

Conservation Watch

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The Gulf Oil Spill - A Sea Change in the Making?

From the GCA Conservation and NAL Committees:

*Nancy McKlveen, Des Moines (IA) Founders G.C. – Zone XI
GCA National Affairs and Legislation Committee Chair*

For almost three months, the world watched and waited for oil to stop flowing into the Gulf of Mexico from the British Petroleum (BP) Deepwater Horizon oil well. The “spill” may be the worst environmental disaster in our country’s history. Response came from everywhere: environmental groups, federal agencies, the U.S. Congress, the U.S. Coast Guard, scientists, the fishing industry, the oil companies, and the residents of the Gulf. The impact of so much oil on the diverse ecosystem of the Gulf also elicited a response from the NAL and Conservation Committees of the Garden Club of America at their June meeting in New York. The consensus of the group was that a contribution from the groups will be made following an evaluation of non-profit groups working with wildlife in the Gulf region. Charity evaluators Wise Giving Alliance (www.give.org) and Charity Navigator (www.charitynavigator.org) allow donors to check financial and other information about listed organizations and get giving tips.



Photo: U.S. Coast Guard

Following the oil spill, the Administration issued an offshore deep water drilling moratorium that halted the approval of any new permits and suspended some drilling. Later, a U.S. District Judge rejected the moratorium. A revised moratorium was then issued based more on technology and safety reforms which could last until November 30th.

In a response to the oil spill, the Senate unveiled a draft summary of their energy and oil spill measure on July 27th, and the race against the clock began to pass the measure before the beginning of the August recess. Later in the week, the House narrowly approved their “spill bill” (H.R. 3534), beefing up offshore safety standards and reorganizing the agency that oversees offshore oil and gas drilling. But, the following week found the Senate out of time in their bid to pass their response this summer. On August 3, majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.), pulled the plug for lack of support. After the worst oil leak in U.S. history and months of heated negotiations on energy and oil response legislation, Congress headed home for August recess empty-handed, and the political consequences will be most keenly felt in the Gulf coast region.

There are clearly lessons to be learned as America considers where and how to expand reliance on offshore drilling to meet the nation’s energy needs. The spill is a stark reminder that fossil fuels come with a steep cost. We must move beyond the petroleum-dependent economy that leads us to take risks in some of the most biologically rich ecosystems in the world and on to an economy driven by clean energy. Clean energy legislation, now stalled in Congress, is one key to the Gulf’s future.

We invite you now to read short reports by many of our excellent GCA Vice-Chairs who are experts in fields that relate to the BP oil spill. Read them and decide how YOU can best make a difference in the future.

From the GCA's NAL Energy Vice-Chair:

BP Disaster Brings to Light the Bigger Picture

Vital to an industrial society, oil dominates international trade in volume, value and carrying capacity. One quarter of the world’s oil comes to the United States with Canada being our biggest supplier. According to the U. S. Energy Information Administration, oil consumption per capita in the U.S. is approximately six times that of the rest of the world. Domestic production meets approximately 55% percent of this demand.



Two-thirds of our oil use is for vehicle fuels. Other uses are to heat buildings, to produce electricity and for industrial uses. The most effective policy for cutting gasoline and diesel demand has been Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards, but vehicle manufacturers and states have continually opposed these standards. Investing in research and development of electric cars and trucks also has the potential to significantly reduce demand, as will incentives to use and improve public transportation, and the development and improvements of alternative fuels. In addition, the U.S. should end subsidies to the oil production industry. A *New York Times* article about subsidies can

Photo courtesy of Mexicovacationtravels.com.

be accessed at:

http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/04/business/04bptax.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=oil%20subsidies&st=cse.

The world is now in the era of **extreme energy**. Conventional, more accessible, reserves of oil are now tapped out. Deepwater and arctic drilling and extraction from sands have become necessary, dangerous, and costly methods of meeting the demand for this fuel. A short summary of the societal and environmental risks of offshore drilling can be found at the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy's website. <http://blog.cleanenergy.org/2009/12/10/false-solution-offshore-oil-drilling/>

Legislation in response to the Gulf spill is working its way through both houses. Measures to improve safety, federal oversight, and technological expertise related to offshore drilling and to reform the royalty system have been proposed. On July 15, Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) and others introduced a bill to promote the oil independence of the United States. A scaled-down oil spill response bill may possibly be passed this fall. Agreement on general energy legislation encouraging fuel conservation and aiding the faster development of renewable energy sources appears to be non-existent despite the lobbying by the alternative energy industry and other pro-business and environmental groups. Our demand for oil will only grow without changes to federal law that encourage a more sustainable fuel use. Because of the Deepwater Horizon catastrophe, oil is the current poster child for dirty fossil fuel – and rightly so. The answer to this problem is for us to push for legislation that promotes permanent reductions in our need for oil.

*Melissa McAdams, Knoxville (TN) G.C. – Zone IX
GCA NAL Committee – Vice-Chair, Energy Sources*

From the GCA Vice-Chair for Oceans:

Unimaginable Disaster For Our Oceans

To say that the Gulf oil spill places us in uncharted waters is an understatement. The deep water of the ocean is the largest habitat on earth but it's also the least understood, making the effects of this deep-sea spill without precedent. Unlike previous spills where most of the oil was on the water's surface, some of the oil released in the deepwater has stayed underwater. The so-called plumes of microscopic oil droplets are more like clouds than a concentrated river of oil beneath the surface. Scientists are worried about what will happen when small organisms ingest these microscopic tar balls and how the entire deepwater food chain might be affected by extended exposure to oil. The deepwater reef environments are home to important nursery grounds and larval fishing areas for some of the most important recreational and commercial fish stock. The impact of the underwater oil could be severe. It may not occur in this year's life cycle - it may occur four years' life cycles from now.



Photo courtesy of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The other unknown is the effect of using dispersants to combat the oil spill. Again, we are in uncharted waters. To date 1.8 million gallons of chemicals have been applied at an unprecedented depth underwater. The long-term effects on aquatic life are unknown. The Deepwater Horizon was not capped until 86 days into the disaster. We may look back on that eventual success as the easy part. The real challenge lies in the future as we learn more about the long-term ecological effects of the spill.

*Jennifer Fain – Hancock Park (CA) G.C. – Zone XII
GCA Conservation and NAL Committees – Vice-Chair, Oceans*

Thoughts from a garden club conservation chair:

Oceans and Oil – The National Ocean Policy

In March, President Obama suggested an expansion of offshore drilling in selected coastal areas. The Deepwater Horizon disaster in the Gulf of Mexico forced a change in strategy, subsequently inspiring several attempts by the President at a moratorium on offshore drilling. On July 19th, as oil continued to spread through the gulf, and our nation was reminded of the fragile state of our oceans, the President issued an executive order establishing a National Ocean Policy. This 10-point policy will be overseen by a new National Ocean Council with a single vision – to protect, maintain and restore the ocean, our coasts and the Great Lakes. The new policy adopts the final recommendations of the Interagency Ocean Policy Task Force, which was created on June 11, 2009 to develop recommendations for the long-term sustainable use and conservation of these vast natural resources.



