



# Times-News

## Consuming Less Can Help Us and Nature

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David Weintraub

ECO NOTES



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There are few things I'd rather do than hike in the mountains in this place where ridges rise like dandelions.

Not only does hiking keep me sane, but the rushing sound of water, the serenade of the birds through the trees and the comfort of the lush tree canopies keep me centered, inspired,

thankful.

One of the amazing contrasts in the woods is the sight of magnificent cascades of yellows, blacks and purples of the pipevine, black and Appalachian swallowtails surrounding a clump of scat. It seems like beauty and the beast. In reality, butterflies like the nutrients found in animal manure, in the same way that garden vegetables thrive on it. It's only modern man that makes the value judgment that animal droppings are "dirty" and butterflies are "beautiful." Ancient people knew that death, dying and destruction were natural cycles of life that provided great sources of nourishment for new life. It's more than likely that early agriculture was founded by accident in man's dumping grounds that sprouted and came alive with unexpected sustenance.

What truly amazes me about studying the past is that so often we find that there's more to learn by looking backward at our ancestors who were inextricably connected to our land and its interrelationships in nature. When we just look forward, we tend to assume that we must bow at the altar of technology as our savior.

The so-called "green" movement began not with Rachel Carson and her "Silent Spring" but probably with Ralph Waldo Emerson, who articulated his belief that God's work is visible through nature. From Emerson came efforts to conserve the land, build national parks and preserve large tracts of nature in the wild. The notion of preserving land in its natural state was a direct contrast to the Puritan concept that cultivating and using the land was inherently moral and leaving the land alone to be 'wild' was wasteful.

Today "being green" has too often been tied to purchasing choices rather than lifestyle choices. Is it greener to have a solar panel on one's home and drive a hybrid or is it better to own a smaller home within walking distance to shopping and drive more sparingly? As another founder of the green movement, Henry David Thoreau aptly said, "It is preoccupation with possessions, more than anything else, that prevents us from living freely and nobly."

Consumerism is attributed to more than 500 billion plastic bags being consumed worldwide each year, the accumulation of trash so large that a plastic continent is now afloat in the Pacific Ocean made of garbage which covers an area twice the size of the continental United States, and more than 6 million tons of e-waste that end up in U.S. landfills annually.

"Beyond Recycling" is where many local residents are beginning to travel. ECO's Recycling committee is currently focusing less on recycling, but more on educating on how we can "reduce and reuse" to save money, live better and protect our planet. If you'd like to get more involved in ECO's work to promote a more sustainable approach to our land, come join our Recycling Committee on the second Tuesday of every month at 4 p.m. or our Energy Committee on the second Thursday at 4 p.m. at the ECO Office. For more information, contact ECO at 692-0385 or [www.eco-wnc.org](http://www.eco-wnc.org).

*David Weintraub is Executive Director of ECO, the Environmental and Conservation Organization, which is dedicated to protecting the mountain region's natural heritage. ECO can be reached at (828) 692-0385 or online at [www.eco-wnc.org](http://www.eco-wnc.org).*