

Environment

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RP p. 2

Earth First! founder finds receptive audience in SC

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A more receptive audience couldn't have been hand-picked for Dave Foreman, who, by the end of his lecture in Santa Cruz last night, had the group howling.

No, they weren't laughing. Hardly. Foreman, founder of the radical environmental action group, Earth First!, prefaced his lecture with an apology for being so depressing. "People often tell me, 'Dave — you're a bummer.'"

"It's a family trait," he said, claiming he comes from a long line of Cassandras.

But Foreman isn't worried about Greek soldiers in wooden horses. Foreman was out to sound the alarm that a mass extinction is under way on Spaceship Earth.

There didn't seem to be a soul in the house who questioned Foreman's pronouncement. Birkenstocks dangled over seat backs, and tie-dies flashed color around the hall.

The scene was reminiscent of a Grateful Dead show, except that no one was dancing. Instead, they were listening to what Foreman said were hard facts about what is happening to the Earth.

"The key thing about doom sayers is that we want to be wrong," Foreman said. "We want to prevent the worst from happening, so we warn folks. It's us vs. the Pollyannas. We try to pretend this stuff isn't happening... but it is."

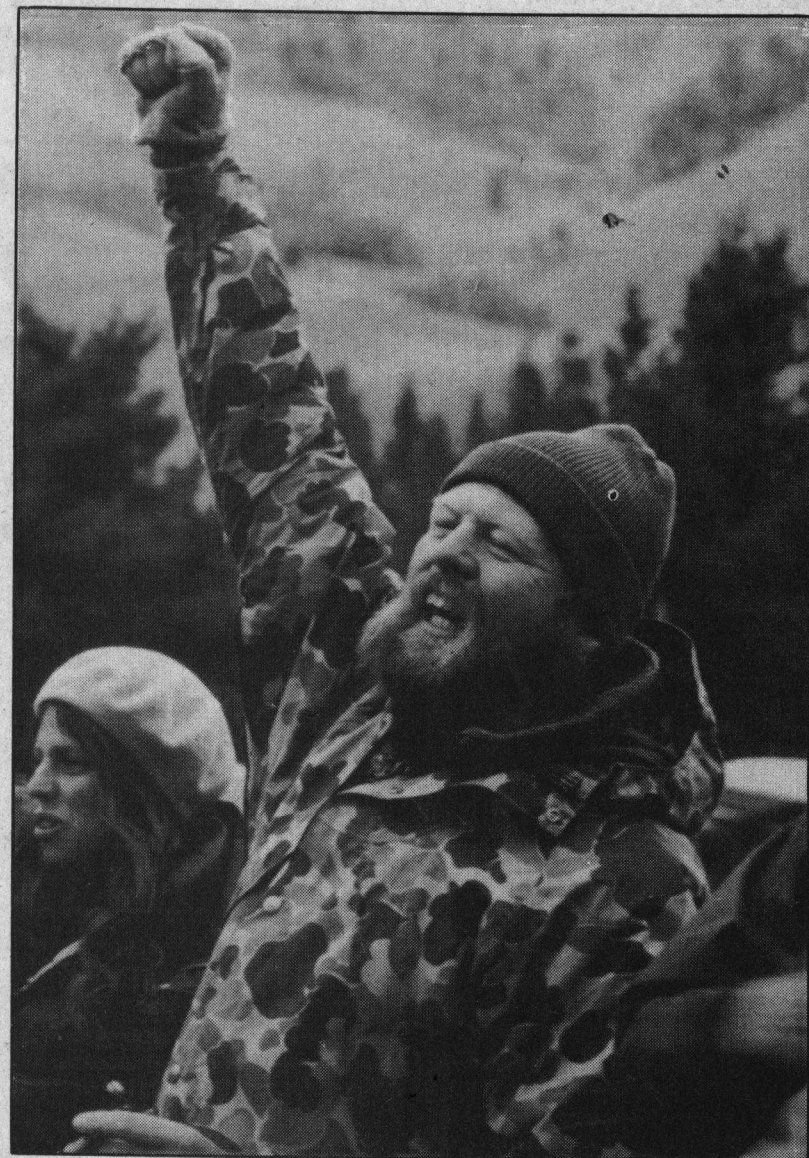
Foreman's answer to the Pollyannas was a brief-but-heartbreaking summary of loss: About 150 years ago, he said, ornithologist and artist John Audubon recorded seeing the skies over the Midwest go dark for three entire days with the passing of a flock of carrier pigeons.

In 1914, the world saw its last carrier pigeon die. Of the bountiful redwoods that once stretched from Santa Cruz to the Oregon border, only 2 percent remains. American grizzly bears once numbered in the hundreds of thousands; today, sightings are as rare as Bigfoot.

Since 1964, 40 percent of Central American rain forests has been destroyed. We may lose 40 percent of the world's species in the next 40 years, he said. The greenhouse effect continues. Acid rain persists.

"We have been interfering with the planet's life-support system," he said, "and we're beginning to feel the effects."

Foreman said the current extinction episode will be as great as that of the Cretaceous period in which the dinosaurs were wiped out. He laid partial blame at the feet of mathematician Rene Descartes, whose philosophy — "I



Dave Foreman at an Earth First! rally.

think, therefore I am" — separated the body from the mind.

"What it did was to make everything else out there a *thing*," Foreman said, the force of his words now beginning to extend down into his outstretched arms and propel him back and forth in front of the audience.

"What we need is a new idea, a new idea that's an old idea," Foreman said. He then launched into a description of the Wildlands Project, his latest, dearest involvement. "We want to give the whole conservation movement a new direction and energy."

Conservation biology — a "crisis discipline" to Foreman — would be the basis of a plan to give all animal life, but especially larger species like wolves and grizzlies, more space than is currently provided. Corridors of protected land would connect existing parks and wildlife refuges throughout the country, and allow these species to thrive and endure the continual infringement by humans.

He related a passage from "A Sand County Almanac," written 80

years ago by Aldo Leopold. In it, Leopold told of a job he took in 1909 with the newly created U.S. Forest Service to count timber board-feet in Arizona. One day, the young Leopold and fellow workers spotted a she-wolf and several pups.

"In those days, the thing to do when a wolf was spotted, was to shoot it," Foreman said. And so the forestry workers did, killing the lot. But Leopold wrote that, when he went to check on the rifles' efficiency, found the mother wolf not dead, but dying. "He watched a green fire die in her eyes," Foreman told the hushed audience. "We need to bring that green fire back. We need to have it in our own eyes."

And with head back and neck arched, Foreman let loose with a long, mighty howl. His second was joined by 100 howls that had the walls vibrating.

Foreman conceded that the new strategy was a 200-year project. But for all his doom saying, he was full of hope. "Wolves are actually being reintroduced into Arizona," he said. "That's Arizona!"