



eleventh edition
INDEX OF LEADING
ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATORS
2006

The Nature and Sources of Ecological Progress in the U.S.
and the World

by Steven F. Hayward



THIS YEAR'S EDITION contains a special section examining what was perhaps the most prominent environmental story of 2005 – China. The news has lent new momentum to the gloomy view of China's environmental future amidst its rush for economic growth. However, the gloom over China's environment may be overstated. China is an ideal test case for the controversial idea of the "Environmental Kuznets Curve," according to which economic growth precedes environmental improvement.

Although current environmental trends in China are serious and deteriorating in many areas, some unappreciated signs of improvement are appearing. Mass environmental protests open a window into several tantalizing issues of environmental politics and policy. As the Chinese government is surely learning on all fronts, it is impossible to keep information and decisions centrally controlled. If China responds to its environmental challenges with administrative decentralization and greater use of market mechanisms and property rights, who knows where it might lead?

THE "DEATH OF ENVIRONMENTALISM"

Closer to home, here in the United States, leaders of the environmental movement have been involved in an intramural debate over the "death of environmentalism." While continued success in blocking the opening of the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge shows the latent potency of environmentalism as a political force, at the same time the environmental movement increasingly resembles the hapless incipient corpse in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* who protests, "I'm not dead yet!"

No movement that commands hundreds of dollars in financial resources and millions of dues-paying members can be said to be fully deceased. This year's edition explores the unfortunate events surrounding the collapse of the modern environmental movement and identifies ways to renew and restore its credibility.

POSITIVE TRENDS

- The number of exceedences of the 8-hour ozone standard in Los Angeles over the last 30 years has dropped significantly, from 201 in 1975 to 75 in 2005. In fact, there are large scale areas of the LA air basin where there have been no exceedences of the ozone standard for the last several years, meaning millions of residents have no exposure to high levels of ozone.
- In the Washington, D.C. area, not a single Code Red day for poor air quality was declared over the summer of 2005, despite the hot temperatures. Ozone levels are falling in 19 Eastern states where smog was a recurring problem in the summer.
- Automobile tailpipe emissions from carbon monoxide has been reduced by 96 percent since the 1950s. These emissions rates per mile are not an average for the whole auto fleet, but apply to all makes and models uniformly. In other words, the frequently-heard claim that large SUVs “pollute more” is a myth.
- In 2005, the Center for Disease Control reports declining amounts of chemicals in human blood and urine almost across the board.
- The Catalogue of Life Program, begun in 2001, has passed the half-million mark in the number of species listed in its database.
- Grizzly bears may be coming off the endangered species list. The largest population in the continental U.S. outside of Alaska lives in and near Yellowstone National Park, where the grizzly population has grown from about 200 in the early 1980s to about 600 today.
- The EPA found significant declines in high acidity in every region except New England, where there was no change from 1990 levels.
- The biggest back-from-extinction story of the year was the reappearance of the ivory-billed woodpecker, thought to have gone extinct in the 1940s. Several independent observer teams confirmed the return of the bird to the Big Woods region of Arkansas.



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