



# 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.\**

1892 -- June 4 -- The [Sierra Club](#) is founded by John Muir, Robert Underwood Johnson and William Colby "to do something for the wilderness and make the mountains glad."

1902 -- June 17 -- Congress establishes the Bureau of Reclamation to administer money from the sale of public lands to build dams and irrigation projects for Western states.

1906 -- June 8 -- The National Monuments Act protects Muir Woods, Pinnacles National Monument (CA), Mount Olympus National Monument, and others.

1906 -- June 11 -- The Yosemite Valley becomes Yosemite National Park after 42 years as a state park.

1906 -- June 29 -- Grand Canon Game Preserve is established by Congress.

1910 -- June 11 -- Jacques Cousteau is born. The French oceanographer, inventor, explorer and environmental activist helped people around the world understand that a threat to the oceans was a threat to all life on earth.

1960 -- June 12 -- A Federal court halts construction of the Laguna Beach, Mich. nuclear power plant 30 miles southwest of Detroit, but the US Supreme Court allows it to restart. Six years later, an accident resulting in a nearly catastrophic loss of coolant forces its permanent closure.

1969 -- June 22 -- The Cuyahoga River bursts into flames 5 stories high from oil and chemical pollution, illuminating (literally) the extent of pollution and simultaneously igniting (figuratively) controversy over how much cleanup will be needed.

1972 -- June -- United Nations Conference on the Human Environment convenes in Stockholm, Sweden and sparks global debate. Following the conference, the United Nations General



Assembly established the [UN Environment Program](#) (UNEP) to act on the recommendations of the Stockholm meeting.

1977-- June 15-- The U.S. Supreme Court upholds the 1973 Endangered Species Act and stops construction of the Tellico Dam. On May 25, 1976, a judge ruled that it was too late to stop the project. The government had already spent \$80 million and the dam was almost finished. But the plaintiffs appealed and in the case of Tennessee Valley Authority vs. Hill et al., the Supreme Court ruled to suspend construction. "It is clear that Congress intended to halt and reverse the trend toward species extinction whatever the cost," said Chief Justice Warren Burger in his opinion.

1988 -- June 23 -- NASA scientist James Hansen and others warn Congress about possible consequences from global warming – rising sea levels, drought and increased storm severity. Meanwhile, the World Meteorological Organization and UN Environmental Program establish the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). At the World Conference on the Changing Atmosphere in Toronto, Canada, a resolution calls for global CO2 emissions reductions of 20% by 2005. A United Nations resolution is approved characterizing climate change as a "common concern of mankind."

1992 --June 3-14 -- Earth Summit is held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The conference focuses on five issue areas:

1. Agenda 21 -- Assistance to developing nations and access to environmentally sound technology
2. Rio Declaration -- Intended as an "Earth Charter," an attempt to reconcile conflicts over many issues.
3. Statement of Principles on Forests -- Initially seen as a binding convention of forest preservation, consensus broke down as the US wanted to confine the agreement to tropical rain forests.
4. Framework Convention on Climate Change -- Began the process that led to the Kyoto Protocols which the US has rejected.
5. Convention on Biological Diversity -- Aims were to conserve biological diversity, plan for sustainable development and a fair share of benefits of biodiversity. The US did not sign the convention.

1995 -- June 23 -- The World Bank and international conservation groups announce a plan to establish 155 marine protection areas around the world.

1997 -- June 25 -- Jacques Cousteau, oceanographer, explorer and environmental activist, dies.

2001 -- June 9 -- Science magazine publishes a NASA satellite survey of over 2,000 glaciers showing that most of are shrinking. Many thousands of NASA images from the Terra spacecraft are compared with aerial photos over the decades. Some glaciers shrank by as much as several kilometers.

2005 -- June 5 -- [World Environment Day](#) is held in San Francisco, the first time the event has been held in the U.S. in 30 years.



*Questions for further discussion and research*

1. Write a biographical sketch of Jacques Cousteau. What were some of his most important accomplishments? What sort of person was he?
2. What are the responsibilities and powers of the United Nations Environment Program? Who are its members?
3. What causes global warming? As a result of the possible environmental changes such as shrinking icebergs, rising oceans, and a generally warmer world climate, what might be some economic, political, and social consequences?
4. As evidenced by the Laguna Beach incident, meltdowns are a significant danger associated with nuclear power plants. What are some other dangers? What are the environmental benefits to nuclear power? Do you think the dangers outweigh the benefits?
5. The 1992 Earth Summit in Rio was a very significant event. Thirteen years later, are many issues discussed still important? Elaborate on your answer.
6. Describe the activities that led to the Cuyahoga River bursting into flames. How has human behavior and government and corporate policy changed to protect the environment?
7. Was the 1988 World Conference on the Changing Atmosphere in Toronto, Canada resolution calling for global CO2 emissions reduction of 20% by 2005 successful?

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

