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African America Media

Earth Day: No more burning rivers, but new threats (BET)

WASHINGTON – Pollution before the first Earth Day was not only visible, it was in your face: Cleveland's Cuyahoga River caught fire. An oil spill fouled 30 miles of Southern California beaches. And thick smog choked many cities' skies.

Not anymore.

On Thursday, 40 years after that first Earth Day in 1970, smog levels nationwide have dropped by about a quarter, and lead levels in the air are down more than 90 percent. Formerly fetid lakes and burning rivers are now open to swimmers.

The challenges to the planet today are largely invisible — and therefore tougher to tackle.

"To suggest that we've made progress is not to say the problem is over," said William Ruckelshaus, who in 1970 became the first head of the Environmental Protection Agency. "What we've done is shift from the very visible kinds of issues to those that are a lot more subtle today."

Issues such as climate change are less obvious to the naked eye. Since the first Earth Day, carbon dioxide levels in the air have increased by 19 percent, pushing the average annual world temperature up about 1 degree Fahrenheit, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

"We've cleaned up what you can see and left everything else in limbo," said Kathleen Rogers, president of the Earth Day Network.

Improvements took shape in the form of the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and changes in the way businesses treat the environment, said Denis Hayes. Those reforms, he added, grew out of the first Earth Day, an event Hayes helped coordinate.

"It is the most powerful, sweeping, society-wide change America has had since the New Deal," Hayes said. "The air is cleaner despite the fact that we have twice as many vehicles traveling twice as many miles."

Nancy Sutley, head of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, said progress in the past 40 years is about more than just laws. It's also about innovation that made cleaner cars. And that innovation, Sutley said, "is going to be the answer for tackling climate change."

No place illustrates progress more than the Cuyahoga River.

Cleveland's main river used to periodically catch fire. On June 22, 1969, trash and an oil slick ignited. The river burned for half an hour, drawing national attention to water pollution nationwide.

People didn't swim in the river at the time, and anyone who fell in needed to be checked by a doctor.

"The river bubbled like a cauldron. There were all kinds of chemicals in there, and that was what was bubbling at the bottom," said Wayne Bratton, a boat captain then and now, and the first president of the Cleveland Harbor Conservation Committee.

On Tuesday, Wayne Bratton was aboard his boat, The Holiday. He looked over the starboard side at Collision Bend and described by telephone what he saw: "I'm looking at a lot of gulls, there's a loon, a lot of black heron."

People now fish in the river, which holds 60 species. There's a spiffy amphitheater on the river bank, which never would have been built when the water had a dreadful stench, Bratton said.

It's not just the Cuyahoga. In 1957, the Public Health Service declared the Potomac River unsafe for swimming. Now Rogers lets her children swim in it.

"I don't even wash them off any more," she said.

In Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s, the joke was that if you moved in during the summer you wouldn't notice the nearby mountains until the winter. Now peak smog levels are only one-third as high as 40 years ago, he said.

"Unfortunately, it leads some people to think that we don't have a problem any more," said Sam Atwood, spokesman for the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

The region still has 6,000 yearly premature deaths linked to unseen tiny particles in the air that cause heart and lung problems, Atwood said.

In 1970, Ruckelshaus said, about 85 percent of pollution was from places like factories or power plants that the government could regulate. Now such sites account for only 15 percent, with most pollution coming from sources like farms that are harder to control.

That makes fixing the remaining problems politically difficult, said Russell Train, chief environmental adviser in 1970 to President Richard Nixon.

"Back in the '70s, people felt the threat of environmental mistakes and misbehavior," Train said. "There was a real threat to your health and people knew that. Today, people will accept that as a general principal, but don't feel any immediate threat from climate change or indirect source pollution from farmers."

Last month was the hottest March on record worldwide. It was 1.4 degrees warmer than March 1970, according to NOAA.

The average temperatures for the last 40 years are higher than the rest of the 130 years of record-keeping, said Deke Arndt, head of climate monitoring at NOAA's National Climate Data Center.

