

The State of The Commons

2003/04

A Report to Owners
from **Friends of the Commons**



Shared Natural Creations

water
rain
snow
ice

DNA
seeds
algae
topsoil

light
fire
electricity
radio waves

rocks
metals
oil
uranium

wild animals
domesticable animals
edible plants
healing plants

solar energy
wind energy
tides
water power

biosphere
atmosphere
forests
grasslands

oceans
watersheds
aquifers
wetlands

lakes
rivers
estuaries
beaches

UV protection
climate regulation
erosion control
pollination

photosynthesis
waste absorption
nutrient recycling
fresh water replenishment

Items listed are exemplary, not exhaustive.

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Part I: Understanding The Commons pg 2

Part II: The State of The Commons pg 10

Part III: The Future of The Commons pg 24

A letter from FRIENDS OF THE COMMONS

Dear Fellow Owner,

Despite the fall of the stock market and the rise in unemployment, you and your family are richer than you think. Here's why:

All Americans are joint owners of a trove of hidden assets. These assets — natural gifts like air and water, and social creations like science and the Internet — constitute our shared inheritance. They're vital to our lives and make our economy run. Though it's impossible to put a precise value on them, it's safe to say they're worth trillions of dollars.

The trouble is, our shared inheritance is being grossly mismanaged. Maintenance is terrible, theft is rampant and rents often aren't being collected. To put it bluntly, our common wealth — and our children's — is being squandered. We are all poorer as a result.

What should be done? The first step is to do what any responsible owner would do: conduct an audit. To this end, Friends of the Commons, on behalf of American commons owners, formed an audit committee to identify problems and make recommendations. What follows is the committee's report.

The report has three parts. Part I describes our common wealth and sets forth basic principles for managing it. Part II examines the state of six important commons. And Part III makes recommendations for the future. A fuller interactive version of the report is available at www.friendsofthecommons.org.

If you'd like to become a Friend of the Commons, we welcome your support. Donations are tax-deductible and will help protect our common wealth for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Harriet Barlow, chair

Friends of the Commons is a project of the Tides Foundation. We raise and distribute money to non-profit groups working to protect our common wealth.

If you steal \$10 from a man's wallet, you're likely to get into a fight. But if you steal billions from the commons, co-owned by him and his descendants, he may not even notice.

— Walter Hickel, former Secretary of the Interior

