

OPINION



Los Angeles Times illustration by J.J. Smith-Moore

Bush's environmental hypocrisy

By J. SCOTT CHRISTIANSON

I am determined that in the 1990s, the United States of America will continue to assume responsibility by providing world environmental leadership," President George Bush proclaimed in his 1990 EPA Journal article, "What I Believe about the Environment." Has Bush really been an environmental leader? Is America assuming responsibility for the environment? Or has the Bush administration been, as Anthony Lewis of The New York Times noted, "governing by hypocrisy?"

Bush's policies have made the United States an environmental loafer rather than a leader. For example, the United States is the only developed nation to refuse to declare a target date for stabilizing carbon dioxide emissions—the major cause of the greenhouse effect.

Bush is all talk and no action. "Those who think we're powerless to do anything about the 'greenhouse effect' are forgetting about the 'White House effect....'" said Bush in 1988. He continued, "In my first year in office, I will convene a global conference on the environment at the White House.... We will talk about global warming. We will talk about acid rain. We will talk about saving our oceans.... And we will act." However, no such conference was ever convened.

And the action the Bush administration takes when participating in international conferences on the environment is to block measures that would restrict carbon dioxide emissions.

Bush's administration argues that reducing carbon dioxide emissions and increasing energy efficiency will burden an already unstable economy. However, the Rocky Mountain Institute estimates that if fossil fuel consumption was reduced enough to cause a 20 percent decrease in carbon dioxide emissions, the United States would save about \$200 billion a year. They also point out that some of the most energy-efficient countries in the world are

The United States lags the world in green leadership.

also the most economically successful (e.g. Japan and former West Germany).

The National Energy Strategy that Bush introduced in 1991 alarmed even the most conservative conservationists. Bush's proposals included increased off-shore drilling and new drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, while ignoring conservation measures like higher fuel-efficiency standards and increased use of renewable energy sources. How did Bush ever come up with such a plan? By relinquishing the decision-making to his advisers, namely former chief of staff John Sununu. Bush's plan, known as the Johnston-Wallop bill, was initially defeated last fall. However, it was reintroduced into the Senate this session.

Although we use more energy per capita than any other nation and are dependent on foreign sources of energy, Bush doesn't have the courage to propose a higher Corporate Average Fuel Economy standard for autos, which would require increased fuel efficiency in new cars. Bush's auto plan allows the secretary of transportation to set fuel economy standards, without setting a schedule for achieving such standards. As Charles Mandler, an analyst for the Energy Conservation Coalition, said, "It gives the transportation department *carte blanche* to do nothing."

In January 1990, Bush announced that as part of his "America the Beautiful" program, volunteers would plant 1 billion trees a year to combat global warming. Two years later, not one tree has been planted and the not-for-profit organization responsible for coordinating the program, the National Tree Trust, has just submitted its first year's budget: \$1.23 million for salaries, travel and office expenses, and only \$350,000 for tree-planting grants. The NTT has also decided that it will

only be able to plant 3 percent of the promised trees.

Perhaps the best known example of Bush's environmental hypocrisy is his proposed change to the 1989 federal Manual for Identifying and Delineating Jurisdictional Wetlands — the document that defines what constitutes a protected wetland. Once again a campaign promise has been broken. "My position on wetlands is straightforward. All existing wetlands, no matter how small, should be preserved," and "No net loss of wetlands" were lines Bush tossed out to voters during his 1988 campaign.

The wetlands manual was devised by the Environmental Protection Agency and three other agencies in 1989. However, many farmers objected to the criteria set forth in this manual and asked for revision. Instead of referring back to the scientists that created the 1989 manual, the administration took charge of revising it and eventually fell victim to intensive lobbying from oil companies, mining and real estate firms that wanted far weaker regulations than the farmers desired.

Bush decided that to please both developers and environmentalists he would just redefine the word wetland and then continue to protect those wetlands. Unfortunately, Bush's new definition eliminates about one-third of all existing wetlands from federal protection. Jay Hair, president of the National Wildlife Federation, commented, "Protecting wetlands by redefining them out of existence is like ending homelessness by redefining a home as a cardboard box."

In Missouri, this new definition could cost the state up to 424,380 acres of wetlands. Missouri Department of Natural Resources director Tracy Mehan states, "The proposed

changes to the federal manual are not based on scientific grounds. The same technical groups that prepared the 1989 manual should be allowed to make the necessary refinements in its language and protocols, incorporate advances in scientific thinking, and correct misinterpretations of its intent." The fight to block Bush's new wetlands definition is still raging. In June, world leaders will meet in Rio de Janeiro for the U.N. Conference on Environment and Development, hoping to consolidate plans for world environmental reform. Regrettably, the Bush administration will be the biggest stumbling block to the achievement of this goal. The administration refuses to use the conference to set goals and timetables for reducing carbon dioxide emissions, and refuses to lend technological and financial help to developing countries that wish to avoid further destruction of their ecosystems as they industrialize.

A recent article in Time noted: "While the U.S. seems to treat Rio's emerging suite of agreements as a threat, other industrial nations see the Earth Summit as an opportunity.... Japan is developing a 100-year plan to make Japan dominant in ecotechnologies; Tokyo is also said to be pondering ways to become the world leader in environmental reform." When does Bush plan to start "providing world environmental leadership?"

Let's face it, if the so-called "environmental revolution" was a real revolution, Bush would be the first one against the wall. Bush has proved how much he can talk and how little he can do. And proposing a 6 percent increase in the EPA budget doesn't make him the environmental president. This is the year to elect someone who can be a true environmental president.

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