

Forest Service heads hit list

Earth First! founder cites agency's 'crimes' against environment

Dick Manning of the Missoulian

April 23, 1988

The field of environmental problems is vast, but the U.S. Forest Service is still public enemy No. 1, according to one of the founders of Earth First!

“I think that in the United States we recognize that the U.S. Forest Service is the primary destroyer of natural diversity and wilderness,” radical environmentalist Dave Foreman said in an interview. “They have an almost religious mission to go into the backcountry and open it up.”

He also said his group — no stranger to controversy — was unfairly embroiled in a recent uproar because out-of-context quotes brought the charge Earth First! was “gloating” about AIDS.

Foreman of Tuscon, Ariz., was in Missoula to deliver a speech at the University of Montana on Friday. He disagrees with others in the movement on one key point: He is not greeting the end of the Reagan Administration as a boost for the environmental movement.

He said he founded his group in reaction to the Forest Service’s policies under President Carter, and those policies have remained unbroken through the Reagan years.

“The only change in the Forest Service is they have gotten much slicker,” he said.

He said the Forest Service has embarked on a roadbuilding program that will chew up about a million acres of backcountry a year.

“If the Forest Service gets its way in Montana for instance, I think some of the forests here ... are going to have the road density of Pennsylvania by the end of the century,” he said.

He added that the Forest Service does have “good people and there are a lot of them,’ but they are generally denied promotions and kept from decision-making roles.

The storm over AIDS was triggered after a story in the Earth First! newspaper last year. In the piece, writer Daniel Keith Conner suggested that AIDS could be viewed as response from the earth attempting to rid itself of the effects of humans.

“No renegade environmentalist could have invented a better “cure” than AIDS,” Conner wrote.

That statement produced the uproar, despite the fact that Conner’s next sentence said “I am not favorably inclined toward personal extinction.”

“There wasn’t anything in the article gloating about AIDS,” Foreman said. “Some of the charges made have been just bald-faced lies in a lot of ways.”

He added, though, that overpopulation is a key environmental problem that must be solved.

Foreman offered a grim assessment of the effectiveness of the environmental movement, saying the “world is going to hell in a handbasket.”

He said the entire range of environmental groups must work in their own ways to attempt to stop what he sees as destruction of many species on the planet.

“It’s not so we can preserve recreational backpacking parks for yuppies. It’s so we can preserve the flow of evolution,” he said.

Earth First! is a source of considerable controversy, largely because it is associated with some tactics labeled as sabotage.



JOHN ASHLEY/Missoulian

THE "PRIMARY DESTROYER of natural diversity and wilderness" is the U.S. Forest Service, says Dave Foreman, a founder of the radical environmental group Earth First!.

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By DICK MANNING
of the Missoulian

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