Screenshot of the live video feed of the BP oil spill, from 5,000 feet under the sea. (Photo from Frugal-Café.com)

The new policy does not set guarantees for conservation or biodiversity, but it does demand coordination of a complex set of regulatory regimes to create a single, powerful voice to defend and preserve marine resources. Despite comprehensive laws that protect our air, water and public lands, the country has never had a policy dedicated to the health of our oceans; in fact, this vast resource is currently managed by 140 laws and 20 federal agencies that continue to act at cross purposes. This haphazard management of our oceans invites disaster.

While the new ocean policy may not have prevented the BP disaster, it can mitigate future risk. Thirty years ago, America was importing about 30 percent of its oil. Today, we import more than 60 percent. While a deepwater drilling moratorium may offer a temporary reprieve from a rig or well explosion, it will not mitigate the risk for tanker spills, and may **increase** that risk, as we are forced to import more oil from greater distance.

The reality is that deepwater drilling will continue: in North America, off the coasts of Newfoundland and Labrador, in Norway, in Brazil, even Cuba, where a consortium of energy interest is seeking access,

via a deepwater rig, to six billion barrels of offshore reserves. Oil companies go where the oil is, and near-shore, shallow waters have declined in production as newer technology offers cost effective access to high production reservoirs located at depths beyond 1000 feet. According to the US Minerals Management Service, "our best source of new domestic energy resources lies in the deep water Gulf of Mexico and other frontier areas".

The debate over energy production will continue, but whether drilled or delivered, the ocean and our coastlines remain at risk. As the country continues to balance the risk and benefits of domestic energy production, a National Ocean Policy guarantees that resource extraction will not take priority over resource protection.

*Candace Lyche, Conservation Committee Chair
Hillsborough (CA) G.C. – Zone XII*

The GCA Conservation Vice-Chair for Water and Wetlands reports in:

Effects of the Oil Spill on Wetlands

Coastal wetlands are among our nations most valuable resources. They buffer inland areas from storms, they filter the water, they are important nurseries for fish, crab and other shellfish, and they provide winter habitat for millions of migratory birds and waterfowl. The Gulf Coast wetlands have been disappearing at an alarming rate, and are now facing the greatest threat of all - the BP oil spill. Oil spills have occurred in the Gulf of Mexico before. The most notable was the IXTOC 1 oil well in 1980, which resulted in 138 million gallons of oil being spilled off the coast of Mexico. The estimates for the BP spill by Day 108 of the disaster conclude that this is the greatest accidental marine oil spill in history. After the blowout of the gulf well, it is estimated that 4.9 million barrels of oil poured into the ocean. On Aug. 5, 2010, following the temporary capping of the well source, the well was finally sealed with cement. The relief well process is on-going. It is estimated that it will be mid-August before the well is finally "killed."



Photo credit: Gerald Herbert for Associated Press.

A study by Dr. Irving Mendelsohn of wetlands impacted by an oil spill indicated that wetlands have the ability to recover but the recovery process varies from extremely slow in mangroves swamps to relatively rapid in grass-dominated marshes. Many factors influence the rate of recovery. If the oil

remains on the surface of the water, the sea grasses will die, but they will grow again. The situation is much more serious if the oil gets into the soil. A coating of oil would deprive the root structure of oxygen, the plants would die, and would not be able to regenerate. The make-up of the soil in wetlands is so fragile that even the compacting of the soil by footprints causes permanent damage. This type of clean up impacts recovery rates also. In situ burning is best used in grass-dominated wetlands with a water barrier. Bio-degradation, the use of bacteria to breakdown oil, needs oxygen to be effective, and oxygen is in short supply in wetlands. Therefore, there is a real danger of turning the wetland into a dead zone with the depletion of oxygen. Sometimes, as in this case, as hard as it may be to comprehend, no action may be the best action.

*Gretchen Downs, Country G.C. (OH) – Zone X
GCA Conservation Committee, Vice-Chair – Water, Wetlands, and the Great Lakes*

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<http://www.env.duke.edu/wetland/SWSDH.pdf> (The Deepwater Horizon Disaster and Wetlands. Statement from the Environmental Concerns Committee, The Society of Wetlands Scientists).

News from our GCA Conservation Vice-Chair for Endangered Species:

More Stress for Brown Pelicans and Sea Turtles in the Gulf

Photos of oil drenched brown pelicans filled the news media soon after the Deepwater Horizon well blew up. In the months since the disaster, cleaning and relocation strategies have been implemented to save these birds that were added to the Endangered Species List in 1970, after almost succumbing to DDT poisoning. Having made a successful recovery, they were delisted only last year with the requirement that they be closely monitored for five years. Louisiana, which claims the pelican as its state bird, now has the largest pelican population of any of the Gulf States. On June 23, 62 cleaned birds were released in the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on the lower Texas coast where there is already an established population with similar genetics. Much follow-up research is needed to determine if too many birds means too much competition for the available food and nesting areas. It is assumed that the breeding adults will fly back to Louisiana and the juveniles will remain, but no one knows for sure. (1) Animal autopsies will help scientists better understand the causes of death. Not all of the dead birds were covered in oil. Some may have died from ingesting oil or from the chemicals used in treating



Louisiana's state bird, the brown pelican, has come to symbolize the Gulf Oil Disaster. Photo credit: AP photographer Charlie Riedel.

the oil slicks. The pelican chicks are particularly at risk because of lost parents and the inability to feed themselves. (2) While some biologists recommend destroying oiled birds, others claim that in the last 30 years much progress has been made for rehabilitating oiled birds. Radio tracking shows high rates of survival. (3)

The Gulf of Mexico provides habitat for nesting, reproduction, feeding and migration for five species of endangered sea turtles, Kemp's ridley, green, loggerhead, hawksbill and leather back, all protected under the Endangered Species Act since the 1970's. Egg poaching and entrapment in trawls and gill nets led to the listing of these species. (4) Several weeks ago, news of burning sea turtles raised the fury of



Dying sea turtle photo courtesy of nativesunjax.wordpress.com.

conservationists. In an attempt to keep oil from spreading to the coastal wetlands where even more wildlife lives, BP and the U.S. Coast Guard devised a plan for surrounding and containing the oil with boats and booms before setting it on fire. Unfortunately the Sargassum seaweed mats that collect oil also serve as food and shelter for sea turtles. Trapped turtles have been burned alive. A federal lawsuit filed by several conservation groups was successful in getting a temporary restraining order on the burns until a plan was in place to protect the turtles. (5) The federal government's United Area Command that oversees the response to the spill has now announced that observers will be trained to go along with crews on burn and skimmer boats. (6)

Wildlife groups have voiced their fears about what will happen to the thousands of turtle hatchlings that will head out to open water to find seaweed where they can feed after leaving their nests on the coast of the Florida Panhandle and Alabama. U.S. Fish and Wildlife has coordinated an ambitious relocation plan to collect 70 thousand eggs from 800 nests and ship them to the Kennedy Space Center in Florida where they will hatch and then be released into the Atlantic Ocean. (7)

Much is still not known about the effects on all of the Gulf wildlife. Only captured and collected animals are being studied. Many questions remain. "Unless Unified Area Command begins a widespread, systematic, and transparent data-collection effort now, scientists and the public will never know the full effects for this disaster." (6)

*Ruth Flournoy, River Oaks G.C. (TX) – Zone IX
GCA Conservation Committee – Vice-Chair, Endangered Species and Ecological Restoration*

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7. www.thedestinlog.com July 7, 2010.

