

# THE DENVER POST

## Willoughby: Do something nice for the Earth on Earth Day

It's always a funny thing, this Earth Day

by Scott Willoughby  
The Denver Post  
April 21, 2015

It's always a funny thing, this Earth Day. Some consider it the very foundation of environmentalism, others a political ploy. It was proposed to honor the Earth and the concept of peace, yet some hate the very idea of it.

Here it is, the one thing that everyone alive ought to be able to rally around — our life-sustaining planet. But we still can't seem to get on the same page in terms of how to do that.

Instead we find groups such as the Center for Biological Diversity giving away some 50,000 “endangered species condoms” with slogans like



While it isn't always warm there, fishing from the shores of Spinney Mountain Reservoir can be just as productive as casting from boats during the early season. (Scott Willoughby, The Denver Post)

“Before it gets hotter ... remember the sea otter” in an effort to link human population growth and overconsumption to wildlife extinction.

According to the group, the global population has nearly doubled since the first Earth Day, from 3.7 billion people in 1970 to 7.2 billion today, while wildlife populations have plummeted. And while there is undoubtedly some correlation there, nothing says “save the planet” quite like a discarded pile of unrecyclable rubber.

Like so many messages in the new millennium, this one has grown confused. Is Earth Day supposed to be a celebration or a commemoration? Should we give thanks, give money or go to the bar and strike up a conversation on the strife of the horned lizard?

For as long as I can recall, the message emanating from the hunting and fishing communities has been that sportsmen are the original conservationists, that the funds contributed to wildlife management via license fees and excise taxes is the main reason wildlife continues to exist at all. There's some truth to the claim, especially considering the near extinction of several species before the self-imposed regulations of sportsmen and the funding mechanisms that followed.

The guiding philosophy is known as the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. And today is as good as any to reflect upon its two basic principles: Fish and wildlife are for the noncommercial use of citizens, and should be managed such that they are available at optimum population levels forever.

The core of the model is composed of seven focal points:

- Wildlife as public trust resources.
- Elimination of markets for game.
- Allocation of wildlife by law.
- Wildlife should only be killed for a legitimate purpose.
- Wildlife is considered an international resource.
- Science is the proper tool for discharge of wildlife policy.
- Democracy of hunting.

The Earth, of course, encompasses far more than just fish and game. And the day set aside to honor it should encompass more than just philosophy. Since Earth Day hasn't really taken off as a Hallmark holiday over the course of 45 years, my thinking is that it's best to do something practical.

Start simply (and symbolically), like being more diligent about picking up your dog's poop, maybe even your neighbor's (dog, that is). Get serious about that recycling program you've been talking about since the 1970s. Buy a fishing license and a habitat stamp whether or not you think you might actually use it. If you hike, bike, bird-watch or do just about anything else outdoors, odds are you reap some benefit from the dollars others place in the kitty on your behalf.

If you seek something more tangible, try volunteering to help clean a state park or join the Greenway Foundation clean the South Platte River on Saturday. Earth Day lasts into the weekend in several places around Colorado. And when you think about it, it should really never end.