

Mini ENVIRONMENTAL Glossary

Acid rain

Rain, snow or fog that is polluted by acid in the atmosphere and damages the environment. Two common air pollutants acidify rain: sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide. When the environment cannot neutralize the acid being deposited, damage occurs.

Anthropocentric world view (anthropocentrism)

A world view placing humans at the centre of all creation - one which is "taken for granted by most Westerners" (cf. Button). It sees humans as the source of all value (i.e. it is they who bestow value on other parts of nature), since the concept of value itself is a human creation.

Anthropogenic

Resulting from or produced by human beings.

Anthropomorphism

Attributing human traits to non-human entities, such as elements in nature (e.g., plants, animals, rivers), buildings, deities, etc.

Biocentric world view

This considers all species (and individuals) as having equal intrinsic value. Humans are not considered more important or worthy than any other species.

Biodiversity (also biological diversity)

The variability among living organisms from all sources including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems.

Bioregionalism

A contemporary ecosocial movement that emphasizes the importance of the local geographic area (bioregion) rather than abstract notions of nature or nation. On the personal level, the movement encourages intimate knowledge of and identity with the bioregion so that we "reinhabit" our place. On the social level, the movement emphasizes decentralized economics, agriculture, and politics that reflect the uniqueness of the bioregion, while social structures tend to be simple and egalitarian.

Biosphere

1) The part of the Earth system comprising all ecosystems and living organisms in the atmosphere, on land (terrestrial biosphere), or in the oceans (marine biosphere), including derived dead organic matter, such as litter, soil organic matter, and oceanic detritus.

Carrying capacity

The maximum population of a certain species that can be supported by a given ecosystem or habitat.

Clear-cutting

The process of removing all trees, large and small, in a stand in one cutting operation. This practice, if not done properly, reduces biodiversity and degrades or destroys habitat for forest-dependent species, while encouraging water runoff, erosion, sedimentation of streams and lakes, and flooding.

Climate change

1) Refers to any change in climate over time, whether due to natural variability or as a result of human activity. This

usage differs from that in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which defines climate change' as: 'a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods'.

Conservation vs. Preservation

Most early environmentalists believed that government rather than the market should be charged with protecting the environment and ensuring the conservation of resources. An early philosophy of resource conservation was developed by Gifford Pinchot (1865–1946), the first chief of the U.S. Forest Service, for whom conservation represented the wise and efficient use of resources. Also in the United States at about the same time, a more strongly biocentric approach arose in the preservationist philosophy of John Muir (1838–1914), founder of the Sierra Club, and Aldo Leopold (1887–1948), a professor of wildlife management who was pivotal in the designation of Gila National Forest in New Mexico in 1924 as America's first national wilderness area. Leopold introduced the concept of a land ethic, arguing that humans should transform themselves from conquerors of nature into citizens of it; his essays, compiled posthumously in *A Sand County Almanac* (1949), had a significant influence on later biocentric environmentalists.

Consumerism

An ideology, and practice, in which a progressively greater consumption of goods is seen as beneficial. In a culture and economy of production and consumption, especially in developed industrialized countries, goods are produced, purchased, discarded, and manufactured again (and purchased again) on a recurring basis in order to sustain capitalist profit.

Culture

Culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.

Deep ecology

1) In Deep Ecology, nature is seen as a value in its own right, independent of human existence. Humanity is only one species among many, and has no right to dominate the Earth and all the other living organisms. It also advocates the inherent rights of all nonhuman beings to exist in their natural state. Maintenance of the diversity of life on Earth mandates a decrease in the human impacts on the natural environment, and substantial increases in the wilderness areas of the globe.

Ecocentric world view (ecocentrism)

A "mode of thought" (cf. O'Riordan) [or world view] which regards humans as subject to ecological and systems laws. Essentially it is not human-centred [cf. anthropocentrism] but centred on the natural ecosystems, of which humans are reckoned to be just another component. There is a strong sense of respect for nature in its own right [cf. biocentrism].... Ecocentrics lack faith in modern large-scale technology and society, and the technical, bureaucratic, economic and political élites [cf. technocentrism].

