



University of Oregon students took a tour of several toxic sites in West Eugene in November 2019. See page 3 to read Lisa Arkin's "Sacrifice Zones in Eugene," a report on our environmental justice work in West Eugene.

## INSIDE

- Featured Blog: First Foods - p. 2
- Interview with Dr. Gundersen - p. 2
- Sacrifice Zones in Eugene - p. 3
- Beyond Toxics Project Snapshots - p. 4/5
- So. Oregon LOCAL Update - p. 6
- Climate Change & COVID-19 - p. 6
- Farewell to Pablo, Welcome Haley - p. 7



## Featured: Beyond Toxics Blog on First Foods

**FIRST FOODS FOR SPRING** (excerpt) by Jennifer Eisele, Western Shoshone and Northern Paiute and Krystal Abrams, Cherokee & Muscogee

Food is our medicine. The land where we live was once home to a wide array of foods, medicines, and fibers of the first inhabitants that, if supported, could provide enough sustenance to nurture and bring balance to communities.

Food not only provides nourishment for our body, it can also fill our souls, emotionally and spiritually. Whether it is root foraging, harvesting wild fruits and nuts, harvesting plant fibers for basket weaving, fishing, hunting, or gardening, these activities forge a spiritual bond with the earth and make us feel whole. The ritual of these activities also keeps people connected as families, and honors our ancestors by continuing traditions imperative for our health, livelihood, and cultural survival.



An example of a First Food source, curled fern tips are tender and mild, with a taste similar to asparagus.

This knowledge of edible wild foods, known as First Foods, is passed from generation to generation from our elders. Especially during uncertain times, traditional knowledge that describes how to access, cultivate and prepare food

can offer security and peace of mind. Urban planning would benefit tremendously if our local governments would recognize the connection between people and the natural world. By implementing planning policies that protect first foods habitats from degradation and destruction near our cities, we can enhance our shared connection to the land and the bounty it may provide.

Please visit our website: [beyondtoxics.org](http://beyondtoxics.org) and scroll to the bottom to read the full blog with

examples of spring First Foods plants, including Camas, Fiddlehead Ferns and more.

Stay tuned for a follow-up blog: **First Foods for Summer!** Visit [beyondtoxics.org](http://beyondtoxics.org) and check out our Blog section. Two recent blogs by Haley Case-Scott and Lisa Arkin link the COVID-19 health crisis and environmental justice.

## Synergistic effect of exposure: An interview with Dr. Deke Gundersen

by Ephraim Payne

As America and Oregon respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, scientists and public health experts warn that it is critical to enforce and strengthen environmental protections and testing for toxic effects of pesticides and other industrial chemicals.



Deke Gundersen, PhD, Director of Environmental Studies at Pacific University

Deke Gundersen, PhD, Director of Environmental Studies at Pacific University, studies the harmful effects of chemicals on humans, animals, and our environment. His research shows that aerial herbicide spraying and other types of pollution expose Oregonians to complex chemical mixtures that have not been thoroughly tested for toxicity to humans or animals.

According to Dr. Gundersen, farm and factory workers, people of color and other minorities, young children and pregnant mothers face a greater risk for suffering cancers, breathing disorders and other consequence of exposures to toxins. And Environmental Justice communities are disproportionately exposed to multiple toxic chemicals at work and in their neighborhoods.

These toxic-caused health effects render people more susceptible to other diseases. Chronic exposure to endocrine disrupting chemicals increases production of the hormone cortisol, which suppresses the immune system, Dr. Gundersen warns. "If your immune system is suppressed, you're going to be more susceptible to pathogens like the virus that causes COVID-19."

In the face of an unprecedented public health crisis, it is unethical to relax public health protections from exposure to chemical toxins. Doing so will increase the number of people who fall ill. "Scientists have been warning about this and sooner or later this is going to catch up to us as well," warns Dr. Gundersen, "unless we put on more stringent restrictions on these chemical companies and their ability to use these chemicals."

## Sacrifice Zones in Eugene

We feel a special connection with our homebase community in West Eugene. For over twelve years, Beyond Toxics has been partnering with neighborhood leaders and residents in the Bethel and Trainsong areas. The families here are mostly working-class, and there are more children and people of color than in other Eugene areas. Thirty-five corporate polluters surround these neighborhoods. We've connected with residents at countless community events to bring attention to the public health needs of local residents. Our January Town Hall drew a standing-room only crowd!