Comments from our NAL Endangered Species Vice-Chair:

Don't Forget About the Plants in the Gulf Oil Spill!

While the brown pelican of Louisiana has captured the Gulf oil spill headlines, less has been written about the botanical degradation of the wetland ecosystem that provides fall and winter habitat for over 13 million birds. Some of the marsh grasses in the wetlands have already been coated with oil despite the placement of booms and berms. The oil spill and dispersants threaten to kill the very small free-floating plants, phytoplankton, that form the basis of the aquatic food chain in the Gulf. Various proposals to save the wetlands could have unintended consequences. Fertilizing microbes to consume the oil could be problematic if the nutrients flow out to the Gulf causing algae blooms and destroying phytoplankton. Cutting marsh grasses to regenerate growth could cause the oil to seep deeper into the sediment and remain for years. Burning the grasses could permanently destroy the root system vital for preventing erosion. The Fish and Wildlife Service and several non-profit organizations have suggested that new alternative habitats for migratory birds be established by flooding dry coastal lands. These and other proposals are being considered under President Obama's Gulf Coast Restoration Plan. This plan is intended to restore the Gulf of Mexico and its beaches and wetlands from the Gulf spill and reverse a century of damage caused by levee building, hurricanes, and neglect.



*Kathy Jones – Lake Minnetonka (MN) G.C. – Zone XI
GCA NAL Committee – Vice-Chair, Endangered and Invasive
Species*

Soaked oil boom trying to protect a marsh.
(Photo courtesy of Christian Science Monitor
5/24/10.)

Information from our GCA Conservation Vice-Chair for Toxic Substances:

Effects of Chemical Dispersants in Treating the Oil Spill

Why? How? Do they work? Why not?

As a first response to the massive Deepwater Oil Spill, British Petroleum (BP) sprayed massive amounts of chemical dispersants on the oil as it reached the surface. The dispersants have two main components: a solvent and a surfactant. The solvent allows the surfactant to move through the water and the surfactant has two parts - one attracts water and the other attracts oil. The dispersants separate the oil into smaller droplets that are rapidly diluted and subsequently biodegraded by microorganisms. Spraying the dispersants can dilute the oil quickly so that marine life is less affected and less of the oil reaches the shoreline.

The dispersants are applied from boats or planes. The oil must be thick enough and not too light or the chemicals won't work. BP, in a massive experiment, sprayed the dispersants into the deep water in an



Aerial application of dispersants on surface oil.
Photo courtesy of *The Encyclopedia of Earth*.

attempt to break up the oil before it reached the surface. The chemical dispersant originally used on the spill was Corexit 9521, the same chemical used in the Exxon Valdez spill and considered an “acute and chronic health hazard” by the EPA. When the EPA questioned the use of Corexit 9521, BP used Corexit 9500, a dispersant that does not contain 2-butoxyethanol, the chemical thought to cause the health problems in the Exxon Valdez spill. Before the EPA and the Coast Guard ordered BP to stop using dispersants “except in extreme cases,” the company had sprayed 1.1 million gallons of the chemicals in the waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

The ingredients in Corexit 9500 have until now been a “trade secret,” registered with the EPA but the information not released to the public. Because of pressure from the Administration and Congress, the EPA released the list of chemicals. The biggest concern for environmentalist is whether the chemicals can “bio-accumulate,” meaning they would multiply in the food chain. There is some evidence that it does.

The EPA and the Coast Guard stopped the use of chemical dispersants because of health complaints by workers involved in the cleanup and because of concerns about the long-term effects of the chemicals on wildlife. Very little research has been done on the long-term effects. Nalco Chemical based in Dupage County, Illinois produces the chemicals. The label for Corexit 9500 warns of the dangers of prolonged contact with the skin. It also specifically states it is not to be used on surface water. Nalco claims there is little research on the toxic effects of the chemical on wildlife. It seems clear that the effects of the spill and the chemicals used to clean it will be with us for many years to come. Only time and nature can restore what has been lost.

*Annie Ager, French Broad River G.C. (NC) – Zone VII
GCA Conservation Committee – Vice-Chair, Air Quality/Toxic Substances*

How You Can Help



Wolfram Burner photo for Flickr.

We have passed the three-month anniversary of the BP Deepwater Horizon rig explosion and resulting oil spill and the problems loom larger every day. The magnitude of this spill and the environmental impact will not be known for years. This is a terrible tragedy that leaves us feeling helpless. We would all love to go down to the Gulf and clean birds or rescue sea turtles, but unfortunately, we cannot do that. Much of the work needs to be done by trained professionals. However, there are things you can do!

Inform Yourself

There is a wealth of information and misinformation out there. Newspapers and television coverage has not always been completely accurate. For example, there are 2,731 local boats enrolled in Vessels of Opportunity, the program that hires local boats for the cleanup operation. Depending on the newspaper you read, this program is either a complete fiasco or an overwhelming success. Local boat owners often do not like the red tape involved in filing the forms to sign their boat up. If you just listen to their frustration, you think nothing is being done. Other boat owners have been out working for weeks, and they are very satisfied with the program. It is up to you to read articles from a variety of sources. Here are some excellent resources:

- [Clean Water Network](#) - Links to timely, current alerts and updates on the situation.
- [Wetlands International](#) – A global view of the spill.
- [Association of State Wetland Managers](#)- Covers the spill's effects on wetlands, including recent projections, media coverage.
- [Society of Wetland Scientists](#)- SWS has launched an interactive webpage on oil and wetlands.
- [Restore the Gulf](#) – U.S. Government and PB Joint Command Center.
- [The Oil Drum](#) – A site dedicated to discussions of energy and our future.
- [Visualizing the BP Oil Spill](#) – Interactive map that allows you to move the oil spill to your home town.

Be Pro Active

Contact your elected officials and let your voice be heard. Insist on better regulatory procedures. The Mineral Management Service (whose name has been changed to Bureau of Ocean Energy Management Regulation and Enforcement) did very little to prevent this disaster. In a 2009 document filed with MMS

in response to questions about off shore drilling operations in the Gulf, BP stated it was "unlikely that an accidental surface or subsurface oil spill would occur from the proposed activities." BP acknowledged that any spill would impact beaches, wildlife refuges and wilderness areas. The company argued that "due to the distance to shore (48 miles) and the response capabilities that would be implemented, no significant adverse impacts are expected." The amazing thing is that MMS accepted that response. Changing the name will not solve the problem, if strict enforcement of the regulations is not required.

