

Remarks: The Ecology of Growth and Development

Ted Turner, *Turner Broadcasting Systems, Inc., Atlanta, GA*

Proc. Annu. Conf. Southeast. Assoc. Fish and Wildl. Agencies 47:10-15

I want you to know that I agree almost completely with the previous speakers, and I pretty well tore up the talk I was going to make, because I was going to say the same thing. It's so much easier to list the litany of the problems that we face. But, there is some good news too, although not enough. Things can change quickly nowadays, and they have to change quickly. I mean, just look what happened to the cold war and the nuclear threat. If this meeting had been held five or six years ago, the threat of nuclear annihilation would have been the thing that we were most concerned about and the nuclear winter that came after a full-scale launch of all nuclear arsenals of the super powers. That worried me the most, and at least with population growth and the collapse of the environment, we've got a little bit of time, but not much. We have just a few years.

I'm a forward thinker, and I have spent a lot of time with a lot of other people thinking it through. Just three weekends ago, or maybe four, I spent a long weekend with Paul Ehrlich and his wife, who is a leading expert on population, probably in the world.

Just a few weeks ago my wife spoke at the United Nations and did tremendous research on the problem of population, because that is at the root core. It's not wildlife management that we need right now. What we need is total management. We need a holistic management plan for the planet. Now, that is extremely difficult, and you have to have the public's support. That is exactly right. Or you're not going to get anywhere. And, the public happens to be the 5.5 billion people on this planet. It is a daunting task, but we do have some help.

We had the Rio conference last year for the first time with world leaders. Virtually every country on earth met in Rio with a lot of preparation and finally agreed that there was a problem with the environment. Next year, there is going to be a U.N. sponsored conference—they do it every 10 years, it will be the third one, the last one was Mexico City nine years ago and I was there. We will be in Cairo next year and we are going to—that's on population and development—a global conference.

My father always used to say that a problem recognized is a problem half solved. The very fact that we all recognize this problem—those of you who are

working out there in the woods and on the streams can see it every day. So, we do realize there is a problem, although it is very difficult here in the United States where 97% of us, or whatever, live in urban areas. Their idea of the environment is a flower garden in their front yard. But, we do have great awareness for it and we are going forward with that awareness. Our company has for a long time, and I promise you we will stay with it.

Now looking out, I don't agree that the population of the planet is going to hit 10.5 billion or 11 billion people in 40 years. It is not going to happen because there is not enough food to feed those people. Right now, as we sit here, and for the last few years, the gains in food production per person in the world have been reversed and we now have less food being raised each year for the people of the planet. We have to look at it on a planetary level.

The world is now filled with an increasing number of environmental refugees. That is what Mexicans and Central Americans coming into the United States and the Chinese and the Haitians are, they are environmental refugees. They are going to flood into the places where there are surpluses. There are still surpluses here in the United States, one of the few places. There are only four or five countries in the world now that produce a surplus of food. The other 100 and some odd countries are in a food deficit situation. Already 20% of the people on the planet, approximately, don't get enough caloric intake per day. Another 20% don't get a decent balanced diet. Forty percent of the people, almost half of the people in the world, are undernourished and malnourished today. One of our earlier speakers mentioned that 40,000 children today are dying, most of starvation. The population is going to take care of itself. Unfortunately, as we continue to let the population build, the environment gets more and more degraded, making the carrying capacity of the planet for humans more and more reduced. I do not think that we will become extinct, but we are going to go through a tremendous collapse of our population.

I like to—I don't like any of this, but it's more like a lemming situation. You know the lemmings up in Nova Scotia over a six-year period—and I may be wrong about the facts—but the concept is right, the lemmings increase over a six-year period 500 times. They eat grass, and in the sixth year there is no more grass. They have eaten it all, and that is when they go running and jump in the ocean, and run around in these little herds and die. The grey owls that feed on them, and the foxes—their population increases with them. But, basically when the food runs out, the lemmings die back, and they die back to 1/500 of what they were. Just a very few remain, and then the grass comes back because all they have done is grazed the grass down to the roots. The grass comes back the next year, and there is plenty of grass and almost no lemmings.

Humanity is not like that. We, with our industrialization, have learned how to damage the environment so badly that it will take a long time for it to come back. We are basically turning the world into a desert right now. We are the fighters at the edge of what is left of the natural world, trying to hold it back, but we can't hold it back unless population becomes the number one issue in the world. There

is no hope to avoid absolute calamity—not for the planet or life on the planet, remember, the time of the dinosaurs—in a very short period of time, over 60% of all the species became extinct. The planet will heal itself after this damage is done. It will heal itself. We—that is something that we are interested in, we are interested in ourselves—we are the ultimate endangered species.

