

SAVE EVERYTHING

I recently watched a TV special on Ted Turner. He is best known for winning the American's Cup yacht race in his early years and as the founder of the first all-news TV channel, CNN. But he is best known by most people today as being very very wealthy and as being a avid conservationist and environmentalist.

In his early years he became friends with Jacque Cousteau, the oceanographer, and they spent a lot of time together. At one point, Cousteau told Turner he could reduce the goal of conservation to two words, "SAVE EVERYTHING."

Turner made that his motto. He even has bumper stickers on his vehicles that say Save Everything.

Turner has used his vast fortune to purchase several large tracts of land in the west, (He is the largest private landowner in the US.) He has converted most of the areas from cattle grazing to raising bison in a way that brings back the quality of the grass and soil as well as preserves the native bison. And he has done it consistent with the nature philosophy of Save Everything.

The idea behind the save everything slogan was not original to Cousteau. Aldo Leopold, the naturalist, philosopher, and author of many articles and books, expressed the idea in different ways in the 1920's to 1940's. Here are some quotes:

"...the basic premise of ecological conservation: the land should retain as much of its original membership as is compatible with human land-use. The land must of course be modified, but it should be modified as gently and as little as possible."

"The practice of conservation must spring from a conviction of what is ethically and esthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing is right only when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the community, and the community includes the soil, waters, fauna and flora, as well as people...."

I like to think of it this way. We, even in the 21st century, are not smart enough to know in advance all of the consequences of humans making changes to the mixture of flora and fauna in a given native habitat. All of the different plant and animal species that lived here with each other before modern man arrived had evolved to be here with each other, and for the most part had done so for hundreds or thousands of years.

When European man's arrival made drastic changes to this habitat in a very short period of time, we interrupted all of the various interactions between and

among all of the insects, birds, mammals, trees, grass and forbs to the detriment of many and the benefit to a few species.

We can't go back to the habitat of 1800 and before. But we can try very hard to not make any more changes to the native habitat than necessary, and we can certainly try to protect all of the native species here now. And we can do that by thinking of Turner's bumper sticker—Save Everything.

I wrote recently about how for the sake of the planet, we need to try to have as small a footprint as possible. For the sake of our native habitat, we need to have as small a footprint on it as possible.

Last week I wrote about the decline of the horny toad and quail being largely ascribed by experts to loss of native habitat. Conversion of native grasslands, savannas or woodlands to farmland by destroying all of the native vegetation and plowing represents perhaps the most drastic change we humans can make in the native landscape. It is the opposite to save everything—it saves nothing.

Now, before you think about blaming the farmer, it is necessary to realize we are all responsible. Our growing numbers and our consumption habits create the demand for more food and fiber, and the farmer is just the agent complying with the demand.

If we had listened to Paul Ehrlich, author of the "Population Bomb," back in the 60's, there would be fewer of us to need more food and fewer new farms. But we didn't listen.

It doesn't help us to point fingers at the past, other than to hopefully not make the same mistakes over again. We simply have to do the best we can to consume less food, fiber, energy, and water, and be mindful of protecting all of our native cohabitants, plant and animal.

In other words, try to SAVE EVERYTHING.

Until next time...

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