

Earth Liberation Front - Wikipedia

Various

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The **Earth Liberation Front (ELF)**, also known as "Elves" or "The Elves",¹ is the collective name for autonomous individuals or covert cells who, according to the ELF Press Office, use "economic sabotage and guerrilla warfare to stop the exploitation and destruction of the environment".

The ELF was founded in Brighton in the United Kingdom in 1992,² and spread to the rest of Europe by 1994. The ELF acronym derived from the original ELF guerilla group, the Environmental Life Force, that was founded in 1977 in Santa Cruz, California by activist John Clark Hanna. The Earth Liberation Front is now an international organization with actions reported in 17 countries³⁴⁵ and is widely regarded as descending from Animal Liberation Front because of the relationship and cooperation between the two movements.⁶ Using the same leaderless resistance model, as well as similar guidelines to the ALF,⁷ sympathizers say that it is an eco-defense group dedicated to taking the profit motive out of environmental destruction by causing economic damage to businesses through the use of property damage.⁸

The ELF was classified as the top "domestic terror" threat in the United States by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in February 2001,⁹¹⁰¹¹ and its members classified as eco-terrorists.¹²¹³ Despite the lack of deaths from ELF attacks, the FBI's deputy assistant director for counterterrorism has said, "I think we're lucky. Once you set one

¹ Best, Steve; Nocella, Anthony J (2006). *Igniting a revolution*. AK Press. ISBN 1-904859-56-9.

² ^{a b c d e f} Best & Nocella 2006 p. 49.

³ ^{a b} Best & Nocella 2006 p. 19, 52 & 53.

⁴ Diary of Earth Liberation Actions 2006–2008<sup>, *Earth Liberation Front Press Office*, 2006–2008.

⁵ ^{a b} ELF actions have been reported in; Australia, Canada, Colombia, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, Poland, Russia, Scandinavia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom and the United States.

⁶ ^{a b c d} Updates from the Frontlines: ALF and ELF Archived 2009-01-16 at the Wayback Machine, *San Diego Indymedia*, January 10, 2003.

⁷ ^{a b c d e f} Best & Nocella 2006 p. 49.

⁸ Article:405, *Arkangel*

⁹ ^{a b} Earth Liberation Front is now FBI's No. 1: Mainstream media finally pick up on the concern of ecoterrorism, *Property Rights Foundation of America, Inc*, March 2001.<sup><sup class="noprint Inline-Template[The material near this tag may rely on an unreliable source. (April 2014)]/[unreliable source?]</sup><sup class="noprint Inline-Template[The material near this tag needs to be fact-checked with the cited source(s). (June 2020)]/[verification needed]</sup></sup>

¹⁰ ^{a b} Jarboe2002 - Jarboe, James F. (February 12, 2002). "Congressional Testimony: "The Threat of Eco-Terrorism"". Archived from the original on 14 July 2004.

¹¹ "The Boy Who Cried 'ELF'". *The Wall Street Journal*. 14 February 2001. Retrieved 5 December 2020.

¹² ^{a b c} Brad_Knickerbocker2006 - Brad Knickerbocker (January 30, 2006). "Eco-vigilantes: All in 'The Family?'. *The Christian Science Monitor*. Retrieved December 6, 2016. ^{<q>The recent arrests mark a breakthrough for the FBI in its fight against what it calls "ecoterrorism."}^{</q>}

¹³ Grigoriadis2011" class="citation magazine cs1][Grigoriadis, Vanessa (2011-06-21). "The Rise and Fall of the Eco-Radical Underground". *Rolling Stone*. Retrieved 2021-07-22.

of these fires they can go way out of control.”¹⁴ The name came to public prominence when they were featured on the television show *60 Minutes* in 2005.¹⁵ The group was further highlighted in the 2011 Academy Award–nominated documentary *If a Tree Falls: A Story of the Earth Liberation Front*.¹⁶

¹⁴ "FBI, ATF address domestic terrorism", CNN, May 19, 2005.

¹⁵ ^{a b} Messick2005 - Messick, Graham (2005-11-24). "Burning Rage". *CBS News*. Archived from the original on 24 November 2005. Retrieved 2021-12-27.

¹⁶ "The Film". www.ifatreefallsfilm.com.

Structure and aims

Main articles: Ecotage and Ecodefense

ELF "monkeywrenching" is carried out against facilities and companies involved in logging, genetic engineering, GMO crops, deforestation, sport utility vehicle (SUV) sales, urban sprawl, rural cluster and developments with larger homes, energy production and distribution, and a wide variety of other activities, all charged by the ELF with exploiting the Earth, its environment and inhabitants.¹²

The Earth Liberation Front has no formal leadership, hierarchy, membership or official spokesperson and is entirely decentralized; instead consisting of individuals or cells who choose the term as a banner to use. Individuals are commonly known to work in affinity groups, known as cells, and are usually self-funded.³⁴

Techniques involve destruction of property, by either using tools to disable or the use of arson to destroy what activists believe is being used to injure animals, people or the environment. These actions are sometimes called *ecotage* and there are marked differences between their actions in the United States and the United Kingdom.

With many different reasons why ELF activists carry out economic sabotage, a communique to the press claiming the responsibility for arson against urban sprawl in December 2000, described the reason a cell took an action. As Elves usually do, they claimed that burning down the house was non-violent because it was searched for any living creatures; an issue which is much debated within the environmental movement.⁵

Some of the most common and notable attacks are against the development of multimillion-dollar houses, a frequent target in the ELF campaign. In a communique to the press from the group's "above-ground spokesperson", Craig Rosebraugh, that was later published in *The Environmental Magazine*, the group said in November 2000:⁶

Urban sprawl has undoubtedly served to alter nearly 90 percent of Long Island's habitats, either by physically removing them, paving them, or pollut-

¹ ^a ^b <cite class="citation web cs1"MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base". 2005-02-04. Archived from the original on 4 February 2005. Retrieved 2021-12-27.