Ecofeminism

Ecofeminists assert that there is a connection between the destruction of nature by humans and the oppression of women by men that arises from political theories and social practices in which both women and nature are treated as objects to be owned or controlled. Ecofeminists aim to establish a central role for women in the pursuit of an environmentally sound and socially just society.

Ecological footprint

1) The environmental impact of one human being on the ecosystem, measured by the variety of material goods consumed in day-to-day living; the concept includes the area of productive land and water (ecosystems) required on a continuous basis to produce the resources consumed and to assimilate the wastes produced by a defined

population, wherever on Earth that land is located.

Ecosocialism

A current of thought within existing socialist and green-left movements, seeking to win ecology activists to socialism and to convince socialists of the vital importance of ecological issues and struggles.

Ecosystem

A system of living organisms interacting with each other and their physical environment. The boundaries of what could be called an ecosystem are somewhat arbitrary, depending on the focus of interest or study. Thus, the extent of an ecosystem may range from very small spatial scales to, ultimately, the entire Earth.

Endangered species

A wildlife species facing imminent extirpation (a wildlife species no longer existing in the wild in Canada, but occurring elsewhere) or extinction.

ENGO (environmental non-governmental organization)

A non-governmental organization (NGO) is an organization that is not formally part of the public sector — either as a department or agency, or any other entity directly under the authority of, or reporting to, the executive, legislative, or judicial branch of government. In principle, this definition would include the private sector, but business organizations are quite different from [NGOs such as] religious organizations, charitable groups, neighbourhood groups, and the voluntary sector in the way in which they interact with government. NGOs are crucial to modern societies in several ways. They make up most of what we think of as "civil society" — the arena of organized social life that is distinct from the market and from politics. They often are created to represent certain interests or causes — for example, Greenpeace in the environmental arena or Amnesty International on human rights issues. In this sense, while non-governmental, NGOs are usually entangled in the political process, championing one cause or interest or another.

Environmental injustice/ environmental racism

The tendency for minorities of all types to face unfair treatment, discrimination, and oppression, resulting in greater risks of pollution and other forms of environmental risk, often regardless of their socio-economic status.

Environmentalism

A political and ethical movement that seeks to improve and protect the quality of the natural environment through changes to environmentally harmful human activities; through the adoption of forms of political, economic, and social organization that are thought to be necessary for, or at least conducive to, the benign treatment of the environment by humans; and through a reassessment of humanity's relationship with nature. In various ways, environmentalism claims that living things other than humans, and the natural environment as a whole, are deserving of consideration in reasoning about the morality of political, economic, and social policies.

Extinct species

A wildlife species that no longer exists.

(Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. *Status Reports: Definitions and Abbreviations* »»»).

Free-market environmentalism

The notion that free markets could protect the environment as well as or better than government.

Globalization

The growing integration and interdependence of countries worldwide through the increasing volume and variety of crossborder transactions in goods and services, free international capital flows, and the more rapid and widespread diffusion of technology, information and culture.

Green consumerism

An approach that avoids buying products that harm the environment or that buys products that have a lesser impact on the environment. It is controversial because of its tendency to substitute for more substantial critiques of consumerism in general.

Greenhouse effect

1) The process in which the absorption of infrared radiation by the atmosphere warms the Earth. In common parlance, the term 'greenhouse effect' may be used to refer either to the natural greenhouse effect, due to naturally occurring greenhouse gases, or to the enhanced (anthropogenic) greenhouse effect, which results from gases emitted as a result of human activities.

