

The Alabama Faith Council

ALABAMA FAITH COUNCIL STATEMENT ON ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Overwhelming scientific evidence points to a very serious situation created in great part by our human consumption and exploitation of nature, our waste and pollution, and lack of reverence for the Earth, Earth's waters, and for all living creatures. This degradation of the environment affects everyone.

CONSIDERING THE FACTS:

- World Wildlife Fund has identified the Tennessee River and Mobile Basin watersheds, comprising most of Alabama, to be in critical need of environmental preservation and conservation.^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6}
- Land clearing and development have stressed smaller forests, such as those growing along the banks, floodways and floodplains of streams and rivers, compromising erosion control and the natural nutrient cycling capacity of plants and soils.^{7, 8}
- In Alabama we have some of the worst air pollution in the nation.^{9, 10}
- Where other parts of the nation are attempting to reach recycling rates of 50% or more, Alabama is reducing its waste stream by only 8-10%.^{11, 12}
- Our use of fossil fuels and changes in land use have been primary contributors to a global increase in average temperature that will impact the poorest most severely.^{13, 14}
- Too often it is the poor and minorities who receive a disproportionate burden of the negative health and economic impacts that result from environmental degradation.¹⁵

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OUR FAITH TRADITIONS SHARE IN COMMON:¹⁶

- All the Earth community is valuable to God. Surah 13:3; Surah 40:57; Genesis 1:31; Psalm 19; Psalm 24:1; Psalm 104; Isaiah 10:12; Isaiah 40:28, Romans 8:22-27; John 1:1-5.
- Stewardship of the Earth entails a profound responsibility. We are guardians of a divine trust. Surah 2:30; Surah 25:63; Genesis 2:15; Isaiah 41:17-20; Ecclesiasticus 24:13-17; Mark 12:28.

WE RESOLVE AS FOLLOWS:

- To apply the principles of our faith traditions to these important and timely issues.¹⁷
- To educate ourselves and our communities in becoming better stewards of God's Earth.
- To join forces with water and energy conservation and preservation efforts in our cities and state.
- To apply low impact development and green building principles in our faith communities.
- To support and work for renewable energy.
- To support and endorse smart growth and mass transit.
- To support and work for effective recycling programs.
- To celebrate Earth Day in our faith communities.
- To endorse a commitment for Stewardship of Creation in our faith communities.
- To show a preferential option for the poor and marginalized in our Stewardship of Creation.
- To sustain God's Earth for future generations.

Study/Action Plan for Environmental Stewardship

FOOTNOTES TO THE AFC STATEMENT ON ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

- ¹ Alabama is among the most biologically diverse and beautiful geographical areas in the world. The World Wildlife Fund has targeted 200 places worldwide for their focus over the next 50 years. Out of these select 200 places around planet Earth, World Wildlife Fund is focusing with highest priority on just 19 places, "... that are of the highest priority, based on the wealth and diversity of life they support, the destructive challenges they face, and our ability to impact them within the next decade." One of these top-focus 19 places is the U.S. Southeast Rivers and Streams including the Tennessee River and Mobile Basins. This includes most of the state of Alabama.
<http://www.worldwildlife.org/what/wherewework/index.html>
- ² According to The Nature Conservancy, Alabama has the richest diversity of species, including plants and animals, east of the Mississippi. The Nature Conservancy highlights the Cahaba watershed as one of eight "Hotspots of Biodiversity" out of 2,111 watersheds nationwide. <http://www.riversofalabama.org/Cahaba/Species%20Diversity.htm>
- ³ According to *National Geographic College Atlas of the World (2007)*, Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, p. 41, *BIODIVERSITY, Southeast U. S. Rivers & Streams*, "A single river in the region, the Cahaba River, has more fish species per mile than any other river in North America."
- ⁴ Alabama has 77,000 miles of streams and rivers with more aquatic diversity of life than any other state in the nation. However, we also have one of the highest extinction rates, many of which are freshwater species. 40% of our nation's rivers, lakes, and estuaries do not meet existing water quality standards. (*Alabama Nonpoint Source Management Program. 2007 Annual Report.*) Alabama has 117 Federally-listed imperiled species, more than any other state except Hawaii and California. (http://ecos.fws.gov/tess_public/pub/stateListing.jsp?state=AL&status=listed)
- ⁵ Alabama's precious water resources are currently faced with many threats - from improper enforcement of environmental regulations to lack of planning and policies to ensure sustainable water flows for future generations.
Alabama Rivers Alliance, www.alabamarivers.org.
- ⁶ Alabama's rivers and their vital tributaries face substantial pollution threats including dams, coal mining, coalbed methane extraction, quarries, industrial discharges, sewage, industrial chicken farms, clearcutting, irresponsible development and road building, and urban storm water runoff. To learn more about specific pollution issues we face in the watershed, visit <http://blackwarriorriver.org/issues.html>. Black Warrior Riverkeeper is a citizen-based nonprofit organization advocating for water quality, habitat, recreation, and public health throughout 17 Alabama Counties.
- ⁷ According to *Alabama Nutrient and Pesticide Management, Alabama Extension System, Auburn University and Alabama A&M University, Southern Regional Water Program*, <http://srwqis.tamu.edu>, there is a growing concern for water quality problems associated with both nutrients and pesticides. The nutrients of primary concern are nitrogen and phosphorus. Without human influence, nutrients are cycled regularly throughout the natural environment. Humans, however, significantly have impacted what were once natural nutrient cycles and these nutrients are finding their ways into both surface and ground water, artificially enriching aquatic ecosystems and contaminating water supplies. Fertilizers are used on lawns, gardens, sports fields and agricultural fields.

