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the planet [winter 2003]

the bush administration: an environmental audit
Dear Reader,

George W. Bush promised a new era of environmental protection during his presidential campaign. He wasted no time showing what he meant by backing out of the Kyoto Protocol, cutting renewable energy research funds in half, and proposing what critics have called a Neanderthals, fossil-fuel-driven energy policy — all in his first 100 days of office.

While no one familiar with Bush's environmental legacy as governor of Texas would have predicted a green administration, even his most ardent supporters could not have imagined Bush's success in combining environmental protection with big business values.

This issue of The Planet audits the Bush administration's environmental record and attempts to answer the question of whether the environment can thrive with so much emphasis put on the health of big business.

Reporters of varying educational backgrounds and journalistic experience scoured Bellingham and the Northwest in search of environmental issues carrying the Bush administration's stamp.

Because this administration has been especially busy changing the landscape of environmental protection, stories were not hard to find. Using a three-pronged attack consisting of budget cuts, revisions to legislation and the less visible strategy of regulation changes, the Bush administration has made far reaching decisions.

Environmental budget cuts will be felt in every region of the United States as Bush slashed nearly $1 billion in environmental funding in his 2003 budget. Locally, educators fear cuts to the EPA's Office of Environmental Education will leave programs without funding.

Proposed revisions to the National Roadless Area Conservation Act show Bush's desire to combine business's interest with environmental protection. If the revisions go into effect, timber sales and projects that are currently prohibited could be allowed, while environmental reviews would be reduced.

These revisions would then compromise the Endangered Species Act and potentially lead to more logging and less regulation.

Regulation changes by the Bush administration can be seen through the Freedom of Information Act — an act requiring federal agencies to disclose records to the public. Since the Bush administration took office, journalists and agencies like the ACLU have complained of requests not being honored or being heavily censored. Without this information, the public cannot stay informed and hold the government accountable for its actions.

The ultimate goal of The Planet is to inform our readers about environmental issues. While this is by no means an exhaustive look into the Bush administration's environmental actions, it shines light on the notorious record the administration is compiling.

Hopefully this quarter's magazine will convince you to take a critical look at the marriage of environment and economy by the Bush administration. Only informed voters can have a positive influence at the polls. By reading this magazine you are taking the first step — don't stop — educate yourself about what is happening to the precious earth around you and make an impact.

Enjoy,

Matt Bucher
During his time as governor of Texas, President George W. Bush learned much about creating and implementing environmental policy. But, environmentalists are concerned that he might have learned the wrong things.

SUV sales are on the rise across the nation — to the worry of environmentalists. Fuel economy standards should improve fuel-inefficiencies but some of the worst polluters are exempt from the standards.

Whatcom County's economy relies heavily on its two oil refineries, BP Cherry Point and ConocoPhillips. But, as technology changes the future of oil refining is uncertain.

Skiers have had a disappointing year across the state and scientists warn that there might be more disappointments to come if global warming continues at its present rate. But, with Bush backing out of the Kyoto Protocol, the United States remains a part of the problem.

The Bush administration's changes to the Clean Air Act could worsen the nation's air quality. Under the plan, power plants would face fewer regulations requiring them to reduce pollution.

Endangered species are at risk from a Bush administration plan and less stringent environmental regulations could destroy salmon habitat.

Whatcom County's Clearwater Creek boasts some of the Northwest's most challenging rapids drawing whitewater kayakers from across the region. But, a proposed dam on the creek could threaten this awesome stretch of fast-moving water.

The Whatcom County Council approved an ordinance that reduced the allowable amount of arsenic in drinking water four years before the federal rule required it. Some wonder if the council's early decision is worth the expense to builders.

The Bush administration has revived an old statute that makes it easier to turn old trails and right-of-ways into roads, increasing access to some wild-places and possibly harming others.

Whatcom County's economy relies heavily on its two oil refineries, BP Cherry Point and ConocoPhillips. But, as technology changes the future of oil refining is uncertain.

The 2003 Bush administration budget doesn't include funding for the Office of Environmental Education — a department created by Bush's father, George H.W. Bush. Environmental educators feel removing these programs is a big mistake.

The word "Republican" wasn't always synonymous with "anti-environmental" but recent shifts in the party's views on the environment have some green Republicans concerned.
January 2001

- Bush announces a regulatory freeze. (1/20)
- The Bush administration proposes opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil drilling. (1/20)
BUNDLED UP IN fleece pants, a hooded sweatshirt and a long brown jacket, a rosy-cheeked anti-war protester shouted, "No War with Iraq," while her cold hands tightly grasped a picket sign reading NO BLOOD FOR OIL. The streets of downtown Bellingham filled with the sound of drums beating, people shouting and car horns honking.

"We come to show solidarity against the war," anti-war protester Kathy Loathers said. "There is power in numbers."

Since early November 2002, nearly 50 people have gathered together every week outside Bellingham's Federal Building to protest the possibility of war with Iraq.

With war on the minds of people across the nation, the George W. Bush administration's decision to reshape the course of environmental protection receives limited exposure.

From the beginning of his political career as governor of Texas, Bush has modified environmental policies concerning air, water and natural resources. But, with the possibility of war so strong, Bush's current environmental policy modifications have gone largely unnoticed.

BUSH AS GOVERNOR OF TEXAS

In 1994, Bush was elected governor of Texas. He was re-elected in 1998, serving a total of six years in office. As governor, Bush established a conservative reputation and assembled a notorious environmental record.

"The Bush administration in Texas was masterful at the public relations game of making themselves look reasonable while engaging in radical changes in environmental policy," said Phyllis Dunham, regional field director for the Sierra Club's Texas division.

"If people looked at his environmental record they would be horrified, since Texas went from a state with generally poor quality air and water to a state with absolutely filthy air and water."

As governor, Bush introduced the idea of self-regulation in Texas. The policy allowed "grandfather polluters"—industries that predate laws such as the 1970 Clean Air Act—to be exempt from environmental regulations. Exxon, Alcoa, Shell, Enron and Amoco were among the companies exempted from certain pollution controls. Because these environmental laws allowed industries to audit their own pollution, companies that were grandfathered in...
managed to pollute without being held accountable for it. At the same time, Bush's Texas administration gave the impression that it cared about the environment, Dunham said.

"They went to great lengths to allow polluters to regulate themselves entirely," she said. "The administration messed around with the environment big time, all in favor of big business."

Dunham said the industries were required to audit their own pollution records. As long as they provided these records they were guaranteed protection from public disclosure.

Bush's environmental record as governor of Texas has followed him into his presidency.

"There is no question that the Bush administration is doing the same thing nationally as they did in Texas," Dunham said.

In his first 100 days in office, Bush cut funds for research into renewable energy sources by nearly half, backed out of the Kyoto Protocol — an international treaty on global warming — and delayed rules that lowered the level of arsenic in drinking water.

"What we are seeing on a nationwide scale is the Bush administration's Texas environmental legacy at large," Dunham said.

HEALTHY FORESTS INITIATIVE
In the 2003 State of the Union, Bush told the United States that the Healthy Forests Initiative would prevent catastrophic fires that devastate communities, kill wildlife and burn millions of acres of forests.

The initiative, proposed in Medford, Ore., on August 22, 2002, is designed to stop fires by limiting fuel using thinning and prescribed burning. According to the Northwest Ecosystem Alliance Web site, an estimated 192 million acres of national forests and nearly 3,000 species could lose vital protection under the initiative.

Whatcom County Republican Central Committee Chairman Bruce Ayers said he agrees with the administration's plan. He said he believes that thinning keeps disease from spreading. Responsibly managing forests so that they grow and flourish is a good thing, he said.

Sierra Club Washington, D.C. division's national forest policy specialist Sean Cosgrove said, however, what the administration is proposing would allow the timber industry to do severe damage to forests.

"They are using annual forest fire seasons to roll out proposals which would effectively gut national forest laws," he said.

CLEAR SKIES INITIATIVE
On Feb. 14, 2002, Bush proposed the Clear Skies Initiative that claims a 70 percent decrease in power plant emissions of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides and mercury by 2018 and sets nationwide emission limits on the pollutants.

In a recent press release, however, the Natural Resources Defense Council claims the initiative would only allow increased emissions for a longer period of time. Natural Resources Defense Council argues that over the next decade the initiative would allow two times as much sulfur dioxide, one-and-a-half times as much nitrogen dioxide and five times as much mercury than if the Clean Air Act was enforced as is.

The initiative modifies the 1970 Clean Air Act and allows industries to self-regulate their emissions — like the policy Bush introduced in Texas when he was governor.

The Clear Skies Initiative would allow companies to buy and sell emission credits, audit their own pollution records and regulate their own pollution. By meeting emissions requirements early or reducing pollution below set standards, power plants can sell pollution credits to other companies that are having difficulty meeting emission limits.

Dunham said she believes that self-regulation doesn't work, as evidenced by Texas' poor air quality. The system allows polluters to continue to pollute as long as they can afford to buy permits from other companies. This could lead to intense pollution near specific plants.

Ayers said he agrees with the self-regulation approach.

"President Bush is doing a better job of achieving better air quality by partnering with industry and allowing people to be part of the regulations," Ayers said. "He is holding industry to a higher standard and giving them incentives."

Cosgrove said new legislation is working in favor of big corporations by allowing industries to determine how much they pollute.

"The Bush administration is fundamentally trying to change the effect of environmental laws," Cosgrove said. "They are trying to take it back to the sixties."

March 2001 | Bush goes back on his campaign promise to reduce carbon dioxide pollution. (3/13)
The Bush administration is fundamentally trying to change the effect of environmental laws. They are trying to take it back to the sixties.  

Sean Cosgrove  
Sierra Club  

CLEAN WATER ACT  
The administration modified the Clean Water Act on Oct. 18, 2002. The original act established regulations concerning discharging pollutants into United States’ waters.  

Provisions in the modified Clean Water Act could dismantle historical wetland protection and impact the quality of the United States’ water, according to the Natural Resources Defense Council. The original act made it unlawful for an industry to discharge pollutants into waterways without first obtaining a permit.  

Controversy surrounds the revised act because it loosens permits and would make it easier for industries to discharge pollutants into waters without public notice or opportunity for public comment, according to the Natural Resources Defense Council.  

“The question is whose water should be dirty?” Cosgrove said. “We’ve cleaned up 70 percent of America’s waters, what about the other 30 percent that affects peoples lives?”  

FREEDOM CAR  
In an effort to decrease America’s dependence on foreign oil and work toward a cleaner environment, the Bush administration proposed the FreedomCAR (Cooperative Automotive Research), a hydrogen-powered vehicle. The administration said it plans to devote $1.2 billion for research money over the next five years.  

“It is certainly a step in the right direction,” said Wayne Elson, who works for the Environmental Protection Agency office of air quality. “Many believe that is the way our automobile technology should be going.”  

In the State of the Union, Bush promised a national commitment to take fuel-cell-powered cars from the laboratory to showrooms within the next 20 years.  

“Research is critical across the board,” said Brad Smith, dean of Huxley College of the Environment at Western Washington University. “There should be more money allocated for it.”  

BUSH, OIL AND CORPORATE CONNECTIONS  
Bush promotes plans to reduce dependence on foreign oil, but his family has a long history in the oil industry.  

Former President George H.W. Bush founded Zapata Oil, making his first million in Midland, Texas. His son followed in his steps in 1978 when he founded Arbusto Energy, an oil and gas company. In 1983 he became the CEO of Spectrum 7, another energy company that merged with Arbusto.  

“The president and vice president are oil men,” Cosgrove said. “They came from the oil industry and worked in the oil industry.”  

Cosgrove said the administration’s proposals reflect plans that the oil industry would favor, such as a proposal to drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.  

“President Bush is a puppet for the oil industry,” anti-war protester Michael Savatgy said.  

The president isn’t the only member of the administration with corporate connections.  

Bush’s Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman served on the board of Calgene, one of the first companies to sell genetically modified food in stores. Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham received $700,000 from the automobile industry when he was a Michigan senator. He opposed research into renewable energy. Condoleezza Rice, National Security Adviser, serves on Chevron’s board of directors and Gale Norton, Secretary of the Interior, was the national chairperson of the Coalition of Republican Environmental Advocates, a group funded by Ford and BP Amoco. While she was attorney general of Colorado, Norton argued that the Endangered Species Act is unconstitutional.  

Other cabinet members chosen by Bush have connection to corporations like Monsanto, Microsoft, General Motors, Boeing and AOL.  

The cabinet certainly reflects a poor environmental record, especially after two years, Cosgrove said. People are starting to realize the impacts the Bush administration has on environmental laws and environmental proposals.  

Realizing short-term decisions made by the Bush administration can have long-term effects, protesters continue to stand outside in the cold, holding on tightly to the belief that power in numbers can influence political decisions and alter the fate of the United States.

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Senior Melanie Rasmussen studies environmental education and mass communication at Huxley College. This is her first published piece.

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Bush does not back new arsenic-in-drinking-water standards. (3/20)  
Bush rejects the Kyoto Protocol. (3/28)  
The Bush administration delays regulations on hard-rock mining that protect watersheds. (3/21)
Ford Explorers, the most popular SUV in the United States, line the front of the Diehl Ford lot. The Bellingham dealership sold 60 Explorers in 2002.

**APRIL 2001**

Bush supports the United Nations’ treaty against Persistent Organic Pollutants. (4/9)

The Bush administration proposes relaxing Endangered Species Act requirements. (4/9)
Misel Cruzado pulled into a Bellingham Shell station to fuel up his 1995 Mitsubishi Montero. It takes $32 to fill up his tank, which he does every three days. He commutes, but said he didn’t consider the fuel efficiency of his vehicle before purchasing the SUV. He liked the car and that was all that mattered, he said.

