



**Part of the Solution or Causing
Pollution? Changes in Earth Day
Practices at Bowling Green State
University in the Late 20th Century**

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ABSTRACT

On April 22, 1970, people across the United States staged the largest environmental gathering in history. The first Earth Day was celebrated through teach-ins, workshops, and marches. This project uses evidence from the university newspaper and archives are used to narrate changes in BGSU Earth Day. Bowling Green State University is a public university in Bowling Green, Ohio. In 1970 the university joined hundreds of universities and colleges nationwide to celebrate the first Earth Day. By examining Earth Day activities by decade, this paper concludes that BGSU has transitioned away from an institutional activist approach and toward a program of environmental celebrations. Drawing on performance theory, it also concludes that BGSU's post-1990 Earth Day practices are tradition oriented with no lasting impact or intent beyond demonstrating that BGSU is environmentally conscious. The project challenges the scholarship that rural universities are less environmentally conscious than urban universities, localizes scholarship on environmentalism, and reveals BGSU's previously unexamined relationship to environmentalism.¹

Introduction

Bob Stein woke up on the morning of April 1, 1970, in his dorm room at Bowling Green State University (BGSU) in Bowling Green, Ohio. Getting ready for class, Bob walked his shower bag down the hallway to the shared men's shower room. He was rudely awoken by a freezing cold shower. Though his peers would aggressively turn the shower knobs hoping for a speck of warm

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water, Bob knew it was no use to try. As the student chair of the BGSU Environmental Teach-in Committee he was well aware of the kick-off event to the first Earth Day at the university. The Committee had worked with the heating plant to shut off hot water, heat, and any way to warm up food. It was an aggressive awakening for students, meant to highlight the “drastic changes that can be caused by tampering with the living environment.”¹ This was the start of a 22-day teach-in on the environment, organized by the Environmental Teach-in Committee and co-hosted by BGSU students, professors, and Bowling Green High School students. Throughout the month of April 1970, and particularly on April 22, people across the United States staged the largest collection of environmental gatherings in history, celebrated across communities, college campuses, K-12 schools, and more. The first Earth Day was celebrated by communities in many ways. Universities were often sites of teach-ins, workshops, and marches. Cities hosted parades, speakers, and loud protests against corporate polluters. Earth Day 1970 was arguably the start of the modern environmental movement.²

Adam Rome details the lead-up and implementation of the first Earth Day in *The Genius of Earth Day*, arguing that Earth Day’s most important impact was the creation of a generation of environmental activists. Environmental activism and education on college campuses began in 1970 with Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson’s proposal for nationwide teach-ins. Nelson’s intention was to educate the public on environmental problems. These teach-ins were envisioned to be ground-up, led by a variety of community actors. Nelson organized several offices to serve as communication hubs for media relations but, despite common misconceptions, his offices did not create a national curriculum for environmental education.³ He never envisioned Earth Day to be an annual event in public and educational spheres. Earth Day was intended to be a singular event year to accomplish his task of fostering environmental awareness and conversations about environmental problems and solutions.

Since 1970, Earth Day activities across university campuses have shifted away from university-wide teach-ins and the original goals of environmental education and toward celebration and

appreciation of nature, often via social media. Bowling Green State University was no exception to these changes. This project asks how BGSU changed its celebration of Earth Day from 1970 through the present by examining campus events and activities by decade. It concludes that BGSU has transitioned away from an institutional, education-based activism approach toward an under-funded program of environmental celebrations and community clean ups. Examining the evolution of Earth Day celebrations from 1970 to 2020 at Bowling Green State University and the city of Bowling Green, this paper broadens the existing literature in time and space.⁴ It reveals the significant role of technology in fostering a culture of easily accessible information, changing Earth Day to social media campaigns and surface-level celebrations of nature.

Most of the historiography of Earth Day is a very surface-level understanding of the event as launching the modern environmental movement. When Earth Day is discussed in a work of environmental history, it is often without regard to the long-term implications or changes in Earth Day celebrations over time. For example, Richard Sellars, in *Crabgrass Crucible: Suburban Nature and the Rise of Environmentalism in Twentieth Century America*, briefly describes how Earth Day was the start of modern environmentalism. Sellars does not discuss Earth Day further than that.⁵ There is a short nod in Andrew Kirk's *Counterculture Green* about Earth Day inspiring an increase in membership in environmental organizations and lobbying.⁶ In *Bulldozers in the Countryside*, Adam Rome argues that Earth Day 1970 started a long history of ecological sciences and environmental studies programs at colleges and universities.⁷ The historiography on Earth Day and education-based activism is slim. Rome is the leading scholar, and his monograph *The Genius of Earth Day* the only publication, focused on the history of Earth Day.⁸ While Earth Day was only one part of the movement, historiography suggests it was a major launching point of the national environmental movement. Because it is such an influential moment, understanding Earth Day scholarship is necessary to place Bowling Green within the narrative of environmental education and activism.

A growing trend in environmental history is examining the participation of marginalized peoples in activism. Carolyn Finney

explores the long history of African Americans grappling with environmental change from slavery through the late-1900s.⁹ Around the time of first Earth Day the Black Panther Party led a public relations campaign about how exploitation of natural resources is exploitation of marginalized people. A commonly held belief that the environmental movement ignored the types of environmental issues plaguing marginalized communities inspired the beginning of an environmental justice movement in the 1980s. The environmental justice movement also has roots in Nathan Hare's seminal article stating that "the environmental crisis of whites already pales in comparison to that of blacks" because of the intense pollution African American communities experience(d).¹⁰ As a result, some African Americans participated in the first Earth Day and modern environmental movement in different ways than white Americans.¹¹ While this paper secondarily aims to discover the participation of marginalized people in Earth Day, there is so far little evidence of diversity among participants at BGSU.

