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Perspectives on Conservation and Sustainability: a New Paradigm or Two

Peter E. Black¹

ABSTRACT

It has taken a century to define and refine, extend and put into economic terms the term *conservation* of natural resources. Today, the term is used rather loosely and is important in political campaigns, but not necessarily in elected officials' list of accomplishments; historically that has not always been true. Confusion over the term conservation reflects misunderstanding of *wise use* and *preservation*, both often used as synonyms for *conservation*. Conflict over conservation of natural resources ranges from small disagreements over property rights and language at the local level to inter-jurisdictional legal clashes and wars over ownership, access, and allocation of scarce resources. Further, there is a seemingly universal pattern to resource distribution that we need to emulate in our conservation efforts. It is in this fundamental context that the future of resource-using humans on planet Earth must be seriously considered. In the final analysis, conservation is the cornerstone of sustainability.

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