

# AJES

Adirondack Journal of  
Environmental Studies

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## MISSION STATEMENT

Covering the broad range of issues that concern the Champlain-Adirondack Biosphere Reserve, the *Adirondack Journal of Environmental Studies* (AJES) exists to foster a dialogue about this area loved by so many. The journal purposefully avoids serving as a vehicle for any single or special point of view. To the contrary, in searching for common ground AJES welcomes variety and a broad spectrum of opinion from its contributors.

## CONTRIBUTING TO AJES

We encourage the submission of manuscripts, reviews, photographs, artwork and letters to the editor. Please send your material to Gary Chilson, Paul Smith's College, Paul Smiths, New York 12970.

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

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# Prerogative

"Editorially Speaking"

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There are, and should be, many different bio-regions in a global society. Each of these,

obviously, faces different problems. As a result, people in each region must find their own, often unique, ways of solving the interrelated problems of ecological and social prosperity. To me, the colleges and universities in a region are the institutions most capable of developing, demonstrating, monitoring, preserving, and promoting the knowledge and skills needed for a decentralized and sustainable society. I believe the time has come for our schools to lead us up the path of sustainable development.

As most now realize, our children's future is very uncertain. Several elements of the near future suggest an especially grim picture for our children and all our non-human neighbors. Five quick, broad brush-strokes make these elements clear: first, our human population is still increasing and ex-

pected to double in 40 years; second, those nations with increasing populations have an increasing expectation of sharing in the world's affluence; third, national environmental and economic regulatory mechanisms are becoming ever more useless against global economic forces; fourth, there is a frantic scramble for the planet's increasingly marginalized natural resources; and last, though certainly not least, there hangs over us all, humans and non-humans alike, the continued presence of obliterative weapons in the more unstable regions of the

world. These social and ecological problems make a strong case for taking a proactive approach to designing our future.

One deliberately chosen route, perhaps more aptly described as a herd path, could be up a learning curve of sustainable development to a solar-hydrogen powered, ecologically and economically sustainable society. The five 'e's of sustainable development, referred to in past Prerogatives, seek to address the problems of our children's future within this coherent framework. While no panacea, the transition to a sustainable, solar-hydrogen society should result in a better balance between humans and non-humans and a better life for all on this planet.

## THE TIME HAS COME FOR OUR SCHOOLS TO LEAD US UP THE PATH OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

We should not, however, look to the government for help. Using the police power of the state to coerce people into a standardized model of sustainable development, however necessary or appropriate it might seem to some, is destined to fail. Americans simply wouldn't stand for it. Importantly, too, a one-size-fits-all model wouldn't produce the kind of social, economic, and technical innovations we will need. The transition to a sustainable, solar-hydrogen society should be accomplished without the heavy hand of government coercion and, it will be all the better the more we do without it. Our traditions of decentralized decision-making and local self-reliance coupled with our entrepreneurial spirit fosters exactly the kind of innovations the transition requires to be successful.



Despite these important cultural advantages, much of our difficulty in solving our looming social and ecological problems is still due to ignorance. We are largely blind to the problems as well as the possible alternatives, opportunities, and potential solutions. Without an appreciation of the wealth of potential solutions already available or of the bright, optimistic vision of the future, we will embrace our blindness and ignore the problems facing us. Refusing to see is very easy to do. The problems and solutions are practically invisible to the untrained eye or uninformed mind. After all, no one actually sees the extinction of a species, the collapse of a social system like the Soviet Union's, or a population explosion. Nor are many people aware of the latest developments in science and technology or the innovative institutional solutions hidden within esoteric academic journals.

**T**raining the mind and eye to see and solve our problems is among the things our academic institutions are supposed to do. Of course, promoting sustainable development by playing a practical and functional role in a regional community's socio-economic evolution may not be appropriate for every academic institution. Arguably, some schools should be devoted to the timeless and universal, and thus serve their communities only indirectly. Other schools should even develop and promote alternative visions. Yet all academic institutions have the ethical obligation to teach their students the best way to live in community. My point here should be very clear: our schools should lead us.