The present research in university and local archives seeks to accomplish two main tasks in the paper: reconstruct the first Earth Day at BGSU and examine the changes in BGSU's Earth Day practices over time. Drawing upon these sources, the narrative that follows uses cultural and social theories to depict who organized, spoke, and participated in BGSU's Earth Day events from 1970 through the early twenty-first century. It also draws upon performance theory to describe how Earth Day remains a tradition with no strong environmental values. This research is heavily based on local archival research due to the limited secondary sources of Earth Day history in Ohio.¹² The paper seeks to address the following questions: What events, speakers, and/or activities were planned for BGSU's Earth Day celebrations? Who organized BGSU's Earth Day? Was Earth Day organized by students, faculty, organizations, or departments? From 1970-2020, how do the answers to these questions change?

This paper examines its primary sources through the lens of performance theory. Performance theory is the notion that people's presentations of themselves and interactions with others denote certain cultural and social orientations. The roots of

performance theory lie in Erving Goffman's 1956 work arguing that everyday actions are performances of an individual's values, perceptions, and desires to present themselves to others in their desired lights.¹³ The field has expanded to include analysis of theater performance, history, literature, and more.¹⁴ Earth Day is a performance because its value is derived from the interactions between people at events. Its significance is created by the organizers in their decisions of which speakers to invite and which environmental issues to represent.

There are two main arguments presented in this paper. First, it argues that Earth Day has continued to become a tradition and it is now a practice of performance rather than having an impact on life-long environmental activism of participants. It secondarily argues that technology had a major impact on the shifting patterns of Earth Day at BGSU. The university had multiple evolutions in how it celebrated Earth Day. Shifts often occurred even within a few years, suggesting that leadership in student organizations may have played a role in changing priorities. However, the major shifts occurred with the inclusion of technology in classrooms and daily life. Once communications technology became a widespread educational tool, Earth Day was no longer necessary to create informed citizens. The internet, social media, and virtual activities replaced the need for teach-ins and live speakers to keep students updated on relevant scholarship and activism. Even before the inclusion of technology into higher education spaces, the practice of Earth Day continued because of the power of the first teach-ins. Subsequent Earth Days were never as well-attended or supported as the first teach-ins in creating large-scale environmental change at BGSU, yet it remains part of the university and environmentalism cultures because of its use as performance tradition.

BGSU Earth Day 1970s

Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson had always been engaged in environmental issues, but the late-1960s environmentalism and Vietnam War teach-ins inspired him to launch a campaign for a nationwide day of environmental education.¹⁵ Nelson organized Environmental Teach-In, Inc. when

he could not do all the work himself. He hired several young people to staff the office in DC, which was intended as a communication hub; Environmental Teach-In, Inc. was not intended to be the sole party responsible for Earth Day. The teach-ins were meant to be organized by people living in the communities hosting the event. Earth Day was as successful as it was because of Nelson's vision of grassroots organization around the theme of hope for the future health of the environment.¹⁶

Several hundred universities celebrated the first Earth Day after Gaylord Nelson proposed a nationwide teach-in for the environment. Communities, non-profits, and K-12 schools also celebrated. Some communities planned marches and loud protests against corporate polluters. Others hosted quiet speakers and concerts in parks or community centers. While each community had its unique set of activities, all centered around educating the public on environmental problems.

BGSU celebrated Earth Day in ways similar to many other universities. The University of Michigan held a multi-day teach-in in March of 1970, featuring Michigan Governor William Milliken, environmentalist Barry Commoner, Senator Gaylord Nelson, and more.¹⁷ The University of Alaska at Fairbanks hosted a federal geologist, US Secretary of the Interior Walter Hickel, and a Stanford University environmentalist to share a panel on the contemporary pipeline debate. Pennsylvania State University held weekly seminars in early 1970 in addition to a music festival, films, exhibits, speakers, games, panels, and more.¹⁸ The BGSU Environmental Teach-in Committee was instrumental in organizing twenty-two days of educational, recreational, and leisurely activities for the university community. They hosted speakers, concerts, interdisciplinary panels, documentary screenings, waste treatment facility tours, and debates.¹⁹ Speakers represented nearly every area of society, including industry, environmental sciences, politicians, students, and faculty.²⁰ The 22-day speaker series began with a standing-room only presentation by Ralph Nader, consumer activist and lobbyist.²¹ Dr. W.D. Yerkes discussed problems of water pollution, Dr. Arnold W. Reitze promoted natural resource management, Murray Bockhin spoke about environmental politics, and more.²² While the teach-in schedule

and campus newspaper did not include details about each of the presentations, Dr. Yerkes' discussion was likely of particular importance following the 1969 burning of the Cuyahoga River.²³ The Earth Day teach-in concluded with population scientist and author Dr. Paul Ehrlich discussing population growth, agriculture, family planning, migration, and the role of science in environmental protection.²⁴ The diversity of speakers represented the commitment of BGSU and the support of the national Environmental Teach-In, Inc. to create broad, relevant, and well-represented Earth Day programs.