President George W. Bush recently proposed an increase of 1.5 miles per gallon in Corporate Average Fuel Economy standards for SUVs and light trucks. He also announced $1.2 billion for research on pollution-free vehicles, which he said would help the United States lessen its dependence on foreign oil while eliminating vehicle emissions that contribute to global warming.

In the 2003 State of the Union address, Bush said he wanted to promote energy independence for the country, while dramatically improving the environment. Two weeks prior, however, he had announced an increased tax break for small businesses that purchase large SUVs.

In 1975, Congress passed CAFE standards, requiring automakers to meet certain standards of fuel efficiency for their entire line of vehicles each year.

Environmental Protection Agency spokesperson Wayne Elson said the standards are currently set at 27.5 miles per gallon for cars and 20.7 mpg for light trucks. These standards have remained unchanged for nearly a decade.

The fuel economy standards were originally set at 18 mpg in 1975. In 1988, the average fuel economy of cars was 28.6 mpg. Since then, the average fuel economy of cars has dropped 2 percent.

According to the EPA’s annual statistics, 2003 model cars and trucks get worse gas mileage — 20.8 mpg — than last year’s models. This year’s rate was 6 percent below the peak efficiency of 22.1 mpg set 15 years ago.

“The numbers could be higher,” Elson said. “What automakers believe consumers demand is what they will produce.”

Today, SUVs are outselling cars in the Pacific Northwest said Tom Jordan, spokesman for Diehl Ford in Bellingham.

In 2002, Diehl Ford sold 335 trucks and SUVs compared to 98 cars, said Colleen Suttif of Diehl Ford.

“Fuel efficiency has continued to go down as SUV sales go up,” said Jim DiPeso, policy director for Republicans for Environmental Protection.

Northwest Environment Watch spokesperson Elisa Murray said SUVs emit a record amount of carbon dioxide, which contributes to global warming.

Light trucks, SUVs and minivans consume about 25 percent more gas per mile and emit 30 percent more carbon monoxide than smaller cars. They also emit 30 percent more cancer-causing...
Misel Cruzado gasses up his 1995 Mitsubishi Montero. He said gas mileage and efficiency were not considerations in his decision to purchase the vehicle. “I just liked it,” he said.

particles as well as nitrogen oxides and hydrocarbons that cause respiratory illness, according to a report from Northwest Environmental Watch.

In December 2002, the Bush administration announced that CAFE standards for SUVs and light trucks would be raised by 1.5 mpg over the next five years while the standard for passenger cars would remain the same.

Due to the United States’ dependence on foreign oil, this increase is not enough, DiPeso said. The National Academy of Sciences stated that fuel economy could be 10 times better than what the administration proposed.

“One point five mpg is a very small increase and doesn’t apply to our biggest problem, vehicles over 6,000 pounds,” said Michael Seal, director of the Vehicle Research Institute at Western Washington University.

United States automakers have found a way to avoid complying with CAFE standards by making SUVs so large that they qualify for lenient air pollution rules originally meant for farmers and businesses with large equipment. At the time, 6,000-pound luxury vehicles were unheard of, DiPeso said.

Luxury vehicles such as the Suburban, Ford Excursion and the Hummer are exempt from CAFE standards entirely.

On Jan. 9, 2003, Bush allowed the 6,000-pound SUVs to benefit from a large tax break. The amount small business owners can deduct from their taxes when purchasing an SUV. The tax deduction increased from $25,000 to $75,000.

With this increase, the entire cost of vehicles such as the 2003 Hummer H2 could be written off in one year. This encourages businesses to purchase SUVs rather than passenger cars, which are not eligible for the deduction. Hummers get 10 mpg. Other vehicles targeted by the tax break, such as the Lincoln Navigator, get 12 mpg, according to the Fuel Economy Guide of 2002.

“There is no excuse for that at all,” DiPeso said.

On the other hand, fuel-efficient hybrid vehicles getting 61 mpg only qualify for a $2,000 tax break. According to the Sierra Club, this deduction is only allowed until 2003, when it will be reduced 25 percent a year until it is completely phased out. Upcoming hybrids such as the 2004 Ford Escape won’t get the full deduction.

On Jan. 28, 2003, Bush announced that the administration would spend $1.2 billion on research of hydrogen-powered fuel-cell vehicles to improve the environment and help the country become energy independent.

“The first car driven by a child born today could be powered by hydrogen, and pollution free,” Bush said in his State of the Union. Seal said he disagrees.

He argues that a lot of money has been spent on zero-emission research and producing hydrogen cells requires tremendous energy, making such vehicles impossible to get on the market. He said he believes the fuel-cell automobile is not going to happen.

“If we were half way there it would help, but we’re not,” Seal said. “We’ve spent more than that already.”

Although some environmental groups agree with the research funding by the administration, the need for short-term solutions remains.

“President Bush’s call for increased research on hydrogen-powered cars is a welcome step toward a balanced national energy policy,” DiPeso said. “However, it will not do enough to reduce pollution, greenhouse gas emissions or Middle Eastern oil dependence unless other near-term and long-term measures are adopted.”

Bush’s policies are a contradiction, Murray said.

Just two weeks after announcing the SUV write-off Bush said a hydrogen-powered car would make the country much less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

It’s uncertain, though, if people will buy fuel-efficient cars.

“Less than 50 percent (of customers) are concerned with fuel efficiency,” Jordan said. “Their buying decision is not affected, nor are they concerned with the numbers.”

Junior Carly Wyatt studies journalism at Western. This is her first published piece.
THE REFINERY CAME OUT OF NOWHERE. My photographer was driving and I looked out the window at the grasslands and forests along the road. Suddenly, Whatcom County's British Petroleum Cherry Point Refinery came into view. It loomed above us and columns of steam poured from the stacks. Metal dominated the horizon and asphalt conquered the earth. We drove along the fence looking at the framework of industry, turned left though the brick entryway and parked outside the administrative building.

The BP refinery was built in 1969 but remains one of the newest oil refining facilities in North America, said Keith Willnauer, Whatcom County assessor.

More than 90 percent of the refinery's crude oil comes from the Alaskan North Slope. The refinery is specially designed to process Alaskan North Slope crude, said Mike Torpey, an engineer at the refinery. The crude is processed into gasoline, diesel, jet fuel and propane. Every four days an 800,000-barrel tanker arrives from the Prudhoe Bay oil field in Alaska.

In an effort to balance the nation's energy supply with its demand, President George W. Bush commissioned a group of cabinet members to create a National Energy Policy. Released in May 2001

ACRONYM KEY
DOE — Department of Energy
BP — British Petroleum
ANWR — Arctic National Wildlife Refuge
I think the local economy will evolve as technology changes. In the near future our local economy is somewhat dependent on those two refineries, but I think in the long term that may not be the case.

— Pete Kremen
Whatcom County Executive

2001, the policy makes it easier for refineries to increase capacity and efficiency while expanding oil exploration and production. Whatcom County's economy is dependent on the oil industry's ability to continue production and provide jobs for the approximately 1,300 permanent and contract-based employees of the area's two refineries — BP Cherry Point and ConocoPhillips.

Whatcom County Executive Pete Kremen said if the refineries in Whatcom County shut down it would have a severe effect on the local economy.

"Between the number of jobs lost and the elimination of the overall payroll produced by the two facilities (it) would have a significant adverse impact to our local economy," he said.

Kremen said the facilities produce revenues through taxes that fund road building, public schools and other county projects.

For example, the Blaine School District receives $1.8 million in tax money from the BP Cherry Point Refinery annually, Willnauer said.

"We're a major player for the economy," said George Fletcher, a senior laboratory technician at BP Cherry Point. "We have 600 employees and a number of contractors. The impact is just tremendous."

BP Cherry Point's government and public affairs manager Mike Abendhoff said the jobs provided by the refinery pay well, offer good benefits and are some of the most sought after jobs in the county. The refineries contribute to the local tax base and the money spent by employees supports local businesses, he said.

"The economic ripples of (the refineries') ability to expand and grow would be significant," Abendhoff said.

According to the Bush administration's policy, refineries have had trouble getting money through investments to improve efficiency due to the numerous environmental regulations and required permits. The policy recommends expediting the permitting process to make it easier for refineries to expand and meet the nation's oil demand.

Abendhoff said the required permits and the poor national economy limit the BP Cherry Point Refinery's ability to expand production. He said, however, the refinery has been running near maximum production at 220,000 barrels per day for the last five years.

According to the energy policy, as the nation's demand for oil increases refineries are running near full capacity.

“Whether the economy is booming or in a recession, we still have to drive to work and heat our homes,” Abendhoff said.

The policy states that the nation’s energy crisis is due to an imbalance between production and consumption. It also says the United States gets 52 percent of its oil from imports.

According to the Department of Energy, in December 2002 the United States imported more than 11 million barrels of crude oil and oil products — each day.

On average, the United States consumes more than 25 percent of the oil produced worldwide, according to the energy policy.

In 2000, more than 55 percent of oil refined in the United States came from four countries: Canada, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela and Mexico, according to the DOE.

To increase domestic sources of oil, the energy policy and Bush's 2004 budget proposal suggest opening public lands, such as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, to oil exploration and production.

Bill Bradlee, Western Region program manager for the League of Conservation Voters, said he questions the amount of oil that could be extracted from public lands and whether it would quench the nation’s demand for oil. He said some estimates predict the oil in ANWR would satisfy six months of consumption in the United States.

“I don't see opening up the Arctic wilderness or building new pipelines as any kind of solution other than a temporary solution,” said Kathy Moran, an operations technician at BP Cherry Point.

The Bush administration also suggested that alternative forms of energy, such as solar, wind and geothermal energy should be researched for future use. Both the energy policy and the budget proposal recommended opening ANWR to drilling and using part of the money from land bids to fund research for renewable and alternative forms of energy.

Bradlee said because the money for renewable research has to come from drilling in the Arctic, the proposal, in essence, takes renewable energy hostage.

Bush’s 2004 budget has to be approved by Congress before the oil industry can begin exploration for oil in the Arctic. For now, oil companies will continue to drill on Alaska’s North Slope and BP Cherry Point’s employees will continue to refine its crude.

Within the next few years, the refinery will add two new units
that will make production of petroleum products more efficient and provide jobs.

BP Cherry Point's manager of environmental health and safety Karen Payne said the refinery is adding a clean gasoline unit that will allow the refinery to produce cleaner gasoline, which should be available at gas stations by 2005.

The refinery is also adding a co-generation facility that will provide electricity for the refinery as well as for the electricity grid. The unit takes natural gas through turbines that produce electricity and steam for the refinery, Payne said.

Abendhoff said the two units will provide 55 to 65 permanent jobs at the refinery.

"I have to look at the big picture," Fletcher said. "I work in the oil industry. It's provided a fantastic living."

Kremen said that he believes times will change and in the future the production of gasoline will not have the value that it has today.

"I think the local economy will evolve as technology changes," he said. "In the near future our local economy is somewhat dependent on those two refineries, but I think in the long term that may not be the case."

Moran said that oil is woven into American culture and will be necessary until better options are available.

"I don't know very many people who would be willing to give up their ability to travel," Moran said. "They don't want to give up police responding to their calls or the military to a national incident. At this point in our economy and technology, we have to have gasoline and diesel to move our people."

Senior Leah Hadfield studies journalism at Western. She has previously been published in The Western Front.
If the Pacific Northwest were to experience a significant temperature increase, Mount Baker would ultimately lose the whole lower area of the ski resort.

by Jessica Stahl
photos by Jamie Clark

Aug. 2001

Tongass National Forest and other forests opened to roads and logging. (8/12)

The Bush administration appeals the ban on drilling along the coast of California. (8/17)

The EPA postpones actions against power plants. (8/14)
The beginning of the 2002-03 ski-season was disappointing for local winter-sports enthusiasts. At the Mt. Baker Ski Area, warm days and rain melted patches into the slopes, exposing dirt and gravel beneath. On a Sunday in January, only a few determined skiers and snowboarders took to the slopes, willing to ride out the poor conditions — conditions that could become commonplace in the future.

By the end of the century, the Pacific Northwest could lose between 63 percent and 87 percent of its spring snow-pack to global warming, according to the 2002 U.S. Climate Action Report. This loss would be preceded by a 1,500 foot rise in freezing levels by as early as 2040.

"That would bum me out," said Mark Belles, a Washington native and winner of the 1999 Powder Pig Award. "I'm not excited to hear information like that."

The Powder Pig, an unofficial award created by Bellingham local Michael Jackson, recognizes one of the season's most enthusiastic skiers. Belles' Powder Pig Award is on display in Milano's restaurant in Glacier, Wash. What distinguishes Belles from the award's other winners, however, is the year he won it: 1999.

Mt. Baker Ski Area set a world record for the most snowfall in a single season in 1999 with 1,140 inches, or 95 feet. Duncan Howat, owner of the ski area for the past 35 years, said ski area employees worked long hours that year digging tunnels through the snow to allow access to the chair lifts.

The heavy loads of snow also increased the number of lift tickets sold at the ski area. Howat said the number of visitors to the area increased by 15 percent.

The unprecedented amounts of snow made 1999 a profitable year for the ski area, but Washington's heavy snowfalls are also a key component in the success of the entire state's economy. Now, global warming threatens this natural source of economic wealth.

In the winter, snow accumulates in Washington's mountains, storing large amounts of water. Later, during the dry summer months, snow-melt feeds the region's streams and rivers. This water is the foundation for cheap hydroelectric power, irrigation, forest fire prevention and healthy salmon runs. Global warming could affect all of these areas by reducing the amount of available water.

