

Why a new ecological forum?

In an age of information overload and electronic bombardment, why start a new online journal, some readers may wonder. Why launch *The Ecological Citizen*, when many good publications go unread? “Because it takes a community to save a corridor,” would be my answer. It will take a community to restore vital connections not only between wild places on the ground but also between people and the natural world. The conservation cause needs a growing, vibrant, exciting tribe, which attracts people young and old, and helps them be better members of the biotic community. We need a forum to build this community and a voice to emanate from it. We need that voice to speak for the full range and glory of biological diversity, from ants and butterflies, to forests and grasslands, to salmon and streams, and to wolves and whales.

Since the last issue of *Wild Earth* thirteen years ago and the publishing of Dave Foreman’s landmark book *Rewilding North America*, I’ve rambled countless miles of proposed local, regional and continental wildways, looking at the feasibility of protecting them on the ground and talking with key people along the way. The most frequent comment I heard on TrekEast in 2011 and TrekWest in 2013 was, “We miss *Wild Earth*.” One of the clearest conclusions I reached on these conservation treks is that we need a community forum and communications vehicle.

We wildlands advocates, we ecological citizens, are a talented and dedicated lot, but we are not yet a tight community, much less a powerful movement. We are voices not just *for*, but *in*, the wilderness. Few outside our small circles of friends and colleagues hear us – even though we are speaking for the broadest imaginable interest: life on Earth.

We need a new forum and a voice for nature-first conservation, for ecological citizenship. Much has changed, though, since journals like *Earth First!* and *Wild Earth* (Figure 1) gave voice in print form to wild creatures. Print periodicals are prohibitively expensive to produce, unless one invites advertisements from any and all corporations, regardless of their records of land exploitation. At the same time, electronic communications have proliferated to the point of drowning readers and themselves in excess verbiage.

Rising above the fray

How, then, do we rise above the fray and share our message of rewilding, wildways and ecological citizenship? I think part of the answer is an ecologically honest, nature-first, visually appealing and intellectually enticing publication, building into an authoritative voice for wild nature and forging a community of advocates along the wild way.

This publication must be forthright. It should, in my view, begin with the supposition that most of the world ought to be wild. (EO Wilson’s *Half-Earth* is a good goal, but we should strive for even more.) It should then accept, and purvey, the logical conclusion that we humans have taken much more than our share: we are far too many in number, and we consume way too much. *The Ecological Citizen* should then point to specific ways we can help rewild lands and waters, reconnect protected areas, become plain citizens of the biotic community (to borrow Aldo Leopold’s apt phrase), scale back the industrial enterprise, actively give back to nature, restore degraded areas, reintegrate ourselves into the natural world, convert a global economy based on exploiting nature to local economies based on restoring nature, and generally preserve and restore life on Earth.

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“*The Ecological Citizen* can be a catalyst for radical, egalitarian, compassionate, unifying change.”

The Ecological Citizen should, I’d opine, be more global than past ecocentric or biocentric journals. For better or worse (mostly worse, I fear), the electronic web has shrunk the world. An ambitious forum for vibrant biotic communities, available to anyone with internet access (which, let us never forget, is far from entirely inclusive), now has ample reason to cover the whole of wild Earth, and even much of domesticated Earth, as it strives to grow a movement of people devoted to caring for and living with the rest of nature. Grassroots conservation and restoration folks in North America have much to learn from counterparts in Africa, for instance, and vice versa. Successful on-the-ground restoration efforts in South America’s Southern Cone, to imagine another example, might inform restoration ecology in Australia.

Particularly since the disastrous 2016 election in the US, the fight for life on Earth can convincingly be portrayed as a fight of good versus evil. Thinking people know this is an oversimplification – that American consumers, especially, all share moral and physical culpability for the degradation of wild Earth. Yet the lines between life-affirming and life-destroying actions are now as clear as they’ve ever been. Friends of Earth can be easily discerned from foes of Earth.

A catalyst for change

The Ecological Citizen can rally and empower those friends of Earth. *The Ecological Citizen*

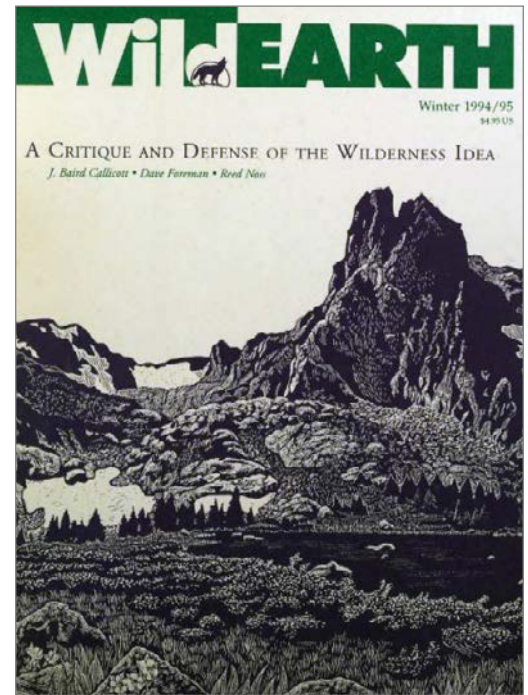


Figure 1. The front cover of the winter 1994–95 issue of *Wild Earth*.

can be a catalyst for radical, egalitarian, compassionate, unifying change. It can be a voice for lions and tigers and bears and birds and bees and other creatures who are losing their homes and kin to the industrial juggernaut. May this much-needed new forum lead to a truly wild Earth, with secure homes for everyone in the biotic community. ■

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You can discuss a range of Earth-centred issues by joining the Ecocentric Alliance’s email group

www.ecocentricalliance.org/#ju