In contrast to the active first Earth Day at BGSU, the remaining nine years of the decade were relatively non-eventful. *BG News* only contains articles about three other years of activities.²⁵ In 1971, the university was active with a radio show, a trash clean-up, tree planting, an Earth Day dance, a march, and several documentaries.²⁶ This was also the last year the proposed Earth Day logo was used in the university newspaper. The university also hosted a clean-up in 1978, but the exact organizing party is not clear.²⁷ In addition, Jerry Rubin, counterculture activist and famous anti-Vietnam War leader, spoke on April 25, 1979, though it is unclear whether his visit was connected to Earth Day.²⁸

While there was little campus media coverage about BGSU's Earth Day in the 1970s, this does not mean the university did nothing. Activities may have been small-scale, friend-group-size celebrations or teach-ins. In some years, such as the 1972 Help Us Recycle Trash (HURT), Inc. city trash drive, large events involving BGSU students may have occurred off campus and, thus, were not written about in the campus newspaper.²⁹ In addition, the *BG News* reporting staff or editorial staff changed from 1971 to 1972, thus perhaps the publication priorities of the newspaper to have changed. However, the decrease in Earth Day events after the early 1970s would not be an anomaly as Earth Day lost its novelty and the original infrastructure was not designed to host an annual event.

BGSU Earth Day 1980s

The decade following the first Earth Day demonstrates the legacy of the first environmental teach-ins in the creation of "eco-

infrastructure” to continue environmental conversations on college campuses.³⁰ One key eco-infrastructure at BGSU was the creation of the Environmental Interest Group (EIG/EAG), a student organization created to spread knowledge of environmental problems and foster engaged students.³¹ The key characteristic of 1980s Earth Day was student-sponsored activities centered on contemporarily relevant environmental issues. Compared to the 1970s, this decade was more active. There were more events, more speakers, and more diversity in subjects. Speakers were also more focused on the original purpose of Earth Day as education. While speakers were oriented to Nelson’s original intention, students viewed Earth Day as a time to celebrate the beauty and resources Earth provides for humans. Unfortunately, there was little coverage in the university newspaper about Earth Day events, further suggesting its lack of staying power.

The 1980s show a shift in BGSU students’ understanding of Earth Day as a time for celebration instead of starting life-long activism. “According to EIG, [Earth Day] is for celebrating the earth’s natural resources and making new energy goals.”³² While Rome argues that the first Earth Day created lifelong environmental activists at many universities, the 1980s activities suggest that Earth Day now lacked its lasting influence on young people.

Speakers in the early 1980s focused on political activism and politically relevant science. There were petitions against nuclear arms in 1982 and speakers from the energy industry, Green Peace, and the Ohio Public Interest Campaign.³³ Celebrations in 1986 continued this political activism. The featured speaker was Tom Murray, Democratic candidate for 5th Congressional District of Ohio, which includes the city of Bowling Green. He spoke about environmental policies and the relevance of environmental concerns to his candidacy and campaign.³⁴ As appropriate environmental policy decisions cannot be made without environmental science data, the 1984 Earth Day season addressed scientific concerns. It featured several local speakers: Steve Pollick, outdoor editor of *The Toledo Blade* newspaper; Rex Lower, BGSU biology professor; and Jane Forsythe, BGSU geology professor.³⁵ These speakers localized environmental problems, making Earth

Day relevant for BGSU students and their education. They also highlight the role of BGSU in fostering support for political activism by equipping students with science to support their efforts.

The last few years of the 1980s focused on animal conservation, taking BGSU activism to a national level. The inclusion of marine animal exhibits in the 1987 Earth Day educational fair was one way for EIG and the marine biology lab to reach beyond local environmental problems.³⁶ BGSU has a strong marine and aquatic biology program despite Ohio not being an ocean-touching state. Many students connect their work in marine biology to the freshwater ecosystems of the Great Lakes.³⁷ The Center for Environmental Programs and EIG also hosted a Nuclear Waste Symposium.³⁸ The Earth Day keynote speaker was Kathleen Blanchard, Canadian conservation scientist who studies the reintroduction of the Atlantic puffin.³⁹ EIG furthered the Earth Day political activism in 1988 with a petition to protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). They sponsored Jonathan Waterman, former mountaineer and ranger in Denali National Park and Rocky Mountains National Park, to speak about preservation and wildlife in ANWR.⁴⁰ This connected BGSU students to the national movement to protect ANWR from oil and gas development, an environmental issue that would circle back in twenty-first-century BGSU environmental studies courses.

BGSU Earth Day 1990s

The 1990s were a particularly busy decade for Earth Day at BGSU. Besides hosting a total of twenty-one speakers, students organized a large variety of activities for their peers and community members. This was the decade with the largest number of years with concerts and outdoor educational displays in front of the student union at the busiest pedestrian crossing point of the campus. There was also at least one speaker every year of the decade, something that did not happen in any other decade. There were new organizing groups and departments on campus. Speakers represented all categories of academia, politics, industry, and more.

