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Peer reviewed

The Ecocruiser, #4

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It is my intent in this column to briefly highlight electronic resources on environmental topics. While the focus will be on Internet resources, there will be an occasional look at non-net resources.

A refreshing alternative to the usual approaches of environmental activism is Sustainable Sources, a solutions-based site at <http://www.greenbuilder.com/>. The aim of this site, compiled under the direction of Bob Christensen, is to provide demonstrable and rational alternative solutions to environmental problems by providing and linking to resources that offer practical options to the conventional methods of building, community, travel, and more.

Included is the entire Sustainable Building Sourcebook that was compiled by the Green Builder Program of the city of Austin, Texas. Sections on water, energy, building materials and solid waste are subdivided into a total of 42 chapters, which routinely include definitions of what is addressed in the chapter, considerations of what the problems are and what environmentally oriented products are available. Commercial status for the technology, its availability from suppliers and its cost, implementation issues for obtaining financing, and acceptance of the technology by the public are also included. Government regulations, guidelines and specifications for the products and their installation, and lists of resources for professional assistance, components/materials/systems, and other general aids are listed.

The original version of the Sourcebook is being revised and updated and the latest versions of each chapter are being posted to the site as they become available. The printed version of the Sourcebook is available for US\$25 from the Green Builder Program, P.O. Box 1088, Austin, TX 78767 USA.

Two series of articles are other resources found at this site. The first is a more practical series on building and maintaining a home written by the Green Builder Program staff. The second involves the spiritualistic building design principles of Sthapatya Ved, which involves the

establishment of a relationship between the owner, house and/or building and cosmic order. Also available are issues of the Green Builder News and other articles, both archived on the site and linked elsewhere on the net, about green building and sustainability. A directory for sustainable sources points to catalogues and commercial sites, industry and school programs, intentional communities, and other environmental sites. A more local bent is satisfied with links to other Austin and Texas environmental groups. Future additions include posting the proceedings of the International Green Builder Conference recently concluded in Austin. Anyone interested in incorporating environmentally sound concepts and products into building, remodeling and landscaping will be rewarded by visits to this site.

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) offers the Ecosystem Management and Environmental Education BBS (Bulletin Board System) at 800-217-2934 (8-N-1). The heart of the BBS is the conferences area and you can enter or join any conference. Each conference has a list of files which can be viewed. Unfortunately, I couldn't discern any great order to the files in a conference other than an alphabetical listing by file name. One option of seeing what files are available is to just go through the list of files screen by screen, which is tedious because of the great number of files in the conferences. Another option is to search the file descriptions, which works well, but it'd still be nice to have better options for viewing the files in a discernible order like a classification of the files. That may just be the librarian in me, but I would think such an order would be helpful to just about anyone.

The Rules conference has, as it implies, rules and regulations promulgated by DEP and is probably of most interest to businesses operating in Florida or to other regulators. The Ecosystem Management conference is of broader interest with a wide range of documents, from basic explanations of ecosystem management to discussions of the ecosystems for particular wildlife like bear and deer to chemical fact sheets prepared by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Equally rich is the conference entitled EETEXT, which I assume to be text publications dealing with environmental education from the titles of some of the files. The conferences entitled Critters and EEFILES didn't seem to have anything different than what was in EETEXT. There's a conference on Florida State Parks, which contains files with brief descriptions of each of the parks. The Jobs conference lists files of information about DEP jobs and, more generally, about careers in environmentally related fields.

The main way to see the content of files is to download them, then view

them with local software. For those files that are just ASCII text, it's also possible, as long as you remember to write down the name of the file first, to back out from the list of files and choose the Read option from the menus to view it while you're logged in to the BBS.

DEP also operates a web site at <<http://www.dep.state.fl.us>>. Easy to find here are the department's promulgated rules and regulations and a few environmental education publications, including leaflets on the environmental effects of the automobile, environmental citizenship, drinking water, the status of Florida's environment, exotic species in Florida, ground water, the history of environmental legislation in Florida, mercury, and on wetlands. The best of these is Ecosystem Management Around the Home, "a citizen's guide to protecting the environment," which contains a large collection of tips for more ecological living in the home, around the yard and in the community. Not so easy to find are gems like information on such protected wildlife and plants as manatees, right whales, seagrasses and sea turtles. I had to dig through What's New, then Division of Marine Resources, then to the home page of the Bureau of Protected Species Management to find those.