Getting our regional schools to take the lead, however, requires three important steps in preparation. First, there must be sufficient time for the gradual but deep changes to occur in our social and moral values. Second, some significant global event must occur to act both as the spark at the flash point of change and to remove the stigma of provincialism shunned by all academicians. Third, there must

be an accumulation of prestigious and precedent-setting examples by the Academy's leaders. All these necessary steps now appear to have been taken.

Since the first Earth Day in 1970, there has clearly been a change in our nation's values. In response to growing student demand, for example, there are now more than 700 colleges and universities across the United States with environmental studies programs. Throughout the economy, there are now a tremendous number of corporations promoting their environmentally-sensitive products and corporate activities that protect environmental harmony. And only now could an environmentalist politician like Vice-President Al Gore be considered an asset to an election campaign rather than a liability.

According to some, the global event that took us through the second step came in 1987 with the Brundtland Report of the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, popularly entitled, *Our Common Future*. The international support and momentum for embracing sustainable development following the publication of *Our Common Future* augmented on-going efforts and helped make possible the eventual success of the United Na-

the seeds. Perhaps it actually was the Brundtland Report that stimulated the seeds to sprout. Regardless, in 1990, twenty university presidents, rectors, and vice chancellors from around the world declared the clear and unequivocal role of the Academy in promoting an equitable and sustainable future for all mankind in harmony with nature. More than 100 universities and colleges quickly came forward and lent their support to what was called the Talloires Declaration. Then, in December of 1991, at a conference sponsored by the International Association of Universities, the United Nations University, and the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, presidents and representatives of another 33 universities developed and signed the Halifax Declaration. This document accepted the Talloires Declaration and went further, enumerating specific actions for the Academy to take in order to promote the transition to a sustainable society.

Following these precedent-setting examples came a series of three significant endorsements in quick succession. Representatives from more than 400 universities and colleges in 47 countries gathered in Wales for the Association of Commonwealth Universities' 15th Quinquennial Congress

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tions Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. These international events established local sustainable development efforts at the center of the global strategy to solve our environmental and social problems.

Twenty years of gradual social change prepared the soil and planted

in August, 1993. The Swansea Declaration called upon the Academy to embody sustainable development in all their operations and to incorporate the promotion of a sustainable society within their institutions' mission. The Kyoto Declaration, released by the International Association of Universities in November of 1993, called upon



their 650 members to embody both the Halifax and Swansea Declarations. Then in May, 1994, the Conference of European Rectors, representing 500 universities, endorsed the University Charter for Sustainable Development, and repeated the call to all academia to incorporate sustainable development as a key element in their institutional missions.

All the necessary preliminary steps have been taken. Many schools in the United States have answered the call and are in the process of revising their mission statements to include their ethical obligation and responsibility to their bioregion. In and close to our own region, Middlebury College and Dartmouth University have taken leadership roles in assuming their institutional responsibility. Now the time has surely come for our other regional academies in the Champlain-Adirondack Biosphere Reserve to explicitly proclaim their role in promoting a sustainable society.

**W**hile we encourage our schools to recognize their institutional responsibilities within the bioregion, the *Adirondack Journal of Environmental Studies* shall seek to promote sustainable development by helping to clarify viewpoints and fostering a recognition of the common ground that exists among the multitude of perspectives. For instance, in this issue, Paul Gutmann describes Lake Placid's efforts to improve the quality of the West Branch of the Ausable River by on-land disposal of its treated sewage. Glenn Harris looks at past elk introductions in the Adirondacks for lessons to remember as we consider re-introducing wolves and other species, today. Peter Redmond describes the Summit Steward program that seeks to help save our alpine islands in the sky. John Penney, editor of the *Adirondack Daily Enterprise*, summarizes his perspective on the Adirondacks since he arrived during the controversial days of the Commission on the Adirondack Park in the 21st Century. And Curt Stager responds to Dale French's article, "Acid Rain - So What?" that appeared in our last issue. ■