The depth and breadth of BGSU Earth Day matched the national environmentalism trends as the 1990s were a busy time

for environmental decision making. The decade started with the United Nations first report on global climate change, recommending a reduction in global CO₂ emissions. The Earth Summit in Brazil was held in 1992, increasing awareness and global collaboration in environmental technology, forest preservation, climate change, and biological diversity. In 1994, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published its first report on the danger of increasing greenhouse gas concentrations.⁴¹ In 1995, after an extended period of scientific study, native wolves were reintroduced to Yellowstone National Park. The Kyoto Protocol to reduce global carbon dioxide emissions was adopted in 1997, though the US Congress never ratified the international agreement.⁴²

Nationally, Earth Day grew beyond the previous two decades as the twentieth anniversary approached. Universities renewed their interests in environmental education and activism by hosting large gatherings reminiscent of the 1970 teach-ins.⁴³ However, the decade at BGSU started short of its potential with the twenty-year anniversary of Earth Day much smaller than anticipated. The Environmental Interest Group (EIG) was responsible for organizing a nationally renowned speaker, the University Bookstore for organizing an eco-book fair, and the Cousteau Society for organizing additional lectures.⁴⁴ EIG hosted the former Secretary of Interior, Stewart Udall, as the featured speaker.⁴⁵ Udall was a prominent figure in the federal government advocating for the protection of public lands. He was most known for his work in expanding and managing new units of the National Park Service. Beyond the speaker and historic BGSU eco-fair, 1990 did not hold any additional significance.

The momentum and excitement of the twentieth anniversary of Earth Day in 1990 snowballed as the decade pushed onward, though Earth Day looked and felt differently than the 1970 teach-ins. In 1992 the university shifted in its Earth Day practices, both in scope and focus. The University Activities Organization sponsored activist Bob Reiss, consultant for the Rainforest Alliance, to speak on campus.⁴⁶ This was the first and last time a BGSU student organization not directly tied to environmental activism organized a campus Earth Day event. That same year EAG hosted a

residence hall trash clean-up. Several environmental studies faculty members credited technology for the shift in the intention and impact of Earth Day.⁴⁷ Technology made information more accessible than ever before. While students and the public may have been concerned about environmental issues, technology made mass education unnecessary and redundant. Time was apparently best spent together cleaning or celebrating unique environments rather than learning about a variety of topics from a diverse array of speakers.

Despite technology making mass teach-ins redundant, the remaining years of the 1990s were active on campus. The first speaker series of the decade in 1991 was “a global warming teleconference with the Mendeleev School of Technology in Moscow.”⁴⁸ This workshop featured several speakers and was a collaborative effort. It also demonstrates the power of technology in connecting people across space for environmental conversations. With technology as the “bad actors” in so many environmental discussions, BGSU utilized technology in a meaningful and productive manner to show students the power and potential in international climate work. In 1993, EAG hosted Michigan-based student activist Kim Maxwell, the first featured BGSU Earth Day speaker who was a student.⁴⁹ EAG hosted the highest number of speakers ever in BGSU Earth Day history in 1994: Carl Holmberg, BGSU Popular Culture professor; Anthony Thiebaut, Bowling Green cooperative farmer; James Ludwig, founder of The Scientific, Ecological Research, and Environmental Education (SERE) Group consulting firm, which focused on environmental toxins and pollutants in the Great Lakes region; and a six-person panel on environmental justice. The panel was also the first time a single student organized an Earth Day event.⁵⁰ There were six years in the 1990s with Earth Day concerts, two years with clean-ups (including 1992), and eight years with educational displays. Besides EAG, the University Bookstore, and University Activities Organization, the Undergraduate Student Government sponsored events.

The twenty-fifth Earth Day anniversary celebrations were the most active, widely organized in BGSU’s history.⁵¹ Earth Week started with a double-speaker presentation with Dr. Paula

Gonzalez, founder of Earth Connection in Cincinnati, and BGSU professor Dr. Steve Steele, population growth researcher. EAG and the faculty Center for Environmental Programs co-sponsored an educational fair and keynote speaker Howie Wolke, co-founder of Earth First!, who spoke on wilderness preservation. In this way, the university once again connected students to national environmental issues. Students could also attend an Earth Day concert, clean-up of Toledo's Buckeye Basin wetlands, and a documentary of the mining of national forests.⁵² With the widest variety of activities, university students learned about national land preservation. They expanded their understanding of Northwest Ohio's connection to similar national problems by directly experiencing local land pollution via the wetland clean-up and large-scale problems via speakers and documentaries.

Beyond the twenty-fifth anniversary, Earth Day keynote speakers the second half of the 1990s all connected the university to national environmental politics. In 1996, EAG hosted speaker Dr. David Mech who connected academic research on trophic systems to the reintroduction of wolves on Isle Royale National Park.⁵³ The following year students attended an Earth Day presentation of Jerry Brown. Brown was an attorney, politician, and the Democratic candidate for California governor.⁵⁴ The event was co-hosted by EAG with funding from BGSU senior Political Science student Paul Gessing.⁵⁵ Activists Dave Foreman and Winona LaDuke were Earth Day speakers the following two years, continuing the 90s trends of environmental politics.⁵⁶ Earth Day had finally become a time to connect students to larger environmental problems. However, much of Earth Day remained surface-level and routine.

The 1990s were the first time it is apparent that Earth Day was tradition alone. An educational fair and one speaker in most years suggest that organizers were more concerned with portraying a traditional Earth Day celebration than with having an impactful experience. Except for Paul Gessing, no individual students are identified with the organizing committee. This suggests that Earth Day has no metaphorical face, thus, no students claimed it as a moment of pride or as vital to their education. The university was barely involved in the 1990s organization of Earth Day; all responsibility was left on EAG. This is further evidence that

Earth Day was not institutionally valued. Because “cultural performance and social drama seem to offer an insight into how a society negotiates change,” the maintenance of traditional Earth Day practices may explain the reluctance of BGSU to change its environmental practices.⁵⁷ It may further explain why BGSU administration, departments, and faculty groups did not participate in Earth Day beyond the major anniversaries.