Let your legislators know your position on energy. Garden Club of America has a position paper on Global Warming and the reduction of green house gases. [On the GCA website home page, click on "Position Papers."] Urge your Senators to pass the strongest bill possible to reduce of nation's emissions of greenhouse gases. It is time that we develop a clean energy plan. The rest of the world is developing these technologies while we remain tied to oil and coal consumption.

The Clean Water Act gives citizens the right to bring suits to stop water pollution and hold polluters accountable. This is certainly a case that fits. In fact, several groups including The Center for Biological Diversity, Gulf Restoration Network, and others have filed suit.

The Gulf Coast has been in trouble long before the oil spill. There have been numerous plans to restore the area, but none have been fully funded. The Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection and Restoration Act (CWPPRA) was passed by Congress in 1990 to fund wetland enhancement. While there has been funding, there has never been enough funding to prevent wetland loss, let alone restore wetlands. New legislation, The Gulf Coast Restoration Act, seeks fund to restore the Gulf with funding provided by BP. The Women of the Storm, a group established after Hurricane Katrina that includes many CGA members, has initiated a petition drive to ensure funding for the restoration. Follow this link for the video and petition: [Sign the Petition to Restore the Gulf.](#)

Concrete Actions

For many, the ideological battle makes it seem as if we are doing nothing. If you want to do something concrete, the following websites direct you in ways you may help. These sites have opportunities from sending wading pools for the cleaning of birds and turtles to donating money, to monitoring bird migrations. Look over the list and you will find ways you can help from your own home.

- [National Audubon Society](#) – The Audubon's Coastal Bird Survey teams are helping to assess the impacts of the Gulf disaster on birds and their habitat. Many other ways to help are listed on their website.
- [LA Gulf Response - Volunteer for oil spill recovery](#) - This site includes a list of materials that are needed in clean up operations and a lot of good oil spill information.
- [Coalition to Restore Coastal Louisiana](#) – If you live along the Gulf Coast, there are many beach cleanup opportunities. If not, you can always donate money to help with the effort.
- [National Wildlife Federation](#) – The NWF is organizing Gulf Coast Surveillance Teams to spot wildlife in distress and report it to NWF. If you cannot go to the Gulf, the site provides a list of supplies you could donate to help the effort.

There are many more organizations that are involved with the cleanup effort; I have just named a few. It does not matter how much or how little you do - just do something. This is an environmental disaster that begs all of us to become involved.

*Gretchen Downs, Country G.C. (OH) – Zone X
GCA Conservation Committee – Vice-Chair, Water, Wetlands and the Great Lakes*

Editorial

**Diane Stoner, Litchfield (CT) G.C. - Zone II
GCA Conservation Committee – Vice-Chair, Climate Change**

The Bill Has Come Due

For the past several months, we have watched with horror the gusher of oil from a two-mile deep well in the Gulf of Mexico. The common reaction of all of us has been a deep desire to “do something” that would make it alright again. We would all feel better if we could just scrub a bird or pick up tar balls from a beach. Action would have a soothing effect on the souls of us all.



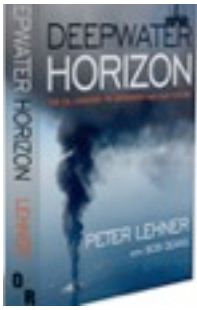
Oil victim photo courtesy of Stuff.co.nz.

Unfortunately, solutions to this mess are not that simple or easy. In the long arc of history this spill or its equivalent was inevitable. The huge demand by the United States and the rest of the world for oil has expanded drilling into areas once considered either sacrosanct or too difficult to reach. The Garden Club of America has over many years opposed drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for exactly the reasons we are seeing in the Gulf spill.

Now we find ourselves at a moment in time that the previously impossible or difficult may be achieved. As with the tragedy of the September 11 terrorist attack in New York, the public mind is momentarily focused on the ultimate cost of our demand for oil. The payment for the past 100 years of “cheap” energy is coming due. The original cost of the gasoline and plastics and everything else made from petroleum products was just a down payment. The second “installment payment” is now due to be paid and its cost will be far more than anyone anticipated. It will be a multi-generational cost with our grandchildren still paying off this debt for many, many years to come. Whether we chose to start these payments now or in the future does not change the fact that they will ultimately come due.

This second installment will be in the form of cleanup costs for the mess left behind in the extraction process. Whether it is the Gulf of Mexico, Nigeria or Fort McMurray in Canada (or non-biodegradable plastics in every dump in the world), the clean-up process will be lengthy and expensive. The costs properly should have been borne by the original user but were not. So governments and citizens and private industry will have to bear the burden of these costs over the years to come.

As citizens we can urge our lawmakers to properly address this issue. It will take political courage to solve these problems in the comprehensive way they demand. In an ideal world, the cost of using fossil fuels should include the costs of cleaning up the extraction process - but that seems unlikely in today's political climate. But the difficulty of a viable solution should not hinder us from advocating energy action and legislation at every level of government. We can insist on realistic solutions no matter what our political leanings and can hold our lawmakers - *and ourselves* - accountable.



Coming Soon!

NRDC Executive Director Peter Lehner, together with Bob Deans, will author the first book on the Gulf oil spill entitled **Deepwater Horizon: The Oil Disaster, Its Aftermath, and Our Future**, available soon in paperback copies and e-books (www.orbooks.com). A review will follow in the next issue of *Conservation Watch*.

Virtual Water - There's an App for That!

Gretchen Downs, Country G.C. (OH) – Zone X
 GCA Conservation Committee – Vice-Chair, Water, Wetlands and the Great La



Have you ever wondered how much water it takes to produce the foods we eat, the clothes we wear, or the appliances we use? Though many of us do not give it a great deal of thought, water consumption for producing daily necessities is coming into focus as a global problem. There is even a name for it: *virtual water*. Virtual water refers to the water used in the production of any goods or services. Hoekstra and Chapagain have defined the virtual-water content of a product (a commodity, good or service) as "the volume of freshwater used to produce the product, measured at the place where the product was actually produced." It cannot be stated as an exact amount because the precise volume can depend on climatic conditions and agricultural practice. Here are some examples:

Total Water Used in Production

Item	Gallons of Water Used	Item	Gallons of Water Used
1 lb of rice	250	1 pound of wheat	130
1 lb of cheddar cheese	650	8 oz of tea	7
1 lb of potatoes	65	1 gal. of milk	2,400
1 lb of sugar	400	1 lb of coffee	2,650
2 egg omelet	130	1 scoop of ice cream	400
1 head of lettuce	15	1 glass of wine	66
1 car	39,090	1 gal of ethanol	1,000
1 gal of gas	42	1 pair of jeans	2,866
1 cotton t-shirt	400	1 board of lumber	5.4
Plastic for 1 bottle of bottled water	1.8	1 quarter pound hamburger	1,500-5,000 estimates vary wildly

Virtual water figures comprise an important part of our ability to understand water usage and to plan for the future. When we talk about water conservation, we usually encourage shorter showers, low-flush toilets, decreasing sprinkling our lawns and planting natives. While these are important things to do, if we are not aware that 70% of water consumption goes into such activities as food production, we are burying our heads when it comes to true water conservation.

