

**“Good luck, Darlin’. It’s been
great.”**

Dave Foreman and Nancy Morton

September 1990

Dear friends

We feel like we should be sitting at the bar of a seedy honky-tonk, drinking Lone Star, thumbing quarters in the country-western jukebox, and writing this letter on a bar napkin.

Breaking up is never easy to do, whether it's with a lover or an organization that's been the central focus of your life for a decade. But people and groups change over time, and the Earth First! movement seems to be changing in such a way that we don't feel comfortable sharing a name with it any longer.

So it's time to sit down and write a "Dear John" letter to Earth First!. This isn't a sad letter, but it's not a happy letter either. It's a letter that remembers the good times, but recognizes we and Earth First! are on separate trails. It's bittersweet, with fond memories and glad anticipations.

From the beginning, Earth First! has straddled a wide slice of the environmental movement. It seems to us that we've had three major strains: monkeywrenching, biocentrism and ecological wilderness preservation/restoration, and confrontational direct action both legal (demonstrations) and illegal (civil disobedience). Different personalities have been attracted to Earth First! by each of these strains and the dynamic among them has contributed to the vigorously positive impact Earth First! has had on the environmental movement.

A good metaphor, we think, *for* Earth First! over the last decade is that of a generalist species in a new habitat with many available niches. (Say, a finch blown over to the Galapagos.) Slowly, different populations of that generalist species adapt to more effectively exploit the different niches and evolve into separate species. Oftentimes, external environmental stresses push a generalist species toward faster differentiation into separate, specifically adapted sister species.

This is what has happened to us in Earth First!. Those given to better exploiting the different niches of monkeywrenching, direct action, and conservation biology have been diverging.

For several years we've recognized signs of these changes and Dave has tried to point them out in articles and speeches. Sensing an influx into our gene pool by those more adapted to a social and economic justice worldview than an ecological one, Dave offered his perspective on what defined the Earth First! species in a speech at the 1987 Grand Canyon Rendezvous and later in an article for the *Earth First! Journal* entitled "Whither Earth First?"

However, the divergence continued and has been hastened by increased predation from the FBI and others. Unless we can adapt to both this changed environment and this divergence within our gene pool we will become extinct as a species.

Our personal choice for adapting is to declare that the Earth First! movement has been a success, that it has accomplished far more than any of us dreamed possible ten years ago, and then retire the name "Earth First!." We should then regroup under different names to continue the work to which we are individually best adapted and with those we are most closely related. In ecological terms, then, to declare our generalist

species extinct because of evolution into separate sister species that are specifically adapted to different niches. Of course, this is unlikely to happen because many remain attached to the Earth First! name for various reasons and others are loath to give up the tribal sense of belonging inherent to the Earth First! movement.

So be it.

Both of us have smoked a lot of cigars and downed a lot of beers trying to figure out what to do. But we cannot escape the fact that we are uneasy with much in the current EF! movement. We therefore have come to the irrevocable decision to leave. This letter announces that decision. We do not henceforth represent what has become Earth First! and we are not represented by it.

We do not wish to go into some unfortunate matters of recent rhetoric directed against us (Dave in particular) and the original ideals of Earth First! by some who would lead the movement to a new niche, nor belabor the specific trends and tendencies within EF! that cause us concern. And we wish to make it abundantly clear that for the most part these are honest differences between decent people who respect one another.

In short, we see happening to the Earth First! movement what happened to the Greens in West Germany—an effort to transform an ecological group into a Leftist group. We also see a transformation to a more overtly counterculture/anti-establishment style, and the abandonment of biocentrism in favor of humanism.

Mind you, we are not opposed to campaigns for social and economic justice. We are generally supportive of such causes. But Earth First! has from the beginning been a wilderness preservation group, not a class-struggle group. For us, we still believe in Earth First!. We are uncompromising advocates for the process of evolution and the non-human world. We stand by the guidelines Dave offered in 1987 in “Whither Earth First!?” Moreover, we are conservationists. We are not anarchists or Leftists. We are biocentrists, not humanists.

Yes, we do believe that overpopulation is a fundamental problem. William Catton in *Overshoot* restates Malthus’s dictum in ecological terms as *The biotic potential of any species exceeds the carrying capacity of its habitat*. That is exactly the case with human beings on this planet today. We believe that human overpopulation has led to overshooting the carrying capacity of the Earth and will result in a major ecological crash. We do not think that believing this means one is racist, fascist, imperialist, sexist or misanthropic even if it is politically incorrect for comucopians of the Left, Right and Middle.

So, what does our leaving Earth First! mean? First of all, we will not exit in a rancorous or angry way. We wish those who remain in Earth First! the best and we wish campaigns like Redwood Summer every success. We will not attack the evolving Earth First! organization or individuals in it. We will not encourage anyone to leave Earth First! with us. We will not tell anyone they have to make a choice between EF! and us. We will not claim we are right and the class-struggle Left/counterculture approach of the “new” Earth First! is wrong. We are merely different and have our own

separate strengths and roles to play. We continue to admire and respect many of the people and local groups in Earth First! and have no reason to criticize them.

We will continue with the fight. Dave plans to begin work on thoroughly revising and updating *Ecodefense* into a Third Edition. And, along with others who emphasize biocentrism, we will be starting a new organization to work on concrete proposals for ecological wilderness identification, preservation and restoration.

Some will ask, “Why not stay and fight to return Earth First! to its original ideas and goals? Why abandon the movement to those who would transform Earth First! into an environmental reincarnation of the New Left?” We can only reply that we have never seen a fight for control of an organization achieve anything positive. We all have better things to do than engage in a sectarian donnybrook that will take us away from the real battle and result only in hard feelings. Also, as we’ve pointed out, we think that the Earth First! name and movement have outlived their usefulness for us. One reason for this is that we no longer manipulate the media. The media manipulate us and establish our style for us. It is time to regroup, refocus our energies, confuse our enemies, and do whatever we can do best to impede the destruction of our precious Earth. Moreover, a number of conservationists to whom we are very attached and with whom we wish to work in the future have already left or are planning to leave Earth First!. Finally, we do not want to discourage the courageous actions of those remaining in Earth First!.

In closing, let us thank all of you for your friendship and fellowship whether you are in the Earth First! movement or outside of it. These last ten years have been the best of our lives although we expect the next ten to be even better. We do not ask anyone to follow us out of Earth First! nor do we plan to offer competition to Earth First!. There is considerable room in the no-compromise environmental movement, many niches to fill, and a need for many groups working separately and/or harmoniously in defense of the great dance of life. Too much diversity within one group can become counterproductive. When that occurs, energy and time is wasted debating contrasting styles, philosophies, worldviews, priorities and strategies. It is far better to recognize the differences, accept that one is not right and the other wrong, that we’re simply different, kiss a last time, file a no-fault divorce, and say to the other, “Good luck, Darlin’. It’s been great.”

Splitting the sheets is not pleasant but staying together with irreconcilable differences is worse.

Happy Trails

—Dave Foreman and Nancy Morton

The Ted K Archive

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The Earth First! Reader. <www.archive.org/details/earthfirstreader0000unse>

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