



In response to a published letter from the president of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals about another animal rights group mailing razor blades to medical researchers, the president of the Foundation for Biomedical Research writes, "When members of these groups condone violence as an acceptable means to an end, and their more moderate counterparts encourage them, anyone who contributes to an animal rights cause is helping to underwrite terrorism." Data on the soil erosion rates in the United States and their implications are discussed. And the idea of evolution as an analogy for the creative process is further elaborated.

Biomedical Attacks

It comes as little surprise that a group of animal rights activists is getting violent—this time mailing razor blades in letters to 87 medical researchers. [The mailings are described in the News of the Week article "Booby-trapped letters sent to 87 researchers" (5 Nov., p. 1059) by Jocelyn Kaiser.] We have been fortunate in the United States to have experienced so little violence and terrorism by the animal liberation movement. In Great Britain, where animal rights violence has become commonplace, there have been dozens of incidents annually in recent years: mail and car bombings, razor blade letters, arsons, and violent demonstrations at scientists' homes.

What does seem surprising is a statement from the leader of the largest "nonviolent" animal rights organization in the United States about these latest mailings. Referring to the razor blade letters, Ingrid Newkirk, president of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), wrote, "Perhaps the mere idea of receiving a nasty missive will allow animal researchers to empathize with their victims for the first time in their lousy careers" (1).

PETA and other large animal rights organizations have tremendous resources, largely from well-meaning contributors who see themselves as being friends of animals. But contributors need to question where their money is actually going. Does the group tacitly condone activist violence? Many groups encourage acts of extremism to advance the movement's agenda, even while remaining less than outspoken on the issue.

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Rates of Soil Erosion

In his report "Decreased rates of alluvial sediment storage in the Coon Creek Basin, Wisconsin, 1975–93" (20 Aug., p. 1244), Stanley W. Trimble presents the significant findings that there is a relatively constant supply of sediments released to the Mississippi River from Coon Creek and that enormous amounts of eroded sediments are stored in the creek. In 1989, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) (1) also reported that large amounts (2.7 billion tons) of eroded sediments are transported to small streams each year, and the total quantity per year has probably declined somewhat (2).

The study by Trimble would have been more informative if he had reported what proportion of the 360-km² area he studied was in agriculture from 1930 to 1993; what types of crops were grown during this period; how the crop culture technology changed; and how much of the region was reforested, especially along the creek margin—all factors that would influence the amounts of erosion and sediments being deposited in Coon Creek.

Trimble states that "General and substantial increases of soil erosion in the United States are not borne out by measurements of sedimentation in Coon Creek." Contrary to Trimble's suggestion in this statement that U.S. soil erosion outside of Coon Creek has increased, erosion rates in the United States generally have declined from an average of 17 megagrams per hectare per year (Mg ha⁻¹ year⁻¹) (3) to about 13 Mg ha⁻¹ year⁻¹ (2, 4) (a

megagram is equal to a metric ton). For the 1994 USDA (4) study, investigators sampled 800,000 sites in the United States. A further decline in erosion rates to slightly less than 12 Mg ha⁻¹ year⁻¹ was recently reported by the USDA (5). However, this erosion rate is a factor of 12 higher than soil sustainability, on the basis of the average rate of soil formation (6). Uri and Lewis (5) also reported that the social costs of erosion remain high and are estimated to be \$29.7 billion annually.

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Response

As Pimentel and Skidmore state, land use and soil conservation measures are primary independent variables. For my report it was sufficient to state only that the land use of Coon Creek is generally representative of the region. For details, however, readers were directed to (1), wherein land use and conservation practices have been reconstructed from

1860 to the present. The analysis in that study showed a hysteretic relationship caused by a lag in the response of erosion and sedimentation rates to changes of land use.

With regard to erosion rates in the United States, the values Pimentel and Skidmore refer to of 17 and 13 Mg ha⁻¹ year⁻¹ are not measurements, but are estimates from models, and they do not predict movement of sediment to streams. If U.S. soils have indeed been eroding at such rates over the last two or so decades, where are the detritus and efflux?

In regard to soil-loss tolerance (sustainability), Pimentel and Skidmore state that the current average rate of erosion of 12 Mg ha⁻¹ year⁻¹ is "a factor of 12 higher than soil sustainability," citing the study by Troeh *et al.* (2), which would suggest that the tolerance is



Accumulated sediments in Coon Creek covered an old mill dam.