

National Nursery Issues

A Cause for Optimism

Earth in the Balance--Ecology and the Human Spirit

I bought this book last summer but held off discussing it here until after the election. Now that the author, Al Gore, has been elected vice-president, I want to share some of his published philosophy on reforestation:

Balance at Risk, (p. 125)--"Those lands that have been degraded frequently offer some of the best opportunities for restoration of the environment in a way that not only halts the destruction but reverses it and begins the process of recovery. Specifically, reforestation programs offer one of the most accessible and effective strategies for removing carbon dioxide from the environment, halting soil erosion, and restoring habitats for living species."

A Global Marshall Plan, (pp. 323-324)--"A strategic initiative to plant billions of trees throughout the world, especially on degraded lands, is one of the most easily understandable, potentially popular, and ecologically intelligent efforts on which the Global Marshall Plan should concentrate. The symbolism--and the substantive significance--of planting a tree has universal power in every culture and every society on earth, and it is a way for individual men, women, and children to participate in creating solutions for the environmental crisis. But for a tree planting program to be truly successful, two other tasks must be performed, one preceding the planting and the other following it. First, the seedling must be both genetically appropriate for its particular ecological niche and available in adequate numbers at the right times and in the right places. Second, whatever incentives are used to encourage the planting of trees must be keyed, not to the planting itself, but to the

appropriate follow-up visits to ensure the survival of the seedling with adequate water and protection from grazing animals until it is sufficiently well established to grow on its own."

The US Role in the Global Marshall Plan--Point #7, (p. 351)--"Tree planting programs--with carefully selected seedlings appropriate to the areas being planted and careful follow-up to ensure tree survival--should be part of workfare programs in communities where work requirements are attached to welfare payments. Similarly, tree planting projects should be given higher priority in summer jobs programs for teenagers."

Well, I think that you can see that the vice-president elect has some very definite and enlightened opinions about the benefits of tree planting. In particular, I was encouraged to read that he understands the importance of using source-identified, locally-adapted seedlings. Other government tree planting programs often become obsessed with the number of seedlings that are planted with little concern about the use of appropriate stock. The other thing that caught my eye is that the stated measure of outplanting success is a free-to-grow tree--a concept that many well-meaning people fail to appreciate. Granted, these are only opinions but I feel hopeful just knowing that someone of Al Gore's political stature has an appreciation of these important concepts. Now, all we have to do is wait and see if these ideas will be translated into national policy.

Reference: Gore, A. 1992. Earth In the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit. New York, Houghton Mifflin Company. 407 p.