

How the big boys honored Earth Week

Environmental activists will long remember Earth Week 1972. It will not have earned its historical niche as a result of huge rallies or the rhetoric of President Nixon's Earth Week declaration. It will be remembered as the week the dam broke and the environmental movement was flooded with defeats.

Nixon's Earth Week proclamation set the rhetorical tone for the event, but the government officials and politicians must not have read the part of the President's statement addressed specifically to them. It read, "I call upon appropriate officials of the Federal Government and of State and local governments to encourage an understanding of the purposes of Earth Week, to observe the week through appropriate ceremonies, and to give special attention to the educating of our citizens in the preservation and enrichment of our natural environment."

Other government documents released during the week may have stolen the attention of the officials. Those concerned about the energy crisis started Earth Week by mulling over the Atomic Energy Commission's environmental impact statement for the liquid metal fast breeder reactor which came out the previous Friday. The preparation of this statement, which toes the AEC's party line that the breeder is great, paves the way for construction of the first plant to demonstrate the commercial feasibility of the power source.

Perhaps our congressmen in the House of Representatives may have been too involved in the efforts of some members to dismember the National Environmental Policy Act to notice the President's message. On Monday of Earth Week, the House passed a bill authorizing the operation of nuclear power plants before the completion of the environmental impact statements required by the Act. Even though some members objected to the provisions which subverted NEPA and to the haste with which the measure was being pushed through (it was reported out of Committee on Friday and voted on under a suspension of the rules on Monday), the House passed the measure 283 to 78.

The Justices of the Supreme Court must not have thought they came under the President's category of "appropriate government officials." They chose Earth Week to release their long-awaited decision in the Mineral King case. The 4 to 3 decision blunted the Sierra Club's attempt to challenge a proposed \$35 million Walt Disney resort in California's Sierra Nevada Mountains.

Although the Sierra Club can try again on some other legal points in lower court, the decision strictly limits the right of conservation groups to go to court to protect the environment. This opinion reinforces the precept that a group will have to prove that its members have been personally and directly harmed in order to sue. The full implications of the decision will not be known until lower court judges interpret it in other cases, but it is expected to limit the freedom of public interest law firms to file environmental cases against the federal government.

Environmental activists might expect the House of Representatives, the Atomic Energy Commission and the Supreme Court to miss the thrust of the President's statement, but an environmentally oriented Department



Earth Week, 1972

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

For the Nation and for the world, there are few issues of greater moment than the quality of our environment. As civilizations have evolved, man has increasingly altered his world to accommodate his needs. Today, our immense technological expansion affects the earth more than at any earlier time.

The air, water, and natural resources of the earth are not inexhaustible, yet we continue to make major and often contradictory demands on these resources. If man is to preserve the natural heritage upon which his survival and the quality of his life depend, he must make resolute choices and fix uncompromising priorities.

The environmental awakening of recent years marks a new maturity in our attitudes toward the relationship of man to his surroundings. We have made a beginning, but it is only a beginning. Every American—and indeed, every citizen of the world—must endeavor by earnest and sustained effort to nurture the earth which we all share.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RICHARD NIXON, President of the United States of America, do hereby designate the period of April 17 through April 23, 1972, as Earth Week.

I call upon appropriate officials of the Federal Government and of State and local governments to encourage an understanding of the purposes of Earth Week, to observe the week through appropriate ceremonies, and to give special attention to the educating of our citizens in the preservation and enrichment of our natural environment.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-fourth day of March, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred seventy-two, and of the Independence of the United States of America the one hundred ninety-sixth.

like Interior should certainly take his words seriously. After all, the President himself said in his White House Earth Week statement that if man is to survive, "he must make resolute choices and fix uncompromising priorities." Interior officials should understand that. However, on Wednesday the department made public a task force recommendation that may bring Teddy Roosevelt right out of his grave. Stating, "This will necessitate some trade-offs with environmental values," the group concluded that "additional coal-fired electric generation" is necessary in the Southwest. The report saw no alternative to the construction of all six mammoth plants in the Four Corners area. The task force report is now open to comment from the public and a formal decision from Secretary Rogers Morton is expected in the near future.

It took the Department of Agriculture five days to come up with an appropriate way of celebrating Earth Week, but the department came through in style on Friday. Filling in for absent Secretary Earl Butz, Under Secretary Phil Campbell approved the exchange of Forest Service land for land owned by the Burlington Northern Railroad in Montana. The move paves the way for the construction of the planned luxury resort, Big Sky, forty miles from Yellowstone National Park. The former public land will be used for an exclusive ski slope; Montana environmentalists, who have opposed Big Sky, vowed to take the Forest Service to court.

With his whole government ignoring the grandiose Earth Week statement, President Nixon might be expected to deliver wrath-filled condemnations of the incompetence, ineptitude and obstructionism in the bureaucratic agencies and legislative bodies. Unfortunately, however, he found himself too busy directing the bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong to give much time to domestic issues.

With an Earth Week as successful as the one just concluded, it is doubtful that the movement can afford to hold another one.

Sam Love