

Environmental Rangers

Biodiversity Defense

Avalon

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“If a stranger batters down your door with an ax, threatens your family and yourself with deadly weapons, and proceeds to loot your home of whatever he wants, he is committing what is universally recognized—by law and morality—as a crime. In such a situation the householder has both the right and the obligation to defend himself, his family, and his property by whatever means are necessary. This right and this obligation is universally recognized, justified and even praised by all civilized human communities. Self defense against attack is one of the basic laws not only of human society but of life itself. The American wilderness, what little remains, is now undergoing exactly such an assault”—Edward Abbey

World War III is happening right now. It is humanity’s war against the planet and the casualties are ever increasing. Fewer and fewer species each year have stable, genetically viable populations, and new threats to population health spring up in today’s techno-industrial world as fast as MTV videos. Whole ecosystems seem to be balanced on the edge of what Christopher Manes has called “ecological meltdown.”

As the core continues to heat almost unchecked, a growing number of activists are becoming disillusioned with the ‘too little, too late’ reform efforts of mainstream environmental groups. In response, the radical environmental movement, popularized by Earth First! and the Animal Liberation Front, grows and expands each year. The Environmental Rangers are the latest embodiment of no-compromise activism.

The Environmental Rangers (E Rangers) are an avant-garde group that will redefine the parameters of the radical movement. The E Rangers, a paramilitary organization founded by Ric Valois, are extensively trained, fit, and possess strict standing orders and state-of-the-art firearms.

I met with Ric at an activist strategy conference for the Cove-Mallard campaign. I was at first intimidated by the uniform, his perfect posture and several high-caliber stories I’d heard last summer which made the E rangers a favorite topic of conversation. Ric turned out to be a friendly, almost endearing individual. He is an articulate spokesperson for a doctrine of activism born out of the disparity of ecological meltdown. The E Rangers go a step beyond the nonviolence codes held almost religiously by all other groups engaged in direct action or civil disobedience: E Rangers will not be coerced by the heavy-handed methods of armed Forest Service officers.

The paramilitary operations of Forest Service law enforcement have made it possible for timber barons to raze systematically old growth forests in spite of nonviolent activists’ diligence and creative protests. The paramilitary operations of the E Rangers, on the other hand, are intended to balance the playing field in this critical game of planetary survival. In addition, E Rangers have provided physical support for campaigns seeking to protect biodiversity. I have heard eyewitness testimony that a single E Ranger is more helpful around base camp than a half-dozen tie-dyed hipsters.

The formation of the E Rangers comes at a time of increasing death threats against environmental activists from coast to coast. Activists have had their wells salted, their barns and houses burned and their families harassed. I don’t have to tell you about Judi Bari and the car bomb that has maimed her for life. Diné activist Leroy Jackson is dead under suspicious circumstances, probably murdered. Ric Valois hopes that the presence of his group will act as a deterrent to the violence that has been inflicted upon activists.

Mainstream groups, such as Audubon and the Sierra Club, admit that the no-compromise stance of Earth First! makes their groups appear more moderate and helps them gain more politi-

cal clout. It has long been the hope of many Earth First!ers that other groups will push the fringes of the environmental debate further, so that Earth First! will look moderate by comparison. After all, hanging banners, performing guerrilla theater and incapacitating big, yellow machines is hardly an extreme reaction to worldwide ecological melt-down. In contrast, the mere presence of armed Environmental Rangers calls attention to both the seriousness of the environmental crisis and the seriousness of their resolve to halt the today's blatant attack on biodiversity.

"[The Environmental Rangers] practice and espouse non-violence but with one minor variation. We will go fully armed on all of our missions. Weapons will be carried as a symbol of our commitment and willingness to put our lives on the line and of course will be used if necessary. Observation of nature teaches that violence (change) is omnipresent but never malicious. So while it is true that any fool can pull a trigger, many find the courage within themselves to refrain from doing so until all else fails.

