

October 2015

Dear Everybody,

First, a light haze obscured the summer sun. Each day more smoke drifted in from the west, where wildfires in Washington State were burning hundreds of acres every day. Whole towns were evacuated. Soon the sun was only an eerie pale orb behind a gray blanket of heavy smoke that rested on the mountaintops and filled the valleys.



The Western United States was on fire. Wildfires in California, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Alaska, and Canada burned out of control. One of the worse droughts on record had spread for four years like cancer, drying the grass to nubbins and trees to tinderboxes. Record-breaking heat and dry winds fueled the fires into monsters, killing firefighters trying to stop them. *In all, eight millions acres have burned this year; eighty-seven million in the last decade, equal to an area the size of New Mexico.*

Northern Idaho was once a wet inland forest, usually resistant to such disasters, but drought had struck here as well. Finally, a towering column of black billowing smoke reared hundreds of feet into the air on the far side of the mountains surrounding the new wetland. A sick feeling overcame me. A feeling I knew well.

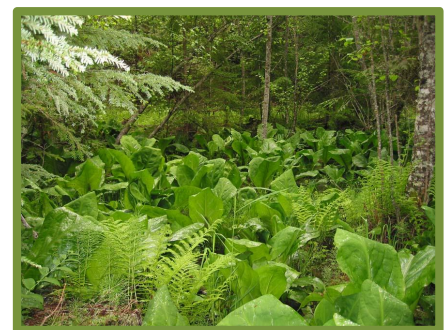


Mark and I fought wildfires to save our camp in Africa many times. In the Kalahari, almost every year. For days, we'd watch the wave of distant smoke burning closer, knowing there was nothing between us except dry grass, heat, and wind. We always scraped the grass to clear a large firebreak around our tree camp, but one year the fire topped East Dune at midday when the temperature was 105 degrees and the winds blew at 40 mph. The firebreak was not wide enough to stop it, so Mark used a cotton rope to attach a large, fallen acacia tree to the old Land Rover. Racing to beat the fire, he circled camp, pulling the tree and widening the break. But the fire reached the truck, and as I watched, the cotton rope and tree burst into flame behind the vehicle. I ran after Mark, screaming, and finally he saw me, and by jerking the truck forward and backward, broke free from the fire.

He drove into camp, and we stood in the center between the tents as the fire approached. There was nothing more to do. We held our faces in towels trying to breath. The heat was unbearable, but Mark had managed to widen the break enough that the fire burned up to it, and around camp.

And now I stood alone on the meadow watching this volcanic-looking plume of smoke rising on the other side of the mountain. I called the US Forest Service, but there were so many fires to fight, they had no resources to send to this one.

The valley itself is filled with the restored wetland. In the midst of drought-stricken lands and raging fires, the marsh gleamed with green grass, braided creeks, fens, and ponds. Deer grazed succulent grasses and bears nibbled sedges. Much of the west once looked like this. Not any more.



Extreme droughts and crazed fires are not only Nature's doing. The hand of man is deep in the pot. Across much of the country, we have re-structured creeks, streams, and even major rivers from

their former, natural meandering state into channels of fast moving water. Even major rivers in southern California have been lined with concrete. All these “improvements” act to flush the water quickly across the land and into the sea, which lowers the water table in every habitat. This in turn prevents the aquifers from being recharged, so they too are diminished. Some are even collapsing. And of course, global warming is contributing to the heat waves and droughts. The year 2014 was the warmest on record and so far 2015 is even hotter. In all, a witches’ brew leading directly to major changes in weather patterns, food production, water availability, and habit conservation.

None of this is happening in the restored wetland situated in a valley between mountains, where the water flow has been slowed to an easy meander. The water table is right at the surface. Still, I worried that the wildfire would destroy the forests on the mountain, above the wetland.

For the entire day, I watched the smoke as it teetered on the peaks, threatening to come over to our side. In late afternoon, I saw the first flames devouring the trees on the summit. A very sick feeling. And then I heard a roar and, there flying along the ridge, was a huge tanker plane. It dropped low, flew several reconnaissance passes, and then dropped its load of red-orange retardant along the fire line. Then two helicopters and spotter planes arrived as re-enforcements. I jumped up and down with joy. Ran around like a crazy person. Of course, the smoke gets heavier when a fire suffers, and it spewed out a great plume of tumbling grayness. And later the choppers landed with a crew of firefighters to finish it off. They worked for over a week and finally the smoke returned, as it had started, to a light haze. I baked oatmeal cookies and took them to the crew at the airstrip.

All of this is to say, we must rethink the damage we have made as a nation to the natural water courses that flow across our land. Just as we have done in this small valley – one stream at the time – we must remove the concrete and return the natural meanders, pools, and wetlands, so that the earth can drink the water again before it reaches the sea. So that the water table rises and aquifers recharge and endure for generations. So that we have water, the meadows have water, and bears, geese, moose, and muskrats have water. Before it all burns.

**ZAMBIA:** As you well know, the work we started in Zambia has been continued and expanded by Hammer Simwinga. This spring we introduced to you Andozile Simwinga, Hammer’s 18 year old son, affectionately known as Ando. He has taken after his father and works for conservation, also in the Mpika District in North Zambia.

Photo credit: kelvin/U4C ambassador/2015



We are proud to announce that Ando has been proposed by UNICEF to represent the youth of Zambia at the United Nations Conference of the Parties 21 on Global Warming in in Paris! In this picture Ando (in orange tee shirt) is meeting with a Zambian Forestry Department Official. Next they made a long trip to Mwamfushi to see the effects of climate change on a village that was once of the most active areas for poaching expeditions in the 1980’s – before our project introduced legal alternative income from agriculture and small businesses.

