth Day Celebration. Lane Center, Frostburg State University, Frostburg, Maryland, April 22, 2008.

The next role of an environmentalist is that of law enforcement. It is to enforce laws that help ensure a safe habitat. Every species seeks to modify its environment to favor its activities. It is a lesson of survival. It is the “stick” in the carrots and sticks approach. Some will change their behavior knowing that it the right thing to do. Others will not. This group needs persuasion. Laws and policies that are enforced with laws can help provide this persuasion. In addition, these laws are usually premised upon a foundation of good science. Often environmentalists have an agenda that leads to a corruption of their purpose. Unfortunately, science is often used to support the agenda rather than the bigger picture of what is best for mankind. The goal is simple. It is to improve the habitat for humans. Currently, we face a conflict between individual freedom which traces its origins back to David Hume, John Locke and Adam Smith and the founding of this country and the collective actions of people as classes as suggested by Marxism.

The third role of an environmentalist is that of an educator. It is insufficient to arrest and punish people for environmental crimes that they do not believe are crimes. People need to know the why. It is the “carrot” in the carrot and sticks approach. Many people will do the right thing because it is the right thing to do. Education helps provide the why so that people can act appropriately.

Just like the policeman, the role of the environmentalist is to protect, serve and educate the public. Forming a triangle, each component forms a side of the triangle that complements and reinforces the components that form the other side. Enforcement without education leads to laws where people do not understand why the laws and policies are important. Without education, enforcement will eventually breakdown. Conversely, education without enforcement is good for those are educatable but not good for those who don't care. Some people need the “stick” more than the “carrot” to do what is right. Education without knowing how the system works leads to a situation where no one knows the reason why people should be educated. Research helps create this body of knowledge . Education communicates it to everyone. Enforcement without knowing how the system works leads to sterile laws without validity. Also, knowing how the system works is a precursor for passing laws and policies.

Looking at the earth from the outer reaches of the atmosphere, the atmosphere encircling the earth makes a thin blue line of life. To know, to educate and to protect the thin blue line and the life that it contains is the mission of the environmentalist. For the survival of the earth and its inhabitants, there is no more important mission than this.

This paradigm makes sense. Since I originally wrote this essay a couple of years ago, I have come to moderate my views. Unfortunately, environmental extremists linked with a continual threat of environmental cataclysm threatens to turn the world on its end. It is the difference between value laden terms like pollution and ecological principles that everything is recyclable. It is a system where man is the villain and the source of the problem. For environmentalism, it is as if the police believed all of the citizens whom they serve were the criminals who needed to be arrested. It is as if the police had total contempt for the very people who they serve and protect.

Conservation is now the better purveyor of the principles which I originally suggested were those associated with environmentalism. Conservation is the wise use of the resource. It is stewardship. It is husbandry. It involves the concept of sustainability. Unlike the environmentalists who are locked in the notion of environmental cataclysm, it does not deny the fundamental reality that in order to survive, every species consumes resources and modifies the environment. The same principles of to know, to protect and to serve apply. However, it does not deny the obvious fact that in order to survive, we use resources. What it does acknowledge is that we have a responsibility to protect and to serve the environment of

which we are a part.

It is the difference between value laden term like pollution and the ecological principle that one species' wastes is another species food. Oxygen is the by product of photosynthesis. Oxygen is plant poison. To plants, oxygen is pollution. However, to mammals oxygen is life. And to plants, the carbon dioxide which we exhale is important for their survival. Plants need us to survive or they would soon poison themselves with excessive amounts of oxygen. Yet, we view carbon dioxide as pollution. As I joking say... feed a plant, exhale, or recycle, burn fossil fuels, and feed a plant.

We view the creation of carbon dioxide by man as the creator of global warming. However, a quick assessment reveals that carbon dioxide is only 0.75% of the atmosphere. Actually, at 0.90% of the atmosphere, there is more argon in the atmosphere than carbon dioxide. Yet, mankind while living their lives on this earth are vilified because in living their lives they are servicing the needs of plants by creating carbon dioxide.

The difference between being a conservationist and an environmentalist is the difference between being reasonable and being extreme. This became apparent to me a couple of years ago I did a session on "leave a trace" at the AEE conference. Yes, it was leave a trace and not the Leave No Trace which is commonly espoused. For me it was the difference between extremism and reasonableness. My session impressed upon me the fact the best of movements are often hijacked by the extremists. It suggested to me the difficulty with being reasonable, with seeking the middle ground, and with not being cataclysmic or contemplating pending doom in my thoughts. Also, it why I am a conservationist and why I am not an environmentalist.

The Leave No Trace movement is a very practical movement which arose out of necessity in backcountry management. The woods were being overrun with campers and backpackers. Its principles such as carry out what you carry in, plan ahead, or travel on durable surfaces make perfect practical sense in terms of management practices. In its normal state, I have no problem with the leave no trace ethic, and the leave no trace movement.

The term LNT Nazis has crept into the vocabulary to note some of the more extreme practices and more importantly, the Nazis like or extremist attitude of a select group in the know toward others in the backcountry. If a person drops a small piece of pasta on the ground, not only do they need pick it up, they need to eat it in order to leave not trace. The instructor impresses the lesson upon the backcountry user with a glare and a stern command that they are desecrating the environment. There is no in between position. Anything less than the extreme position is not tolerated. The movement runs the risk of being hijacked by the extremists. Likewise, extremism is a synonym that keeps popping up when I hear the term environmentalist.

At the conference session, I was taken back by the extent of the backlash of those in attendance to the LNT Nazis. They wanted more red meat than I was providing them. I was only trying to be reasonable. Unfortunately, being reasonable in the presence of extremism is often an untenable position to take.