BGSU Earth Day 2000-2010s

Earth Day again lost its momentum in the inter-anniversary years at BGSU. While Earth Day always seemed to happen, it did not garner media attention or feature the depth of activities in previous years. Unfortunately, most of the activities also lost the student organization component. With the national rise of university sustainability offices, BGSU’s Earth Day organizing moved to the Office of Campus Sustainability in the twenty-first century.⁵⁸ In 2018, one of the “Office of Sustainability interns did most of the [Earth Day eco-fair’s] planning.”⁵⁹ Several years prior to 2018 were organized by the Office of Campus Sustainability director and/or individual student interns. While EAG was still involved in Earth Day, their role mostly became one of presence at the eco-fair events, not as the main organizer. They no longer planned speakers or activities beyond their regular weekly meetings. Perhaps this explains why students and the university newspaper expressed less interest in Earth Day: the student role was minimized with the lack of student committees organizing the events.

As Earth Day began to lose its institutional value, there were a few active years in the early twenty-first century. Students organized a documentary screening, a panel, and a recycling clean-up in 2008, but the topics were limited. Mike Tamor, fuel cell researcher at Ford Motor Company, was the featured speaker.⁶⁰ He was the only speaker that year, demonstrating that BGSU was still not committed to hosting diverse interests and perspectives on Earth Day. There were two weeks of events in 2012, including a restore event of donating used clothing and items, a live tree giveaway, music, artwork, tree plantings, campus service events, and documentary showings. The campus Outdoor Programs co-

sponsored a park clean-up event with the city naturalists to remove invasive species.⁶¹ Similar events happened in 2017, though the advertising in the *BG News* and campus attention to Earth Day decreased. These pockets of interest do not coincide with an anniversary as the 1990s did, so it is unclear why BGSU students were active these years.

National environmental events may again have influenced the sporadic rise in Earth Day interest, though the relevant environmental problems did not feature in BGSU Earth Day rhetoric or planning. The rise of fracking may have influenced 2012 activities but no campus event focused specifically on energy or natural gas. In the fall of 2016, there were campus-wide peace protests against the development of a natural gas pipeline just north of the city, but these were not directly connected to Earth Day in 2017.⁶² The rise of activities in 2017 may have coincided with contemporary environmental politics, particularly the rollback of environmental policies and EPA power by the Trump administration. If this were the case, however, students would have demonstrated their interest in environmental politics by hosting events and presentations about policies and public lands. While it is possible that contemporary environmental events influenced BGSU student participation and planning of Earth Day in the early twenty-first century, there was not as much of an intense relationship between Earth Day activities and relevant environmental problems as there was in the 1990s and previous decades.

BGSU Earth Day 2020

Earth Day in April 2020 was a particularly unique case demonstrating the benefits of technology to environmental activism. In mid-March, BGSU locked its physical doors and transitioned to virtual learning for the next year and a half. The COVID-19 global pandemic shut down many universities after March spring breaks. Due to the pandemic, Earth Day in 2020 was largely a virtual event across the United States.

The BGSU Office of Campus Sustainability hosted several virtual Earth Day activities in April. The activities were created, organized, and managed by Dr. Nick Hennessy, director of Campus Sustainability; undergraduate interns Adam Smith and Jacob Kern;

and graduate intern Christina Deehr. They created a virtual bingo card that students could complete on their path to living a more sustainable lifestyle. Such activities included creatively reusing a piece of trash, nature journaling, going electricity free, and biking for transportation. They encouraged participation via a social media campaign and the hashtag #BGSUsustainability.⁶³ Campus Sustainability also hosted a social media competition to encourage green behaviors. Using the same hashtag, they recorded student names of participants doing sustainable actions such as those on the bingo card. Of those students, they randomly selected one each week to win a raffle prize. Intended to raise awareness of how easy it is to live sustainably, unfortunately the Campus Sustainability social media campaigns had low participation.⁶⁴ The explanation for low participation can only be speculated but it was possible that the new societal changes at the beginning of a stressful pandemic distracted BGSU from environmental activism.

In addition, Campus Sustainability originally had a prominent speaker planned, which would have demonstrated the university's commitment to the public good. Ohio Governor Mike DeWine was supposed to celebrate the 50th Earth Day at BGSU but COVID-19 made it difficult or impossible to gather in one space to hear people talk. Governor DeWine had prepared a speech on the H2OH program, a water quality initiative "to reduce harmful algal blooms, improve wastewater infrastructure, create wetlands and prevent lead contamination."⁶⁵ He was also supposed to feature BGSU researchers and their positive impact on water quality.

While Earth Day 2020 was not the most successful or well-visited day of environmental activism at BGSU, it would not have been possible without growing technology and social media. The activities at the very least kept students engaged with Campus Sustainability, even if it did not engage *more* students or attract *new* students to the sustainability movement.

Conclusion

The BGSU Environmental Teach-in Committee organized a robust set of activities in 1970 for community education. They invited speakers from around the nation, starting the twenty-two-day teach-in with a speech from Ralph Nader and culminating with

a standing-room-only presentation by Dr. Paul Ehrlich, one of the inspirations for environmental teach-ins. They engaged in direct activism by shutting off hot water and heat to campus dormitories. They featured the teach-in logo proposed, but never utilized nationally, by three students. The 1970 activities clearly mimicked those of other large universities, particularly those featured in Rome's Earth Day monograph.

