



Disney & Conservation

by Jamie Hecker

It's a beautiful morning at Walt Disney World as you enter the Magic Kingdom, where multiple joyous sights and sounds greet you at once. One particular fragrance wafts in your direction and you recognize it as the unmistakable smell of freshly baked cookies at the Main Street Bakery. As you take in the delightful aroma, you're jolted briefly back into reality as you wonder to yourself, "Did I turn off the oven before I left the house?" A few more thoughts quickly jump into your head, "Did I turn off unnecessary lights and lower the thermostat? Did I remember to take the recycling to the curb?" You quickly remind yourself that you're on vacation as you casually walk past a trashcan and recycling container nestled between the finely manicured bushes.

But even though conservation may be the farthest things from your mind, the reality is that the Walt Disney Company and Walt Disney World have made great strides to ensure that you can be environmentally conscious and active while on vacation, even if you're not aware of it. Disney coined the phrase "environmentality" as a means to express the core values of its environmental efforts. The three tiers of this concept are conservation, education, and action, and all are on prominent display across Disney properties worldwide. Consider the following examples: solar panels straddle the rooftop of the Walt Disney Studios in California, creating a source of clean, renewable energy. The trains at Disneyland operate on a cleaner-burning soy-based biodiesel fuel, Dis-

neylands' central bakery utilizes tubular skylights to create natural illumination within the facility, and a wildlife conservation fund has been set up that's dedicated to aiding our planet's most needy species. An entire theme park – Disney's Animal Kingdom – was created to put the concept of environmentality into motion. The Walt Disney Company has appeared regularly on the World Economic Forum's list of the Global 100 Most Sustainable Companies, allowing the company to receive the coveted EPA "Energy Star Partner" label.

Conservation Yesterday and Today

The roots of conservation run deep within the Walt Disney Company. Walt Disney himself championed the natural world with his True Life Adventure series, starting with the Academy Award winning documentary Seal Island in 1948. Other enlightening entries included the Prowlers of the Everglades, The African Lion, and The Vanishing Prairie. The company's contemporary response to its heritage of preserving nature on film is the DisneyNature film series. Established in 2008, it spotlights a visually stunning and thematically rewarding film each year, released on Earth Day (April 22nd). African cats and our vast oceans have been featured, and this year we'll see up close the life of an orphaned simian in Chimpanzee. Like the previous DisneyNature films, a portion of the proceeds from the opening weekend box office receipts will go to support a worthy environmental cause. In the spirit of the chimpanzee, the Jane Goodall Institute is this year's beneficiary.

A visit to the parks offers you a firsthand opportunity to see conservation practices in action, although it may not always be obvious. That park map and times guide you picked up when entering the park? They're made from 100% recycled material and printed with a soy-based ink, which is more environmentally friendly and easier to recycle. You can return the favor by tossing your used material into the recycling bin back at your hotel room. If you're busy shopping at the parks or Downtown Disney – and who isn't? – take comfort with the knowledge that your plastic shopping bag is gentler than its predecessors. Since 2010, the merchandise bags have been made from low-density polyethylene, which release roughly 60% less carbon dioxide during production. Even better, the bags are also made from 100% post-consumer materials. Of course, you're at Walt Disney World to enjoy the attractions. Picture, if you will, the exterior of the Twilight Zone Tower of Terror. During its recent refurbishment, the 199-foot tall building was coated top to bottom with a low volatile organic compound (VOC) paint. Low VOC paints, being used more and more on property, reduce harmful emissions by more than two-thirds. Nighttime activities at Walt Disney World create lasting memories, especially with the return of a Disney favorite, the Main Street Electrical Parade. The parade floats now boast more energy-efficient LED lights, replacing the traditional incandescent light bulbs. In fact, LED lights have been installed all over the Walt Disney World property, saving over 20% in power consumption.

