

SER Conference Inspires Letter

"If not us, who? And if not now, when?"

Tony Gross, Park Ranger at Sequoia and Kings Canyon NPs, included this implicit apology for his unsolicited report on the Second Annual Conference of the Society for Ecological Restoration, held April 29-May 3 in Chicago. No apology needed. Excerpts from his excellent report follow:

An Aldo Leopoldian tone was set for the conference with an informal bratwurst and beer reception at the *Fermilab*. There, the impact that one person can have toward restoration is embodied in the work of Dr. Robert Betz. Betz, a physicist and a restoration visionary, led a group of volunteers in restoring farmlands and construction sites. Their work continues and they hope to reintroduce the native animal component to this magnificent restored prairie.

A synergistic effect was felt as the conference took on a life of its own – a spirit of excitement and a sense of the urgency of the mission of restoration ecologists. Jacob Sigg of the California Native Plant Society urged restorationists' involvement when he addressed the President's plan to plant 100 million trees in the next 10 years. (Without such involvement, we might have eucalyptus planted in Dr. Betz's prairie, creating a biological wasteland.)

Five symposia were presented: Recovery and Restoration of Endangered Species; Prairie Restoration; The State of the Art: Restoration, Mitigation and the Sistine Ceiling Debate; Setting Standards for Monitoring in Tallgrass Prairie Restoration; Global Climate Change – the Implications for Restoration Ecology. The theories and philosophies expounded were supported with documentation and case studies. The conference participants were not only visionaries and thinkers, they were the dirt-under-the-fingernails workers of an undeclared Leopoldian Society.

A surprising group of "doers" emerged – the US

Army! Dr. Ray Hinchman of the Argonne National Lab put together an extensive program depicting the US Army's role in restoring training sites throughout the world to native vegetation.

Dr. Tom Bonnicksen's "Hi Tech" computer graphics presentation was a show stealer: a backward look in time (1987 to 1857) into a Sequoia grove at Sequoia NP. For restorationists a potentially valuable tool to describing "pristine" or any other "target-time" has emerged.

With almost evangelical fervor, soft-spoken Dr. Vine Deloria, a native American, spoke of how an effective restoration ecologist must "read the land," must "sense the spirit" of the land. Romantic notions of American Indians must give way to a close look at how they treated the land and worked with nature. Compared to European man's 500 years here, the Indian managed the land successfully for over 2,000 years. Pause to wonder!

The capstone presentation of what one individual can do was given by Dr. David Wingate of Bermuda. During his life's work of over 50 years, he and his family not only snatched the Bermuda petrel back from extinction, but restored to a "natural" state Nonesuch Island, his family's home.

SER members from all over the world participated in Chicago and will continue to encourage the grass (and trees and shrubs) to grow under their feet as they return to their own habitats with the seeds of inspiration and new techniques gleaned from this conference. Convinced that one man can indeed make a difference and that together we can leave a legacy of biodiversified natural wonders, the Restoration Ecologists reaffirmed their Partnership with Nature.

The 1991 SER Conference will be May 19-23 in Orlando, FL. Contact: SER, 1207 Seminole Highway, Madison, WI 53711: (608) 262-9547.