The big picture makes it imperative that we keep track of our virtual water use. In an effort to feed the world we have depleted the Aral Sea in Russia, exhausted the mighty Yellow River in China and threatened the Ogallala Aquifer in the United States. Fred Pearce says it best in *When Rivers Run Dry*, “Water is not about to run out. Thanks to nature’s water cycle of evaporation and rainfall, water is the most renewable of all resources. But today, humans are affecting that natural cycle on such a scale that some of the great rivers of the world are running dry. And if harvests fail because of dry river beds, it is little consolation to know that the water is raining somewhere else.”

The Virtual Water Project hopes to show the world how much freshwater is consumed to produce selected products - hoping people will rethink their consumption habits. In fact, there is an app for that! (Click on <http://virtualwater.eu/> to learn more.)

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[Note: iPhone app designs by Timm Kekeritz.]



Here’s the Latest! Federal Legislation - Congress Breaks for August

*Martha Phillips, Litchfield G.C. (CT) - Zone II
GCA NAL Committee - Vice-Chair, Legislative Update*

Climate and energy gridlock blocks Senate action

Before leaving for the month-long August recess, the Senate leadership tried to rally fence-sitters to join supporters to pass even a greatly watered down bill dealing with the Gulf oil spill disaster, renewable energy and limits on power plants emissions. In the end, the votes simply were not there for any configuration that leaders could devise.

Even though a small handful of republican senators seemed willing to break partisan ranks to support a bill, a larger handful of democratic senators balked over coal-state impact of any steps that would reduce emissions from coal-burning power plants or impede future exploitation of oil and gas in the Gulf of Mexico. So the Senate adjourned without even holding test votes on energy conservation measures or measures to raise private company liability in the event of future oil spills.



The outlook for legislative action on the climate issue in the fall, either before or after the November elections, is down to the "hail Mary pass" realm. The cap-and-trade effort appears to be dead. Even if the Senate miraculously agrees to even a few provisions, there is not likely to be enough time to push those items through the House before the end of the 2010 legislative session. Attention is shifting to what the states can do and what the executive branch can do through a federal regulatory approach.

Regulatory track is still moving forward

Using federal Clean Air Act regulations to reduce greenhouse gas regulations is becoming more real every day. Federal regulations to curb emissions are no longer a hypothetical threat or bargaining chip. The regulations have been drafted, reviewed and officially proposed. In January, 2011, they will take effect for facilities that are already regulated for sulfur, nitrogen dioxide and lead emissions. In July, 2011, the EPA regs will be extended to new construction projects that emit at least 100,000 tons of CO₂ equivalent annually. Under a so-called "tailoring" rule, EPA regs would not affect smaller emission sources.

Stopping the EPA regs

A motion by Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) to block EPA from regulating greenhouse gases failed 47-53 in June. But that was not the end of "stop EPA" efforts. Federal environmental regulations are enforced by state environmental agencies. Most states are struggling to be ready to comply by January. But Texas environmental quality officials have notified EPA that they have "neither the authority nor the intention" of enforcing the EPA regulations in their state. EPA's response: if necessary, it would resort to a federal implementation plan (FIP) for states that do not comply by the deadlines.

Meanwhile, Sen. Rockefeller (D-West Virginia) and others are planning to force votes on a two-year time out before EPA can enforce the new regulations. In addition to its Democratic co-sponsors,¹ the bill is backed by most Senate Republicans. As the date grows closer for the EPA regs to take effect, the likelihood increases that such motions could succeed. If such a bill passes, look for a veto. Another strategy may be to add EPA-delay language to the appropriations bill where a veto would be difficult.

Full funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

Efforts by a broad coalition of garden clubs, conservation and environmental groups, sportsmen's groups and outdoor recreation and forest products industries paid off in the House when full funding for the LWCF through 2040 was included in H.R. 3534, a large bill that focused primarily on the Gulf oil spill. Most of the LWCF money comes from fees and royalties on offshore drilling and oil/gas production.

The Senate also included increased funding for the LWCF in its energy-climate-Gulf spill bill, but the bill failed to gain traction (see above). One of the issues in the Senate was how much of the offshore revenues should go to coastal states versus a national land protection approach. Although the prospects are dimming for a climate bill, the Gulf spill provisions may have better prospects. Garden Club members who support full funding for the LWCF should make sure their Senators are aware of this important full funding provision and urge them to support it.

¹ Dorgan and Conrad (ND), Johnson (SD), McCaskill (MO), Webb (VA), and Nelson (NE).

[Aug. 9, 2010]

Limitations of Single Stream Recycling: New GCA Club Learns the “Ins and Outs” of Today’s Recycling

*Daren McCullough, Conservation Committee Chair
Carrie T. Watson Garden Club (PA) - Zone V*

“Single stream” recycling allows consumers to mix all recyclable glass, paper and plastic in one collection bin. Since the onset of single stream recycling, residential recycling rates have increased dramatically, in some areas resulting in a three-fold increase in the collection of recyclable materials. However, even with advances in screening and optical sorting, many plastics are not able to be recycled at the regional recycling facilities and end up in our landfills.

Many single stream recycling plants are only capable of recycling **rigid** plastic containers and lids with symbols ♻️ through ♻️ accepted. However, this excludes a vast quantity of flexible plastics that still ends up in the trash and eventually a landfill.

Local grocery stores have begun collecting plastic shopping bags for recycling. The limitations are many – only clean grocery bags are accepted, no other types of bags are permitted, and most are transported out of town to specialized recycling centers. Many consumers use plastic bags to purchase produce; much of our food (crackers, cereal, bread, cheese, mesh bags of potatoes) is sold in some sort of plastic bag or wrapping; our dry cleaning comes in plastic bags; our paper products are packaged in plastic; some pet foods come in plastic bags; and plastic blister packs are the norm for many consumer goods. In addition, many garden products are sold in plastic packaging that, if washed, can be recycled.



The technology does exist to recycle the huge quantity and variety of flexible plastics we use in our everyday lives. The Conservation Committee of the Carrie T. Watson Garden Club in Erie, PA (new to the GCA family in 2009) learned that a local plastics manufacturer, Engineered Plastics, Inc., is actually recycling all forms of flexible plastics from basic plastic wrap used in the food industry to the shrink wrap used to winterize boats and the IV bags used by hospitals to administer drugs. These items are processed, returned to a ground or pellet form and utilized by the plastics industry to create new products.

