

## April 22, 2020: 50 Years of Earth Day

*By T.W. Beck Architects*

There is a special kind of hypocrisy in the official act of planting a tree to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Earth Day, while simultaneously gutting the EPA, rolling back protections of our water and air quality, and sanctioning the deregulation of pesticides which harm wildlife.

We write this article for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the first Earth Day celebrated April 22, 1970. POTUS 37's accomplishments while in office included "a broad environmental program."<sup>1</sup> In 1970 Richard Nixon "signed the National Environmental Policy Act, and launched several environmental initiatives including the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts, the mammal Marine Protection Act, and the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency."<sup>2</sup> In other words, in the 1970's a Republican President was willing to honor Mother Earth with meaningful legislation for the conservation of our environment.

Time Magazine's excellent April 19, 2020, interview<sup>3</sup> with Denis Hayes, the organizer of the first Earth Day, is a recommended read for perspective on the origin of this 50-year tradition. Denis Hayes was contacted by Senator Gaylord Nelson (D-WI) to organize the event.<sup>4</sup>

Among the issues listed in Time's interview with Hayes as impetus for the event:

- The publication of the book Silent Spring about the dangers of pesticides
- Television coverage of an oil spill in 1969 showing animals covered in goo
- A fire on the Cuyahoga River
- Air pollution becoming a big problem due to leaded gasoline use
- Pesticide use on our food supply documented by the Chicano movement's support of farmworkers

Some of us kids back in those days remember planting trees for Earth Day as elementary school students. There were television ads with a weeping Native American in a littered landscape. As a family we visited National Parks like Yellowstone littered with the refuse of Polaroid camera photos, which at the time had a backing that peeled off to reveal the image. Earth conscious crafters made vests out of pull tabs that detached from soda pop cans. In the late 70's this writer witnessed so much air pollution in the Denver metro area that one could only see the tops of the skyscrapers rising through the smog from above Red Rocks Amphitheater.

Architect Thomas Beck was one of the first student representatives at the American Solar Energy Conference in Denver in the early 70's as a CU Boulder Environmental Design student. In the late 1970's POTUS 39, Jimmy Carter, installed 32 solar panels on the White House roof. In 1986 POTUS 40, Ronald Reagan, removed them. In 2002 POTUS 43, George W Bush, installed solar water heaters to heat the White House pool. In 2014 POTUS 44, Barack Obama, installed solar panels on the White House roof.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [whitehouse.gov](http://whitehouse.gov)

<sup>2</sup> [nixonfoundation.org](http://nixonfoundation.org)

<sup>3</sup> Meet 'Mr. Earth Day,' the Man Who Helped Organize the Annual Observance

<sup>4</sup> [senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/Gaylord\\_Nelson\\_Promotes\\_the\\_First\\_Earth\\_Day.htm](http://senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/Gaylord_Nelson_Promotes_the_First_Earth_Day.htm)

<sup>5</sup> [pvbuzz.com/the-saga-of-the-white-house-solar-panels/](http://pvbuzz.com/the-saga-of-the-white-house-solar-panels/)

POTUS 45's 2020 Earth Day remarks committing to protecting our "priceless National Parks and our Public Lands" are in direct contrast to the actions of his administration. Those actions are quite a bit different than their public face of Earth Day celebration and "Trillion Tree" planting. The following headlines are a sampling of recent actions of the current administration:

**With Wildlife Extinction on the Rise, Trump Administration Reduces Protections for Endangered Species, Allows Greater Harm from Pesticides**<sup>6</sup>

**Industry seeks to lease 100,000-plus acres near Canyonlands, Arches for drilling**<sup>7</sup>

**Trump administration rolls back Obama-era fuel efficiency standards**<sup>8</sup>

**EPA suspends enforcement of environmental laws amid coronavirus**<sup>9</sup>

**EPA Registers Toxic Pesticide for Use on GE Soybeans without Required Opportunity for Public Comment**<sup>10</sup>

**Proposal to Allow Genetically Engineered Crops on National Wildlife Refuges in Southeast U.S.**<sup>11</sup>

**EPA sued over reapproval of key Roundup chemical**<sup>12</sup>

While farmers struggle to sell produce once destined for restaurants, now closed due to the coronavirus pandemic, the Trump administration is trying to cut the SNAP Food Stamp benefits to an American public in dire need of food. Farmers are plowing under crops of beans while thousands stand in or drive through food bank lines.

In better news, the U.S. Supreme Court on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020, refused to curb the Clean Water Act, thwarting attempts by the Trump Administration to further gut existing environmental protections.

We can do better than this, for ourselves and for future generations. Solar and renewable energy technologies are far better, and much less expensive than 50 years ago. Organic, sustainable farming practices are being proven to be viable alternatives to pesticides. Vehicles using alternatives to fossil fuels are becoming readily available. Over the past 50 years a great deal of progress has been made, but we all need to double down on our commitments to the planet and respect Mother Earth for the greater good.

Beck, Thomas W. "April 22, 2020: 50 Years of Earth Day", *Estes Park Trail Gazette*, Friday, April 28, 2020, <https://www.eptail.com/2020/04/28/april-22-2020-50-years-of-earth-day/>

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<sup>6</sup> *Beyond Pesticides*, April 3, 2020

<sup>7</sup> *The Salt Lake Tribune*, April 05, 2020

<sup>8</sup> *The Hill*, 3/31/20

<sup>9</sup> *The Hill*, 3/26/20

<sup>10</sup> *Beyond Pesticides*, April 7, 2020

<sup>11</sup> *Beyond Pesticides*, April 7, 2020

<sup>12</sup> *The Hill*, March 20, 2020