

60 Minutes segment on Earth First!

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13jV0bywqcw>

News Reporter: Who recycles? Who protests toxic waste? How about a saboteur? 20 years after the First Earth Day, some environmentalists are so frustrated with the lack of progress, they've gone beyond blocking whaling vessels and started sinking them. They're still writing letters, but they're also wrecking bulldozers. That's how far a group called Earth first is willing to go to save the Earth.

Activist #1: Our point of view.

News Reporter: Birth posters have the battle cry. No compromise in defense of. Earth Earth course believes that the worldwide environmental crisis is so dire they must shock the American public, industry and even mainstream environmentalists with their words in action. For instance, they put themselves in the path of destruction by sitting in trees marked for cutting.

Activist #2: I've cared about the forest ever since I was in grade school and in the 20 years since then, I've seen too much of it disappear, and I can't take it anymore.

Activist #3: We're willing to risk our lives and risk our freedom for this cause, and that's why I think that eventually we'll win this cause.

Activist #4: Cause if I knew I had a fatal disease, I would definitely do something like strep dynamite. For myself and take that from Kane and Dan, or maybe the maximum building in Los Angeles. Afterwards, closed up for the night.

News Reporter: Maxim is the name of the company cutting down most of the old redwoods in Northern California like this one, which was over 1000 years old. The point of these statements, Earth firsters say, is to make people wake up to the crisis.

Activist #4: We want people to have the jitters. They ought to have the jitters. The planet is being killed by corporations right now. And if people don't get the jitters, then something is seriously wrong with the human species.

Dave Forman: Earth First! is warriors. And if you're not a warrior, then I suggest you find another group.

News Reporter: Dave Foreman is one of the founders of Earth first.

Dave Forman: We are the most important generation of human beings to ever walk this planet. Today is the most critical time in 3 1/2 billion years of organic evolution on this planet. We aren't trying to save backpacking parks. We are trying to clean up the air so we have nice scenic views to the Grand Canyon. We're trying to help evolution continue.

News Reporter: This group, founded by Foreman and four other environmental activists, has no leaders, no rules, and no official membership. Only the circulation of its unofficial newspaper gives any indication of their size, about 12,000. And where did the founder of this so-called radical environmental movement come from? He's no aging left wing, tree hugging holdover from the 60s. Back then, Foreman was busy trying to help Barry Goldwater become president. But this conservatives love of the desert southwest pulled him towards environmental issues until finally in the late 70s he became the chief lobbyist for the National Readiness Society in Washington, DC.

News Reporter: Why did you leave that?

Dave Foreman: Because I started thinking if I play my cards right, I could be assistant secretary of the interior someday. I was soft peddling my message. I was making compromises I shouldn't make, but I wasn't so much involved with trying to protect the earth as I was in playing the political game.

News Reporter: So in 1980, Foreman. And four other environmental activists who felt the same frustration decided to leave the system and the cities behind.

Dave Foreman: Somebody had to be saying honestly, but many environmentalists really felt in their hearts that you don't have to justify the preservation of grizzly bears or rainforest for people that they have a right to exist for their own sake, that somebody should be saying. Not just that we should protect a few areas, but that we should protect all that's still wild on this continent because there's so little left and earth. First summarized our feeling.

People before the Earth people are going to lose in the long run that Earth is first.

News Reporter: You know there there are a lot of people who I know who will watch you and listen to you talk about being a warrior in this society. And become. Frightened, but I kind of.

Dave Foreman: Maybe the terminology is a little frightening, but it doesn't to me, have a violent. Connotation to it, it means that I am dedicated.

News Reporter: Being a warrior means taking personal risks. Being a warrior can mean for summon Earth first, breaking the law. It can mean committing acts of sabotage to protect the earth and even taking pictures of themselves doing. One of their techniques is direct logging machinery by pouring sand or dirt into the engine, they call these actions monkey wrenching, sticking a monkey wrench into the Gears of the industrial machine to make it stop.

Activist #5: Monkey wrenching is in many ways, is using the tools of the devil against the devil.

News Reporter: Another Earth first tactic is to hammer long nails into trees. Logging companies plan to harvest because workers can't safely cut those trees without a metal detector.

Activist #6: I've done all kinds of those here.

News Reporter: Such as?

Activist #6: I've taken out, I've munched roads, I've spiked trees. I've silted equipment.

Activist #4: The next day. At the work site, the loggers had a big surprise. The Dozer engine seized up and their tires drop like 4 and. Before they could raise. Chain-saw, they found this note and cursed draws. It said no dice. These trees are spikes, sunflowers, and peace earth stars.

Bruce: They're terrorizing rural Americans who? And the environment that they claim to be.

News Reporter: Protecting Bruce Wilson is a timber industry spokesman whose family has been logging in northwest Montana for four generations.

Bruce: I wish what we did wasn't so ugly.

News Reporter: Vincent's company Harvest trees on private and National Forest land with permission of the Forest Service. Logging companies will often cut down every single tree on large tracts of land, the practice being fought by both mainstream environmentalists and earth. First, Vincent told us that last year his bulldozer was just one of several pieces of equipment sabotaged by people using Earth first techniques.

Bruce: We have a fellow. Here in town, 8 pieces of machinery were attacked the weekend before this was. There were 60 people. Who were affected by that 15 employees and families who didn't have income coming in. So who was attacked? By that was it a machine or first claims it was a machine. We just disable machinery. No, they disable families.

News Reporter: But Vincent says Earth first doesn't just attack machinery.