The conservation committee has spent the last year educating our membership and the public, collecting the flexible plastics, and delivering them to the local facility for recycling. It is truly astounding to see these plastics accumulate in our garages and appreciate the amount of plastic that can be recycled instead of ending up along the side of the road, caught in the trees, or washed up along our great resource, Lake Erie.

Each of us must be a steward for the environment in the items we purchase and consume, encourage local merchants to carry more environmentally friendly products with minimal packaging, and encourage the expansion of our communities’ recycling efforts to include flexible plastics. We must continue to diligently place our rigid plastics in the single stream recycling containers. However, our flexible plastics can and should be collected, recycled, and converted into new and different products. Research your area to find sites where this can be done. These are ways we can lessen our dependence upon petroleum.

Summer Shorts

Poison Ivy – Summer Scourge

This summer has brought a particularly virulent and unpredictable poison ivy season. Poison ivy, poison sumac, and Western poison oak all produce *urushiol*, a skin-irritating oil that combines with skin proteins, triggering the allergic reaction – an itchy red rash. Only about 15% of the population is insensitive to urushiol, so most of us are susceptible. A study in the journal *Weed Science* in 2007 asserted that poison ivy is getting bigger, spreading faster, and producing more urushiol as a result of increasingly levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. This may be yet another effect of climate change. What can you do about these nasty outbreaks? First, you have about a 15 – 30 minute window in which you can avoid a reaction by washing the urushiol off your skin. Wear socks and long sleeves when gardening. And everything, including your pets who may have urushiol on their fur, needs to be washed after exposure because the sap from the poison ivy plant stays allergenic forever. Many swear by home remedies once you are suffering from the allergic reaction. To learn more about the alternatives to steroid treatment for outbreaks, go to WSJ.com (Wall Street Journal) where you'll find a review of these remedies.

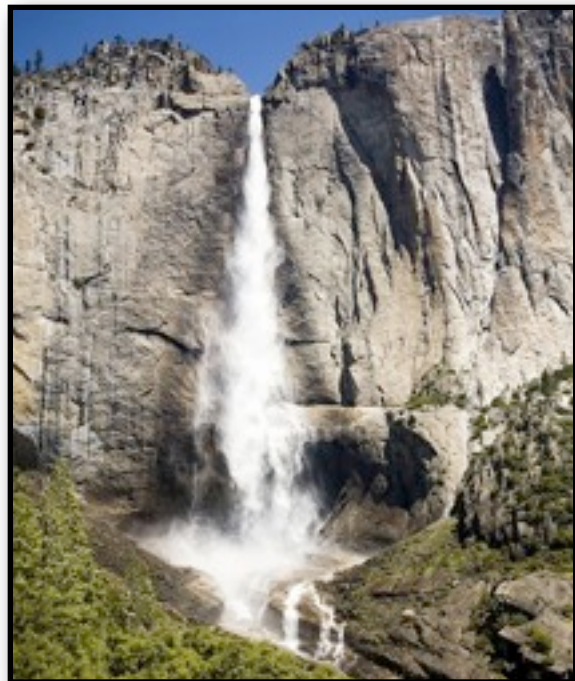
Farm to Table Dining

More and more restaurants all over our country are touting their answer to locavore eating by serving food they grow themselves or are grown in the immediate area. Imagine: Brooklyn-grown mushrooms, fiddlehead ferns, and heirloom tomatoes being served in the heart of New York City! The New Leaf Restaurant in New York near the Cloisters Museum is just such a restaurant. The mission of Bette Midler's New York Restoration Project uses restaurants' profits to green parks, community gardens, and urban streets through the Million Trees project in the city. To find a "farm to table" restaurant in your area, search americanfarmtotable.com.

Yosemite Waterfalls Make a Comeback

More snow in the winter leads to more water in the spring and summer. If your summer vacation travels takes you to National Parks, this year visitors are gushing over the waterfalls in Yosemite National Park in California. It's because of the increased amount of water making a roaring comeback tumbling down the granite cliffs as it hasn't done in years. Often by early July, many of the valley's waterfalls aren't there at all – they've run dry. Heavier than usual snowpack this year in the Sierra Nevada mountains has contributed to the views that many have missed in recent years. And, a cooler than usual spring saved the big runoff for the height of the tourist season. Yosemite Falls is the fifth highest waterfall in the world.

Editor



Flickr photo by Darren L. Carroll.

Zone News

Zone V Field Study Trip to Sustainable Stargazers Winery

In June of this year, conservation committee members of Zone V took a Conservation Field Study trip to scenic Stargazers Winery, overlooking the Brandywine Creek in southeastern Pennsylvania. Stargazers was the first vineyard to produce wine grapes in our area, and it was named for the nearby “Stargazers Stone” placed as a surveyor’s mark by Mason and Dixon in the 1700’s. Alice Weygandt, who owns the winery with her husband John, led the tour of the vineyards. She explained that they have planted German and French varietals appropriate for the microclimate, fertilize the vines naturally (by plowing weeds under for green manure), and irrigate with rainwater collected in cisterns. Other sustainable practices included building the winery into a hillside to provide for temperature control for wine storage, and using a photovoltaic array to provide most of the electricity for the winery and the owner’s home. We were fascinated by the winery’s water conserving toilet lid sink. When the toilet is flushed, rainwater from the cistern comes out of a little spigot on top of the toilet. Water for handwashing drains back in the tank and is used for the next flush. As part of our “research,” we enjoyed tasting five of their wines.



Photo by Barbara Geltosky.

Our next stop was at the Fat Spike Lavender Farm, on the vineyard property. Chris Mason gave us an informative talk on growing lavender. There we learned that *grosso* is the hardiest variety in our area and good for culinary uses, too. After a picnic lunch, Alice took us on a tour of her passive solar envelope home. The unique design of hollow walls with vents and a front solarium wall keeps the house warm in winter, with a little help from a soapstone stove as the only source of heat. The envelope design also kept the house very comfortable on a hot summer day. All who attended enjoyed the outing and returned home with lavender products, local wine, and a renewed respect for the complexities of running a truly “green” vineyard and winery.

*Barbara Geltosky, The Gardeners (PA)
Zone V GCA Conservation/NAL Representative*

Zone X Conservation Camp ***Bald Eagles, Prairie White-Fringed Orchids, and Marshes . . . oh my***

Location, location, location. Picture this: an historic duck hunting club with a marsh conservancy component, single rooms with accessories like dog bowls and stuffed flying wild turkeys, marshes being restored with native plants, Sandusky Bay and the adjacent Lake Erie, and two beautiful spring days in early May. All this exists in the geographical center of the eleven Zone X Clubs of Indiana, Michigan and Ohio.



Photo by Sue Klein.

