



The **GREEN STEPS ASSOCIATION** is a new non-profit organization touting the benefits of sustainability in the outdoor industry.



a **S**

T

E P



in the right direction

BY PRIDE WRIGHT



Outdoor Retailer Winter Market 2005 in Salt Lake City will mark the debut of the Green Steps Association, a non-profit organization established for the purpose of promoting principles of sustainability within the outdoor industry.

It's hardly a revelation that the "outdoor industry" requires not only a healthy planet, but also a constituency that values wild places and an association to promote both. These facts alone should provide ample incentive to pursue sustainable business practices. The industry has a rich and colorful heritage of maverick leadership and technical innovation, and also happens to be densely populated with committed environmental activists. This combination has produced some outstanding outcomes for the environment. In fact, without the outdoor industry, there would likely be no PET-made fleece and little or no market for organic cotton. While we've come a great distance, the more compelling story is the road yet to be traveled—and it is one that Green Steps hopes to help pave.

"As an industry, we may be a bit ahead of the curve on the environment," said Scott Leonard of Indigenous Designs, a driving force behind Green Steps. "But we've only begun to scratch the surface in terms of what can be done."

There's a growing sense among many in the industry that it's time to move beyond corporate giving and a handful of marquee achievements to take a more comprehensive and systemic look at the entirety of the way we do business. On the environmental side, this includes thinking twice about everything from all materials and energy types used in the manufacturing process, to the products used to clean the employee bathroom. And then there is the social side of the equation, which can encompass everything from community service to paternity leave for staff to working conditions in Third-World factories. A surprising number of companies, large and small, are taking up this challenge, and the solutions are as varied as the products produced by those companies. The common denominator? A willingness to embrace a completely new way of thinking about business. In time, the end results could be revolutionary. These companies and their stories are the focal point of the new Green Steps Resource Guide, which will be distributed at Outdoor Retailer Winter Market.

Any model of sustainability must succeed not only environmentally and socially, but also economically. While our industry's interaction with the environment provides its members the incentive to lead, it's the values we share with our customers that place us in a unique position to do so. But does the American consumer at large care about how the products they buy come to market? Will socially and environmentally progressive companies meet with financial reward?



15 years of hard work, no pay, boundless enthusiasm, and real dollars to save our last wild places...Thanks Conservation Alliance!

Photo: Ian McAllister

Since we began in 1989, The Conservation Alliance has helped protect 38 million acres of wildlands, stopped or removed 25 dams, preserved access to over 16,000 miles of waterways, and kept world-class climbing areas open to the public. So when you buy from our member companies, you also purchase a piece of the future.

Member Companies

ADS Ventures
American Alpine Institute, Ltd.
Anker Climbing Equipment, LLC
Backpacker Magazine
Backpacker's Pantry, Inc.
Belinda Sanda Sales
Bernzott Capital Advisors
Buffalo Peak Outfitters
CGPR
Campmor, Inc.
Cascade Designs
Chaco Sandals
Columbia Sportswear Co.
Dansko
Eagle Creek Travel Gear
Earth Games
Eastern Mountain Sports, Inc.
The Eleven
Eureka!
Fendler Communications
Flamand Sports
The Forest Group
Frontier Group, Inc.
Functional Design
Galyan's
GoLite
Grabber Performance Group
Grand Union Trading Co., Ltd.
Gregory Mountain Products
HiTec
Highgear USA
Hooked on the Outdoors
JanSport
Jimmy Chin Photography
Keen Footwear
Kelty, Inc.
Kirwin Communications
Lotus Designs
Lowe Alpine Systems
Lowepro
Martin Grabijas
Merrell Footwear
Montrail
Mountain Hardware, Inc.
Mountain Lake Marketing, LTD
Mountainsmith
National Geographic Maps
Nike ACG
The North Face
Outdoor Retailer
Paddler Magazine
Pale Morning Media
Patagonia, Inc.
Pearl Izumi
Perception, Inc.
prAna
RJ Guiney Associates
Recreational Equipment, Inc.
Ridgeway Productions
Riverside Design
SNEWS/GearTrends.com
Shaman's International
Sierra Designs
Sorensen's Resort
Stanwood & Partners
Summit Coffee, Inc.
Thor-Lo Sock Company
Thule, Inc.
The Timberland Company
The Whiting Group
WrightSock
W.L. Gore & Associates, Inc.
Yakima
Zephyr Adventures



The Conservation Alliance

Outdoor business giving back to the outdoors.

The Conservation Alliance is a group of companies working to save the natural environment. If you are an outdoor-related business, sales rep or manufacturer, and would like to join the Alliance, please call Casey Sheahan, President of Kelty at 303-262-3322.

www.conservationalliance.com



Does capital investment in the pursuit of sustainability make good business sense? Recent studies suggest not only that social responsibility and profitability can coexist, but also that there appears to be an interrelation of cause and effect in the relationship.

That's not to say the process won't be challenging. While the benefits of economic consolidation and giantism (cheap goods) are concrete to the consumer, the often devastating social and environmental consequences are largely invisible. That is to say that for Americans, the consequences most often seem to be happening somewhere else and to someone else. Fortunately, there are some exceptions emerging to this paradigm.