What can we do to make this more publicized? How can we gain public support? I think that is the main purpose. One thing I thought we needed—we need a whole new ethic. So, I sat down over the years, and I said if Jesus Christ came back today, He would see a whole new set of problems that weren't there when He was here 2,000 years ago, or even more so, back at the time of Moses, approximately 4,000, 5,000, 6,000, 7,000 years ago, when the 10 Commandments were written. And, so I have, over a period of years, thought about it, drawing up a new set of rules to live by. You couldn't call them commandments anymore, because commandments are passé. People don't want to be commanded. We are not in the age of kings and emperors anymore, we are in the age of democracy. So, in order to get by with it today you would have to have it to be voluntary initiatives. And, besides, that is the only way that it would be worthwhile anyway. I would rather see us become extinct and all starve to death in a democracy, than have some dictator order us to do things and have to do it or they—you know, like they would shoot poachers and stuff like they used to do back in the time of Robin Hood, for killing the king's deer. But, I finally wrote up these voluntary initiatives. They are a few years old, but I am going to read them to you real quickly. You've heard the problems. Let's get on to try and figure out what we are going to do with the solutions. Here they are.

The first one is: I love and respect the planet earth and all living things thereon, especially my fellow species, mankind. (2) I promise to treat all persons everywhere with dignity, respect, and friendliness. (3) I promise to have no more than two children, or no more than my nation suggests. You know, in China they are suggesting one, because they are so overpopulated now there really is no environment left. (4) I promise to use my best efforts to help save what is left of our natural world in its untouched state, and to restore damaged areas where practical. (5) I pledge to use as little non-renewable resources as possible. (6) I pledge to use as little toxic chemicals, pesticides, and other poisons as possible, and to work for their reduction by others. (7) I promise to contribute to those less fortunate than myself, to help them become self-sufficient and enjoy the benefits of a decent life, including clean air and water, adequate food, health care, housing, education, and individual rights. (8) I reject the use of force, in particular, military force, and back United Nations arbitration of international disputes. (9) I support the total elimination of all nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and, in time, the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction. (10) I support the United Nations and its efforts to collectively improve the conditions of the planet and all of its inhabitants, and pledge to do all I can to further these ideals.

One of the earlier speakers said poverty is the greatest enemy the environment has, and that is true. What we are going to have to do, and can we do it in 10

years, 5 years, today—can we start acting like intelligent, forward thinking, educated human beings? That is what we need to do. We have got to stop fighting with each other. We have got to get rid of all the prejudice that we have. We are not going to save the planet, or, you are not going to save your parks in south Georgia, we are not going to save anything unless we save it all.

Today, we have one atmosphere, and one set of oceans out there. Right now, CNN is doing a story on the terrible state of fisheries, particularly in the ocean, on the halibut season in Alaska, and I have seen several of the pieces. Over 90% of the giant tuna in the Atlantic Ocean are gone. It is absolute catastrophe, and it is not in 30 years, it is happening right now. We are watching it happen right now. If you live in Bangladesh or Haiti or Ethiopia or Somalia, the catastrophe is already happening. It is going over the world and it is caused by the fact that there is too damn many of us, and that is all there is to it. But, we can control that and we can do it in a humane manner by using birth control. We can control our numbers. We have to manage our own selves as well as the fish and wildlife that we have been managing all along. If we don't do it we have only ourselves to blame. We are capable of it, we have the information on what we need to do and we now, thank God for meetings like this, we know what the problem is. I am going to keep fighting away at it. I think that there is a real good chance that we are not going to make it. If you are putting odds on it, the odds are way against us. When we were 10 games out earlier this year—the Braves were—you know, it didn't look like we were going to make it either, and that makes it more exciting. When you are behind, when you are deep in a corner, when the going get tough, that's when the tough get going.

I remember about 12 years ago, when we started underwriting the Cousteau programs, I was with Captain Cousteau there on the Amazon and we were right in the middle of the arms race, right after President Reagan had been elected. The President was calling the Soviet Union an evil empire. I was trying to talk to the President just about getting rid of nuclear weapons and ending the arms race, because it looked to me like we were headed for a nuclear holocaust. I said, "Captain Cousteau, I'm really despondent about the situation." He said, "Well, Ted, what else can we do?" What else can you do even if you know you are going to lose, you've got to go out and play the game as hard as you possibly can. Everybody has been on losing high school football teams and everything, but, by God, when Friday evening came along and you were asked to go out there, you went out there and did your best anyway. We've got to do our best anyway. Don't allow too much despair to creep into your lives.

