

Consider Living a More Environmentally-friendly Lifestyle

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Here in the Florida Keys, we have many opportunities and some challenges to living an environmentally sensitive lifestyle. Some opportunities to contribute positively will arise this month during the varied Earth Day celebrations held during the month of April. Everyone should try to participate in one of the many events and activities throughout Monroe County that will be held to commemorate this historically important day.

It is a biological/ecological fact that every organism - be it an animal, plant, or microbe - impacts and changes its surrounding environment as it goes about its life. Obviously some individual impacts are greater than others. The greatest impacts are those done collectively by multitudes of individual organisms. For local marine examples, just consider the red tide or Florida Bay algae blooms each caused by tiny or microscopic organisms. Think also of the large beautiful coral head that may be over a hundred years old constructed by the collective action of individual coral polyps.

Humans obviously have the capability to exert large impacts on our surrounding environment both individually and collectively.

The United States is the most affluent society in the history of mankind with the highest standard of living that is the envy of the world. The U.S. per capita consumption is up to 20 times greater than in the developing world; for example, we consume one-fourth of the world's oil and a third of its paper. Surely we can reduce some of our more wasteful activities without any real inconvenience.

Most of the global environmental issues today are becoming more recognized every year as real threats to our future. And most, if not all of them, are inter-related. The effects of loss of natural habitat, spread of invasive species, global warming, sea level rise, population growth, and ever increasing dependence on fossil fuels are not isolated.

Clearly, governments can have major direct influences regarding society's future environmental impacts. But, people also can have direct impacts through the individual daily decisions and choices that they make.

Independently, the small seemingly isolated actions we take every day help to shape not only our future but also the future of our environment. Many of us are concerned about these worldwide issues and even local issues pertaining to our community quality of life. We should not feel helpless about our ability to effectively have an positive impact on such issues. Participate and contribute in any small way you can. It all helps.

Thus there is truth in the now old environmental cliché: "Think globally, but act locally."

Each of us can make major lifetime contributions through our individual daily decisions. We can make a difference in many different ways: by buying a more fuel efficient vehicle, using less electricity, generating less garbage, voting, increasing your contribution to your community, becoming more healthy, and by participating in continuous lifelong learning.