



# Women Protecting Our Environment

**Women** have been involved in using the Earth's resources in an environmentally friendly manner for thousands of years. There have also been abuses of our planet's resources by both women and men. Today there are more people on the planet and advances in technology that are less in harmony with the Earth than was the case over the course of humankind's earlier history. While both men and women have contributed to pollution and to efforts to eradicate its effects, theorists have noted that it is women who often initiate major social changes that affect our country's culture.

Currently women have taken the lead in supporting environmentally sound practices. This month, we profile four women whose passion was to live and work in harmony with our environment. We feature environmental steward Marjory Stoneman Douglas, biologist Ruth Patrick, primatologist Dian Fossey, and oceanographer Sylvia Earle.

*There are no other Everglades in the world. They are, they have always been,  
one of the unique regions of the earth; remote, never wholly known.*

*Nothing anywhere else is like them.*

These opening words from **Marjory Stoneman Douglas**' immortal book *Everglades: River of Grass* not only crystallize the uniqueness of the Everglades, they demonstrate the passion and the life work of the woman. Her book was published in 1947, the same year that Everglades National Park was established; it has become the definitive description of the natural treasure she fought so hard to protect.

In 1970, to add a voting constituency to her efforts, she formed the "Friends of the Everglades", a non-profit to support and raise funds for the area. Until shortly before her death, Douglas remained active at the head of the organization. Marjory Stoneman Douglas modeled leadership through activism. Her stewardship has enabled the generations who follow her to enjoy the unique beauty of that special place.



**Ruth Patrick** became well-known in her time as a biologist who was responsible for raising ecological awareness in our society. Her efforts in the field of limnology, which is the study of freshwater ecosystems, led to the methods by which the environmental health of rivers and streams is evaluated today. Patrick's particular expertise was diatoms; these are single-celled algae that are a basic food source for organisms living in fresh water. In order to accurately determine the presence of pollution in fresh water, she invented the diatometer, a device that accurately determines the presence of pollution in fresh water.

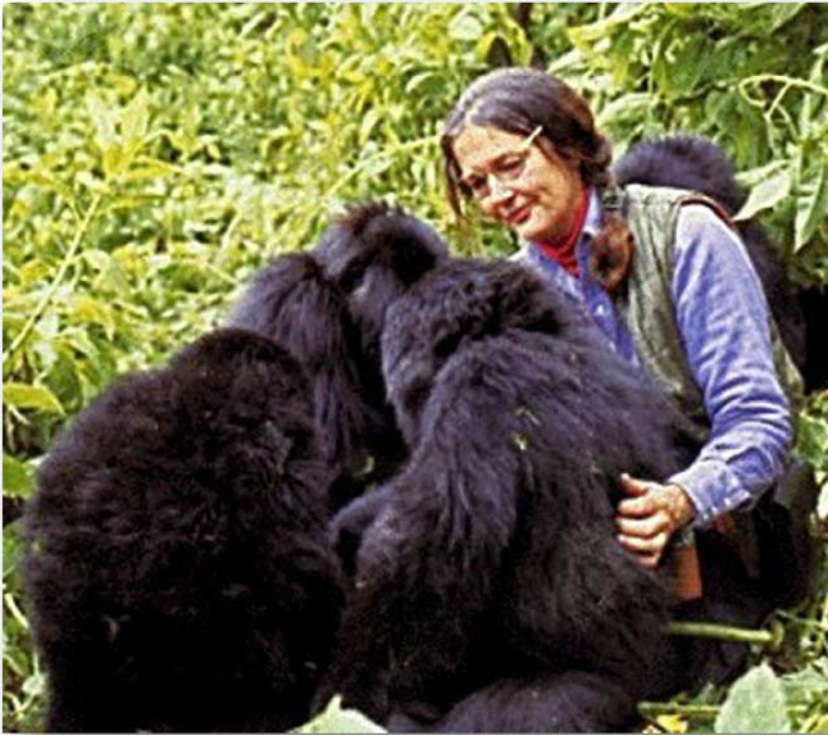


In the early 1950s, the Atomic Energy Commission assigned Patrick to collect baseline data on the water quality of the Savannah River; this was prior to the opening of the Savannah River Plant. With a team of scientists from the Philadelphia Academy of Sciences, she was the first to diagnose the health of a river or stream by analyzing plant life and animal species. Patrick's early studies contributed significantly to the developing field of ecology. She established for the first time a set of aquatic indices that



could be used to describe the health of water systems and the impact of industrialization and its attendant pollution. Her work has been utilized by ecologists worldwide.