According to Riparian Buffer Width, Vegetative Cover, and Nitrogen Removal Effectiveness: A Review of Current Science and Regulations, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2005, forests growing adjacent to streams and rivers are important for reducing nutrient contamination of surface and ground water. Forest vegetation and soils play important roles in capturing and recycling nutrients, particularly nitrogen.

⁸ Unfiltered nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen from improper fertilization contaminate groundwater and create aquatic overgrowth which clogs water intakes, interferes with recreation, and degrades habitat for fish and other aquatic life. New Studies Initiated by the U.S. Geological Survey—*Effects of Nutrient Enrichment on Stream Ecosystems* By Mark D. Munn and Pixie A. Hamilton, <http://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/fs11803/>

⁹ The Birmingham-Hoover-Cullman metro area is one of the eight metro areas in the country that are ranked as the nation's worst-polluted cities in all three major measures of air pollution. The Birmingham-Hoover-Cullman, AL metro area is ranked 5th worst in nation in short-term particle pollution, 4th worst in nation in year-round particle pollution, and 22nd worst in nation in ozone pollution. *The American Lung Association State of the Air Report 2008*, <http://www.lungusa.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=dvLUK9OOE&b=34893&ct=5318243¬oc=1>

¹⁰ This places citizens at risk for premature death, increased asthma attacks, decreased lung function, respiratory infection, lung inflammation and worsening of lung diseases such as emphysema and chronic bronchitis. *The American Lung Association State of the Air Report 2008*, <http://www.stateoftheair.org/2008/health-risks/>

¹¹ Alabama has had a goal to decrease waste into landfills by 25% since 1991; however, there are still inadequate mechanisms to make that a reality and our waste stream has increased by 57%. <http://www.adem.state.al.us/PublicNotice/Feb/SWMPPROP.pdf> (p. 8 and p. 2). Many other states have waste stream reduction goals of 50%. [http://www.afandpa.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Environment and Recycling/Recycling/State Recycling Goals/State Recycling Goals.htm](http://www.afandpa.org/Content/NavigationMenu/Environment%20and%20Recycling/Recycling/State%20Recycling%20Goals/State%20Recycling%20Goals.htm)

¹² Each Alabamian produces approximately 85% more waste each day than the national average and most Alabamians have no recycling opportunities. It is estimated that during 2004-2007, each Alabamian produced 9.9 pounds of solid waste each day “combining the municipal, construction/demolition and industrial waste streams, and that approximately 8.3 percent of the non-hazardous solid waste stream in the State is recycled or beneficially reused.” The national average was 5.3 pounds per person per day. <http://www.adem.state.al.us/PublicNotice/Feb/SWMPPROP.pdf> (p. 2). Only 81 of 460 municipalities and 26 of 67 counties have recycling opportunities, and some of those are very limited in scope. Alabama Environmental Council, www.aeconline.org.

