

# Reducing the Footprint

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OLYMPIA (6/25/07)-- Learning about a problem is the first step toward solving it. Many people with foresight are beginning to ask how they can help reduce our collective footprint—what actions they can take to turn the tide on water shortages, pollution and habitat destruction.

It begins at home, of course. Use mass transit, conserve water and energy, recycle, switch to low energy light bulbs and curb the use of poisons on your lawns and gardens.

But how do we get beyond reducing the footprint around our homes to reducing the footprint of our communities?

One way is to support E3.

While it's true that almost anything we can do to help our environment is important, nothing is more effective over the long run than making ongoing improvements in environmental education. It's good in the home. It's good in the community. It's good in school.

That's where E3 Washington comes in. The "E's" stand for environment, education and economy. It's a statewide program I co-chair with Governor Gregoire and Bill Ruckelshaus. Through E3, we're coordinating with other outstanding programs, such as the Pacific Education Institute, the Puget Sound Partnership, the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians and the Washington Indian Education Association to develop environmental education for everyone who lives, learns, works, and plays in Washington. E3 connects people in the "inner city" to urban communities, farmers to environmentalists and tribes to non-tribal agencies and communities. Its doors are wide open to you, whoever you are.

There's nothing fancy about the way E3 works. Educators, natural resource managers, business leaders, elected officials and others get together to brainstorm ideas about getting the word out about the environment at the watershed level. Across the state, regional and statewide summits are being held this year and early in 2008 to help plans come together and support programs needed to make real headway. Academic performance is advanced in schools in a way that links healthy natural resources with healthy communities. E3 is a way to plan our future together and avoid the pitfalls of the past.

Many environmental education efforts in the state today are unfortunately underfunded, fragmented and, in some cases, redundant. E3 has the ability to help generate the resources needed to change all that, by linking and leveraging current resources, identifying areas that need improvement, and gaining increased commitment and funding to ensure success from both private and public entities.

Tribes are working hard to make a difference in environmental education. But none of us can do it alone. We know the resources and enthusiasm—and the traditional knowledge we bring to the table—can make a difference. We support E3 because we want to help all children and all adults understand their connection with the world and lessons of traditional knowledge that have stood the test of time.

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