Patrick was a woman working in a male-dominated field. She was also in the vanguard of scientists who introduced the concept of biodiversity. Today, when scientists talk about biodiversity as a key indicator of ecosystem health, they call it the “Patrick Principle.” She has been inducted into the National Women’s Hall of Fame.

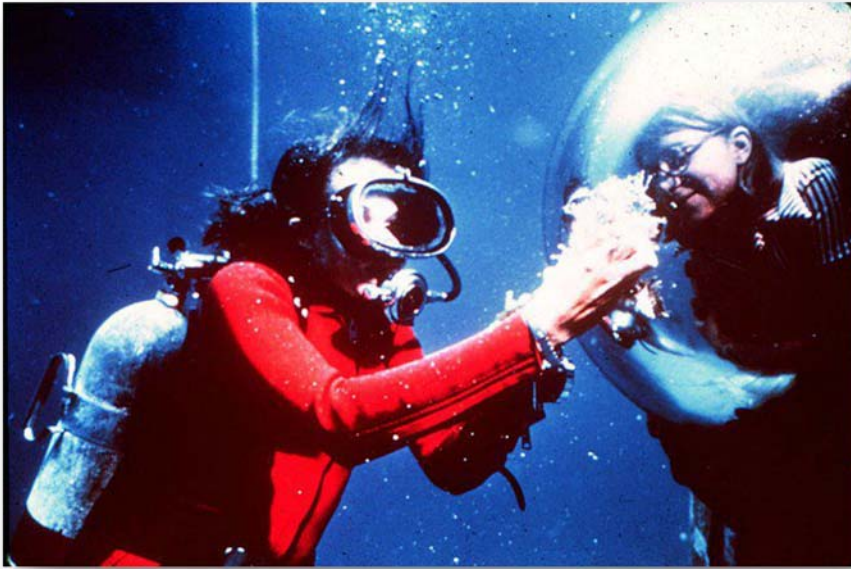


It is hard to study animals unless you go to a place where a large number of them are living together. That is exactly what primatologist **Dian Fossey** did. In 1967, she went to Rwanda (Africa) to study mountain gorillas. She spent most of her professional career with the gorilla families she studied.

Fossey loved animals as a child and early on she determined that she would become a veterinarian. During college, however, she changed her major to occupational therapy. She practiced in that field for a

while, but she loved travel and wanted to see the world--particularly Africa. Using up her life savings, she travelled to Africa where she met paleoanthropologist Mary Leakey and her husband, archaeologist Louis Leakey. During this trip, she became enamored with understanding gorillas. After returning to Kentucky, she met again with Louis Leakey; it was he who encouraged her to study mountain gorillas. Her book about the gorillas was titled *Gorillas in the Mist* and was made into a movie in 1988. Fossey’s work today continues through the auspices of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International.

Marine biologist and oceanographer **Sylvia Alice Earle** was the first woman to serve as the Chief Scientist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Called “Her Deepness” by the *New Yorker* and the *New York Times*, “Living Legend” by the Library of Congress, and the first “Hero for the Planet,” Earle is an oceanographer, explorer, author, and lecturer with experience as a field re-



search scientist. She is the author of many books about the ocean, including *Sea Change: A Message of the Oceans* and, most recently, *Ocean: An Illustrated Atlas*, with Linda K. Glover.

Earle has led more than 60 expeditions and logged more than 6,000 hours underwater, including leading the first team of women aquanauts during the Tektite Project in 1970. At that time, a

record was set for solo diving to a depth of 1,000 meters (3,300 feet). Earle's research concerns marine ecosystems with special emphasis on exploration and the development and use of new technologies for access and effective operations in the deep sea and other remote environments. She has been inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.

From ecosystems, to water, to animals, we both marvel and are inspired by these women's incredible accomplishments. Their efforts address issues far beyond the borders of our country. They have helped to ensure that our world will be protected for our children and our grandchildren. We are proud to stand on their shoulders.

**Charlotte S. Waisman**, PhD, co-author of *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America* (HarperCollins), is a national champion and advocate for women as a professor and keynote speaker. As an executive coach, Waisman coauthored *50 Activities for Developing Leaders* and *The Leadership Training Activity Book*. She is a principal with a consulting company specializing in leadership and workforce excellence initiatives.

**Jill S. Tietjen**, PE, co-author of *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America* (HarperCollins), is an author, speaker and electrical engineer. Her other books include the *Setting the Record Straight* series. Tietjen is a top historian on scientific and technical women. She is President/CEO of *Technically Speaking*, a consulting company that specializes in improving career opportunities for women in technology.

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