

**J. SCOTT CHRISTIANSON**



## Conservationists not the same as environmentalist

*"The real substance of conservation lies not in the physical projects of government, but in the mental processes of citizens."*

— Aldo Leopold

A recent survey reported that more than 50 percent of U.S. citizens consider themselves to be environmentalists. What does it mean to be an environmentalist? Or a conservationist? Everyone has his or her own idea of what conservation and environmentalism means.

The word conservationist was coined in the late 1800s by Gifford Pinchot, the first chief of the U.S. Forest Service. He said that "conservation is the foresighted utilization, preservation and or renewal of forests, waters, lands and minerals for the greatest good of the greatest number" of people "for the longest time."

While Pinchot had a utilitarian definition of conservation, others have emphasized a multiple-use approach. John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club and a contemporary of Pinchot, believed that conservation involved both the sustained utilization of natural resources and the preservation of unique wilderness areas for their intrinsic value as wilderness.

Another famous conservationist, Aldo Leopold, defined conservation as "our effort to understand and preserve the capacity of the land for self-renewal." He also said that conservation is "a state of harmony between man and the land."

Who is an environmentalist? Is being an environmentalist different from being a conservationist? Robert Redford, speaking in support of a Missouri Department of Conservation book project, stated broadly, "We are all environmentalists. If we care about the quality of life that we lead, about human values, we're environmentalists."

Environmentalism is a term that has become popular during the last 20 years. The use of the word environmentalism, instead of conservation, reflects a shift in the reasons people are concerned about our natural environment. Traditionally, citizens concerned about environmental quality were sportsmen and women who wanted to protect the habitat of the game that they hunted and

fished. Today, more and more people believe that society has a moral responsibility not to ruin the environment. For example, most people believe that Missouri's streams should be free of trash and toxic chemicals because that is their natural condition, not just because they support trout.

This change in viewpoint has also caused some people to take a stand on whether they are conservationists or environmentalists. Those who consider themselves conservationists, sometimes view environmentalists as radical "tree huggers," while some environmentalists see conservationists as selfish users of nature who aren't willing to take on issues that are unrelated to hunting or fishing.

Webster's dictionary defines a conservationist as "a person who advocates the conservation of natural resources," while an environmentalist is someone who is "working to solve environmental problems." Are these really different objectives?

What do you think environmentalism and conservation mean? Do they have different meanings? What do you consider to be important conservation issues? Or environmental issues? Are you an environmentalist? Why? Why not? Send in your responses, and I'll summarize the replies in a later column.

### **EARTH DAY CONFERENCE**

The Earth Day Conference will be held from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Feb. 27 in the Arts & Science Building on the University of Missouri-Columbia campus. The theme of the conference is "Sustainable Community: Here and Beyond," and the keynote speaker will be David Shorr, Columbia resident and the new director of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources. The conference is free and open to the public. For more information, stop by the Columbia Earth Day Coalition, Peace Nook, 804-C E. Broadway, Columbia, Mo. 65201, or call 875-0539.

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.