Greenhouse gases

Carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), perfluorocarbons (PFCs), sulfur hexafluoride (SF₆) and hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs). These gases together absorb the earth's radiation and warm the atmosphere. Some greenhouse gases occur naturally but are also produced by human activities, such as CO₂, which occurs naturally but is also produced during the burning of fossil fuels. When greenhouse gases build up in the atmosphere, they have an impact on climate and weather patterns. They are usually measured in carbon dioxide equivalents. The United Nations says the GHGs mostly responsible for causing climate change are carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄) and nitrous oxide (N₂O).

Greenwashing

The act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service.

Indigenous knowledge

Refers to detailed and complex systems of knowledge that Indigenous peoples have gathered and developed about their natural environment, including plant and animal ecology, climate, and other local conditions and resource management. While this is often learned or demonstrated in terms of specific activities or ideas, each part is but one facet of an overarching whole and a coherent way of understanding and respecting the world. In addition to the use and management of natural resources, indigenous knowledge encompasses cosmologies, as well as relationships with the natural environment. Simply put, indigenous knowledge refers to a system and body of knowledge based on Indigenous peoples' traditional livelihoods, practices, and skills....

Monoculture

A commonly used method of crop cultivation; refers to a single-crop production method wherein all other existing or potential crops are excluded. Such practices are used both in small and large-scale farming operations across the globe. This method of production is amongst the most contested of farming practices today. Many global environmentalists dispute the use of monocultures, arguing that a lack of diversity inherent to this mode of production has serious repercussions for soil fertility, local climates, and the consumption practices of both humans and animals. At the crux of the issue is the widespread use of environmentally destructive chemical products in this mode of production, bringing to the forefront a conflict between the private property rights of landholders and the rights of the populace to a clean environment and to sustainable use of lands....

Natural resources (Resourcism)

1) A feature or component of the natural environment that is of value in serving human needs, e.g. soil, water, plantlife, wildlife, etc. Some natural resources have an economic value (e.g. timber) while others have a "noneconomic" value (e.g. scenic beauty).

Political ecology

The notion that physical and social systems are integrated and that we need to study the politicized aspects of the

environment and human uses of nature in order to understand global environmental issues.

Social ecology

An emphasis on small-scale economic structures and the social dimensions of the ecological crisis ... [and] whose major proponent was the American environmental anarchist Murray Bookchin. Social ecologists trace the causes of environmental degradation to the existence of unjust, hierarchical relationships in human society, which they see as endemic to the large-scale social structures of modern capitalist states. Accordingly, they argue, the most environmentally sympathetic form of political and social organization is one based on decentralized small-scale communities and systems of production.

Stewardship

Maintains that humans hold a certain privilege and responsibility in relation to their environment, as stewards of nature.... [with the] duty ... to look after all living things and to treat them with respect.

Sustainable development / sustainability

1) Economic activity or growth that balances current interests without reducing or depleting the resources available to future generations. The term was popularized in *Our Common Future*, the 1987 Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development. It is a highly contested concept. Many in the environmental movement reject the term, fearing its meaning has been co-opted "as being merely to preserve the environment to the extent that it is necessary for the maintenance of the economic system" (Beder 1993). Since its first usage, the differences between corporate visions of sustainability and those of environmental organizations, social movements, and the poor countries of the South have become sharper.

Technocentric world view (technocentrism)

A 'mode of thought' [or world view] which recognizes environmental problems but believes either unrestrainedly that man will always solve them through technology and achieve unlimited growth ... or, more cautiously, that by careful economic and environmental management they can be negotiated In either case considerable faith is placed in the ability and usefulness of classical science, technology, conventional economic reasoning. There is little desire for genuine public participation in decision-making, in favour of leaving decisions to politicians advised by technical élites ('experts').

Utilitarian value

The usefulness of a thing or function to humans.

Wildlife management

The scientific management of ecosystems can ensure stable populations of wildlife. This wildlife population can be seen as a crop from which excess populations can be sustainably harvested in accordance with the ecological limitations of a given area. This excess wildlife population can be used for human recreation in sport hunting.