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## State must connect education, environment, economy

By Cliff Moore

Can our economy and the environment both thrive? This is an open question, but not a rhetorical one. Indeed, many of the 200 individuals who gathered on a pristine South Sound day in early June at The Evergreen State College longhouse for the E3 Summit would assert that only the preservation of our environment will ensure a healthy, growing economy. These 200 individuals, from government, business, higher education, K-12, tribal organizations and the nonprofit sector are part of a statewide process that might well lay the groundwork for a sustainable future, economically and environmentally. And what is the secret to this group's success? Like any good business, it boils down to three simple words: education, education, education.

The June summit at Evergreen focused on Thurston and Mason counties, and is one of 18 similar meetings that are happening in Washington in the coming months. The summit steering committee, buoyed by the audacity of hope, is linking our two most precious resources, our children and our natural environment, with a view to developing a comprehensive approach to create environmentally literate citizens.

It might be tempting to write off this effort as merely a left-wing attempt to hijack the educational agenda. But our world today is far too complex for such a simplistic viewpoint. Ask our local shellfish farmers about the biggest threat to their business and the answer won't be low market prices or competition from the outside. Rather they will tell you in no uncertain terms that declining water quality in the Puget Sound is their overriding concern.

So what do the E3 planners hope to accomplish with 18 statewide summit meetings? The first priority is the development of a comprehensive strategy to educate decision makers of the future about environmental issues. Also, they seek to create a "mechanism for leveraging existing education opportunities across the state and a network for coordination and delivery of those resources."

By early 2008, once all of the meetings have been held, the E3 team will deliver "a statewide plan that defines coordinated and phased actions, resources, and commitments needed at the state and local levels for environmental literacy and sustainability to take hold in Washington." In short it's a holistic process, informed by business, government, tribes and non-profits alike, that will result in a citizenry equipped to make decisions in the best interest of the next seven generations.

Yes, this is an ambitious agenda. Yes, it will take sacrifices from all of us. And yes, we are in uncharted waters. However, drawing from the lexicon of the day, failure is not an option.

The key to success, in my view, lies with the generation of college students currently engaging around these issues. Every table at our E3 summit included Evergreen students, many planning to be K-12 teachers. Their scientific knowledge, their passion and their commitment to our shared future, left me with optimism around this issue I have not felt in a long time. We are fortunate to have them on this team.

*For more information about the E3 process, and the schedule for upcoming summit meetings, see [www.e3washington.org](http://www.e3washington.org)*

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