

An Environmental Service Corps for America

An Idea to Consider from Alex Wilson

Just as President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal led America out of the Great Depression in our grandparent's day, a dramatic set of initiatives will be required if we are to prevent the Great Warming. Many have argued for something akin to the Apollo Project to carry out the research and development needed to advance low-cost renewable energy that can replace fossil fuels. I agree that such a program is crucial—and I'm optimistic that if we put American ingenuity to the task, we can make tremendous headway in a transition to sustainability.



But we need to go further. We need to weatherize and insulate the nation's existing houses. We need to restore the wetland ecosystems that protect our coastal areas from storm surges. And we need to respond effectively to such challenges as invasive species and the rapid migration of ecosystems. To do this not only requires the right materials and know-how, it also requires labor—and a lot of it. We need a new workforce to carry out such a monumental effort.

I therefore propose the creation of an Environmental Service Corps. This would look like a cross between the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s and the Peace Corps that President Kennedy launched in 1961. The Environmental Service Corps would ask men and women to invest two years of their lives in the service of their country, especially after high school or college—by carrying out a wide range of projects to help our nation reduce the likelihood of catastrophic climate change while at the same time adapting to changes brought about by a warming climate.

Activities of the Environmental Service Corps could include the following:

A Rebuilding America program to weatherize and insulate America's housing stock. While the U.S. Department of Energy's Weatherization Assistance Program has been insulating homes for 30 years, it does not go far enough with these energy retrofits and it does not serve enough homeowners. We need to dramatically upgrade the energy performance of our 120 million existing housing

units. For lower-income Americans, the Environmental Service Corps would provide a pool of labor that could be managed by paid team leaders trained in building science and construction. In colder climates, such retrofits would involve boosting wall insulation levels to R-30 or higher, replacing windows, and addressing moisture and durability problems.

Ecological restoration. Restoring natural ecosystems is critically important, particularly in coastal regions where wetlands and coastal forests are needed to protect against flooding and storm surges that will become increasingly common with global warming. Teams from the Environmental Service Corps would carry out these plantings and coastal restoration efforts.

Reforestation with species adapted to more southern climates. Climate scientists predict that global climate change will result in dramatic geographic shifts in ecosystems in North America as species adapted to cooler climates become thermally stressed or die off without cold winters to kill insect pests. Some experts believe that climates will change more rapidly than ecosystems can adapt. If this is the case, humans may need to intervene through widespread reforestation programs that introduce more southern (but regionally native) species and genetic strains resistant to introduced disease organisms. The Environmental Service Corps could perform this function.

Invasive species control. One of the consequences of global commerce is the introduction of invasive species that threaten natural ecosystems. Controlling invasives is difficult and often involves significant labor—for which the Environmental Service Corps would be well-suited.

The wide-ranging programs that the Environmental Service Corps could tackle are huge, and the infrastructure of the Corps would have to be similarly scaled, potentially involving hundreds of thousands of volunteers. Its programs would be challenging to initiate and expensive to operate. Indeed such projects, especially the Rebuilding

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Environmental Service Corps (cont.)

America program, could be among the most challenging our nation has ever undertaken. But these efforts are critically important if we are to succeed with the level of carbon emission reductions that climate scientists tell us are needed and if we are to protect our nation from some of the expected effects of climate change.

Obviously, the details of this plan aren't figured out. The complexity and challenges inherent in establishing the Environmental Service Corps and implementing its programs are immense ... but so would be the benefits. If we as a nation are serious—or become serious—about grappling with the challenges of climate change, the Environmental Service Corps provides a mechanism for doing so.

Alex Wilson

(These comments first appeared in *Environmental Building News*, a sustainable building newsletter.)

Alex Wilson is the President of BuildingGreen, Inc. in Brattleboro, Vermont and executive editor of *Environmental Building News* and the *GreenSpec® Directory*. A biologist by training, he has written about energy-efficient and environmentally responsible design and construction for more than 25 years. Wilson is coauthor of the *Consumer Guide to Home Energy Savings* (ACEEE, 8th edition, 1993) and the Rocky Mountain Institute's textbook *Green Development: Integrating Ecology and Real Estate* (John Wiley & Sons, 1998). He has also written many articles for other publications, including *Fine Homebuilding*, *Architectural Record*, *Landscape Architecture*, the *Journal of Light Construction*, and *Popular Science*. Along with writing about design and construction, he has written four guidebooks on quiet-water paddling in the Northeast for the Appalachian Mountain Club, including *Quiet Water New York, 2nd Edition*.

