vide income for owners and access for those who can't buy. Wright notes that community members had pursued low-income housing options at Nyland through state programs, but were met with bureaucratic roadblocks. "It's hard now, but I think as the movement grows it will get better."

Contact: The CoHousing Company, 1250 Addison Street, #113, Berkeley, California 94702/(510)549-9980; Communities Directory, Sandhill Farm, Route 1, Box 155, Rutledge, MO 63563/(816)883-5543.

—Helen Cordes

SWEET HOME ALABAMA

The State's Appointment of a Polluter as Environmental Chief Shows Just How Bad Things Have Gotten

Even by the free-wheeling standards of Alabama politics, John M. Smith seemed an unlikely choice for the post of the state's top environmental watchdog. In the early 1980s, he served as spokesman for an abortive scheme to export hazardous waste abroad from the Birmingham area. A few years ago, state auditors questioned his computer company's performance in fulfilling state contracts.

But Smith was a longtime friend of outgoing Alabama Governor Jim Folsom, Jr. And before Folsom—defeated in last November's election—left office early this year, a board stacked with his appointees named Smith director of the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM).

The uproar was immediate. The Alabama chapter of the Sierra Club quickly filed a lawsuit seeking Smith's ouster on the grounds that he lacked the legally required environmental background. The state's newly elected attorney general and governor are also scrutinizing several Folsom appointments to the board that hired Smith. The matter is now tied up in the state courts, and Smith continues to insist that he is fully qualified for the post.

> *"A dearth of environmental knowledge has practically been a requirement of the job."*

Whatever the legal outcome, Smith's critics call his appointment dismally symptomatic of the importance that Alabama politicos assign the environment.

"I think what it very clearly states is that for too long the environment has been this sort of ugly stepsister," says Sheila Holbrook-White, the Sierra Club's Alabama coordinator. "That while you have had top qualified directors for every other agency, ADEM is the exception."

Indeed, since ADEM's creation in 1982, a dearth of environmental knowledge has practically been a prerequisite for the job of running it. Smith's predecessor, for example, was a former state legislator and college administrator whose eight-year tenure at the agency was marked by stormy battles with citizens groups and the environmental community. While observers say ADEM has competent staff members, the agency's problem has been leadership. "We wanted to send a very clear signal," Holbrook-White says. "What concerns me is that if we wait around for the politicians to get a clue, we're going to be waiting until infinity." →

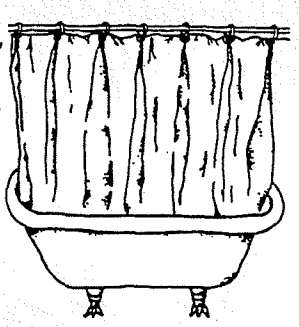
100% Cotton Shower Curtain!

(Just say nope to vinyl!)

Think of the thousands of plastic liners that get landfilled or incinerated each year. Don't "dump" another vinyl shower curtain! Our tightly woven 100% cotton duck curtain keeps water in the tub. No liner necessary and it's machine washable! Rustproof brass grommets. Size: 6' x 6'. White or Natural, $38.75. Send check to:

n.o.p.e. (non-polluting enterprises)
822-A Frederick Rd. Baltimore, MD 21228.

Free catalog. Wholesale inquiries welcome.
VISA/MC orders: call (800)323-2811.



A GUIDE TO COOPERATIVE LIVING



The All-New *Communities Directory*

Lists 540 North American communities and 70 abroad, including contact information and a full self-description.

Includes maps, cross-reference charts, an extensive index, and 31 articles about cooperative living, plus 250 alternative resource listings.

440 pages, $23 [$25 foreign] postage paid.

Published by the Fellowship for Intentional Community, publishers of *Communities*, the quarterly journal of cooperative living (sample issue $5 [$6]).

