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Earth Day 1970-1995: An Information Perspective

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"Earth Day is a commitment to make life better, not just bigger and faster; to provide real rather than rhetorical solutions. It is a day to re-examine the ethic of individual progress at mankind's expense. It is a day to challenge the corporate and government leaders who promise change, but who shortchange the necessary programs. It is a day for looking beyond tomorrow. April 22 seeks a future worth living. April 22 seeks a future."

Environmental Teach-In Advertisement

New York Times

January 18, 1970 ([1](#))

The celebratory event known as "Earth Day," created in 1969 and 1970, found its initial inspiration in the 1950s and 1960s, decades marked by tremendous social and cultural awareness, times of activism and change. One cultural concept around which millions of people began to rally was the environment.

The legacy of environmental thought in the decades prior to the first Earth Day gave birth to the event in 1970. A body of environmental literature emerged in the United States which traced its roots to the colonial and post-Revolutionary War periods. The writings of Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and George Perkins in the latter half of the 19th and in the 20th century stimulated and created a philosophy and ethic for the environment and concerns for nature and the wilderness.

The "birth" of the contemporary environmental movement began with the 1949 publication of Aldo Leopold's *SAND COUNTRY ALMANAC*, considered by many to be one of the most important books on conservation. This environmental classic was preceded by the evolution of a contemporary wilderness ethic that began in 1935 with the publication of the first issue of the magazine, *The Living Wilderness* by the Wilderness Society. The Society's first director, Howard Zahniser, drafted the first version of a wilderness bill in 1955. The bill was introduced in the U.S. Senate by Hubert Humphrey (D-Minnesota) in 1956 and signed into law as the Wilderness Act by President Lyndon Johnson in 1964.

The 1960s saw the publication of several other works that would forever change the way Americans and the world looked at our environment. Following is some environmental literature (popular and technical) of the post-World War II period which helped sway public opinion and concerns about the environment:

Journal of the Air Pollution Control Association (APCA) 1958. Environment. Committee for Environmental Information, 1958. SILENT SPRING. Rachel Carson, 1962. THE QUIET CRISIS. Stewart Udall, 1963.

"Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis." *Science*. Lynn White, Jr., March 1967. *Environmental Science and Technology*. (First issue.) American Chemical Society, 1967. "Tragedy of the Commons." *Science*. Garrett

Hardin, December 1968. *Pollution Engineering*. (First issue.) Technical Publications, 1969. *Environmental Pollution*. Elsevier, 1970.

The First Earth Day

Several events stimulated a greater concern for the environment in the 1960s, among them the proclamation that the Great Lakes were dead, - choked by what seemed to be an endless infusion of pollutants; the grounding of the "Torrey Canyon" off the coast of England, the first catastrophic oil spill from a supertanker; the publication of Rachel Carson's *SILENT SPRING*, a best-selling book which stimulated widespread concern over the misuse of pesticides and their devastating impacts to the environment.

By the late 1960s, Gaylord Nelson (D-Wisconsin) had become quite frustrated with a lack of environmental interest among his colleagues in the U.S. Senate. Hoping to stimulate popular interest for the environment, Nelson looked to America's non-violent campus activism for inspiration and proposed a series of environmental learning experiences, "teach-ins" for campuses across the nation.

Harvard law student Denis Hayes helped to organize one of these "teach-ins" at Cambridge, after going to Washington, D.C. to interview Senator Nelson, who made one of his most persuasive environmental arguments. Nelson convinced the young, idealistic student to coordinate the nationwide activities that would become the first Earth Day.

April 22 was chosen as the best date to reach the primary audience, college students; a Wednesday was chosen because it would be the least inconvenient for students who were called upon to participate in the event. There would be no competition with weekend activities, the weather in the northern states would be warming, it was after the annual southern migration of "spring-break" and well before final exams.

