

JAN 28 1982

Mr. James W. Ransom
Mohawk Council of Akwesasne
Box 204
Hogansburg, NY 13655

Dear Jimmy:

Ever since our Buffalo meeting I have been wrestling with the most appropriate words for our Subcommittee objective. The more I read and think about this, the more convinced I am that your suggestions would improve upon the "stewardship" objective and rationale crafted by EOWG. Since you (and Henry Lickers) seem to have a deeper perspective on this than most of us, I suggest that we collaborate on a revised objective statement for refinement by the full Subcommittee.

If I understood you correctly in Buffalo, your central concern about "stewardship" is the implication of supervising or managing the environment. (My Webster's definition of stewardship is, 'the duties of one who acts as supervisor or administrator, as of finances or property, for another or others.')

I believe you suggested a much different emphasis: acting responsibly and respectfully toward the environment, so that the earth will continue to support and nurture life, and because we are thankful for the human and other life sustained by nature. Your view accords fully with the ecologist's notion of essential "life-support systems" which are too complex and too imperfectly understood to be responsibly managed, at least on large scales. Even well-intentioned "environmental management" has negative, counterintuitive results so often that it is seldom a credible strategy on large scales.

Also, I am not convinced that 'embracing environmental ethics' adds to our goal. It seems both vague and redundant if the goal outlines action upon a specific ethic.

So, assuming I understand you, I agree with your suggestion. How about:

5. Ecosystem Responsibility and Respect

Human values and actions shall again become consonant with our life-supporting environment.

Humans have not always and everywhere seen the environment as property to be exploited within a legal framework. Preindustrial cultures -- European and Native American -- recognized and reconciled themselves to their dependence upon finite ecosystems. These cultures respected, indeed revered, the earth which sustained them, and would assuredly sustain their children for generations. They felt a sense of community with their ecosystems. Such cultures persist today, and the germ of similar social values is evident in North American post-industrial society. So, recent dominant perceptions that society depends upon relatively unfettered environmental exploitation are not "human nature." These perceptions can change, as views have changed through history, when they conflict with new knowledge and experience.

The ability of our society to ensure a life-supporting environment for us and future generations requires that we respect the environment and act in accord with that respect. Our tendency to consider ourselves separate from the ecosystem has greatly contributed to the degradation of Lake Ontario. Because the Lake has long been taken for granted and exploited rather than valued, we must now do more than recognize our influence in the ecosystem. We must accept responsibility for maintaining the ecological processes and components of Lake Ontario, preserving its biologicval diversity and following the principles of sustainable use of resources. Increased acceptance of this responsibility by all sectors of society is required to ensure that future generations inherit a better environment. Increasing responsibility and respect for the environment will require: educating society about the fundamental importance of ecosystems and current resource uses and practices; changes in existing practices that are necessary to sustain ecosystem integrity; and advocating environmentally sound behavior in individuals, communities and governments.

Please consult with Henry in marking up this draft, and fax me your improvements (212-264-4690).

Sincerely yours,

Joel S. O'Connor
Ocean Policy Coordinator

cc: Henry Lickers