"This is not something we're speculating on seeing in the future, we're seeing it now," said Philip Mote, lead author for the Climate Impacts Group at the University of Washington. "I'm surprised to see how much our snow-packs have already shrunk over the last 50 years."

Mote's research has revealed 30 percent reductions in snow-packs during a time span when the PNW saw little change in precipitation levels. These data indicate that the changes in snow-packs are due to increased temperature, not low levels of precipitation.

According to the 2002 U.S. Climate Action Report, emissions from human activities — primarily from burning fossil fuels — are partly responsible for this temperature increase. The report says global warming will have costly effects on human health, the environment and the economy.

Carbon dioxide is one of the gases that contributes to global warming. While on the campaign trail, President George W. Bush said he hoped to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

"With the help of Congress, environmental groups and industry, we will require all power plants to meet clean air standards in order to reduce emissions of sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, mercury and carbon dioxide within a reasonable period of time," he said.

Since then, Bush has shifted his position.

In March 2001, Bush withdrew the United States from the Kyoto Protocol, an international treaty aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions to levels below those of 1990. The Kyoto Protocol was drafted in 1997 in response to growing international concern about global warming. The following year was the hottest year on record since 1860 and 2002 was the second hottest year in the same period.

Under the Kyoto Protocol, the United States would have been required to cut greenhouse gas emissions to 7 percent below 1990 levels by 2012. Bush said he believes that requirement would have "severely damaged the United States economy."

Hart Hodges is a professor of economics at Western Washington University and a former Natural Resource Damage Assessment Economist for the Department of the Interior. He said he disagrees

ACRONYM KEY
PNW — Pacific Northwest
CIG — Climate Impacts Group
NRDC — Natural Resources Defense Council
IPCC — Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

A five degree temperature increase would raise the freezing levels on Mount Baker by 1,500 feet.

The Forest Service stalls the Roadless Protection Act. (8/22)
The Bush administration is asked to draft an environmental impact statement for its fast track missile defense program. (8/28)
with Bush's suggestions that the costs of complying with the Kyoto Protocol are not economically viable.

"The Kyoto Protocol could look scary, but in the end it wouldn't be nearly as expensive to comply with as people think," Hodges said. "People are focusing too much on short run costs and believing exaggerated figures."

In 1997, Hodges conducted research on the cost of complying with various environmental regulations, including permissible levels of asbestos exposure, the 1978 Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act, and United States industries consumption of CFCs.

"Usually, the actual cost of compliance was orders of magnitude lower than projected," Hodges said. "Complying with regulation in some cases resulted in a net gain to the company, not a loss. Pollution is inefficiency.

"Things could be very expensive if you don't respond (to global warming). We shouldn't compare compliance cost with doing nothing."

Bush also argued that the Kyoto Protocol would have resulted in billions of dollars in industry losses and the elimination of nearly 5 million American jobs. Mote said that job losses caused by the 1970 Clean Air Act serve as an example of what could be expected under the Kyoto Protocol.

"6,793 coal miners claimed benefits under the Clean Air Act Amendment," Mote said. "Even in coal communities, most places were diverse enough to absorb those losses."

Mote estimated that compliance with the Kyoto Protocol would cause the loss of 10,000 to 30,000 jobs over the span of a decade.

"Boeing does that in the space of a year," Mote said.

Environmental supervisor at British Petroleum's Cherry Point Refinery near Blaine, Wash., Liz Daly said reductions in greenhouse gas emissions at BP have not resulted in the loss of any jobs. BP has decreased their emissions of greenhouse gases to 10 percent below 1990 levels, and said it has plans to further their reductions.

"BP supports the greenhouse gas reduction," Daly said. "Anytime you increase your energy efficiency ... you certainly have less expense."

In a statement issued on Feb. 12, 2003, Bush discussed the difficulties presented by global warming and maintaining the economy.

"Underpinning our approach to climate change is an understanding that meeting this long-term challenge requires policies that recognize that sustained economic growth is an essential part of the solution," Bush said. "Policies that undermine the health of our economy would only hamper America's ability to develop and deploy new energy technologies and invest in energy efficiency and productivity improvements."

Hodges said he disagrees.

"You can go around that circle in the exact opposite direction," Hodges said. "Investment in energy efficient technology is a source of economic development."

Patrick Mazza, research director of Climate Solutions in Seattle, said clean energy investment is good for the economy because it creates entirely new industries. He said Climate Solutions intends to help create a Silicon Valley of clean technology industries in the PNW.

The CIG, formed in 1995, focuses its studies on climate change in the PNW. Using results from seven different climate models, the CIG predicts that by as early as 2040 the PNW will experience a temperature increase of 3.1 to 6.3 degrees Fahrenheit. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reported that earth's average temperature could rise by 3 to 10 degrees Fahrenheit over the next 100 years — the most rapid change in 10 millennia.

The IPCC said that economic development depends on maintenance of healthy ecosystems. To understand how loss of snow-pack would affect the PNW's economy, it helps to recall previous years of drought.

During warm winters, less snow accumulates and therefore less is stored in the mountains for summer use. For example, the drought during the summer of 2001 followed a winter of little snowfall. Industry, agriculture, salmon and forests all felt the drought's influence, according to the Washington state Department of Ecology.

"If we don't do something about (global warming) a lot of things we think are important won't matter," Mazza said. "All around the world action is underway. The U.S. may be the last place to get it."

During his 2000 presidential campaign, Bush promised to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide. Now, he has proposed using "emission intensity" targets to achieve reductions rather than setting fixed target levels for power plant emissions. This approach allows carbon emissions to increase along with economic growth. The plan allows indefinite increases in emissions as long as the rate of economic growth outpaces the emissions increases.

"It's kind of a silly way to pose it," Mote said. "It is a very slight reduction from business as usual. It's a goal, not a commitment."

The Natural Resources Defense Council said that Bush's plan simply calls for continuing the status quo. The plan forecasts a 38 percent increase in gross domestic product over the next decade. This means emissions could increase by 14 percent from 2002 to 2012 — the same increase measured over the last decade.

Bush also emphasized further research on climate change as part of his global warming policy. In December 2002, senior officials of the Bush administration said that numerous uncertainties remain about global warming's cause and effects.

"More studies on the basis of uncertainties as an excuse to avoid action is simply unconscionable," Mazza said.

Mote said he is not convinced the Bush administration is trying to avoid action, but did criticize their plan. He said it is not possible to remove all uncertainty.

"The plan focuses on reducing uncertainty, (but) study of the problem doesn't necessarily reduce uncertainty," Mote said. "It's a bit misdirected to embark upon a plan to reduce uncertainty."

Mote said the numbers generated by climate models 35 years ago are still used today. What has changed is the level of understanding and insight into what these numbers mean.

"Earth's systems are subject to disproportionate responses to seemingly small increases in temperature," Mazza said. "We really are playing Russian roulette. The claims that climate would change slowly and gradually (are) unfounded. Each decade we go on this
greenhouse gas course is putting another bullet in the Russian roulette chamber."

Some, however, argue that right now a growing economy and population mandate increased greenhouse gas emissions. William O'Keefe, president of the George C. Marshall Institute and former petroleum industry executive, said that right now, there are no viable alternatives to coal, oil and gas, which provide close to 90 percent of the United State's energy.

"That is like telling an alcoholic there is no viable alternative to whiskey," Mazza said. "We know greenhouse gases are wreaking havoc with the planet's climatic systems, so we need to get off the fossil (fuel) binge."

He also said exploring alternatives to fossil fuels could have benefits beyond a reduction in greenhouse gases.

"Rather than ripping ancient biomass from the earth, we need to live off our current solar budget," Mazza said. "More diverse energy sources will be more stable (and) more resistant to terrorist attack."

He listed wind-power, solar energy, fuel cells, bio-fuels, geothermal, wave and tidal energies and advanced efficiency technologies as available energy alternatives.

"Viable alternatives are within reach, and vital to our future," Mazza said.

These alternatives could also help secure the future of the PNW by reducing the amount of carbon released into the atmosphere. The NRDC states that lowering carbon emissions could help solve the threat of global warming. For now, however, the PNW faces a future hinted at by the 2001 drought.

"If anything, we're on a faster track to reduced snow-pack than I expected," Mote said. "It's hard to know where things will stand 100 years from now."

Sitting in his lodge at the Mt. Baker Ski Area, Howat said he is not familiar with the Bush administration's policies regarding global warming.

"I study the weather, but maybe I look at it too short a time span," Howat said. "The problem with a lot of people is they only think about their own future. I've got my daughters who work here, and I'm worried about their long term success."

Mazza said that everybody is part of the problem; consumers must make a choice to become part of the solution.

"We need a cultural change that is similar to changes we've seen in domestic abuse, inside smoking and drunk driving," he said. "Global warming has the potential to be a great teacher to us. If we choose to buy a big SUV, we're choosing something that has a negative impact on the environment."

Solving the difficulties presented by global warming will require the United States to act as a whole in making these choices. Mote said he has confidence in such an undertaking.

"I'm personally optimistic that American ingenuity is up to the task," Mote said.

Mazza said that for him, it's a leap of faith.

"If I didn't think we could do it, I wouldn't be here," he said.

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**the local cost of global warming**

In 2001, Washington felt the effects of a dry summer compounded by a winter with little snowfall. The drought affected the economy throughout the Pacific Northwest.

**Electricity:** High electricity prices closed all seven of Washington's aluminum smelters. The smelters employ about 7,000 people, and Oregon's employ more than 2,000. Loss of snow melt could reduce the Columbia River's flow by 15 percent over the next twenty years. The PNW obtains nearly three-quarters of its electricity from hydropower, most of it from the Columbia.

**Farming:** By June 2001, 90,000 acres of agricultural land were out of production, an additional 25,000 acres were at risk, and the sugar beet industry closed down. Research published in Washington CEO magazine states drought could cost Washington agriculture from $270 million to $400 million each year. Between 4,600 and 7,500 farm jobs would be lost, affecting an additional 1,400 jobs in related industries.

**Salmon:** The drought conditions and Columbia River dam operations of 2001 stranded more than 700,000 salmon smolt. The CIG states that warming trends combined with reduced summer flow might push threatened salmon to extinction. According to Washington CEO magazine, Columbia Basin salmon are worth $13 billion.

**Forest fires:** In August 2001, five forest fires burned 54,000 acres and cost the U.S. Forest Service more than $4.3 million. Increasing summer dryness heightens the risk of forest fires, and fires burn more intensely.

**Flooding:** With rising temperatures, winter flooding would increase, as more precipitation would fall as rain. Unlike snow, rainwater immediately runs to lower ground. During the floods of 1996-97, the Northwest states withstood estimated damages of $3 billion.

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Nooksack River's low water levels reflect the possible state of the river if the Pacific Northwest experiences the 3.1 to 6.3 degrees Fahrenheit temperature rise predicted to occur as early as 2040.

_2003 winter / THE PLANET_ [17]
The road to the Centralia coal-power plant winds away from town and into the rural countryside. At first, only an infrequent mix of farms, houses and trees line the road. After a few miles, however, billowing clouds of steam appear, seemingly rising from the hills. Farther down the road, the enormous plant comes into view; first the towers and then the rest of the large, gray building. Huge coal trucks, with tires bigger than most cars, look miniature next to the structure. Behind the plant is a backdrop of stripped earth, black piles of coal and many rectangular man-made ponds where water used in the plant is cooled.

In 1999, the Centralia plant released 21,828 tons of nitrogen oxide and 87,756 tons of sulfur dioxide into the air — more than any other industrial source in Washington state that year, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

When Canadian energy company TransAlta bought the Centralia plant in 2000, the company spent $200 million to install pollution "scrubbers" to reduce the sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide emissions. The company's goal was an 85 percent reduction of pollutants.

On Dec. 31, 2002, the George W. Bush administration announced major revisions to the Clean Air Act. Environmentalists criticized the changes, saying the new regulations are too lenient towards industry. In the future, upgrades like those made to reduce pollution from the Centralia plant would be required less frequently under the CAA.

The scrubbers TransAlta installed at the Centralia plant are an example of Best Available Control Technology. The plant's scrubbers combine sulfur dioxide with liquid limestone to form synthetic gypsum used in wallboard. At the same time, the plant also cut nitrogen oxide emissions by about a third by installing higher efficiency burners.

Southwest Clean Air Agency chief engineer Paul Mairose said 2003 will be the first full year the plant will run with both scrubbers installed, but he expects the reductions to be near the 85 percent that TransAlta predicted. The agency enforces federal, state and local outdoor air quality standards and regulations in Clark, Cowlitz, Lewis, Skamania and Wahkiakum counties in Washington state.

Bush's proposed revisions could change when plants are required to upgrade to new technology, like the scrubbers at the Centralia plant. The revisions came after Bush's National Energy Policy Development Group asked the EPA in 2001 to determine if the New Source Review section of the CAA was too restrictive to industry.

Created in 1977, the NSR is a part of the CAA that requires any new power plant built to meet current pollution standards. According to the EPA Web site, the review process was designed to protect areas with good air quality and help clean up areas with poor air quality. The process was supposed to reduce pollutants such as sulfur dioxide.

Northwest Environmental Advocates Executive Director Nina Bell said sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide are two common pollutants produced during the burning of coal.
She said sulfur dioxide can produce the hazy brown cloud that often hangs over the Interstate 5 corridor.

The NSR section also requires existing facilities to apply for a "clean unit" exemption when they make a major upgrade that provides a significant increase in production capacity and pollution. The EPA's study found that the NSR prevented facilities from investing in ways to improve energy efficiency. According to the study, the process took too long and the required technology was cost-prohibitive. The upgrades at the Centralia plant, for example, cost $200 million. It also took the plant 18 months to go through the permitting process to build a backup natural gas plant.