Mother listens to West Eugene Clean Air presentation

In 2011, and again in 2019-2020, a total of over 600 residents in the West Eugene Industrial Corridor talked to Beyond Toxics staff and volunteers from the doorsteps of their homes. Responding to detailed survey questions about environmental health issues, they provided data that was then compiled and analyzed by Beyond Toxics staff and University of Oregon researchers and students. Our analysis drew on government databases including the Eugene Toxics Right to Know program, the Lane Regional Air Protection Agency, Lane County Public Health, the US Environmental Protection Agency and the US Census.

Statistical and mapping analyses both confirmed that West Eugene is an air and water pollution "sacrifice zone." Residents in these neighborhoods report

asthma, diabetes, stroke and cancer at rates significantly greater than the rest of Eugene and oftentimes above the national average. On average, nearly 1 in 3 or 33% of people in West Eugene neighborhoods suffer from asthma. The national average is 1 in 13 people, or 7.7%.

According to Dr. Robert D. Bullard, described as the father of environmental justice, "Sacrifice zones are often 'fenceline communities' or 'hot spots' of chemical pollution where residents live immediately adjacent to heavily polluted industries." In the vicinity of Roosevelt, Elmira and Danebo streets alone, these "sacrifice zone" neighborhoods suffer air quality degradation from at least sixteen nearby polluting facilities.

This pattern of air and water pollution burdens constitutes, by any measure, an environmental justice problem. West Eugene residents, demonstrably more medically vulnerable than other community members, include higher numbers of low-income residents and families of color. They live with patterns of inequity: increased distances to emergency health care, fewer places to buy fresh food and more criss-crossing highways and railroad corridors.

Our vision for the people of West Eugene is clean air and healthy families. This will be achieved when the sacrifices these residents must make for their families' health are validated and brought into the regulatory process. Eugene's environmental justice neighborhoods are demanding stronger land use laws and environmental protections.

West Eugene survey respondents often had similar stories: they've lived with asthma, diabetes, skin rashes, knowing others on their street who had died of cancer and some who must live with cancer. Here are memories of conversations with residents from our West Eugene Environmental Health canvassers:

*We sent our child to live with family elsewhere because of being sick all the time at home, but as soon as they left West Eugene our child's headaches and nosebleeds were gone.*

*I've lived here less than a year but I notice strange smells and I have to close the windows and doors so the smell won't get in my home.*

*I want to be heard and for others to know that our experiences with bad air, noxious smells, and polluted water are real.*



**Project Snapshots** by Lisa Arkin

**Protecting the Innocent from Pesticide Drift**



**Beyond Toxics and PCUN arrive at the state capitol to testify on chlorpyrifos legislation.**

In 2019 and 2020 we worked with our farm worker advocacy partners and teamed up with Oregon's top organic businesses to phase-out chlorpyrifos, the brain-damaging organo-phosphate insecticide. Although both legislative sessions ended in a Republican walk-out, stymying our policy efforts, we continue this work as an appointed member of an Oregon Department of Agriculture Chlorpyrifos Work Group. Beyond Toxics is forcefully fighting for a full phase-out of chlorpyrifos to protect children, workers and drinking water quality from this WWII nerve agent designed to cause death and destruction. Oregon should see the adoption of new pesticide rules later this year.

**An eerie resemblance to Agent Orange**



**Crossbow drift severely damaged grapevines in Jackson County.**

From the steady stream of calls from people who have been harmed by pesticide spray drift, we've noticed a pattern involving the highly volatile herbicides, 2,4-D ester and triclopyr ester.

2,4-D made up one half of the notorious Vietnam War era defoliant, Agent Orange, manufactured by Dow and Monsanto. Triclopyr is an herbicide with a chemical structure similar to the other half of Agent Orange (which was banned because it caused birth defects and miscarriages). Today, 2,4-D and Triclopyr are often combined in easy-to-buy herbicide products such as Crossbow. Their chemical composition makes these herbicides highly likely to drift and move long distances as a poisonous vapor. We are working with state regulators to ensure that Crossbow and other products with combinations of 2,4-D ester and triclopyr ester are no longer sold on store shelves to unlicensed pesticide users and are never used on school grounds.