Earth Day, April 22, 1970, coincided with the 100th birthday of Vladimir Lenin, and it was also the birthday of the original environmentalist, St. Francis of Assisi, both interesting sidelights.

The result was a spectacular demonstration. Earth Day was a beautiful spring day across the United States. Folk singer Pete Seeger performed at the Washington Monument and cars were banned from New York City's Fifth Avenue to accommodate the events. Public speeches, parades, marches, rallies on college campuses, and "teach-ins" launched the contemporary environmental movement. The first Earth Day was the largest focused demonstration in history. Congress closed its doors as politicians went home to attend or participate in local events. Legislatures from 42 states passed Earth Day resolutions to commemorate the date. An estimated 20 million Americans - students, teachers, and officials - took part in the activities.

The impact on the nation was tremendous. Environmental organizations blossomed and the membership ranks of established conservation groups swelled. The United States Congress, spurred on by the earlier passage of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, passed the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act revisions. By the end of the year, the Environmental Protection Agency was created.

Twenty years later, Earth Day '90 was a well-organized and well-funded event and saw the commemoration grow to more than 200 million participants in more than 140 countries. A new generation focused its concerns on recycling, saving the rainforests, reducing hazardous wastes and acid rain. New environmental

magazines such as *Buzzworm*, *Garbage*, and *E: the environmental magazine* were launched amid a massive public relations and advertising blitz. The Earth Day logo was licensed and began appearing on T-shirts, reuseable cloth grocery bags, posters, and other souvenirs, ushering in what many saw as the over-commercialization of Earth Day.

The April 1995 issue of *E: the environmental magazine*, vol. 6, no. 2, provides a special report on Earth Day. There are two featured articles, "Making Earth Day Count," and "It Didn't Begin with Earth Day." Both Gaylord Nelson and Denis Hayes were interviewed, and the editorial "Fighting Words on Earth Day" called for action in light of the 1994 federal elections; there was also a column by Andre Carothers, "Unwelcomed Saviors: Five Reasons to Oppose Corporate Sponsorship of Earth Day."

A tribute to Earth Day's 25th Anniversary also appears in the April/May 1995 issue of *National Wildlife*, vol. 33, no. 3. The story, "25 Messages from Wildlife," describes how nature has demonstrated its connection to the human species. A sidebar, "Looking Back: Earth Day at 25," provides 14 comparisons between 1970 and the present, i.e. "World Population in 1970: 3.7 billion; Projected for 1995: 5.8 billion; Thousands of tons of lead polluting America's air in 1970: 219; In 1992: 5.2; Amount of aluminum cans recycled in 1970: 3 percent; In 1993: 62 percent."

The amount of environmental information became prolific. Within months of the first Earth Day, the tectonics of environmental information began with gentle murmurings, but soon the environmental topics were covered by traditional science indexing and abstracting services such as BIOLOGICAL ABSTRACTS, CHEMICAL ABSTRACTS and CURRENT CONTENTS.

After Earth Day, services specific to the environment began to appear. ENVIRONMENT INFORMATION ACCESS, the precursor of ENVIRONMENT ABSTRACTS, was started by the Environment Information Center (EIC) in New York in 1971. POLLUTION ABSTRACTS published its first yearly index in 1972 and ENVIRONMENTAL PERIODICALS BIBLOGRAPHY began providing specific coverage in the 1970s.

In 1972, only two private organizations were described as providing general search retrieval services for the environment: EIC and the Institute for Scientific Information [\(1\)](#). Today, an examination of GALE'S DIRECTORY OF DATABASES reveals scores of databases in various formats which provide access to environmental information resources [\(2\)](#).

The table below demonstrate the growth of two of these databases. Terms used to produce the the results were: environmental, ecology, pollution, and their respective truncated forms.

Year	NTIS	CA SEARCH
	Number of Citations	
1970	3,916	7,285
1975	8,210	19,682

1980	11,454	28,857
1985	9,986	28,577
1990	13,123	30,986
1991	12,773	34,662
1992	14,136	37,192
1993	12,879*	34,240*
1994	6,584*	21,736*

* Because of lag times in obtaining and processing entries for these databases, the last two years' data may be considered as incomplete.

