

e-Edition Plus

A current events feature for teaching with electronic editions.

By Emilia Pastina

Economic problems bring shift in attitudes about environment

When it comes to protecting the environment, most Americans would say it's a pretty important concern for the nation.

That is, unless the economy is suffering.

In a Gallup poll taken last month, 53 percent of the adults surveyed said improving and strengthening the nation's economy should now come ahead of environmental concerns.

The Earth isn't used to losing out to economic issues. In the 25 years that Gallup has been asking that question, it's only happened twice.

From 1985 through 2002, the environment easily was rated more important than the economy, jobs and the strength of businesses. But when the economy began to sour, the gap began to narrow.

Last year, for the first time, and again this year more Americans said strengthening the economy should come first.

At the same time, more people told Gallup they believe the health of the environment is "excellent" or "good," which may explain why more people are willing to put the economy first.

Despite hard economic times, however, the environment is still getting attention from top national leaders.

Earlier this month President Obama introduced a program called America's Great Outdoors, which seeks to reshape the nation's conservation policy.

One of the goals is to get more Americans — especially children — to re-connect with outdoor areas "just down the street or outside of town" and participate in outdoor recreation.

Environmental history

Forty years ago, on the first Earth Day in 1970, 20 million Americans in 2,000 communities and 10,000 schools planted trees, picked up trash and declared it was time for humans to take care of the Earth.

From that day forward, kids and adults all over the country began doing more to protect the land, water and air. However, some experts say that protecting the environment really gained ground when environmentalists began linking conservation goals with economic needs.

"We were trying to tap into that and align it with our environmental goals," Gwen Ruta, a vice president of the Environmental Defense Fund, said in a Wall Street Journal article.

Environmental future

According to the U.S. Department of the Interior, which has control of many of the nation's park lands, development takes away 2 million acres of U.S. land each year.

On top of that, American children now play outside half the amount of time that their parents did.

With the America's Great Outdoors initiative, President Obama wants to get state and local governments to work more closely with private businesses and individuals to protect the environment, promote the sustainable use of private land and encourage Americans to bike, hike and get outdoors.

"Even in times of crisis, we're called to take the long view to preserve our national heritage," Obama said, "because in doing so we fulfill one of the responsibilities that falls to all of us as Americans, and as inhabitants of this ... small planet."

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Families have long led the way in efforts to protect nature and the environment. But economic and money worries have changed attitudes this year.

Talk About the News

- **Economic and social challenges often affect the way people feel about certain issues. As a class, discuss the possible reasons more Americans are placing a higher priority on improving the economy than protecting the environment this year and last. Talk about how you feel about the issue. Discuss the responsibilities of the U.S. government and its citizens to both strengthen the economy and protect the environment.**

Learning Standard: Engaging peers in constructive conversation about matters of public concern by clarifying issues, considering opposing views, applying democratic values, anticipating consequences and working toward making decisions.

Explore Your e-Edition

- **Polls are a good way to get an idea about how people from various backgrounds feel about an issue. Read today's e-Edition to find a story about an environmental issue, challenge or program. Take a survey of your class to find out how students feel about it. Write a summary of the results of your poll.**

Learning Standards: Engaging peers in constructive conversation about topics of interest or importance; posing social science questions; designing strategies; conducting investigations to answer the questions; writing fluently for multiple purposes.

- **When people lose their jobs or homes, it's hard to think about protecting the environment. However, environmental challenges sometimes go hand-in-hand with economic concerns. Read today's national, local and business sections of the e-Edition for an example of how doing something good for the environment can also save money. Write a letter to the editor about this issue.**

Learning Standards: Explaining ecosystem concepts and processes; describing positive and negative effects of humans on the environment; writing fluently for multiple purposes.

- **Part of the America's Great Outdoors program seeks to encourage Americans to spend more time outside. Read today's news or features sections of the e-Edition to find a photo of a park, river or other outdoor place in your community or state. Create an e-Edition ad that encourages children and adults to visit this place.**

Learning Standard: Reading and writing fluently, speaking confidently, listening and interacting appropriately, viewing critically and representing creatively; acquiring information from multiple sources.



How Well Did You Read?

Understanding what you read is a skill that will help you all through life. Review the story about the economy and the environment by answering the questions below.

- 1. According to the story, more Americans favored protecting the environment:**
 - A. When the economy was good
 - B. During a recession
 - C. During a presidential election year
 - D. When they were younger
- 2. According to the story, the nation's economy involves issues connected to:**
 - A. Jobs
 - B. Businesses
 - C. Planting trees
 - D. A and B
- 3. In the third paragraph, the word "poll" refers to:**
 - A. An election place
 - B. A survey
 - C. A conference
 - D. A Presidential memorandum
- 4. According to the story, one of the goals of America's Great Outdoors initiative is to encourage Americans to:**
 - A. Drive less
 - B. Eat healthier
 - C. Work more
 - D. Spend more time outside
- 5. According to the story, American children play outside:**
 - A. Half the time their parents did
 - B. Twice the time their parents did
 - C. Too much
 - D. Only in the summer