

Going the distance for the environment

On Earth day today, let us reflect upon our relationship with the planet and what we can do to protect it from further damage.

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IN the decades since the first Earth Day teach-in in 1970, the annual observation of environmentalism has become a worldwide day of political and civic action, with participants taking part in cleanups, tree planting events and marches.

“Earth Day is now a global event each year, and we believe that more than one billion people in 192 countries now take part in what is the largest civic-focused day of action in the world,” Earth Day Network president Kathleen Rogers said in a recent statement.

Just as the movement that sparked modern environmentalism has morphed into an international, grassroots event, Don Gorney, executive director of Earth Day Indiana in the United States, says that the entire movement has

turned away from governmental engagement and toward individual action.

“The environmentalists in the 1960s and 1970s were focused on governmental regulation,” he said. “Once that was done, with acts like the Clean Water Act, Endangered Species act and other laws, over the next decades the focus was less on the federal government and more on what you can do personally.”

Specifically, he points to actions many are taking to reduce their impact on the environment, including recycling and composting, installing solar panels and reducing reliance on single-use plastics.

Many businesses, too, have reduced their energy consumption



through installing LED fixtures, using energy-efficient heating and cooling systems and other measures. And some have led

external efforts, such as Indiana-based Rickers Oil Company’s Replenish Program, which has overseen the planting of more

than 11,000 trees.

“Both individuals and businesses pursue that, either because they are concerned about the natural resources or, in a lot of cases, it’s good business for a corporation to make those changes,” Gorney said.

Our green rights

While the environmentally conscious adapt their personal lives to reduce their carbon footprint, groups concerned about the natural world see a renewed need for grassroots efforts to protect the environment at a federal level.

The need coincides with the 2016 election of President Donald Trump and his subsequent selection of former Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt, a longtime ally of the oil industry.

Under Pruitt, the EPA has rolled back Obama era environmental protections, such as near-future standards for vehicle fuel efficiency.

“With the ever-growing threat climate change poses to our planet and our way of life... (the environment is) in worse shape perhaps than we were in 1970,”

Rogers said.

Though green initiatives seem common in homes and workplaces, few Americans self-identify as environmentalists, compared to record highs in the 1990s.

A 2016 Gallup poll found only 42% of people would call themselves environmentalists, compared to 78% 26 years before. This, too, might be just the latest evolution of a movement that has penetrated the mainstream.

“While dwindling identification of the public as environmentalists may not be a welcome development for supporters of the environmental movement, it may not reflect a substantial weakening of the movement and its ability to achieve its objectives,” the Gallup report reads.

The report suggests that the loss in self-identification springs from a mainstreaming of basic environmental ideals, such as the right of all people to breathe clean air and drink clean water, as well as a personal responsibility to reduce energy and fossil fuel use.

Ashley Williams, a representative for the Sierra Club in northwest-

ern Indiana, cautioned against relying on individual efforts instead of joining with larger environmentalist groups.

As a young woman growing up in Illinois near natural gas fracking fields, she saw the dangers of the NIMBY (Not In My Backyard) syndrome.

“We see that happen where a lot of folks dive out of these fights,” Williams said. “Maybe they got on board because a mine was going to be in their backyard Then, once it’s over, they don’t follow through.” Williams argues that those who truly care for the environment shouldn’t be satisfied with simple actions or individual lifestyle changes.

“It’s about reinforcing that, again, our collective home is on fire, and it takes all of us, every single one. And, yeah, we have to put out our fire. But what is the next fire?” she said. – The Herald Bulletin, Indiana/tribune News Service