

# EDITORIAL: Environmental Responsibility (and New Year's Resolutions)

By Dick Colby

In preparing a talk recently for prospective college students and their parents, I was tempted to warn them of the coming traumas of the adolescent transition: the loneliness of the freshly fledged freshman, the difficulty of making career choices, the every-evening contest between the urge to party and the duty to study, the opportunity to confront one's conscience (often for the first time) and establish long-term values with respect to honesty, self-worth, obligations to society, religion, sexual behavior, use of stimulants, and (here it comes!) environmental responsibility.

Ever since that time in my life (when I discovered that I was a shy minimalist, and that I could get my pleasures inexpensively from treading gently through wilderness and from the intellectual encounters of a teaching career), I've puzzled at why some people want such big lawns surrounding such big houses, drive such big gas-guzzling vehicles (one can no longer call them cars), and feel entitled to discard multiple bags of trash each week. Again it's the story of the three pigs and the big bad wolf: why are so few people able to live prudently?

Wouldn't you know it: environmental psychology is a legitimate area of scientific study, with its own journals (*Environment and Behavior*; *Environmental Education Research*; many others) and investigators. Some have approached the topic by examining the behavior of related animal species. Some work with focus groups, or administer questionnaires. Some just speculate, what was once considered "philosophizing." What I'm going to do is review some notes I've taken in libraries over the years, and propose my own hypothesis to explain why environmental responsibility is so hard to instill, and what we can do.

The vast majority of people lived lives of bare subsistence until only a few hundred years ago. There was no aluminum, or other packaging material, or junk mail to discard or recycle. When water had to be pumped by hand, there were natural incentives not to waste it. So I don't think we can look to genetic or evolutionary explanations for modern materialism and wastefulness: there wasn't "time" for these attitudes to evolve by natural selection (survival of the fittest).

Old societies did maintain strict codes of behavior, partly because the frailties of existence (e.g. infectious diseases before antibiotics) made religion a more urgent moral force, partly because farm families (the vast majority!) needed to stick together for economic reasons, partly because communities had to work together as economic units and for military defense. There wasn't enough wealth for people to waste anything.

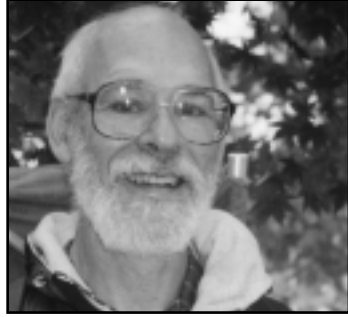
I prefer a "what-me-worry?" hypothesis

## New Trenton

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ing projects, will go a long way to helping to bring growth management to our state. Taking the highway funding that Gov. Whitman used to subsidize sprawl by Merrill Lynch in Hopewell or Rt. 15 in Sussex County, and using that money for transportation and economic development projects in places like Newark, will help revitalize our cities. Likewise, Gov. McGreevey could use the money in this year's budget that was allocated for new sewer plants in Vernon and in Salem County, instead to fix the combined sewer overflow problem in places like Paterson. By just taking the financial reigns of government and controlling them, Jim McGreevey can do more for Smart Growth than any other Governor.

There will need to be legislative initiatives as well, and with a deadlocked Senate and a relatively close Assembly, the environment will play an important role in the legislative agenda. Many of the new legisla-



to explain much of modern human nature, perhaps what psychologists call the Pleasure Principle. We've been freed from most of the constraints on behavior noted in the paragraph above, and we suffer from the combination of wealth and potent advertising. You might say that evolution has not prepared our species for such temptation.

A recent poll to determine why Americans don't recycle revealed the following reasons: "takes too much time" (30%); "why should I?" (19%); "don't know how" (12%); "too messy" (8%); "too inconvenient" (8%); other reasons (23%). [*McGraw Hill Recycling Handbook*, 1993, Chapt 10: Psychology of Recycling]

Yet some of us do adopt environmentally responsible life habits. I hypothesize that environmental behavior rises through five levels of commitment, each of which requires some kind of intellectual decision:

1. The recycling habit: newspaper, bottles and cans, plastics, composting of garbage.
2. Consumer practices: energy-efficient appliances and bulbs, low-flow toilets, avoiding overpackaged products such as most breakfast cereals.
3. Political and financial involvement: lobbying legislators and friends, letters to editors, serving on planning boards, organizational involvement such as Sierra Club activism.
4. Lifestyle changes: eating less meat, living more densely in walkable communities, using cars less (e.g. by carpooling), using less electricity, avoiding use of pesticides.
5. Societal responsibility: having fewer children, teaching or preaching environmentalism.

John Holt described his observations of "how children learn" (in a book with that title): many altered behavior patterns are established quite suddenly as a child experiences something that is frightening or pleasurable. The adolescent transition is also a time of receptivity to new behavior patterns, perhaps facilitated by the "opening up" that comes with that fledgling process I started with. But I like to think that serious contemplation is a rational basis for most of us to make new commitments (like new year's resolutions), at any time of life, to higher levels of environmental responsibility.

tors were elected with support from the environmental community, and have agreed to support many of our legislative proposals. There will be competition between the Democrats and Republicans for our support during this legislative session with both houses of the legislature back up for election in just two years.

