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Environmentalism

Why green has gone out of fashion
 4/29/2005

For 35 years now, environmentalists have specialized in “Chicken Little scare tactics and doomsday prophesying,” said **Chip Giller** in *The Boston Globe*. But the movement reached new “depths of gloominess” when it recently announced “the death of itself.” Two prominent environmentalists, Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus, have published a paper, bluntly titled “The Death of Environmentalism,” declaring that environmentalists have become irrelevant. Activists are so mired in “narrow policy fixes” and bureaucratic jargon, the authors say, that they’ve stopped connecting with ordinary Americans. As a result, they’ve lost popular support in their battle with the Bush administration on issues ranging from oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to mercury emissions from power plants. Last week’s Earth Day observances should have been a celebration of the movement’s many successes in bringing cleaner water and air to all Americans. But activists were too busy lamenting their new political “impotence.”

The greens shouldn’t be so hard on themselves, said **Sally Pipes** in *National Review Online*. There’s a good reason most Americans are no longer moved by dire warnings about species becoming extinct or the oceans boiling over: Thanks to decades of environmental activism, the Earth is doing just fine. Ozone air pollution has fallen to its lowest level in U.S. history. Air quality in the 10 largest metropolitan areas has improved by more than 53 percent since 1980. Forests and wetlands are thriving. Our national symbol, the bald eagle, was down to only 500 nesting pairs in 1965; now there are 7,500 of them, and they’re being taken off the Endangered Species List. “All the good news may put green lobbies in a panic,” because their agenda still calls for “draconian” regulation. But “it’s time Americans gave themselves a pat on the back” for helping to forge a “greener and cleaner Earth.”



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Good Week For

Magic tricks, after San Antonio mayoral candidate Julian Castro sent his identical twin brother to appear at a parade while he attended a different campaign event across town. “We can’t help that we look like each other,” said Castro.

Bad Week For

Drunken arguments, when a Russian man invited a friend over for a drink, spent the evening pounding down vodka and arguing, then woke up in the middle of the night with a splitting headache. When he looked in a mirror, he found a 14-inch kitchen knife sticking out of his face.

But unfortunately, it’s also becoming hotter, said **Kathleen Parker** in *USA Today*. And no amount of wishful thinking, or willful ignorance, changes that scary fact. Some 2,000 scientists from 100 nations now believe that “global warming is real and that man is at least in part responsible.” The average temperature in Alaska has risen 2 to 4 degrees Fahrenheit over the last 30 years. Glaciers there, in Greenland, and in the Arctic are melting, filling the ocean with vast amounts of fresh water and causing sea levels to inch up. Cutting down on gas guzzling and smokestack emissions may or may not slow the warming trend; on that point, the science is unclear. But what isn’t debatable is that global warming, left unchecked, will change the Earth’s climate catastrophically, flooding coastal areas and disrupting agriculture worldwide. “If anything should be a bipartisan concern, surely the future of the Earth’s climate should top the list.”

Yet even on global warming, said *The Economist* in an editorial, the environmental lobby has “failed to spark the public’s imagination.” Most people are pragmatic, seeking a balance between economic development and preservation. But environmental activists see the world in black and white. So they “roll their eyes” at the very notion of “cost-benefit analysis,” and they don’t even consider weighing the risks of nuclear power against, say, the benefits of producing electricity with no greenhouse gas emissions. Or they ignore the fact that the cost of removing the last 5 percent of a pollutant is often far greater than removing the first 50 percent. That the activists themselves are starting to admit they are “dreadfully out of touch” is actually a hopeful sign. We truly need environmentalists engaged in a “thoughtful” debate over the stewardship of our planet, because on a fundamental level, they are correct: “Some things in nature are irreplaceable—literally priceless.”

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