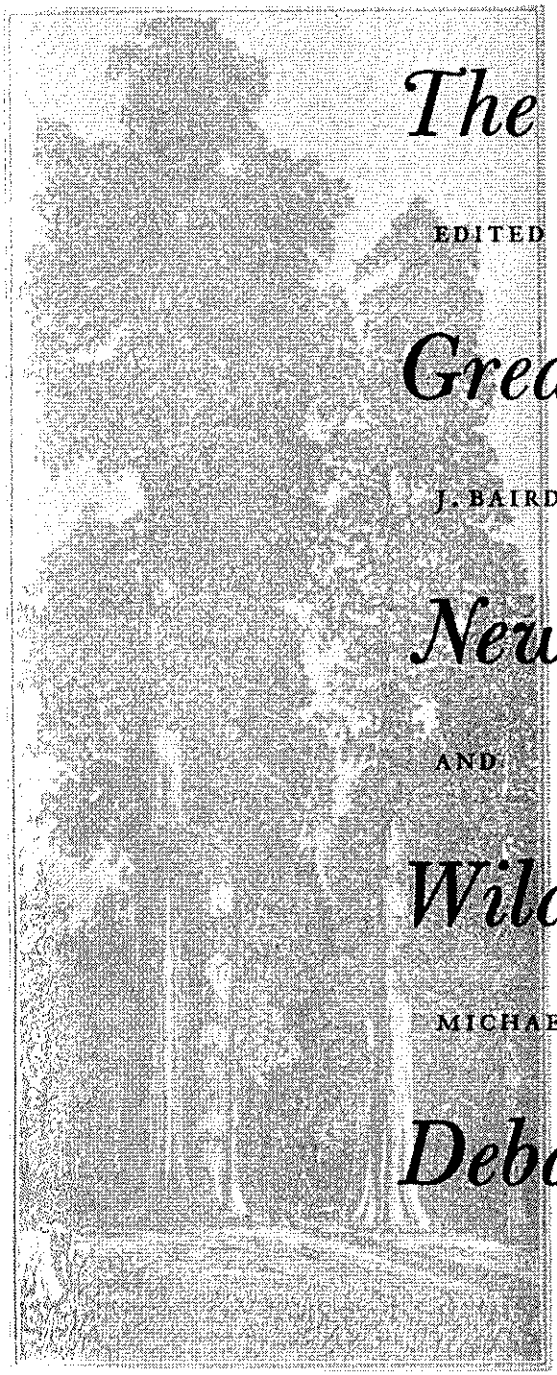

The Great New Wilderness Debate

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The Third World, Wilderness, and Deep Ecology (1995)

I

THIS ARTICLE IS MOTIVATED by listening to some people from the Third World who express a suspicion that Deep Ecology is a new variant of Western domination and "neocolonialism": they fear that people of the Third World will be pushed out of their homes to make more room for spectacular animals. Some authors have expressed the opinion that Deep Ecology is for the rich nations that can afford the luxury of vast wilderness as habitat for wild species. In my opinion, however, it would indeed be tragic if such ideas were going to spoil the much-needed cooperation between supporters of the Deep Ecology movement throughout the various regions of the globe, including the Third World.

Throughout most of human history, all humans have lived in what we now call wilderness. As Gary Snyder points out:

> Just a few centuries ago, when virtually *all* was wild in North America, wilderness was not something exceptionally severe. Pronghorn and bison trailed through the grasslands, creeks ran full of salmon, there were acres of clams, and grizzlies, cougar, and bighorn sheep were common in the lowlands. There were human beings, too: North America was *all populated*. . . . The fact is, people were everywhere. . . . All of the hills and lakes of Alaska have been named in one or another of the dozen or so languages spoken by the native people.[1]

Prior to agriculture, our ancestors left few traces. Ecosystems were not appreciably changed for the most part, except by large fires, and probably through the extermination of some large animal species. But for the most part, landscapes and ecosystems were not irreversibly reduced in richness and diversity, and the basic ecological conditions of life were maintained. There is not today, nor was there ever, any essential conflict between humans in moderate numbers and a state of wilderness or wildness. There are reasons today, however, for some areas to be left entirely devoid of human settlement, and for limiting even short carefully arranged visits by scientists to a minimum, but this should be looked upon as an exceptional situation.