Another thing that I tried to do, and this was very scary, because it did not succeed. One of the things that is not right about the environmental movement is all we are doing is telling people not to do things. Don't shoot crows, you're shooting too many ducks, you're throwing too much trash in the river, and God knows there is too much. Don't have so many children, let's not have any more development, let's stop building that highway. It is a negative approach. What I thought of is what we need is a positive approach. One meeting I was at like this

we had a roundtable discussion and somebody pointed out that there are lots of movies made about a disastrous future—like *soil and grain and on the beach* and *Dr. Strangelove* and *Logan's Run*—all these movies about overpopulation and nuclear annihilation—in 1984, and so forth. There was never a book written that had a positive view of the future, or a movie that was made. So, I decided to have a global contest to see if anybody could write a book about what the future ought to look like. Where should we be headed?

Personally, I have 300,000 acres and 80 people live on those 300,000 acres. I don't know just how many square miles, but it is less population per square mile than Siberia, and, God, it's beautiful and wonderful. There's not one cow on 300,000 acres. I've got 4,000 bison and about 4,000 elk, and they are just wandering around. I know what the populations are because I've got fish and wildlife people working my own little park system. It's so gorgeous.

I'd like to see us, personally, live at a density like the Indians did, you know, a couple million people here; no 250 million. That is what the population was when the white man landed in this country, a couple million people, and they lived here for thousands and thousands of years. Ehrlich thinks that we need two billion people in the world. He said, "Ted, if you go back to a population density that low, there will be no roads." I said gee, I didn't think about that. Then you couldn't have cars. Well, so what, we would go back to horses. Do we want to go back to horses? I like horses, but it's not so good for getting across the country, it is real slow, and difficult too. Those things are good to ride for a couple hours. What is it that we would like to see? What kind of world would we like to see? With two billion people, which is about one-third of what the world population is now, we could still have roads and reasonable development, and we would have enough people to have major league baseball and things like that.

At any rate, I put up \$1.5 million of money, we call it the Turner Tomorrow Awards and we are looking for manuscripts of fictional looks at the future, where things have worked out, a positive view of the future. I was hoping we would get a number of different ones. The first prize was \$500,000 and then there were four \$50,000 prizes. We got over 10,000 manuscripts in, 10,000. One of them just had the word Pray on 500 pages—pray, pray, pray, pray. That was one of the more creative ones, but it wasn't one of the winners I might add. They came in from over 60 countries. But, not one of them had a positive view of the future.

How are we going to get somewhere when we ain't got no idea where it is we want to go, because you are never going to really motivate people. We need to have a plan. No architect ever built a building that he didn't have a plan for. When you are going to put turkeys back on some place, you know exactly where. First you write out a plan—how big an area? You survey your resources—how many can be supported here? How many can we bring in? Where are we going to get them? You work out a plan. I hope ya'll have a retirement plan. I've got all these plans. But, we do not have a planetary plan. If somebody does come up with a plan, maybe it is somebody here, you don't have to be a great writer, but write down a synopsis.

Think about it. What is your view of the future? I'm working on it, and Jane is working on it. I'm not a writer, but we've got to have a plan of what we want the world to be like. Then we have to sell that plan to the populous around the world. How can you get somewhere when you don't even know where it is you are going? You cannot do it with just don't do this, don't do that, don't do this. Where do we draw the line? I was supposed to speak this morning about how ecology and development can be resolved together. As a practical matter, if the population keeps growing, which is the real reason why we need more development, if the population were shrinking we would need less development. We could take houses down and buildings down—we wouldn't need them anymore. They are basically to house people. If the people keep increasing, there is nothing the rest of us can do except have catastrophe come. Eventually the population is going to collapse. We are going to starve to death on a very, very degraded planet.

Even here, in this country where we have got relatively plenty of timber, we are still cutting a little bit of old growth timber out in the northwest. What in the hell are we doing it for? Why can't we stop it? We can't even stop that. Then, we are bitching at the people down in Brazil for cutting down their forests, when we have already cut down 98% of ours. You talk about the pot calling the kettle black. Let's stop cutting down our own forests. Down in south Georgia it is already ruined, it's all a monoculture down there. I'm cutting down some pine trees, they grow in 40 years, but, for God's sake we should stop cutting down the last little bit of the old growth forests. Put some thoughts on paper about what you would like to see the world to be, think it through the same way you would work a trout rehabilitation program or a turkey restocking program, and send me a copy of it. Maybe we can develop it into a film or something. Keep up the good work. I know it is easy to lose heart on this one, but, when you shave in the mirror, say I'm just going to stick with it, I'm not going to give up. That is what we have got to do. We can't give up. Keep trying.