To order contact: *Communities*, Rt 4, Box 169-E, Louisa VA 23093; Phone: 703-894-5126

"The most comprehensive and accurate reference book ever published on community living!"
—Kirkpatrick Sale,
Author & Bioregionalist

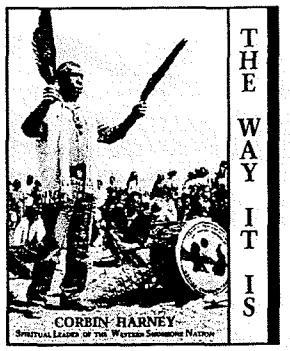
DSW 133869

STLCOPCB4033827

THE WAY IT IS

Corbin Harney

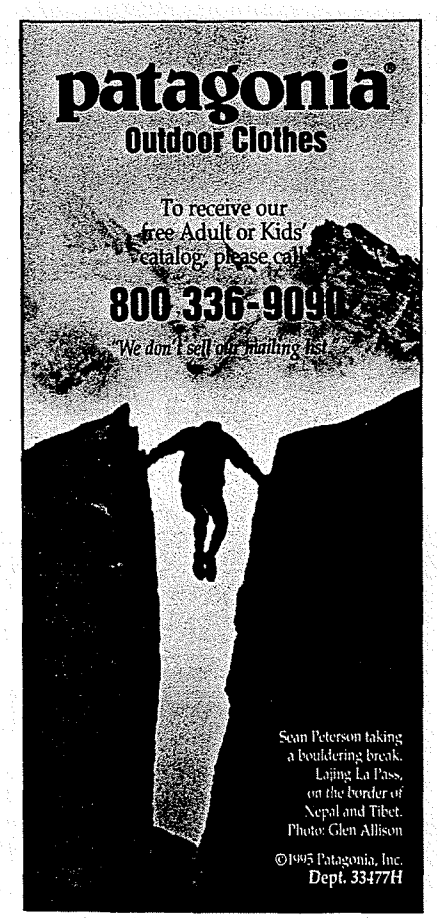
Spiritual Leader of
the Western Shoshone Nation

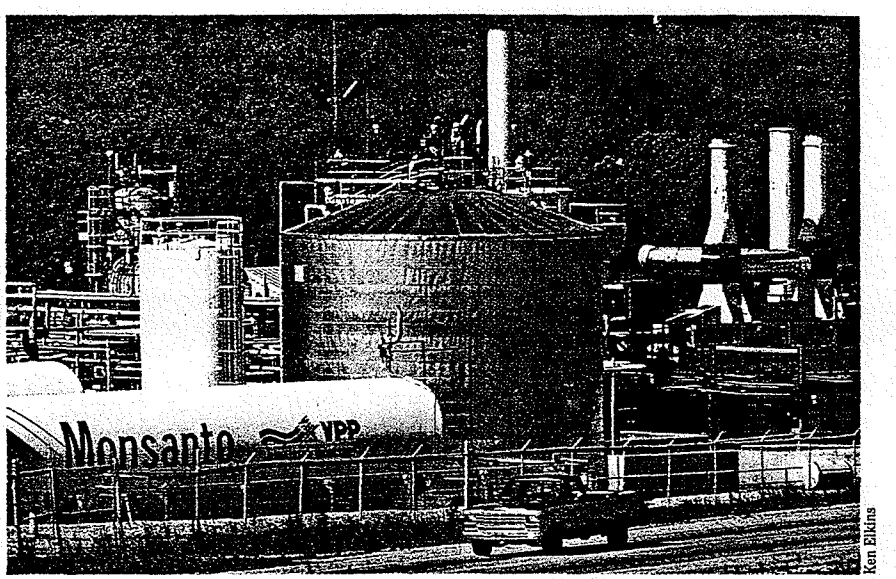


"We, the people, are going to have to put our thoughts together to save our planet here. We only have One Water, One Air, One Mother Earth."

ISBN: 0-931892-80-5, $16.00
paperback, 256 pp., 105 photos

At your local bookstore or
Blue Dolphin Publishing, Inc.
(800) 643-0765





Ken Elkins

Alabama's Monsanto plant produced PCBs—and dumped them into Choccolocco Creek.

The power of state regulators is likely to grow, not diminish, under the new Republican Congress, which is busy shutting federal agencies and funneling responsibilities to the states. And state agencies are as susceptible to influence peddling as are their federal counterparts. Activists around the nation say that well-heeled industry and farm groups often wield sizable clout with state lawmakers and regulators. Bill Craven, legislative coordinator for the Kansas Sierra Club, says, "We are non-partisan in giving agribusiness a free hand to pollute in this state." According to one study, Kansas ranks last in the nation in meeting surface water use designations. In New York, the new chief of the Department of Environmental Conservation is a former vice president of Tenneco Oil. In Connecticut, the incoming environmental appointee is a former state legislator with a long history of opposition to green initiatives.