Wilson served on the board of directors of the U.S. Green Building Council for five years and he is currently a trustee of The Nature Conservancy - Vermont Chapter. He lives in Dummerston, Vermont with his wife and two daughters, and in good weather commutes by bicycle to work.

To contact Alex Wilson go to www.buildinggreen.com.

2008 Conference on the Environment

The 2008 Conference on the Environment will be held at St. Lawrence University in Canton, NY from Oct.17 to Oct. 19. The theme for the Conference is "*The Future of EMCs and CACs - Education, Research, Involvement.*"

The intent of the Conference is to (1) inspire EMCs and CACs to engage the research potential around the State to address environmental issues and bring the results of this research to the public and decision-makers and (2) to become directly involved in environmental projects through direct actions. The concept of "Citizen Science" will be a unifying theme. Topics planned include: Biofuels, Invasive species/Biodiversity, Open space and Wetlands. For further information, contact Jon Montan at jmontan@stlawco.com

Book Review

Go Green, Live Rich - 50 Simple Ways To Save the Earth (and Get Rich Trying) by David Bach



Walk into a bookstore and you will find numerous displays of books covering "green" topics - global warming, recycling, tips to save the earth - from very technical volumes to excellent children's books. So, put "green" in the title and a reference to making money on the cover and it seems as if the book will be a sure bestseller.

Go Green, Live Rich promises 50 simple ways to save the earth, and strives to deliver just that.

Surprisingly, it succeeds. The book is engaging, skillfully designed, well written and clearly presented, with many excellent resources and websites.

Driving smart, energy conservation, low water flow, shopping green, profit by recycling, green as a family value, green at work, making your first green million and giving green are the broad chapter headings with individual strategies broken out and described.

David Bach states, "Going green is the most important issue that will shape our future." He is convinced that people will take action and that the action we take to become environmentally smarter will shape the environmental and economic futures of us all. He maintains going green can make you rich - not going green can make you poor. Investing green will be to the twenty-first century what investing in technology was to the twentieth century.

This small paperback is a good addition to an environmental library. It's great to have all those websites categorized and in one place.

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Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs



If every American home replaced just one light bulb with an Energy Star qualified bulb, enough energy would be saved to light more than three million homes for a year, more than \$600 million in annual energy costs. In addition, greenhouse gases equivalent to the emissions of more than 800,000 cars would be prevented.

Compared to incandescent lamps, CFLs use less energy and have a longer life. A CFL can save over \$30.00 in electricity costs over the light's lifetime compared to an incandescent lamp (IL). The purchase price of a CFL is higher than that of an IL, but this cost is recovered in energy savings and replacement costs over the bulb's lifetime.

CFLs radiate a different light spectrum from that of an IL. Improved phosphor formulations have refined the subjective color of the light emitted by CFLs such that the best "soft white" CFLs available in 2008 are similar in color to standard ILs. Bulbs are labeled soft or bright white.

CFL bulbs do contain trace amounts of mercury. Precautions must be taken if one should break. For broken bulbs, nearby windows should be opened to disperse any vapor that may escape. Fragments should be swept, not vacuumed, and the area wiped with a disposable paper towel. Check www.earth911.org for information concerning mercury recycling or disposal facilities. Although there is some controversy regarding disposal, it is agreed that the benefits outweigh the disadvantages.

There are two places to go for the answers to lighting questions: your local lighting store or one of several websites.

Michael Lichtenstein, President of the Lighting Gallery in Huntington Station, Long Island likes the idea of contributing to energy efficiency on an individual level. In a recent interview, he said, "We are committed to helping increase the use of energy efficient lighting. We encourage all of our customers to make the switch to Energy Star bulbs whenever it is appropriate. CFLs are especially useful in:

- Unfinished areas such as the garage or basement
- Non-dimming table lamps (there are 3-way CFLs)
- Recessed lights that are used for long periods of time each day
- Outdoor flood lights
- Any non-dimmable enclosed fixture."

He adds that work is currently being done to achieve full brightness quickly and to adjust color temperature to match IL. There is also an effort being made to improve dimming capability and to make CFLs more attractive. However, for lighting, LED will be the big wave of the future because of increased efficiency.

Go to www.edf.org and click on Light Bulb Guide and then Make the Switch. There are detailed tips for selecting and buying energy-efficient bulbs, the Energy Star program and an opportunity to "Take the Pledge" to switch to CFLs. Make the Switch!