Buzzword and *Garbage*, two popular magazines launched five years ago are, no longer with us. Two general interest environmental magazines in the United States and Canada are *E: the environmental magazine* (28 Knight Street, Norwalk, CT 06851, TEL: 203-854-5559) and a newcomer, *Grassroots: The International Environmental Magazine* (250 H Street, P.O. Box 8110-476, Blaine, WA 98231-8100, TEL: 604-535-7682).

One tool not around for the first Earth Day in 1970, the Information Superhighway, reveals some pleasant surprises. From All the Gophers in the World, a simple Veronica search for "Earth Day" identifies 175 gopher site responses. Some of the 175 entries went back as far as 1991. There were more than a score of files providing the text of speeches made by President Clinton and other government officials for Earth Day '94. Also found are informal chats discussing the influence of capitalism on the environment, lists of activities for students and community groups (clean-up programs, recycling awareness, energy efficient technologies, postcard and letterwriting campaigns, and a surprising number of "dead ends").

One unique source is the Earth Day gopher, the source of a treasury of environmental, ecological, and earth science information and resources. From Earth Day look at the subdirectory Earth Sciences, BUBL, locating Earth Science Gophers and the Earth Science Resources Gopher. At these points, the options soon become almost limitless - one can navigate to specific resources from federal agencies, academic institutions, nonprofit organizations, and a host of international resources. Coverage tends to reflect two major areas of concentration: science and technology, and environmental education.

This exercise touches only the tip of a giant cyberspace information iceberg. Try to absorb information about using the Internet like a sponge: read both print and online articles, attend meetings of professional societies, go back to school for a refresher course, attend seminars, workshops, and network with your peers. Space here does not permit the listing of all of the environmental resources available on the Internet and other roadways on the Information Superhighway. However, the following sources are examples of the places where one can find environmental information.

The January issues of *Pollution Engineering* are devoted to an annual environmental software review, and now provide a major compilation of resources available in electronic formats.

The January 1994 issue of *Journal of the Air & Waste Management Association* contained an extensive article, "1993 Environmental Software Survey," by Scott M. Johnson, listing more than 1000 environmental software products from 380 vendors. This inventory was subsequently made into an electronic database available from the author.

Mildred R. Green and Theodore B. Selover, "Chemical Property Databases for Process Engineering," *Chemical Engineering*, May 1994.

Michael J. Blotzer. "CD-ROMs Offer Rich Information Resources," *Occupational Hazards*, July 1994.

Ashok Kumar and Ajay Manocha. "Environmental Resources on the Internet," *Environmental Progress*, May 1994. (part of a featured Software Review column)

Lonny J. Brown. "Environmentalism Goes Online: It's Only Natural," *Link-Up*, March/April 1994.

Bill Thoen. "Access the Electronic Highway for a World of Data," *GIS World*, February 1994.

Dan Kennedy. "Cruising Envirospace," *Garbage*, Fall 1994. (Last Issue).

Mickey Mercier. "The Green Net," *E: the environmental magazine*, January/February 1995.

"Re:Sources," *ES&H NEWS* (a featured column by this author, appearing in the newsletter of the Environmental, Health, and Safety Communicators' Professional Interest Committee of the Society for Technical Communication.)

Michael J. Blotzer. "Three Easy Steps to the Internet," *Occupational Hazards*, March 1995.

Marydee Ojala. "Weather Databases Online," *Database*, February/March 1995.

Douglas Le Comte. "Using Your Computer: Home Page, Sweet Home Page," *Weatherwise*, April/May 1995.

Patrick McGlamery and Melissa Lamont. "Geographic Information Systems in Libraries," *Database*, December 1994.

