

Community Comment  
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### On Earth Day

Wednesday was Earth Day. This date was picked in the early seventies for reasons I don't remember. How the date was selected, that is. Richard Nixon was President and he signed Congressional Legislation that created some of the most important environmental laws and protections we have ever implemented. The Clean Air and Clean Water Acts were established and the Environmental Protection Agency was created in this era. Remember what we faced in those days. Schools would cancel outdoor activities like sports and gym class due to heavy pollution levels in the air. Cities had 50 to 100 year old sewage pipes and outdated treatment plants. Broken pipes allowed raw sewage to pollute the groundwater and poorly treated water was contaminating freshwater lakes and rivers. Standards for acceptable levels of pollution were practically non-existent and threatened public health. These laws not only acknowledged these issues but financed 87.5 percent of the cost.

In Ohio, a river caught fire it was so polluted. That event opened many eyes that refused to open before that.

Locally, by the late seventies, Eureka and Arcata were prevented from any new construction until we built a new wastewater treatment plant. This led to the local Wastewater wars when Arcata decided that a treatment plant on the Samoa Peninsula that would allow treated water to come back into the Bay was simply not acceptable. Besides that, the cost was outrageous. Eureka now has a modern treatment plant and Arcata developed our Marsh Treatment system to finish the process. And we got the Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary as a major public park. Since then, Eureka, Humboldt County, and Arcata have added salt marshes, trails, and Bay access.

On a larger scale, scientists were coming to grips with population dynamics. We had seen a doubling of human population in one period of time and realized it would double again in a much shorter period and this trend would continue to move faster. We knew from our studies of wildlife populations that we could control population levels at a given area's carrying capacity or nature would do it for us. And natural population control is harsh.

Since the Seventies, science has learned so much more. And the advent of the computer for research and analysis has further advanced our knowledge. In the years since, for example, we have proven the subduction theory of enormous plates of land mass because of our studies of earthquakes. We know more about climate history and conditions over vast periods of time. This enables us to predict weather with more accuracy than ever

before which helps farmers and saves lives. Climate change is a real issue and we know that a significant part of the change is caused by man's pollutants.

We should celebrate Earth Day and realize that we have one Earth. It is our home. We can choose to be good stewards of our home or not. I have grandchildren as do many of you. I prefer to leave an Earth that is healthier than the one we inherited; what about you?

This has been Sam Pennisi for community comment.