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THIRD CANADIAN EDITION

# environment

THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORIES



jay withgott   matthew laposata   barbara murck

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UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO MISSISSAUGA

PEARSON

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# Brief Contents

Preface xx  
The Canadian Edition xxi  
Acknowledgements xxiv  
About the Authors xxv

## PART ONE

### FOUNDATIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE I

- 1 An Introduction to Environmental Science 2
- 2 Matter, Energy, and the Physical Environment 25
- 3 Earth Systems and Ecosystems 57
- 4 Evolution, Biodiversity, and Population Ecology 90
- 5 Species Interactions and Community Ecology 118

## PART TWO

### ISSUES, IMPACTS, AND SOLUTIONS 151

- 6 Human Population 152
- 7 Soils and Soil Resources 178
- 8 Agriculture, Food, and Biotechnology 207
- 9 Conservation of Species and Habitats 242
- 10 Forests and Forest Management 282
- 11 Freshwater Systems and Water Resources 313
- 12 Marine and Coastal Systems and Fisheries 351
- 13 Atmospheric Science and Air Pollution 383
- 14 Global Climate Change 419
- 15 Fossil Fuels: Energy Use and Impacts 462
- 16 Energy Alternatives 499
- 17 Mineral Resources and Mining 542
- 18 Managing Our Waste 566
- 19 Environmental Health and Hazards 597
- 20 Environmental Ethics and Economics: Values and Choices 632
- 21 Environmental Policy: Decision-Making and Problem-Solving 666
- 22 Strategies for Sustainability 700

**Appendix A:** Answers to Data Analysis Questions A-1

**Appendix B:** Some Basics on Graphs B-1

Endnotes E-2  
Glossary G-1  
Credits C-1  
Index I-2

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# Contents

Preface xx  
The Canadian Edition xxi  
Acknowledgements xxiv  
About the Authors xxv

## PART ONE FOUNDATIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE I

### AN INTRODUCTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE 2

#### CENTRAL CASE EARTH FROM SPACE: THE POWER OF AN IMAGE 3

Our Island, Earth 4

The environment is more than just our surroundings 4

“Environment” has legal, social, economic, and scientific aspects 5

Environmental science explores interactions between people and the natural world 5

The Nature of Environmental Science 6

Science is a systematic process for learning about the world 6

Environmental science is an interdisciplinary pursuit 6

Environmental science is not the same as environmentalism 7

**THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORY:** The Lesson of Rapa Nui 8

Environmental science can help us avoid mistakes made in the past 9

Earth’s Natural Resources 10

Resources range from inexhaustible to nonrenewable 10

The environment provides goods and services but has intrinsic value 11

Earth’s carrying capacity is limited 12

Human Activities and the Environment 12

People differ in their perception of environmental problems 12

Population growth has driven our environmental impacts 13

Consumption and technology also make an impact 14

Ecological footprints help us quantify our impacts 14

Sustainability and the Future of Our World 16

Sustainability meets environmental, social, and economic goals 16

We face many environmental challenges 17

Solutions to environmental problems must be global and sustainable 18

Are things getting better or worse, and how can we tell? 19

**THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORY:** Mission to Planet Earth: Monitoring Environmental Change 20

Conclusion 21

Reviewing Objectives **22**, Testing Your Comprehension **23**, Thinking It Through **23**, Interpreting Graphs and Data **23**

## 2 MATTER, ENERGY, AND THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT 25

#### CENTRAL CASE THE TŌHOKU EARTHQUAKE: SHAKING JAPAN’S TRUST IN NUCLEAR POWER 26

How Scientists Investigate the Environment 28

Scientists test ideas by critically examining evidence 28

There are different ways to test hypotheses 30

The scientific process does not stop with the scientific method 31

## Matter 32

Matter cannot be created or destroyed 33

Atoms, isotopes, and ions are chemical building blocks 33

**THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORY:** How Isotopes Reveal Secrets of Earth and Life 34

Atoms bond to form molecules and compounds 36

The chemical structure of the water molecule facilitates life 36

Hydrogen ions control acidity 38

Matter is composed of organic and inorganic compounds 38

Macromolecules are building blocks of life 39

## Energy 40

There are different forms of energy 40

Energy is always conserved but can change in quality 41

Light energy from the Sun powers most living systems 42

Geothermal energy also powers Earth's systems 44

## Geological Systems: The Physical Basis for the Environment 45

Earth consists of layers 45

Plate tectonics shapes the geography of oceans and continents 45

There are three main types of plate boundaries 46

Tectonic processes build Earth's landforms 47

Plate movements also cause geological hazards 48

The rock cycle modifies Earth's physical environment 50

## Early Earth and the Origin of Life 52

Early Earth was a very different place 52

Several hypotheses have been proposed to explain life's origin 52

## Conclusion 53

Reviewing Objectives **54**, Testing Your Comprehension **54**, Thinking It Through **55**, Interpreting Graphs and Data **55**

# 3 EARTH SYSTEMS AND ECOSYSTEMS 57

## CENTRAL CASE

### THE PLIGHT OF THE ST. LAWRENCE BELUGAS 58

#### Environmental Systems 60

Systems are networks of relationships 60

Feedbacks are common in environmental systems 60

Homeostasis is a state of balance 61

A whole may be more than the sum of its parts 62

Complex systems have multiple subsystems 62

#### Earth's Major Subsystems 63

The geosphere is the ground beneath our feet 64

The atmosphere is our planet's gaseous envelope 64

Surface and near-surface waters compose the hydrosphere 64

The biosphere is the living sphere 65

The anthroposphere is the human realm 65

#### Ecosystems 66

Ecosystems are systems of interacting biotic and abiotic components 66

Energy is converted to biomass through primary productivity 67

Nutrient availability limits primary productivity 69

Ecosystems provide vital services 71

#### Environmental Systems in Space and Time 71

Temporal and spatial scales of natural processes differ dramatically 72

Models help scientists understand complex systems 72

Ecosystems are studied on a variety of spatial scales 73

Landscape ecologists study broad geographical patterns 74

Remote sensing and GIS are important tools 74

Biogeochemical Cycles 76

- Nutrients and other materials move in biogeochemical cycles 77
- The hydrologic cycle influences all other cycles 78
- The carbon cycle provides the foundation for living organisms 79
- The nitrogen cycle involves specialized bacteria 81
- The phosphorus cycle circulates a key plant nutrient 83

**THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORY:** The Gulf of Mexico’s “Dead Zone” 84

Conclusion 87

Reviewing Objectives **87**, Testing Your Comprehension **88**, Thinking It Through **88**, Interpreting Graphs and Data **89**

## 4 EVOLUTION, BIODIVERSITY, AND POPULATION ECOLOGY 90

---

### CENTRAL CASE STRIKING GOLD IN A COSTA RICAN CLOUD FOREST 91

Evolution: Wellspring of Biodiversity 92

- Natural selection shapes organisms and diversity 93
- Natural selection acts on genetic variation 94
- Environmental conditions influence adaptation 94
- Evidence of natural selection is all around us 95

Biological Diversity 96

- Evolution generates biological diversity 96
- Speciation produces new types of organisms 97
- Populations can be isolated in many ways 98
- We can infer the history of life’s diversification by comparing organisms 98
- The fossil record teaches us about life’s long history 100

Extinction 101

- Extinction is a natural process, profoundly influenced by humans 101

- Earth has seen several episodes of mass extinction 102
- Human activities have initiated another mass extinction 103

Levels of Ecological Organization 103

- We study ecology at several levels 104
- Each organism has habitat needs 105
- Niche and specialization are key concepts in ecology 106

Population Ecology 106

- Populations show characteristics that help predict their dynamics 106

**THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORY:** Climate Change, Disease, and the Amphibians of Monteverde 108

- Populations may grow, shrink, or remain stable 111
- Unregulated populations increase by exponential growth 111
- Limiting factors determine carrying capacity and restrain population growth 112
- Reproductive strategies vary from species to species 114

Conclusion 115

Reviewing Objectives **115**, Testing Your Comprehension **116**, Thinking It Through **116**, Interpreting Graphs and Data **117**

## 5 SPECIES INTERACTIONS AND COMMUNITY ECOLOGY 118

---

**CENTRAL CASE**  
**BLACK AND WHITE AND SPREAD ALL OVER: ZEBRA MUSSELS INVADE THE GREAT LAKES 119**

Species Interactions 120

- Competition can occur when resources are limited 121
- Predators kill and consume prey 122
- Parasites exploit living hosts 123
- Herbivores exploit plants 124
- Mutualists help one another 125

Ecological Communities 126

- Energy passes among trophic levels 126



Energy, biomass, and numbers decrease at higher trophic levels	127
Food webs show feeding relationships and energy flow	128
Keystone organisms play especially important roles in communities	128
<b>Disturbance, Resilience, and Succession</b>	<b>131</b>
Communities respond to disturbance in different ways	131
Succession follows severe disturbance	131
<b>THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORY:</b> Ecological Recovery at Mount St. Helens	132
Invasive species pose new threats to community stability	134
Some altered communities can be restored to a former condition	136
<b>Earth's Biomes</b>	<b>137</b>
Climate influences the locations of biomes	138
We can divide the world into 10 major terrestrial biomes	139
Altitude creates patterns analogous to latitude	145
Aquatic and coastal systems also show biome-like patterns	146
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>147</b>
Reviewing Objectives <b>147</b> , Testing Your Comprehension <b>148</b> , Thinking It Through <b>148</b> , Interpreting Graphs and Data <b>149</b>	

## PART TWO ISSUES, IMPACTS, AND SOLUTIONS 151

### 6 HUMAN POPULATION 152

#### CENTRAL CASE

#### CHINA'S ONE-CHILD POLICY 153

The Human Population at over 7 Billion	155
Population is still growing, but more slowly	155
Perspectives on human population have changed over time	156
Is population growth really a “problem” today?	157

Population is one of several factors that affect the environment 158

**THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORY:** A Different Population Bomb: The “Household Explosion” 159

The environment has a carrying capacity for humans 160

Humans place heavy demands on the planet's primary production 161

#### Demography 162

Demography is the study of human population 162

Total fertility rate influences population growth 168

Population change results from birth, death, immigration, and emigration 168

Some nations have experienced a demographic transition 169

#### Population and Society 170

The status of women greatly affects population growth rates 170

Many nations have policies to control population growth 171

Poverty is correlated with rapid population growth 172

Demographic change is linked to environmental, social, and economic factors 173

The Sustainable Development Goals address many of these issues 174

#### Conclusion 175

Reviewing Objectives **175**, Testing Your Comprehension **176**, Thinking It Through **177**, Interpreting Graphs and Data **177**