AN AWAKENING

The explosive growth in sales of organic foods and, to a lesser extent, the accompanying interest in and awareness of the agricultural practices and other systems that bring food products to market, seems to have paved the way for a broader understanding of the cause-and-effect relationships set in motion by our patterns of consumption. To what extent these consumers will transfer what they've absorbed about these systems and processes to non-food products is an open question. To date, it would be dishonest to suggest the organic cotton label is driving sales at the retail level. The dramatic growth in organic cotton over the past several years has been fueled not by consumer demand, but largely by the stubborn determination of one individual—Yvon Chouinard of Patagonia. (Many others in the industry are now picking up the cause.) There is, however, much evidence to suggest more retailers are seeking out organic cotton, and are responding well to other fabrics and products with progressive environ-

mental or social stories.

There is no shortage of such stories in the outdoor industry. Yet it can be difficult for the retailer to determine which sustainability efforts are truly productive and which are largely symbolic or even overtly misleading. Part of the program for the new Green Steps Association is to serve as a clearinghouse for credible information so retailers can shop with confidence on behalf of their customers.

While most of the sustainability buzz in the industry to date has focused on the manufacturing side, the role of the retailer in this progression toward sustainability will be pivotal. Retailers are not only positioned to support those companies doing excellent work on behalf of the planet, they are also the industry's interface with the buying public. In time, informed retailers will translate into informed consumers. And, of course, retailers have their own unique sustainability issues, which will be addressed in the Green Steps Resource Guide available at the trade show.

With the help and cooperation of Kenji Haroutunian and others at VNU (producers of Outdoor Retailer Winter Market), some baby Green Steps have been taken in relation to the trade show itself, and many others are in the works. The show's annual industry party is featuring organic food and drink, along with recycled paper products. Even the entertainment is environmentally friendly, as the industry welcomes award-winning Austin, Texas, recording artist Patrice Pike and her band. (Pike doubles as an uber-activist.) There is also a movement afoot to run the entire performance on renewable energy, although it isn't yet clear if this can be accomplished for the 2005 show. (Those who have seen her perform would contend the show could run on the energy of Pike, but that's another story.) Of course, this represents a tiny fraction of what must be done to transform a trade show the magnitude of Outdoor Retailer into a green event, but the players are engaged—it's a worthwhile beginning.

Every mindful step in the direction of sustainability, however small, amounts to a priceless act of compassion. Whether it's an innovative new dyeing process or a roll of recycled toilet paper, it's a shot in the arm for an emerging paradigm.


LOOK

for the Green Steps Resource Guide at Winter Market!

IS ORGANIC COTTON THE MOST LAND- AND water-efficient fabric currently on the market? What about soy, hemp, bamboo, wool and viscose? Can fabrics other than fleece be made from recycled plastic bottles? Isn't there a more environmentally friendly way to print on a T-shirt? What does "fair trade" mean within the outdoor industry? Is there a textile business left in the United States, and should we care?

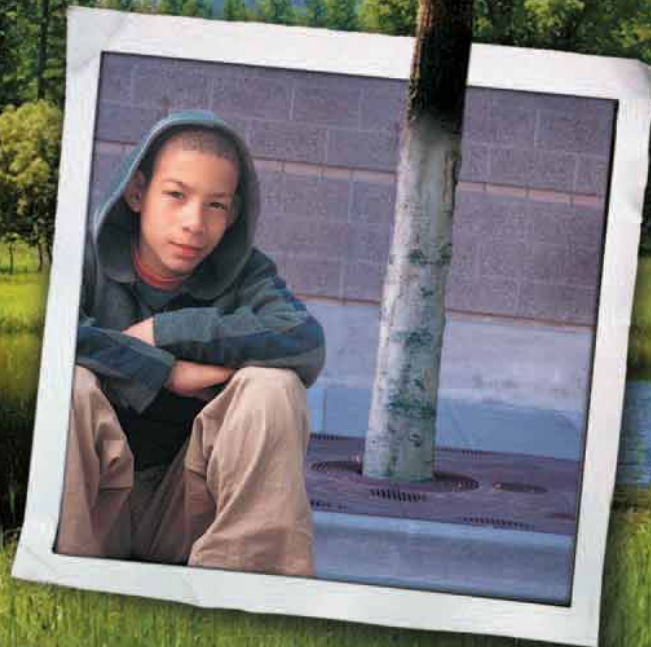
These and many other questions will be addressed in the new Green Steps Resource Guide available at Outdoor Retailer Winter Market. In addition, the guide will take a peek behind the curtain at six companies learning to think differently about every aspect of the way they do business. It will tell great stories, ask tough questions, and provide valuable tools and resources for those ready to go to the next level. Not going to Winter Market, or just reading this and missed picking up a copy while you were at the show? No worries, just visit www.greensteps.org to read the content online and find out more information as the project develops. Or for your own copy, email pride@harbingerproject.com with the words "Green Steps Resource Guide" in the subject line.

Pride Scott Wright is an activist, journalist, publisher and outdoor retailer, roughly in that order. His award-winning alternative rag, The Harbinger, is now in its 13th year. For more, go to www.harbingerproject.com.

The Green Steps Association invites all to continue this conversation at Winter Market in Salt Lake City. Stop by Booth 001, pick up a copy of the Resource Guide, enjoy some organic goodness at the industry party, attend one of the forums, share thoughts and ideas, and consider getting involved. 

» To download extra copies of this magazine or to give us feedback, go to GearTrends.com.





Help make a true connection from city streets to starry skies.

Sometimes the only way to change a teens perspective is by providing an entirely new one. With your help, Big City Mountaineers can provide life-changing one-to-one mentoring experiences in wilderness settings for urban youth. Help lay the same foundation for them that has been so instrumental in your life. To learn how you can help, go to:

www.urbanyouthexpeditions.org or call: 303-271-9200



Special thanks to JanSport, GearTrends Magazine and Jeff Engel