² ^a ^b Best & Nocella 2006 p. 54.

³ ^a ^b <cite class="citation web cs1"MIPT Terrorism Knowledge Base". 2005-02-04. Archived from the original on 4 February 2005. Retrieved 2021-12-27.

⁴ ^a ^b Best & Nocella 2006 p. 54.

⁵ Best & Nocella 2006 p. 410

⁶ Ziner2001 - Ziner, Karen Lee (May 2001). "Burning Down the Houses – Earth Liberation Front tries to stop urban growth in rural Long Island". *Wayback Machine*. E - The Environmental Magazine. Archived from the original on 2005-05-04. Retrieved 2021-12-27.

ing them with toxic man-made materials, making them either undesirable or unsustainable for most species.

Press office

The North American Earth Liberation Front Press Office (*NAELFPO* or *ELFPO*) was relaunched in October 2008, receiving anonymous communiques from activists, for distributing to the press and public, to discuss the motives, ideologies and history behind such actions.⁷

Craig Rosebraugh served as an unofficial spokesperson for the ELF Press Office in North America from 1997 to early September 2001.⁸ Doubts have been raised about whether Rosebraugh or other unofficial spokespeople have ties to the cells involved,⁹ although the press office claim they do not know the identities of ELF members.¹⁰

Support networks

Main article: Earth Liberation Prisoners Support Network

Prisoner support networks support ELF prisoners, such as *Spirit of Freedom (ELPSN)*, an English website listing all Earth Liberation prisoners, as well as a variety of other *prisoners of conscience*. There are also ELF support networks in Belgium, Italy, North America, and Poland, which collectively coordinate the support of prisoners, as well as websites for specific prisoners, such as for; Rod Coronado, Jeff "Free" Luers, Daniel McGowan, Briana Waters and Tre Arrow.¹¹ The networks distribute literature written by those in prison, to their supporters and other support groups, and sometimes raise funds for those who require financial aid in their cases.¹²

⁷ ^{a b} <cite class="citation web cs1">North American Earth Liberation Front Press Office". Retrieved November 11, 2008.

⁸ "Craig Subpoenaed to Federal Grand Jury in Eugene; ELF Investigation Continues." *Wayback Machine*. 2007-02-23. Archived from the original on 23 February 2007. Retrieved 2021-12-27.

⁹ "Earth to ELF: Come In, Please". *LA Weekly*. December 22, 2005. Archived from the original on November 29, 2006.

¹⁰ ^{a b} <cite class="citation web cs1">North American Earth Liberation Front Press Office". Retrieved November 11, 2008.

¹¹ Prisoner support websites include:

Support Rod Coronado

Free Free Now (Jeff Luers) Archived 2008-03-15 at the Wayback Machine

Support For Daniel McGowan Archived 2018-10-18 at the Wayback Machine

Support Eric McDavid

Free Tre Arrow Archived 2008-03-12 at the Wayback Machine

Support Briana Waters

¹² About: Spirit of Freedom Archived 2007-11-17 at the Wayback Machine, Earth Liberation Prisoners Support Network.

Philosophy

Main articles: Earth liberation and Leaderless resistance

Earth liberationists, are a diverse group of individuals with a variety of different ideologies and theories. These include; animal liberationists, anti-capitalists, green anarchists, deep ecologists, eco-feminists, and anti-globalisationists.¹³

Elves argue that direct action is required to aid the earth liberation movement, also referred to as *eco-resistance movement*, and a part of the radical environmental movement. The ELF claim that it would be similar to how the ALF has projected forward the animal liberation movement. There was also the intention that in the same way animal liberationists "help out" with legal campaigns, earth liberationists would aid above-ground environmental organizations, notably Earth First!, by acts of ecotage.¹⁴

¹³ Manes, Christopher, 1990. *Green Rage: Radical Environmentalism and the Unmaking of Civilization*, Boston: Little, Brown and Co.

¹⁴ ^a ^b Best & Nocella 2006 p. 50 & 51.

Origin

Main articles: Radical environmentalism and Earth First!

United Kingdom

The symbol of Earth First!: a monkey wrench and stone hammer.

The Earth Liberation Front was founded in 1992 in Brighton, England by members of the Earth First! (EF!) environmental movement at the first-ever national meeting. At the time, EF! had become very popular, so people's concerns were based on maintaining this popularity and by doing so not associating with overt law-breaking. There was no universal agreement over this, but it was accepted amongst the movement that British EF! would instead continue to advocate and focus on civil disobedience and mass demonstrations.¹ If people wanted to participate in acts of ecotage, the new name "Earth Liberation Front" would be used, with its name and guidelines derived from the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), another movement that uses direct action to liberate animals or sabotage companies using them. It was understood that the simplicity of the guidelines was a crucial factor to engage as many people as possible to the new cause, with the intention that the ELF would quickly become as popular as the ALF.²

Earth Night

The very first ELF action is unknown, or undocumented, but one of the first and most notable actions was on April Fool's Earth Night 1992, a night organized by activists to carry out ecotage and also one of the first of them. The Elves, as they were also known, targeted Fisons, a peat company accused of destroying the peat bogs causing £50,000–70,000 worth of damage. Pumps, trucks and other machinery belonging to the company were destroyed after legal campaigners, Friends of the Earth, spent two years advocating a boycott of the company. *Green Anarchist* magazine publicized the communique with the demands from the ELF:³

All our peat bogs must be preserved in their entirety, for the sake of the plants, the animals and our national heritage. Cynically donating small

¹ *a b c d e f* Best & Nocella 2006 p. 49.

² FIRE Archived February 11, 2006, at the Wayback Machine, *Greenfield*.

³ Best & Nocella 2006 p. 51-52

amounts will do no good. The water table will drop, and the bogs will dry out and die unless it is preserved fully. Fisons must leave all of it alone – now!

