

J. SCOTT CHRISTIANSON

Readers express views about conservation, environment



When a person says "I am an environmentalist," or "I am a conservationist," what does he or she really mean? In a column last spring, I explored how people define environmentalism and conservation. Several readers responded with their insights into the meaning of environmentalism and their opinions as to whether conservation and environmentalism differ.

"It is clear that environmentalism has many different meanings to different sorts of people," wrote John Stinchcombe, a sophomore at Bucknell University. "To many people, being environmentally conscious may be as simple as recycling soda cans and an occasional visit to a state park, while to others it extends to buying only recyclable containers, eating 'organic-only' foods, and making a concern for the environment one of their first priorities."

"To me, environmentalism covers a broad series of concerns for the natural wilderness left in the world and the developed parts of the world. Just as the Amazon rain forest, a river, a lake and a mountain should exist for their own sake, so should the residents of our cities have a right to air free of smog, water free of industrial pollutants, and food free of harmful chemical pesticides. I define environmentalism as the concern for the maintenance of the natural and developed world, for both humans and other organisms."

"To me, conservation has a double

meaning," continued Stinchcombe. "I like the idea of preserving wetlands, streams and forests, but not solely for the purpose of hunting, fishing or cutting timber. These activities and ways of life are not inherently bad or evil as some 'environmentalists' have branded them; they are a part of our society and culture ... we must reach a balance between preservation and the sustainable use of our resources."

Renee Matyear, executive director of Everything Green based in Washington state, believes there is a difference between conservationists and environmentalists. "In my opinion, they are somewhat different," wrote Matyear. "Advocating conservation is more passive than actually working to solve environmental problems. Conservation seeks to preserve the status quo while some environmentalists are actively working to repair damage while preventing further damage and perhaps even enhancing humankind's impact on the Earth."

"I do not believe that environmentalism and conservation are mutually exclusive," wrote Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia. "Going strictly by a definition, they are not identical, but they are related. Environmentalism is a love of nature and a concern for the state of the environment. Conservation, on the other hand, is the preservation of existing resources for the future."

"I consider myself both an envi-

ronmentalist and a conservationist. One of my favorite activities is canoeing, which goes hand in hand with environmentalism and the love of being with nature," continued Kelly. "In addition, I am also a conservationist because I want my children and their children to be able to enjoy the same things which I have been able to enjoy. That is why we must work hard for tougher environmental regulations and programs to help preserve the small amount of untouched wilderness there is left in the world."

Jerry Presley, director of the Missouri Department of Conservation, also considers himself both a conservationist and an environmentalist. He wrote, "'Conserve' and the 'environment' go together as verb and object: the environment is what we need to conserve."

"Most dictionary definitions of 'conservation' include the terms 'use' and 'preservation,'" noted Presley. "Both are important to the environment. Overuse can become abuse, but minimal use — i.e. preservation — can also. The true conservationist/environmentalist tries to find an appropriate balance of the two.... Conservation and environmentalism are two sides of the same coin."

Whether we call ourselves environmentalists or conservationists, what is most important is that we use our natural resources in a sustainable manner. In the end, monikers are dispensable, but our environment isn't.

If you have a suggestion for a column, a gripe, a success story or whatever, write it down and send it to me, care of the Columbia Daily Tribune, PO Box 798, Columbia, Mo., 65205.