

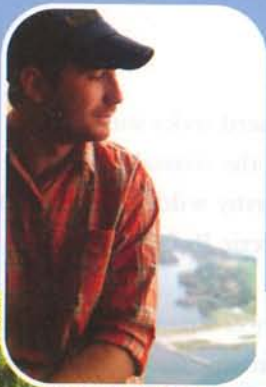


Wilderness

The Wilderness Society 2007-2008



**WILDERNESS & GLOBAL WARMING
FIVE UP-AND-COMING ENVIRONMENTAL STARS
A GAME PLAN FOR THE MAHOOSUCS
AN ESSAY BY TOM TOLES**



THE NEXT WAVE of Conservation Leaders OFFERS HOPE

By Jane Braxton Little

Global warming, paved-over farms and forests, swarms of off-road vehicles on ever-dwindling public lands—it's easy to feel hopeless about the future of our planet.

Take heart! A fresh generation of conservation activists is emerging from the doom and gloom. These youthful entrepreneurs are already tackling some of the most egregious assaults on the environment, protecting wild places and restoring habitat. They are mastering familiar tactics and honing new technical skills.

Wilderness is introducing five among the legions of worthy candidates whose achievements show the promise of national leadership. They are smart, dedicated, and fearless, but not too sophisticated to admire Harry Potter, giggle, and speak in gusts of "oh wows." All have been inspired to take action by threats to the special places of their childhoods—the secret nooks under trees and beside creeks that nurture hopes and dreams. They have gone forth from home, bolstering their fundamental conservation instincts with science, political savvy, and a network of allies.

These youth activists have enough passion to rouse the most cynical among us to believe that together we can save the world. Join them!

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ERIKA CHASE, 18
Hoopla, California

Erika Chase was a high school freshman on the Hoopla Valley Reservation in 2002, when low water levels in the Klamath River killed over 64,000 salmon. A teacher showed photographs of the catastrophe to an elder who came to speak to the class. He stared at the images of dead and rotting salmon, then uttered one word: "*Tima*." Famine.

It was a transforming moment for Chase, a member of the tribe based in northwest California. "He said our people were going to starve to death. I realized something had to be done," she says.

With three classmates, she organized a 214-mile relay run along the Klamath and Trinity rivers. It raised awareness of the plight of the salmon, the river ecosystem, and their importance to local tribes. Chase has continued to coordinate opposition to the dams that block passage to salmon spawning grounds and the policies that contribute to the rivers' degradation.

Now a sophomore at Stanford, she is expanding her interests through a club she is organizing focused on native activism. It combines social and environmental justice issues. "For my people they are one and the same," she says. The message of the Klamath salmon has taken her across the country to student groups, environmental organizations, and government officials. These interactions have made her aware that native people around the world share many of the same problems, she says. They will bear the brunt of environmental crises, whether caused by global warming or by political manipulations like those that triggered the salmon kill.

Chase is grounded in a tribal identity that gives her a foundation for environmental activism, says John A. Knox, executive director of the Earth Island Institute. "All indications are that Erika will continue to find innovative ways to include her tribe in raising public

awareness over rivers. These are human rights issues as well as environmental issues," he says.

Erika hopes to eventually use her skills as a tribal rights attorney and asserts, "There is no way I can turn back now."



PETE CLARK, 23
Farley, Massachusetts

A bent for connecting the seemingly unconnected took Pete Clark on a time travel back to 435 A.D. and the ponderosa pine forests of eastern Oregon. There, in the rings of trees, he documented a relationship between the pines and Pandora moths that has found a decidedly 21st century application. U.S. Forest Service staff used his analysis to reconsider chemical spraying where they had thought they faced an unnatural infestation of moths.

A recent graduate of Hampshire College in Massachusetts, Clark's interests range from dendrochronology to design. He was raised by parents involved in land conservation and grew up wandering the northern Massachusetts woods. An early passion for rock climbing led him to organize a successful effort to preserve Farley Ledges, a biologically rich nine-acre parcel threatened by development. He coordinated the fundraising, developed the software used for a letter drive, and engaged well-known rock climbers for a five-college festival. The journey from conception to realization of a project is what excites him, he says. Clark specializes in bringing people together, says Larry Winship, a Hampshire College botany professor who advised him on the dendrochronology project. "He also combines environmental

activism, the expertise of an outdoorsman, and a high level of scientific skills—pretty similar to Aldo Leopold himself,” Winship says.

Clark’s future agenda includes an eclectic mix of travel, interdisciplinary study, and involvement in environmental justice issues. The common denominator is a drive to bridge the disconnect between people and the space they inhabit. “Seeing wealthier class areas surrounded by preserved spaces while the economically disadvantaged areas get landfills—this energizes me to take what I know and act,” he says. His advice to young activists: “Take risks. Walk in the woods—slower. And be nice. It’s a good thing.”



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MISHA MYTAR, 27
Sullivan, Maine

Misha Mytar spent much of her childhood outdoors in coastal Maine, but it was hiking the Appalachian Trail from Georgia to Maine that focused her attention on the environment. “You see it intimately at that pace,” she says.