At present, there are old growth forests in Australia, for example, which are inhabited by ecologically conscious and careful people. This situation illustrates the essential compatibility of people living in wilderness with a presumably high quality of life—a "rich life with simple means." They use plants for food and other purposes, but they do not, of course, engage in subsistence agriculture.

What is considered a normal lifestyle in industrial countries is clearly incompatible with living in wilderness. Industrial people interfere so severely with natural processes that even a very small number of them can significantly alter the landscape. For example, it is widely recognized that people doing research in the Antarctic should use extreme care not to damage the ecosystems, but it is also clear that the rules are widely disobeyed.[2] Bad habits are difficult, but not impossible, to change!

It is unavoidable that some people concerned with the protection of wildlife and natural ecosystems tend to see a direct and global antagonism between human settlement and wilderness. But supporters of the Deep Ecology movement, like many others, know that wilderness, or wildness, need not be destroyed by people living in these areas (or nearby) and that they may enjoy a high quality of life.

It is not possible for people living in the United States to interfere as little with the wilderness as did the traditional American Indians, and Gary Snyder (and other articulate American supporters of the Deep Ecology movement) insist that there should be no further destruction of wilderness in America. Even what is now set aside in the United States as designated

wilderness is interfered with too much. The traditional point of view of the U.S. Forest Service still has a lot of influence: "Wilderness is for people. . . . The preservation goals established . . . are designed to provide values and benefits to society. . . . Wilderness is not set aside for the sake of its flora or fauna, but for people."[3] It is not only the "*but* for people" that makes all the difference, from Gary Snyder's point of view, but also the term "society." People who live in wilderness, or who have their roots in wilderness, form communities rather than "societies." There is a vast difference between the slogan of the World Wildlife Fund ("wilderness for people") and the meaning of the U.S. Forest Service phrase: "wilderness for American society."

Those people in the United States who are actively trying to stop the destruction of wilderness do not tend to publish *general proposals on how to treat apparently similar problems in the Third World.* At least this is true of theoreticians of the Deep Ecology movement. Nevertheless, there are writers who look upon "radical environmentalism," including Deep Ecology, as a threat to the poverty stricken people of the Third World. The opinion is not uncommon that people in the rich Western world tend to support wild animals and wilderness rather than poor people. However, the real question is: *How* can the poor be helped in a way that is sustainable in the long run?

Close cooperation between supporters of the Deep Ecology movement and ecologically concerned people in the poor countries requires that the latter trust the former's concern for the economic progress of the poor. But what is progress in this case? Is consumerism progress?

The principle formulated by Gary Snyder is applicable in Third World countries: that is, there is no inherent antagonism between human settlement and free nature, for it all depends on the *kind* of culture humans have. It should he a universal goal for mankind to avoid all kinds of consumerism and concentrate, instead, on raising the basic quality of life for humans, including the satisfaction of their economic needs.

The number of poor people in Third World countries is too large for all of them to dwell non-destructively in the tropical forests; more and more subsistence agriculture in these forests serves neither the best interests of the poor, nor does it protect the forests from destruction. Millions of people now live in the tropical forests in a broadly sustainable way; that is, without reducing the richness and diversity of life forms found there. But what is

now happening is an *invasion* of these areas resulting in major disruption of the people and the communities who have been living there in harmony. The forests are clear-cut and burned, and subsistence agriculture is introduced. These practices cannot help the poor reach the goals of long-term economic progress. This is true as well of the large industrial operations in the forests and along the rivers.

The present ecological world situation requires a focusing of attention upon *urban* settlements; changing them in ways so that they will be appropriate and habitable places for the thousands of millions of people who now, and in the next century, will need a place to live. This gigantic effort will require mutual help between rich and poor countries. Significant economic progress for the poor is not possible through the extensive use of less fertile lands for agriculture. *There is no way out except through urbanization,* together with the willingness of the rich to buy products from the poor.

