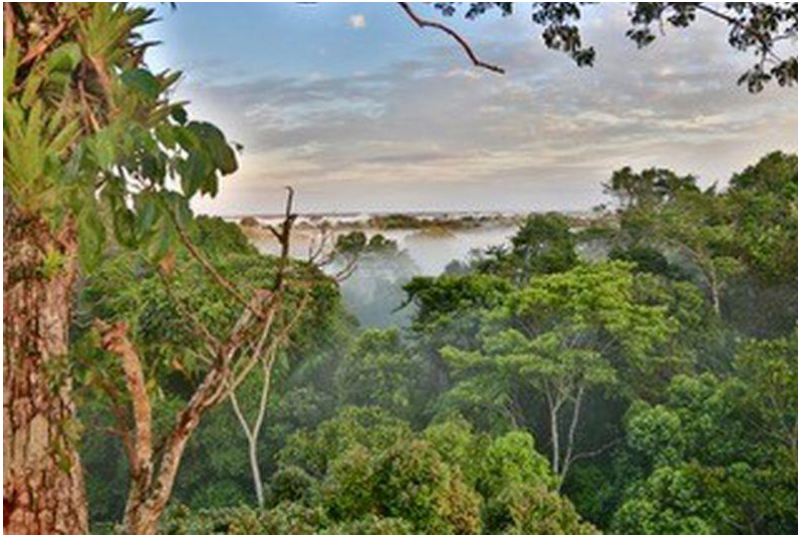


On Earth Day, we should commit to save oceans and forests

20 April 2020



Rain forest canopies house an estimated 50% of our terrestrial biodiversity as well as serving as a source of timber, medicine, fabrics, food, productivity, and water filtration. (ABOVE) Tree canopy in the Amazon.(Meg Lowman)

As people hunker down in their homes, with city centers deserted and highways empty, Mother Nature is gearing up for her biggest celebration of the year. In North America, we call it spring.

The signs are everywhere – eagles and osprey noisily feeding their babies in Florida, whip-poor-wills tuning up their nocturnal symphonies in North Carolina, bluebirds singing for sex in Pennsylvania, and northern parula warblers announcing sunrise in Vermont. If leaves made noise, gazillions of screaming voices would overpower the countryside as trees burst their buds.

Emerging from this COVID-19 crisis, most people will focus on recovery, and rightfully so. But a few of us tirelessly keep an eye on the long-now vision, working for the quality of life of our grandchildren.

Three years ago, in honor of International Women’s Day, the two of us presented a conversation called “Her Deepness and Her Highness” at the iconic Tampa Theatre. (Thanks to biodiversity expert EO Wilson of Harvard University, who gave us our nicknames – Her Deepness (Ms. Earle); Her Highness (Ms. Lowman).

We spoke to girls, families and students, telling our stories about one woman diving to the ocean depths and another climbing into the tallest tropical trees, both with missions to advance conservation of planet Earth. This year, our sisterhood celebrates Earth Day with an emboldened conversation to bring attention to both oceans and rain forests.

Over the past three years, millions of acres of rain forest have been burned or clear cut with seemingly nonchalant abandon. Millions of tons of sharks, tunas, and other ocean wildlife have been taken out of the ocean, only to be replaced by millions of tons of plastic and carbon dioxide.

Oceans are essential for livelihoods, food, and climate control. Rain forest canopies house an estimated 50% of our terrestrial biodiversity as well as serving as a source of timber, medicine, fabrics, food, productivity, and water filtration.



Figure “Her Highness” Meg Lowman pioneered the science of canopy biology and explores forests around the world with a focus on biodiversity, tropical rain forest conservation, and mentoring girls in science. She can be contacted at www.mission-green.org(Courtesy of Meg Lowman)

We both watch with grief, knowing that these marine and terrestrial ecosystems are essential to the survival of humans as well as all life on Earth. The current pandemic is a wake-up call. The laws of nature must be respected. Healthy humans need a healthy planet.

Ten years ago, Her Deepness launched Mission Blue to inspire action to explore and protect the ocean which now features more than a hundred “Hope Spots,” special places critical to ocean health. They are supported by local champions and communities in collaboration with more than 200 partner organizations from the National Geographic Society, Rolex, universities, multinational companies and non-profits.

Emulating this successful Mission Blue program, Her Highness is launching Mission Green to create similar “Hope Spots” throughout global forests, sharing Wilson’s goal to conserve Earth’s biodiversity.

In his recent book, “Half Earth,” Wilson listed 17 forests critical to conserve, which creates a blueprint for Mission Green. By building 10 canopy walkways in 10 of the world’s highest-diversity rain forests, Mission Green plans to provide permanent refugia for an extraordinary number of species that inhabit the tropical treetops.

Environmental stewardship will be assured by training local people to obtain a sustainable income through canopy ecotourism, not logging. Mission Green walkways have been piloted in Malaysia and Amazonian Peru. At a recent lunch date, Wilson advised Mission Green, “This is one of the best ideas I’ve ever heard to conserve biodiversity!”

We invite you to celebrate a vision to keep our oceans and rain forests healthy for your grandchildren. On this Earth Day, join us to give thanks for another North American spring, but also to invest in our planet’s future by saving oceans and tropical forests.

Source: <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/opinion/commentary/fl-op-com-lowman-earle-oceans-forests-amazon-earth-day-20200420-wbbsmovhxrexlogtjcdfi26miq-story.html>