Grassroots Action Annual Gathering / Eugene's Environmental L.A.W. Conference

Contributed by Jan Lundberg
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The grassroots environmental movement is suppressed, but its biggest splash and bash happens every year in Eugene at the University of Oregon. The cool workshops and attendees are unparalleled. One of the best climate action groups today, Rising Tide, reports back.

Before that report on the 27th Annual Public Interest Environmental Law Conference, here's the general flavor of the event each year, plus a sampling of the keynote speakers:

I don't go every year, ironically due to being stuck in the trenches of environmental action elsewhere, usually in front of my computer. But I know ELAW to be the networking heaven for enviro activists, and in Eugene there's a civic pride in attracting them.

In 2006, an "extracurricular" night out featured ecotroubadours Dana Lyons, Casey Neill and David Rovics on the same stage, and I got on the radio twice with my radical ecosongs. My highlight has been to play at two of the weekend finale's Earth First! parties. A previous year, my daughter Spring Lundberg gave a well-attended presentation on the pepperspray torture case then in federal court. One night I bumped into the legendary Albert Bartlett hailing from University of Colorado. Almost no other town in the U.S. could have such things happen.

This year's keynote speakers included:

* Riki Ott -- Author of Sound Truth and Corporate Myths and Not One Drop, two books that draw on her firsthand experience of the devastating effects of the Exxon Valdez oil spill.

* Katharine Redford -- Cofounder and U.S. Office Director of Earth Rights International ("ERI"), a nonprofit group of activists, organizers, and lawyers with expertise in human rights, the environment, and corporate and government accountability.

* Stephen Stec -- Adjunct Professor at Central European University in Budapest, Hungary, and Associate Scholar at Leiden University in The Netherlands.

* Fernando Ochoa -- Founding member and Executive Director of the environmental advocacy organization Defensa Ambiental del Noroeste ("DAN"); Legal Advisor for Pronatura Noroeste, a Mexican nonprofit organization.

* Claudia Polsky -- Deputy Director of the Office of Pollution Prevention and Green Technology for California's Department of Toxic Substances Control ("DTSC").

This year's theme was "Solidarity! United Action for the Greener Good". The students of Land Air Water ("LAW"), a student environmental law society, hosted the annual conference of the National Association of Environmental Law Societies and the Environmental Alliance Worldwide in conjunction with the Public Interest Environmental LAW Conferrence (PIELC).

Billed as the premier annual gathering for environmentalists worldwide, the 2009 PIELC examined "how leading defenders of the environment identify and maximize their shared missions and work cooperatively to find solutions to the immense problems facing our planet and its inhabitants."

Cascadia Rising Tide report

Experiences at the ELAW Conference Feb. 26-Mar. 1, reported by Ant:

Cascadia Rising Tide (CRT) has been busy recently getting ready for the Spring and Summer “festivities” and decided to kick off the season down in Eugene at the annual Public Interest Environmental Law Conference [PIELC aka ELAW, or Land, Air and Water, not to be confused with Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide]. ELAW is a conference held at the University of Oregon every year around the beginning of March, packed full of workshops ranging from Direct Action 101 to the ins and outs of suing the government on anything environmental.

ELAW is the largest environmental law conference in the nation, is totally free and tends to signify the beginning of the summer environmental activist season here in Cascadia. Due to these factors CRT decided to come out and spread the word about Climate Justice perspectives and make the event a little more fun and action oriented.

The conference officially started on Thurs. Feb.26th with a few keynote speakers in the evening. Four Portland Rising Tiders (PRT), who organized the Northwest Black Mesa Solidarity Caravan last November, showed up early to give a presentation on Black Mesa and their experiences helping on the land. They talked a bit about the history of Black Mesa, the injustices caused by the US government and the fossil fuel industries. They used a slide-show to help folks visualize the region and the stories they told about the many projects they helped with. The story of Black Mesa is a clear example of the connections between climate criminals and social injustices. This connection has become known as the fight for Climate Justice.