### 7 SOILS AND SOIL RESOURCES 178

#### CENTRAL CASE

#### MER BLEUE: A BOG OF INTERNATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE 179

Soil as a System	180
Soil is a complex, dynamic mixture	180
Soil formation is slow and complex	181
A soil profile consists of layers known as horizons	182

Soils vary in colour, texture, structure, and pH	183	Agriculture first appeared around 10 000 years ago	210
Biochemical Cycling in Soil	186	Industrialized agriculture is more recent	212
Soils support plant growth through ion exchange	186	We are producing more food per person	212
Soil is a crucial part of the nitrogen cycle	186	We face undernourishment, overnutrition, and malnutrition	213
<b>THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORY:</b> Dark Earth: A New (Old) Way to Sequester Carbon	188	Impacts of the Green Revolution	214
Soil is an important terrestrial reservoir for carbon	188	The Green Revolution led to dramatic increases in agricultural productivity	214
Regional differences affect soil fertility	190	The Green Revolution has had both positive and negative impacts	215
Soil Erosion and Degradation	192	Pests and Pollinators	218
Soil erosion can degrade ecosystems and agriculture	193	Thousands of chemical pesticides have been developed	218
Erosion happens by several mechanisms	193	Pests can evolve resistance to pesticides	219
Accelerated soil erosion is widespread	194	Biological control pits one organism against another	220
Soils can also be degraded by chemical contamination	195	IPM combines biocontrol and chemical methods	221
Desertification damages formerly productive lands	196	We are critically dependent on insects to pollinate crops	221
The Dust Bowl was a monumental event in North America	197	<b>THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORY:</b> The Alfalfa and the Leafcutter	222
Protecting Soils	198	Conservation of pollinators is crucial	223
The Soil Conservation Council emerged from the experience of drought	198	Genetically Modified Food	223
Erosion-control practices protect and restore plant cover	198	Genetic modification of organisms depends on recombinant DNA	224
Better irrigation technologies can prevent soil salinization	200	Genetic engineering is like, and unlike, traditional breeding	224
To protect soil it is important to avoid overgrazing	202	What are the impacts of GM crops?	227
Conclusion	203	Debate over GM foods involves more than science	227
Reviewing Objectives <b>203</b> , Testing Your Comprehension <b>204</b> , Thinking It Through <b>205</b> , Interpreting Graphs and Data <b>205</b>		Preserving Crop Diversity	228
		Crop diversity provides insurance against failure	229
		Seed banks are living museums for seeds	229
		Raising Animals for Food	230
		Consumption of animal products is growing	230
		High demand has led to feedlot agriculture	230

## **8** AGRICULTURE, FOOD, AND BIOTECHNOLOGY 207

<b>CENTRAL CASE</b>	
GM MAIZE AND ROUNDUP-READY CANOLA	<b>208</b>
The Race to Feed the World	210

Our food choices are also energy choices 231

We also raise fish on “farms” 232

Aquaculture has benefits and drawbacks 232

Sustainable Agriculture 234

Organic agriculture is on the increase 234

Organic approaches reduce inputs and pollution 235

Locally supported agriculture is growing 236

Organic agriculture can even succeed in cities 237

Conclusion 238

Reviewing Objectives **238**, Testing Your Comprehension **239**, Thinking It Through **240**, Interpreting Graphs and Data **240**

## 9 CONSERVATION OF SPECIES AND HABITATS 242

### CENTRAL CASE

#### SAVING THE POLAR BEAR: WHAT WILL IT TAKE? 243

##### Our Planet of Life 246

Some groups hold more species than others 246

Biodiversity encompasses several levels 247

Measuring biodiversity is not easy 250

Biodiversity is unevenly distributed on the planet 250

**THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORY:** Counting Species in the World’s Most Biodiverse Place 252

##### Biodiversity Loss and Species Extinction 254

Extinction and extirpation occur naturally 254

Some species are more vulnerable to extinction than others 255

Humans may have started a sixth mass extinction 255

There are several major causes of biodiversity loss 258

##### Benefits of Biodiversity 261

Biodiversity provides ecosystem services 262

Biodiversity helps maintain ecosystem integrity 262

Biodiversity enhances food security 263

Biodiversity provides drugs and medicines 263

Biodiversity boosts economies through recreation and tourism 264

People value connections with nature 266

##### Approaches to Conservation 267

Conservation biology addresses habitat degradation and species loss 267

Island biogeography can help us understand habitat fragmentation 268

Captive breeding and cloning are single-species approaches 270

Some species act as “umbrellas” to protect communities 272

Canada protects species at home and internationally 272

Hotspots highlight vulnerable areas of high biodiversity 273

Community-based conservation is increasingly popular 274

Innovative economic strategies are being employed 274

##### Parks and Reserves 274

Why do we create parks and reserves? 275

Protected areas are increasing internationally 276

Parks and green spaces are also key to liveable communities 277

##### Conclusion 278

Reviewing Objectives **278**, Testing Your Comprehension **279**, Thinking It Through **279**, Interpreting Graphs and Data **280**

## 10 FORESTS AND FOREST MANAGEMENT 282

### CENTRAL CASE

#### BATTLING OVER THE LAST BIG TREES AT CLAYOQUOT SOUND 283

##### The Forest and the Trees 285

Trees have several basic requirements 285

There are three major groups of forest biomes 286

Forests grade into open wooded lands	288
Canada is a steward for much of the world's forest	289
Canada's forests are varied	289
Forests are ecologically valuable	290
Trees provide ecosystem services of value to people	292
Harvesting Forest Products	292
Forest products are economically valuable	292
Timber is harvested by several methods	293
Plantation forestry has increased	295
Land Conversion and Deforestation	296
The growth of Canada was fuelled by land clearing and logging	296
Agriculture is the major cause of forest and grassland conversion globally	297
Pest infestations have become increasingly problematic	298
Deforestation is most rapid in developing nations, for a number of reasons	300
Forest Management Principles	302
Public forests in Canada are managed for many purposes	302
Many forest managers practise adaptive and ecosystem-based management	303
Fire management has stirred controversy	303
Climate change poses new forest management challenges	305
<b>THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORY:</b> Assisted Migration: Getting Trees Where They Need to Go in a Changing Climate	306
Sustainable forestry is gaining ground	308
Conclusion	309
Reviewing Objectives <b>309</b> , Testing Your Comprehension <b>310</b> , Thinking It Through <b>310</b> , Interpreting Graphs and Data <b>310</b>	

## **FRESHWATER SYSTEMS AND WATER RESOURCES** 313

<b>CENTRAL CASE</b>	
TURNING THE TAP: THE PROSPECT OF CANADIAN BULK WATER EXPORTS	<b>314</b>

Earth's Fresh Water	316
Water moves through the hydrologic cycle	316
Water supplies our households, agriculture, and industry	317
Water <i>in situ</i> is important for both people and ecosystems	318
Climate change will cause changes in the hydrologic cycle	318
Freshwater Systems	319
Rivers and streams wind through landscapes	319
Wetlands are diverse and complex	320
Lakes contain open, standing water	321
<b>THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORY:</b> Near-Death Experience at the Experimental Lakes Area	323
Ground water plays key roles in the hydrologic cycle	326
Diversion and Consumption of Fresh Water	328
Diversion of surface water can have unintended impacts	328
We have erected thousands of dams, dikes, and levees	329
Draining of wetlands is a form of diversion	332
Inefficient irrigation wastes water	333
Ground water is easily depleted	334
Our thirst for bottled water seems unquenchable	334
Dealing with Depletion of Fresh Water	335
Solutions can address supply or demand	336
Desalination "makes" more fresh water	336
We can reduce agricultural, residential, and industrial water use	337
Economic approaches to water conservation are being debated	337
Freshwater Pollution: Types and Sources	338
Water pollution takes many forms	338
Scientists use several indicators of water quality	340

Groundwater pollution is difficult to detect 341

**THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORY:** When Water Turns Deadly: The Walkerton Tragedy 342

Mitigating and Remediating Water Pollution 343

Legislative and regulatory efforts can help reduce pollution 343

Safe drinking water is a Millennium Development Goal 343

It is better to prevent pollution than to remediate the impacts after it occurs 344

Municipal waste water can be treated and improved 344

Contaminated ground water is especially challenging to remediate 346

Artificial wetlands can aid in remediation 347

Conclusion 347

Reviewing Objectives **347**, Testing Your Comprehension **349**, Thinking It Through **349**, Interpreting Graphs and Data **349**

## **12** MARINE AND COASTAL SYSTEMS AND FISHERIES 351

### **CENTRAL CASE**

**LESSONS LEARNED: THE COLLAPSE OF THE COD FISHERIES 352**

The Ocean 354

The ocean covers most of Earth's surface 355

Seafloor topography can be rugged 355

Ocean water contains dissolved salts 356

Ocean water is layered from top to bottom 357

Ocean water flows vertically and horizontally, influencing climate 357

**THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORY:** Tip Jets and NADW off the Coast of Greenland 360

El Niño demonstrates the atmosphere–ocean connection 361

Marine and Coastal Ecosystems 362

Open–ocean ecosystems vary in biological diversity 362

Shallow–water systems are highly productive 363

Intertidal zones undergo constant change 365

Coastal ecosystems protect shorelines 366

Fresh water meets salt water in estuaries 367

Marine Resources: Human Use and Impacts 368

The ocean provides transportation routes 368

We extract energy and minerals 368

Marine pollution threatens resources and marine life 369

Marine oil pollution comes from many sources 369

Pollutants can contaminate seafood 370

Emptying the Ocean 371

We have long overfished 371

Modern commercial fishing is highly efficient 372

Some fishing practices kill nontarget animals and damage ecosystems 373

Several factors can mask stock declines 375

Aquaculture has benefits and drawbacks 376

Marine Conservation 377

Consumer choice can influence marine harvest practices 377

We can protect vulnerable areas in the ocean 378

Reserves can work for both fish and fishers 378

Conclusion 380

Reviewing Objectives **380**, Testing Your Comprehension **381**, Thinking It Through **382**, Interpreting Graphs and Data **382**

## **13** ATMOSPHERIC SCIENCE AND AIR POLLUTION 383

### **CENTRAL CASE**

**“AIRPOCALYPSE” IN BEIJING 384**

The Atmosphere and Weather 386

The atmosphere is layered 386

Atmospheric properties include temperature, pressure, and humidity 387

Solar energy heats the atmosphere, creates seasons, and causes air to circulate 388

