

Environmental and Conservation Resolutions for the New Year

Instead of starting the new year with the latest tabulation of Florida's environmental ruin, how about environmental and conservation resolutions. Actions you can take to make a difference. Simple ones.

Bear in mind, your personal actions are almost meaningless in combating the earth's two man-made existential threats, climate change and the extinction/biodiversity crisis, but if everyone reading this newsletter took these actions, or everyone in the IXIA Chapter, or everyone in the Florida Native Plant Society, that collective action could move the needle.

Sadly, both problems are so far advanced, only sweeping governmental action and industrial reform can begin to solve them.

For 2024, can you commit to these "11 easiest environmental/conservation actions:"

1. **Don't litter.** (A message to truck owners. If you throw your trash in your truck bed, drive somewhere, and then realize the trash is no longer there, the trash fairy didn't come along and dispose of it for you. It flew out somewhere and will probably end up in the nearest body of water.)
2. **Turn your lights off.** Did you know roughly a third of pollination occurs at night? All those moths and insects can't do their nighttime pollination if they're banging against your exterior house lights. Turn them off! The industrial application of this measure is the nationwide "lights out" programs trying to raise awareness for businesses to turn their lights off at night to reduce the millions of fatalities birds experience during migration due to building strikes.
3. **Keep your cats indoors and clean up after your dog.** Outdoor pet cats kill millions of birds every year, and with bird populations plummeting, we need them all. Dog waste left to wash away ends up in the groundwater and then on to lakes, rivers, and streams, where the nutrients lead to toxic algae blooms and water pollution.
4. **Eliminate your use of single use plastic water bottles...** Believe it or not, there was a time in America when single use plastic water bottles were not a fashion accessory required for anytime anyone left the house. Yes, hydration is important, but unless you're a competitive athlete, you'll be just fine without water until you're back home or in the office. If you're worried about dying of thirst at the grocery store or beach, use a reusable bottle. Here's another newsflash: the water out of your tap is drinkable. Water bottled in California or Arkansas and then shipped to Florida is no better than ours out of the faucet and think of the carbon footprint that water bottle stomped out getting to your fridge. Consuming "spring" water is especially bad, as it robs water from natural springs, something we have experience with here in Florida.
5. **... and plastic shopping bags.** Get yourself a handful of reusable bags, keep them in the car.
6. **... and Styrofoam to-go containers.** This is one I'm working on. My family (re: my wife) eats most meals out. As a result, we/she generate a massive amount of Styrofoam waste over a year. I'm keeping her purse and car stocked with reusable food containers.
7. **Shop local.** If you have access to a local farmer's market where you can shop for groceries, do so. If you're at a bar ordering beer, order a Florida beer as opposed to a German beer. Think about your purchases and how far – and how much fossil fuel emissions – go into shipping that product to wherever you buy it from. Blueberries from South America, apples from Washington, water from Fiji... shop local and buy seasonal.

- 8. Buy less.** Speaking of buying things, buy less. Do you really need the latest and greatest of everything? The runaway consumption that has become a feature of American capitalism is totally at odds with protecting the environment. All that stuff requires raw materials to produce, it requires fossil fuels to ship, it requires plastic to pack, and then it generally ends up in a landfill. Start with your clothes. The fashion industry accounts for an outrageously high percentage of global greenhouse gas emissions and water use. Look at your closet, do you really need another blouse, shirt, slacks, etc., etc. Use and reuse items until you need another one, not until you want another one.
- 9. 1 degree.** Since JEA refuses to end its addiction to coal and fossil fuels for powering Jacksonville, try turning your thermostat up one degree in summer, down one degree in winter. Everyone's comfort level is different, but if you keep your house at 72 in the summer, make that 73... then try 74. You'll get used to it.
- 10. Lawncare.** If you feel you must have a lawn, mow it less. How about twice a month in summer, every other month in winter. The emissions from gas powered mowers are much richer in CO₂ than from cars and all those wonderful insects in your lawn will appreciate the break. And for heaven's sake, don't use fertilizer, insecticides or pesticides, toxic chemicals which all end up in the groundwater supply and then on to lakes, rivers and the ocean. When presented the choice, use native plants in your landscape as opposed to merely decorative choices.
- 11. VOTE!** Number 11 is probably #1 in importance. While neither of America's two major political parties are doing enough to combat climate change and the biodiversity crisis, one of the parties is actively hostile to the environment and conservation, engaging in a war on nature nationwide at the behest of industry and developers. If you have voted by mail previously, the state legislature recently monkeyed with the registration process taking millions of voters off the vote by mail rolls. Contact your local supervisor of elections to make sure you'll get a ballot.