

Manning, A. (1994, April 22). Children Committed to Cleanup, Adults May Not, but Kids Call Saving Earth 'Their Mission.' [USA Today](#).

OVERVIEW

Americans are great for brief commitments to social causes and fads. If there is a serious problem, Americans are in favor of using brains, money, and technology to fix it quickly. The writer of this article captures current moods regarding ecology as she writes:

Another Earth Day. More green hoopla. More hype about pollution and recycling. Big deal.

Even amid observances today such as tree-plantings, concerts, and cleanups, there are signs that for some adults, at least, the message is growing monotonous. Once-active supporters of eco-causes are suffering energy depletion. Membership in the largest environment groups, which doubled and tripled during the 1980s, is diminishing. Eco-magazines founded in the green glow of Earth Day 1990 are gasping for air.

[National Opinion Research Center](#) polled U.S. adults to find out how many thought more should be spent on environmental protection. In 1990, 75% felt that more resources needed to go toward improving the environment; in 1994, the figure had dropped to 56%.

But for the young people of America it seems that environmental protection is no fading fad. A 1994 [Louis Harris](#) survey of 10,375 4-12th grade students is intriguing:

- Only crime tops ecology as a topic children think about "a lot."
- 74% Wanted to help fix problems like polluted beaches and oceans.
- 72% Wanted to do something about polluted air.
- 62% Wanted to do something about chemicals in the ground that hurt people or animals.
- 58% Were concerned enough about garbage to help fix the problem.

Several organizations help young people fix environmental problems:

- **Girls United to Save the Environment.** This project of the [National Coalition of Girls' Schools](#) involves 25,000 K-12 students in

- projects ranging from building bird houses for zoos to cleaning rivers.
- **Dolphin Defenders.** Fifty-five pre-teens, organized by neighborhood worker Neil S. Andre, have collected 12,000 pounds of glass and 1000 tires along with returning 100 abandoned shopping carts. On Earth Day, 1994, they created a habitat for animals in a vacant lot (their fifth such project). Evergreen trees, flowering trees, berry bushes and brush, along with an underground water dish to be filled regularly, will provide shelter for raccoons, possums, and birds.
 - **Roots and Shoots.** was established in 1994 by primatologist Jane Goodall. With chapters in 40 countries, this program will "bring back meaning into the world of children...generating concern for the environment, for animals and for each other." USA Today's cover picture was of students cleaning algae out of a school pond at Holland Hall School (Tulsa, Oklahoma).
 - **Tree Musketeers.** in Segundo, California plant trees. It is a program that grew out of Brownie scouts' efforts for environmental concern.

Vice President Gore used Earth Day, 1994 to announce the creation of an international project uniting children, educators, and scientists for monitoring the environment.

Just a few days earlier, President Clinton gave an early Earth Day speech in which he said:

Preserving the environment is at the core of everything we have to do in our own country—building businesses, creating jobs, fighting crime and drugs and violence, raising our children to know the difference between right and wrong, and restoring the fabric of our society.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

- What are your own five or six main natural and social concerns for the world? How high does environmental concern place on your list? Is your concern rising or waning? Why, do you think, this is so?
- In your opinion, why in the 1990s was adult concern for the environment waning while involvement of young people increasing?
- What do you know of the tendency to deify nature as a basis of environmental concern?
- As a youth leader, teacher, or parent how do you approach this issue

with young people?

IMPLICATIONS

- All human beings and every nation today cannot disrespect our environment; it is a matter of quality of human life and of survival.
- Concern for the environment is an issue that brings people and nations of the world together for the common good.
- There are strikingly divergent opinions about this topic. We must learn to share convictions about the environment. Part of our differences will come from our various religious approaches and beliefs. Here to we must learn to accept divergent opinions and look for common ground.
- Young people must be respected for their particular concern for the environment.

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