



# Environmental History



Earth Day: Every  
Day for Everybody



*Below is a brief listing of some of the major environmental events that have occurred in history this month. Each is capable of being researched further by your students, and there are some questions below the timeline to help you get started.*

May 25, 1900 – The [Lacey Act](#) regulates interstate traffic in wild birds in order to stop the importation of birds where they have become endangered. The act is a reaction to lobbying by the women's clubs and Audubon society. Birds, particularly egrets, were being slaughtered on a mass scale to provide elegant plumes for ladies hats.

May 25, 1907 -- [Rachel Carson](#), biologist and author is born. Carson was the author of *Silent Spring*, *The Sea Wind*, and other non-fiction work intended to improve the public understanding of science. Carson became a leading figure in the environmental movement before her death in 1964.

May 13 – 15, 1908 -- Teddy Roosevelt holds a governors conference on conservation policy. Forrester Gifford Pinchot chairs the technical committee with a follow-up report on national resource inventory. This became the [National Conservation Commission](#), and its report, delivered January 22, 1909, was called by Roosevelt "one of the most fundamentally important documents ever laid before the American people."

May 23, 1908 – The National Bison Range was established on the Flathead Indian Reservation in Montana.

May 10, 1925 – U.S. Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover receives but does not publicize a report concerning alternatives to leaded gasoline then used in 25 foreign countries.

May 25, 1925 -- The U.S. Surgeon General holds a conference on leaded gasoline. Ethyl officials claim it is a "Gift of God" and no alternatives are possible. But the investigation of alternatives is sidetracked, much to the dismay of Harvard professor Alice Hamilton and other public health crusaders.



May 18, 1971 – The U.S. Chamber of Commerce director warns of the potential “collapse of entire industries” from pollution regulation, especially oil and automotive. Later the speech is seen as a classic example of industry exaggeration about pollution controls.

May 21, 1980 -- President Carter announces the relocation of 700 families in the Love Canal area of Niagara Falls, New York, who had been exposed to toxic wastes deposited there by the Hooker Chemical Company.

May 6, 1989 – Brazil, Bolivia, Columbia, Ecuador, Suriname, Peru, Guyana, and Venezuela sign the Amazon Declaration. The declaration endorses the work of the Amazonia Special Environmental Commission and says: "We reiterate that our Amazon heritage must be preserved through the rational use of the resources of the region, so that present and future generations may benefit from this legacy of nature."

### *Questions for discussion and further research*

1. Herbert Hoover was notified in 1925 about alternatives to leaded gasoline, yet the phase-out of leaded gas didn't begin for another 50 years, in the 1970s. Why is it necessary to find alternatives to leaded gasoline? Why do you think it took so long to phase out leaded gas in the United States? What might have been some obstacles? Consider the conference held on May 25, 1925, and the comment by the Chamber of Commerce director in 1971.
2. Who is Rachel Carson? What did she do that made her such an important person in the environmental movement?
3. The Amazon Rainforest in South America is an amazing ecosystem – definitely worth researching to learn more about the wildlife, culture, and natural resources. Here are some questions to think about:
  - Why do the countries that signed the Amazon Declaration in 1989 have such strong feelings about the Amazon Rain Forest?
  - What is unique about this ecosystem?
  - What environmental benefits does it have?
  - Find out how many species of plants and animals live in the Amazon.
  - Discover how much of the Amazon Rainforest is reduced each year by logging and farming. Consider its impact on slowing global warming.
4. The Lacey Act was one of the first environmental acts in the United States. Can you find any that preceded it? What did these acts cover? The Lacey Act was one of many environmental acts produced under Teddy Roosevelt during his tenure as president between 1900 and 1908. What were some other acts passed and parks established during this period? Are there any you recognize?

\*Information comes from the [Environmental History Timeline](#)