And, this week, German scientists published an analysis in the scientific journal Nature that says the greenhouse gas agreement reached by some international leaders last December in Copenhagen would lead to a 10 to 20 percent increase in carbon dioxide levels in 2020.

That puts "in dire peril" chances for limiting the effects of warming, the researchers said.

Still, the White House's Sutley is optimistic.

"The Cuyahoga River is not on fire anymore, and air quality in Los Angeles is not as bad as it was 40 years ago. I think people get those connections," Sutley said. "People get that something is changing about our climate."

On the Net:

Earth Day Network: http://www.earthday.net/

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on the Cuyahoga River fire: http://tinyurl.com/epacuya

Hispanic Media

40 Years of Earth Day: From Rachel Carson to Al Gore (*Hispanic Business*)

Outlet Full Name: Hispanic Business - Online
News OCR Text: Forty years ago today, Earth Day exploded into our American lexicon with a new brand of do-it-yourself environmentalism. Billed as "the largest protest in American history," the first Earth Day centered on college campuses as part sit-in, part act up.

This commemoration of conservation consciousness has grown into a worldwide effort, with "saving the planet" becoming an everyday part of life.

How the movement has changed:

Go-to Earth guy

Then: Sen. Gaylord Nelson, the father of Earth Day. The former Wisconsin governor overhauled his home state's resources policy, then took on the whole country as senator. His inspiration for Earth Day came from two sources: a 1969 Santa Barbara channel oil spill and student anti-war protests.

Quote: "Our goal is not just an environment of clean air and water and scenic beauty. The objective is an environment of decency, quality and mutual respect for all other human beings and all other living creatures."

Now: Former Vice President Al Gore. His book and Oscar-winning documentary, "An Inconvenient Truth," brought the global climate crisis into perspective for millions.

Quote: "The good news is, we have everything we need now to respond to the challenge of global warming. -- But we should not wait, we cannot wait, we must not wait."

Must reading

Then: "Silent Spring" by Rachel Carson.

Now: "An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming and What We Can Do About It" by Al Gore.

What's the point

Then: Get mad, get noticed during a united day of protest over the lack of government action on air and water pollution.

Now: Get off the couch, pick up trash. The emphasis is on individual participation and making Earth Day an everyday mind-set.

Buzz words

Then: Environmentalism, ecology, overpopulation, rivers on fire, fossil fuels, DDT.

Motto: "Save the planet."

Now: Go green, global warming, all-organic, Earth-friendly, recyclable, energy efficient, sustainable, carbon footprint, biofuels, LEDs.

Motto: "Think globally, act locally."

Hot-button issues

Then: Pesticides ban, lower emissions standards, clean drinking water, offshore oil drilling.

Now: Climate change, carbon trade-offs, plastic water bottles, offshore oil drilling.

Stand up to be counted

Then: An estimated 20 million Americans participated in inaugural Earth Day events, mostly on school and college campuses.

Now: More than 1 billion people worldwide will take part in International Earth Day events this month.

How have we changed since the first Earth Day?

By the numbers

POPULATION:

Sacramento

1970: 263,400

2009: 481,100

California

1970: 19.9 million

2009: 38.2 million

United States

1970: 205 million

2009: 305.5 million

World

1970: 3.7 billion

2009: 6.7 billion

REGISTERED VEHICLES IN U.S.

1970: 111.2 million

2009: 255.9 million

NATIONAL PARKS SERVICE LAND

1970: 29.6 million acres

2009: 84.4 million acres

MUNICIPAL WASTE

Tons generated:

1970: 121 million

2008: 249.6 million

Tons discarded:

1970: 113 million

2008: 166.7 million

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, California Finance Department, U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics, National Parks Service.

The Bee's Pete Basofin and Sheila A. Kern contributed to this report.