"The NSR permit process can add a year or more to the time needed to review proposed plant modifications and cost over $1 million," according to the EPA Web site. "As a result, many companies delay or abandon plans to modernize their facilities in ways that would benefit the environment."

The four main changes made to NSR policies in 2002, because of the EPA's study, were the addition of plant-wide applicability limits, clean unit exemptions, changes in emissions calculations and a simplified pollution control and prevention projects program.

Plant-wide applicability limits place a single emissions cap on an entire facility. A company can escape NSR approval if their overall emissions don't exceed this cap.

A pollution control exemption applies to a specific unit of the facility and would exempt pollution control projects from NSR approval as long as they produced an overall reduction in pollution. The exemption would prevent singling out specific pollutants for control. In the future, this exemption would allow the Centralia plant to decrease one type of pollution but increase another, as long as the project resulted in overall emissions decreases.

Under the clean unit exemption, when a company upgrades a unit in their facility to meet current air quality standards, they receive a permit that allows them not to conduct an upgrade for 10 years after they install BACT. A unit is a component of the facility, such as a generator. The Centralia plant could ask for a clean unit exemption for sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide. If they could demonstrate the scrubbers are BACT then they could have clean unit status for 10 years.

The NSR revisions also change how a company measures pollution increases. Companies will look at a projection of their actual emissions instead of their potential emissions. Projected actual emissions are less likely to require a NSR because they are usually lower.

"We were aiming to provide greater regulatory certainty and flexibility for industry to make voluntary emissions reductions while preserving the same amount of protection provided by the current program," EPA environmental engineer Lynn Hutchinson said.

Environmentalists have criticized the EPA for its decision to change the NSR because they say the changes will make it easier for companies to avoid installing BACT, meaning the new regulations will be too lenient towards industry.

These changes are a solution the EPA says is necessary to help streamline the NSR, but environmental groups are fighting the changes. They say they are too complicated and provide too many loopholes for industry to avoid regulations.

"The people on the other side are saying this will make it easier to clean up but it's just another giveaway to industry and especially the fossil fuel industry, and the Bush administration is a fossil fuel administration," said Patrick Mazza, research director at Climate Solutions, a nonprofit group that focuses on global warming. "You can see that in a number of ways from its industry policy to its climate policy to its war plans in the Middle East."

Bill Becker is the executive director of the State and Territorial Air Pollution Program Administrators and the Association of Local Air Pollution Control Officials. Both are national associations representing air pollution control agencies in 49 states and more than 165 major cities throughout the United States. The associations act as a national coalition that lobbies Congress and the EPA on legislations and regulations, Becker said.

"The revisions) allow facilities that would have been subject to New Source Review requirements, including the installation of modern pollution controls, to avoid requirements in the future," Becker said. "Many more industries will escape controls, and that's a step backwards."

Hutchinson said the problem with the old NSR was that when a facility wanted to upgrade they had to install BACT. Upgrading usually means spending a lot of money so many companies would avoid any upgrades he said.

"They would do nothing, so you have dirty, old equipment continuing to run, as opposed to cleaner more efficient plants," she said. "In the end we feel we get better reductions with the voluntary reductions."

Washington had a deadline to make the NSR changes by March 3, 2002. But, because the requirements are so complicated, they won't be completed until the middle of 2004.

Despite criticism from environmental groups like Climate Solutions, Bush and the EPA believe changes to the NSR are necessary. Major polluting sources can clean up, like the Centralia plant, but opponents wonder if the president is doing enough to force them to, Mazza said.

"The President's plan actually rolls back existing air pollution laws, allowing any power plant in any community to increase emissions without safeguards to protect the public," said David G. Hawkins, director of the Natural Resources Defense Council Climate Center.

The reductions in sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide at the Centralia plant show what installing BACT can do for emissions reductions. But, critics fear the new NSR policy changes will make air quality improvements like these less likely at other facilities across the country.

"It doesn't mean (the Centralia plant is) clean, but they are heck of a lot cleaner," Bell said. "It's not perfect, but it's a huge improvement."

Senior Zeb Wainwright studies journalism at Western. He has previously been published in The Western Front.

The Bush administration plans to cut back on environmental spending. (11/28)
If your plan is for one year, plant rice;  
If your plan is for ten years, plant trees;  
If your plan is for a hundred years;  
Educate Children. 

Confucius

ON THE BLOCK

by Justin McCaughan  PHOTOS BY KATIE KULLA

"There's always one student who doesn't dress for the occasion," Sehome High School biology teacher Sue Blethen said. "It was the middle of winter and I remember a 10th-grade girl who must have forgotten we were going out to the apple orchard. She ended up coming to class wearing high heels."

Blethen taught her Sehome High School students about air quality under an Environmental Protection Agency-funded environmental education program.

"This girl spent the entire time punching holes in the soggy, wet ground," Blethen said. "She toughed it out, though; her feet were wet and she was whining, but knew she had an obligation to her group."

In 1990, President George H. W. Bush signed the National Environmental Education Act. The act created the Office of Environmental Education, a division of the EPA responsible for administering environmental education grant funds and supporting environmental education programs. Thirteen years later, the office faces the possibility of losing all of its funding.

On Feb. 4, 2002, President George W. Bush released his fiscal year 2003 budget request, including an Office of Management and Budget recommendation that would effectively close the Office of Environmental Education created by his father. The current Bush administration requested that the office's funding be transferred to the National Science Foundation's math and science program.

As it stands, any entities nationwide that are requesting environmental education grant funds from the EPA have no guarantee that funds will be available this year or ever again, depending upon whether Congress approves Bush's proposal.

The changes are a result of the 2003 White House proposed budget, in which the administration labeled environmental education "ineffective." Sally Hanft, EPA Region 10 environmental education grant coordinator and an avid supporter of the program, said she objects to that assessment.

"We don't agree with that because we think that we've been effective and affected a lot of students and teachers," Hanft said. She said she worries that funds transferred to the National Science Foundation might emerge as grants intended for large programs or projects, leaving more localized ones without funding.

"What we've seen (the Foundation) do is large research kind of grants," Hanft said. "So, they could just take the whole pot of money and give it to one organization and they wouldn't get down to the local level."

She said she believes that local programs have the greatest potential to make a positive difference in the environment.

"Often the catalyst for learning about the environment occurs at the community level," Hanft said. "Teachers, environmental professionals and even scout leaders often have wonderful ideas to raise awareness about environmental issues. With a little community support and some funding from the EPA, they turn those ideas into an educational experience."

Joy Monjure, environmental resources education coordinator for the City of Bellingham, said she believes environmental education programs are important for the future of the planet.

"If we don't start thinking about the planet we won't have one; we'll lose it all," she said. "The people in Bellingham are very sheltered as to what is going on worldwide. We think everywhere is as beautiful and pristine as Bellingham. It's not. Environmental education is what is allowing us to keep it beautiful."

Bellingham-based RE Sources sponsored Northwest AirNET, the program that Sue Blethen and her students participated in during the 1997-98 school year. AirNET, based on a New England program, teaches students about air quality issues. The majority of the $13,275 grant came from the Office of Environmental Education. The grant funded the project in Whatcom, Skagit and Island counties.

Environmentalists challenge the Bush administration's national energy plan. (12/6)
Northwest AirNET sponsored a teacher in-service training workshop in the fall of 1997 for high school science teachers involved in the project.

Lisa Friend, special projects coordinator at RE Sources, helped design and adapt the program to work in Northwest Washington.

"We taught the teachers how to deal with the equipment and materials," Friend said. "I’m really glad we had a chance to establish a program like that in Whatcom County."

Students taking part in the program learned to evaluate air quality by identifying important bio-indicators, such as lichens, whose absence warns of possible problems in the environment. At select schools, students communicated their research with peers at other schools in an Internet-based newsgroup.

"I think the greatest benefit of the AirNET program was that it gave focus and purpose to studying organisms," Blethen said. "The students will see the importance of bio-indicators for the future and what they tell us about our environment."

Blethen said she believes support of quality programs like AirNET is important.

"I was involved in a corporately sponsored program in later years," Blethen said. "They just didn't do as good of a job. The RE Sources program was just much better."

Approximately 8,700 students of varying ages in 345 classrooms viewed presentations given by RE Sources during the program's first year.

"The key to educating students about the environment is to pique their curiosity," Blethen said.

In a RE Sources survey of three participating high school classes, results indicated that students in general had "increased knowledge and a (positive) change in attitude" as a result of the presentations.

In another effort to increase awareness, the City of Bellingham is currently applying for an Office of Environmental Education grant of its own.

Monjure is organizing a project that will place wastewater sump-pumps at 10 locations in the city. The pumps will transfer carwash runoff into the city sewer system rather than Whatcom County rivers and streams. Pumps will be available to nonprofit organizations, such as youth groups, to use in the parking lots of designated businesses.

"I like the idea of kids taking responsibility in environmental issues," she said.

Monjure stresses that the program would still exist without the EPA Office of Environmental Education funds, but the impact of such a program would be reduced without the funding to let people know about it.

"What we’re asking from the EPA is grant money which would go towards the purchase of educational materials," she said.

While the City of Bellingham has the funding necessary to buy the pumps, it currently lacks funding to educate the public about the program, Monjure said.

Although the EPA is currently accepting grant applications, Hanft said it clear that the availability of these funds is not guaranteed.

Both the House and Senate have moved to preserve environmental education at the EPA and fund it at the fiscal year 2002 amount of $9.16 million. Until a Veterans Administration/Housing and Urban Development bill is approved, however, the future of environmental education remains uncertain because funding for the Office of Environmental Education is within that bill.

Bush’s plan to end funding for the office could put programs across the country in jeopardy. Blethen said she hopes continued support is given to environmental education programs. She said she believes children genuinely want to learn about the environment and the issues that affect it.

"I think part of human nature, after meeting physiological needs, is to learn about our environment," Blethen said. "As human population increases, it's becoming more important than ever to look at our effects on the environment and create an informed society."

Junior Justin McCaughan studies journalism at Western. This is his first published piece.
Scott Salmon, Whatcom County District 2 firefighter and local fisherman, stood knee-high in the chilling current of the Nooksack River fishing for steelhead and pointed toward the nearby evergreens. He said that removing the trees will lead to erosion.

"Sediments will be dumped into the river and this will give fish an unhealthy spawning area," Salmon said.

As he stepped out of the river, beads of water dripped off his wader suit. He knelt down alongside the rocky embankment and picked up some mud.

"This murky sediment is unhealthy for the fish," Salmon said. "The majority of this comes from logging and landslides upstream."

Runoff from logged lands causes a sediment build-up in rivers and streams, he said.

Sediments divert the flow of water causing a rise in temperature and altering the natural environment for salmon, said John Thompson, Whatcom County Endangered Species Act coordinator and resource planner.

Aquatic animals protected under the ESA — such as the newly revived spring run Chinook salmon on the Nooksack River in Whatcom County — would be threatened by revisions to the National Roadless Area Conservation Act proposed by the George W. Bush administration. Revisions to the act would allow roads to be built more easily on pristine habitat — compromising the ESA and potentially leading to environmental impacts like sediment build-up in rivers and streams.

The original act, enacted during the Clinton administration, protects old-growth forests and requires managers of 192 million acres of national forests to emphasize clean water, recreation and the safety of wildlife and their habitat.

If Congress approves the revised plan, it could greatly alter the Northwest Forest Plan implemented to protect endangered species throughout the Pacific Northwest. Bush also proposed dismantling the Aquatic Conservation Strategy, a part of the NWFP, said Dave Werntz, Northwest Ecosystem Alliance science director.

The NWFP is intended to provide a balance between habitat destruction and conservation of wildlife. The ACS, which is designed to protect aquatic habitat for salmon and other fish. The NWFP governs the lands west of the Cascade Mountain Range in Washington and Oregon, Werntz said.

The ACS, created in 1994, protects resident and native fish communities and their habitat in all major forest aquatic ecosystems.

The strategy balances the needs of endangered species with regulations for timber sales.

Under Bush's proposed plan, timber sales and projects that are currently prohibited could be allowed. Environmental reviews might be less comprehensive and local federal forestry officials could alter management plans without having to conduct Environmental Impact Studies — an analysis of the project's impact on wildlife, watersheds and public recreation throughout the forest. This, in turn, would allow more logging and less mandatory regulations toward the protection of endangered species, Werntz said.

The ESA, originally passed in 1973, provides for the classification and protection of invertebrates, wildlife, fish and plant species that are in danger of becoming extinct. The act makes it unlawful for anyone to harm, injure or damage a listed animal. The ESA also protects threatened or endangered species' habitat.

In 1992, only 10 spring run Chinook salmon were recorded in Whatcom County. Ten years later, that number increased to 5,000 with the help of the ESA, fish hatcheries and local organizations such as Nooksack Salmon Enhancement Association.

NSEA monitors Whatcom County waterways and has completed more than 120 restorations on more than 15 miles of local streams to protect salmon habitat. Volunteers from NSEA replant native vegetation along stream banks, install fencing to keep livestock out of the streams and create spawning habitat by adding natural debris like rocks and logs.
NSEA board member Jeremy Brown said the association's restorations are designed to protect the creeks from runoff and sediment accumulation in the stream. The sediment comes from road building and logging, he said.

But if the proposal by the Bush administration passes, logging companies won't have to worry about the consequences of endangering the salmon or the ecosystem, Werntz said.

He said if the administration undermines the National Roadless Area Conservation Act then he believes it will lead to more logging. Cutting down mature and old-growth trees will cause damage to the overall environment, while reducing the power of the NWFP and programs such as the ACS, Werntz said.

"Bush's approach is to remove the teeth of the ACS," Werntz said. "Instead of working with the ACS, let's remove that entire part of the program.

