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Environmental education sought for all by group

Soundings

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The Olympian

About 200 people gathered Friday in the Evergreen State College Longhouse to help give birth to a new approach to environmental education in South Sound.

They are part of a state-funded effort called E3Washington, with the E's standing for education, environment and the economy.

Their goal? Optimize environmental education for everyone who lives, learns, works and plays in Washington.

It's an ambitious undertaking that comes at a time when environmental-education efforts across the state are disjointed, underfunded, redundant and too often missing the mark, especially if you buy into the notion that the audience needs to be everybody, not just students in a captive classroom.

The conference at Evergreen was the third of 18 regional summits scheduled across the state in the next several months, culminating with a statewide summit in November and a completed plan by May 2008.

I'm participating in E3Washington, helping environmental educators and others understand how The Olympian perceives and fosters the coverage of environmental news, and offering advice on the best ways for environmental educators to deliver their messages to print journalists such as myself.

I'm a firm believer that every region in the state, including South Sound, would be well served by a comprehensive approach to environmental education that helps people make sustainable decisions as they go about their daily lives.

"We need to make environmental literacy the norm, not just something for environmental activists," noted Evergreen educator Jean MacGregor.

MacGregor suggested, and I tend to agree, that we as a society are on the cusp of the third wave of environmentalism in this nation. The first was the natural resource conservation movement spearheaded by early 20th-century leaders such as President Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot, the first chief of the U.S. Forest Service and someone credited with coining the well-worn phrase "conservation" as it applies to natural resources.

The second wave hit land in the 1960s and early 1970s with the work of Rachel Carson, the author of *Silent Spring* whose 100th birthday was this week, Earth Day and the birth of federal laws and agencies to curb and clean up pollution.

The third wave seems to be galvanizing around responses to global warming, including alternative fuels and cars, reduced carbon dioxide emissions and the emergence of new corporate citizens willing to change to more sustainable business practices.

As fate and scheduling would have it, Gifford Pinchot III, the grandson of the first Forest Service chief, was at the conference Friday to talk about his latest job as president of the Bainbridge Graduate Institute, a graduate school on Bainbridge Island that offers master's degrees in business administration with sustainability at the core of the curriculum.

There's a war going on inside every corporation these days between the forces of change — how to run a successful business in an environmentally friendly way — and the forces of the status quo — how to make a profit with continued disregard for environmental consequences, Pinchot said.

One of the goals of the institute is to send graduates into the corporate world to fight for change, he said. "This is a very long march, and there's no easy answers," he said.

Some other random observations for a day at the longhouse:

- **Evergreen President Les Purce** talked about sustainability programs on campus. One indicator of progress: 20 percent of the food served on campus comes from within a 150-mile radius of the school.

- **A number of Evergreen students** served as note-takers at the conference, including sophomore Jenna Fissenden.

"I'm the product of a K-12 education with no environmental education involved," the Monroe native told me. "I want to be part of fixing that huge problem."

If you want to learn more about, or get involved in, the environmental-education movement in this state, go to the Environmental Education Association of Washington Web site at www.eeaw.org.

I'll keep you posted on the plan and whether it receives the kind of funding and support it will need to avoid turning into just another dusty document on a shelf.

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