**Schools and Pesticides**



**Children are highly vulnerable to cancer-causing and brain-damaging pesticides.**

It is unconscionable that, as a society, we prioritize killing weeds above the health of school children. Many schools continue to spray herbicides in kindergarten play areas, on sports fields, and on the grass where school buses drop kids off. The Oregon School Integrated Pest Management Act clearly states that non-toxic methods must be used first to protect children's health. Hundreds of parents have signed our petition asking agencies that oversee Oregon's law to eliminate pesticides and support organics-first land care at schools. Our Non Toxic Oregon program works with schools and cities to adopt organics-first policies. Beyond Toxics is working with legislators to adopt clear and compelling statutory language putting Children's Health First.



## Beyond Toxics part of Historic Forestry Agreement



**Governor Brown acknowledges signatories to the forest practices reform agreement.**

Governor Brown called it “an historic agreement” when key environmental health and forest protection defenders and 10 corporate timber representatives brokered and signed a Memorandum, subsequently codified in HB 4168-2. Beyond Toxics helped negotiate the parts of the agreement related to timber herbicides based on previous bills we brought before the state legislature. By signing on to this agreement and supporting HB 4168-2, timber companies openly acknowledge that they can (and should) step up to protect water quality with mandatory and expanded no-spray buffers on all headwater streams. Timber companies also agreed to provide 24-hour advanced notice of aerial sprays to nearby residents. This agreement lays down a marker to end the stalemate on regulating pesticides in timber management. Beyond Toxics takes action on many forestry issues, including our work to support the validity of rural communities’ narratives. Their descriptions of suffering from pesticide drift must be at the center of changing timber management in Oregon.

## Working to Advance Oregon’s Climate Leadership



**Public pressure moves Oregon Governor Brown to action.**

From droughts of historic proportion, to unprecedented forest fire smoke, to the novel coronavirus pandemic, Oregonians are experiencing indicators of a world shaped by climate chaos. Yet, Oregon has struggled with adopting a mandatory cap on greenhouse gas emissions and a polluter-pays program. The 2020 legislation was disappointingly weak on provisions for fair and just access to economic benefits and green energy programs for underserved communities. Yet, after the Legislature was shut down by the Republican walk-out, Governor Brown took decisive and measurable action to limit greenhouse gas emissions and set us on a path to combat climate threats. As active advocates of meaningful climate policy, Beyond Toxics staff was among those invited to witness the signing of Governor Brown’s Executive Order 20-04. The Executive Order prioritizes equitable benefits for vulnerable Tribes and communities. While we track what happens at the state level, we’re leading a collaborative project with the NAACP of Lane County and Geos Institute to develop a series of climate equity and resiliency plans for local governments.

## Diseases and Air Pollution



**Roseburg Lumber in Springfield was fined for this air pollution violation.**

Working with our air protection allies, Beyond Toxics helped make the winning case for Oregon to finalize protective air toxics standards. In April 2020, Oregon adopted laws to require air polluters to reduce the chemicals that cause serious health impacts such as asthma, neurologic damage, birth defects and heart disease. Stringent air quality regulations and toxics reporting are the bedrock of public health. As the federal government eviscerates environmental protections, we’re proud to help Oregon reduce risks of toxics exposure and illness.



## Southern Oregon LOCAL Update by Bianca Ballar

Beyond Toxics, in coalition with Unete Center for Farmworker Advocacy and NAACP-Eugene/Springfield, is supporting the most marginalized communities in Central and Southern Oregon through our coalition, LOCAL. Unete Center for Farmworker Advocacy initiated a Farmworker and Immigrant Families Relief Fund. This relief fund is extremely important to the stability of immigrant families and minority individuals, as many are providing essential services work, but will not receive any financial support from the federal government while our economy is staggering.



Our coalition is finding it vital to create virtual space for our Native, Latinx, immigrant, BIPOC families and individuals to gather and discuss what support looks like when we can only work from home. Salud!: A Covid-19 Conversation for Minority Community Health was our first Southern Oregon bilingual Zoom meeting to share resources, information and ideas that our communities need to be supported through this emergency.

I’ve been facilitating community LOCAL meetings to discuss several priorities, including heritage, unity in diversity, environmental justice needs and bringing our hard-to-reach communities together. We see that, in the face of this pandemic and future climate change disasters, it is more important than ever that we build the strategic power of our community through grassroots education, coming together and skills training. Toward this end, LOCAL is developing an Environmental & Climate Change Activist Training course to explore ways that our neighborhoods and local governments can adapt to the impending environmental changes through mutual aid. Stay tuned as we build this vision for resilient and self-sustaining grassroots communities throughout Oregon with our diverse community leaders!