After studying anthropology at Yale she returned to Maine, where she worked with Blue Hill Heritage Trust, a small conservation organization. That exposed her to the challenge of bringing together various public interests with private landowners to consider how to meet the needs of everyone. “The tricky part is applying the good work going on in private land conservation to public decision making,” she says. So Mytar sought a master’s degree exploring how unplanned and rapid development affects local economies, the environment, and quality of life. She is learning to quantify issues to help clarify the outcomes. It’s important that a community understands how a two-acre-minimum zone differs from a 10-acre-minimum, she says.

Mytar has made a conscious choice to work at the community level instead of “going for the highest

paycheck,” says Jim Dow, executive director of Blue Hill Heritage Trust. “She works well with people and is a problem solver. Misha holds great promise as an environmental leader, and I encourage her to accept the mantle of that responsibility,” he says.

Mytar believes the key to land conservation is assembling people representing various organizations to think beyond their own project. “I want to see linkages. I want to teach people to leap beyond their own organization and see the bigger picture,” she says. She is using that approach to establish an ecological corridor involving multiple towns and conservation organizations. Mytar also worked on a plan to reduce municipal greenhouse gases.

Now back in her coastal Maine hometown, she plans to focus on reconciling growth and conservation. “Conservation planning is community planning,” she says. “I love living and working in the community where I grew up—where I’m most accountable.”



LA CONSTANCE SHAHID, 21
San Francisco, California

Since high school, La Constance Shahid has been collecting the seeds of salt grass, yarrow, and other native plants to sow in restored parks and wetlands around her home in the southeast corner of San Francisco, just north of the Giants’ former stadium, Candlestick Park. It wasn’t so much an affinity for botany that drew her to the project as a drive to clean up her neighborhood, where toxic waste and industrial pollution have contributed to high levels of asthma, cancer, and birth defects.

Shahid helped design and build Plants Gone Wild Nursery, then supervised other urban youth raising seedlings for a \$20 million restoration project on 34 acres. “I like working with the plants,” she says, “but I really see this project as helping people.”

The wetlands work introduced her to other environmental justice issues. She participated in a successful campaign to close a coal-fired electrical generation plant in her Bayview Hunter's Point neighborhood. Her activism has taken Shahid from lobbying door-to-door close to home, to Sacramento, where she and others her age have frequently met with state representatives.

Shahid is recognized as a local leader despite her youth, says Patrick Rump, Bay Youth program coordinator with Literacy for Environmental Justice. "Whether it's leading hundreds of volunteers to produce thousands of native plants, walking into a legislator's office to lobby for protection and restoration of our parks, or providing the voice of the next generation of environmental leaders on the LEJ board, Connie always steps up. She is a true asset to her community and our world," Rump says.

Now a journalism major at City College of San Francisco, the soft-spoken Shahid has inspired neighborhood teenagers to work on local environmental issues. "Young people should get involved with fixing the world. One day we will be running it," she notes. When she gets frustrated, Shahid heads for the garden, where working in the quiet beauty restores her spirit as surely as it restores wetlands.



YOCHANAN ZAKAI, 23
Washington, D.C.

Yochanan Zakai was a freshman in high school when he learned that a highway was planned through the woods where he had always played in Rockville, Maryland. Driven by gut-instinct, he rallied opposition in his neighborhood and went on to the state capital to challenge the project, which was diverted away from his patch of forest.

Zakai's victory whetted his appetite for environmental activism. He organized a countywide school recycling program, then coordinated a press event to report on how individual schools were doing.

It was at the University of Michigan that he began focusing on environmental justice issues. He founded Brewing Hope, a business partnership with farmers in Chiapas, Mexico. Along with supporting organic shade-grown coffee, Brewing Hope created relationships between the growers in Mexico and latte drinkers in Ann Arbor. To promote the concepts of fair trade and sustainable agriculture, Zakai and his partners developed a traveling photo exhibit that circulated around coffee shops and throughout Ann Arbor.

Following a stint with the Sierra Student Coalition in Washington D.C., Zakai recently took a job with Co-Op America, where he is working with small landowners to promote fair trade coffee, bananas, chocolate, and the other organic products they grow. "Fair trade is inherently about land conservation. The small landholder system respects rivers and biodiversity as carefully as it respects human rights," Zakai explains.

He uses his magnetism in a collaborative way that attracts others to his causes, says Jim Crowfoot, dean emeritus of the University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources and Environment. "Yochi has the capacity to integrate science with values and move beyond the environment to the lifestyle changes we're going to have to make," Crowfoot says.

Zakai has hope for the future as he sees the students he has trained use their organizational skills. Transitioning to a more sustainable world demands young people working alongside the leaders of today, he says. And he's not above prodding them. "Don't be afraid to use your power," he counsels. "Organize your friends. Young people are catalysts for change."

Jane Braxton Little has written about natural resource issues for more than 40 national publications that run the gamut from Audubon to Yes! She lives on 35 acres of forestland in California's northern Sierra Nevada.