

Dear SFB,

Bill Devall's excellent piece in the November issue entitled "Devall Dissects Environmental Agenda for the Future" presented what I believe to be a very accurate and important view about the course being taken by mainstream environmental groups. There is, however, one thing that bothers me. It seems that whenever he leaves the critique and moves into describing the alternative, I get lost.

I suppose this will bring snickers and groans from your inner circle, but even though I believe in and support virtually everything EF! promotes, I have no idea what deep ecology is. I haven't even read anything that makes me want to know what it is. The Devall article quotes a social ecologist, Murray Bookchin, as promoting a vision "based on a libertarian (anarchist) commitment to decentralization, alternative technology and a libertarian practice based on affinity groups, direct democracy, and direct action" and says if we don't do all that, we're headed for "ideological obscurantism." I ran to the dictionary several times, but I still don't know what all that means. I am reminded of people who sit around arguing about the theories of Marx and Lenin and wondering why the revolution never happens.

The environmental movement has been accused of being elitist, mired in established techniques, and bankrupt of vision — and justifiably so, as Devall explained. But I don't see how this "rising culture" of understanding about how we must relate to the earth will catch on if all of us Jill Sixpacks out here have no idea what you're talking about. Who's being elitist now?

—Nancy, Portland, OR

*Editor's reply: Good point. Some of our articles and essays do get a bit thick at times (but some of our readers like a little turgidity). Earth First! is an extremely diverse tribe, ranging from academic philosophers to lots of Jill & Joe Sixpacks. This newspaper is a diverse publication offering both academic papers on the finer points of our philosophy to besotted accounts of the Rendezvous. As someone who nervously straddles that range, let me offer a couple of down-to-Earth definitions of Deep Ecology: Earth first! Wilderness for its own sake! Never stop howling! Over my dead body! Who speaks for the Grizzly? Resist much, obey little. Where's the beer? Your tent or mine?*

*To state it a little more seriously, the central idea of Deep Ecology is that all things — animals, plants, rocks, rivers, clouds, etc. — have a right to exist for their own sake, without needing to justify their existence by some real or imagined value to human beings. This is the concept of "intrinsic value." In other words, a Grizzly Bear or a Snail Darter has traveled the same three and a half billion years of evolution that we have and has just as much right to be here as we do. We have no right to consider them or anything else on Earth as mere resources for our use or abuse.— DF*