Native American Media

Protestors air complaints about Peabody (*Navajo Times*)

Black Mesa riders, supporters pepper delegate with hard questions
By Marley Shebala
Navajo Times
WINDOW ROCK, April 26, 2010
Horseback riders, some of whom rode all the way from Pinon, Ariz., arrive at the Navajo Nation Council Chamber on the first day of the spring session on April 19.
For the past 40 years, residents of Black Mesa, Ariz., have walked, driven and ridden on horseback to Window Rock to meet with their leaders.

On April 19, the first day of the Navajo Nation Council's spring session, a group walked to the council chambers carrying signs protesting the renewal of Peabody Western Coal Co.'s lease on Black Mesa.

Among the group were eight horseback riders who had ridden for three days from Big Mountain and PiÃ±on, Ariz., to the capital.

Outside the council chamber, they met informally with delegates including George Arthur (Nenahnezad/San Juan/T'iistsoh Sikaad), the sponsor of a resolution to renew Peabody's lease.

Arthur chairs the council's Resources Committee, which is supporting the lease renewal with no increase in the royalty rate, which is set at the minimum allowed by federal law.

The council tabled the resolution twice in 2009 - on Nov. 12 and Dec. 22 - so the delegates could educate themselves about the lease.

On April 1, the council met in a one-day work session about the Peabody lease. At the end of that meeting, the delegates called for another workshop and public hearings on the issue.

Arthur assured the council public hearings would happen but none have been held.

During a 30-minute talk with Arthur, Nicole Horseherder, founder of Tó Nizhóní Áníí (beautiful springs speak), said elders and children are suffering from asthma and respiratory diseases related to living near the area being strip-mined by Peabody.

She asked how Arthur and his committee could justify sacrificing the health of elders and children for coal royalties and mining jobs.

Marie Gladue, the daughter of long-time Big Mountain activist Katherine Smith, urged that Peabody pay restitution to the families before the council agrees to renew the lease.

Gladue and other activists believe Peabody's desire to exploit Black Mesa coal reserves is behind the Navajo-Hopi land dispute, which led to the displacement of mostly Navajo families in the area.

Gladue and her mother are among the few still resisting removal from their homes.

She said Black Mesa is a female goddess that brings rain and water for Mother Earth.

Another activist, Louise Benally, urged Arthur and his committee to focus on alternative energy and green jobs.

But she criticized a wind project proposed for the tribe's Big Boquillas Ranch as a venture that would benefit the Navajo government but not grassroots Navajos.

Arthur did not respond.

Marshall Johnson, one of the riders, said it's time for the leaders to be leaders and include the protestors' voices in decision-making.

Johnson said the people also want the government to be open about its dealings with Peabody and how it spends money.

Mabel Benally, who lives a few feet from the shuttered Black Mesa Mine, said Peabody promised running water and electricity but residents must still haul water.

Benally said her family members all have asthma and some have died from respiratory diseases.

Juan Begay, PiÃ±on Community School Board vice president, said he rode for the school children.

He said the schools in PiÃ±on are so overcrowded that they have to turn away students.

"We need new classrooms," he said.

Johnson said the money that comes from Peabody has never reached the people who were removed to make way for mining or the people who remain on the land.

Arthur said his family lives next to the Four Corners Power Plant in northwest New Mexico and he understands their concerns. He said he's heard from many of them before and he's taken their concerns to heart.

Arthur also assured the group that he would hold public hearings on the matter in their community.

Wahleah Johns, with the Black Mesa Water Coalition, said the Peabody's 1987 coal lease allows for negotiations on royalty rates every 10 years.

The royalty rate is 12.5 percent for the 8580 lease, which covers a portion of the Peabody's Kayenta Mine, and 6.25 percent for the 9910 lease, which covers a portion of the Kayenta Mine and the former Black Mesa Mine.

Horseherder wondered about the tribe's willingness to continue accepting the lowest possible rates.

"For 14 years, the official position of the Navajo Nation was that it deserved at least a 20.5 percent royalty rate," Horseherder said. "Now, Navajo Nation leaders are trying to ram through another 10-year agreement with Peabody at the 12.5 percent rates.

"If the Navajo Nation is really concerned about economic prosperity, why are they negotiating at rock bottom rates?" Horseherder asked.