EF! Journal

In the September–October 1993 issue of the *Earth First! Journal*, an anonymous article announced the creation of the ELF in England. It said the ELF is a movement of independently operating eco-saboteurs that split from the British EF! movement, which has focused directly on public direct actions. The author noted that unlike the ALF which seeks publicity: "ELF cells, for security reasons, work without informing the press and do not claim responsibility for actions."<sup>

Development of the ELF abroad

Europe

The ELF quickly spread across to Europe by 1994, with actions first occurring in the Netherlands, Germany, Russia, Scandinavia, New Zealand, Italy, Ireland, Poland, Spain, France and Finland, and the name starting to be used across the globe.¹² The Earth Liberation Front is widely regarded as the Animal Liberation Front's younger sibling, because of the relationship and cooperation between the two movements.³ It is believed that cells rapidly established themselves in new countries because of the global outreach of Earth First! and the connection between the two groups.⁴ British Elves were also making contact with like-minded activists, informing them about the ELF and its tactics, with missionaries targeting specifically France, Spain, Germany, and the Netherlands.

Within two years, McDonald's had been vandalized in Germany and Poland, Amsterdam Airport Schiphol had been sabotaged, and high-emission vehicles had been destroyed. Hunting towers were torn down in the Netherlands and Germany, which was presumably inspired by similar actions against hunting by the ALF.⁵

North America

Further information: Earth Liberation Front Press Office

Canadian ELA

Main article: Earth Liberation Army

The first time it was known that an earth liberation action had happened in North America, was in 1995, in Canada, by a group calling itself the Earth Liberation Army

^{1 a b} ELF actions have been reported in; Australia, Canada, Colombia, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, Poland, Russia, Scandinavia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom and the United States.

² Best & Nocella 2006 p. 19, 52 & 53

^{3 a b c d} Updates from the Frontlines: ALF and ELF Archived 2009-01-16 at the Wayback Machine, *San Diego Indymedia*, January 10, 2003.

^{4 a b} Best & Nocella 2006 p. 47.

^{5 a b} Best & Nocella 2006 p. 52.

(ELA).⁶ They were considered by the European Elves at the time to be "transatlantic cousins". On 19 June 1995, the ELA burned down a wildlife museum and damaged a hunting lodge in British Columbia.⁷

United States

On Columbus Day 1996, activists spraypainted "504 years of genocide" and "ELF" on the walls of a public relations office, as well as a McDonald's restaurant in Oregon, the actions were the very first by the ELF in the United States. The same restaurant then had its locks glued and spraypainted again, but this time in support of the British McLibel Two, two activists who had distributed anti-McDonald's leaflets. The next day, it was reported that another two McDonald's restaurants, again in Oregon, had their locks glued by ELF activists.⁸⁹ The only other reported action of the year was on Christmas Day, when a fur farm was raided in Michigan and 150 mink released into the wild by the Great Lakes ELF.¹⁰

The Fox, a Chicago area Fox River environmental activist, began ELF style operations in the early 1970s and continued into the 1980s, while the peak number of ELF actions occurred in the early 1990s.

ELF activities declined in the United States after 2003, and by 2012 there were next to none.¹¹

Mexico

In late November 2008, a group calling itself Eco-Anarquista Por El Ataque Directo (Eco-anarchist cell supporting direct attack) claimed responsibility for several recent actions, including half a dozen Molotov cocktails thrown at tren férreo (metro rail) in Mexico City, incendiary sabotage against Telmex,¹² and a Molotov cocktail thrown at a Banamex ATM. The group claimed that these attacks were a form of protest against the construction of a new rail line (line 12), in Mexico City (D.F.) and Mexico State. The construction had caused deforestation and the eviction of many families.¹³

Soon after this initial group of actions, the Frente de Liberación de la Tierra (Earth Liberation Front) claimed responsibility for a number of actions including the sabotage

⁶ *Globe and Mail*, Toronto, 12 July 1995.

⁷ Best & Nocella 2006 p. 55.

⁸ Best & Nocella 2006 p. 55

⁹ Diary of Actions of the Earth Liberation Front 1996–2001 Archived 2009-01-16 at the Wayback Machine, reposted by *Portland Indymedia*.

¹⁰ ^a ^b ^c ^d Best & Nocella 2006 p. 56.

¹¹ Kirchner2017" class="citation magazine cs1][Kirchner, Lauren (14 June 2017). "Whatever Happened to 'Eco-terrorism'?" *Pacific Standard*. Retrieved 7 September 2020.

¹² "Liberación Total » Saboteado Patrocinador de Corridas de Toros, México". Lahaine. Retrieved 7 August 2012.

¹³ "directaction.info". directaction.info. Retrieved 2012-03-21.

of a construction machine on December 30, 2008,¹⁴ arson at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM)¹⁵ and the March 22nd, 2009 burning of construction equipment in Guadalajara, Jalisco.¹⁶

South America

Argentina

Over the first months of 2012, several car arson cases in Buenos Aires were claimed by the "Frente de Liberacion de la Tierra", stating that "... we propose to destroy property from the bourgeoisie class from Palermo to Villa Devoto who are sure that everything will stay the same, but some individuals are tired of this and pretend to continue with this initiative to expand the daily riots..."¹⁷

¹⁴ "directaction.info". directaction.info. Retrieved 2012-03-21.

¹⁵ "anarchistnews.org". anarchistnews.org. 2009-02-09. Archived from the original on 2016-03-07. Retrieved 2012-03-21.

¹⁶ "news.infoshop.org". news.infoshop.org. 2009-03-26. Archived from the original on 2012-02-15. Retrieved 2012-03-21.

¹⁷ "Grupo anarquista se atribuye la masiva quema de autos en la Capital Federal -". Infobae.com. 2011-01-30. Retrieved 2012-03-21.