Woodstock Zero-Carbon Initiative

By Town Board resolution, Woodstock New York has made it a goal to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases thought to contribute to global warming. The Town has embraced the goal of becoming "carbon-neutral" - that is, achieving no net emission of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

Among the steps outlined in the resolution are increasing the fuel efficiency of town vehicles, conforming with the guidelines of the Energy Star and US Green Building Council programs, increasing recycling and promoting the development of renewable energy. The Woodstock Town Board committed to a Zero-Carbon Initiative, leading the Woodstock community by example and by implementing policies resulting in no net emission of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases by the end of 2017.

For further information contact Ann Brandt, NYSACC Treasurer, 14 Evergreen Lane, Woodstock, NY 12498, or e-mail at AnnBrandt@prodigy.net.

Reconnecting With Recycling

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) 130 million cell phones will be retired this year and fewer than 20 percent will be recycled. We all need to consider ways to reduce, reuse and recycle no-longer-used wireless phones, batteries and accessories.

Recycle: According to the EPA, recycling 100 million cell phones would save enough energy to power more than 194,000 U.S. households with electricity for one year. Consumers and businesses can recycle their old wireless phones through Verizon Wireless' HopeLine program or at various manufacturer or service provider sites. Simply drop-off your phone, battery and accessories and they will be disposed of in an environmentally sound way.

Reuse: Phones are refurbished, resold and reused whenever possible. Proceeds can be donated to domestic violence advocacy groups, or other charities, as is the case in HopeLine, a program run by Verizon Wireless.

Reduce: When left plugged in, empty cell-phone chargers consume standby or 'phantom' energy. Consumers should plug all chargers (cell phone, digital camera, mp3 player, etc.) into a power strip and switch it off when not in use. The U.S. Department of Energy estimates appliances and home electronics are responsible for about 20 percent of a typical home's energy bill. Simply unplugging appliances, electronics and their chargers, when not in use, can save each household hundreds of dollars a year.

Recycling a wireless phone may seem like a small step - but if we all take the time we might be able to save money, the environment and, quite possibly someone's life.

Patrick Devlin
Verizon Wireless
NY/NJ Metro Region President

(This editorial first appeared in The Long-Islander, April 17, 2008)

President's Message

Being Green – Which Choice Do We Make?

We have just moved through various Earth Day celebrations in our municipalities. Maybe your conservation commission did the planning and execution; maybe you participated in a group or in a personal way. But we came to Earth Day 2008 with a green emphasis that is unprecedented since the concerns that created the first Earth Day in 1970. I've saved a gigantic amount of green articles, magazines, and books to consolidate into a concise President's message. It's overwhelming. Also, if I have received all of this stuff, so have each of you – both personally and to your CB or CAC. How can all this information be organized, synthesized, analyzed and prioritized?

NYSACC's website and newsletter offer steps to some possible solutions. Bedford's Energy Plan can be accessed and evaluated at nysaccny.org. In *NYSACC News* there is information in the form of websites, member initiatives, book reviews.

Alex Wilson's idea of an Environmental Service Corps is so innovative and timely that I don't understand why it hasn't been proposed by one or all of the presidential candidates. Don Duger, NYSACC's secretary, comments, "CCC was a rip-roaring success. We are still enjoying the fruits of their labors. The Peace Corps was a success. Americorps was a success. With jobs declining, this is the time for this initiative."

We also introduce Wilson's organization, Building Green, a source for information on environmental design and construction and his sustainable



building newsletter, Environmental Building News.

Today's green actions are complex and often very technical. But many green actions are very personal. In an effort to utilize the solar information I have been exposed to, I decided it was time for my south facing roof to have solar collectors for domestic hot water to reduce my oil burning carbon footprint. I also planned to include a solar power system. Maybe I wouldn't get a quick financial return on the PV system, but I would be making an important environmental statement. The Solar Center, Inc. came and evaluated my roof with a neat device called a Pathfinder, which, placed on the roof, traced the sun's rays through the year. Since PV modules require sunrays with little shading, trees can be a problem. I took down a dying tree, trimmed down another, but I can't part with trees planted almost 50 years ago – a locust, spruce and pine which are now great, large trees, just for sunlight. OnEarth, the spring issue of Natural Environmental Defense Council magazine, writes about the new research that finds that mature trees continue to actively absorb carbon while holding great quantities in storage. I will settle for hot water panels. This is, of course, personal, but on a small scale illustrates that there is a continual dilemma. The trees are as important as the sun in achieving my environmental goal.

Most of us, cannot know or understand all the green, global warming issues. Eco-anxiety is the new word for the environmentally conscious. Are we doing enough? Are we making the correct lifestyle choices? Which of several options is the correct one? As Kermit says, "It's not easy being green."

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