Air masses interact to produce weather 389

Large-scale circulation systems produce global climate patterns 391

Outdoor Air Pollution 392

    Natural sources can pollute 393

    There are various sources and types of outdoor air pollution 394

    CEPA identifies harmful airborne substances 395

    Government agencies share responsibility for air pollution 397

    Monitoring and reporting are standardized through the AQI and AQHI 398

    Monitoring shows that many forms of air pollution have decreased 398

    Smog is the most common and widespread air quality problem 403

    Acidic deposition is a transboundary problem 404

**THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORY:** Acid Rain at Hubbard Brook Experimental Forest 408

Stratospheric Ozone Depletion 408

    Synthetic chemicals deplete stratospheric ozone 409

    There are still many questions to be resolved about ozone depletion 410

    The Montreal Protocol addressed ozone depletion 410

Indoor Air Pollution 411

    Indoor air pollution in the developing world arises from fuelwood burning 411

    Tobacco smoke and radon are the most dangerous indoor pollutants in the industrialized world 411

**THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORY:** Discovering Ozone Depletion and Its Causes 412

    Many VOCs pollute indoor air 414

    Living organisms can pollute indoor spaces 415

    We can reduce indoor air pollution 416

Conclusion 416

Reviewing Objectives **416**, Testing Your Comprehension **417**, Thinking It Through **417**, Interpreting Graphs and Data **418**

**CENTRAL CASE**

**THE RETREAT OF THE ATHABASCA 420**

Our Dynamic Climate 422

    What is climate change? 422

    The Sun and atmosphere keep Earth warm 422

    Greenhouse gases warm the lower atmosphere 422

    Carbon dioxide is the anthropogenic greenhouse gas of primary concern 424

    Human activity has released carbon from sequestration in long-term reservoirs 424

    Other greenhouse gases contribute to warming 425

    There are many feedback cycles in the climate system 426

    Radiative forcing expresses change in energy input over time 426

    The atmosphere is not the only factor that influences climate 427

The Science of Climate Change 429

    Proxy indicators tell us about the past 429

**THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORY:** Reading History in the World's Longest Ice Core 430

    Stable isotope geochemistry is a powerful tool for studying paleoclimate 432

    Direct atmospheric sampling tells us about the present 432

    Models help us understand climate 432

Current and Future Trends and Impacts 435

    The IPCC summarizes evidence of climate change and predicts future impacts 435

    Surface temperature increases will continue 436

    Changes in precipitation and storm activity will vary by region 437

    Extreme weather is becoming “the new normal” 439

    Melting ice and snow have far-reaching effects 440

    Canada's Arctic is changing dramatically 442

Rising sea levels will affect millions in coastal zones and on islands 443

Climate change affects organisms and ecosystems 445

Climate change exerts societal impacts—and vice versa 448

Are we responsible for climate change? 451

Responding to Climate Change 452

Shall we pursue mitigation, adaptation, or intervention? 453

We should look more closely at our lifestyle 454

Transportation is a significant source of greenhouse gases 455

We will need to follow multiple strategies to reduce emissions 456

We have tried to tackle climate change by international treaty 456

Market-based tools are being used to address climate change 457

Conclusion 458

Reviewing Objectives **459**, Testing Your Comprehension **460**, Thinking It Through **460**, Interpreting Graphs and Data **461**

## **15** FOSSIL FUELS: ENERGY USE AND IMPACTS **462**

### **CENTRAL CASE** ON, OFF, ON AGAIN? THE MACKENZIE VALLEY NATURAL GAS PIPELINE **463**

Sources of Energy 465

We use a variety of energy sources 465

Industrialized nations consume more energy than developing nations 467

It takes energy to make energy 468

Fossil fuels are indeed fuels created from fossils 469

Coal: The Most Abundant Fossil Fuel 470

Coal use has a long history 470

Peat is the first step 471

Coal is mined at the surface and underground 471

Coal is used to generate electricity 472

“Clean coal” technologies can mitigate some environmental impacts 472

Natural Gas: Cleaner-Burning Fossil Fuel 474

Natural gas has only recently been widely used 474

Natural gas is formed in two main ways 474

Natural gas extraction becomes more challenging with time 475

Oil: World’s Most-Used Fuel 477

Heat and pressure underground lead to petroleum formation 477

Petroleum geologists infer the location and size of deposits 478

We drill and pump to extract oil 479

Both offshore and onshore drilling have risks and impacts 480

Petroleum is refined and made into many products 481

We may have already used almost half of our oil reserves 483

“Unconventional” Fossil Fuels 484

Canada owns massive deposits of oil sands 484

Oil shale is abundant in the United States 485

**THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORY:** Keystone XL, Northern Gateway, and the Dilbit Controversy 486

Methane hydrate is another form of natural gas 488

Alternative fossil fuels have significant environmental impacts 489

Environmental Aspects of Fossil Fuel Dependency 490

Fossil fuel emissions cause air pollution and drive climate change 490

Some emissions from fossil fuel burning can be “captured” 491

Impacts reach terrestrial and aquatic environments, too 491

Political, Social, and Economic Aspects 492

Oil supply and prices affect the economies of nations 492

Residents may or may not benefit from fossil fuel resources 493

We need to conserve energy and find renewable sources 493

Personal choice and increased efficiency are two routes to conservation 494

Conclusion 495

Reviewing Objectives **495**, Testing Your Comprehension **497**, Thinking It Through **497**, Interpreting Graphs and Data **497**

## **16** ENERGY ALTERNATIVES 499

### **CENTRAL CASE** **HARNESSING TIDAL ENERGY AT THE BAY OF FUNDY 500**

Alternatives to Fossil Fuels 501

Hydro, nuclear, and biomass are “conventional” alternatives 502

The “new renewables” are still being developed 503

Hydroelectric Power 503

Modern hydropower uses two approaches 503

Hydropower generates relatively little air pollution 505

Hydropower has many negative impacts, too 506

Nuclear Power 506

Fission releases nuclear energy 507

Enriched uranium is used as fuel in nuclear reactors 508

Nuclear power delivers energy more cleanly than fossil fuels 509

Nuclear power poses small risk of large accidents 509

Radioactive waste disposal remains problematic 514

Multiple dilemmas have slowed nuclear power’s growth 515

Nuclear fusion remains a dream 516

Traditional Biomass Energy 516

Traditional biomass sources are widely used in the developing world 516

Traditional biomass energy has environmental pros and cons 516

“New” Renewable Energy Sources 518

“New” renewable contributions are small but growing quickly 518

Rapid growth will continue, but the transition won’t be overnight 520

Biofuels and Biopower 520

Biomass can be processed to make vehicle fuels 520

Electricity can be generated from biomass 522

Biomass energy has environmental and economic benefits and drawbacks 523

Solar Energy 524

Passive solar heating is simple and effective 524

Active solar technologies can heat, cool, and produce electricity 524

PV cells generate electricity directly 525

Solar power offers many benefits, but location and cost can be challenges 526

Wind Energy 527

**THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORY:** Weighing the Impacts of Solar and Wind Development 528

Modern wind turbines convert kinetic energy to electrical energy 528

Wind power is the fastest-growing energy sector 529

Wind power has many benefits 530

Wind power has some downsides—but not many 531

Geothermal Energy 532

We can harness geothermal energy for heating and electricity 532

Use of geothermal power is growing, though there are limitations 534

Ocean Energy 535

We can harness energy from tides, waves, and currents 535

The ocean also stores thermal energy 535

Hydrogen Fuel and Power Storage 536

Hydrogen may be produced from water or from other matter 537



Fuel cells can be used to produce electricity 538  
Hydrogen fuel cells have many benefits but require further development 538  
Conclusion 538  
Reviewing Objectives **539**, Testing Your Comprehension **540**, Thinking It Through **540**, Interpreting Graphs and Data **541**

## **17** MINERAL RESOURCES AND MINING 542

### CENTRAL CASE

#### MINING FOR . . . CELL PHONES? **543**

Earth's Mineral Resources 545  
Rocks provide the minerals we use 545  
We obtain minerals and metals by mining 546  
We process ores after mining 547  
Canada is a world leader in mining 548

#### Mining Methods 549

Subsurface mining takes place in underground tunnels 549  
Solution mining dissolves and extracts resources in place 549  
Strip mining removes surface layers of soil and rock 550  
Open-pit mining creates immense holes at the surface 551  
Placer mining uses running water to isolate minerals 551  
Some mining occurs in the ocean 552

#### Mining Impacts and Reclamation 552

Environmental impacts vary with the stage of mining 552

**THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORY:** Mount Polley Tailings Dam Failure 554

Restoring mined sites can be very challenging 557

Mining also has social and economic impacts 558

#### Toward Sustainable Mineral Use 558

Minerals are nonrenewable resources in limited supply 558

Several factors affect how long mineral deposits may last 559

We can make our mineral use more sustainable 560

We can recycle metals from e-waste 561

#### Conclusion 562

Reviewing Objectives **562**, Testing Your Comprehension **563**, Thinking It Through **563**, Interpreting Graphs and Data **564**

## **18** MANAGING OUR WASTE 566

### CENTRAL CASE

#### THE BEARE ROAD LANDFILL: MAKING GOOD USE OF OLD GARBAGE **567**

#### Waste Generation and Management 569

Consumption leads to increased waste generation 569

We have several aims in managing waste 569

#### Municipal Solid Waste 571

Patterns in municipal solid waste vary from place to place 571

Waste disposal is regulated by three levels of government 573

Open dumping has given way to improved disposal methods 573

Sanitary landfills are engineered to minimize leakage of contaminants 573

Landfills can be transformed after closure 574

Landfills have drawbacks 575

Incinerating trash can reduce pressure on landfills 576

Landfills and incinerators can be used to generate power 577

#### Waste Reduction and Recycling 577

Reducing waste at its source is a better option 577

Reuse is one main strategy for waste reduction 578

Composting recovers organic waste 578

Recycling has grown rapidly and can expand further 580

Financial incentives can help reduce waste 581

**THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORY:** Edmonton  
Showcases Reduction and Recycling 582

## Industrial Solid Waste 582

Regulation and economics influence industrial waste generation 583

Industrial ecology seeks to make industry more sustainable 584

Businesses are adopting industrial ecology perspectives 585

## Hazardous Waste 586

Hazardous wastes have diverse sources 587

Organic compounds and heavy metals can be hazardous 587

“E-waste” is a new and growing problem 588

Several steps precede the disposal of hazardous waste 589

There are three disposal methods for hazardous waste 590

Radioactive waste is especially hazardous 591

Contaminated sites are being cleaned up, slowly 592

## Conclusion 593

Reviewing Objectives **593**, Testing Your Comprehension **594**, Thinking It Through **594**, Interpreting Graphs and Data **595**