"The Environmental Rangers are an equal opportunity organization. Anyone with the heart and the soul for it is welcome. You must be self supporting and in good mental, physical and spiritual condition and capable of sustained hardship and risk in the outdoors. A sense of humor will come in real handy too."

Onan On Guns and Stuff...

—by Onan the (Reconstructed) Barbarian

War, Guns blazing, corpses lying in blasted streets surrounded by pools of congealing blood, the scream of heavy artillery raining constant, faceless death from afar, the innocents hiding in burned out buildings waiting for a break in the action to go scrounge food or water before it starts all over again. This is the story most of us know of domestic wars raging in Chechnya, the former Yugoslavia, and Somalia.

It is with these various examples of world conflict that I consider the intention of some regional "eco-warriors," the E-Rangers (dun-da-da-DUM!), to wage their own war against the forces of ecological destruction. Take on the Fredgies, put the logging, mining, drilling and road building companies on notice, show that the land, the animals, Gaia herself, is worth the shedding of blood and the taking of life. The idea, I suppose, is to take the notion of "No Compromise in the Defense of Mother Earth" to its logical extreme, although I question the logic in reaching that extreme.

One dictionary definition of compromise is "a settlement in which both sides make concessions," not a terrible premise from which to pursue an objective, indeed, it is the very nearly the premise that underlies our beloved consensus circle. But the politics of compromise—the current political paradigm—is the referent for the "No Compromise" slogan, not Webster's. In the politics of compromise, those with power make very small concessions and those without power give up everything but a hollow shell of their principles. In this arena, the reality of compromising means we lose. So compromise has become a dirty word, a slur when used in reference to one's character, and rightly so. In contrast, "No Compromise" has taken on the connotations of strength, but unfortunately, for some, its connotations are rife with sexist imagery of what is strength, and what is compromise. "No compromise," for some, is the new code phrase for "let's get drunk and kick some ass!" But no matter how these types of attitudes are couched, they are still bullshit.

“No Compromise” is not about tactics, it’s about heart and steadfastness, and how wilderness can and will be saved.

With a No Compromise approach, we’re trying to affect change by standing up for what is right, by refusing to accept powerlessness and its concomitant loss of biological diversity. The big question is how do we transcend our inherent powerlessness and gain the ability to save ecosystems? One way is to change the arena we have to work in (“Subvert the Dominant Paradigm”) and foster a worldview that holds wilderness as fundamentally important. In lieu of this, the goal is to affect the current political system in order to achieve our objectives. If this is not, or does not seem possible, at least make a personal stand for one’s beliefs, and for the wildness at stake. The benefits and rewards of making such a stance are often surprising and greater than anticipated (although usually not without some associated judicial ramifications) because even the most rabid of foes can appreciate the courage needed to stand in opposition armed only with the righteousness of one’s ethics, and strength of conviction.

This courage, the act of taking a non-violent stance, is power. And this non-violence is the heart and soul of EF! and one of the main reasons for its success. Without it, we would be nothing more than a bunch of armed goons destined for failure. Why? Because we can’t compete in their game of violence, intimidation and ‘might is right’ for very long, for they, the government/corporate alliance of eco-fuckers, have 99.99999% of the chips, and all the aces. More importantly, we cannot win because the taking up of arms negates the intellectual, moral and spiritual power that we possess. Non-violence confers far more power than we can ever achieve using force. And finally, we can have all the facts in the world on our side, but the truth of ecosystem collapse and environmental calamity are quite hard to convey as one’s skull is exploding from the force of lead entering at high speed.

I am no hippie geek who thinks we just have to think pretty thoughts and eat tofu and then the earth will be saved; just the opposite, I think everything is fucked and we are probably doomed. It comes down to this: if we take up arms we have no chance, but if we avoid ego-maniacal, macho, martyr gun trips there is still some chance that maybe everything isn’t doomed. Maybe. As for those testosterone poisoned E-Ranger boys with the lead shootin’ pecker poles, I suggest they consider the option of self-immolation, now that is suicide with Style!

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<www.environmentandsociety.org/sites/default/files/key_docs/wild_rockies-ef_vol8-no1.pdf>
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