Bruce: Tree spiking. If my brothers Chainsaw hits that spike and his chain breaks that chains aimed at his face. If we're lucky enough that it doesn't happen out in the field and we're going to mail it to the mill and that shrapnel is going to be aimed at somebody's face in there, not warehouser, but Americans, they're attacking people.

News Reporter: 1st 1st to say people are never the target, adding that they always warn loggers about spikes because the point is to keep the trees standing. Reportedly, no Earth first action has ever caused an injury. However, one Northern California Millworker was almost decapitated when the factory's high speed saw blade shattered. The spike and Internet not attributed to Earth first!

Bruce: America treats them as if they're an environmental group, and they aren't, they're a terrorist group

Dave Foreman: Terror or terrorism? Is the chainsaw ripping into a 500 year old Douglas fir? It's the exploding harpoon going into a sperm whale. To me, that's what terrorism is.

News Reporter: Where do people learn how to spike trees, damage logging roads, pull down power lines in a book co-authored by Dave Foreman called Eco Defense, a field guide to Monkey wrenching. I mean, I went through your book. You you had a section here on disabling motor vehicles of all kind particularly heavy equipment. Jam the door ignition locks with slivers of wood. Pour gallon and more water, or brine into the fuel tank. Pour dirt, sand or salt or grinding. Compound into the oil filler hole. Pour a box of quick rice in the. In the radiator. It's not your equipment, right? It's it's against the.

Dave Foreman: It is against the law.

News Reporter: It's crime. It is. You willingly you. You're telling people you're advocating crime.

Dave Foreman: I'm not encouraging anybody to do anything. You wrote the. Book I wrote the book. There are techniques there that it's an individual decision.

News Reporter: So you can't tell me that you wrote this book how to do this, that you're not encouraging?

Dave Foreman: I think it's a worthwhile technique I. Think that an old growth forest has more value than a bulldozer? Yes, I think that.

Peter: That is unconscionable. I think that that is has no place in a civilized society.

News Reporter: Peter Burley, executive director of the Audubon Society, says that while he agrees with Earth first assessment of the vast environmental crisis, he feels monkey wrenching solves nothing.

Peter: Whether it be done by. People who have an environmental cause or people who have some other political cause that is not the way that we get things done in.

Dave Foreman: This country, it's the type of thing that started our country. The Declaration of Independence said that when a government becomes too distant or unresponsive to the people that the people have right to take matters into their own hands. That's what happened in Boston Harbor 200 years ago, when King George refused to listen to us. A group of good citizens in Boston. Went on the ships to the East India Company and threw \$1,000,000 worth of tea in the. I see that as being. Probably the classic act of monkey wrenching.

News Reporter: While some on Earth first want the forest save, others are fighting our water and energy policies. These electrical lines power one of the many pumping stations that supply central AZ with water one day last May about nightfall, FBI agents watched as three people began to cut through the. Base of this tower with a blowtorch, according to the government, their plan to take down this tower was financed by Earth 1st and was more than just an effort to disrupt power. The government alleges this was just a dress rehearsal for mission that was much more. Mark Davis was one of the people arrested by the FBI that night.

You've been accused of plotting to take out. Power lines to three nuclear power plants at the.

Mark Davis: Two nuclear power plants and one weapons production facility.

News Reporter: The facilities allegedly targeted were Palo Verde in California, as well as Diablo Canyon in California and Rocky Flats in Colorado. Davis admits to none of the charges against him and spoke to us against the advice of his attorney, knowing that everything he says can be used against him when he goes on trial later this year.

Mark Davis: There you go. Allegedly, they were hoping the dastardly perpetrators of this plot we're hoping to have them stop working for a little while, have them turn off. Until they got their power lines repaired.

Peter: That clearly is is terrorism that involves a whole lot of people who are not parties to the dispute, but folks who are dependent on those lines for. For their jobs and for their homes. And it's the wrong way to deal with the really fundamental issue, which is energy policy in this country, for the structure of the environment that energy generation causes and how you appropriately meet the needs of a society to build its energy needs and environments and way. This doesn't contribute to. Any of that kind of thinking? The judge.

Mark Davis: One millionth of a gram plutonium in your lungs will guarantee you death by cancer within 20 years, one thousandth of a gram. Plutonium in your lungs will kill you within a few hours. They're producing tons of this stuff a year. There's no no place to put it, and no way to isolate it from the environment. Now I think it might be a legitimate. Activity on the part of someone to try to stop the production of that particular.

News Reporter: If convicted of all the charges against him, which include damaging 29 poles carrying power to this uranium mine, and twice sabotaging his ski lift during the offseason, Earth firsters are against any destruction of the wilderness for man's recreation. If convicted, Davis could spend several decades in prison. He isn't the only one. Charged in the alleged scheme, the government says Dave Foreman helped the supposed conspirators by giving them money. Foreman denies the charge and claims he's always argued against attacking nuclear plants.

People say that your organization that you were dangerous. Are you good?

Dave Foreman: Well, dangerous is the has a lot of connotations to it. I I hope I'm dangerous to apathy. I hope I'm dangerous to not taking responsibility for our life on this planet. I hope I'm dangerous to the attitude that the entire earth is just a smorgasbord table for human beings.

News Reporter: You say we're doing everything OK as far as the fires are.

Bruce: Third, they say we're destroying the forest. We're destroying our environment. How do we know who to believe? Well, I think, I think what we need to believe is in the process, we talked to our land managers, we talked to biologists and then we try to figure out what the truth is. We don't talk to somebody who's blowing machinery. To find out what shape the world in.

Dave Foreman: I pity those people were only interested in their paychecks for their VCR on their own life. I salute you. I celebrate you and I love you for being fellow warriors.

The Ted K Archive

60 Minutes segment on Earth First!
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