# 19 ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND HAZARDS 597

**CENTRAL CASE**  
**MICROPLASTICS: BIG CONCERNS ABOUT TINY PARTICLES 598**

## Environmental Health 600

Environmental hazards can be chemical, physical, biological, or cultural 600

Disease is a major focus of environmental health 604

Environmental health hazards exist indoors, as well as outdoors 606

Toxicology is the study of chemical hazards 608

## Toxic Agents in the Environment 609

Synthetic chemicals are ubiquitous in our environment 609

*Silent Spring* began the public debate over synthetic chemicals 610

Toxicants can have different effects 611

Endocrine-disrupting chemicals are of increasing concern 612

**THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORY:** Banning Bisphenol A 614

Some toxicants are concentrated in water 615

Airborne toxicants can travel widely 616

Some toxicants are persistent 617

Toxicants may accumulate over time and in the food chain 618

Not all toxicants are synthetic 619

## Studying the Effects of Hazards 619

Wildlife studies use careful observations in the field and lab 619

Human studies rely on case histories, epidemiology, and animal testing 620

Dose–response analysis is a mainstay of toxicology 620

Individuals vary in their responses to contaminants 622

The type of exposure can affect the response 622

Mixes may be more than the sum of their parts 623

## Risk Assessment and Risk Management 624

Risk is expressed in terms of probability 624

Risk assessment analyzes risk quantitatively 625

Risk management combines science and other social factors 626

## Philosophical and Policy Approaches 626

Two approaches exist for determining safety 626

Philosophical approaches are reflected in policy 626

Toxicants are also regulated internationally 627

## Conclusion 629

Reviewing Objectives **629**, Testing Your Comprehension **630**, Thinking It Through **630**, Interpreting Graphs and Data **631**

## 20 ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS AND ECONOMICS: VALUES AND CHOICES 632

---

### CENTRAL CASE MINING DENENDEH 633

Culture, Worldviews, and the Environment 635

Culture, worldviews, and values influence our understanding of the environment 635

Many factors shape our perceptions of the environment 637

There are many ways to understand the environment 637

Environmental Ethics 638

Environmental ethics pertains to humans and the environment 638

We extend ethical consideration to non-human entities 638

Environmental ethics has ancient roots 640

The Industrial Revolution inspired environmental philosophers 641

Conservation and preservation arose at the start of the twentieth century 641

The land ethic and deep ecology enlarged ethical boundaries 642

Ecofeminists see parallels between the oppression of nature and of women 643

Environmental justice seeks equitable distribution of costs and benefits 644

Economics and Environmental Goods and Services 646

Economics studies the allocation of scarce resources 647

Several types of economies exist today 647

Environment and economy are intricately linked 647

Classical economics promoted the free market 650

Neoclassical economics considers price, supply, and demand 650

Cost–benefit analysis is a useful tool 651

Environmental Implications of Economics 651

Are resources infinite or substitutable? 651

**THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORY:** Ethics and Intergenerationality in Economics: Discounting, Climate Change, and the Stern Review 652

Should long-term effects be discounted? 652

Are costs and benefits strictly internal? 654

Is growth always good? 654

Economists disagree on whether economic growth is sustainable 655

We can measure economic progress differently 656

We can give ecosystem goods and services monetary values 657

Corporations are responding to sustainability concerns 661

Conclusion 662

Reviewing Objectives **662**, Testing Your Comprehension **663**, Thinking It Through **664**, Interpreting Graphs and Data **664**

## 21 ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY: DECISION-MAKING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING 666

---

### CENTRAL CASE SARA AND THE SAGE-GROUSE 667

Environmental Policy 669

Environmental policy requires inputs from multiple sources 669

Environmental policy has changed along with society 671

The economic context influences environmental policy 673

Different environmental media require different regulatory approaches 674

Many factors hinder implementation of environmental policy 676

Canadian Environmental Law and Policy 677

Canada's environmental policies are influenced by our neighbour 677

Legal instruments are used to ensure environmental goals are achieved	677	Environmental protection can enhance economic opportunity	704
Environmental goals also can be promoted by voluntary initiatives	678	We are not separate from our environment	706
Canadian environmental policy arises from all levels of government	679	We can follow a number of strategies toward sustainable solutions	706
Government and ENGOs can work together on environmental issues	682	<b>Sustainability on Campus</b>	713
Scientific monitoring and reporting help with environmental policy decisions	683	Why strive for campus sustainability?	713
<b>International Environmental Law and Policy</b>	686	Campuses are great places to implement sustainable approaches	713
Transboundary problems are a big focus of international policy	686	<b>THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORY:</b> Rating the Environmental Performance of Nations	714
Several organizations shape international environmental policy	687	Campus efforts often begin with an audit and grow from there	716
<b>THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORY:</b> The Great Lakes and the International Joint Commission	688	Campus sustainability also belongs in the curriculum	722
Sustainable development now guides international environmental policy	691	Organizations are available to assist campus efforts	723
<b>Other Approaches to Environmental Policy</b>	692	<b>Precious Time</b>	723
Command-and-control policy has improved our lives, but it is not perfect	692	The systems we depend on are changing	723
Economic tools can be used to achieve environmental goals	692	Earth is an island	724
Market incentives are being tried widely on the local level	694	<b>Conclusion</b>	724
Science plays a role in policy, but it can be politicized	695	<b>Reviewing Objectives 725, Testing Your Comprehension 725, Thinking It Through 726, Interpreting Graphs and Data 726,</b>	
<b>Conclusion</b>	696	<b>Appendix A:</b> Answers to Data Analysis Questions	A-1
<b>Reviewing Objectives 696, Testing Your Comprehension 697, Thinking It Through 697, Interpreting Graphs and Data 698</b>		<b>Appendix B:</b> Some Basics on Graphs	B-1
		<b>Endnotes</b>	E-2
		<b>Glossary</b>	G-1
		<b>Credits</b>	C-1
		<b>Index</b>	I-2

## 22 STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABILITY 700

### CENTRAL CASE

#### A DIFFERENT WAY OF DOING BUSINESS 701

#### Sustainability and Sustainable Development 702

Sustainable development starts with the triple bottom line 702

# Preface

## Dear Student,

You are coming of age at a unique and momentous time in history. Within your lifetime, our global society must chart a promising course for a sustainable future. The stakes could not be higher.

Today we live long lives enriched with astonishing technologies, in societies more free, just, and equal than ever before. We enjoy wealth on a scale our ancestors could hardly have dreamed of. Yet we have purchased these wonderful things at a price. By exploiting Earth's resources and ecological services, we are depleting our planet's bank account and running up its credit card. We are altering our planet's land, air, water, nutrient cycles, biodiversity, and climate at dizzying speeds. More than ever before, the future of our society rests with how we treat the world around us.

Your future is being shaped by the phenomena you will learn about in your environmental science course. Environmental science gives us a big-picture understanding of the world and our place within it. Environmental science also offers hope and solutions, revealing ways to address the problems we create. Environmental science is not simply some subject you learn in college or university. Rather, it provides you basic literacy in the foremost issues of the twenty-first century, and it relates to everything around you over your entire lifetime.

We have written this book because today's students will shape tomorrow's world. At this unique moment in history, students of your generation are key to achieving a sustainable future for our civilization. The many environmental challenges that face us can seem overwhelming, but you should feel encouraged and motivated. Remember that each dilemma is also an opportunity. For every problem that human carelessness has created, human ingenuity can devise a solution. Now is the time for innovation, creativity, and the fresh perspectives that a new generation can offer. Your own ideas and energy *will* make a difference.

Environmental science helps show us how Earth's systems function and how we influence these systems. It gives us a big-picture understanding of the world and our place within it. Studying environmental science helps us comprehend the problems we create, and it can help us find solutions for those problems. This is not just another course in your university or college program; it relates to everything that is around you, and it will resonate for the rest of your life.

## Dear Instructor,

You perform one of our society's most vital jobs by educating today's students—the citizens and leaders of tomorrow—on the fundamentals of the world around them, the nature of science, and the most central issues of our time. We have written this book to assist you in this endeavour because we feel that the crucial role of environmental science in today's world makes it imperative to engage, educate, and inspire a broad audience of students.

In *Environment: The Science behind the Stories*, we strive to implement a diversity of modern teaching approaches and to show how science can inform efforts to bring about a sustainable society. We aim to encourage critical thinking and to maintain a balanced approach as we flesh out the vibrant social debate that accompanies environmental issues. As we assess the challenges facing our civilization and our planet, we focus on providing forward-looking solutions, for we truly feel there are many reasons for optimism.

In crafting this latest Canadian edition, we have incorporated the most current information from this fast-moving field of environmental science, and have streamlined our presentation considerably to promote learning. We have examined every line with care to make sure all content is accurate, clear, and as up to date as possible. We also have introduced a number of changes and new material that we think you will enjoy using in your teaching.

We sincerely hope that our efforts will come close to being worthy of the immense importance of our subject matter. We invite you to let us know how well we have achieved our goals and where you feel we have fallen short. We are committed to continual improvement and value your feedback, as does the team at Pearson Canada. Please feel free to write and send comments or suggestions to Barbara Murck at [barbara.murck@utoronto.ca](mailto:barbara.murck@utoronto.ca).

—Jay Withgott,  
Matthew Laposata, and Barbara Murck

# The Canadian Edition

When we embarked upon writing a first Canadian edition of *Environment: The Science behind the Stories*, we endeavoured to produce a book that represented a truly Canadian perspective of environmental science, while maintaining the powerful teaching and learning tools of the American edition. We wanted to tell students about the great, sometimes groundbreaking, work done by Canadian environmental scientists. We wanted to celebrate our environmental achievements and history, and familiarize students with the people, locations, and events of that history with examples from coast to coast to coast.

During these years of the Canadian first and second editions, we have enjoyed receiving feedback and suggestions from adopters and reviewers across Canada. You, our users, have told us that you appreciate the truly Canadian focus of the book, as well as the balanced approach and the integration of science with policy. You like the rigour and the breadth and depth of coverage and value our efforts to represent environmental issues from all corners of this vast country and around the world. You also welcome the clarity and liveliness of the writing and the visual program.

