

PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE & COSTS

Preamble: Historically, the environmental movement has emphasized three tracks: 1) conservation; 2) changing consumptive habits; and 3) regulating, eliminating, and reducing the production of harmful substances.

Preservation and Conservation of Land: In the 19th and 20th centuries the efforts of John Muir and Teddy Roosevelt laid the foundation for conservationists. An outgrowth of their efforts was the creation of national parks and an appreciation of the intrinsic value of our natural resources.

Consumption and Conservation of Resources: The second track relates to the adjusting of consumer habits. Efforts to “reduce, reuse and recycle” and the use of Compact Florescent Bulbs illustrate this trend.

Precautionary Principle & Costs: The third track attempts to alter the production of substances or stop activities that are harmful to people and the environment. If “an activity raises threats of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not fully established scientifically.” This track strives to learn if we have “hidden” costs, placed on the public and government for resource development and production. “Hidden” costs can include tax subsidies, environmental destruction and adverse health problems experienced by residents and workers.

¹ Paul Russell Cutright, *Theodore Roosevelt: The Making of a Conservationist*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985 and John Muir, *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth*, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1916

² Wingspread Statement on the Precautionary Principle, Jan. 1998, <http://www.sehn.org/wing.html>

³ Jenrose Fitzgerald, Ph.D., Jason Bailey and Melissa Fry Konty, Ph.D., *The Economics of Coal in Kentucky: Current Impacts and Future Prospects*, Berea, Ky.: Mountain Association for Community Economic Development, June 25, 2009. http://maced.org/coal/documents/Impact_of_Coal.pdf and Jenrose Fitzgerald, Ph.D., Jason Bailey and Melissa Fry Konty, Ph.D., *The Impact of Coal on the Kentucky State Budget*, Berea, Ky.: Mountain Association for Community Economic Development, June 25, 2009. http://maced.org/coal/documents/Economics_of_Coal.pdf; and Downstream Strategies has published reports on the impact of coal on the state budgets of Tennessee http://www.downstream-strategies.com/Documents/reports_publication/DownstreamStrategies-coalWV.pdf and West Virginia http://www.downstreamstrategies.com/Documents/reports_publication/DownstreamStrategies-coalTN.pdf

⁴ Michael Hendryx and Melissa M. Ahern, “Mortality in Appalachian Coal Mining Regions: The Value of Statistical Life Lost,” *Public Health Reports*, Volume 124, Issue Number 4 July/August 2009, pp. 541-550, available from <http://wvgazette.com/static/coaltattoo/MortalityAppCoalRegions.pdf>

SOME STARTING POINTS FOR OUR CONVERSATION

The Central Appalachian region has been characterized as a “rich land with poor people.” Our resources have fueled industrial growth for approximately 150 years. Yet much of the cost of this development has fallen on local communities, and more broadly on the entire region. For example, the price of coal does not cover the cost of water pollution. Action has been taken to address problems caused by this development. However, prevention is in the end a better alternative.

Should we take a leading role in examining the True Cost of Resource Development? How can we help our region and nation move toward open, nonthreatening discussions of the True Cost of Resource Development?