Some elements of the parks put conservation and the environment on center stage. It's a natural fit for Epcot to host pavilions that express themes of conservation and sustainability, given the park's edutainment philosophy, especially in Future World. Appropriately enough, there's an impressive array of solar panels atop the Universe of Energy Pavilion, which provide some of the necessary energy required to power the attraction inside. Over at the Land Pavilion, Living With the Land imparts a meaningful message of agricultural challenges and accomplishments, including the unique approach of hydroponics. Nearby is the Circle of Life: An Environmental Fable film, featuring Timon and Pumbaa from The Lion King in a cautionary tale about the ramifications of unchecked development. Next door to The Land is The Seas with Nemo and Friends, a dedication to life below the waterline. Here, you can see firsthand the citizens of the oceans within a 5.7 million gallon saltwater aquarium and the delicate balance of life it holds. A favorite attraction at the pavilion is the manatee exhibit, where you'll find several manatees that are being reha-

bilitated back to health under the watchful eye of the Disney Animals Programs team. Disney has an impressive history of taking in injured manatees, giant but gentle mammals that are actually an endangered species in Florida. When they are back to full strength they are returned to the ocean.

A Kingdom Devoted To Conservation

The company's environmental tenets are on full display at Disney's Animal Kingdom, which celebrates the majesty of our winged, prehensile, and four-footed friends, both real and imaginary. It's only fitting that the park opened on Earth Day, April 22nd, 1998. Conservation and ecological themes resonate throughout the park: the "two week" Kilimanjaro Safaris tour highlights the importance of wildlife protection on the African continent, and our river rafting expedition on the Chakranadi River on Kali River Rapids brings the reality of deforestation into sharp focus. The environmental and conservation message is perhaps best exemplified by the activities at Rafiki's Planet Watch and the affiliated Conservation Station. Here, you can learn how Disney takes care of the many animals at the park, and also learn some common sense steps you can take with you back home for animal habitats. To understand just how important the wildlife is within Disney's Animal Kingdom park, consider this: balloons are not for sale, nor are plastic straws or lids used for sodas. These materials pose a significant health risk to any animals that may inadvertently digest them. Presently, biodegradable paper straws are available for use.

Perhaps the furthest reaching tool that Disney's Animal Kingdom has brought to us is the Disney Wildlife Conservation Fund (DWCF). When the park first opened, Disney created the DWCF as a means of supporting flora and fauna. On the ten-year anniversary of the park, it was announced that the DWCF would undergo a name change to better reflect its global aim; it's now the Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund. Over the history of the program, nearly \$18 million has been awarded to over 600 conservation programs worldwide.



Park Guests can directly support this program through the purchase of specially designated pins and unique merchandise at Disney's Animal Kingdom and the Animal Kingdom Lodge. Proceeds from select "pressed penny" machines also support the DWCF. Some recent examples of DWCF funds in action include specific grants to the National Audubon Society for shorebird conservation in the Bahamas, the Jane Goodall Society to assist the re-introduction of the mandrill into the wild in the Republic of Congo, the Nature Conservancy for efforts to increase the Red-Cockaded woodpecker in Florida, and the World Wildlife Fund for education and outreach programs in West Africa to protect chimpanzees.

Behind the Scenes
Disney's Animal Kingdom may represent the visible end of the conservation spectrum at Walt Disney World, but there are plenty of environmental efforts that aren't always seen by Guests. Disney maintains a large fleet of vehicles necessary to keep its operations humming along. A portion of the vehicles feature hybrid engine technology, reducing the overall need for fossil fuels. Electric golf carts are used extensively within resorts as a healthy alternative to traditional gasoline-powered vehicles.

Walt Disney World offers convention facilities at The Contemporary and Coronado Springs Resorts. When the vast square footage of conference space isn't in use, automatic sensors dim the lights and lower the air conditioning settings. Select stoplights on property are now being served by solar-powered panels to power more energy-efficient LED lights, reducing the overall energy usage of the stoplights. Most fitting of all is the amount of Walt Disney World property that will remain in its natural state. Roughly one-third of Walt Disney World is reserved as a dedicated wildlife conservation area, such as the natural wetlands around the Treehouse Villas.