Notable attacks: 1998–2009

Main articles: Timeline of Earth Liberation Front actions and Street of Dreams arson fires

1996–1999

The ELF gained state attention in the state of Oregon in 1996 when they burned down the Oakridge Ranger Station. The ELF gained national attention for a series of actions which earned them the label of eco-terrorists,¹ and one of the top domestic terror threats in the United States.² This came after the burning of a ski resort in Vail, Colorado, on October 19, costing \$12 million.³ In a communique to the press, the ELF said:⁴

Vail, Inc. is already the largest ski operation in North America and now wants to expand even further. The 12 miles (19 km) of roads and 885 acres (3.58 km²) of clearcuts will ruin the last, best lynx habitat in the state. Putting profits ahead of Colorado's wildlife will not be tolerated.

Actions also included sabotaging power lines, the burning of an SUV dealership, and the burning down of a logging headquarters causing \$1 million in damages. The Elves wrote to the local paper "Let this be a lesson to all greedy multinational corporations who don't respect their ecosystems,"⁵ with most actions taking place in Oregon. The

¹ Rosebraugh2004 - Rosebraugh, Craig (2004). *Burning Rage of a Dying Planet: Speaking for the Earth Liberation Front*. New York: lantern. p. 236. ISBN 1-59056-064-7.

² ^a ^b Earth Liberation Front is now FBI's No. 1: Mainstream media finally pick up on the concern of ecoterrorism, *Property Rights Foundation of America, Inc*, March 2001.<sup class="noprint Inline-Template[The material near this tag may rely on an unreliable source. (April 2014)]/[unreliable source?]</sup><sup class="noprint Inline-Template[The material near this tag needs to be fact-checked with the cited source(s). (June 2020)]/[verification needed]</sup>

³ ^a ^b ^c Eco-Terror Incitments: 'Operation Backfire' Nets 11 Archived 2010-08-17 at the Wayback Machine, *FBI*, 20 January 2006.

⁴ Rosebraugh2004 - Rosebraugh, Craig (2004). *Bruning Rage of a Dying Planet: Speaking for the Earth Liberation Front*. New York: lantern. p. 60. ISBN 1-59056-064-7.

⁵ ^a ^b ^c Eco-Terror Incitments: 'Operation Backfire' Nets 11 Archived 2010-08-17 at the Wayback Machine, *FBI*, 20 January 2006.

defendants in the case were later charged in the FBI's "Operation Backfire", which included 17 acts of property destruction.⁶

The ELF then set fire to Michigan State University on New Year's Eve, using a gasoline bomb to cause \$1.1 million in damages, because of a program to provide GMO plants to African farmers. ELF spokesmen claimed Monsanto had been a major contributor to funding the program; however, the only funding from Monsanto Corp. was a one-time sum of \$2,000 to send five African students to a conference on biotechnology.⁷ The next day, commercial logging equipment was set on fire, with "ELF" and "Go Log in Hell" spraypainted on a truck. In March 2008, four activists were charged for both the arsons.⁸

2000

On November 27, in Colorado, the ELF burned the Legend Ridge mansion and sent a message to the *Boulder Weekly* saying "Viva la revolution!" Damages were estimated at \$2.5 million.⁹

2001

In March, a total of thirty SUVs were torched, belonging to Joe Romania's dealership, in Oregon, with damages estimated at \$1 million. The action was claimed in support of Jeff "Free" Luers, who targeted the very same dealership and was in court for the charges at the time.¹⁰ He was then sentenced to twenty-two years in jail, later revised to ten.

On May 21, a fire destroyed laboratories, offices, and archives at the Center for Urban Horticulture, University of Washington, causing a total of \$7 million in damages.¹¹ The arson destroyed 20 years of research and plant and book collections. The ELF claimed responsibility based upon the incorrect belief that the university was involved in genetic engineering of poplar trees.¹² No genetic engineering was being con-

⁶ Defendants plead guilty in Operation Backfire case Archived 2007-06-30 at the Wayback Machine, *FBI*, November 9, 2006.

⁷ "Ag Hall | Special Reports | Michigan State University". *Special.news.msu.edu*. 1992-02-28. Archived from the original on 2012-03-26. Retrieved 2012-03-21.

⁸ 4 linked to radical group indicted in MSU arson, *Detroit Free Press*, March 11, 2008.

⁹ ELF Archived 2009-02-18 at the Wayback Machine, *Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise*.

¹⁰ ^a ^b ^c <cite class="citation web cs1">SPLCenter.org: Eco-Violence: The Record". 2003-10-19. Archived from the original on 19 October 2003. Retrieved 2021-12-27

¹¹ Dave_Birkland_and_Sherry_Stripling2001 - Dave Birkland and Sherry Stripling (May 21, 2001). "Fire damages UW's Center for Urban Horticulture". *Seattle Times*.

¹² ELF members gained nothing by the UW arson, and so much was lost Archived 2010-01-07 at the Wayback Machine, *Crosscut.com*, May 30, 2008,

ducted. In the wake of the attack, an FBI spokeswoman in Portland, Oregon said "I don't think there's any doubt the ELF is upping the ante".¹³

On November 7, ELF member Ian Wallace planted incendiary devices outside of two buildings on the campus of Michigan Technological University in Houghton, Michigan during the early morning hours. The devices failed, and on March 21, 2009, Wallace was sentenced to three years in prison for the incident by Judge Robert Holmes Bell, who said Wallace "didn't intend to hurt anybody, (but) this is a serious offense."¹⁴ Said Wallace after his conviction, "I have been consumed by shame for what I have done," Wallace said. "My greatest blessing is that no one got hurt."¹⁵

2003

On January 1, in Girard, Pennsylvania, jugs of gasoline were set under three vehicles at Bob Ferrando Ford Lincoln Mercury and set ablaze. Two pickup trucks, one Sports Utility Vehicle (SUV) and a car were destroyed causing \$90,000 in damages. Steve Dartnell of Fairview claimed responsibility for the attack.

