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Opening Remarks

Forging Environmental Links

There are no simple solutions to environmental problems these days. Consider, for instance, the role of coal-burning power plants in our society. They choke our atmosphere with unsavory chemical combinations and, among other things, release mercury and produce acid rain. But they also create energy and jobs. While everyone desires a pristine environment, no one wants to see people laid off or endure a blackout. Without question, the more we build and expand our boundaries and technologize our lives, the greater the chances are that we'll deplete more of our natural resources and encroach on the environment. And the more this happens, the more complex the tradeoffs become.

Even when folks line up on the same side of an issue, there's no telling what might happen. I discovered this at a local trout conservation club meeting, where discussion of protecting the upper Delaware River's wild trout fishery was overshadowed by a spat over which advocacy organization deserved the club's support on the issue. I had expected talk of trout preservation, but never thought such a gathering would require a copy of *Robert's Rules of Order* and a sergeant at arms.

Looking back on my years as a reporter, I can't recall any issue connected to the environment that didn't stir people's passions. I've seen many citizens turn into activists over the fear of groundwater contamination, haphazard development, and the loss of wetlands. Critics often attribute such activism to NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) syndrome. In some instances, that may very well be the case. But who wants low-level radioactive waste "stored" on the other side of their fence? Without grassroots activism, this world could become an environmental shambles.

That's why no matter what the issue, it's important to amass as much information as possible about it and examine it from multiple perspectives. Here on campus, a collaborative effort—inspired by the Academic Plan—is under way between the faculties of SU and the



Nicholas Wiltou

SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry to address environmental issues through an interdisciplinary lens (see "Eco-Connections," page 40). "The human impact on every ecosystem in the world is undeniable," says Rachel May, director of the Office of Environment and Society, which was established to enhance collaborative research among faculty. "The natural, political, and cultural forces affecting the environment are all related, and the only way to make progress is by looking at all of these factors together." If you look at the directory on the office's web site (enspire.syr.edu/directory/htm), you'll see an array of disciplines represented. There are ecologists, biologists, engineers, and chemists, as well as economists, geographers, landscape architects, urban designers, and policy experts. With access to the directory, faculty can search out each other's interests and look for potential intersections in their work.

It's a promising approach to connecting researchers in creative ways that otherwise could easily be overlooked. Let's hope this effort ignites. For it can lead us not only to a better understanding of the environment, but also to a better understanding of ourselves and our role in keeping Mother Earth alive and kicking well beyond our time.

JAY COX
Editor