A little easier to find, because the link to the Division of Marine Resources also lists its availability, is Fishing Lines, but exactly where it is (from the Division of Marine Resources page, you will need to select the link to The Office of Fisheries Management and Assistance Services to find it listed there) and what it is are not very clear. Subtitled "The Angler's Guide to Florida Marine Resources," this resource is an absolute treasure about Florida's saltwater fishes and marine habitat, including an identification guide to Florida's sportfishes with full images.

Then there's Florida State Parks Online, with brief descriptions of all the Florida parks and several ways to find them, geographically, alphabetically and by type of recreational activity available. After a while it becomes clearer that the actual organization for this site is by the organization of the DEP. So follow the organizational structure to find information about particular environmental programs. To find information about ozone, the path to follow from the home page is to People, Places and Organization, then to Organizational Structure, then to Division of Air Management, where the link to ozone information can be found. Well, OK, but I think we could use some better clues to where particular information is located. Perhaps just by putting the organizational structure up front on the first page might help with that, though a little explanation of what the coverage of each Division is would be even more helpful, again, all on that home page of the Department.

Even though I have complaints about the organization of the DEP web site, in comparing it to the BBS, information is found much more easily on the web. There's certainly good information scattered about in the BBS, including practically everything on the web site (though I couldn't find Ecosystem Management Around the Home on the BBS) and much more. It's just too difficult to find files, then download them. It's also too obvious that information can be presented and found more easily on web sites. One indication here is that I was caller number 2,682 to the BBS. Whether that figure is just for this year or since the BBS was inaugurated, I'm sure the DEP would find that, if they took the statistics, their web page probably registers that number of visits within one or two weeks. The BBS might be something to keep for those users who only have modem access without internet access, but that number is increasingly smaller all the time. A better strategy would be to devote more and more time and effort to making all of DEP information available through the World Wide Web (WWW).

A site with an industrial engineering slant is Water Online at <<http://www.wateronline.com>>. The intent is to provide sellers of products in the water and wastewater industries an online marketplace.

The Supplier's Marketplace is a clearinghouse of suppliers and service providers, each with their own storefront, where you can find introductory information about each company and contact links for email, fax, or to the companies' web pages. Some of these pages are on the Water Online server; other companies have their own web sites linked. Initial entry into the marketplace brings a list of all the companies, but the list can be narrowed to those companies supplying or servicing specific products. In the Engineering Marketplace, there is a searchable Directory of Engineering Firms boasting contents of over 15,000 firms and individuals.

Initially I was impressed to click on the U.S. map on Idaho and to be presented with a list of about 35 Idaho engineering companies. However, my local phone directory revealed many other engineers than the one produced in the search and searches for individual company names of those others were fruitless. Furthermore, a search for a local firm identified as Environmental and Ecological Engineers, Inc., produced a long, long list of firms in alphabetical order by name that had any of those words in the company name, a not very efficient search.

The Water Online Times features regulatory and industry news, articles, features and columns. It's difficult to pick out the latest news, though, since it's divided into a number of sections, each of which must be

looked at in order to find news briefs by date. It'd be more convenient to have a reverse chronological date listing of all the articles in this news section. It's also hard to believe that the latest news in the regulatory section is from January 1996. But that's because more regulatory news and more current items are actually posted in a column, "Wilcher on Water."

Forums for discussion about water or wastewater have registered little activity so far with practically no discussion, just a small number of questions that with one exception have gone unanswered. Not much action is evident either in Projects Out For Bid, where only eleven total projects (ten US, one UK) are listed. The geography can stand a little updating in this section, too, since there really is not any country as USSR any more! There is a useful directory of associations in this area, but the calendar of events associated with the directory is outdated. The Resource Library section allows a search for articles, case studies, product reports, etc.