It has been pointed out that, from an ecological long-range perspective, the economies of some traditional North American native cultures were superbly sustainable in a broad sense. It has been noted that the philosophical, religious, and mythological basis for these economies, and for their social relations in general, was expressed through sayings which are eminently consistent with the fundamental attitudes found in the Deep Ecology movement. Similar sayings found in Eastern cultures have had an even greater impact. As the Indian social ecologist Ramachandra Guha (who has published what he sees as a Third World critique of Deep Ecology) claims, "This coupling of (ancient) Eastern and (modern) ecological wisdom seemingly helps consolidate the claim that deep ecology is a philosophy of universal significance."[4] The total views suggested among supporters of the Deep Ecology movement do, in a sense, couple "(ancient) Eastern and (modern) ecological wisdom." But there are reasons to be cautious here.

To cherish some of the ecosophic attitudes convincingly demonstrated by people from the East does not imply the doctrinal acceptance of any past definite philosophy or religion conventionally classified as Eastern. Heavy influence does not imply conformity with any beliefs: the history of ideas and contemporary philosophizing are different subjects. At any rate, there is ample reason for supporters of the Deep Ecology movement to refrain from questioning each other's ultimate beliefs. Deep cultural differences are more or less cognitively unbridgeable and will remain so, I hope.

Desperate people (including desperately poor, hungry people) will naturally have a narrow utilitarian attitude towards their environment. But overall, the people of the Third World, apart from the desperate minority, manifest a positive concern for the protection of free nature, and a respect for nonhuman living beings. At least this has been my experience while living among poor people in India, Pakistan and Nepal (and others in the Third World agree with me on this point). Without these experiences, I would not have talked about the international basis of a Deep Ecology movement.

Temporarily pressing problems of material need might monopolize their attention, but this is also true of people in similar circumstances in the West, despite their affluence. In short, there is a sound basis for *global* cooperation between supporters of the Deep Ecology movement and ecologically concerned people in the Third World, and also with people who try to understand and lessen the poverty in those regions. These people cooperate in movements against poverty which do not entail further large-scale deforestation. And there is no tendency to support animals at the expense of humans within the framework of this cooperation.

II

To Social Ecologists in countries which are less affluent than the United States, it may look threatening when environmental activists in the United States declare "an unflinching opposition to human attacks on undisturbed wilderness."[5] Some activists even engage in un-Gandhian ecotage; for instance, destroying vehicles and other machinery while making sure that no one gets hurt in the process. So far, there have been very few authenticated cases of anyone being seriously hurt. Considering the vehemence of these struggles, and the passions involved, this should be considered a great victory.

Clearly, these intense personally involved activists are speaking about wilderness primarily in the United States, not necessarily about the situation on other continents. At least, this is true of supporters of the Deep Ecology movement, but this point can be easily overlooked by observers in the Third World. Unflinching opposition to the cutting down of *any* trees, or to the establishment of *any* new human settlements in any wilderness *what so ever* is a preposterous idea presumably held by no one. The real issue here for the Third World is: How much wilderness and wildlife habitat is it acceptable to continue to modify and destroy, and for what purposes?

In the richest nations of the world, the destruction of old growth forests still goes on. There is ample justification for activists in the United States to focus on these destructive, mindless, irreversible activities. The term "ecocriminality" is a suitable word to use for this forest destruction, and a question of great importance arises here: given their own unecological practices, do the rich nations deserve any *credibility* when preaching ecological responsibility to the poor countries?

One has to distinguish between three things: (1) the present dismal situation concerning the lack of protection of wilderness; (2) the estimates published by conservation biologists concerning the size of wilderness areas needed for continued speciation; and (3) the more-or-less realistic plans put forth by established environmental organizations (e.g. the World Wildlife Fund and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature) concerning how to improve the present state of affairs for protecting wildlife and wild ecosystems. (It should be pointed out that, given the estimates of Frankel and Soulé that an area on the order of six hundred square kilometers is necessary for the speciation of birds and mammals, of course nothing *specific* follows concerning how to achieve what is deemed necessary for this purpose.)

Is the idea that "the biosphere as a whole should be zoned" considered threatening to some in the Third World? Actually, it should be considered more of a threat directed against First World practices than toward any other nations. For, according to Odum and Phillips, establishment of protection zones "may be the only way to limit the destructive impact of our technological-industrial-agribusiness complex upon the earth."[6] This is clearly a warning directed more toward the destructive practices of the First World. Of course, if Third World elites try to copy First World excesses, then the situation would change.