In this era of global warming or as it is now defined, climate change, try to be reasonable. It is difficult. Anything but their view is vilified and not tolerated. In this regard, ask yourself the following questions:

1) **Is our environment and climate static or dynamic?**

The natural state of the environment is change. It is not static. Yet man has this notion of trying to make nature static. For me, this is typified in the taming or damming of rivers. The natural state is one of fluctuation between high and low flows, between floods and summer droughts. We build a dam and stabilize the flow of the river. We have civilized the river. We have tamed it. We control it or at least we think that we do. We interpret the controlled flow as natural and the fluctuating flows as unnatural. Then as has occurred in the Grand Canyon, we have to create artificial flows to mimic what was once natural flows. We need to do this to cleanse the river banks and to eliminate evasive species which begin to encroach the river bank. Let me see if I have it straight. We take the natural state and claim that it is unnatural. Then we claim that the artificial state is natural. However, to complete our control over the environment, we need to create artificial flows that mimic the original flows, however, we consider our artificial flows which mimic the natural flows as natural because they are artificial. The cure is often worse than the original dynamic state.

Our system is constantly changing. It is dynamic not static. Trying to stabilize the climate is like trying to control the Colorado River or for that matter, the weather. It is ephemeral at best. It is to turn our world upside down. And in attempting to control our environment, we make matters worse. People confuse weather with climate and it is as if we are seeking to stabilize and control the weather.

## 2) **Do we have a responsibility to maintain our environment?**

Yes, the concept of stewardship and husbandry embody this responsibility. Aldo Leopold in the land ethic discusses the importance of the land as a living organism and the importance of husbandry and stewardship toward the land. From the person who wrote the first book on ecology, he discusses the concept of conservation or wise use of the resource. It is a concept of sustainability.

## 3) **Who has done the most to improve the environment and why?**

As a country, we tend to beat on ourselves too much. This is a question of Earth Day, environmental cataclysm of the 1970s, and the inherent wealth in this country. I was around for the first Earth Day. We were experiencing a period of environmental cataclysm. Paul Ehrlich had published the neo-Malthusian book titled the Population Bomb where the world's population would come to a cataclysmic end by now. The time of his predicted cataclysm has come and gone and it hasn't happened. We had polluted Lake Erie to the point that like an atrophic mill pond, it was not a question of whether it would die, but how long it would finally take to die as an atrophic pond. We are still waiting. The lake is alive and fairly healthy. I can go on with example after example, but at least in this country, we have cleaned up the environment and we have made it better. The question is why? There are a lot of reasons, but the one which I like to point to is that we can afford to do so. We have sufficient wealth that we can afford to clean up the environment. We can afford to clean up the environment.

## 4) **Why I am a conservationist and not an environmentalist?**

We are part of the ecosystem. Environmentalists have made the same mistake that they have accused others of having made. Man is part of the ecosystem. We are a player. We are a big beaver. A beaver builds a pond. The pond favors some species and not others. The difference between man and the beaver is that the beaver is limited by its "physiological technology." In contrast, man possesses a much greater technology. Nevertheless, like the beaver, man's changes favor some species and not others. Like any other species, we consume resources and we change our environment to benefit us.

We are held to the same ecological principles as any other animal on the face of this earth. I note two. Everything is recyclable and one species waste is another's food. And with this comes a sense of responsibility for our environment. It is a sense of husbandry. Some refer to it as stewardship. It is characterized by the philosophy of Aldo Leopold where we treat the earth as a living organism rather than a disposable commodity. These are concepts of conservation or the wise use of the resource, not of extreme environmentalism where man is the destroyer.

### 5) It is a question of hubris?

It is a question of whom or what determines what happens on this earth. Does man have the ability to destroy the earth. I pose this question to students. We discuss the explosion of Krakatau in 1883 and the nuclear winter that occurred for several years until all the particulate matter settled out of the atmosphere. Recently, we have discussed the explosion of the Yellowstone caldera which supposedly explodes every 500 to 700 thousand years. Its explosion is about 100 times more powerful than Krakatau. As a footnote, we are overdue for an explosion by the way. In the end, we conclude several things with this exercise. Once you get past nuclear bombs and nuclear winter, it is not really that easy to destroy the world. Actually, when doing this exercise, most students never turn to global warming as a method to destroy the earth.

Second, we conclude that man may become extinct, but life will go on. As the students suggest, the cockroach will survive. We conclude that the sun is the prime determinant of pretty much everything which goes on this earth. So, in conclusion, we are along for the ride. We don't have the power to destroy the earth even if we wanted to do so. To think that we do is hubris or arrogance on our part. Yet the environmentalists in their cataclysmic extremism demand that we are destroying the earth's environment.

In terms of the environment and the environmental cataclysmic movement, I would suggest that geothermal energy production in the Yellowstone caldera might harness and dissipate the energy stored in the magma might be a better mission in terms of saving the earth than attempting to remove the variability of the weather.

### Conclusion:

Returning to the thin blue line and why I am a conservationist rather than an environmentalist. In my opinion, the environmentalists have gone too far. They have become too extreme. In becoming too extreme, we run the risk of threatening individual liberty and the individual pursuit of happiness in the name of the supposed common good.

We have a duty to protect and serve. We have a duty to protect our environment and to make it hospitable for us. In addition, this includes other species also. This is a concept of husbandry or stewardship. It is conservation or the wise use of our resources.

The environmentalists want everything green. They want to create a "*thin green line*." Green is in. However, the world isn't the thin green line. It is the thin blue line. It is the planet of water and water vapor. The earth is a huge homeostasis machine where water evaporates and creates clouds. These clouds cool the earth by reducing solar radiation and they cool the earth with rain. In their extremism, environmentalists have gone too far. It is a blue world; not a green world. That is why I am a conservationist and I no longer even try to be an environmentalist.