Bruce Maxwell. "The 10 Best Federal Government BBSs," *Database*, December 1994.

Database continues to provide "restricted" coverage of environmental information resources in its December 1994 update of the environment online series. Gale Research, long noted for its commitment to assuring ready-reference tools for contemporary librarians, has just published its long-awaited GALA GUIDE TO INTERNET DATABASES (ISBN 0-7876-0198-5, 478 pp., \$95.00, 1995). More than 8000 references to databases are provided with nearly 1300 specific subject terms (from "Abnormalities (Animal and Plant) to Zoology, I counted 89 subjects related to the environment, energy conservation, and natural resources). Additional listings of specialized home pages are also provided.

As this issue of the *Electronic Green Journal* goes online, Cambridge Scientific Abstracts is about to announce the release of its ENVIRONMENTAL KNOWLEDGE CENTRAL, an encyclopedic reference guide to Environmental Information on the Internet.

Earth Day People - Then and Now...

While the major players of the first Earth Day have evolved and emerged in their respective lives, it is fitting to take a brief look at several members of the information profession and see how their lives, too, have changed or been influenced by Earth Days past and present.

Gaylord Nelson, Counselor to the Wilderness Society, Washington, DC, conceived the Earth Day concept in 1970 and has not missed a celebration since. As reported to *E Magazine*, he will be involved with Earth Day activities in the DC-area, "but not too deeply." Despite his modesty with his involvement with Earth Day, accolades continue to find their way to his doorstep. This past April President Clinton bestowed the Presidential Medal of Freedom to Gaylord Nelson for his lifetime commitment to environmental protection. "In establishing Earth Day Gaylord Nelson helped us to recognize that our fragile environment was increasingly at peril and that each of us could make a difference", President Clinton said in making the award to Nelson. "His work inspired all Americans to take responsibility for the planet's well being and for our children's future." The Medal of Freedom is the highest civilian award given and was established in 1963 by President John F. Kennedy.

Denis Hayes, President of the Bullitt Foundation, which administers an \$85 million environment-oriented philanthropic trust, Chair of the Board of Green Seal, and Co-Chair of the Coalition for Environmentally Responsive Economics, implemented the first Earth Day in 1970 and continues to educate the public at large about environmental issues.

William R. Wagner, Executive Director of the Center for Environmental Information (CEI, Rochester, NY) was just 14 on the first Earth Day, and was "totally oblivious" to the green happenings of the day. We turn the clock 25 years ahead and we will find Bill busy putting the polishing touches on an Earth Day Festival and Energy Fair being held in Rochester and co-sponsored by CEI and the Rochester Institute of Technology. Bill has first-hand knowledge of the impact of the first Earth Day and his career. The first Earth Day " ...set the stage for the creation of environmental organizations such as CEI [founded in 1974], which I now head!"

While not as commonly known as Nelson, Hayes or Wagner, several information specialists in quite diverse settings have shared their stories about the first Earth Day, and what the past 25 years has done for them.

Gretta Siegel is Librarian at the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission. She spent the first Earth Day at her junior high school teach-in. She pursued an academic track in the life sciences in the areas of biochemistry and toxicology, before seeking a second graduate degree in library science. Gretta was one of the very fortunate students of Marta Dosa at Syracuse University, where a graduate reference course, Environmental Information, was taught for more than a decade before Marta's retirement in 1992. Ms. Siegel planned to do some serious recycling and took a hike on this Earth Day. Initially, she "pursued a career in environmental chemistry and toxicology and detoured into librarianship;" working now with fisheries, scientists, and environmental information.

Donna Hanson is an Associate Professor and Science Librarian at the University of Idaho in Moscow, Idaho. On the first Earth Day, she attended a teach-in at what was then Western Washington State College, now Western Washington University. Donna was busy putting the final touches on a display that was featured in the University of Idaho Library. The first Earth Day made her "more aware of the need to conserve, to reduce, reuse, recycle, and of the need to educate people about the need to conserve and preserve the environment."