III

The movements supporting the establishment of "green" societies, and for a global Green movement, have their origin among people in the rich countries. It is understandable that they have not had much impact so far among people in the Third World, and that they are met with suspicion. The pri-

orities among First and Third World countries are and, to some extent, must be, different. Furthermore, "green utopias," and even the everyday conceptions of what constitutes "greenness," tend to be rather uniform, as if green societies, in spite of the deeply different cultures and traditions of the world, would look very much alike.

It is to be hoped that there would be no standard green societies, no *Gleichschaltung* of human institutions and behavioral patterns. Hopefully, economically sound societies of Africa, South America, and Southeast Asia would not resemble present rich countries except in certain rather superficial ways.

Some people think that "ecological sustainability" will be attained when policies have been adopted which will protect us from great ecological catastrophes. But it is beneath human dignity to have this as a supreme ecological goal! Ecological sustainability, in a more proper sense, will be achieved only when policies on a global scale protect the full richness and diversity of life forms on the planet. The former goal may be called "narrow"; the latter "wide" ecological sustainability. In short, it is my opinion that *a necessary, but not sufficient, criterion of the fully attained greenness of a society is that it is ecologically sustainable in the wide sense.* (The Bruntland Report admits of various interpretations, but it does envisage a sustainable "developed" country to be one that satisfies the wide sense of ecological sustainability.)

(A small digression: When I do not go into complex argumentation, but just announce that "it is beneath human dignity to aspire to less than *wide* ecological sustainability," I intend to express a personal view (and as with other assertions) thought to be *compatible* with supporters of the Deep Ecology movement. My assertions *that* supporters of the Deep Ecology movement have such and such attitudes or opinions are, of course, more or less certain, and should not be taken to assert that strictly everybody has those attitudes or opinions.)

IV

It should he clear that the realization of wide ecological sustainability will require deep changes in the rich societies of the world having to do, in part, with policies of growth and overconsumptive lifestyles. If we accept that the realization of the goals of the Deep Ecology movement imply wide sustainability, two questions immediately arise: (1) does the realization of wide sustainability presuppose or require acceptance of the views of the Deep Ecology movement? and (2) does the realization of wide sustainability require significant changes in Third World societies?

If we answer "yes" to the first question, this might be interpreted as asserting that the realization of wide sustainability would require that most members of the relevant societies must accept the views of the Deep Ecology movement. As I see it, this is not necessary (and it would imply a change of heart of an extremely unlikely kind!). But a "yes" to the first question might be interpreted as the assertion that a sufficiently strong minority would be needed to bring about wide sustainability. This situation may well arise. (I don't mean to claim here that a definite answer to the first question is conceptually implied. A decisive "no" to this question is thinkable. It does seem clear, however, that the more people who explicitly or implicitly accept the views of the Deep Ecological movement, the better.)

As to question (2), a "yes" answer seems warranted as far as I can judge. In Third World countries at present there is a general tendency to attempt to follow an "economic growth and development" path which emulates the rich countries. This must be avoided, and to avoid it requires significant changes in the orientations of these societies.

What kinds of changes are necessary? A discussion of the nature of these changes has intentionally been left abstract and general in the Deep Ecology "platform." Point 6 of the "platform" states that "Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present."

It is obviously pertinent to ask: "Exactly which changes need to be made?" But times change. A short answer to this question seems much more difficult to provide in 1993 than it was in 1970. Practically every major concrete change envisaged in 1970 today seems either more difficult to realize, or not unreservedly desirable in the form it was proposed in 1970.

As a preliminary to serious practical discussion, one must specify which country, state, region, society, and community one has in mind. The distinction First World/Second World/Third World/Fourth World is still

relevant. But practically all Deep Ecology literature has focused on rich countries even though there are many supporters in other kinds of countries. The "sustainability" literature is fortunately more diverse.

As an example of social and political change that was highly recommended in 1970, but not in the nineties, one may mention various forms of decentralization. Today the global nature of all the major ecological problems is widely recognized, along with the stubborn resistance of most local, regional, and national groups to give global concerns priority over the less-than-global, even when this is obviously necessary in order to attain wide global sustainability. To the slogan "Think globally, act locally" should be added a new one: "Think globally, act globally." Even if we take it for granted that your body is geographically at a definite place, nevertheless every action influences the Earth, and many of these may be roughly positive or negative. Actions are global in whatever locality you act. Many fierce local or regional conflicts have a global character, crossing every border and level of standard of living.