Washington Loggers Corp. owner Howard Hammer, 82, has been in the logging industry since he was 15. He said he agrees with Bush's proposal to log on federal lands.

"I am on Bush's side 100 percent," Hammer said. "I would even go farther than Bush will ever go."

Hammer said through his years of experience with logging, he has not jeopardized any animal habitat.

"We don't endanger any species in these hills," Hammer said.

Clearing out the old growth makes new vegetation for the animals, he said.

"Animals don't go out in the old-growth forests to feed," Hammer said. "They go out in the clear cuts where there is nice young stuff growing."

NWEA volunteer coordinator Hudson Dodd said those who claim logging is beneficial to wildlife are distorting the truth.

"Reality is, logging old growth destroys the vast majority of all organisms in the ecosystem," he said.

Just because people don't know salmon require old growth to survive doesn't mean it isn't true, Dodd said. Through scientific research, the connection between the abundance of old-growth forests and salmon population health is becoming more clear, he said.

Hammer said, however, he feels the regulations are still too restrictive on loggers.

"I don't want to shoot environmentalists down but we need to come to the middle road," he said. "It's a bad thing when people can't work out a problem. If there is no way to settle it, let's sit down and talk about it."

Senior Tyson Lin studies communication at Western. He has previously been published in The Western Front.

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LEFT: Howard Hammer is called the "The Iron Man" because of his performance in the Deming logging show and his work ethic in the logging industry. RIGHT: Scott Salmon fishes the Nooksack river as often as he can. Salmon lives at the Whatcom County Fire Station District 2 as a resident volunteer while attending Western Washington University.
On a gray, rainy morning, Western Washington University students James Hall, Ryan Bradley and his brother Brent, carried their kayaks to the edge of Clearwater Creek and pushed off into the powerful current. Sandstone boulders, set in the narrow, tree-lined canyon, form a series of drops and pools, transforming the creek into the 1.25 miles of turbulent whitewater that makes Clearwater Creek a favorite among local kayakers.

As the trio approached "Orange Slice," a waterfall named for the vibrant orange colored rocks that force the creek to drop 5 feet, Hall stroked hard, using his paddle to push off the lip of the waterfall and free fall into the pillow of recirculating water foaming below. As his kayak landed flat against the downstream water, it made a dull slapping sound kayakers call boofing.

"Your adrenaline is pumping for the entire mile and a quarter," Hall said. "Runs like the Clearwater demand every thought; you’re completely lost in the moment and if you’re not, you better be."

Clearwater Creek is a small tributary stream in Whatcom County known for its many small waterfalls, holes and steep gradient that challenge even experienced kayakers and provide a powerful flow of water that, in theory, could generate electricity. A proposed dam on Clearwater Creek would produce 23 gigawatt-hours of electricity annually and could power 2,700 single-family homes.
The Bush administration backs making Yucca Mountain a nuclear waste dump. (2/15)
The Bush administration opens the Missouri National Forest to oil drilling. (2/15)
The project would involve constructing a 75-foot dam that diverts the creek water into an 8,785-foot-long pipeline. The pipeline would carry the water downhill to a powerhouse, bypassing the creek bed between the intake and the powerhouse.

"The problem with this project is that there won't be a lot of water left for anything," said Rich Bowers, American Whitewater boardmember. "They are proposing to put the bypass at the kayaking put in and the powerhouse at the take out. The whitewater aspect would be totally gone."

Although a variety of hydropower companies have spent nine years pursuing the proposed project, in January the current company said it didn't have the financing to build the dam. But the process of licensing the proposed Clearwater Creek Hydroelectric project illustrates the Bush administration's efforts to streamline the process at the expense of environmental reviews.

Washington, D.C.'s, Hydropower Reform Coalition Chairperson Andrew Fahlund said that both hydropower developers and conservation groups want the process of hydropower licensing to be less time consuming, but for different reasons.

Conservation groups said they want more public involvement in the process and want hydropower companies to consider the environmental impacts of small hydropower projects. Hydropower companies, however, want the process to become cheaper, Fahlund said.

"The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has the job of issuing the final license, but there are a number of others who are involved in making the ultimate decision," Fahlund said. "The hydropower industry over the last five years has been pushing very hard to limit the authority of those other agencies."

In 2001, Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho, a member of the Senate subcommittee on Water and Power, introduced the Hydroelectric Licensing Process Improvement Act. The act, which passed the Senate in 2002, could change the process of licensing and re-licensing hydroelectric projects. The bill still needs to be reconciled with the House's version.

"In previous years, the Clinton administration consistently promised to veto bills like Sen. Craig's," Fahlund said. "We got no such promise from the Bush administration. In fact, they offered up support for those bills with some amendments."

"This is not about efficiency," Fahlund said. "This is about profiteering. If they can avoid having to install expensive fish passage, if they can avoid spilling water into dry reaches of river — they make more money."

Nooksack Hydropower, Inc., now owned by Ballaton Power, Inc., of Boise, Idaho, first applied for a hydropower license for Clearwater Creek in August 1994. The Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Washington state Department of Natural Resources and the Nooksack Indian Tribe have performed environmental reviews of the project during the past nine years.

Under current law, outside agencies such as these can insert specific clauses in the hydroelectric project's license — like a requirement for a minimum water level to protect fish habitat. The new legislation would weaken this ability. It would also take away requirements that other agencies review the project.

In the Clearwater project, agencies other than FERC raised major concerns about bull trout. Bull trout, an endangered species, make economic factors that they don't currently consider, said Bret Swift, associate director of Northwest Hydropower Programs for American Rivers.

The law would amend the Federal Power Act by requiring only a single environmental review of a dam's impact. It would also weaken the power of current laws by requiring agencies to consider economic factors that they don't currently consider, said Bret Swift, associate director of Northwest Hydropower Programs for American Rivers.

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In the Clearwater project, agencies other than FERC raised major concerns about bull trout. Bull trout, an endangered species, make
their home in Clearwater Creek and under the current law FERC must examine the environmental impacts of proposed projects on fish habitat.

In June 2002, FERC issued the final EIS — an in-depth scientific survey of the environmental impacts associated with the project — for the Clearwater Creek Hydroelectric Project. The EIS recommended construction of the project.

FERC’s EIS created controversy, in part, because agencies and conservationists said they believed that it didn’t sufficiently acknowledge impacts to fish habitat.

“The first three-quarters of each section in the EIS are really good,” said Seth Cool, conservation associate with Northwest Ecosystem Alliance. “FERC describes how the project is going to affect the environment and how the project will damage the environment.”

Cool said, though, that the mitigation plans wouldn’t have overcome the negative environmental effects of the project.

Despite the environmental impacts associated with constructing a hydroelectric project on Clearwater Creek, FERC recommended the project because it offered a source of “dependable and renewable energy.”

The publication of the controversial EIS resulted in conservation organizations like American Whitewater, American Rivers and NWEA to file petitions in order to become official partners and have a voice in the proceedings.

“It’s not that we want to deny people the ability to generate electricity and have that as an income,” said John Gangemi, conservation director for American Whitewater. “It’s that we want to reduce the impacts on the environment — both the flora and fauna — and then the recreational opportunities.”

On Feb. 12, 2003, FERC dismissed the permit application on Clearwater Creek, citing the applicant’s failure to acquire a Whatcom County shoreline permit — a requirement that the HLPIA could throw out. In the end, laws that might not exist in the future — not conservationists' efforts — halted the project.

The consequences of small-scale dams or micro-hydro projects, like the proposed dam on the Clearwater, can impact the entire river ecosystem, Gangemi said.

“Small creeks are some of the most pristine areas left in many of these watersheds, particularly in areas where there has been extensive logging, mining and road building,” Gangemi said. “Cumulatively, small creek habitat may be the only thing that’s making these species survive anymore.”

Bowers said the hydropower companies do a good job of promoting these projects as a source of clean energy while shielding projects from the public view.

“What you see is a fence and the river flowing out from under a fence and everything looks fine,” he said. “What you don’t see is dried up river bed.”

Regardless of whether micro-hydopower is a renewable resource, it is an expensive source of energy. The Clearwater Creek project would cost more than $15 million to build, and, according to FERC, it would lose $615,000 a year.

Ballaton spokesperson Maureen O’Brien said that other companies are interested in taking over the Clearwater Hydroelectric Project, but nothing is confirmed.

Randall Rinders said he has kayaked Clearwater Creek more than 100 times and that if the Clearwater Creek Hydroelectric Project is built he would leave Bellingham.

“There are probably only ten people out of the entire population (of Whatcom County) that use Clearwater Creek on a regular basis,” Rinders said. “So you might think it’s pretty selfish for us to think it should be free-flowing, when they supposedly can generate power from it. Small-scale hydro is pretty sustainable energy, but does it have to be on the best mile of whitewater in the county?”

Senior Alex Brun studies geography at Huxley College. He has previously been published in The Planet Magazine and the Mazamas Annual for an Oregon mountaineering club.
The well water on Lorraine Morlock's property in Ferndale contained high levels of arsenic, forcing her to install a $3,500 filtration system in order to meet strict regulations passed by Whatcom County Council in May 2002.

BY KIRSTEN CARLSON  PHOTOS BY JAMIE CLARK

Everyday Whatcom County residents drink water from their faucets. Lorraine Morlock is no different except her water must go through a special system to filter out arsenic.

One of the mandatory steps Morlock had to take when she began building her home near Ferndale, Wash., last year was testing her well for arsenic. When Morlock received the test results, she said she was shocked to learn she would have to spend more than $3,500 on a water filtration system. The level of arsenic in her well was higher than the 50 parts per billion limit then allowed in private wells in Whatcom County.

"I think (the arsenic filter) is basically a big huge water filter and it was a lot of money that I was not planning on spending," Morlock said.

In the future, more Whatcom County homeowners will have to install arsenic filters like Morlock. In April 2002, the Whatcom County Council approved an ordinance to reduce the maximum allowable level of arsenic in private wells from 50 ppb to 10 ppb. The decision preempted a federal rule that required drinking water in public wells to contain no more than 10 ppb of arsenic by Jan. 23, 2006.

The County Council started a controversy by reducing the allowable amount of arsenic to federal levels nearly four years before the Bush Administration required the change. Whatcom County's new standards went into effect in May 2002. The ordinance the County Council passed,
however, applied only to new construction where private wells were being used, while the national rule applied to public wells.

Environmental health supervisor for Whatcom County Paul Chudek said arsenic is released into the environment through natural processes or through human action. He said arsenic can cause chronic diseases — meaning that long term exposure to it increases the risk of adverse health effects, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, nervous system damage and several forms of cancer.

Chudek said the arsenic that affects water supplies in Whatcom County comes from rock formations that naturally contain arsenic.

According to the EPA Web site, lowering the allowable amount of arsenic in drinking water from 50 ppb to 10 ppb will prevent five to eight deaths from bladder cancer each year. The EPA Web site also said lowering the standard will prevent 16 to 22 deaths from lung cancer per year. According to the Web site, the change will also prevent diabetes and heart disease.

Whatcom County Councilmember Dan McShane said he first suggested changing the county standard at a health board meeting.

"The scientific evidence was there that arsenic is a problem and we shouldn't wait around for the state to change their regulations," McShane said.

He said that when he proposed changing the arsenic standard for private wells, the more conservative members of the County council thought he was doing so as a slap in the face to the Bush administration because the administration was not requiring the standard for public wells to be raised until 2006.

"I did not believe and do not believe that Whatcom County, who has not done studies on safe levels of arsenic in drinking water, should preempt the federal government in determining the appropriate levels of arsenic," said Sam Crawford, the only County Councilmember to oppose the ordinance. "I know that we do not have the research capabilities or the science at the local level and that's why national standards are set."

Rich Emerson, government affairs officer for the Building Industry Association of Whatcom County, said he agreed with Crawford.

"I think that it is interesting that Washington state or Whatcom County would take action (four) years before federal standards come into play, and in my view it is all part of environmental extremism that has gotten to epidemic proportions," he said.

Emerson said he thinks that the council should have taken more time before making the decision.

"The County Council has a history of making instantaneous decisions based on faulty information and this is another example of this," he said.

McShane said the 50 ppb standard was in place for more than 50 years before former President Bill Clinton's administration changed the standard to 10 ppb. The original standard was based on years of scientific research, including studies conducted by the National Academy of Sciences. Bush decided to put the change on hold in early 2001, said John Millett, press officer for the EPA.

"It was a complex rule and the new administration and leadership wanted a chance to review science and data backing the rule so they could sign off on it with confidence," he said.

Sierra Club Environmental Quality Program Director Ed Hopkins said he thinks Bush had other motives for putting the rule on hold.

"I believe that he did that to satisfy mining and industrial contributors to his election efforts because they would have been hurt by more stringent arsenic standards," Hopkins said. "It would have cost them money to meet those standards."

In October 2001, the Bush administration and EPA decided to re-implement the 10 ppb standard, Millett said.

"I think he changed it because there was a public outcry and people don't want to be exposed to arsenic in their drinking water, and when they found out what Bush was doing, they were upset about it," Hopkins said.

The Whatcom County ordinance affects a relatively small number of people. Chudek said he expects between 20 and 25 residences will fail to meet the new standard each year. According to the EPA's Web site, the national ruling will affect 74,000 systems across the country and 4,000 of those systems will need to take steps to decrease their arsenic level to 10 ppb.

Chudek said the cost of the water treatment systems ranges from $2,000 to $10,000, depending on the original quality of the water.

Morlock said she was aware of the dangers of arsenic but was not happy about having to pay for the system.

She said she would not have gotten the filtration system if the county did not require it.

"I guess it's a good thing that they're doing it, but I don't know how important it is that it goes that low (to 10 parts per billion) verses a couple parts per billion higher," Morlock said.