For more info on how to help the Black Mesa folks, and

Black Mesa Water Coalition

Friday is when ELAW really gets going, so we spent the day tabling and talking to the hundreds of people attending to learn more about where the movement is headed. In the late afternoon about 35 people left with a bike-hauled sound system and headed for (St)Umpqua Bank’s Regional Headquarters in downtown Eugene. The chairman of their board, Allyn Ford, is also the owner of Roseburg Forest Products, the biggest logger of Old Growth on our Public Lands. We took our traveling dance party into the lobby and made business near impossible as we danced our asses off and distributed literature on the issue. The party was inside for about 25 minutes and then moved out to the busy intersection to urge passers-by and traffic to boycott Umpqua Bank.

For more info on why to boycott Umpqua Bank

Since most of us didn't get our fill of dancing and because we totally support some bad ass lawyers and who they fight for, we went down to the Civil Liberties Defense Center (CLDC) benefit later that night. CLDC is a group of amazing lawyers who represent radical eco and animal liberation activists. They do this pro bono (for FREE) and represent many of the folks resisting the Green Scare. The benefit had a great turn-out, fun radical music and amazing display boards with specifics about a dozen radical political prisoners that CLDC is supporting. Also, there was a short auction where a bottle of wine was auctioned for $150, called Jake's Fault – indicating the root of the Green Scare, Jake Ferguson, who snitched on numerous environmental activists. Over all, the event was tons of fun and raised a bunch of money to help support some of the amazing activists that have put their freedom on the line in the defense of the Earth and all its inhabitants.

For more info on the CLDC and
the
Green Scare

We had a lot planned for Saturday, so we forced the sleep from our eyes and made our way to the conference. Some of the folks who had too much fun the night before tabled while some folks went to workshops and a few others gave a panel on the False Solutions to Climate Change. The panel was done in collaboration with the Global Justice Ecology Project (GJEP) and covered the harm caused to people and the earth from the agro-fuels, giant dams, carbon trading and offsets and other bogus "solutions" to climate change.

Two amazing CRT womyn took up some slack and did a creative action right in the middle of the conference hall. They set up a small table, a sandwich board saying "Get Paid to Offset Others' Infidelity" and "Cheat on Your Partner? Offset Your Guilt Here" and started advertising their mock business, Cheat Neutral. The business basically offers folks the chance to pay them a small sum for not being faithful to their partner and they would then pay a couple to stay faithful; thus offsetting their cheating. This was a very fun and creative way to show folks that Carbon Offsets are really just offsetting your guilt and don't make a difference as far as Carbon output is concerned. Part of the reason folks did this action at ELAW was because both ELAW and the UofO advocate and use offsets to make themselves feel better and look "greener." In response, some CRTers also hung a banner in the main hallway proclaiming, "Carbon Offsets are a Greenwash SCAM". Not long after these festivities, three Rising Tiders gave a Direct Action workshop which consisted of fun interactions and role plays.

A big tradition at ELAW is the Outlaw Bash, Earth First!'s annual fundraiser/drunken extravaganza. There was a bunch of great music and people, a big fire, a huge hula-hoop and even Boots Riley from the Coup showed up this year. The Outlaw Bash tends to signal the end of ELAW, even though there is another day left, where folks mostly attend morning workshops, clean up their tables and head home. This year was no different.

Overall it was a great weekend of learning, action and fun. Once everything was packed up and we said our goodbyes to all our old and new friends, we headed back to Portland to give a presentation on the weekend's festivities. We made more connections with folks interested in the fight for Climate Justice. Next year we hope to make ELAW even more action packed and full of fun, radical entertainment. We would love for more folks to join us and help make it that much more of a communal effort.

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Don't miss the 2010 conference, no matter what your interest is in environmental or climate affairs, if you are honest and impassioned. Block out the first weekend in March each year and make the scene!

For those in or near Portland, get involved with Cascadia Rising Tide. Send an e-mail to cascadia "at" risingtidenorthamerica "dot" org or come to monthly presentations at the Red & Black Café (400 SE Oak, Portland) on the 1st Sunday of every month at 7 PM.

Confronting the Root Causes of Climate Change:
Cascadia
Rising Tide

The official E-L.A.W. - PIELC website:

law.uoregon.edu

Also in Eugene:
Environmental Law Alliance Worldwide

Rising Tide North America's direct action, Washington, DC:

Climate Activists Invade DC Offices of Environmental Defense on Culture Change

Rising Tide - UK

Navajos & Hopis Fight Office of Surface Mining's Decision on Peabody Coal's Black Mesa Project on Culture Change