From 1971 to 1989, the *BG News* frequently did not cover Earth Day activities. This may have been due to changing student staff, whether reporting/writing or editorial. As staff changed, priorities of reporting may have also changed, particularly if there were more pressing campus or nationally concerns. The newspaper frequently contained sections on national news, international events, and student athletics. These likely reflected the interests of the audience, mainly BGSU students. Thus, it can be implied that BGSU students had less of an interest in Earth Day as time went on, particularly in years when there was no major national environmental disaster.

The general trend from 1970-2020 in BGSU's Earth Day practices is one of increased student organization responsibility, fewer funded events, fewer speakers, and less of a focus on environmental education. As environmental studies professor Dr. Holly Myers stated in 2008, "Earth Day seems as if it is a part of the [university and environmentalism] culture, but [is no longer] a day for learning."⁶⁶ This declaration remains true through to 2020 Earth Day; Earth Day is a performance tradition, removed from its original context and intent, yet continued because of its power of community-building and cultural tradition. Technology was the most important driving force in changing activities. The internet made grassroots activism much more national, and Earth Day has been no exception. The internet also removed the need for an entire day dedicated to environmental education, as people have access to more information at the tips of their fingers every day. The purpose of Earth Day, to create informed and environmentally minded citizens, was no longer necessary because of technology. While the intention of the organizers of twenty-first-century Earth Days is not apparent, changes in how Earth Day was practiced at BGSU suggest a technologically exacerbated changing mindset of

the value of education to create informed citizens. Earth Day has become a tradition or a ritualistic practice, continued simply because it once created a vibrant community culture of environmental education.

This initial research can easily be expanded to address the changes in Earth Day more specifically. More time needs to be devoted to discovering the impact of Earth Day at an institutional level: what changes did the first Earth Day cause in infrastructure and the environmental ethic of university administrators? Oral history interviews should be conducted with BGSU's organizers to determine the legacy of Earth Day on individual lives and careers. While it does not appear that BGSU experienced its own post-Earth Day environmental justice movement, more time should be spent examining the role of race, class, and gender in campus environmental activism. As Earth Day was the launching point of unified, diversified environmental activism, more attention needs to be given to the ways it had sticking power at BGSU beyond the annual tradition of an April day or week for Earth Day.

¹ Lee Stephenson, "A Cold Shower Is Part of Ecological Teach-In," *BG News* (Bowling Green, OH), April 1, 1970.

² Other scholars situate the start of the movement with the earlier publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and the rise of urban housewives being concerned about air quality. Particularly, Richard Sellars discusses the origins of the environmental movement in suburbia in *Crabgrass Crucible: Suburban Nature and the Rise of Environmentalism in Twentieth Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012). Chad Montrie recognizes the cultural memory of Earth Day and/or *Silent Spring* as the origin of environmental activism, but he challenges that notion by situating working class people in early 20th-century environmental activism, see more: Chad Montrie, *A People's History of Environmentalism in the United States* (New York: Continuum, 2011). For more about modern environmentalism, see: Marco Armiero and Lise Sedrez, *A History of Environmentalism: Local Struggles, Global Histories* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014); Benjamin Kline, *First Along the River: A Brief History of the US Environmental Movement*, 4th ed. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2011).

³ Adam Rome, *The Genius of Earth Day: How a 1970 Teach-in Unexpectedly Made the First Green Generation* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 2013).

⁴ Personal conversation with Dr. Adam Rome, March 25, 2022. Dr. Rome shared with me that not a lot is known about Earth Day between 1971 and the rise of technology and social media. I strive to connect BGSU's way of celebrating Earth Day to other universities, but there is not a lot of evidence of national trends in Earth Day. Part of that comes from the lack of national organization of Earth Day.

There was no national curriculum of teach-ins at the university level, so each community celebrated according to the cultural norms or values existing in that space.

⁵ Richard Sellars, *Crabgrass Crucible*.

⁶ Andrew G. Kirk, *Counterculture Green: The Whole Earth Catalog and American Environmentalism* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2007): 100-101.

⁷ Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁸ Rome, *The Genius of Earth Day*; Adam Rome, "The Genius of Earth Day," *Environmental History* 15 (2010): 194-205.

⁹ Carolyn Finney, *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

¹⁰ Nathan Hare, "Black Ecology," *The Black Scholar* 1, no. 6 (1970): 2-8.

¹¹ Sylvia Hood Washington argues that African Americans interacted with the environmental movement primarily through the lens of public health, environmental (in)justice, and pollution. Sylvia Hood Washington, "Ball of Confusion: Public Health, African Americans, and Earth Day 1970," in *Natural Protest: Essays on the History of American Environmentalism*, 205-221, Michael Egan and Jeff Crane, eds. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009); other noteworthy studies in historic environmental justice include: Paul Mohai, "Black Environmentalism," *Social Science Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (1990): 744-765; Camille Dungy, *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry* (Atlanta: University of Georgia Press, 2009). For more recent studies of environmental justice in the 21st century, with a historic lens, see: Amanda J. Baugh, *God and the Green Divide: Religious Environmentalism in Black and White* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017); Joshua B. Guild, "Malik Rahim's Black Radical Environmentalism," *Southern Cultures* (2021): 40-65.

¹² Most of the Earth Day monographs or articles examine the first Earth Day celebrations at large public or private universities or big cities in the United States. A few images on the Ohio Statehouse website show twenty-first-century Earth Day tree plantings and fossil tours, but those took place in Columbus: Capitol Square Plaques, *Earth Day*, photograph, Ohio Statehouse, Apr 22, 2008, <https://www.ohiostatehouse.org/galleries/media/earth-day-135866>. For scholarship on Earth Day at large higher education institutions, see: Rome, *The Genius of Earth Day*.