Evidence of official neglect is not hard to find in Alabama. In a survey last year, the North Carolina-based Institute for Southern Studies ranked Alabama 40th among the states in per capita spending on the environment. In the report's overall "Environmental Health" index, the state place 46th.

Part of the explanation may lie in the legacy of a poor, rural state traditionally eager for industry at any price. Another may be the political power of timber, mining and other well-heeled special interests that often bridle at the prospect of strong environmental regulation. And the grassroots activism that has typically powered the environmental movement has little precedent in the state's clannish political system.

The practical impact of such neglect can be found about 120 miles north of ADEM's Montgomery headquarters. Choccolocco Creek meanders through a large swath of northeast Alabama before emptying into Logan-Martin Lake east of Birmingham. For more than a year, the last 25 to 30 miles of the creek have been under a "no consumption" fish advisory because of contamination by polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs).

In itself, that's not unusual: Choccolocco Creek is now only one of many waterways and lakes tainted by toxic chemicals. Once a staple of the electrical industry, PCBs are a suspected carcinogen and have also been linked to reproductive problems. Their manufacture and most uses are now banned.

And their presence in the creek should have come as no surprise, only as a rueful irony. What has become one of the world's most widespread environmental hazards was first commercially produced in Anniston.

More remarkable is that the potential dangers apparently aroused little concern at the state level for more than two decades after they were first recognized. In 1970, tests showed that Choccolocco fish contained PCB residues up to 72 times federal guidelines. Any worries at the time were downplayed by state environmental officials and managers at the Monsanto plant in Anniston that produced the chemical.

"I can't say that they would necessarily require action," one state regulator told a newspaper reporter in 1970. "The value of PBC (sic) is something in my opinion

DSW 133870

STLCOPCB4033828

that has yet to be decided." Monsanto's plant manager stressed the company's efforts to reduce PCB discharges. In an internal company memo a few weeks later, another Monsanto official cited the reporter's article as an example of the value of cooperation with the news media. With apparent satisfaction, the official added, "The feature emphasized that the PCB problem was relatively new, was being solved by Monsanto and at this point was no cause for alarm."

And that was pretty much that. Monsanto halted PCB production at its Anniston plant in 1972. During the next two decades, however, sporadic tests would show that the long-lived toxins continued to taint creek fish. With the exception of the attorney general's office—which helped prod the quiet removal of almost 1,000 tons of contaminated sediment in a Choccolocco tributary in 1989-90—state and federal regulators did nothing.

Attention on the problem refocused only in 1993, after a private contractor noticed deformed fish in the creek. When he had them tested on his own, they showed PCB residues well above the federal guidelines. The fish advisory from the state public health department followed a few months later. Property owners, anglers and businesspeople have since filed at least four lawsuits against Mosanto, alleging that the firm knew about the continuing contamination and did nothing. The company's attorneys say that the firm acted responsibly at all times and that the evidence will bear that out.

As lawyers battle out the issue in paper wars, the consequences of regulators' failure to earlier warn the public—particularly those who regularly ate Choccolocco Creek fish—may never be known. The exact reasons for that failure will probably also remain a mystery. But it seems clear that, until recently, the state lacked much of the regulatory framework to confront the problem.

Not until 1989 did the state public health authorities even adopt written guidelines for issuing fish advisories. Not until 1991 did ADEM begin a systematic program to sample fish in the state's major waters for contamination. Fish advisories, after all, are often controversial. Fish sampling programs are expensive. Too often in Alabama, the costs of doing nothing are never figured into the balance sheet.

Contact: Sierra Club/Alabama, 1330 21st Way South, Suite 100B, Birmingham, AL 35205/(205)933-9111. —*Sean Reilly*

