

Warnings on warming

Environmental groups sponsor Earth Week

By JUSTIN CARINCI
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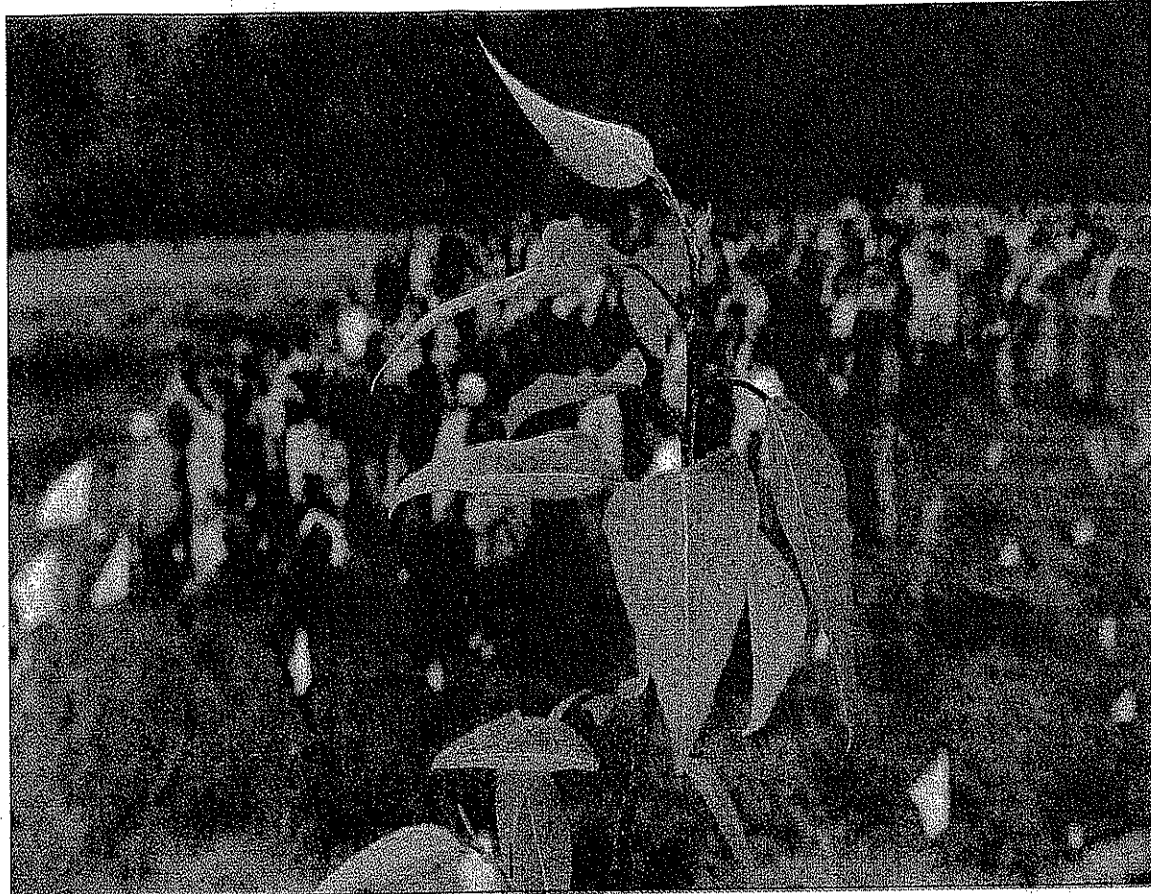
Calling global warming "the most urgent issue facing our time," University of Oregon law professor Mary Christina Wood urged an overhaul in environmental laws that fail to protect natural resources. Speaking Saturday at Clark College, Wood said governments give polluters a free pass through permit systems.

"Most agencies today spend nearly all their resources to permit, rather than prohibit, environmental destruction," Wood said. "Essentially, our agencies have taken the discretion in the law and used it to destroy nature."

On Page C6 Wood's speech capped 10 gifts you can give your planet off a week of forums and presentations,

sponsored by the environmental group Friends of Clark County, leading up to today's observance of Earth Day. The Sierra Club, Clark Conservation Voters and Clark College StudentLife also co-sponsored Saturday's event.

Bridget Schwarz of Friends of Clark County declared the group's first Earth Week a



MIKE SALSBUURY/The Columbian

New plantings take center stage as Earth Day volunteers pose for a group photo Saturday at the Salmon Creek Greenway.

success.

"There's a lot of reasons to be hopeful, and there's a lot to be proud of," Schwarz said. "We've got a huge challenge, but I think we've got a huge level of awareness."

That awareness is key to

protecting the environment, Wood said. For environmental laws to work, governments must manage natural resources as trustees manage a property trust. "You can imagine all of the resources essential to our human welfare and sur-

vival — including the waters, wildlife, air and forests — as being packaged together in a legal trust, or endowment."

When people see themselves as co-owners of "nature's trust," they will refuse to let governments give away

permits to polluters with good lawyers. "They start thinking, 'Hey, that's my air, even if I share it with others,'" Wood said. "Pollution of that air becomes an infringement on American property."

EARTH DAY, Page C6

Earth Day:

From Page C1

As the property rights movement has shown, Americans are fiercely protective of their property, Wood said. "Once they understand they have a property right in something, they are inclined to protect it," she said.

Regarding global warming, Wood said the planet is approaching a "tipping point" —

cut greenhouse gases now and catastrophe can be avoided; let emissions continue to increase and that catastrophe will become inevitable.

"If we continue business as usual, then at some point within this coming decade, and probably sooner than later, we will effectively place a lock on the door of our heating greenhouse," Wood said, "locking ourselves and future generations inside."

The tipping point concept is a crucial one, Wood said,

responding to an audience question. She urged those in attendance to use the concept to explain global warming to others.

She cautioned, however, against spending too much time trying to sway those who refuse to see how dire the situation is. "At this point," she said, "if people are still in denial, they want to be in denial."

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