The moderately poor people in the Second and Third Worlds may seem more helpless, for example, than the coastal people of rich Arctic Norway, but the ecological conflicts are, to a remarkable degree, of the same kind. Communities who live largely by fishing within a day's distance from land in Arctic Norway are in extreme difficulties, because the resources of the Norway Sea, and even the vast uniquely rich Barent Sea, have been badly depleted. For the coastal people it is "a question of sheer survival" but, because Norway is a rich welfare state of sorts, there is no chance that they will go to bed hungry. If the policy makers had seen the intrinsic value, the inherent greatness of the ocean with its fullness of life (and not *only* its narrow usefulness as the source of big profits; e.g., trawling, ocean-factories), then the coastal people could have retained their way of life. They would not have lost their self-esteem by having to migrate to the cities. The supporters of the Deep Ecology movement in the rich countries are not in conflict with Deep Ecology supporters in the Third and Fourth worlds. Such behavior would be strange indeed, because the global perspective reveals the basic similarity of the situation among poor and rich.

The Sami people (wrongly referred to as Lapplanders), a Fourth World nomadic people living in the Arctic Soviet Union, Finland, Sweden, and Norway, have resisted being completely dominated by these four powerful

states for the last four hundred years. When a big dam was proposed in their lands (as part of an unnecessary hydroelectric development), thousands of First World people joined them in protest. When a Sami was arrested for standing "unlawfully" on the shore of the river, the police asked him, "Why do you stay here?" He answered, "This place is part of myself." I know of no major ecological conflict anywhere which has not manifested the power and initiative of people who are not alienated from "free nature," but who protect it for its own sake as something which has meaning in itself, independently of its narrow human utility. This kind of motivation for protection of "free nature" adds substantially to the strong, but narrow, utilitarian motivation.

Sometimes the "environmental concern" of poor Third World communities seems to Westerners to relate to the "environment per se." As an example, the people of the Buddhist community of Beding (Peding) in the Rolwaling Himalaya live with the majestic holy mountain Gauri Shankar (Tseringma) straight above their heads. It has long been the object of religious respect. Some of us (mountaineers and Deep Ecology supporters) asked the people whether they wished to enjoy the profits they would get from expeditions by Westerners and Japanese trying to "conquer the mountain," or whether they preferred to *protect the Mountain itself* from being trodden upon by humans with no respect for its cultural status. The families of the community came together and unanimously voted for protection. I had the honor of walking for a week with the chief of the community, Gonden, to deliver a document addressed to the King of Nepal in Kathmandu, asking him to prohibit the climbing of Gauri Shankar. There was no reply. The rich Hindu government of Nepal is economically interested in big expeditions, and the opinion of the faraway Buddhist communities of poor people carry little weight.

The work of Vandana Shiva and others shows how women in rural India continue to try to protect an economy that is largely ecologically sustainable. But do they have the power to resist Western inspired unecological development?

Consider an example from Africa. Large areas where the Masai live may be classified as areas of "free nature," if not wilderness. The Masai are not disturbed by the vast populations of spectacular animals on their lands, such as lions and leopards, together with hundreds of others, nor are these animals severely disturbed by the Masai. For a long time, there has been a

remarkable compatibility between people and wild animals. As more or less nomadic herders, the Masai do not need land set apart for agricultural purposes.

What holds true for the Masai holds as well for a great number of other peoples and cultures in the Third World. Ecologically sustainable development may proceed in direct continuity with their traditional culture as long as population pressures remain moderate.

Lately, the Masai have been using more and more money for motor vehicles and other products they don't make themselves. This makes it tempting to sell parts of their territory to farmers looking for land for their many children. From the point of view of economic development, such sales are unfortunate because the relevant kind of subsistence agriculture does not lead to economic progress. The Masai can get sufficient cash through very carefully managed tourism and still have the traditional use of the land and preserve their cultural continuity. Some supporters of the Deep Ecology movement are working with the Masai to help them keep what is left of their land intact. An increase in subsistence farming, in this situation, is a blind alley. But the alternatives are all problematic and there are no easy answers to be found anywhere.