EPA honors tribes as environmental heroes (*Navajo-Hopi Observer*)

By Brenda Norrell / Indian Country Today
Story Published: Apr 24, 2006
Story Updated: Sep 10, 2008
SAN FRANCISCO - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency selected American Indian tribes in the West, along the border and in Hawaii for environmental excellence, during the EPA;s eighth annual Environmental Awards ceremony.

EPA Regional Administrator Wayne Nastri presented plaques to three dozen organizations and individuals throughout the Pacific Southwest in recognition of their efforts to protect and preserve the environment in 2005.

"These organizations and individuals have applied creativity, teamwork and leadership in addressing many of the west's most sensitive and complex environmental challenges," Nastri said at the award ceremony April 18.

Among the environmental heroes: David Saddler, Tim Walls and Cauy Washburn of the Tohono O'odham Utility Authority in Sells, Ariz. They were honored for bringing water to the O'odham community of Quitovac, a small village in Sonora, Mexico, with no indoor plumbing or electricity.

The EPA said O'odham were using shallow, hand-dug wells contaminated with total coliform and fecal coliform, and at least one well was contaminated with high levels of lead, arsenic, uranium and chromium.

The Tohono O'odham Nation used EPA funding to create the community's first water distribution system, increased water storage capacity and well improvements. The EPA recognized this as a first on the border.

"This marks the first time a U.S. tribe has completed a water infrastructure project to serve an indigenous community along the Mexico border, and the collaboration with EPA and Mexico provides additional long-term benefits such as basic sanitation for the local boarding school, a health clinic and electricity for the village."

The EPA also selected Sandi Tripp and Susan Corum of the Karuk Tribe of California, Department of Natural Resources, in Orleans, Calif.

The Karuk Tribe played a key role in discovering and providing a timely response to toxic algae blooms in the Klamath River. Tribal members notified resource managers and public health officials throughout the Klamath Basin and California, resulting in a comprehensive monitoring program.

Karuk let others know of the algae bloom's dangers, which range from mild skin conditions to permanent organ impairment and even death depending upon exposure time and intensity. The Karuk Tribe's data led the owner of two hydroelectric dams on the Klamath to fund a three-year study of the cause, effect and extent of blooms in the Klamath Basin.

The Ak Chin Indian Community in Maricopa, Ariz., was honored for creating an effective environmental department. The environmental benefits include cleaning up and preventing new illegal dump sites; removing more than 90 vehicles and 184,000 pounds of auto, farm and truck tires; recycling 53,030 pounds of scrap metal, 46,000 pounds of scrap appliances and 432 batteries; and removing all underground storage and septic tanks from the community.

On the Navajo Nation, the EPA award went to the Surface and Ground Water Protection Department of the Navajo Nation EPA in Window Rock, Ariz. In 2005, the Surface and Ground Water Protection Department under the Navajo Nation EPA was selected for its environmental protection activities.

The tribe promulgated five new regulations; completed more than 1,000 environmental compliance assistance, monitoring and enforcement activities; is now treated as its own state for important sections of the Clean Water Act; and conducted more than 100 environmental outreach activities.

Further, the tribe secured important EPA funding to address the Black Falls Community of Arizona, where 100 percent of the residents have no running water in their homes.

In Hawaii, Keikialoha Kekipi and Ho'oulu Lahui of Pahoa were honored. Ho'oulu Lahui, an educational nonprofit organization, preserves cultural traditions and practices of ancient Hawaiians. By embracing traditional concepts and merging them with the latest in technology, its goal is a sustainable community living in harmony with the environment.

The organization's 600-acre coastal land base includes an ancient Hawaiian village that serves as a

cultural and environmental learning center. Ho'oulu Lahui's partnership with Kua oka La Public Charter school includes plans for the first totally driven solar school in the state of Hawaii.

"Ho'oulu Lahui is an exemplary environmental model for educational agencies," the EPA said. Among its activities, it partners with college students on forest management and hosts students, families and educators from across the world on its solar program and other environmental practices.