Standing Rock and Dakota Access: Why Do Environmentalists Vandalize the Environment?

By Alex Berezow, PhD — February 22, 2017

It's a headline perfectly befitting The Onion. Unlike stories found in the satirical newspaper, however, this one is absolutely true.

The Dakota Access Pipeline, which has replaced Keystone XL as the cause célèbre of the environmental movement, has united Native Americans and political activists in opposition. The merits (or lack thereof) of this infrastructure project are not relevant for this discussion. Instead, let's focus on the activists' incredibly bizarre and destructive behavior.

After months of physically blocking the construction of a legal project, the protesters are finally being forced out. In their undying love for the environment, they are, according to the Seattle Times [2], "ceremonially burning their tents and other structures as they prepare to leave."

Preparing to leave, Standing Rock protesters ceremonially burn camp
Surely, the Seattle Times noted the hypocrisy of environmental activists engaging in an act of environmental harm? Nope. In fact, the journalist glorified it. She referred to fire as an "old ally" of Native Americans and that it is used "to heal and to cleanse." It's curious that no ecologists were consulted to determine if they agreed that setting things on fire is a good way to cleanse the environment.

The Dakota Access Pipeline protesters are hardly alone. Engaging in destructive behavior, including littering, vandalism, and even ecoterrorism, are ironically common among supposed environmental activists.

Activists outside Seattle left behind "more than a ton of trash" after a protest last year. Environmental protests, invariably described as "mostly peaceful," regularly devolve into riots in which buildings are vandalized and police officers are assaulted. The Earth Liberation Front firebombed buildings at Michigan State University and the University of Washington in 2001. European environmentalists threw Molotov cocktails at police and tried to block and possibly derail a train carrying nuclear waste. And Greenpeace irreparably damaged Peru's famous Nazca lines, a World Heritage site.

If environmental activists want others to care about the environment, perhaps they ought to lead by example by not actively destroying it.

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