On August 1, a 206-unit condominium in San Diego was destroyed, with a banner left at the scene saying "If you build it, we will burn it", signed "The E.L.F.s are mad".¹⁶ The damages totaled \$20 million¹⁷ after flames reached an estimated 200 feet (61 m) in the air, as over a hundred firefighters attempted to put out the fire. The destruction was the movement's most financially damaging action against a target, with a local preservation group calling the action pointless, noting that "You can go and burn something down, but it's just going to get built again."¹⁸ Exactly three weeks later, 125 SUVs and Hummers were torched in Los Angeles costing a total of \$3.5 million, with "I love pollution" spray-painted at the scene,¹⁹ and a month later, homes being built in San Diego were targeted again, this time costing an estimated \$450,000 in damages.²⁰

¹³ Earth Liberation Front, stepping up arson campaign Archived 2008-07-20 at the Wayback Machine, *Associated Press*, June 2, 2001.

¹⁴ "Tech bomber sentenced to 3 years - MiningGazette.com | News, Sports, Jobs, Michigan - The Daily Mining Gazette". 2011-06-07. Archived from the original on 2011-06-07. Retrieved 2021-12-27.

¹⁵ "leadertelegram.com". Archived from the original on 2016-01-26. Retrieved 2009-10-05.

¹⁶ ^a ^b ^c Militant group suspected of torching condo project Archived 2008-05-26 at the Wayback Machine, *Sign On San Diego*, August 2, 2003.

¹⁷ ^a ^b ^c Militant group suspected of torching condo project Archived 2008-05-26 at the Wayback Machine, *Sign On San Diego*, August 2, 2003.

¹⁸ ^a ^b ^c Militant group suspected of torching condo project Archived 2008-05-26 at the Wayback Machine, *Sign On San Diego*, August 2, 2003.

¹⁹ Eco protesters and US anti-terror law, *The Guardian*, March 2, 2005.

²⁰ Unfinished homes destroyed; banners point to militant environmental group ELF Archived 2008-05-11 at the Wayback Machine, *Sign on San Diego*, September 20, 2003.

2006

The FBI's most recent report stated that there had been over 1,200 "criminal incidents",²¹ within January 2006. A nearly completed 9,600-square-foot (890 m²) house, worth \$3 million, was burnt to the ground in Washington. It was reported that a bed-sheet was draped across the front gate, with a message reading "Built Green? Nope black. McMansions and RCDs r not green," a reference to rural cluster developments.²²

2008

One of the latest ELF arsons was reported on the morning of March 3, when explosive devices set fire to four multimillion-dollar homes from the 2007 Seattle Street of Dreams in Echo Lake, Washington, causing \$7 million in damage.²³ Authorities described the act as "domestic terrorism" after finding "ELF" spray-painted in red letters, mocking claims that the homes were environmentally friendly: "Built Green? Nope black! McMansions in RCDs r not green. ELF."²⁴ ^{Template[The material near this tag needs to be fact-checked with the cited source(s). (June 2020)]/verification needed]}

2009

On March 23, the ELF claimed the burning of an excavator in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico. In one of many recent anonymous communiques, the ELF reported to *Bite Back*; "Maybe we have not collapsed the system of domination with these actions, but it begins with actions like these."²⁵

On September 4, ELF claimed responsibility for using a stolen excavator to overturn two AM radio towers belonging to the station KRKO near Seattle, Washington; they claimed that radio waves are dangerous.²⁶

²¹ ^{a b} Best & Nocella 2006 p. 47.

²² Gillespie2008 - Gillespie, Elizabeth (5 March 2008). "Early signs indicate arsonists in Washington "green" house fires did not use accelerants". AP Worldstream. Archived from the original on 18 May 2013. Retrieved 15 April 2012.

²³ Luxury Homes Burn in Apparent Eco-Attack, *Associated Press*, March 3, 2008. Archived March 6, 2008, at the Wayback Machine

²⁴ 'Street of Dreams' homes torched; eco-terrorists suspected^{Template[Dead link tagged September 2017]/permanent dead link]}, *Seattle pi*, March 3, 2008.

²⁵ *Bite Back*, March 23, 2009

²⁶ "Activists topple towers, claim dangers of AM radio waves". CNN. 2009-09-04.

A Texas man was arrested after construction workers found a disabled construction vehicle graffitied with the words "ANOTHER TRACTOR DECOMMISSIONED BY THE E.L.F."²⁷

Other movements

****ELA and Environmental Rangers ****

Further information: Earth Liberation Army

The first major report of a name other than ELF being used to claim ecotage was in October 1998, when the Earth Liberation Army (ELA) claimed to be responsible for causing \$12 million in damages to Vail Ski Resort by setting fire to several buildings and four chairlifts.²⁸

Two years later, in Oregon, three SUVs were destroyed by placing jugs of gasoline under the vehicles, with the ELA calling for others to "[c]ontinue the fight to remove the profit motive from the killing of the environment (biophysical)." Jeff Luers was later convicted of arson, as part of the Operation Backfire case, along with other ALF and ELF defendants.²⁹ There have also been other groups that have caused similar damage as the ELF, within 2001 reports that "eco-terrorist" attacks, known as "ecotage", had increased. These included the ELF, the ELA, and another name being used – the "Environmental Rangers" who use similar tactics.³⁰ Activists have also used the names "The Moles", "The Grey Wolves", "Westcountry Wildlife Cell", "Eco-Animal Defense Unit", and "Radical Brigades for Ecological Defence", as well as others.³¹

****Environmental Life Force ****

Main article: Environmental Life Force

The *Environmental Life Force*, also known as the *Original ELF*, was the first radical group to use explosive and incendiary devices to promote pro-environment causes. It was founded by John Hanna, who was the only member of the group to be arrested and convicted for the use of explosives on federal property.³² <sup> Although it was an eco-guerilla entity with similar philosophies to the current ELF (Earth Liberation Front), which formed fifteen years

²⁷ "Texas Man in Custody on Federal Arson Charges With Possible Eco-Terrorism Link". *Fox News*. October 2, 2009. Archived from the original on October 5, 2009. Retrieved October 5, 2009.