Senior Kirsten Carlson studies journalism at Western. She has previously been published in The Western Front and the AS Review.
In 1897 Jack Post crossed the shoulder of Bear Mountain and screamed to his companions, "I've found it! I've found it!" So began the Mount Baker gold rush. Prospectors hoping to make quick fortunes struck out for the gold fields in the largely uncharted forests of the North Cascades.

The impact of the Mount Baker gold rush was not just in the gold mined from the mountains, but in the trails, roads and bridges men built while looking for riches. Today, lands in the Mount Baker area are scarred with old miners' trails.

A few of the mining trails have been turned into paved roads, but most have been converted into hiking trails or are so overgrown they are unrecognizable.

But a new Bush administration policy will make it easier to open up old mining trails — which are now in the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, and federally protected park and wilderness areas — to paving and off-road-vehicle access.

On Christmas Eve, while Americans wrapped presents and decorated trees, the Department of the Interior quietly announced a new rule. The rule, published in the federal register Jan. 6, 2003, makes it easier for states, local governments and individuals to claim right-of-ways on federal lands.

Though the wording sounds innocuous, conservationists, members of Congress and the National Park Service said the rule has the potential to devastate wilderness and national park areas throughout the western United States and Alaska.

The rule allows individuals and governments the right to claim roads, mining trails, cattle...
Bush cuts funding and budget for EPA’s toxic clean-up programs. (6/30)
paths and wagon trails in environmentally protected areas through a "recordable disclaimer of interest."
A disclaimer of interest is a document that states that the federal government is no longer interested in a particular piece of land. When exercised, it could create a spider web of non-federal control over public lands. Individuals and state and local governments could control rights to dirt roads, overgrown paths and old mining routes in federal forestlands and national parks.

"Potentially, you could have road construction over hundreds of miles of park (which would) destroy vegetation, destroy wildlife habitat, (give) easier access to and destruction of archeological resources," said Ted Zukoski, project attorney at Earthjustice in Denver, a non-profit law firm that protects natural resources and wildlife. "There is tremendous potential for ecological degradation."

Erik Burge, education coordinator for the Pacific Northwest Trail Association, said he estimates there are 500 miles of potential claims in the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, including 75 miles of claims in the Mount Baker district alone.

A press release from the Bureau of Land Management, the agency responsible for the rule change, eliminates the need for private lawsuits and simplifies land ownership disputes.

John Styduhar, realty specialist at the BLM Oregon state office, said people exaggerate the impacts of the rule change.

"I don't see states and counties staking a lot of claims because they then take responsibility for that public highway (and maintenance)," he said.

But conservation groups, including the Wilderness Society, are anxious.

"The concern is (people) would claim a right-of-way ownership and try to turn that route into a road," said Mike Anderson, senior resource analyst with the Wilderness Society.

Environmentalists are concerned with people "bulldozing through the mountains, damaging the streams and vehicles traveling into endangered species habitats," he said.

THE HISTORY
The rule resurrects a 130-year-old law: Revised Statute 2477. The Civil War-era law was passed when Jesse James was robbing banks and a horse-drawn carriage was the accepted means of travel. It was meant to encourage Western settlement and resource extraction.

The law, part of the 1866 Mining Act, states: "And be it further enacted that the right-of-way for the construction of highways over public lands, not reserved for public uses, is hereby granted."

In those days, very little land was reserved for public use. The law was basically blanket permission for governments to build and maintain roads on federal land.

Despite pressure from mining companies, Congress repealed the law in 1976 with the passage of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act. But: If a road had been in use prior to 1976 it could still be claimed under RS 2477.

The statute became an issue again when Donald Hodel, Interior secretary under President Reagan, loosened the interpretation of the statute. Horse paths, foot paths and primitive trails could all be considered valid right-of-ways.

This move was popular in much of the West where states fought against federal land ownership. In Utah, county commissioners used bulldozers to tear "roads" into proposed and existing wilderness areas, trying to disqualify the areas from federal protection.

When Clinton's Secretary of the Interior, Bruce Babbitt, attempted to tighten the road policy, Congress put a moratorium on all RS 2477 policy changes. Babbitt responded by blocking his department from processing RS 2477 claims.

RS 2477 was in a political chokehold. That changed on Christmas Eve 2002. The Bush administration issued a rule change creating a new method for individuals and governments to claim right-of-ways under RS 2477. The administration went around the bottleneck.

Under prior regulations and laws a recordable disclaimer of interest couldn't be used to disclaim an interest in a RS 2477 rights-of-way. Now it can, Zukoski said. This change makes it easier to claim federal land.

"(The Department of Interior) states unequivocally that this (recordable disclaimer of interest) rule can and always could have been used to apply to RS 2477 rights-of-way," he said.

Styduhar said, however, that the BLM is still looking at the rule and whether it can be used to claim right-of-ways.

NATIONAL IMPACTS
According to a 1993 NPS memo by Martin Ott, Utah state coordinator for the NPS, more than 17 million acres of Park Service land in Utah could be affected by right-of-way claims. The memo called
The Bush administration opposes renewable energy requirement. (7/19)

impacts potentially devastating.

The memo states: "Possible RS 2477 right-of-ways in NPS areas could cross many miles of undisturbed fish and wildlife habitat, historical archeological resources and sensitive wetlands."

The memo continues, stating that RS 2477 claims would impair the ability of the NPS to manage the parks for the public.

The biggest environmental impacts from the rule will be in Alaska, Utah and Idaho, said Doug Scott, policy director of the Campaign for America’s Wilderness, a non-profit environmental organization.

RS 2477 applies only to unreserved public land, which is land that is not reserved for other uses such as national parks, national forests and military bases, Scott said. President Theodore Roosevelt made much of the federal land in Washington state into national forests in the 1900s, thus reserving the land. Almost all right-of-way claims would have to be traced back over 100 years in Washington state.

"(Washington land is) a good deal less susceptible to this claim," Scott said. "But if anyone asserted (a right-of-way in Washington) park and forest defenders would fight them to the death."

Utah's Canyonlands National Park is much more susceptible to claims. The park wasn't created until 1964, so a claim would be more modern and easier to document.

"In Alaska and Utah, if they get away with this crap, they create a spider web of land bisecting the federal land, and that's the problem," Scott said. "In Utah it's a very real threat. (That's why) the headquarters of the RS 2477 campaign is in Utah and southern Idaho and Alaska, not in Washington state."

Washington's reserved areas are older than most, but that does not mean its parks and wildlife preserves are necessarily safe. Hannegan Pass, Ruth Creek, Twin Lakes and Shuksan were all part of the Mount Baker gold fields, and are thus areas ripe for potential claims.

Excelsior Pass, which climbs up from the north fork of the Nooksack River in the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, is an example of one local trail where individuals and governments could claim a right-of-way, Burge said.

Prospectors used to shoulder their packs and provisions up to the Excelsior Mine. Today, hikers frequent the rocky trail.

"To me that trail fits (the scenario of a potential claim) the most of any in the northern part of the district," Burge said.

Officials with the NPS and the National Forest Service said they don't know how on where the rule change could potentially impact lands in Washington.

"I don't have an answer at this point," said Nancy Stromsen, management assistant for the Columbia Cascades support office of the NPS.

Ron DeHart, public affairs staff officer for the NFS, gave a similar response.

"The Forest Service is not in the loop in this one," he said. "We haven't seen it. We don't understand how it applies to anything we manage. We don't have anything for our agency from the Washington level on what it means."

Miners once frequented the Excelsior Mountain Trail, but now it is a popular hiking trail in the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest.
Washington is less susceptible to the revisions of RS 2477 because most of its national reserves were put into effect in the early 1900s.

PUBLIC ACCESS

While environmentalists prepare to fight RS 2477 claims through the legal system, public access groups greet the rule enthusiastically.

“(RS 2477) is a very positive thing,” said Bill Dart, public lands director of the Blue Ribbon Coalition, a wise-use organization that wants access to public lands for recreational purposes. “It means that some of the roads and trails that people use to access some of their favorite spots, they’ll still be able to use potentially. (But) if you are a person desiring more wildernesses, it is not a positive and it may limit some areas from being considered.”

Chuck Cushman, executive director for the American Lands Rights Association, a wise-use organization, also agreed with the rule. “It’s going to be good for hunters and fishermen because it will keep federal agencies from closing off access to lands,” he said.

While many people fear RS 2477 will make it easier to pave over backwoods roads, Dart said he disagrees. “Yes, it makes it tougher to eliminate access, but it does not give them permission to pave over a backwoods trail,” he said.

Dart said that even if a person or government wanted to pave over a trail, they would still have to go through regular environmental protection processes.

But, Scott said, environmental protections on non-federal lands are inadequate. “(There are) hardly any decent environmental laws regarding state and local governments,” Scott said. “Instead of a park superintendent or a federal land manager, it would be some board or county supervisor making the decision. (RS 2477) is a very big threat.”

Dart also said he disagreed that increased access to wilderness areas would be harmful to the environment. “Anybody who has done much study of environments will quickly learn that man has an incremental ability to affect the landscape,” he said.

Pollution, habitat fragmentation and wilderness destruction by off-road vehicles is not a small effect, Scott said. “Today there are 7 million miles of roads in the United States, and I’m not talking about jeep trails, I’m talking about roads, and places that were very large expanses left for wildlife and wilderness have been crisscrossed and penetrated by roads to a very unfortunate degree,” he said.

Scott called RS 2477 an attack on United States’ natural heritage. “All the time the American people have been working so hard to get places protected as national parks and wilderness areas, a lot of that good can be undone (by RS 2477),” he said.

Senior Leanne Josephson studies journalism at Western. She has previously been published in The Western Front, Klipsun and the Bellingham Herald.
Sue DenAdel said she developed asthma and adrenal and liver tumors after she moved to Bellingham's Birchwood neighborhood in 1975.

"The Birchwood neighborhood had a good reputation for being a safe, family-oriented neighborhood," she said. "We did not know what chemicals were being used at Oeser (Cedar Co.)."

DenAdel said she watched as one of her daughters suffered unexplained rashes and her other daughter developed a central nervous tic. She said that daughter moved out eight years ago and still has nervous system problems.

DenAdel's house is less than 100 feet from the Oeser Cedar Co. The company treats utility poles with pentachlorophenol (PCP) to resist insects and rot. The site is contaminated with byproducts of creosote, which was once used to treat the poles. According to the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, the byproducts include at least nine possible carcinogens including PCP. DenAdel said she believes Oeser's air and water pollution are responsible for the ailments affecting her family and possibly the residents of her neighborhood.

According to the ATSDR, PCP and other toxins on the site can cause serious health problems, including damage to the immune and nervous systems, reproductive and developmental problems, harmful effects to the lungs and liver, and can result in unconsciousness and death.

THE SITE AND THE SUPERFUND
Oeser, a 26-acre facility on the northwest edge of Bellingham, became a Superfund site in 1997. The EPA chooses Superfund sites based on levels of dangerous contaminants. Currently, Oeser is the only active Superfund site in Whatcom County. Oeser is still operating while the EPA performs an emergency cleanup. But, the EPA is only responsible for cleaning up contamination that occurred on the site before 1997.

In the Superfund program, the EPA supervises the study and cleanup of sites with money from the Superfund tax and other taxes. President George W. Bush said in a 2000 campaign speech that he believes the complicated nature of the Superfund law hinders its effectiveness.

"Not only has Superfund been slow and costly," he said, "but also the complexity of the law itself has been an obstacle to state and local efforts to clean up (contaminated sites)."

White House Media Affairs employee Taylor Griffin said Bush has requested a $150 million increase to the long-term cleanup section of Superfund in his 2004 budget — a 75 percent increase from
the 2002 budget, according to the White House Web site.

This funding will come from taxpayers, not oil and chemical companies, contrary to the Superfund slogan: 'the polluter pays.' The tax on the companies ended in 1995 and Congress has not reinstated it. All oil and chemical companies had to pay the tax including those companies that produce few pollutants.

In a 2002 Congressional testimony, EPA Administrator Christie Whitman said the tax applied to "everyone in the industry, so that even those that have the best of environmental records are also paying."

If a site requires an emergency cleanup, the EPA pays for it and then bills the owners, said EPA's Oeser Project Manager Loren McPhillips.

"In order to get things going and moving forward, we decided we had to do (an emergency clean up)," McPhillips said. "In Superfund, you end up with usually coming in after a facility goes away. Usually we don't (clean up) operating facilities."

The EPA's emergency cleanup of Oeser, along with the study of the site, included excavating soil and liquid waste and the installation of an asphalt cap over four acres. Oeser also removed 23,000 gallons of creosote.

EPA Unit Manager Sylvia Kawabata said cleanup has cost the EPA $5.8 million, the equivalent of nearly half the state agency's yearly cleanup budget. She said, as of 2003, the EPA has spent $12 million on research and cleanup of the site.

"That's an awful lot of money to spend on a small site," McPhillips said. "I'm sort of mystified as to why we're being criticized for being cost-effective. My management wants us to move forward on the site."

Kawabata said the EPA struggles with a lack of money since the Superfund tax ended.

She said if Oeser refuses to pay the EPA's costs, the agency will begin litigation.

"EPA has paid for all of the investigation so far as well as the removal and we're hoping that they'll pay it back," she said.

The EPA has finished its study on the Oeser site and is considering a final cleanup plan to excavate contaminated soil, cap more of the damaged areas and improve the caps. The plan is estimated to cost another $4 million.

THE NEIGHBORS

Some residents, however, said the EPA is not doing a thorough enough job. They said they believe the EPA is not addressing air quality, a contaminated stream near the site or illnesses common in the neighborhood. Several residents, consultants and activists said the Bush administration is responsible for the changed attitude of the EPA toward Superfund cleanups.