We hope you will find that these traditions have continued in the third Canadian edition. We have tackled some of the significant changes that have been happening in Canada, in the physical and biological environment, as well as changes in the political, social, and economic context of our nation that have an impact on the environment. We believe that we have approached these important changes with balance, and a spirit of scientific inquiry.

## What's New in the Third Canadian Edition?

For the third Canadian edition we maintain all of the aforementioned strengths, while enhancing the Canadian content, clarifying the overall structure, adding significantly to the cited scientific sources, and updating the book as a whole. We have responded to your suggestions for new examples, additions, and, where needed, conceptual reorganization, and we thank all of the adopters and reviewers who contributed ideas and suggestions.

This has been a deep revision. Some chapters have been streamlined, updated, and strengthened with the addition of new topics; other chapters have been completely restructured. You will now find that the learning objectives in each chapter closely parallel the structure of the chapter headings. In this edition you will also discover

scores of new and updated graphs, photographs, and tables, as well as expanded and improved discussions of many topics, new case studies, and scientific focus articles.


## Integrated Central Cases

Telling compelling stories about real people and real places is the best way to capture students' interest. Narratives with concrete detail also help teach abstract concepts because they give students a tangible framework with which to incorporate new ideas. We integrate each chapter's "Central Case" into the main text, weaving information throughout the chapter. In this way, the concrete realities of the people and places of the central case study demonstrate the topics we cover. Students and instructors using the book have lauded this approach, and we hope it can continue to bring about a new level of effectiveness in environmental science education. As instructors ourselves, we find the central cases to be extremely effective as a pedagogical tool for opening our lectures and setting the stage for new areas of inquiry.

In the third Canadian edition, 15 of the 22 Central Cases have a specifically Canadian focus. All of the Central Cases have been updated and improved, with additional scientific sources. Four of them are new:

- **Chapter 2:** The Tōhoku Earthquake: Shaking Japan's Trust in Nuclear Power
- **Chapter 13:** "Airpocalypse" in Beijing
- **Chapter 19:** Microplastics: Big Concerns about Tiny Particles
- **Chapter 21:** SARA and the Sage-Grouse

These, along with classic Canadian cases like "Battling over the Last Big Trees at Clayoquot Sound," "Lessons Learned: The Collapse of the Cod Fisheries," and "The Retreat of the Athabasca" tell the important stories—the iconic stories that our students *need* to know if we are to move forward in our search for environmental solutions, rather than repeating the mistakes of the past.

 Each chapter now contains questions that are specifically aimed at helping students actively engage with graphs and data. The questions accompany some of the data-driven figures in each chapter, challenging students to practise quantitative skills of interpretation and analysis. To encourage students to test their understanding as they read, answers are provided in Appendix A.

## The Science behind the Story

Our goal is not simply to present students with facts, but to engage them in the scientific process of testing and discovery. To do this, we feature “The Science behind the Story” boxes, which expand upon particular studies, guiding readers through details of the research. In this way we show not merely what scientists discovered, but *how* they discovered it. Instructors and students confirm that this feature enhances comprehension of chapter material and deepens understanding of the scientific process itself—a key component of effective citizenship in today’s science-driven world.

“Science behind the Story” tells students about the science of the environment in Canada and around the globe, and about the important work of Canadian environmental scientists internationally. This edition showcases many new “Science behind the Story” features, including

- **Chapter 5:** Ecological Recovery at Mount St. Helens
- **Chapter 6:** A Different Population Bomb: The “Household Explosion”
- **Chapter 9:** Counting Species in the World’s Most Biodiverse Place
- **Chapter 10:** Assisted Migration: Getting Trees Where They Need to Go in a Changing Climate
- **Chapter 11:** Near-Death Experience at the Experimental Lakes Area
- **Chapter 15:** Keystone XL, Northern Gateway, and the Dilbit Controversy
- **Chapter 16:** Weighing the Impacts of Solar and Wind Development
- **Chapter 17:** Mount Polley Tailings Dam Failure
- **Chapter 18:** Edmonton Showcases Reduction and Recycling
- **Chapter 20:** Ethics and Intergenerationality in Economics: Discounting, Climate Change, and the Stern Review
- **Chapter 21:** The Great Lakes and the International Joint Commission

## End-of-Chapter Features

Each chapter concludes with features that facilitate review and develop critical thinking skills. “Reviewing Objectives” summarizes each chapter’s main points and relates them to the learning objectives presented at the beginning of each chapter, enabling students to confirm that they have understood the most crucial concepts. “Testing Your Comprehension” questions provide concise study questions targeted at main topics in each chapter, while “Thinking It Through” questions encourage broader creative thinking aimed at finding solutions.

“Interpreting Graphs and Data” uses figures from recent scientific studies to help students build quantitative and analytical skills in reading graphs and tables, and making sense of data.

## MasteringEnvironmentalScience

With this edition we are thrilled to offer expanded opportunities through **MasteringEnvironmentalScience**, our powerful yet easy-to-use online learning and assessment platform. We have developed new content and activities specifically to support features in the textbook, thus strengthening the connection between these online and print resources. This approach encourages students to practise their science literacy skills in an interactive environment with a diverse set of automatically graded exercises. Students benefit from self-paced activities that feature immediate wrong-answer feedback, while instructors can gauge student performance with informative diagnostics. By enabling assessment of student learning outside the classroom, **MasteringEnvironmentalScience** helps the instructor maximize the impact of in-classroom time. As a result, both educators and learners benefit from an integrated text and online solution.

- “Pearson eText” gives students access to the text whenever and wherever they have online access to the internet. eText pages look exactly like the printed text, offering powerful new functionality for students and instructors. Users can create notes, highlight text in different colours, create bookmarks, zoom, click hyperlinked words and phrases to view definitions, and view in single-page or two-page view.
- “Process of Science” activities help students navigate the scientific method, guiding them through in-depth explorations of experimental design using “Science behind the Story” features. These activities encourage students to think like a scientist and to practise basic skills in experimental design.
- “Interpreting Graphs and Data”: “Data Q” activities pair with the new in-text “Data Analysis Questions” and coach students to further develop skills related to presenting, interpreting, and thinking critically about environmental science data.
- “First Impressions” Pre-Quizzes help instructors determine their students’ existing knowledge of environmental issues and core content areas at the outset of the academic term, providing class-specific data that can then be employed for powerful teachable moments throughout the term.
- “Video Field Trips” allow the instructor to kick off class with a short visit to a wind farm, a site tackling invasive species, or a sustainable campus.

- “Interpreting Graphs and Data” exercises and the interactive “GraphIt!” program guide students in exploring how to present and interpret data and how to create graphs.
- “Viewpoints” are paired essays, which are authored by invited experts who present divergent points of view on topical questions.

## The Teaching and Learning Package for the Instructor

We have prepared an excellent supplements package to accompany the text.

**Instructor Resources** The instructor resources are available online via the Instructor Resources section of **MasteringEnvironmentalScience**<sup>®</sup> and <http://catalogue.pearsoned.ca>. The following supplements are designed to facilitate lecture presentations, encourage class discussions, aid in creating tests, and foster learning:

- The **Instructor’s Manual** includes lecture outlines, teaching notes that integrate material from the chapter, discussions of “The Science behind the Story” features, suggestions for supplementary print and online resource material, and solutions to end-of-chapter questions and problems.
- The **Test Item File** is a test bank that contains approximately 1400 questions and includes multiple-choice, short-answer, graphing, and scenario-based items. For all questions, we identify a suggested answer, an associated learning objective, and a difficulty level of easy, moderate, or difficult.
- The **Computerized Testbank (Pearson TestGen™)** presents the testbank in a powerful program that enables instructors to view and edit existing questions, create new questions, and generate quizzes, tests, exams, or homework. TestGen also allows instructors to administer tests on a local area network, have the tests graded electronically, and have the results prepared in electronic or printed reports. The Pearson TestGen is compatible with Windows or Mac systems.
- The **PowerPoint Presentations** are available in Microsoft PowerPoint<sup>®</sup>. The colourful slides highlight, illuminate, and build on key concepts in the text.
- The **Image Library** is an impressive resource to help instructors create vibrant lecture presentations. Almost every figure and table from the text is provided in electronic format and is organized by chapter for convenience. These images can be imported easily into Microsoft PowerPoint to create new presentations or to add to existing ones.

**Pearson’s Learning Solutions Managers** Learning Solutions Managers work with faculty and campus course designers to ensure that Pearson technology products, assessment tools, and online course materials are tailored to meet your specific needs. This highly qualified team is dedicated to helping schools take full advantage of a wide range of educational resources, by assisting in the integration of a variety of instructional materials and media formats. Your local Pearson sales representative can provide you with more details on this service program.



# Acknowledgments

A textbook is the product of *many* more minds and hearts than one might guess from the names on the cover. All three of us have been exceedingly fortunate to be supported and guided, through this and previous editions of the book, by a tremendous publishing team and a small army of experts in environmental science who have generously shared their time and expertise. Although we alone, as authors, bear responsibility for any inaccuracies, the strengths of this book result from the collective labour and dedication of innumerable people.

As the author of the Canadian edition I am extremely grateful to the team at Pearson Canada for its support, advice, and professionalism throughout the development of the Canadian editions. First of all, many thanks to Sherry Zweig, who first got me involved with this project and with Pearson Canada, for her continuing support and friendship. Special thanks go to Joanne Sutherland, Developmental Editor, and Susan Bindernagel, Production Editor and Proofreader, for bearing with me through all of the inevitable delays and frustrations, and never losing faith, and to Cathleen Sullivan and Lisa Rahn, Executive Acquisitions Editors, and Darryl Kamo, Program Manager. Other members of the Pearson Canada team whose contributions to this project (not to mention their patience and professionalism) were crucially important include Söğüt Y. Güleç, Copy Editor; Jessica Hellen and Jessica Mifsud, Project Managers; Kathryn O’Handley, Permissions Project Manager; Kimberley Teska, Marketing Manager; Anthony Leung, Senior Designer; and Vignesh Sadhasivam, photo researcher from Integra. Francine McCarthy, Technical Proofreader, made me shake my fist but also made many valuable contributions to the text. It is a pleasure to work with such a talented and committed group of people.

I also want to extend my deep appreciation to my colleague and friend, Monika Havelka, whose creative ideas, experience teaching with the book, and insights from being the other half of my brain have been invaluable.

