

Column: Environmentalism parallels parenthood

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Being a parent alters the way one sees the world both subtly and overtly, giving pause to reconsider some basic assumptions.

It asks us to rethink our place in the world, our personal and familial legacies, and the state of things that we leave behind for future generations. Being a parent, simply put, calls on us to be responsible.

As father to two young boys, I've begun to sense this alteration of perspective in a number of settings. Basic matters such as food, clothing, shelter, education, and health care are obvious examples. More broadly, this parental sensibility also has informed my views on issues ranging from warfare to the environment.

Perhaps because I'm a relatively new parent, I've been seeing signs of these tendencies in a lot of places. For instance, I recently dialogued with Edie Dillon and Joanne Oellers of the Center for Biological Diversity about their "Save the Verde" campaign, where they've combined the best practices of environmental science with the emotional appeal of artistic expression to inform and inspire people about the importance of the [Verde River](#).

This quote from them stood out in particular: "We love the Verde, the Verde is being threatened, and we protect what we love. Period."

This immediately struck my parental chord, and gave me new insight into the essence of environmentalism. I'd long been a proponent of ecological thinking, but hadn't before considered the matter in terms akin to the responsibilities attendant to childrearing.

In this sense, we're all parents to future generations and the world we leave behind for them. I don't mean this in a paternalistic sense where we are "in charge" or "in control" of others' destinies, but rather that our essential obligation to each other and all things is primarily to help create and maintain a space where life may flourish. This is how I see my role as a father: to give my children a productive environment in which to grow.

The Save the Verde campaign arises from similar values of protecting this critical watershed and riparian area for its unique ability to nourish both humans and wildlife.

Values often mentioned include the river's intrinsic beauty, its historical importance, and our tenuous relationship with scarce desert water sources. In short, people see the Verde River as something both important in its own right and as part of a larger system that nurtures other lives, including ours.

Again, I see strong parental parallels here. I especially appreciate the notion of intrinsic value, since much of the public dialogue about water often devolves upon resource-based thinking that fails to account fully for the right of a thing simply to exist apart from how it supports human endeavors. This small notion challenges much of Western thinking about the environment, asking us to be stewards and not just consumers.

I'm thankful for the efforts of these dedicated environmentalists, not merely for working to protect rivers, but for giving my children a chance to flourish both in and with nature.