"I think they are the Industrial Protection Agency," said resident Doug Tolchin after a Jan. 15, 2003 hearing about the Oeser site. "Staff people do what their boss tells them to do and the boss is appointed by the Bush administration."

He said EPA staff members often feel powerless to change the agency's practices.

"They know that if they ring the bell, they lose their job," Tolchin said. "(But) they're very sick of what goes down."

Birchwood neighborhood residents said they believe Oeser's pollution is responsible for a variety of ailments.

Oeser President Christopher Secrist said the site is not to blame for residents' illnesses.

"It's human nature to try and identify and allocate blame for one's physical condition," Secrist said. "Not only can you say the contamination is not getting offsite, it is not detected in our perimeter wells."

He said, however, a city-utility pipe running under the site is old and in poor condition. Residents said they worry toxins are leaking into the pipe, which could carry them offsite and into the local stream.

"We don't worry about it unless it's caved in and water's not running through it," Secrist said.

Barbara Trejo, the Washington Department of Health public health adviser who is in charge of evaluating the health effects of Oeser, said the DOH has not found a link between Oeser contamination and residents' health. She said she plans to conduct a public health assessment. The assessment would include air pollution from the site, which residents believe is making them sick.

"We're going to be looking at the air data collected by the EPA," she said.

Trejo said the department will only look at the EPA's data, and will not survey the residents to find out how many are sick. She
Mark Asmundson, mayor of Bellingham, attended the public hearing about the Oeser site on January 15, 2003. (photo by Jaime Clark)

The Oeser stack stands above the Birchwood neighborhood and creates the stench in the area. Neighbors said they have called the Northwest Air Pollution Authorities about the problem. Resident Sue DenAdel said she feels her health problems are directly related to pollution from Oeser and her close proximity to its property. Her house borders Oeser's property line.

said the residents are too small a group to survey properly, and that it is more effective to examine toxins on the site that could affect the residents.

"As part of EPA’s evaluation, they also look at health effects," Trejo said. "I have no reason to suspect that EPA is doing anything wrong."

McPhillips said health effects are not in the EPA’s jurisdiction but the EPA has collected air data anyway. The EPA is working to clean up contaminated soil, but not water or air, he said.

"We don’t gather health information ourselves," McPhillips said. "We’ve actually gone the extra step and collected some air data."

Bellingham resident John Dutton said he suspected the EPA and the State Department of Health did not want to know the extent of residents’ illnesses. Dutton’s wife Janille said there are seven residents in the Birchwood neighborhood with breast cancer. She said the EPA should notify people that they live near a Superfund site.

"I’m just dumbfounded how many people are unaware," she said.

Birchwood resident Tara Felder said there were at least fourteen people in two city blocks with serious ailments.

"Something hit my adrenal system and wiped it off the face of the earth," she said.

Without a health survey, these numbers cannot be confirmed and the residents have no way to prove a correlation exists.

WAITING

Senator Patty Murray and 26 other senators sent a letter to Bush on Sept. 23, 2002, asking him to reinstate the Superfund tax. According to the letter, taxpayers will pay for all of Superfund studies and cleanups by 2004 if the Superfund tax is not restored.

Murray said she supported the concept of ‘the polluter paying,’ but had no plans to do anything to help pass a new tax in the near future.

"Given that Republicans control both the White House and both houses of Congress, (restoring Superfund) will be very difficult," Murray said. "There is a real challenge because of inadequate funds to clean up the Superfund sites across the country. There’s been a lot of problems with the EPA (since Bush took office.) That’s why the Superfund budget is so important."

Frank James, a former Whatcom County health officer, agreed.

"I believe there are substantial health risks to the Oeser Cedar site," James said. "I believe those are cumulative."

He said health risks are hard to prove but that the government should take more precautions, instead of waiting for proof.

"There’s a principle of prudence and that’s a principle that’s not being followed by our current administration," James said. "People thought Reagan was bad. They have no idea what’s going on (with the administration). This administration has very masterfully redefined problems out of existence. Redefining doesn’t make it go away. Those compounds are still in the ground."

He said the Bush administration allows people in economic power to avoid responsibility and defers environmental problems for future generations to deal with.

"There’s been a change in the executive personnel, who have a different philosophy towards environmental protection," said Mark Herrenkohl, a Foster Wheeler aquatic scientist who was hired by the citizen committee to study Oeser. "There’s been a big difference for funding in enforcement and cleanup."

Birchwood Neighborhood Association President Rodd Pemble said the Superfund program requires the community to prove a problem exists, assumes polluters will clean up to the fullest and fails to enforce the law.

"The EPA is kind of being hamstrung," he said. "The average person has just basically given up on the project because it’s been so many years and so little has been done. There’s too many powerful forces at work."

Junior Laurel Eddy studies environmental journalism at Huxley College. She has previously been published in Ecotones and The Western Front.

The Bush administration proposes to lift federal protection for wolves. (9/25)

The Bush administration rewrites logging rules in the Northwest. (9/30)

The Administration relinquishes federal water rights. (9/30)
It has long been the conventional wisdom in security that no single measure can provide effective security.

"I GOT PAGE AFTER PAGE of documents — blacked out."

Duff Wilson is a Pulitzer Prize nominated investigative reporter for the Seattle Times. While preparing to write a story on Seattle's actions to prepare for biological attacks, he submitted a Freedom of Information Act request to Seattle Public Utilities. He said what he got back was so heavily censored that he had to scrap his story. Wilson said he's had similar experiences in the past with FOIA, especially since George W. Bush took office.

FOIA was enacted in 1966 to provide citizens access to government information. The act requires all federal agencies to disclose requested records that don't fall under an exemption. Each federal agency handles its own FOIA requests and any citizen can submit a request to a federal office for information.

Over the years the act has been influential in uncovering government documents that informed the public of government decisions and abuses of power. In the 1970s, for example Ford sped up production of the Ford Pinto, ignoring a flaw in the gas tank that later proved fatal. FOIA was used to reveal that both the government and Ford had knowledge of the flaw.

Wilson said he has significant experience with FOIA, using it for almost every story he's published in the last 10 years. He said the Bush administration is making it harder to obtain information and keep the public informed by allowing agencies to restrict more information. On Oct. 12, 2001, Attorney General John Ashcroft issued a memorandum to the heads of all federal departments and agencies. He urged agencies to carefully consider what they disclose.

"They should name it the 'Freedom to Delay Act,' or the 'Freedom to Deny Act,'" he said.

Wilson said the openness of FOIA changes with every administration. When Janet Reno was attorney general, the general feeling was for an open government. Reno also tried to get agencies to speed up their requests, he said.

"That ended with the Bush administration," Wilson said. "From my experience, they've just slowed down."

Doug Honig, public education director for the American Civil Liberties Union in Washington state, said FOIA itself has not changed. What has changed is the current administration's willingness to honor requests.

He said the ACLU is concerned with the government's actions. In Ashcroft's memorandum, he

ACRONYM KEY
FOIA - Freedom of Information Act
NWEA - Northwest Ecosystem Alliance
ACLU - American Civil Liberties Union
told government agencies that they should withholding information if they see any legal grounds to do so, Honig said.

FOIA contains nine exemptions for the information that agencies can release, allowing agencies to deny certain requests. Exemptions include trade secrets, lawyer/client materials, personal privacy files and national security information.

Wilson said he thinks the national security exemption is used too broadly, especially in wartime. He said that the Bush administration has been secretive and the Department of Justice has followed suit.

Citizens need to have access to hold the government accountable and perform checks and balances, Honig said. FOIA was passed to curb government’s abuses of power, but withholding information sends a message that the government doesn’t want to be held accountable, he said.

“In the wake of 9-11, we shouldn’t be subverting our values of democracy,” Honig said.

FOIA office Director of Public Affairs Barbara Comstock said, however, any changes made during the Bush administration have been minor. She said there are no qualitative differences in the amount of information flowing out.

“Ascroft’s memorandum just reiterated previous policies,” she said.

An official at the Department of Justice, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said that their first policy consideration is to follow the law. Agencies consider the individual exemptions that fall under the act.

The official said Ashcroft has simply put more emphasis on careful consideration for disclosure.

“Careful consideration is due to heightened security in a post-9-11 world,” he said.

The official also said that Ashcroft’s October memorandum was not a reaction to the events of Sept. 11, 2001. He said the plan was already in progress prior to those events.

Rob Lopresti, librarian for government information at Western Washington University, said although he is not immediately affected by FOIA, or by denial of information, he is concerned with what the government is doing.

“Librarians are concerned with how the act is diminishing,” he said. “After 9-11, access to government information has diminished.”

Following the terrorist attacks, the U.S. government began pulling information away from public view. Ashcroft points to national security, the effectiveness of law enforcement and business confidentiality as key reasons for denying requests.

Dave Werntz is science director for Northwest Ecosystem Alliance, a Bellingham-based environmental advocacy group. He said they have had information requests for environmental policies returned incomplete.

When confronted with possible rollbacks of the Northwest Forest Plan, NWEA submitted a FOIA request. The plan concerns federal land management policy for land within the range of the spotted owl. NWEA said it feared the new policy included provisions that would allow access to lands that originally were off limits. NWEA feared the new provisions would allow logging in the area.

“We did not receive what we think are entire documents,” Werntz said. “I haven’t experienced (this problem) until the Bush administration took office.”

NWEA submitted a FOIA appeal to get more information. Depending on the outcome of that appeal, they will consider whether they want a judge to review the case.

Wilson said he thinks the current administration has a lot to do with the delays and denials. He said FOIA has always been difficult to use because agencies take so long to release information. Recently, he said he has tried to avoid using the FOIA.

“What’s bad has gotten worse (with Bush),” Wilson said. “It’s our job to oversee the government, and we need to see their files to do that.”

Junior Torhil Dunham studies journalism at Western. She has previously been published in the Planet.

They should name it the ‘Freedom to Delay Act,’ or the ‘Freedom to Deny Act’

— Duff Wilson, Seattle Times investigative reporter

censored document courtesy of Duff Wilson

2003 winter / THE PLANET [39]
ACRONYM KEY
PEER-Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility
NEPA-National Environmental Policy Act
GAO-General Accounting Office
FOIA-Freedom of Information Act
CIWS-Close in weapons system
NPLS-National Priorities List Superfunds
MMMA-Marine Mammal Protection Act
NMFS-National Marine Fisheries Service
LFA-Low Frequency Active

AFTER AN EERIE SILENCE, nearly 5,000 dead fish rose from the harbor’s depths.

Jim Muck, a biologist in a boat about 200 feet away, said the Navy’s five-pound C-4 underwater explosive went off prematurely. Muck and other government officials weren’t paying attention. Then a shock wave rocked the boat.

“I thought we had hit a log or something,” he said. “The Navy drove us back and forth and that’s how we estimated the number of fish killed.”

Muck, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist, witnessed this military training exercise in October 2001 in Crescent Harbor near Whidbey Naval Air Station, Wash. The Navy invited state and federal officials and local tribes to observe the exercise.

The Navy said that since the early 1980s similar underwater detonation exercises have occurred in Puget Sound. The Navy is authorized to conduct up to 60 exercises per year.

These activities became widely public in late 2002 after a government whistle blower informed Public Employees for Envi-
When the U.S. Army originally constructed the Fort Lewis Military Installation, the 86,000 acre site was surrounded by prairie land. Because of growth around Ft. Lewis, diverse and endangered wildlife have been forced to take refuge on the base.

Environmental Responsibility, an activist group representing state and federal employees.

Though military training activities have helped the United States win two world wars and defend the nation, some activities harm the environment. Concerned citizens and advocacy groups worry the increasing secrecy afforded to the military masks potentially harmful — and perhaps unnecessary — practices.

At the same time, the George W. Bush administration insists current interpretations of several environmental laws hinder military readiness and deserve redress.

In December 2002, PEER encouraged the White House Council on Environmental Quality to consider filing criminal charges against the Navy for failing to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act.

PEER said the Navy should have started the NEPA review process several years ago.

Navy Region Northwest spokeswoman, Commander Karen Sellers said the Navy has waited until now to initiate the NEPA process because federal fish biologists are nearing completion of their federally-mandated Endangered Species Act consultation.

"The main concern was the number of fish that were floating on the surface," Muck said.

He said his second concern is that as few as 10 percent of corpses float. The death toll might have been as high as 50,000 fish, mostly surf smelt — food for the endangered bull trout.

"PEER's broad concerns regard the military's pattern of shielding its actions from the public and trying to avoid or subvert environmental compliance," said Lea Mitchell, director of PEER's Washington state office. "I think it's being allowed in the name of national security. We hope this won't be allowed once the public becomes aware and raises concerns about it."

The Bush administration introduced the Readiness and Range Preservation Initiative into the Defense Authorization Act of 2002. The legislation would have clarified the interpretation of key provisions of several landmark environmental laws on military installations, including the Endangered Species Act, Clean Air Act, Marine
Mammal Protection Act and Migratory Bird Treaty. Much of that legislation failed in Congress.

The provisions that failed in 2002 will be considered again this year, said Bruce Beard, policy analyst of the Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Installations and Environment. He said the administration has not yet submitted the new legislative package to Congress.

External influences that inhibit the sustainability of training on military installations are at the heart of the matter. Beard said these so-called encroachment pressures include increased urbanization around military facilities that, for instance, force at-risk species onto military installations and into testing areas. The designation of critical habitat area at some military bases in the United States has hampered training activities, he said.

“A lot of military facilities were put out in the middle of nowhere, but since then communities have grown around installations and ranges to the point where there’s urban growth up to the fence line,” he said.

At the 86,000-acre Fort Lewis military installation south of Tacoma, rows of sandwiched houses and seemingly endless strip malls meet miles of barbed-wire fencing, for instance, to remove scotch broom, an invasive plant that chokes out prairies where endangered species live.