On April 15, 2008, Alabama Governor Bob Riley signed into law the Solid Wastes and Recyclable Materials Management Act (“SWRMMA” or “the Act”), Ala. Act 2008-151, amending the Alabama Solid Waste Disposal Act (“SWDA”). It provides a funding mechanism to clean up illegal dumps, to support inspection of legal landfills, and to provide financial and technical support to local recycling programs. See “ADEM Excited Over Passage of Recycling Act”, April 10, 2008, <http://www.adem.state.al.us/PressReleases/2008/4RECYCLINGACT.pdf> and “Officials hope to see more recycling”, April 28, 2008, <http://www.gadsdentimes.com/article/20080428/NEWS/473687322/1016/NEWS>

Recycling has many benefits beyond saving money on waste disposal. Recycling a ton of paper saves 17 trees, and the energy savings on recycling an aluminum can will run a TV for 3 hours. See “Energy Costs and Conservation Facts”, <http://earth911.org/energy/energy-costs-and-conservation-facts/>

¹³ *Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report. Summary for Policymakers, An Assessment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Nov. 17, 2007.* http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/syr/ar4_syr_spm.pdf

¹⁴ Increases in flooding and drought, rising sea levels, and decreases in snow and ice extent are already occurring and are expected to continue, resulting in scarcity of food and water, and increasing energy costs. *U.S. Climate Change Science Program report “Synthesis and Assessment Product 4.3 (SAP 4.3): The Effects of Climate Change on Agriculture, Land Resources, Water Resources, and Biodiversity in the United States”* (http://www.usda.gov/oce/global_change/sap_2007_FinalReport.htm); and *Poor left out of environmental loop: Those with low incomes will be most affected by climate change, but often are least informed.* By Julie A. Varughese, *Special to the Times Union*, First published: Monday, April 7, 2008

¹⁵ For example, pollution from industrial smoke stacks or discharge pipes; from landfills, quarries, or strip mines; from poisoned soil or well water; from toxic fish in local streams. See *Monsanto Hid Decades Of Pollution: PCBs Drenched Ala. Town, But No One Was Ever Told*, By Michael Grunwald, Tuesday, January 1, 2002; Page A01 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn?pagename=article&contentId=A46648-2001Dec31> ; *The grassroots of environmental justice*, Nov 8, 2007; <http://www.carrborocitizen.com:80/main/2007/11/08/the-grassroots-of-environmental-justice/>; *Environmental Justice Resource Center – Feature Articles* <http://www.ejrc.cau.edu/featurearticles.htm>; and “*Emelle, Alabama: Home Of The Nation’s Largest Hazardous Waste Landfill*”, <http://www.umich.edu/~snre492/Jones/emelle.htm> .

“Environmental Justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. **Fair treatment** means that no group of people should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, governmental and commercial operations or policies.” <http://www.epa.gov/oecaerth/basics/ejbackground.html>. See Executive Order 12898 of February 11, 1994, Federal Actions To Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, <http://www.epa.gov/history/topics/justice/02.htm> .

¹⁶ For these and other sacred text quotations see:
http://islam.about.com/od/activism/a/earth_day.htm
<http://www.env-steward.com/reflect/creationtxt.htm>
<http://www.coejl.org/Hanukkah/documents/jtext.php>
<http://www.prcweb.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=resources&fuse=resources#scriptures>

¹⁷ See the following links on the [Environmental Protection Agency Web site designed for congregations](#)
[Coalition for the Environment and Jewish Life](#)
[Episcopalian Ecological Network](#)
[Evangelical Environmental Network](#)
[The Forum on Religion and Ecology](#)
[Interfaith Power and Light](#)
[Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences](#)
[National Association of Evangelicals](#)
[National Council of Churches](#)
[National Religious Partnership for the Environment](#)
[Presbyterians for Restoring Creation](#)
[Quaker Earthcare Witness](#)
[Unitarian Universalist Ministry for Earth](#)
[U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops](#)

See <http://www.webofcreation.org/Links/denominational.htm> for a more extensive list of faith community contacts.