How did this come to be? Ando and his friends formed *The Mpika Climate Ambassadors*, an organization specifically founded to educate Zambians about global warming and ways to combat it. We think this is remarkable and actually very progressive compared to activities in the USA. The “Ambassadors” inform the public about effects of global farming on radio, in public speeches, and in schools. Many farmers have noticed that the seasons have shifted over the past decade, rainfall coming later and temperatures remaining warmer for longer periods. The club, also with Hammer’s help, has instructed the farmers on how best to improve their crop production under the new conditions. Tree planting is one of their big efforts along with minimizing charcoal production.

### ***From Hammer's Latest Report:***

***In the recent years our communities have seen variations in seasons that have affected their agriculture planting calendars. Both rain-fed crops and irrigated crops have dropped in yield due to reduced number of rain days. Mpika has for the past 10 years continued receiving reduced rainfall. This has resulted in seed and food insecurity among households. We have seen an increase in prices for almost all farm produce.***



***The drying of streams and low flow of water in some of our major rivers has become an awakening call to do something about the climate conditions, which have had an impact on the rural livelihoods. It is behind this reason that FWHC and Mpika Climate Change Ambassadors have joined efforts to mitigate negative impacts of climate change in Mpika.***

***Working with 35 C4C Mpika Ambassador, Hammer has established a tree nursery for both indigenous and exotic trees for distribution to schools and the surrounding community. Over 3000 plants have so far been distributed to different community schools and about 600 plants have been sold to farmers who want to start orchards.***

***ABOVE: "Hammer "at Chitulika primary school, working with children, motivating them to plant one tree per year for the school.***



***Ways to combat changing farming conditions:***



***Water for irrigation is not enough. Farmers have to look for crops which mature early and do not require a lot of water. New irrigation technics have of to be found to sustain productivity. Promoting crops like beans, groundnuts and soya beans have remained the core business crop. It matures early, does not require a lot of water, and has high nutrition. It is both a cover crop and soil nitrogen fixing crop. It's also good for rotation.***

***Other challenges farmers are experiencing are emerging tough pests and diseases which are expensive to control. Heavy pest infestation of aphids and weeds are some of the contributors to crop yield lose.***

***What we are doing to mitigate the impact of Climate Change:***

***FWHC is conducting sensitization programs on climate change, its impact, possible mitigation options, and how to adopt to the current situation. So far the organization has done the following;***

- ***Conducted 12 community meetings on climate change preparedness***
- ***Promoting conservation farming (use of organic matter, no burning, permanent farming in place of destructive and unproductive slash/ burn practices)***
- ***Promotion of agro tree plants (soil fertility trees and composting)***
- ***Use of organic pesticides (use chilli, garlic and tephrosia vogellii)***
- ***Promotion of good seed and crop rotation.***
- ***Do mulching for crops not to lose excessive moisture***



### ***Other news from Zambia: Progress of the Nature Conservancy***

***Through donations and support from both Zambia and US-based partners, the project has acquired 6,000 hectares of uninhabited, pristine Miombo forestland near North Luangwa National Park under a proposal to establish a nature conservancy, plus a research and training institute. The first pre-planning session was held with a team of thirteen selected supporters. Conserving this critical ecosystem will serve to protect watersheds critical to all living things and help save the North Luangwa animal populations brought to the brink of extermination by illegal hunting. It is extremely important habitat for elephants.***



We could not accomplish good things for people and wildlife without your support. Thank you!

Cheers,

*Debi and Mark*

### **UPDATES FROM MARY:**

**AMAZON.COM – FREE MONEY FOR CONSERVATION!** The OFWC has received hundreds of dollars generated by donors shopping at Amazon. Just go to [www.owens-foundation.org](http://www.owens-foundation.org) and click on the Amazon link at the bottom of our Home Page and begin your shopping. Amazon will automatically donate 5% of your purchase amount to the Foundation. Presto! It doesn't cost you a penny. Or - you can also register on Amazon SMILE (look on their home page for directions) designating the Owens Foundation as your preferred charity to receive this 5% donation from Amazon every time you shop. Our Federal Tax ID # is 58-1749339. It is free, easy money and badly needed. **THANK YOU!**

**CHANGE OF ADDRESS:** Please let us know of postal or email address. We have experienced some glitches with newsletter mailings. If you notice an error (double posting, etc.), please, let us know.

**DONATION BY CREDIT CARD:** Can be made at [www.owens-foundation.org](http://www.owens-foundation.org) via **DONATE NOW BUTTON** or by calling Tammy Johnson (678-648-1267). Three percent of your donation goes to the credit card company for processing fees. You will be asked for the security code on your credit card as an added level of protection for you.

**FOREIGN CURRENCY DONATIONS:** Must be made by wire transfer, US dollar money order or check - or by credit card (see above for online donations). Thank you for the extra effort!

**LEGACY PLANNING:** Touch the future. Include the OFWC in your Estate Planning.

- **Will, Living Trust or other plan:** Name the OFWC as a recipient of a fixed amount or a % of your estate.
- **Annuity or Life Insurance Policy:** Designate OFWC as the beneficiary.
- **Retirement Plans:** Designate OFWC as a beneficiary of all or a percentage of your Retirement Plan.

**MATCHING DONATIONS:** Some companies match employee and retiree donations to 501(c) (3) nonprofits such as the Owens Foundation. Multiply your giving and empower conservation.

***Owens Foundation, P.O. Box 870530, Stone Mountain, GA 30087, [www.owens-foundation.org](http://www.owens-foundation.org), 678-648-1267***