

History/Background of the Environmental Rights Movement

"Ecoterror is any crime committed in the name of saving nature."

Two specific issues advocated by single issue terrorists are environmentalism and animal rights. These issues are based on the belief that all life on earth has the right to exist, be respected and be protected from destruction by man. Many people endorse these same views but the majority do not commit criminal acts to further them. The criminal acts are what separates the actions which are of interest to law enforcement from legitimate protest activity. This type of domestic terrorism differs from traditional left-wing and right-wing terrorism because specific issue resolutions rather than widespread political changes are sought. These terrorists are attempting to force society to change its attitudes about specific issues that these terrorists consider important to them.¹

Since at least 1977, when disaffected members of the ecological preservation group Greenpeace formed the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society and attacked commercial fishing operations by cutting drift nets, acts of so-called "eco-terrorism" have occurred across the United States. Eco-terrorism can be defined as "the use or threatened use of violence of a criminal nature against innocent victims or property by an environmentally oriented subnational group for environmental-political reasons, aimed at an audience beyond the target, often of a symbolic nature."²

Following the philosophy of Deep Ecology, espoused in 1972 by Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, eco-terrorists emphasize the belief that human beings are ordinary members of the biological community. This "biocentric" view insists that the concept of equal rights should be applied all the way down to a virus. Deep Ecology calls for more than protecting animals by applying a moral code to inanimate objects such as rivers, mountains, and trees. The philosophy envisions a rollback of civilization, recreating wilderness. One radical environmentalist wrote, "What Earth requires, in short, is an end to civilization and to the vast majority of 'relatively expendable' human lives."

Radical environmental groups are in direct conflict with mainstream conservation organizations such as the Audubon Society, Sierra Club, and the Wilderness Society, which advocate lawful, non-violent, action. The real genesis of the radical groups in the United States can be traced to 1979, when the United States Forest Service, in the Roadless Area Review Evaluation, decided to make more than 65 million acres of timber under its control available for commercial harvest. Conventional environmentalists viewed this action as a betrayal by the Carter administration and, with the election of Ronald Reagan and the subsequent relaxing of Federal environmental regulatory policies, disaffected environmentalists, in 1980, formed a radical group called Earth First! (EF!).

¹ 291-HQ-0, 04/01/1998

² NCAVC report