This area, once known as the impenetrable Great Black Swamp, is a hot bed of conservation activity by the likes of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Ducks Unlimited, Trust for Public Land, the Black Swamp Conservancy, University of Toledo, Ohio State University and our host - the Winous Point Marsh Conservancy and Winous Point Shooting Club. What's more, these folks don't work in isolation; they are professional colleagues as well as friends and share information.

Our nineteen GCA Conservation "campers" heard representatives from all these organizations, either as field guides, dinner guests and informal speakers, or with formal power point presentations in the classroom of the Marsh Conservancy. Meeting, hearing, and walking with these dedicated, hands-on people was inspirational. We determined that good stuff is happening in the field.

The extra attraction that put this outdoor experience over the top was that the spring bird migration was at its peak. This Sandusky area is the resting point for many birds after they fly over Lake Erie on their way south. Some say it's the best location for bird watching in the country. The Conservancy helped us connect with two bird watchers who led us on an early morning walk.

Take home value? No one will ever forget the bald eagles as we looked out our windows before breakfast or the many eagles flying overhead almost constantly in the marsh. On our bird walk, a young Ohio State University researcher demonstrated that by using birdcalls from her Ipod she could locate bird species. Another serendipitous moment was during our visit to the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. Two young biologists were guiding us and pointed out the emerging leaves of the prairie white-fringed orchid that reappeared last summer after their successful effort to restore a wet prairie environment - a Partners for Plants project in the making. Our wake-up call came from a University of Toledo professor. During her "State of the Lake" talk she showed us evidence that Lake Erie is again in serious trouble with new dead zones, new invasive species, and other problems.

Our enthusiastic campers all felt that the sharing at a round table discussion on individual club advocacy efforts was invaluable and really gave us a chance to connect. This was a truly inspirational time spent with amazing GCA women. It can be safely said that the two days of Conservation Camp in this Sandusky area were magical.

*Sue Klein, Akron (OH) G.C.
GCA Zone X Conservation/NAL Representative 2008 – 2010*

Harvesting the Land & Sea – Zone III Meeting

The Garden Club of East Hampton (NY) hosted the 2010 Zone II Meeting on June 16 and 17, "Harvesting the Land & Sea," defining the community of farmers and fishermen on the eastern end of Long Island. In her opening message, Marcia Gowen, the garden club's President, stressed the club's commitment to "protecting, preserving and restoring the fragile ecosystems that surround us and the flora and fauna that inhabit them."

Nancy Kelley, Executive Director of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) of Long Island, was conservation speaker for the opening meeting. The TNC agenda includes land protection and habitat restoration of forests, wetlands, bays and harbors. Nancy highlighted current TNC projects with a visual history of East End natural resources beginning with Long Island's first inhabitants, the Montauk Indians, to the early English farmers; from the early whaling, fishing and farming industries to the evolution of the organic farm and local markets. It was a comprehensive introduction to the East End's harvesting of the land and the sea and a statement of commitment to the preservation of these natural resources.

Another speaker was Bob DeLuca, President of the Group for the East End, an environmental advocacy group dedicated to protecting the natural and rural resources of Long Island's East End. His discussion explored the specific process of running an advocacy campaign in the context of the overarching social conditions that shape many final outcomes. Bob gave us a true insider's view into the complex world of the professional advocate and instructions about how to actually get things done.

The Garden Club of East Hampton and The Nature Conservancy were jointly awarded the GCA's Marion Thompson Fuller Brown Conservation Award for their outstanding exhibit at the GCA Flower Show - *Harvesting The Land And Sea*. The exhibit examined current efforts to restore shellfish reproduction in two key Long island seascapes, the Great South Bay and the Peconic Bays Estuary.

The zone meeting provided an introduction to East Hampton and Long Island – its unique natural resources, the land and the sea, beautiful landscapes and gardens, and the Garden Club of East Hampton's participation in the community's concentrated efforts to preserve it.

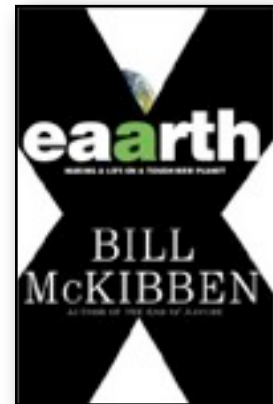
*Linda James - G.C. of East Hampton (NY)
GCA Zone III Conservation/NAL Representative*

Media Reviews

Eaarth: Making Life on a Tough New Planet by Bill McKibben

Writing during the Industrial Revolution, Thoreau recognized early on that our feeling of power over nature was illusory, that “we do not ride on the railroad; it rides upon us.” With equal prescience, in 1989, Bill McKibben wrote about the risks of global warming well before anyone recognized it as a serious threat. We did not heed his caution; now we’re left with a planet so vastly altered from the one we’ve inhabited for the past 10,000 years that he believes it needs a new name, hence the title of his compelling new book, *Eaarth: Making Life on a Tough New Planet*. In this diminished planet, drought in the American Southwest is now permanent; the world’s highest ski run has vanished into rock and mud; Atlantic hurricanes have increased 75%; ocean acidity means 80% of Pacific oyster larvae die; and even large-diameter trees (like the redwoods in the GCA grove) have declined dramatically in density. The statistics, he maintains, “should come as body blows, as mortar barrages, as sickening thuds.” They do. The grim consequences that we thought we had at least several decades to address are coming faster than predicted, threatening ecosystems that have evolved over millennia.

Our earthly home is being foreclosed on in a real estate crisis that makes our current subprime financial debacle look like an exercise in prudent planning. McKibben compares us to someone who smoked for 40 years and had a stroke—he quit smoking, but so did the left side of his body. And we’re nowhere near quitting. Even if we stop producing so much CO₂, the concentration will likely increase as a result of feedback loops from the melting of sea ice, the release of methane from thawing tundra and undersea clathrates (crystalline water that traps methane gas), the drying of peat, and the deforestation of the Amazon. Yet if you have to hear the grim diagnosis that “the earth that we knew—the only earth that we ever knew—is gone,” McKibben is just the kind of doctor to deliver the news.



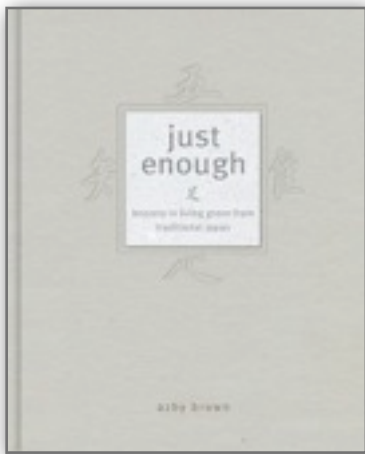
Eaarth manages to find hopeful, realistic solutions without promising that the future will always be better and easier. He emphasizes small, self-reliant communities and small businesses because they’re safer and more adaptable. Whether small-scale agriculture producing local food or microgrids producing local energy, the change sounds manageable. While we might have to go back to an earlier way of life, at least we don’t have to give up technology. If Thoreau were alive today, would he be blogging from an iPad? That’s a hard image to conjure; yet McKibben embraces the Internet, especially through his Step It Up and 350.org websites, to create what CNN called “the most widespread day of political action in the planet’s history.” Whereas Thoreau loved solitude, McKibben seems to love community, affirming the power of the Internet as a low-carbon way to create community cheaply. It is this sense of compassion that makes McKibben such an effective writer and *Eaarth* such a dire yet uplifting work.