²⁸ Paige2008 - Paige, Sean (2008-09-25). "waste & abuse". *Wayback Machine*. Archived from the original on 25 September 2008. Retrieved 2021-12-27.

²⁹ Resentencing date set for Jeff Luers, *Freedom4um*, 29 December 2007.

³⁰ The eco-terrorist anthrax connection, *ESR*, October 21, 2001.

³¹ Best & Nocella 2006 p. 52-56.

³² "Original ELF". Original ELF. Archived from the original on 15 April 2012. Retrieved 2012-03-21.

later, there was no formal link between the two groups, and founders of the Earth Liberation Front may not have even been aware of the existence of the Environmental Life Force.³³ Despite this, it has acknowledged in written communications that Dave Foreman, who founded Earth First! three years after the original ELF, was in communication with Hanna in the mid-1980s, before the Earth Liberation Front was founded, which was after Foreman cut ties with the Earth First! movement.³⁴

³³ ^{a b c} Brad_Knickerbocker2006 - Brad Knickerbocker (January 30, 2006). "Eco-vigilantes: All in 'The Family?'. *The Christian Science Monitor*. Retrieved December 6, 2016. <q>The recent arrests mark a breakthrough for the FBI in its fight against what it calls "ecoterrorism."</q>

³⁴ ELF Archives, *Original ELF*.

Police response and convictions

First ELF arrest

Further information: Earth Liberation Prisoners Support Network

In 1994, Dutch authorities and police made claims that British ELF activists were traveling abroad to cause sabotage, which was disputed by ELF. Later that year the first Earth Liberation Prisoner (ELP) was caught and later charged. Known as Paul S., he was arrested and accused of carrying out an 18-month campaign of vandalism in the Netherlands against road construction sites. The Dutch government attempted to declare him insane, because of his inability to provide a political reason for his actions, other than his care for the environment. This was unsuccessful and the prisoner was sentenced to three years for damaging property.¹

British police raids

Due to the increased popularity of the environmental movement, as well as the animal liberation movement and estimates that five ALF actions occurred per day, police carried out a series of raids against animal rights and environmental activists. In total, there were 55 homes raided against suspected ALF and ELF activists, including an individual in Italy. The police had not managed to charge anyone with any illegal activities, until on January 16, 1996, when six men were charged for a five-year ALF/ELF campaign. They were sentenced a year later each to three years for conspiracy to incite violence in the name of animal and earth liberation.²

Operation Backfire

Daniel G. McGowan was charged for two counts of arson and conspiracy in the FBI's "Operation Backfire". He pleaded guilty to avoid a life sentence, without testifying against his co-defendants, some of whom had done so against him.

The term *Green Scare*, alluding to the *Red Scares*, periods of fear over communist infiltration of U.S. society, is a term popularized by environmental activists to refer to legal action by the U.S. government against the radical environmentalist movement.

¹ ^a ^b Best & Nocella 2006 p. 19, 52 & 53.

² Best & Nocella 2006 p. 52 & 53

It is first known to have appeared in 2002 in the wake of the February 12 congressional hearings titled "The Threat of Eco-Terrorism" which discussed groups including the Earth Liberation Front (ELF) and the Animal Liberation Front (ALF).³ In late 2005 and early 2006, as part of *Operation Backfire*, US grand juries indicted a total of 18 activists on a range of charges related to "violent acts in the name of animal rights and environmental causes".⁴ According to the FBI, many of these acts were carried out on behalf of the ELF⁵ and was considered as one of the largest arrests of environmental activists in American history.⁶

The operation resulted in the arrest of Chelsea Dawn Gerlach, William C. Rodgers, and Daniel McGowan.⁷

In 2008, the FBI increased the reward for handing over four suspects to \$50,000. The four, two Americans and two Canadians, are believed to have fled the U.S. through Mexico and are possibly hiding in Syria, Russia, China or India. The announcement of an increased manhunt came on the tenth anniversary of the bombing in Vail.⁸

A 2011 NPR report claimed some of the people associated with this group were imprisoned in a highly restrictive Communication management unit.⁹

³ ^a ^b Jarboe2002 - Jarboe, James F. (February 12, 2002). "Congressional Testimony: "The Threat of Eco-Terrorism"". Archived from the original on 14 July 2004.

⁴ Operation Backfire Press Conference Archived April 9, 2010, at the Wayback Machine, *FBI*, January 20, 2006.

⁵ ^a ^b ^c Eco-Terror Incictments: 'Operation Backfire' Nets 11 Archived 2010-08-17 at the Wayback Machine, *FBI*, 20 January 2006.

⁶ "Extremist Environmentalists Indicted". *ff.org*. Archived from the original on 2006-12-14.

⁷ "Prison sentences symbolize decline of radical environmentalist movement". *International Herald Tribune*. 2007-07-22. Archived from the original on 2009-02-17. Retrieved 2021-12-27.

⁸ "foxnews.com". *foxnews.com*. 2011-05-03. Retrieved 2012-03-21.