“Fort Lewis does an excellent job as environmental stewards and balancing their military training mission,” Beard said.

Kirkland said urban sprawl in communities adjacent to Fort Lewis, such as Lakewood and Spanaway, have forced at-risk species onto the base.

“About 2 percent of those native prairies are left in Puget Sound, mostly on the base,” Kirkland said. “So where do all the species go? They run over to Fort Lewis.”

He said the base puts up signs to guard breeding grounds and fragile prairie habitat as well as wetlands. Fort Lewis deserves praise for its work, he said.

“We have been pretty creative in meeting obligations,” said James Van Ness, Department of Defense associate general counsel for Environment and Installations. “But every workaround comes at some price.”

The Bush administration was not willing to pay that price, however, concerning deployment of the Navy’s Low Frequency Active Sonar operations.

Early in 2001, PEER intercepted Department of Defense “Pre-Decision Working Papers” dated December 2000. The paper outlined specific provisions or interpretations of environmental laws it alleged encroach on military training and readiness in the marine environment. The memo also cited public review processes and disclosure regarding environmental concerns as delaying training.

Complying with provisions of the Marine Mammal Protection Act, according to the memo, might hinder or delay deployment of the Navy’s LFA Sonar operations.

In July 2002, the Bush administration granted the Navy an exemption from the MMPA to “take” or harass endangered species, including whales, when deploying LFA Sonar to detect foreign submarines.

Mark Palmer works for Earth Island Institute’s International Marine Mammal Project. He said the Navy’s use of sonar around the world has coincided with mass whale strandings.

“In March 2000 in the Bahamas, 16 whales beached within range of the Navy’s use of midrange frequency sonar,” he said.

In December 2001, Earth Island Institute filed a Freedom of Information Act request, asking that the National Marine Fisheries Service release the whales’ autopsy results. Following that request, NMFS issued a report citing the Navy’s use of midrange frequency sonar as the most plausible cause of the whales’ deaths.

The whales that died suffered bleeding of the ears and ear channels, injuries consistent with an acoustically induced trauma that caused them to strand. No other acoustic sources in the vicinity could have caused the whales’ injuries, according to the report.

“But the LFA Sonar is more powerful and has a longer range than the midrange frequency sonar that killed those whales,” Palmer said. “We’re concerned it could kill even more marine mammals.”

In November 2002, a coalition of environmental groups sued the Navy and convinced U.S. Magistrate Elizabeth LaPorte in San Francisco to temporarily limit the LFA Sonar testing until the courts resolve the coalition’s lawsuit.

Fred Felleman Northwest, director of Ocean Advocates and
board member of the Orca Conservancy, said he is concerned that the Navy's sonar testing played a role in the death of a female whale that beached off Washington state's Olympic coast in January 2002.

He said Palmer filed a FOIA request on his behalf regarding Navy training near the location of the beached whale.

"They wanted to charge us over a couple thousand dollars for the request," Palmer said. "They don't want to give out this kind of information because they say, 'there's terrorists out there, so we're not going to tell you anything.'"

Felleman said he remains skeptical about the whale's death.

"If you can't get this kind of information, and if the Navy exempts themselves further, then how can you even begin to look at ways to mitigate these kinds of possible effects?" he said.

Since the attacks of Sept. 11, citizen activists and advocacy groups who traditionally try to shed light on military activities have been denied requests or charged higher fees.

The Navy said these charges cover the cost of copying and time spent collecting the requested materials.

Peace activist Glen Milner said he uses FOIA to research environmental compliance at the Naval Submarine Base Bangor — located approximately 15 miles west of Seattle on Hood Canal.

"They've denied some of my requests due to national security," he said.

Milner said the Bush administration's attempts to prevent public disclosure by denying FOIA requests make public scrutiny impossible.

"Several years ago they would have granted a similar FOIA request, without fees, because they said it was in the public interest to do so," he said.

In late 2001, the Navy responded to one of Milner's requests. The response confirmed that the Navy tests weapons using depleted uranium munitions off the Washington state coast — the same radioactive heavy metal that the United States littered over Iraq during the Gulf War in 1991.

Some fear that if the United States declares war on Iraq, the military will rain down more of the toxic metal on the country and its inhabitants.

Sellers said the Navy fires depleted uranium rounds off the Washington coast with its Phalanx Close-In-Weapons-System from ships.

"Tests of CIWS are required twice per month when a naval vessel is at sea," Sellers said.

According to the Navy's official Web site, it started using a tungsten penetrator for CIWS — and stopped using depleted uranium — fifteen years ago. Milner's discovery, however, made it clear that this is not true.

"The Navy is in the process of phasing out the (depleted uranium)," Sellers said. "The phase out should be complete by 2008."

She said the Navy takes precautions at sea when operating CIWS and, in doing so, it does not think it has any adverse effects on endangered species or critical habitat.

"The radiation exposure to marine life is very low," she said.

The military's use of depleted uranium, which some believe caus-
"The environmental movement in America is alarmingly robust and strong," said George Landrith, president of Frontiers of Freedom. "What they are is they're anti-capitalist and they don't like America."

Frontiers of Freedom is a Republican interest group that denounces environmentalists and environmental protection plans.

Not all Republicans share Landrith's view, said Jim DiPeso, director of Republicans for Environmental Protection, a group that formed in 1995 to combat anti-environmental changes within the party.

"The conservationist roots in the Republican Party actually go very deep," DiPeso said. "Theodore Roosevelt just compiled an amazing large record. He realized that conservation was very important for the country. Richard Nixon was an environmental protection leader."

"There's quite a history to be proud of. That's why it's such a shame that the current Republican leaders have forgotten their history."

He said the Bush administration recently initiated legislation that cuts back on environmental protections.

"The party has been taken over by this kind of hard-edged crowd," DiPeso said. "They believe everything should be left to the market. Years ago the environmental issue was much more bipartisan. For a long time the environmental movement was a very mainstream, middle-class movement."

DiPeso said Congress members who refer to themselves as conservatives are actually radicals and that traditional conservatives try to protect the needs of future generations.

"The Republican Party has kind of dug itself into this hole that in order to be a real Republican you have to be anti-environmental," he said. "If the environment is polluted, it's okay. The free market will save it."
The Republican Party has kind of dug itself into this hole that in order to be a real Republican you have to be anti-environmental.

Jim DiPeso
Republicans for Environmental Protection

Landrith said he believes the free market will save the environment. “America’s wealth is one of the reasons we have a clean environment,” he said. “It is not true that a capitalist system is inherently in conflict with the environment.”

Landrith said he believes capitalism actually encourages environmentalism.

“There are those who view the environment as if businesses are naturally opposed to the environment,” he said. “But a logger would go out of business if he didn’t replant.”

Americans are solving environmental problems because they have the money to do it. Because Americans want a clean environment, they are willing to spend the money, Landrith said.

He called this type of environmentalism free market environmentalism — use of incentives and free market principles to protect the environment as opposed to regulations.

Landrith said traditional environmentalists use fear tactics to gain public support. They threaten the population with global warming and rely on “junk science.”

“If you send a press release out and have a bunch of Ph.D.s sign it, that’s not science,” he said.

Environmental protection and junk science must be put aside to allow development and improve the economy, Landrith said.

Washington state House Representative Doug Ericksen, a Republican, said he agrees.

“Republicans are actually trying to solve the problem rather than make a political statement,” Ericksen said. “Republicans and some of your environmental groups just don’t speak the same language.”

Ericksen said that environmentalists get philosophical and want the world to go back to an earlier time. On the other hand, he said, Republicans look at the world and try to work with what they have.

The new Bush administration policies are good for the environment, despite complaints among environmentalists, Ericksen said. Take for example the Clear Skies Initiative, which amends former clean air legislation, allowing businesses to develop without drastically reducing the pollution they produce.

“On the outside it would appear that you are lowering air quality standards for businesses,” he said.

But, previously the standards were so high that businesses didn’t even try to meet them because it would cost too much money, Ericksen said. Government leaders decided to lower the standards to a reasonable level to gain more support.

“They looked at the situation and said ‘How can we have clean air sooner,’” he said. “We in America have the highest environmental protections in the world.”

Ericksen said the United States’ wealth allows Americans to be more concerned about the environment.

“Republicans tend to believe that wealth leads to environmental protection,” he said.

Ericksen said people try to make the issue environmentalists versus Republicans because they have a political agenda, not an environmental agenda.

“These people are often anti-capitalist and anti-American,” he said. “You can scare people very easily with environmental threats. They can’t really back up what they say and they scare people.”

DiPeso said, however, that environmentalists’ claims are backed by large bodies of research by world-renowned scientists. He said the massive study of global climate change is a perfect example of this.

“The scientists who have been studying (global warming) for the past 10 years are world-class scientists,” he said. “Why would scientists who are concerned about this run around saying, ‘the sky is falling’ without a practical reason to say so?”

Senior Margo Horner studies general studies at Western. She has previously been published in Highland Community College’s student newspaper, The Western Front, Klipsun and the Seattle Post-Intelligencer.
AUG. 30, 1999. Ninety-nine percent of registered voters in East Timor voted to determine their independence from Indonesia — thousands of those voters and their children were killed in post-vote violence.

East Timor had been a province of Indonesia for 33 years. According to a Los Angeles Times report, since Indonesia claimed East Timor in 1975 as many as 200,000 Timorese have died as a result of warfare or starvation. Although the region was under Indonesian rule, it was actually controlled by Indonesian-military armed militias that roamed the region wielding swords, spears and machetes.

In 1999, Indonesian President BJ Habibie granted the East Timorese the right to vote for their independence. In the days leading up to the election, East Timor was rocked by violence as pro-Indonesian militias killed at least 1,000 pro-independence voters and intimidated countless others. The violence drove as many as 80,000 people from their homes, according to the United Nations.

But the militias couldn’t control the will of the people. On election day, 79 percent of East Timorese voted to be an independent nation and the pro-Indonesian militias were outraged. They stormed though the countryside killing thousands of Timorese and destroying about 85 percent of the country’s infrastructure. Women were gang-raped and two-thirds of the population fled to neighboring regions until the U.N. halted the violence.

"The right to vote is arguably one of the most important rights of citizenship in a democratic country yet a substantial number of U.S. citizens choose not to exercise this right," according to a U.S. Census Bureau report on voting and registration in the November 2000 election.

According to statistics gathered from the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration and the U.S. Census Bureau, about 25 percent of voting-age Americans voted for George W. Bush, another 25 percent voted for Al Gore and 2 percent voted for either Patrick Buchanan or Ralph Nader. This means that only 52 percent of voting-age Americans voted and about a quarter of them picked the leader of our country.
A look at the raw numbers — 50,456,062 votes for Bush and 50,996,582 votes for Gore — shows that the two candidates were separated by less than half a million votes.

But, in the United States it's the Electoral College votes that count. Bush received 271 votes and Gore got 266.

Critics and commentators have all formed their own conspiracy theories about how Gore could have won the popular vote and lost the election. Many believe that Governor Jeb Bush had something to do with the way the vote turned out in Florida. But, the fact is, the average American will never know what actually happened during the months before the U.S. Supreme Court chose our president and, I would argue, they don’t really care.

According to the Census Bureau, 21 percent of registered voters who didn’t vote in 2000 said they were “too busy” on election day. Another 12 percent said they just weren’t interested in voting.

Harvard University professor Robert Putnam has written a number of articles and a book — “Bowling Alone: the collapse and revival of American community” — detailing the decline of civic engagement in the United States. He reported that many elements of civic engagement in America appear to be on the decline. Fewer people nationwide attend public meetings, are members of community organizations, give to charity and vote today than 30 years ago.

According to Washington state's voter participation statistics, the percentage of voting-age citizens that actually vote has declined by about 15 percent since 1952.

As a voting citizen, this worries me. If we stay on this same path, fewer and fewer people will choose the leaders who make decisions in the name of the United States. Some of these decisions are minor — like what color the dining room should be in the White House — but most of them are crucial.

Decisions like how our most cherished environmental laws — the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, the Endangered Species Act — are implemented shouldn’t be left to an individual who was chosen by a quarter of voting-age citizens. In order to have a robust exchange of ideas in this country, more people have to speak.

It is difficult to believe that in a country where, according to a survey conducted by The Polling Company in 1999, 70 percent of registered voters are concerned about the environment, we have one of the least environmentally responsible presidents in history.

It’s time for that 70 percent of concerned voters to get off their rears and chug down to their polling station once every four years. Heck, if they like it, they can vote in federal races every two years! And, if they like voting every two years, they should try voting every year.

According to the census, 86 percent of registered voters actually voted in 2000. If 70 percent of registered voters voted for the most environmentally responsible candidate in 2000, the nation’s environmental profile would probably be drastically different.

The environment would be an issue on par with homeland security or health care. Perhaps the director of the Environmental Protection Agency would be a cabinet-level position. Maybe the Oeser site in Bellingham would receive the full benefit of the Superfund program or kayakers who use Clearwater Creek wouldn’t fear losing the best stretch of whitewater in the county. In this perfect world, the Freedom of Information Act would be a nearly hassle-free process for all citizens, the environmental education community wouldn’t beg for more funding and wealthy corporations wouldn’t be able to buy the ability to pollute.

Today, now-independent East Timor has begun to form a stable nation. Aug. 30, 2001, the nation elected 88 new assembly members to draft the country’s first constitution. Ninety-one percent of registered voters turned out to vote for candidates from 16 parties.

Granted, the East Timorese are still feeding on post-revolutionary fervor but hopefully, next time a vote comes up more people will remember that being a free nation wasn’t always so easy.

Do your civic duty — vote.