*Suzanne Booker-Canfield, Ph.D., Garden Guild of Winnetka (IL) – Zone XI
GCA NAL Committee – Vice-Chair, Climate Change*

Just Enough - Lessons in Living Green From Traditional Japan

by Azby Brown

In this new book, Azby Brown gives us a fascinating insight into the Edo period of Japan, while applying the “lessons learned” to today’s consumer-driven society. The title of the book, *Just Enough*, comes from an inscription on a stone basin from the Edo period, an era during the seventeenth and eighteenth



centuries when Japan was essentially closed to foreigners. The inscription, “I Know What Just Enough Is,” is a philosophy that shaped everyday life in pre-industrial Japan. Fearing imminent collapse of their society, the Japanese began to apply a sustainable system of natural checks and balances in areas such as agriculture, forestry, home design and building. They also recycled water, paper, clothing, waste products and building materials, making use of just about everything. Brown illustrates these concepts with numerous intriguing pen and ink sketches, showing how the traditional Japanese lived what we would call a “green” lifestyle.

The author asks the reader to consider which lessons of sustainability from Japan can be applied to our modern consumer oriented society. He clearly believes that there are contemporary parallels to the 300-year-old concepts of “renew, reuse and recycle” that could make our world sustainable for many generations to come. Read this book and find out what “just enough” is!

Barbara Geltosky, *The Gardeners (PA)*
GCA Zone V Conservation/NAL Representative

[Note: Azby Brown is the reviewer’s cousin. He grew up in New Orleans and now lives in Japan with his family.]

Washington D.C.’s Environmental Film Festival

This past March a record audience of over 26,000 people attended the 18th Environmental Film Festival in Washington, D.C. The Festival offers its diverse audiences fresh perspectives on environmental concerns, broadening their understanding of the issues. The films teach the viewers that the environment is not a special interest, but a fundamental matter for each of us.

Screenings were held at many locations including museums, libraries, embassies, universities, theaters as well as international and local grassroots organization headquarters. This year’s program included 155 documentaries, animated, feature, experimental, archival and children’s films with 66 being world premieres from 31 different countries. The film screenings take place over 13 days and more than eighty 80 per cent were free. Many distinguished advocates spoke and led discussions during this year’s Festival.

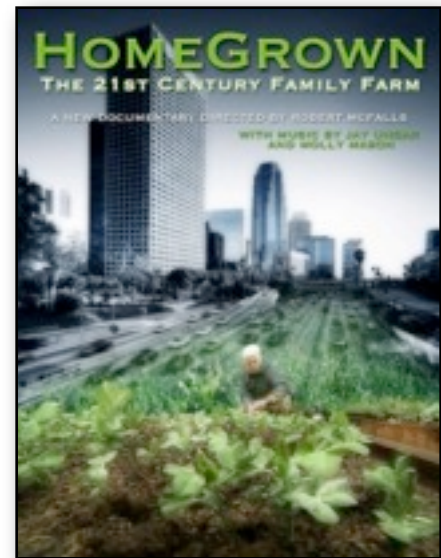
The 2010 Festival’s main theme was Food and Agriculture. Among the most popular films were *Fresh* (www.freshthemovie.com), *Dirt! The Movie* (www.dirtthemovie.org), and *HomeGrown* (www.homegrown-film.com). At the U.S. National Arboretum, Pearl Fryar spoke about his unique topiary garden recently designated as a Preservation Project of The Garden Conservancy at the screening of *A Man Named Pearl* (www.amannamedpearl.com). View the Environmental Film Festival’s website as a resource for films. In January 2011, the website will include the full program for the 19th Environmental Film Festival. Take a look at www.dcenvironmentalfilmfestival.org and join us in Washington next March 15 – 27.



Flo Stone, Georgetown G.C. (Washington, D.C.) – Zone VI
Environmental Film Festival President and Founder

HomeGrown (one of the films at the festival) follows a family who run a small organic farm in the heart of urban Pasadena, California. While "living off the grid", they harvest over 6,000 pounds of produce on less than a quarter of an acre, make their own bio diesel, power their computers with the help of solar panels, and maintain a website that gets 4,000 hits a day. The film is an intimate human portrait of what it's like to live like "Little House on the Prairie" in the 21st Century. This film will be available on DVD soon.

[*Fresh* can be ordered from the website mentioned above. Both *Dirt! The Movie* and *A Man Named Pearl* can be ordered on Netflix.]



Contacts

Susie Wilmerding, Chairman
Conservation Committee
Garden Club of Philadelphia (PA) - Zone V
260 Booth Lane
Haverford, PA 19041-1717
(610) 642-5537
(610) 642-2947 (fax)
swilmerding@yahoo.com

Nancy McKlveen, Chairman
National Affairs and Legislation Committee
Committee
Des Moines Founders Garden Club (IA) - Zone XI
5803 North Waterbury Road
Des Moines, IA 50312-1339
(515) 279-2116
nancymck@earthlink.net

Elva Busch, Editor
Santa Fe Garden Club (NM) - Zone XII
20 Windridge Circle
Santa Fe, NM 87506
(505) 982-4435
(505) 982-4437 (fax)
elvabusch@comcast.net

Anne O'Brien, Assistant Editor
Columbine Garden Club (AZ) - Zone XII
6018 East Cholla Lane
Paradise Valley, AZ 85253
(480) 874-3323
(480) 970-8328 (fax)
annie39ob@cox.net

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Elva Busch, Editor



Index

	Pages:
The Gulf Oil Spill	
Introduction	1
Energy - BP Disaster Brings to Light the Bigger Picture	2
Oceans - Unimaginable Disaster For Our Oceans	3
Oceans and Oil - National Ocean Policy	4
Water and Wetlands - Effects of the Oil Spill on Wetlands	5
Endangered Species (Animals) - More Stress for Brown Pelicans and Sea Turtles in the Gulf	6
Endangered Species (Plants) - Don't Forget About the Plants in the Gulf Oil Spill!	8
Toxic Substances - Effects of Chemical Dispersants in Treating the Oil Spill	8
How You Can Help	10
Editorial - The Bill Has Come Due	12
Other Features:	
Virtual Water	13
Federal Legislation - Congress Breaks for August	14
Limitations of Single Stream Recycling	16
Summer Shorts	17
Zone News	
Zone V - Field Study Trip to Sustainable Stargazers Winery	18
Zone X - Conservation Camp	19
Zone III - Harvesting the Land & Sea	20
Media Reviews	21
Contacts	23