

EDITOR'S NOTE

ECOLOGICAL CROSSROADS

BY

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Today humanity stands before ecological crossroads. The staggering breadth, depth, and rate at which our species alters land, air, and water is destabilizing the natural world. This simple truth jeopardizes not just species of plants and animals, but people living around the globe; for the fate of humankind and nature are, and have always been, inextricably bound. Indeed, history teaches us mighty societies crumble if ecosystems collapse. This sobering reality gives new meaning to the timeless words: *E Pluribus Unum*—out of many, one.

While fortunate that billions of people will shed the chains of poverty and climb into the global middle class by 2050, the ecological stress imposed on our planet will unfortunately intensify. To make matters worse, our changing climate is causing ecosystems to falter, temperatures to warm, sea levels to rise, glaciers to shrink, droughts to linger, and wildfires to spread. Fourteen of the past fifteen years have marked Earth's warmest since keeping record began in 1880. Each day hundreds of species go extinct. Cargo ships now navigate polar shipping passages unimaginable not long ago. These changes serve as a solemn and powerful reminder that our actions today ripple across the waters of tomorrow; a reminder that nature cannot be mastered; a reminder that we are all in this together.

The question arises whether we will stand by as the status quo's gravitational pull continues to overburden our planet; or whether we, together, will labor to safeguard our natural heritage not just for ourselves,

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but for our children and our grandchildren. In the long tale of human history, there has been no greater challenge, no greater struggle, and no greater obligation than to leave our planet better off than it was left to us. Posterity will rightly judge us for how we respond. So let us work together to defend the conditions for life on Earth. Ultimately, to meet this challenge is the mission of this scholarly publication.

Environmental Law was founded in 1969 as our nation's first environmental and natural resources law review. We are a student-run institution that fosters discourse, values teamwork, and honors excellence. Our nearly half-century of publishing sophisticated and forward-looking scholarship is a testament not just to the gravity and endurance of the challenges we face, but to the moral imagination and rational genius of humanity. As was true of our predecessors, the scholarship we publish today helps shape what society considers possible, by providing insightful critiques of, and practical alternatives to, the status quo. Our scholarship seeks meaningful solutions to seemingly intractable problems. Our scholarship strives for a future where people and nature peaceably exist side by side in perpetuity.

In the end, the road to a sustainable civilization will not unfold without obstruction. There will be setbacks and mishaps, uncertainty and frustration, tough choices and tradeoffs. Yet, we must overcome these challenges, for Earth is our only home. Through forging partnerships that transcend discipline, culture, and ideology, we can build a healthy, just, and resilient world for future generations. This road will require governments to adopt smarter policies, businesses to design better products, and civil society to organize stronger movements. It will require that we end fearing that which is unfamiliar and begin to examine honestly our subjective impulses and beliefs. It will require that we fundamentally redefine our relationship to nature's kingdom as one not of exploitation but stewardship, not of excess but moderation, not of independence but interdependence.

And so, today let us faithfully resolve to safeguard our natural heritage. If not only for ourselves and our families, then for the voiceless polar bear that fishes from the shrinking Arctic; for the majestic elephant that trudges across the expanding Sahara; for the hopeful child born on a sinking island in the South Pacific. Let us rise together to meet this great challenge. Let us bridge the divide between the promise of our aspirations and the reality of our practices. Let us never forget, that together, we are greater than the sum of our parts. That together, we can overcome that which appears insurmountable. That together, we have the power to reshape the world to reflect our brightest dreams and not our darkest fears. As Abraham Lincoln said long ago, together let us appeal to "the better angels of our nature." For the simple truth is, we have no other choice.