All in all, there are the beginnings of good sections and good features at this site, but the lack of responsiveness from the industry and the public and the lack of continued attention from the publishers have kept this site from being more up to date and more of a whole. That is, there is plenty of potential here, but there is a lot of work ahead to make this the premier site for the water and wastewater industry that it would like to be.

EnviroLink at <<http://www.envirolink.org/>> "is proud to offer some of the most comprehensive features and services of any environmental site on the internet." There is no question that it does. The EnviroLink Library presents links to a fairly comprehensive set of resources for the environment on the Internet and several ways to get to them, by browsing downward in classification order from the most general classifications of air, earth, fire, water, or flora and fauna, by picking out a subject from the alphabetical list of all the subjects that are covered, or by doing a search using the search engine available on the home page. Each subject area has links first to subcategories, then to resources divided into sections for Actions You Can Take, Education, Events, General Info, Government, Opinions, Organizations, and Publications. It is also possible to review all the links for these sections, say all those for Education, by clicking on the link for the section on the left side of any of the screens in the Library. Most of the links go to other sites, but a few link to more information that is actually on the EnviroLink server.

It would be more convenient for my purposes, which includes finding out what information is actually located on a site, to have some easy way to find this out on EnviroLink, but, right now, that can only be found out by checking the address of each of the links. Doing so, I found that the Animal Rights Resource Site at <<http://www.envirolink.org/arrs/>> is part of the EnviroLink Site, and it contains such useful material as the Manual of Animal Rights, the directory named the World Guide to Animal Rights, and the periodical titled AnimaLife.

Another comprehensive feature or service of EnviroLink is EnviroNews. In this section, clicking on EnviroLink News Service brings up the most recent environmental news story gathered from wire services worldwide. A minor bit of confusion results here in trying to find how to get to previous news stories, because you need to scroll down in the frame on the left side of the screen to find the headlines which link to other news articles. But that's a minor quibble for an excellent news service, and I understand from a conversation with the manager of the site that the frames don't even exist for those with less capable browsers.

The Environmental Calendar lists events, mostly conferences, scheduled around the world by month. Archives of several environmental discussion groups are available to read here. Links to boycott listings around the net also include a couple of lists on EnviroLink, the Mega Index to Progressive Campaigns and Mitch's Environmental Action News Boycotts.

And there are more very good parts of EnviroLink, such as One World Magazine with feature articles and sections on unique and global cultural and environmental phenomena. Examples of the unique include a section on Ethiopia, and articles on the ayahuasca drink, on the Mbaracayu Forest Preserve and on Australian aboriginal art. Examples of global phenomena are articles on the drug trade and on the Women's Opportunity Fund. A separate feature, Express Yourself, gives the opportunity to review and post messages to a number of discussion groups, join an online environmental chat session, or post news items. The Feedback section has a walk-through tour of this feature: how to join, how to post, how to review messages, etc. The editing component for posting messages looked pretty good with some advanced features, including use of HTML.

The EnviroArts Gallery mainly links to sites by and about artists in the areas of visual, audio and written arts, though the works of a few visual artists are hosted on the EnviroLink site, including a cartoon called Cybernauts. Web sites are reviewed in one more feature, What Soars

What Snores. Monthly, three sites are expertly, if opinionatedly, reviewed by David Grenier. What Soars refers to a first-class site that is highly recommended; What Snores usually focuses on a site that is well-intentioned, but may be less informative than it could be, or is dull, or so highly oriented towards the technology of putting together web pages as to cause hardship to those who access the site. The third review of each month, What Bites, gives a look at some nasty, anti-environmental site. I'd only object to the last, because I'm afraid that Mr. Grenier gives too much credence to these sites through his reviews, especially when he also has links to these sites from his reviews. Ignore them and let's hope they go away!

When I was working on this column in the first few days of December, the Sustainable Business Connection, which will replace the Internet Green Marketplace formerly resident on EnviroLink, had not yet been installed, so you'll need to check out that section on your own. We can only hope that it is as good as the rest of this site, which is certainly one of the premier environmental sites on the net, well worth your visits and your participation.

That is all I have time for this issue, but there is plenty more out there to explore and bring to your attention. I would be grateful to see your comments and suggestions about this column and its contents, so send me email at <mikep@uidaho.edu>.

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