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EcoConsumer

Earth Day awareness enhanced by green groups

Environmental organizations flourish in our neck of the woods, so as we celebrate Earth Day this month, it's a fitting time to contemplate our bounty of local green groups.

By Tom Watson

Special to The Seattle Times


Taking actions to protect the environment is a personal choice. But that doesn't mean we have to do it alone.

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Q: It seems like there's a green organization under every rock, but do they really make a difference?

A: Our region is nationally recognized for its environmental leadership, from waste reduction to energy conservation to water quality. It all starts with us as individuals. Governments and businesses also play a vital role, advancing environmental protection with innovative programs and activities.

But green groups tie it all together. Individuals have more influence and clout when they unite. Green groups provide invaluable education resources and offer social connections.

Eco-organizations can take the lead on issues, going where governments and businesses fear to tread. Groups also represent constituencies that might not otherwise have a voice. Many local groups boast an impressive résumé of activities, from restoring wetlands to hosting major conferences.

Q: So who are these green groups?

A: There are too many to list them all, but here is a sampling of 20 environmental organizations based in the Puget Sound area:

Cascade Bicycle Club, Cascade Land Conservancy, EarthCorps, Earth Ministry, Environmental Coalition of South Seattle, Environmental Education Association of Washington, Feet First, Northwest EcoBuilding Guild, People for Puget Sound, Seattle Audubon Society, Seattle Greendrinks, Seattle Tilth, Sierra Club (Washington State Chapter), Sustainable West Seattle, Washington Environmental Council, Washington Native Plant Society, Washington State Recycling Association, Washington Toxics Coalition, Washington Trails Association, Zero Waste Washington.

All those groups offer membership or volunteer opportunities. The Seattle Networking Guide (seati.ms/dSZxCi) provides links to the websites of most of those local enviro-groups and many others.

Q: Sounds like a diverse group of groups. How do green organizations meet the needs of their members?

A: There is no set formula. A green group may be geared toward

recreation, education, socializing, grass-roots activism, policy change, advancing an industry, volunteering, or a combination of those.

Q: I'm interested in joining a green group. How do I find the best fit?

A: First decide what you want out of it. Are there certain activities or places or species you especially want to promote or protect? Do you just want to support a group financially, without much personal involvement? (Most groups have no problem with that!) Do you want to meet like-minded people? Change laws or policies? Get in shape?

Talk to current members and spend time on a group's website to get a feel for an organization. If it's an activity-based group such as Washington Trails Association or Cascade Bicycle Club, joining with a friend can make you feel more comfortable.

Q: What are the latest trends locally for green groups?

A: Many eco-groups have embraced social media such as Facebook and Twitter, which allow organizations and individuals to interact online. For instance, nearly 2,000 people "like" the Washington Toxics Coalition on Facebook, which means they receive all the coalition's postings.

Neighborhood-based green activism has also been on the rise here. "CoolMom" groups, for example, aim to reduce global warming and are active in West Seattle, Greenwood, Mercer Island and other communities. Often a neighborhood group will coalesce around a project such as a farmers market or a community solar-energy installation.

Environmental groups aren't for everyone. They can be messy and frustrating at times, just like other aspects of our lives. But as we increasingly find ourselves staring at a screen, the benefits of real-life social interaction usually outweigh the annoyances.

Being interested in environmental issues means that we want to change things for the better, and organizations can have a far greater impact than we can have alone. Nature forms groups, from forests to schools of fish, so joining together as humans is the ultimate way to show our green side.

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