Supporting the environment and championing conservation is as easy as staying at a Walt Disney World resort hotel. All twenty-three hotels are officially "green" certified by the Florida Green Lodging Program. To achieve this status, hotels must conform to conservation standards in five categories: water conservation, education and awareness, waste reduction, energy conservation, and air quality. Next time you're staying in a Disney resort, take note of the energy-efficient CFC light bulbs, the low-flow faucets and showerheads, and the self-explanatory green receptacle for papers, plastics, and glass. The room key and PhotoPass card you use while on vacation at Walt Disney World is likely recycled, and is easily recycled after your trip is over. In fact, over five million plastic room keys are recycled annually.

Disney has a robust recycling program in place at Walt Disney World. In addition to recycling containers in every hotel room, there are numerous glass and bottle recycling containers throughout the parks. But what about recyclable materials that are tossed into trash bins? All trash on property is taken to the South Service Area and is hand sorted, with recyclable materials being set aside for further sorting. Eighteen thousand tons of materials are recycled each year and sold for reuse to outside vendors. Not only is Disney proficient at recycling, but selling the material nets an additional \$100,000 a month for the Company.

Water, Water Everywhere
Water is the most abundant resource on our planet, covering two-thirds of its surface. However, it's still a vital resource that needs to be carefully monitored. With four theme parks, dozens of resorts and, of course, two water parks at Walt Disney World, managing the water resources is a daunting proposition. Fortunately, Disney is up to the task. Since the early 1990s, Disney's water usage has remained consistent, despite the steady increase in the number of parks, resorts, and Guests. The first philosophy is to use less, by encouraging Guests to voluntarily reuse towels rather than run them through an unnecessary wash cycle. Low flow devices across the resort further reduce the volume of water use. Disney goes the extra mile to reclaim water for innovative uses. Each day, approximately ten millions of gallons of wastewater are treated at a mammoth facility on Disney property. The treated, or "gray" water, is 90% pure and is sufficient as potable water. However, it is instead used for other needy elements of the resort, such as irrigation water for the intricate landscaping, the 110-acre tree farm, the many golf courses, and even for the beautification work of cleaning streets, sidewalks, and buses.

Reclaimed water accounts for thirty percent of the resort's overall needs and nearly all of its irrigation requirements. Disney is so efficient with its reclaimed water program that in 2005 it was named Customer of the Year by the Water Reuse Association "for being a consumer, advocate and promoter of reclaimed water since the early 1990s."

Beyond the Parks

Disney isn't just committed to the nutritional welfare of its Florida neighbors. It's also committed to preserving the local environment beyond the boundaries of Walt Disney World. For proof, look no further than nearby Lake Russell for The Disney Wilderness Preserve, located just twenty miles south of the Magic Kingdom. In the early 1990s, Disney purchased over 8,000 acres of former ranch land and donated it to The Nature Conservancy as an offset to additional development at Walt Disney World. Under the tender care of the Nature Conservancy, this property has been gradually returned to its natural state. Visitors can hike along several trails on the property, and can learn more about the local wildlife and the wetlands by visiting the Walt Disney Imagineering-designed welcome center. This facility features geothermal heating, cooling elements, and solar panels on the recycled corrugated steel roof.

Conservation, recycling, and smart water usage all prevail at Walt Disney World. Kermit the Frog at Disney's Hollywood Studios isn't the only thing green at Disney. You can be too, and everyone comes out ahead!

What To Do With All That Food

Every day there are thousands of Guests and Cast Members at the parks, all with an appetite. Plenty of food is prepared but unfortunately not all of it is served. Given its perishable nature, the unused portions can quickly go to waste. To ensure that as little as possible goes uneaten, Disney partnered with the Second Harvest Food Bank of Central Florida to create the Disney Harvest Program, which donates prepared but unserved food to needy individuals. Each month, fifty thousand pounds of food is directed towards thousands of local citizens through various nonprofit organizations, including homeless shelters, after-school centers, and soup kitchens. Disney has even taken this a step further by donating \$500,000 to Second Harvest to help with new construction of its facilities. The extra funds will allow Second Harvest to triple its cooler and freezer capacity, ensuring that it can accept and deliver thousands of pounds of additional food.

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