

# THE ENVIRONMENT

Now that you have examined a number of readings and other texts focusing on nature, explore one dimension of this topic by synthesizing your own ideas and the selections. Consider doing more research or using readings from other classes as you prepare for the following projects.

1. Take a walk in a favorite natural place close to where you live — in the woods, or out on the prairie, or along the beach, or in the desert. Then write to one of the authors in this chapter, comparing your impressions of nature with those he or she presents.
2. Research a local environmental issue — the development of open land, hunting or fishing regulations, wildlife protection, auto emissions, or another important concern. Then write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper in which you take a position on the issue. Refer to at least three sources from the chapter to support your position.
3. Write an essay in which you compare the ways in which two authors in this chapter use research to support their arguments.
4. Write a personal essay that answers this chapter's essential question: What is our responsibility to the natural environment? Refer in your essay to at least three sources from the chapter for support.
5. Write an essay evaluating and comparing the classic appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos used by two or more of the authors in this chapter.
6. Write an essay explaining how one of the visual texts illustrates a major idea espoused by one of the authors in this chapter.
7. Imagine what a person living fifty years in the future might say to us now about the effect we have had on the environment. Employing both exposition and argument, write a "report from the future" warning our society about the consequences of our treatment of the natural world.
8. Select one of the following statements about nature and the environment, and write an essay that explores its validity. To support your essay, refer to your personal experience and to the selections in this chapter.
  - a. The West of which I speak is but another name for the Wild; and what I have been

preparing to say is, that in Wilderness is the preservation of the World.

— Henry David Thoreau

- b. Sometimes we forget that nature also means us. Termites build mounds; we build cities. All of our being — juices, flesh and spirit — is nature.

— Diane Ackerman

- c. A true conservationist is a man who knows that the world is not given by his fathers but borrowed from his children.

— John James Audubon

- d. To waste, to destroy our natural resources, to skin and exhaust the land instead of using it so as to increase its usefulness, will result in undermining in the days of our children the very prosperity which we ought by right to hand down to them amplified and developed.

— Theodore Roosevelt

- e. We seem to be in a period in which the conservation of anything is disparaged — the conservation of books, the conservation of ideas, the conservation of time, the conservation of darkness, the conservation of love, the conservation of intelligence — it all gets very short shrift in contemporary society. And I think that in the environmental movement, in the curious way in which it overlaps the women's movement and other social movements of the late twentieth century, what we are really seeing is an insistence on the moral dimension of life. When I say the moral dimension, I mean issues of integrity and dignity and responsibility.

— Barry Lopez

9. View former vice president Al Gore's documentary film *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006) or its sequel, *An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power* (2017). Write a review of the film in the voice of one of the writers you've read in this chapter.
10. View one of the following three films — *Fast Food Nation*; *Supersize Me*; or *Food, Inc.* — and



compare it with the voices you have read in the conversation on Sustainable Eating.

11. View the documentary film *From Billions to None*. Referring to the film, to Barry Yeoman's essay of the same title, "From Billions to None," and to another selection from this chapter, write an essay that argues for or against resurrection science.
12. View the documentary film *No Impact Man*. Do you find its argument persuasive? How does it address this chapter's essential question?
13. In 1977, artist Andy Warhol said, "I'm a city boy. In the big cities, they've set it up so you can go to a park and be in a miniature countryside; but in the countryside they don't have any patches of big city, so I get very homesick." Write an essay in which you consider Warhol's perspective in relation to those of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Aldo Leopold, E. O. Wilson, and others included in this chapter.
14. Writers Aldo Leopold, Lewis Thomas, Bill McKibben, and E. O. Wilson all discuss a "choice" that confronts humanity regarding the environment. Indicate each of the choices they discuss, and evaluate which one makes the most sense and offers the best solution.
15. Joel Achenbach concludes his article, "Why Science Is So Hard to Believe," with the following statement: "For some people, the tribe is more important than the truth; for the best scientists, the truth is more important than the tribe" (para. 30). Write an essay that defends, challenges, or qualifies this quotation, referring to the texts by E.O. Wilson, Bill McKibben, and one other writer included in this chapter.
16. "The future we've been warned about is beginning to saturate the present," writes Jon Mooallem in his article, "Our Climate Future Is Actually Our Climate Present" (para. 7). Consider the meaning and implications of that statement and explore its validity as it pertains to the relationship that we have with our environment.
17. "The ethical solution is to diagnose and disconnect extraneous political ideology, then shed it in order to move toward the common ground where economic progress and conservation are treated as one and the same goal," writes E. O. Wilson in his book, *The Future of Life*. Having read the selections

included in this chapter, how likely do you think it is that we will achieve the ethical solution that Wilson suggests? Refer specifically to at least three of the texts to support your answer.

18. ExxonMobil, self-described as "the world's largest publicly traded international oil and gas company, providing energy that helps underpin growing economies and improve living standards around the world," has made the following statements on its website:

#### Managing long-term climate risks

Rising greenhouse-gas emissions pose significant risks to society and ecosystems. Since most of these emissions are energy-related, any integrated approach to meeting the world's growing energy needs over the coming decades must incorporate strategies to address the risk of climate change.

#### Managing climate change risks

Our strategy to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions is focused on increasing energy efficiency in the short term, implementing proven emission-reducing technologies in the near and medium term, and developing breakthrough, game-changing technologies for the long term. Technological innovation will play a central role in our ability to increase supply, improve efficiency, and reduce emissions. Approximately 90 percent of the greenhouse-gas emissions generated by petroleum products are released when customers use our products, and the remaining 10 percent are generated by industry operations. Therefore, technology is also needed to reduce energy-related emissions by end users.

In a time when we still hear many people — even some public officials — questioning the reality of climate change and global warming, it might seem surprising to discover the perspective above coming from a large energy company. What do these statements suggest about climate change? About global warming? About the relationship between economic concerns and environmental protection? Finally, what do they suggest about the essential question posed at the beginning of this chapter: What is our responsibility to the natural environment? Refer to several texts from this chapter as you answer these questions.