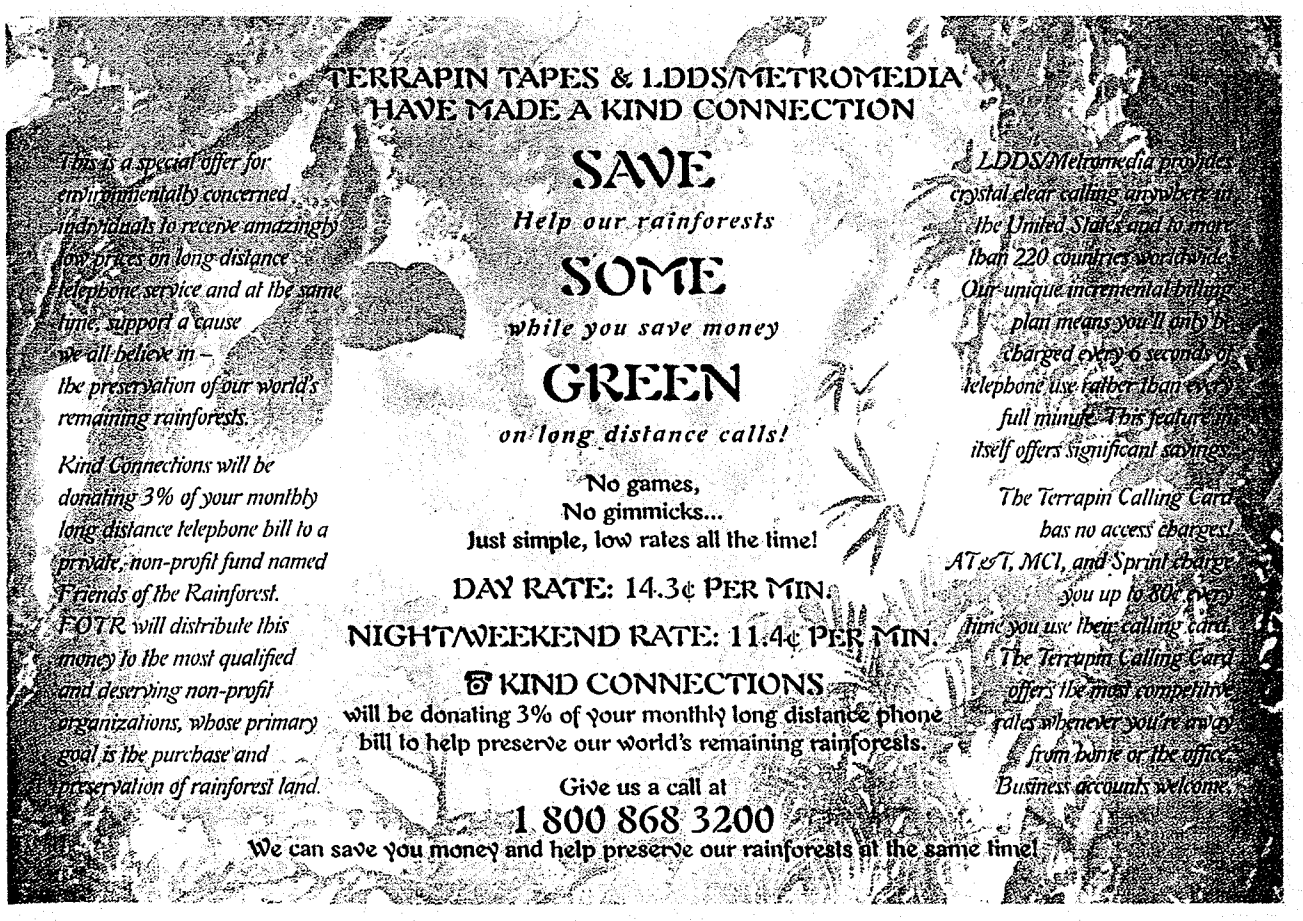
FIGHTING FOR THE FIELDS

Will Poland Stay Green? It's Caught Between Eco-Currents and "Modernization"

Poland is usually thought of as a kind of environmental house of horrors. Belching smokestacks, coal-darkened buildings and mammoth industrial complexes are the dismal and grimy images that leap at us from reports about Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, wholesale despoliation is not a pervasive condition. In spite of the gray renderings, much of Poland is still surprisingly lush. Unfortunately, few get to see past the cheerless Orwellian visage to the other Poland—the green Poland.

Anyone who has ventured beyond the urban tourist corridors knows of the rare quality of the Polish countryside. In her recent book *Exit Into History*, Eva Hoffman describes the rickety socialist city centers as mere "foreground" against the deeper and older rural background of Poland—a background that has survived changing political landscapes.

During the 1950's centralist governments in Eastern Europe sought to "rationalize" private land holdings and create



DSW 133871

STLCOPCB4033829