And for the third Canadian edition, I would once again like to thank my ever-patient family, who happily put up with a perpetually temporary office on the dining room table. My son Riley King and my daughter Eliza King also contributed editorial and research assistance,

at times when they were really needed. I also want to acknowledge the assistance of my colleagues (especially Professors Andrea Olive, Nick Collins, and Kent Moore), Educational Resources Assistant Jennifer Soehner, my friends (especially the Lost Trio Hiking Association), and generations of ENV100 students at the University of Toronto Mississauga.

We dedicate this book to today’s students, who will shape tomorrow’s world.

—**Barbara Murck**  
(for Jay Withgott and Matthew Laposata)

## Reviewers

We have been guided in our efforts by extensive input from colleagues across Canada who have served as reviewers and advisors for the first and second Canadian editions, in addition to the contributions of many reviewers for the U.S. editions. The participation of so many learned and thoughtful experts has improved the book in countless ways and has made this edition much stronger. Sometimes you made me shake my fist at my laptop, but in the end your insightful comments and suggestions led to a much stronger book. If the thoughtfulness and thoroughness of these reviewers are any indication, then the teaching of environmental science in Canada is in excellent hands!

Clem Bamikole, *Georgian College*  
Darren Bardati, *Bishop’s University*  
Sarah Boon, *University of Lethbridge*  
John Buskard, *Concordia University*  
Steven J. Cooke, *Carleton University*  
Mario Corbin, *Champlain College Lennoxville*  
Tim Elkin, *Camosun College*  
Mariola Maya Janowicz, *Concordia University College of Alberta*  
Jeff Lewis, *Vancouver Island University*  
Brian O’Neill, *Holland College*  
Ben Rubin, *University of Western Ontario*  
Yolanda Spithoven, *University of New Brunswick*  
Lorraine Vanderzwet, *Mohawk College of Applied Arts and Technology*

# About the Authors



**Jay H. Withgott** has authored *Environment: The Science behind the Stories* as well as its brief version, *Essential Environment*, since their inception. In dedicating himself to these books, he works to keep abreast of a diverse and rapidly changing field and continually seeks to develop new and better ways

to help today's students learn environmental science.

As a researcher, Jay has published scientific papers in ecology, evolution, animal behaviour, and conservation biology in journals ranging from *Evolution* to *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. As an instructor, he has taught university lab courses in ecology and other disciplines. As a science writer, he has authored articles for numerous journals and magazines including *Science*, *New Scientist*, *BioScience*, *Smithsonian*, and *Natural History*. By combining his scientific training with prior experience as a newspaper reporter and editor, he strives to make science accessible and engaging for general audiences. Jay holds degrees from Yale University, the University of Arkansas, and the University of Arizona.

Jay lives with his wife, biologist Susan Masta, in Portland, Oregon.



**Matthew Laposata** joined the writing team for the fifth U.S. edition of *Environment: The Science behind the Stories*. Matt is a professor of environmental science at Kennesaw State University (KSU). He holds a bachelor's degree in biology education from Indiana University of Pennsylvania, a master's degree in biology from

Bowling Green State University, and a doctorate in ecology from The Pennsylvania State University.

Matt is the coordinator of KSU's two-semester general education science sequence titled Science, Society, and

the Environment, which enrolls roughly 6000 students per year. He focuses exclusively on introductory environmental science courses and has enjoyed teaching and interacting with thousands of nonscience majors during his career. He is an active scholar in environmental science education and has received grants from state, federal, and private sources to develop and evaluate innovative curricular materials. His scholarly work has received numerous awards, including the Georgia Board of Regents' highest award for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning.

Matt resides in suburban Atlanta with his wife, Lisa, and children, Lauren, Cameron, and Saffron.



**Barbara Murck** has authored the Canadian editions of *Environment: The Science behind the Stories* from the beginning. Barb has taught environmental and Earth science at the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM) for more than 30 years. Her academic background is in

geology, with an undergraduate degree from Princeton University and Ph.D. from the University of Toronto.

Barb has worked on a wide variety of environmental management projects in the developing world, from Africa to Asia, mainly as an expert on training and curriculum development. She has published numerous books on topics ranging from physical geology to environmental science to sustainability. She was honoured with the University of Toronto President's Teaching Award in 2010. A current much-loved project is teaching a field course each summer in the Ecuadorian Andes, the Amazon, and the Galápagos Islands. Barb has greatly appreciated having had the opportunity to influence the lives and learning of thousands of UTM students over the years.

Barb lives with her family, including her two kids and the world's best dogs, in a 115-year-old house in Southern Ontario. When not at work, she is likely to be found hiking the Bruce Trail, the oldest and longest marked hiking trail in Canada.

## About Our Sustainability Initiatives

This book is carefully crafted to minimize environmental impact. The materials used to manufacture this book originated from sources committed to responsible forestry practices. The printing, binding, cover, and paper come from facilities that minimize waste, energy consumption, and the use of harmful chemicals.

Pearson closes the loop by recycling every out-of-date text returned to our warehouse. We pulp the books, and the pulp is used to produce items such as paper coffee cups and shopping bags. In addition, Pearson has become the first climate-neutral educational publishing company.

The future holds great promise for reducing our impact on Earth's environment, and Pearson is proud to be leading the way. We strive to publish the best books with the most up-to-date and accurate content, and to do so in ways that minimize our environmental impact.

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### About the Cover ...

Cover image: *Colorado River Delta #2 Near San Felipe, Baja, Mexico, 2011*

“My hope is that these pictures will stimulate a process of thinking about something essential to our survival; something we often take for granted—until it’s gone.”

—Edward Burtynsky

Canadian photographer Edward Burtynsky has devoted his career to documenting our conflicted relationship with the natural environment, particularly the transformation of landscapes by industrial activity. With his Water project, Burtynsky undertook to understand and document our use and abuse of water; our cover photo is part of the resulting series. It shows the Colorado River delta, once a vast tidal estuary flowing into the Gulf of California. The delta and its unique and biodiverse ecosystems were fundamentally degraded by decades of water diversion from the river. In the late 1990s, however, the delta began a slow revival. Releases of water from reservoirs, return flows of agricultural irrigation water, flood water, and even flows of municipal waste water, although polluted and saline, have restored some parts of the delta ecosystem. Water is beginning to flow, where once there was only a desert.

Like most of Burtynsky's photos, the image on our cover makes us stop and think about the impacts of our activities on the things that we depend upon most fundamentally. His images are complicated and contradictory, like our relationships with the natural environment. We are centrally dependent on environmental goods and services to support our lives and our lifestyles; yet, by our very presence and activities, we degrade and destroy those resources. But human actions are also capable of reversing or mitigating those negative impacts, as we see in this image showing the tentative recovery of the Colorado River delta. Burtynsky's photos thus typically contain an element of despair and even horror amidst the beauty: “We did that... ?!” But the despair is mixed with hope that things can change.

In *Environment: The Science behind the Stories*, Third Canadian Edition, as in the previous editions, we look for scientific evidence of our use of environmental resources, our impacts on those resources, and the effectiveness of our efforts to mitigate the impacts. We try to guide students through the complexities of the discipline, and encourage them to think for themselves about the natural world, what science can and cannot tell us, and the impacts of their own attitudes and lifestyle choices on the environment. We have always tried to distinguish, clearly, between environmental science as a scientific discipline, and environmentalism as an advocacy movement; yet, in the end, they come together. Because we are *of* the world, not just *in* it, we are part of the environment, and everything we do (and even what we think) necessarily has impacts. In our modern world we all have a responsibility to be conscious of the impacts of our choices. Burtynsky's photos address these complexities and contradictions head-on, and that is why we have chosen them to be on the covers of all three Canadian editions.

## PART ONE

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# Foundations of Environmental Science



Combers Beach in Pacific Rim Reserve, British Columbia, is part of Canada's National Parks system.

Rolf Hicker/All Canada Photos

# An Introduction to Environmental Science




Earth is like an island in space.

NASA/Visible Earth

## Upon successfully completing this chapter, you will be able to

- Define the term *environment*
- Characterize the interdisciplinary nature of environmental science
- Describe several types of natural resources and explain their importance to human life
- Diagnose and illustrate some of the pressures on the global environment
- Articulate the concepts of sustainability and sustainable development



This crescent Earth was one of the very first photos taken of the whole planet.

NASA

## CENTRAL CASE

# EARTH FROM SPACE: THE POWER OF AN IMAGE

**“The two-word definition of sustainability is ‘one planet.’ ”**

—MATHIS WACKERNAGEL, ECOLOGICAL ECONOMIST AND CO-DEVELOPER OF THE ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT CONCEPT

**“We’re not the first to discover this, but we’d like to confirm, from the crew of *Apollo 17*, that the world is round.”**

—EUGENE CERNAN, *APOLLO 17* COMMANDER

**C**onsider the following: Prior to November 9, 1967, no one had ever seen a photograph of the whole planet Earth, because no such thing existed.

Those of us who were alive back in 1967 were not completely clueless. We knew that Earth is a planet, surrounded by space. We knew that Earth is round (although visual confirmation of this fact still made a considerable impact on *Apollo 17* astronauts a few years later). Yet a simple photograph of Earth—floating

in space, blue and shining and covered by clouds, vegetation, and a whole lot of water—managed to take everyone by surprise and changed both society and history in the process.

Actually, the very first photographs of the whole Earth, taken in 1967, were not the ones that eventually caught the imagination of the general public. The 1967 photographs were taken by automated camera from the unmanned *Apollo 4* spacecraft, the first spacecraft to get far enough away from Earth to photograph the entire planet. Only part of the planet was in sunlight, so the photographs show only a “crescent” Earth (see photo). Not long after, on December 24, 1968, *Apollo 8* astronauts took the first handheld photographs showing Earth rising over the horizon of the Moon (the closing photo of this book). The crew did a live radio broadcast that day, during which astronaut James Lovell commented, “The Earth from here is a grand oasis in the big vastness of space.”<sup>1</sup>

It was not until 1972 that the *Apollo 17* mission put astronauts in a position to photograph the entire *illuminated* planet Earth. The result was the famous Blue Marble<sup>2</sup> image, a version of which opens this chapter. The photograph was beautiful, its impact stunning, even unsettling. The original image was oriented with Antarctica at the top of the globe and an “upside-down” Africa in the middle. The unfamiliar perspective caused consternation among those who had never stopped to consider that the convention of orienting maps with north at the top is completely arbitrary.