¹³ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1956).

¹⁴ Simon Shepherd, *The Cambridge Introduction to Performance Theory*, Cambridge Introductions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Anthony Frost and Ralph Yarrow, *Improvisation in Drama, Theatre and Performance: History, Practice, Theory* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

¹⁵ Many scholars agree that the environmental movement started before Earth Day, though Nelson's vision, manifesting as Earth Day, may have been the start of environmentalism at the national scale. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* were two of the most influential texts in starting large-scale concern for nature. Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962); Paul Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968). For more about modern environmentalism, see Richard Sellars, *Crabgrass Crucible*; Adam Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*; J.E. de Steiguer, *The*

Origins of Modern Environmental Thought (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006); Keith Makato Woodhouse, *The Ecocentrists: A History of Radical Environmentalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Green Revolution: The American Environmental Movement, 1962-1992* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995).

¹⁶ Rome, *The Genius of Earth Day*, 58.

¹⁷ ENACT, "Teach-In on the Environment" Advertisement, *Michigan Daily* (Ann Arbor, Michigan), March 10, 1970.

¹⁸ Rome, *The Genius of Earth Day*, 135-140, 156.

¹⁹ "Teach-in schedule" bulletin in *BG News*; April 3, 7, 10, 14, 16, 17, & 22, 1970.

²⁰ Rome details several shared characteristics, including diversity of speakers, of Earth Day celebrations in chapter 4 of *The Genius of Earth Day*, stating "almost every Earth Day event featured talks by scientists" and two-thirds of Congress were absent speaking at Earth Day events. See more: Rome, *The Genius of Earth Day*, 165-209.

²¹ Lee Stephenson, "A Cold Shower is Part of."

²² "Teach-in schedule," *BG News* (Bowling Green, OH), April 1, 1970.

²³ This was not the first time the Cuyahoga River caught fire in the mid-twentieth century. It was a hot site for industrial waste pollution, considered one of the most polluted rivers in the twentieth century. The 1969 burning, however, was one major inspiration for national change in environmental policies. David Stradling and Richard Stradling, "Perceptions of the Burning River: Deindustrialization and Cleveland's Cuyahoga River," *Environmental History* 13, no. 3 (2008): 515-35.

²⁴ "Teach-in concludes with speaker-author," *BG News* (Bowling Green, OH), April 22, 1970.

²⁵ The *BG News* is the Bowling Green State University campus newspaper. Its first publication was in 1920. The newspaper is still published in 2022 in digital and print formats.

²⁶ "March Tops Eco-Week Plans," *BG News* (Bowling Green, OH), April 15, 1971; "Hamilton Emphasizes New Ecology Decisions," *BG News* (Bowling Green, OH), April 22, 1971; "Today 'Week Week,'" *BG News* (Bowling Green, OH), April 21, 1971; "70 Airs Third Show on 'World of Pollution,'" *BG News* (Bowling Green, OH), April 14, 1971.

²⁷ "Campus Clean-Up Day," *BG News* (Bowling Green, OH), April 20, 1978.

²⁸ "Yippies Founder to Speak," *BG News* (Bowling Green, OH), April 25, 1979.

²⁹ HURT, Inc. hosted an April trash drive downtown. At 600+ Bowling Green families, it was the largest trash drive in the eight months of the organization's existence. HURT, Inc. Trash Drive Advertisement, 1972, MS 1186 Ridge Street School Records 1940-2013, Box 10, Center for Archival Collections, Bowling Green State University.

³⁰ In describing the legacies of the first Earth Day Rome states that "the post-Earth Day eco-infrastructure gave the environmental movement staying power," *The Genius of Earth Day*, 210.

³¹ In the mid-1990s, the Environmental Interest Group student organization changed its name to Environmental Action Group to sponsor more activism on the BGSU Campus.

³² Karen Sandstrom, "Earth Day '80," *BG News* (Bowling Green, OH), April 22, 1980.

³³ Kim Lamoreaux, "Resource preservation: University celebrates Earth Day," *BG News* (Bowling Green, OH), April 22, 1982.

³⁴ Julie Fauble, "Policies Harm Environment, Speaker Says," *BG News* (Bowling Green, OH), April 24, 1986.

³⁵ Owen Fleming, "Environmental Group Seeks Awareness," *BG News* (Bowling Green, OH), April 25, 1984.

³⁶ Judy Ammel, "Earth Day Features Can Crunch Contest," *BG News* (Bowling Green, OH), April 23, 1987.

³⁷ This increase in marine and aquatic animal life does not appear to be a legacy of the 1969 Cuyahoga River fires. It is more likely connected to the Great Lakes Water Quality Board 1980 report on Great Lakes Water Quality and the positive momentum toward a healthier Lake Erie watershed. Great Lakes Water Quality Board, *1980 Report on Great Lakes Water Quality: Report to International Joint Commission*, Toronto, Ontario, Nov 12, 1980, <https://libguides.wvu.edu/c.php?g=418946&p=2855160> (accessed Sept 11, 2022); Thomas Hynes, "Lake Erie Ignited America's Environmental Movement, but Still Suffers from a New Wave of Pollution," *Waterkeeper Alliance*, Apr 23, 2021, <https://waterkeeper.org/news/lake-erie-ignited-americas-environmental-movement-but-still-suffers-from-a-new-wave-of-pollution/> (accessed Sept 11, 2022).