⁹ Data & Graphics: Population Of The Communications Management Units, Margot Williams and Alyson Hurt, NPR, 3-3-11, retrieved 2011 03 04 from *npr.org*

Cooperation with the ALF

Main articles: Animal Liberation Front and Animal liberation movement

Philosophy

Further information: Earth liberation, Animal liberation movement, Ecocentrism, Biocentrism (ethics), and Deep ecology

The name "*Animal & Earth Liberation Front*" or "*Earth & Animal Liberation Front*" (ALF and ELF, respectively) is commonly used when undertaking an animal liberation action, that is inclusively an environmental issue. Or alternatively an ELF action that includes in some way liberating or rescuing animals; for example actions to protect the forests.¹² Both names are also used by radical activists when engaging in direct action to liberate animals *and* defend the earth by using property destruction. This is done within the guidelines of the Animal/Earth Liberation Front; to claim the action by both groups.³⁴

- Radical environmentalists consider the ELF to be the environmental wing of the Animal Liberation Front, effectively acting as the *Eco-ALF*.⁵ Evidence of this include names used such as the "*Westcountry Wildlife Cell*" and then later "*ALF: Eco-Animal Defense Unit*".⁶
- The ELF is also considered to be the ALF's younger sister,⁷ forming 16 years later and due to the fact that the guidelines, as well as the name itself, were derived from the movement.⁸

¹ ^a ^b ^c ^d ^e ^f Best & Nocella 2006 p. 49.

² ^a ^b ^c ^d Updates from the Frontlines: ALF and ELF Archived 2009-01-16 at the Wayback Machine, *San Diego Indymedia*, January 10, 2003.

³ ^a ^b ^c ^d Best & Nocella 2006 p. 56.

⁴ Archives Archived 2007-09-17 at the Wayback Machine, *Food Safety*, June 13, 2001.

⁵ ^a ^b Best & Nocella 2006 p. 50 & 51.

⁶ ^a ^b ^c ^d Best & Nocella 2006 p. 56.

⁷ ^a ^b ^c ^d Updates from the Frontlines: ALF and ELF Archived 2009-01-16 at the Wayback Machine, *San Diego Indymedia*, January 10, 2003.

⁸ ^a ^b ^c ^d ^e ^f Best & Nocella 2006 p. 49.

- Despite the movements only forming alliances in 1996/1997, activists such as Rod Coronado were known to be active in both the ALF and ELF dating back before the names were officially used together.⁹

Noel Molland, a former ELF activist, writes in Steven Best's *Igniting a Revolution* that:¹⁰

The founders of the ELF wanted radical environmentalists to work on the same basis and have a similar name, hoping that people would instantly understand how the ELF operated and what its goals were.

History

Main article: Timeline of Animal Liberation Front actions

During the mid-1990s, the *Western Wildlife Unit*, an ELF branch in Britain, was responsible for various acts of animal rights themed violence. The vandalism included spiking trees as well as targeting anglers. However, it wasn't until sometime later, in the United States, that a joint claim of responsibility was made.

Molland also writes that the first established ALF and ELF action was established on March 14, 1997, when the "*Animal Liberation Front – Eco-Animal Defense Unit*" claimed the spiking of 47 trees in a clearcut area, Oregon. This was only a few months after the fur farm had been raided by the Great Lakes ELF, which also highlighted the overlap in direct action for animal rights and environmentalism.¹¹ The group intended to state that the farm they had raided was a joint effort between members of the Animal and Earth Liberation Front.

Five days later, the "*Bay Area Cell of the Earth and Animal Liberation Front*" claimed the firebombing of the University of California, an animal research laboratory that was still under construction at the time.¹² Also later that year, on November 29, there was another joint ALF & ELF claim, this time releasing 500 wild horses and torching the Bureau of Land Management in Burns, in protest of BLM's intention to round up the wild horses and process them for the sale of horsemeat.¹³¹⁴

However, this claim contradicts the Southern Poverty Law Center, which states that the first incident of cooperation between the two movements was 6 months before

⁹ Toni Bartone. Total Liberation in Erie Archived 2008-07-08 at the Wayback Machine, *Thomas Merton Center*.

¹⁰ ^{a b c d e f} Best & Nocella 2006 p. 49.

¹¹ ^{a b c d} Best & Nocella 2006 p. 56.

¹² ^{a b c} ^{<cite class="citation web cs1">}SPLCenter.org: Eco-Violence: The Record". 2003-10-19. Archived from the original on 19 October 2003. Retrieved 2021-12-27

¹³ Best & Nocella 2006 p. 56

¹⁴ ^{a b} Earth Liberation Front Timeline (Where did the website go?) Archived 2009-01-16 at the Wayback Machine, *Portland Indymedia*, 1992–2001.

these events on October 27, 1996, when the ALF & ELF were both responsible for firebombing a Forest Service truck in Detroit, Oregon. Then three days later both groups claimed the arson at the U.S. Forest Service Oakridge Ranger Station, at the cost of \$5.3 million.

It was then reported that a week before the Bay Area cells fur farm raid, on March 11, 1997, four trucks were torched, at the Agricultural Fur Breeders Co-Op. The damage totaled \$1 million and the action was again claimed by the ALF & ELF.¹⁵

As the ELF was becoming well established through its actions, on 21 June 1998, the United States Forest Service wildlife research center near Olympia, Washington was set on fire with "Eco-Defense" and "Earth Liberation" spray-painted on construction machinery, which had received extensive damage in New Jersey on the 2nd Feb. Both the actions were claimed jointly by the ALF & ELF and were estimated to have caused one of the worst damages yet, estimated at \$1.9 million. The same claim was made when 310 animals were taken from a fur farm involved in experimental research-based in Madison, Wisconsin, which were stolen on the 3rd of July.¹⁶¹⁷

Actions

A fire by an ALF cell; the Oxford Arson Squad, causing £500,000 in damages to Londbridges boathouse, Oxfordshire on 4 July 2005.

Actions claimed by both the ALF and ELF jointly have appeared across the globe, nearly as much as the ELF has, causing more activists from the ALF and other movements to become involved; believing in "*No Compromise in Defence of Mother Earth*",¹⁸ a popular Earth First! the slogan used and populated in the 1980s.¹⁹

Despite this, in comparison to the ALF, there have been few communiques in recent years that have been released to the media or ELF Press Offices. This is largely due to the style of the ELF, who are much less likely to report their actions, or even leave a message to notify their targets regarding why they have been attacked.²⁰

Although ALF and ELF combined actions have continued,²¹ one of the latest string of jointly claimed arsons²² was publicised was in November 2002, when activists sent a communique to *Bite Back* and also the ELF Press Office, claiming responsibility for

¹⁵ ^{a b c} <cite class="citation web cs1">SPLCenter.org: Eco-Violence: The Record". 2003-10-19. Archived from the original on 19 October 2003. Retrieved 2021-12-27

¹⁶ ^{a b} Earth Liberation Front Timeline (Where did the website go?) Archived 2009-01-16 at the Wayback Machine, *Portland Indymedia*, 1992–2001.