The Blue Marble photograph is widely credited with kick-starting the modern environmental movement. Just five years elapsed between the first whole-Earth photographs in 1967 and the last ones to be recorded by human hands. Since 1972, no manned space flight has been far enough away for the planet to be photographed in its entirety by astronauts. In that five-year period was the summer of love, and war—the Vietnam War, the Six Day War, the Cold War. The Beatles sang on the first live international satellite television production. Canada celebrated the hundredth year of Confederation. Neil Armstrong became the first person to walk on the Moon. Civil rights activist Martin Luther King, Jr., died; so did J. Robert Oppenheimer, the “father of the atomic bomb.” The first handheld calculator was sold (for almost \$400).

Society changed dramatically during those five years, and it was a period of dawning awareness and public involvement in environmental issues. The first major

oil spill happened in 1967 when the *Torrey Canyon* ran aground near England with 120 000 metric tons of crude oil on board. The first hints of trouble began to surface (literally) from hazardous chemicals stored underground at Love Canal, New York. Within a few years the site would be infamous, leading to the first declaration of an environmental state of emergency in the United States and making a grassroots hero of local activist Lois Gibbs. Books on environmental topics began to appear on bestseller lists, including *Limits to Growth*,<sup>3</sup> *The Population Bomb*,<sup>4</sup> *Small Is Beautiful*,<sup>5</sup> and their predecessor, *Silent Spring*.<sup>6</sup> The 1970s opened with the signing of the first federal environmental legislation, the United States’ *Environmental Protection Act* (1970). The first Earth Day was held (1970). Greenpeace was founded (1971). The *United Nations Environment Programme* was established (1972).<sup>7</sup>

British astronomer Sir Frederick Hoyle is reputed to have said in 1948, “Once a photograph of the Earth, taken from outside, is available—once the sheer isolation of the Earth becomes known—a new idea as powerful as any in history will be let loose.” To what extent were the milestones of environmental history descended from the first glimpses of our planet from space, with all of its fragility and limitations? We will never know, but the Blue Marble is still considered to be one of the most influential photographs in history—possibly the most widely distributed image of all time—and it remains an iconic symbol of the modern environmental movement.

## Our Island, Earth

Viewed from space, our home planet appears suspended against a vast inky-black backdrop. Although few of us will ever witness that sight directly, photographs taken from space convey a sense that Earth is like an island—small, isolated, and finite. Yet this island supports all of the vastness and complexity of life as we know it.

### The environment is more than just our surroundings

A photograph from space reveals a great deal, but it does not adequately convey the complexity of the environment. Our

**environment** is more than water, land, and air; it is the sum total of our surroundings. It includes all of Earth’s **biotic** components, or living things, and **abiotic** components, the nonliving things with which we interact. The abiotic constituents include the continents, oceans, clouds, rivers, and icecaps that you can see in a photo of Earth from space. The biotic constituents are the animals, plants, forests, soils, microbes, and people that occupy the landscape. In a more inclusive sense, the environment also encompasses the built environment, including the urban centres, living spaces, and physical infrastructure that humans have created. In its *most* inclusive sense, the environment includes the complex webs of scientific, ethical, political, economic, and social relationships and institutions that shape our daily lives.

People often use the term *environment* in a narrower sense, though, referring to a “natural” world that stands apart from human society. This connotation is unfortunate, because it masks the important fact that humans exist within the environment and are an integral part of the interactions that characterize and shape it. As just one of many species, we share with the others a fundamental dependence on a healthy, functioning planet. The limitations of language make it all too easy to speak of “people and nature,” or “society and the environment,” or even “environment versus economy,” as though they were separate, not interconnected, or in conflict. Fundamentally, we exist as part of the natural world, and our interactions with the other parts matter a great deal.

## “Environment” has legal, social, economic, and scientific aspects

Why is it important that we give such careful consideration to the meaning of the term *environment*? Back in 1971, when the federal government passed Canada’s first environmental legislation, the environmental awareness of most North Americans was limited. If they thought about it at all, most people would have equated *environment* with *wilderness*. This oversimplification changed as public consciousness of environmental issues grew. Wilderness preservation is still an important concern, but our understanding of the environment, our impacts on it, and its role in our health and daily lives has broadened dramatically since then.

Today our definition of the term *environment* must be sufficiently comprehensive to include its legal, social, economic, and scientific aspects. Business management, politics, ethics, international relations, economics, social equity, engineering, law enforcement, and chemical, physical, geological, and biological sciences—all of these play a role in managing and protecting both people and the natural environment. Consequently, the mandate of **Environment Canada**, the department of the federal government that is most directly responsible for the protection of the environment, is also very comprehensive. Among other things, the role of Environment Canada includes preserving and enhancing the quality of the natural environment, protecting and conserving renewable resources and water resources, enforcing Canada’s sovereignty over our boundary waters, and forecasting weather conditions and warnings.<sup>8</sup>

To accomplish all of this, our environmental leaders and policymakers need to know what they are talking about; this is the main reason that Environment Canada was established as a science-based organization. As a

community, we must constantly improve and refine our basic scientific understanding of water, air, land and soils, wildlife, weather and climate, and the dynamic interactions among all the components of which ecosystems are composed. This is where *environmental science*—the central focus of this book—comes in.

## Environmental science explores interactions between people and the natural world

**Environmental science** is the study of how the natural world works, how our environment affects us, and how we affect our environment. Appreciating how we interact with the physical and biological environment is crucial for a well-informed view of our place in the world, and for a mature awareness that we are one species among many on a planet full of life. As our population, our technological powers, and our consumption of resources increase, so does our ability to alter our planet and damage the very systems that keep us alive. We need to understand these impacts more thoroughly and manage them more effectively. Environmental science emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century in response to this need.

Understanding the functioning of the natural environment and our role in it, our interactions with it, and our impacts on it is the essential first step toward finding solutions to our most pressing environmental problems. Part 1 of this book, *Foundations of Environmental Science*, takes that first step by providing an introduction to the materials and processes that characterize the biotic and abiotic components of the environment, and the basic concepts and principles of science as applied to the study of the environment.

It can be daunting to reflect on the number and magnitude of environmental dilemmas that confront us today. Many environmental scientists are trying to apply their knowledge to develop practical solutions to the environmental challenges we face. We examine these challenges and issues in Part 2, *Issues, Impacts, and Solutions*, starting with a look at the human population itself and how it has grown and changed over time.

Fortunately, with problems also come opportunities for devising creative solutions. Right now, global conditions are changing more quickly than ever. Right now, through science, we as a civilization are gaining knowledge more rapidly than ever. And right now, the window of opportunity for acting to solve problems is still open. With such bountiful challenges and opportunities, this particular moment in history is an exciting time to be studying environmental science.



# The Nature of Environmental Science

Environmental scientists strive to understand how Earth's natural systems function, how humans are influenced by those systems, and how we are influencing those systems. In addition, many environmental scientists are motivated by a desire to develop solutions to environmental problems. The solutions themselves (such as new technologies, policy decisions, or resource management strategies) are applications of environmental science. The study of such applications and their consequences is also part of environmental science.

## Science is a systematic process for learning about the world

Environmental science is part of the broader human endeavour of **science**, a systematic process for learning about the world and testing our understanding of it. The term *science* also refers to the accumulated body of knowledge that arises from this dynamic process of observation, testing, and discovery, which we will explore in greater detail in the chapter *Matter, Energy, and the Physical Environment*.

Knowledge gained from science can be applied to societal problems. Among the most important applications of science are its use in developing new technologies, and informing policy and management decisions (**FIGURE I.1**). These pragmatic applications in themselves are not science, but they must be informed by science in order to be effective. Many scientists are



Courtesy of Jay Withgott

**FIGURE I.1**

Scientific knowledge can be applied in policy and management decisions and in technology. Prescribed burning, shown here, is a management practice that is used to restore healthy forests, and is informed by scientific research into forest ecology.

motivated simply by a desire to know how the world works, and others are motivated by the potential for developing useful applications and solutions to problems.

Why does science matter? The late American astronomer Carl Sagan wrote the following in his 1995 treatise *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*:

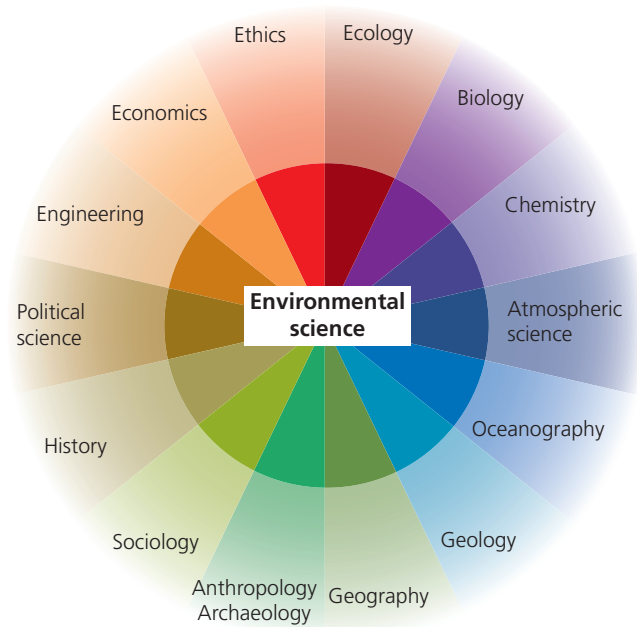
*We've arranged a global civilization in which the most crucial elements—transportation, communications, and all other industries; agriculture, medicine, education, entertainment, protecting the environment; and even the key democratic institution of voting—profoundly depend on science and technology.*<sup>9</sup>

Sagan and many others have argued that science is essential if we hope to develop solutions to the problems—environmental and otherwise—that we face today. We can go a step further and suggest that the *democratization* of science—making the science of our world accessible and understandable to as many people as possible—is also essential if we are to make informed decisions about the management of this planet. That is one reason why it is important for you to learn as much as possible about the science of the environment, and to pass along some of that knowledge to others.

Scientific ideas and methods change and evolve as new information is discovered, ideas are tested, and knowledge grows. Understanding how science works is especially relevant in environmental science, a young field that is changing rapidly as we gather vast amounts of new information, as human impacts on the planet multiply, and as lessons from the consequences of our actions become apparent. Because so much remains unstudied and undone, and because so many issues we cannot foresee are likely to arise in the future, environmental science will remain an exciting frontier for you to explore as a student and as an informed citizen throughout your life.

## Environmental science is an interdisciplinary pursuit

Like science in general, environmental science informs practical applications and can be motivated by them. Studying natural systems and addressing environmental problems are complex endeavours that require expertise from many disciplines. Environmental science is thus an **interdisciplinary** field of study—one that employs concepts and techniques from numerous disciplines and brings research results from these disciplines together into a broad synthesis (**FIGURE I.2**). Traditional disciplines (such as biology, geology, and chemistry) are valuable because their scholars delve deeply into topics, uncovering new



**FIGURE 1.2**

Environmental science is an interdisciplinary pursuit, involving input from many different established fields of study across the natural and social sciences.

knowledge and developing expertise in particular areas. Interdisciplinary fields are valuable because their practitioners take specialized knowledge from different disciplines, consolidate it, synthesize it, and apply it in a broad context to serve the multifaceted interests of society.