³⁸ Center for Environmental Programs, "Events," 1987, UA-0140 Center for Environmental Programs Collection, Box 1, Folder 4, Center for Archival Collections, Bowling Green State University.

³⁹ Center for Environmental Programs, "Earth Day: Dr. Kathleen Blanchard Puffins in Peril," 1987, UA-0140 Center for Environmental Programs Collection, Box 1, Folder 4, Center for Archival Collections, Bowling Green State University.

⁴⁰ While no quotes of Waterman's speech were included in the newspaper reports, it is likely that he discussed the decade-old Trans-Alaskan Pipeline, an environmental hazard that indigenous and activist groups continue to battle in the twenty-first century. "Earth Day 1988, 'Celebrate Your Earth,'" *BG News* (Bowling Green, OH), April 20, 1988.

⁴¹ J. T. Houghton, et al., eds, "Climate Change 1994," published for the International Panel on Climate Change (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁴² The Kyoto Protocol has a long history of complication, skepticism, and denial in the United States, starting as early as a few years after its signing. See more: Brian O'Neill and Michael Oppenheimer, "Dangerous Climate Impacts and the Kyoto Protocol," *Science: Policy Forum: Climate Change*, 296, June 2022: 1971-1972.

⁴³ Adam Rome, "The Genius of Earth Day," *The Great Courses on Audible*, 2020, Audible Originals.

⁴⁴ "Celebrate Earth Day," *BG News* (Bowling Green, OH), April 18, 1990.

⁴⁵ Jill Novak, "University Celebrates Earth Week," *BG News* (Bowling Green, OH), April 17, 1990; "The Ecophile," 1989, pUA-1736 The Ecophile Collection, Center for Archival Collections, Bowling Green State University.

⁴⁶ "If You Are Not Part of the Solution," *BG News* (Bowling Green, OH), April 20, 1992.

⁴⁷ Christy Vargo, "Faculty Comment on Activists," *BG News* (Bowling Green, OH), April 21, 1992.

⁴⁸ Greg Watson, "Activities Planned for BG Earth Day," *BG News* (Bowling Green, OH), April 17, 1991.

⁴⁹ Ginger Phillips, "Earth Day to Be Celebrated," *BG News* (Bowling Green, OH), April 21, 1993.

⁵⁰ Toriano Davis organized a panel focused on environmental justice, though panel participants are not identified in the archives or *BG News* articles. Robin Coe, "Earth Day Events Set to Take Place," *BG News* (Bowling Green, OH), April 20, 1994.

⁵¹ There are two potential, non-exclusive, explanations for why the 25th anniversary of Earth Day was so much larger than the 20th or 1st Earth Days. First, science and awareness of environmental issues boomed entering the 21st century. With previous Earth Days reflecting national environmental problems, this would be a probable explanation. Second, the 1990 celebration is sometimes cited as a poor model because some organizations tried to make Earth Day international with a curriculum and strategies of universal celebration. This was not the most successful plan because environmental problems were not universal.

⁵² "The Ecophile," October 1994, pUA-1736 The Ecophile Collection, Center for Archival Collections, Bowling Green State University; "The Ecophile," March 1995, pUA-1736 The Ecophile Collection, Center for Archival Collections, Bowling Green State University; *Monitor Magazine*, vol. 18, no. 38, April 17, 1995.

⁵³ "The Ecophile," March 1996, pUA-1736 The Ecophile Collection, Center for Archival Collections, Bowling Green State University.

⁵⁴ "2004 Review of Environmental Programs," 2004, UA-0014 Graduate College Records, Box 25, Center for Archival Collections, Bowling Green State University.

⁵⁵ Gessing continued working in the environmental sciences post-graduation as the president of the Rio Grande Foundation. "Staff," Rio Grande Foundation, <https://riograndefoundation.org/about/staff/>, accessed Mar 29, 2022.

⁵⁶ Dave Foreman was the co-founder of Earth First!, a radical environmental organization that focused on monkeywrenching and political change. Winona LaDuke is an Indigenous woman and environmental activist whose work focuses on White Earth Reservation and environmental politics. For more lists of Earth Day speakers, see: "2004 Review of Environmental Programs," 2004, UA-0014 Graduate College Records, Box 25, Center for Archival Collections, Bowling Green State University.

⁵⁷ Shepherd, 46.

⁵⁸ For a history of sustainability coordination and planning in higher education, see: Camille Washington-Ottombre, Garrett L. Washington, and Julie Newman, "Campus Sustainability in the US: Environmental Management and Social Change since 1970," *Journal of Cleaner Production* 196 (2018): 564-575.

⁵⁹ Keefe Watson, "Eco-Fair Attracts Organizations from NW OH," *BG News* (Bowling Green, OH), April 19, 2018.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ BG News Staff, "Earth Week," *BG News* (Bowling Green, OH), April 23, 2012.

⁶² David Dupont, "BGSU Students Urge Mazey and Trustees to Oppose Nexus Pipeline," *BG Independent* (Bowling Green, OH), Nov 14, 2016.

⁶³ BGSU Sustainability, "Happy Earth Day!" Facebook, April 22, 2020, <https://m.facebook.com/GreenBGSU/>.

⁶⁴ Personal communication, Adam Smith.

⁶⁵ Pete Fairbairn, "BGSU Rallies around Earth Day," *BG News* (Bowling Green, OH), Apr 20, 2020.

⁶⁶ Brittany Roderick, "Highlighting the History of Earth Day," *BG News* (Bowling Green, OH), April 22, 2008.

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