News
EarthBeat
Fir trees along the Rattlesnake Ledge Trail in the foothills of the Cascade Mountain Range out

Fir trees along the Rattlesnake Ledge Trail in the foothills of the Cascade Mountain Range outside Seattle. (Brian Roewe)



by Brian Roewe

NCR environment correspondent

View Author Profile

broewe@ncronline.org
Follow on Twitter at @brianroewe

## Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

December 9, 2019
Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

***Editor's Note:*** *EarthBeat Weekly is your weekly newsletter about faith and climate change. Below is the Dec. 6 edition. To receive EarthBeat Weekly in your inbox, sign up here.*

Last week around this time, I was among those to #OptOutside.

The hashtag is part of a campaign begun in 2015 by outdoors retailer/co-op Recreation Equipment Incorporated (REI), inviting its members and employees to forgo the craze of Black Friday shopping and instead spend the day outside enjoying nature. To numb the shopping temptation, REI closes shop on its website and at its 162 stores on Black Friday — delaying those deals on crampons and sub-zero

sleeping bags by 24 hours — and also pays its employees to stay home. Other companies have also joined the Take-Black-Friday-Off movement.

This year, REI expanded the campaign by asking that people not only opt for the outdoors over shopping aisles, but also "opt to act" through clean-up efforts in local parks and communities. Along with it, the co-op, based in Washington state, unveiled its own plans to become a zero-waste company and its commitment to a circular economy, in part through incentives for members to reuse and rent gear rather than always buying new.

"As a single company, our impact is limited, but as a community, we can drive change that powers meaningful action beyond our walls," REI CEO Eric Atz wrote in a letter ahead of the campaign.

[Full disclosure: I am among the 18-million card-carrying REI members.]

The inaugural launch of #OptOutside came just months after Pope Francis released his landmark encyclical "*Laudato Si*', on Care for Our Common Home." For this outdoors-loving reporter, it was hard not to see more than a few parallel themes across the pope's document and the idea of intentionally sitting out the busiest shopping day of the year.

In LS #203, for instance, which opens a section titled "Towards a New Lifestyle," Francis writes, "Since the market tends to promote extreme consumerism in an effort to sell its products, people can easily get caught up in a whirlwind of needless buying and spending."

Francis talks about the dangers of a consumerist lifestyle — a theme of his papacy — that as the need for more things grows, the sense of the common good disappears. "As these attitudes become more widespread, social norms are respected only to the extent that they do not clash with personal needs."

He continues in LS #209: "Many people know that our current progress and the mere amassing of things and pleasures are not enough to give meaning and joy to the human heart, yet they feel unable to give up what the market sets before them."

He adds two paragraphs later that "Only by cultivating sound virtues will people be able to make a selfless ecological commitment. A person who could afford to spend and consume more but regularly uses less heating and wears warmer clothes shows

the kind of convictions and attitudes which help to protect the environment. There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions, and it is wonderful how education can bring about real changes in lifestyle."

A key part of that, Francis said, is learning to see and appreciate beauty, especially in nature. "If someone has not learned to stop and admire something beautiful, we should not be surprised if he or she treats everything as an object to be used and abused without scruple. If we want to bring about deep change, we need to realize that certain mindsets really do influence our behavior."

I spent my #OptOutside day walking with my wife around our Kansas City neighborhood. Though there weren't any tall trees like in the photo above from our trip to Seattle this time last year, it was still not a hectic, stress-filled shopping lane. And that alone was a beautiful sight worth appreciating.

Advertisement

---

**A look at what's new on EarthBeat this week:**

- As the week began, we debuted an Advent meditation with Laudato Si'. It comes courtesy of former NCR editor and publisher Arthur Jones, who poses the question "What is God asking of me?" Watch for the second part on Sunday.
- COP 25, the annual United Nations Climate Summit, opened on Monday. In his message to the conference delegates, Pope Francis said that awareness is still "weak" of the urgent action required to avert dangerous levels of warming and "respect the timeline required by science."
- Marian Ronan has a review of Darren Dochuk's book Anointed with Oil: How Christianity and Crude Made Modern America, which explores how competing theological visions were at play in the story of oil in America.
- The latest Small Earth Story comes from former Global Sisters Report staff writer Dawn Araujo-Hawkins, who describes her family's journey to a paperless kitchen.
- If you haven't checked out the EarthBeat events calendar yet, well, think about it. On Dec. 8, the Earth Negotiations Bulletin will be hosting a free webinar with updates from Madrid at the COP 25 halfway mark.

---

**Other climate-related news from this week:**

- At COP 25, delegates from all over the world share how they are adapting their lives for the sake of the environment. (BBC Video)
- Today, students worldwide are walking out of school to strike in the Fridays for Future movement. In Washington, D.C., they're joined by actor and activist Jane Fonda, who moved to the nation's capital to raise awareness of the climate emergency. (The New York Times)
- And earlier this week, teen activist Greta Thunberg arrived in Portugal after completing a three-week sea journey across the Atlantic, and en route to COP 25. (CNN)
- 2019 is set to be the second or third warmest year on record, according to the World Meteorological Organization. As for the 2010s overall, the decade's average temperatures "are almost certain to be the highest on record." (CBS News)
- How does the air compare in your town with the world's most polluted cities? The New York Times has compiled a visually stunning — and eye-opening — interactive analysis. (The New York Times)
- How accurate are those climate models? A recent scientific review of models from the past five decades found them to be "generally quite accurate." (Vox)

---

**Closing beat:**

If you are wondering the whereabouts of regular EarthBeat Weekly author Bill Mitchell, well, he'll soon be boarding a boat of his own, setting sail for the Galapagos Islands. I'll continue at the newsletter helm until his return in two weeks. At which time, we can only hope he has some wonderful photos to share.

Thanks for reading.

Brian Roewe

NCR staff writer

broewe@ncronline.org

This story appears in the **EarthBeat Weekly** feature series. View the full series.