

## Diverse groups coalesce to protect environment

**By Richard Cizik and Trip Van Noppen**

SEATTLE-

"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves," says Proverbs 31:8. Scripture and teachings throughout the world call us to act with caring and justice for the vulnerable. Today "vulnerable" includes the Earth -- and people, plants and animals threatened by climate change.

Concern for this threat has led diverse groups and people to join hands for the common good. We are one example of such cooperation: evangelical and conservation leaders coming together. Protecting people and biological diversity from the effects of climate change is becoming an increasing priority for both our communities.

Along with ethical reasons, we are moved to act by the world's wonder: Mountain goats that scale heights impossible for others. White beluga whales dubbed "sea canaries" because their songs travel for miles and make boat hulls vibrate. Tiny monarch butterflies that journey 2,000 miles every winter in search of a few mountaintops in the forests of Mexico. Sugar maples that grace the fall with their vibrant colors. How fortunate we are to have a world with such marvels. How important it is to leave this for our children.

Another awe-inspiring part of our world is the dedication and resourcefulness of people who care about each other and the environment. With their commitment, we can reduce greenhouse gas emissions and identify adaptations to help humans and wildlife hurt by global warming.

Each of our traditions provides ways to fulfill this commitment as we speak up for others. In the world of faith, we spread the word about Bible-based and moral obligations to care for creation. Then we roll up our sleeves and engage in service for God's Earth. And at times we raise our voices for acting as a community through public policy.

In conservation law, we use the power of the courts to ensure a voice for people, places and species that need protective laws: People, from Inuit in Alaska with towns eroded by rising seas, to salmon fishermen in Washington who stand to lose their livelihoods, are vulnerable to global warming. So are tiny "rock rabbit" pikas covered year-round with heavy fur that can die quickly when temperatures climb above 75 degrees.

Mountain goats losing forage as less snow allows more trees to colonize the meadows on which they depend. Polar bears that struggle with loss of sea ice needed for hunting and exhaust themselves swimming long distances to land. These, and many more, need our help through both individual steps and action we take together under our nation's laws. And when we protect the web of life, we also protect ourselves.

Science is telling us we dare not wait. In its acceptance of the Nobel Peace Prize in December 2007, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change noted that global warming jeopardizes people's access to food and clean water; poses health threats due to extreme weather, malnutrition, higher ozone levels and changes in infectious disease patterns; and prompts major migrations.

The IPCC also has found that 20 to 30 percent of animal and plant species could be at an increased risk of extinction, with up to 60 percent species loss in some areas, if global warming continues as predicted.

And, finally, the Environmental Protection Agency last week released a scientific report stating that climate change will pose "substantial" threats to human health. It predicts extremely hot periods (heat waves), more powerful hurricanes, shrinking water in the West, and increased spread of diseases contracted through food and water. The poor, young, elderly and those in inner cities will be most at risk.

Thus, people in the faith, science, conservation, artistic and other communities are coming together now to make a difference. Examples mentioned above are taken from a new exhibit designed by these communities, "Irreplaceable: Wildlife in a Warming World," that just opened at the Burke Museum.

Washington is also fortunate to have people working to find solutions to climate change and its impacts, such as local sponsors of "Irreplaceable": Earthjustice, Earth Ministry, People for Puget Sound, Restoring Eden, Save Our Wild Salmon and the Woodland Park Zoo.

Climate change calls us to be innovative, courageous and compassionate. Inspired by our beliefs, informed by science, and using our intellect, we can answer this call to care.