Environmental science is especially broad because it encompasses not only the *natural sciences* (disciplines that study the natural world) but also the *social sciences* (disciplines that study human interactions and institutions). The natural sciences provide us with the means to gain accurate information about the physical environment and to interpret it reasonably. Addressing environmental problems, however, also involves weighing values and understanding human behaviour, and this requires the social sciences. Most environmental science programs in universities focus predominantly on the natural sciences as they pertain to environmental issues. Programs that heavily incorporate the social sciences often prefer the term *environmental studies* or *environmental management* to describe their academic umbrella. Whichever approach we take, these fields reflect many diverse perspectives and sources of knowledge.

Just as an interdisciplinary approach to studying issues can help us better understand them, an integrated approach to addressing problems can help us produce effective and lasting solutions. For example, consider how the Canadian mining industry approaches the problem of acid mine drainage, which can occur when sulphur is present at a mine site. Sulphur is a common constituent of coal and metal ores, both of which are important to

the Canadian economy. If sulphur-bearing waste rock at a mine site interacts with rain or surface water, sulphuric acid is formed; if not contained, the acid can enter local streams, where it is devastating to affected ecosystems. To solve a problem involving *acid drainage*, a mining company could consult a biologist or an ecologist regarding the impacts of the acid on local plants and animals. A hydrologist would be helpful, to understand the flow of water at the site. A mining engineer could help decide how best to contain and isolate the waste rock piles. The company could consult with a chemist about the nature and behaviour of the acidic solution, and how it interacts with rocks and soils. Someone skilled at management would be helpful, to act as a liaison between the scientists and the mine management team. Canadian mining companies routinely make use of teams like this in their efforts to control acid mine drainage.

## Environmental science is not the same as environmentalism

Although many environmental scientists are interested in solving problems, it is incorrect to confuse environmental science with environmentalism or environmental activism. They are *not* the same. Environmental science is the pursuit of scientific knowledge about the workings of the environment and our interactions with it. **Environmentalism** is a social movement dedicated to protecting the natural world—and, by extension, humans—from undesirable changes brought about by human choices (**FIGURE 1.3**).



**FIGURE 1.3**

Environmental scientists play roles very different from those of the environmental activists shown here. Some scientists do become activists to promote what they feel are workable solutions to environmental problems; most try to keep their advocacy separate from their scientific work. This photograph shows Greenpeace activists protesting on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. Greenpeace was founded in Vancouver in 1971.



These immense *moai* statues are iconic symbols of Rapa Nui, or Easter Island. Viktorus/Shutterstock

## The Lesson of Rapa Nui

Rapa Nui (or Easter Island) is a small island in the Pacific and one of the most remote inhabited places on the globe. When European explorers reached the island in 1722, they found a barren landscape populated by fewer than 2000 people living a marginal existence in caves. The island featured gigantic statues of carved stone, called *moai*, evidence that a sophisticated civilization had once lived there.

How could people without wheels or rope, on an island without trees, have moved statues 10 m high, weighing 80 metric tons? The answer lies in the fact that the island did not always lack trees, and its people were not always without rope. The island was once lushly forested, supporting a prosperous society of 6000 to 30 000 people. What hap-

## THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE STORY

pened? Many researchers have tried to solve the mystery.

A key discovery, based on many lines of evidence, was that the island was once forested. British scientist John Flenley and colleagues<sup>10</sup> drilled cores deep into lake sediments and examined ancient pollen grains preserved there. Finding a great deal of palm pollen, they inferred that the island had been covered with tall palm trees. Archaeologists also found ancient palm nut casings buried in soil near carbon-lined channels made by palm roots, and researchers deciphering script on stone tablets discerned characters etched in the form of palm trees.

By studying pollen and the remains of wood from charcoal, archaeologist Catherine Orliac<sup>11</sup> found that at least 21 other plant species—now gone—had also been common. Clearly, the island had supported a diverse forest. Forest plants would have provided fuelwood, building material for houses and canoes, fruit to eat, fibre for clothing—and, researchers guessed, logs and fibrous rope to help move the enormous *moai* statues.

Pollen analyses showed that trees declined and were replaced by ferns and grasses. Charcoal in the soil showed that forests had been burned, perhaps for slash-and-burn farming. Researchers concluded that the islanders, desperate for forest resources and cropland, had deforested the island. With the forest gone, the soil eroded away, confirmed

by data that showed a great deal of sediment accumulating on lake bottoms. Erosion would have lowered crop yields, perhaps leading to starvation.

Wild animals also disappeared. Archaeologist David Steadman analyzed 6500 bones and found that at least 31 bird species originally provided food for the islanders.<sup>12</sup> Today only one native bird species is left. Remains from charcoal fires show that early islanders also feasted on fish, sharks, porpoises, turtles, octopus, and shellfish—but in later years they consumed little seafood.

As resources declined, some researchers concluded, people fell into clan warfare, suggested by unearthed weapons and skulls with head wounds. Rapa Nui appeared to be a tragic case of ecological suicide: A once-flourishing civilization depleted its resources and destroyed itself. In this interpretation, Rapa Nui seemed to offer a clear lesson: We, on planet Earth, had better learn to use our limited resources wisely.

Canadian economists Scott Taylor and James Brander took a different approach.<sup>13</sup> They developed a computer model of the interplay between renewable resources and population. The model is based on standard ecological predator–prey models, with people in the role of predator, and resources as their prey. This scenario generates “feast-and-famine” cycles of rising and falling population and resource stocks. The researchers

Environmental scientists study many of the same processes, locations, and issues that environmentalists care about, but as scientists they attempt to maintain an objective approach in their work. Ideally, science informs and responds to political and social influences, without being overly influenced by them. Remaining as free as possible from personal, political, or ideological bias—and open to whatever conclusions the data demand—is a hallmark of the effective scientist.

Both environmental scientists and individuals in non-scientific professions can make important contributions to the understanding, protection, management, and sustainable use of the natural environment. These people work in a wide range of positions, from policymaker to activist, artist, journalist, business person, hunter, or animal rescuer. Many of them are scientists *and* writers, or scientists *and* filmmakers, or gardeners or politicians or

musicians or managers—and, yes, many of them are also environmentalists.

Consider, for example, David Suzuki, who has been called “Canada’s environmental conscience.” We know him best as a journalist, writer, TV broadcaster, and environmental activist, but Suzuki originally trained and started his career as a scientist—a professor of genetics. His background in science informs his advocacy; however, he has consciously given up “doing” science on an everyday basis, choosing instead to focus on more political questions. David Suzuki’s career demonstrates that environmental science and environmentalism are different, but not entirely or necessarily separate.

Science is a human endeavour; it can never be entirely free of political or social influence. We want our leaders to incorporate scientific understanding into their social decisions, but there is no foolproof way to ensure that



La Tercera/AP Images

Archaeological investigations, like this one by the Easter Island Statue Project, aim to understand and preserve the cultural legacy of the islanders.

speculated that such cycles may account for the decline and eventual collapse of civilizations like that of Rapa Nui, as a result of rapid population growth and consequent resource degradation.

Anthropologist Terry Hunt and archaeologist Carl Lipo drew entirely different conclusions from their scientific findings.<sup>14</sup> When they began their research on Rapa Nui in 2001, they expected simply to help fill gaps in a well-understood history. But science is a process of discovery, and sometimes evidence leads research-

ers far from where they anticipated. Hunt and Lipo ended up convinced that nearly everything about the traditional “ecocide” interpretation was wrong.

Their findings suggested that deforestation occurred rapidly, shortly after the arrival of the first colonists. How could so few people have destroyed so much forest so fast? Their answer: rats. When Polynesians settled new islands, they brought crop plants, domestic animals such as chickens, and rats. Rats multiply quickly, and they soon overran Rapa Nui.

The rats ate palm nuts—perhaps so many that the trees could not regenerate. With no young trees growing, the palm went extinct. Despite the forest loss, Hunt and Lipo argue that islanders were able to persist and thrive, adapting to Rapa Nui’s poor soil and windy weather by developing rock gardens to protect crops. Tools that previous researchers viewed as weapons were actually farm implements, they concluded; lethal injuries were rare, and no evidence of battle or defensive fortresses was uncovered.

The evidence led Hunt and Lipo to propose that the islanders had acted as responsible stewards of the island’s resources. The eventual collapse of this civilization, they argue, came with the arrival of Europeans, who unwittingly brought contagious diseases to which the islanders had never been exposed. Before that, Hunt and Lipo say, Rapa Nui’s people maintained a peaceful and resilient society for 500 years.

This interpretation represents a shift in how we view Rapa Nui. Were the early inhabitants good environmental stewards who were overcome by insurmountable outside forces? Or did they overuse and deplete the island’s resource base, initiating the decline and collapse of the civilization? Debate between the two camps remains heated, and research continues as scientists look for new ways to test the differing hypotheses. In the long term, data from additional studies should lead us closer and closer to the truth.

science is not misused to serve political ends. By becoming aware of the complex relationships among science, society, and politics, we can work to ensure that an appropriate balance is maintained. Environmental science is *distinct* from politics, law, commerce, philosophy, religion, art, and activism, but is it *exclusive* of these human undertakings? You will have to judge for yourself, but you can count on this book to help you make a more informed judgment of what you read, hear, and experience in your encounters with the natural environment.

## Environmental science can help us avoid mistakes made in the past

Today we are confronted with news and predictions of environmental catastrophes on a regular basis, but it can be difficult to assess the reliability of such reports. It is

even harder to evaluate the causes and effects of environmental change. Perhaps most difficult is to devise effective solutions to environmental problems. Studying environmental science will outfit you with the tools to evaluate information on environmental change, and think critically and creatively about possible actions to take in response. These tools can help us do better in the future, and avoid some of the mistakes that have been made in the past in our interactions with the environment.

There is historical evidence that civilizations may crumble when pressures from population and consumption overwhelm resource availability (see “The Science behind the Story: The Lesson of Rapa Nui”). Many great civilizations have fallen after depleting resources or damaging their environment. The Greek and Roman empires show evidence of this, as do the civilizations of the Maya, the Anasazi, and other New World peoples. Plato wrote of