¹⁷ ^{a b} Best & Nocella 2006 p. 57.

¹⁸ ^{a b} Best & Nocella 2006 p. 57.

¹⁹ "Earth First! Worldwide". *Wayback Machine*. 2004-12-16. Archived from the original on 16 December 2004. Retrieved 2021-12-27.

²⁰ ^{a b} Best & Nocella 2006 p. 52.

²¹ Bite Back Archive, *See ELF*.

²² Bite Back Archives, *See 2002/2003 for ALF/ELF*.

the arson at Mindek Brothers Fur Farm.²³ In a press release, the groups stated the reason for their action:²⁴²⁵

Working together, cells from A.L.F. & E.L.F. demolished this feed facility due to its role in the systematic torture and killing of thousands of innocent creatures yearly – animals which possess the same complex emotional/physiological traits as loved household pets, yet are denied all reasonable consideration and confined to a miserable "existence" in tiny wire cages hardly large enough to turn around in.

²³ English introduces bill condemning eco-terrorism, *The Herald*, April 2, 2003.

²⁴ ALF/ELF Burn Down Mink Farm, *Bite Back*, December 2, 2002.

²⁵ Best & Nocella 2006 p. 414.

In popular culture

- Folk musician David Rovics performs a song dedicated to the ELF called "Song for the Earth Liberation Front".¹
- In the novel by Nicholas Evans, *The Divide*, a main character is involved in ELF activities.²
- Edward Abbey's 1975 novel, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, treats eco-terrorists battling forces of growth and development in the U.S. southwestern desert.
- In 2011, a documentary on the ELF by Academy Award-nominated filmmaker Marshall Curry entitled *If a Tree Falls: A Story of the Earth Liberation Front* had its premiere at the Sundance Film Festival. It has since been released on DVD by Oscilloscope Laboratories.³ It was broadcast on BBC Four in February 2012 as part of the *Storyville* documentary series.⁴
- In 2005, the ELF were the subject of a CBS *60 Minutes* report called "Burning Rage"⁵ and another from CNN.⁶
- In 2009 the ELF were the subject of a documentary called *Green with a Vengeance*.⁷

¹ "David Rovics, Lyrics". *Wayback Machine*. 2001-07-26. Archived from the original on 26 July 2001. Retrieved 2021-12-27.

² Evans - Evans, Nicholas. "Nicholas Evans :: Official Website :: Interview". Retrieved 7 August 2012.

³ "If a tree falls". ifatreefallsfilm.com. ASIN B0053YS9XI.

⁴ "If a Tree Falls: A Story of the Earth Liberation Front".

⁵ ^a ^b Messick2005 - Messick, Graham (2005-11-24). "Burning Rage". *CBS News*. Archived from the original on 24 November 2005. Retrieved 2021-12-27.

⁶ "youtube.com". youtube.com. 2009-09-29. Archived from the original on 2021-12-15. Retrieved 2012-03-21.

⁷ "tuppashare.com". *www.tuppashare.com*.

Criticism

Further information: Eco-terrorism

The FBI designated the ELF as "eco-terrorists".¹ Representative Scott McInnis, then chairman of the US House Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health, subpoenaed Craig Rosebraugh in an effort to investigate the ELF's activities. On hearing Rosebraugh's testimony, McInnis suggested it was "luck" no one has been killed by an ELF (or ALF) attack.²

Despite the leaderless nature of the movement, the FBI says that activist Rod Coronado is "a national leader" of the ELF in the US, while Coronado describes himself as an "unofficial ELF spokesman".³

¹ ^a ^b ^c Brad_Knickerbocker2006 - Brad Knickerbocker (January 30, 2006). "Eco-vigilantes: All in 'The Family?'. *The Christian Science Monitor*. Retrieved December 6, 2016. <q>The recent arrests mark a breakthrough for the FBI in its fight against what it calls "ecoterrorism."</q>

² Stop Eco-Violence Archived 2003-04-06 at the Wayback Machine, *Stop Eco-Violence*, February 12, 2002.

³ Paul Watson: Assault on the foundations of freedom, *New Zealand Herald*, February 27, 2006.

See also

- Anarcho-primitivism
- Animal Liberation Front
- Ecopedagogy
- Green anarchism
- Green syndicalism
- List of animal rights groups
- If a Tree Falls: A Story of the Earth Liberation Front
- Resistance: Journal of the Earth Liberation Movement
- Rewilding
- University of Washington firebombing incident

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Further reading

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- Rosebraugh, Craig (2004). *Burning Rage of a Dying Planet: Speaking for the Earth Liberation Front*. Lantern Books. ISBN 1-59056-064-7.
- *The Black Bloc Papers: An Anthology of Primary Texts From The North American Anarchist Black Bloc 1988–2005*, by Xavier Massot & David Van Deusen of the Green Mountain Anarchist Collective (NEFAC-VT), Breaking Glass Press, 2010.

External links

- [Earth Liberation Front](#)
- [Original ELF](#)
- [North American Earth Liberation Prisoners Support Network](#)
- *If a Tree Falls*: Documentary on ELF (2011) — video report by Democracy Now!
- *Igniting the Revolution*: An Introduction to the Earth Liberation Front (2001) — documentary film on IMDb
- [FBI file on the Earth Liberation Front](#)
- [Eco-Terror Indictments: 'Operation Backfire' Nets 11, *FBI*](#)

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