## Double Trouble: Climate Change and COVID-19 by Haley Case-Scott

How are we going to move forward after the COVID-19 global pandemic? We must step back from a system that extracts finite resources and uses the public’s common air and water as the dumping ground for pollution and waste. If there is a silver lining in this crisis, it is that humanity has the opportunity to take a path that promotes sustainability and supports resilient communities.



Our “business as usual” way of life has created devastating and long-lasting environmental damage to the Earth’s ecosystems, and left us unprepared to respond to the pandemic. We need to address the effects now, rather than returning to our path to climate catastrophe.

It is clear that frontline communities - communities of color, Tribes and indigenous peoples, and low-income populations - are suffering the greatest impacts from both the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. The similarities are stark. Frontline communities most often bear the brunt of disasters caused by extreme weather events and other climate-related impacts.

Our decision-makers must develop adaptation and mitigation policies that acknowledge the disproportionate impacts on frontline communities and implement actions that equally benefit their health and well-being. Our system of top down governance has failed us. Instead, solutions need to be developed by the most affected communities.

### Moving Forward

We must not give in to despair. We must endeavor to find the right path in all of this chaos. Join me in imagining a world where our children and future generations will be able to thrive. Imagine a world where our children enjoy full equality and equity, and the bounty of the world’s natural gifts. They will be proud to know that the earth’s previous stewards stood strong and persisted in their fight for climate justice.



## Farewell with hugs to Pablo Alvarez

Pablo joined Beyond Toxics as an environmental justice organizer nearly two years ago. He pioneered an unusual position as a joint employee of both Beyond Toxics and the Lane County NAACP, an opportunity made possible by grants from two Oregon philanthropic foundations.

Pablo adroitly fulfilled the needs of the two organizations and continued to forge the already rock-solid bridge between the NAACP and Beyond Toxics. He quickly became a highly respected and sought-after spokesperson for environmental justice, racial justice and immigrant rights. Whether it was a staff meeting or a public event, Pablo managed to bring high energy and laughter with his upbeat approach to the hard work of being a community organizer.

Pablo has taken off for a new adventure in Chicago. He is supporting his partner and focusing on applying to law schools. A BIG thank you is due to Pablo for all he has contributed to our environmental justice advocacy work! We couldn't hug him goodbye during COVID-19 social distancing, but we sent him off with mementos and warm wishes for continued growth and success!



## Pandemics can't stop us building our Environmental Justice movement!

Quickly pivoting due to the COVID-19 virus, we've announced that the much-anticipated Environmental Justice Pathways Summit has been postponed--not cancelled! The new date is set for April 9th and 10th, 2021 at the University of Oregon. In the meantime, we will be sharing knowledge and strategizing how to transition Oregon to a just, balanced and carbon-free economy and society! As part of that effort, Beyond Toxics is rolling out a monthly series of Environmental Justice webinars. Our first virtual event, presented by our Plenary Panel, "**Historical Intersections of Race, Economy and Environment in Oregon**" on April 17th, drew over 500 registrants and well over 300 YouTube views. The planned summer webinar is "**Youth, Environmental Justice and the Arts.**" We'll be featuring the youth artists who were selected to present their artwork at the Summit, including stunning videography, spoken word and graphic arts. Please sign up for our e-alerts on our home page so you won't miss any announcements: [BeyondToxics.org](https://BeyondToxics.org).

## Welcome Haley Case-Scott!

Haley Case-Scott was hired in March to be our Climate Justice Grassroots Organizer. Her time will be shared with the Lane County chapter of the NAACP. Haley is a member of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, and a descendant of the Klamath Tribes, Yurok Tribe, and the Sakoagan Band of Chippewa Indians. She was born and raised in the Klamath Basin and moved to Eugene in 2014 to attend the University of Oregon. Four years later, Haley received her Bachelor of Arts Degree in Political Science with a minor in Native American Studies.

Prior to working as the Climate Justice Grassroots Organizer, Haley served as a Research Assistant with the Pacific Northwest Tribal Climate Change Project and the United States Forest Service. She is dedicated to ensuring that diverse perspectives are considered and respected in the development of climate policy.







Leadership for a Clean and Just Oregon

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