Anne Hedrich, Science Reference Librarian, Utah State University, Logan, Utah, was only 9 at the time, so in 2nd grade she thinks! She does not have a strong recollection of the day but thinks the school she attended did not recognize the original Earth Day, as it is in a suburb of a fairly conservative city (Milwaukee). She does not remember celebrating anything with her family either, but feels they should have - her father worked for the U.S. Forest Service at the time! On April 22, 1995 she was competing in a regional Ultimate frisbee tournament in Logan, Utah. Part of the proceeds collected at the tournament went to fighting the state Dept. of Transportation's desire to do major "improvements" on US Highway 89 out of Logan up Logan Canyon (they want to make it more of a truck route than the scenic drive it is now). Anne said that the original Earth Day did, "Nothing nearly as much as it should! But it does remind me of my happy environmental studies background that is often forgotten in everyday Library World. And it puts things in perspective - what is important in my job as well as life as a whole. It gives me a reminder and new courage to work towards making my workplace a more environmentally friendly one."

Fred Stoss is Coordinator for Communications and Networking in the Carbon Dioxide Information Analysis Center at Oak Ridge National Laboratory. He spent the morning of the first Earth Day at the Hartwick College teach-in, took advantage of the fine weather and went flyfishing with fraternity brothers, and then dined on freshly caught trout. He was in Washington, DC on April 22, 1995, among those presenting information on global environmental change resources. He took his first environmental course in 1969, earned degrees in biology, zoology, and library science, and has spent more than 20 years working in the areas of environmental toxicology and information management. Mr. Stoss also had the pleasure of being a Marta Dosa student at Syracuse, and will be teaching a reference course, Energy and Environment, in the School of Information Science at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville this summer.

References

1. A DICTIONARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUOTATION, 1992. Barbara K. Rodes and Rice Odell, Simon and Schuster: New York. 335 pp.
2. GALE DIRECTORY OF ONLINE DATABASES, VOL. 1 ONLINE DATABASES. 1993 Gale Research: Detroit, 1352 pp.

Recent Articles

The following articles were written about Earth Day and the Environment in commemoration of Earth Day's 25th Anniversary.

Gregg Estabrook. "Here Comes the Sun," *The New Yorker*, April 10, 1995.

Editorial Staff. "Earth Matters," *Netguide*, April 1995 (One of the most accurate and original pieces written about environmental online information in the past several years).

Donna Faulk. "Green Teams," *Gannetteer*, March/April 1995 (The media looks at its role).

Timothy O'Riordan, William C. Clark, Robert W. Kates, and Alan McGowan. "The Legacy of Earth Day: Reflections at a Turning Point," *Environment*, April 1995 (see also editorial by Robert W. Kates and the initial offering of a series of personal commentaries, "Earth Day 1995: A Celebration, An Assessment, A Forecast").

Frank Graham, Jr. "Earth Day: 25 Years Old," *National Geographic*, April 1995.

John Skow. "Earth Day Blues," *Time*, April 24, 1995 (Time brought us The Planet of the Year in January of 1990, and a 2-page essay in 1995).

Michael Satchell. "A New Day for Earth Lovers," *U.S. News and World Reports*, April 24, 1995.

"Earth Day 25: A Special Report," *E Magazine*, April 1995.

Earth Day 1995 - the 25th Anniversary. A series of eight articles commemorating Earth Day: "The Earth is in Your Hands," Carol M. Browner; "Earth Day Contacts;" "Earth Day 25 Years Later," Gaylord Nelson;

"Environmental Protection: Is the Public Willing to Pay?, A Forum;" "What Voters Say About the Environment Today," Bill Line; "Good News for Waste Watchers," Roy Popkin; "Experienced Help for the Environment," Tom Benjamin; "Looking Ahead to the Planet's Future," Ray Loehr;" *EPA Journal*, April 1995.