Individual arguments can be singled out and used and misused to defend a variety of mutually incompatible conclusions. In his paper, Ramachandra Guha warns that such is the case with arguments used by supporters of the Deep Ecology movement. And this does not happen only to Deep Ecology supporters in the United States.

After a speech I gave in Norway in favor of considering the Barent Sea seriously as a whole complex ecosystem (together with treating the living beings, including the tiny flagellates, as having intrinsic value) the politician considered to be the most powerful proponent of big fishing interests is said to have remarked, "Naess is of course more concerned about flagellates than about people." My point was that the present tragic situation for fishermen could have been avoided if policy makers had shown a little more respect for all life, not less respect for people. In every such case, one has reason to say that communication on the part of the supporters of Deep Ecology was imperfect. In this case, I certainly should have talked more about people than I did, but not to the exclusion of flagellates, radiolarians and all the other life forms which attract the interest of only a

minority of people, and certainly not to the exclusion of ecosystems as a whole.

In 1985, at the international conservation biology conference in Michigan, a representative of a Third World country stood up and asked, "What about *our* problems?" Of course, it was strange for this person, and other representatives of the tropical countries, to hear discussions, day after day, on the future of biological processes in their countries without touching the main social and economic problems facing them. If the conference had been organized by the Green movement, the agenda would have been somewhat different. The discussions concerning how to deal with the ecological crisis would have taken up, let us say, only one third of the time. The other two-thirds would have concerned mainly social problems ("social justice," I would say) and peace. The representatives of the Third World could have introduced the latter two areas of concern and could have stressed that efforts to protect what is left of the richness and diversity of Life on Earth must not interfere with efforts to solve the main problems they have today.

Supporters of the Deep Ecology movement, however, might have raised the following question for discussion. "How can the increasing global interest in protecting all Life on Earth be used to further the cause of genuine economic progress and social justice in the Third World?"

Such questions will inevitably bring forth different and, in part, incompatible proposals. But as we explore these incompatible proposals, we must never lose sight of the importance of all humans everywhere of preserving the richness and diversity of Life on Earth.

NOTES

1. Gary Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), pp. 6–7.

2. See the Greenpeace report: *Greenpeace Antarctic Expedition 1989/90*, p. 53. Waste disposal procedures have improved but "many more changes are still needed if stations are to comply with the new waste disposal guidelines contained in ATCM Recommendation XV-3. Indeed, most stations have not even met the minimal guidelines agreed to by the treaty States in 1975."

3. Quoted from a valuable survey of the wilderness issues: George Sessions, "Ecocentrism, Wilderness, and Global Ecosystem Protection," in *The Wilderness*

Condition: Essays on Environment and Civilization, edited by Max Oelschlaeger (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1992).

4. Ramachandra Guha, "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique," in *Environmental Ethics* 11 (1989). [Included in this volume.]

5. Ibid., p. 72. "In contrast to the conventional lobbying efforts of environmental professionals based in Washington, [Earth First!] proposes a militant defense of 'Mother Earth,' and unflinching opposition to human attacks on undisturbed wilderness."

6. Sessions, "Ecocentrism," p. 112.

Arturo Gómez-Pompa and Andrea Kaus[1]

Taming the Wilderness Myth (1992)

Despite nearly a century of propaganda, conservation still proceeds at a snail's pace; progress still consists largely of letterhead pieties and convention oratory. On the back forty we still slip two steps backward for each forward stride. The usual answer to this dilemma is "more conservation education." No one will debate this, but is it certain that only the volume of education needs stepping up? Is something lacking in the content as well?

Aldo Leopold

NEVER BEFORE HAS THE WESTERN WORLD been so concerned with issues relating to humankind's relationship with the environment. As concerned members of this industrialized civilization, we have recognized that humanity is an integral part of the biosphere, at once the transformer and the self-appointed protector of the world. We assume that we have the answers. We assume that our perceptions of environmental problems and their solutions are the correct ones, based as they are on Western rational thought and scientific analysis. And we often present the preservation of wilderness as part of the solution toward a better planet under the presumption that we know what is to be preserved and how it is to be managed.

However, we need to evaluate carefully our own views of the environment and our own self-interests for its future use. Until now, a key compo-