

Earth Day 1970-2020 Remembered

On the first Earth Day, April 22, 1970 I was a graduate student in Madison, Wisconsin, working on an interdisciplinary Master's degree program in Water Resources Management.

Even though I was focused on issues dealing with the environment through my studies, I was caught by surprise with the overwhelming national response to the first Earth Day. What had started as an idea from Senator Gaylord Nelson (D- Wisconsin) for a nationwide grass roots teach-in on the environment, turned into a nationwide movement. Senator Nelson envisioned building on the energy from the anti war demonstrations and creating a political imperative for national action on the environment. This activism coupled with recent environmental insults witnessed through the Santa Barbara oil spill and chemical fires in the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland led to the participation of an estimated 20 million Americans in the first Earth Day events. These grass roots events were propelled by organized efforts involving thousands of colleges, universities, and high schools and elementary schools nationwide. This large public response and media attention helped launch the modern day environmental movement and resulted in major bipartisan environmental legislation and the creation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on December 2, 1970. For me, earning my degree five months later resulted in my hire by EPA in San Francisco and allowed me to become one of the charter employees with the new agency.

Following a 34-year career at EPA, good fortune again led me to the Friends of Sausal Creek organization in 2008. I was looking for a way to give back to my local community and follow the motto of thinking globally and acting locally. It's been an honor serving on the Board at FOSC for the past 12 years. I can't tell you how much I have enjoyed getting out into this wonderful watershed, hiking the extensive trails, experiencing the beautiful creek and tributaries, learning about the native plants and wildlife, seeing the majestic redwood forests, and observing the native trout. We are so fortunate to be a part of this unique natural environment in Oakland.

As we approach Earth Day 2020, we are challenged with sheltering in place. I sincerely hope we will return safely soon to all the efforts that allow us to become stewards for Sausal Creek, helping to restore, maintain, and

protect this wonderful watershed for all of Oakland and it's future generations. So as you think of Earth Day this year, think of the volunteer work and support opportunities you have in your own community. Also, think globally about climate change and a clean energy future you can support through your actions and voting. Lastly, think about what we can accomplish together with FOSC through our grass root efforts as environmental stewards, leaders, and doers.

Carl Kohnert
Board Member
Friends of Sausal Creek