

POVERTY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

"People say, how can you care about chimps when there's so much suffering among people? And the answer is this: if you don't address the suffering of the people, conservation will never, never work. The thing is we're all interconnected. That's what we have to realize. And you can't address a piece of a problem; you have to think holistically."

—Jane Goodall, "Tears in the Eyes, Rainbow in the Heart: Jane Goodall's Reasons for Hope" (bioneers.org/reasons-for-hope/)

What is environmental justice?

We've known for 50 years that low-income communities and marginalized racial and ethnic groups are the most likely to be impacted by polluted water, air and soil. In the U.S., 56% of residents living in areas adjacent to hazardous waste sites are people of color. In California, this number exceeds 80%. Poverty rates in these communities are 150% higher than those in areas not as affected by pollution.

What has now become evident is that poor and marginalized communities also are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Environmental justice is the link between human rights and the condition of earth's ecosystems. While for decades the term has referred to citizen struggles for clean environments in low-income communities, it's now a key concept as we look to the multiplying impacts of climate change. It embraces the most at-risk communities, both human and plant/animal, as we contemplate a future very different from our past.

The media's tendency is to speak of global warming as a phenomenon that affects weather, plants, animals, and to some extent, human safety. But really, it changes everything. We need urgently to examine our economic, social and moral systems, to help make them more resilient in the "new normal."

A 2014 report from the World Bank outlines several challenges for people living in poverty that are likely to result from climate change. Among these are:

drought, desertification and intensified agriculture that further exhausts arable land; decreased staple food yields and crop failures; loss of glacial river sources; loss of potable groundwater resources; flooding and saltwater intrusion in both urban and agricultural areas; heat waves that impact the health of outdoor laborers, children and the frail elderly; and increases in human, plant and animal diseases.

For people living in poverty around the world, these changes are already wreaking havoc, creating thousands of "climate refugees." Syria's civil war has been called the first global conflict of the climate change era, because it was triggered in part by a massive migration from drought-stricken rural areas into already over-crowded cities, where living conditions led to conflicts with the government. Many migrants fleeing to Europe are climate refugees, notably those from sub-Saharan Africa, which has suffered severe drought for several years, worsened this year by El Niño weather patterns.



Climate change intensifies challenges for people with low and marginal incomes. Among these are the conditions in which millions of people live as a result of massive migration for work and a better life. While economic globalization has improved the financial status of many citizens in countries like China and India, and has made a few individuals very rich, it also has increased greenhouse gas pollution, exacerbated rural poverty and created human migrations larger than any since World War II.

We know much of this. And because it's not in our

own backyard, it seems complex, sad, and remote. Local concerns, some might say, are with struggling pine forests, not struggling people.

The thing is, our Monterey pines are an indicator species. In their battles against drought and disease, what such species tell us is that the ecosystems supporting human wellbeing are in trouble. We need to look more deeply at our community and our state, to see how the evident influences of global warming are impacting the most vulnerable among us.

The average annual salary for a farmworker in California is \$13,800, well below the 2-person federal poverty guideline. Living on the financial edge places these men and women at risk of food, health and housing insecurity if drought forces farmers to fallow fields, vineyards or orchards for one or more seasons.

In the Central Valley, farms have reduced arable land every year since 2009. In that year, 10,000 agricultural jobs were lost to the drought. In 2015, agricultural losses totaled \$1.8 billion, with a loss of at least 26,000 farm and processing jobs. Year-round unemployment rates in Visalia, Mendota and other Valley towns ranged in 2015 from 10% to 41%.

Worldwide, when farmworkers lose livelihoods to drought, they relocate, often seeking jobs in service industries. To date, such migration is very small in our state, but the likelihood of its growth is high if the drought continues. Such a movement will affect coastal communities where low-paying, tourism-related service jobs abound. So the interconnected issues of poverty and climate change come home to places like Cambria.

The question is, how will we welcome these migrants? Will we build inclusive communities in Cambria and other affluent towns along the coast? How will we help the displaced, whether from abroad or from the Central Valley, feel that their children can be at home here? The most vulnerable among us are our "indicators." Will we let them teach us?

Since 2000, atmospheric levels of CO2 have moved permanently from 350 (the safe level) to 400 ppm. How we build community with climate migrants, how we plan for ecosystem changes that affect both our forest and our neighbors may well determine what our world looks like in another 16 years. – CG

Haiku for Greenspace

*Greenspace is a dream
that we are bringing to life
the birds are smiling* – Dan Field

ART & ADVENTURE AHEAD



Save the date for Greenspace's annual Art & Adventure Auction & Dinner! The event takes place Saturday July 23 with wine and cheese at Creekside Reserve from 5 p.m. to 6 p.m., followed by dinner and

the auction at Robin's Restaurant.

Our major fundraiser of the year, the dinner offers a chance to visit with old friends and make new ones, enjoy delicious fare at one of SLO County's best dining places, bid on gorgeous artworks and exciting adventures, and above all, to show our support for Greenspace's programs.

This year, we're offering new art works and great adventures, ranging from condor viewing to a cruise on the Columbia River. Proceeds from the evening go to preserve land in the Cambria area, support Greenspace's daily activities and fund community education projects. Tickets are \$100 each. Call 927-2866 for more information.

WELCOME, KRISTA!

Krista De La Torre, a junior at Claremont McKenna College, will be Greenspace's summer intern for 2016. Krista is an environmental policy major and a member of ECO, an organization of environmentalists of color. She serves on the Claremont McKenna student senate and is interested in global and regional environmental policies. We are thrilled to have her help for the next two months!

INTERESTED in social media, native plants, raising seedlings, database management, fundraising, or event planning?

BECOME A GREENSPACE VOLUNTEER!

805.927.2866

www.greenspacecambria.org



The North Coast area of San Luis Obispo County is a national treasure. Greenspace will protect and enhance its ecological systems, cultural resources and marine habitats through land acquisition, education and advocacy.