Please know that the Sierra Club will have an increased role to play in crafting new environmental legislation and DEP regulations, and then in lobbying officials to enact those measures. We do it mostly with VOLUNTEER labor! The Club needs volunteers to work and be part of its Legislative Committee, its Anti-sprawl Committee, its Wildlands Committee, as well as on the different issues that we are all involved in, from the Highlands to the Pinelands, from the State Plan to Environmental Justice. We can get a lot done with your help! Please call us at 609-924-3141.

## A Fundraising Thank You

To all who gave so generously to our annual New Jersey Chapter fundraising appeal, I want to thank you very much. Without your financial support our Chapter would not be able to continue its efforts to protect our environment at the level that is needed. Most of us are volunteers who give our time and efforts to what we believe in, but it also takes paid staff, an office, phone calls, paper, and many other expenses. Clean air, clean water and saving our land from over-development are still issues that we must fight for. We need your help.

This year, our annual Chapter fundraising appeal was mailed just prior to the September 11th tragedy. It could have been a complete failure for our Chapter if your money gifts had not come in. So your support and generosity is greatly appreciated.

On the heels of the September 11th tragedy came another huge blow - anthrax scares, causing health problems and disruption of postal services in central New Jersey. Some members may never have received their annual appeal letter. If you care to give to our NJ Chapter's annual appeal, the return address is included below. There is still time to send your donation.

I want to thank everyone for believing in our cause: protecting our precious environment for our families and our future.

Sincerely,  
Tina Schvejda, Chapter Chair

NJ Chapter Annual Appeal - Sierra Club  
295 Princeton-Hightstown Road  
PMB Suite 11 - 303  
West Windsor, NJ 08550

# STATE ELECTIONS WRAPUP

By Rich Isaac, Chapter Political Chair



The November 2001 election produced a dramatic change in New Jersey's political landscape. For the first time since 1989 the Sierra Club endorsed and actively campaigned for a winning gubernatorial candidate. As explained in the October-December issue of this newsletter, there were clear differences between the two candidates. We expect Governor Jim McGreevey will be a strong supporter of our issues. New Jersey has arguably the strongest governorship in the country, with the governor having the power of a line item budget veto, so finally having a governor supportive of environmental issues is the best political news we've had in over a decade.

McGreevey's campaign was bolstered by the distribution of Sierra Club bumper stickers: "McGreevey - for the Environment." In addition Chapter Director Jeff Tittel appeared many times with the candidate at press conferences, once even in a canoe. On Election Day many Club members, organized by Political Vice-Chair Meiling Chin, knocked on the doors of Democratic Party voters to ensure a good turnout for McGreevey.

In addition, there's also good news in both houses of the state legislature. In Assembly races, the Club endorsed 45 candidates out of 160 running for 80 available seats. 35 of "our" candidates won, for a success rate of over 75 percent. In the Senate, the Club did even better. Of 20 candidates endorsed, 17 won, for a win rate of 85 percent. These results mean that, in both chambers of the legislature, we will have a sizable core of environmentally-friendly legislators.

The Club looks forward to this next session in the legislature, and to working with Governor McGreevey.

On the right is the list of candidates who won with our support. Club members are encouraged to get to know them.

## ENDORSED WINNING CANDIDATES IN 2001 STATE ELECTIONS

Governor: James McGreevey

State Legislature:

Dist.	Party	Candidate
3	S	D Stephen Sweeney
3	A	D Douglas Fisher
3	A	D John Burzichelli
4	S	R John Matheussen
4	A	R George Geist
6	S	D John Adler
6	A	D Mary Previte
6	A	D Louis Greenwald
7	S	R Diane Allen
7	A	R Herb Conaway
7	A	R Jack Connors
10	S	D Timothy Ryan
10	A	R David Wolfe
10	A	R James Holzapfel
11	S	R Joseph Palaia
11	A	R Steve Corodemus
11	A	R Tom Smith
12	S	R John Bennett
14	A	D Linda Greenstein
14	A	D Gary Guear
15	S	D Shirley Turner
15	A	D Reed Gusciora
15	A	D Bonnie Watson Coleman
16	A	R Chris "Kip" Bateman
16	A	R Peter Biondi
17	S	D Bob Smith
17	A	D Joe Egan
17	A	D Upendra Chivukula
18	S	D Barbara Buono
18	A	D Peter Barnes
19	S	D Joseph Vitale
19	A	D Arline Friscia
19	A	D John Wisniewski
20	A	D Neil Cohen
21	S	R Richard Bagger
21	A	R Tom Kean
21	A	R Eric Munoz
22	S	D Joe Suliga
22	A	D Jerry Green
22	A	D Linda Stender
23	S	R Leonard Lance
26	S	R Bob Martin
27	S	D Dick Codey
31	A	D Joseph Doria
31	A	D Elba Perez Cinciarelli
33	A	D Albio Sires
35	A	D Nellie Pou
36	S	D Gary Furnari
37	S	D Byron Baer
37	A	D Loretta Weinberg
39	A	R John Rooney
39	A	R Charlotte Vandervalk
40	A	R David Russo

## YOU HAVE MORE TO GIVE THAN YOU KNOW

Maybe you can't make a gift to protect the environment during your lifetime, but you can become a financial hero by remembering the Sierra Club in your will. You can even direct your gift to a special Club program or to the New Jersey Chapter.

For information about making a request to the New Jersey Chapter call George Denzer at 609-799-5839.