

The President's Hoot

The World is Blue

This weekend, we attended the Audubon Assembly, our annual state meeting. This meeting and the annual Florida Folk Festival on the Suwannee River in White Springs, inspire me to enthusiastically support conservation via our chapter and other community efforts. The Assembly keynote speaker, Dr. Sylvia Earle, is a National Geographic Explorer-in Residence who pilots her own submarines, deep into the ocean. She, of course, showed us the beauty of our vast oceans, but like Rachel Carson in 1962 telling us about ruining our Earth with pesticides, Dr. Earle described how humans have damaged our oceans and that our future fate and the oceans are one.

While "Going Green" makes the headlines, Dr. Earle pointed out that it is the water or "The Blue" of our planet that sustains our life. Some have claimed we should have called our planet "Ocean" instead of "Earth" as we would be more likely reminded that like Mars, we would not exist without our water. Although water is common in the universe, it is from our oceans 4 billion years ago that the plants, animals, and many of our rocks and landscapes were formed, but they are now being destroyed in less than 100 years. Our oceans with the sun provide the energy for our continued stay here.

Our oceans hold 97 percent of our water and embrace 97 percent of our planet, which determines our climate and weather, our temperature, and absorbs much of our atmosphere's CO₂. The oceans cover about 75% of the globe, but that does not include freshwater, ice, or clouds. The water we drink and the food we eat all depend ultimately upon the existence of our seas, as every spoonful is full of life and there would not be enough rain without the ocean. Sometimes we forget over half of our body weight is water as are most plants and animals. Every other breath we take is a result of half of our atmosphere oxygen coming from ocean photosynthesis as aquatic blue-green bacteria and other ocean organisms produce 50% of our oxygen!

Dr. Earle pointed out that during the last 50 years our planet's human population has doubled, our ocean life has dramatically decline during this period:

- Hundreds of millions of tons of ocean wildlife have been removed from the sea and replaced with equivalent weight in waste.
- 95% of the bluefin tuna, Atlantic cod, American eel, and certain sharks have been killed. Even parrotfish, which Dr. Earle calls the songbirds of the ocean, are now even being sold in China because many of the fish we used to eat are no longer available.
- Fishing techniques- trawls, longlines, and rockhopping dredges- have destroyed habitats and killed millions of tons of animals. Industrial fishing wantonly kills hundreds of marine mammals, seabirds, and sea turtles, hundreds of millions of fish and invertebrate animals while trying to catch fish to sell.
- Half of shallow coral reefs globally are gone or in seri-

ous decline; 80% in the Caribbean are dead. (Our local reefs have declined because of beach renourishment and freshwater release from Lake Okeechobee).

- Similarly deep coral reefs are destroyed by new deep trawling technologies.
- More than 400 "dead zones" have formed recently in coastal waters due to heavy fertilizer runoff, which causes algae to consume all the oxygen, thus killing life.
- Global warming is making the oceans acidic and affecting the coral reefs and all life.

Fortunately, Dr. Earle says we have not reached the point of no return. We have the knowledge, and scientists to have a chance to recover and shape and clean our water circulation system. We should not eat the songbirds of the sea, as we do not on land. While not all of us can work at Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution or the Smithsonian Marine Station, we in Indian River County can do our part by actively participating in local and state government decisions regarding:

- Saving our seagrass fish nurseries from prop dredging and dredging channels and our mangroves and wetlands from development.
- Recycling our waste.
- Using no or little fertilizers.
- Stopping polluting our rivers, bays, and oceans (as Earle says "the ultimate Dumpster.")
- Educating others on the importance our ocean and its recycling via rainfall.
- Conserving our freshwater system/canals and keeping them clean and healthy.
- Stopping oil drilling in Florida's inshore that can harm coral and fish with spills.
- Eating less tuna, swordfish, and other top predators of our oceans. Large fish like cows consume much and live longer (thereby cost more ecologically) before getting to our tables. These fish are concentrating more mercury. According to Dr. Grant Gilmore, the best top predator to eat is mahi mahi as they mature in 3 months from the egg and have a relative short life span, reproduce and feed in the open ocean.
- Stopping overharvesting of our sea creatures and using nets, which capture and harm sea lions, turtles, and other rejected fish.
- Preserving our coral.

I recommend reading Earle's book, *The World is Blue- How our Fate and the Ocean's are one* (2009). She also wrote *Sea Change*. Her talk and book, give me second thoughts about eating tuna sushi and other wild caught seafood. She complimented Audubon on having chicken for the evening meal! I can assure you that reading Earle's book about tuna, sharks, and lobsters is more fun than eating them.

Richard Baker, President