# Comparing and Contrasting the Animal Rights and Environmental Movements

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The environmental movement and the animal rights movement often have similar goals, but the philosophies are different and sometimes cause the two camps to oppose each other.

### The Environmental Movement

The goal of the environmental movement is protect the environment and use resources in a sustainable manner. Campaigns are based on the big picture - whether a practice can continue without harming the balance of the ecosystem. The environment is important as it affects human health, but the environment is also, in itself, worth protecting. Popular environmental campaigns include protecting the [Amazon rainforest](https://www.thoughtco.com/will-remaining-amazon-rainforests-disappear-1203574) from deforestation, protecting endangered species, reducing pollution, and fighting [climate change](https://www.thoughtco.com/the-causes-of-global-warming-1203786).

### The Animal Rights Movement

The goal of the animal rights movement is for animals to be free of human use and exploitation. Animal rights is based on a recognition that non-human animals are sentient and therefore have their own rights and interests. While some activists work on single issue campaigns such as fur, meat, or circuses; the broader goal is a [vegan](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-veganism-127598) world where all animal use and exploitation is eliminated.

### Similarities Between the Environmental and Animal Rights Movements

Both movements recognize we must protect the environment. Both oppose unsustainable practices, and both seek to protect wildlife from habitat loss, pollution and climate change. These threats affect not only whole ecosystems but individual animals who will suffer and die if we continue to ignore environmental issues.

We also often see environmental and animal rights groups taking the same position on an issue for different reasons. While animal rights groups oppose eating meat because it infringes on the rights of the animals, some environmental groups oppose meat eating because of the environmental devastation of animal agriculture. The Atlantic Chapter of the Sierra Club has a Biodiversity/Vegetarian Outreach Committee, and calls meat a "[Hummer on a Plate](http://newyork2.sierraclub.org/content/dont-eat-cow-man" \t "_blank)."

Both movements also work to protect endangered animal species. Animal rights activists work to protect spotted owls because they are sentient beings, while environmentalists want to see individual spotted owls protected because the individuals are important for the survival of the species; and that species is important in the [web of life](https://www.fieldmuseum.org/biodiversity-and-conservation-web-life" \t "_blank).

### Differences between the Environmental and Animal Rights Movements

Most animal rights activists also try to protect the environment, but if there is a conflict between environmental protection and the lives of individual animals, animal rights activists will choose to protect the animals because the animals are sentient and the rights of the individuals cannot be infringed to protect trees or a collective group. Also, environmentalists may not object if an activity kills or threatens individual animals without threatening the species or ecosystem as a whole.

For example, some environmentalists do not oppose hunting or may even support hunting if they believe that hunting will not threaten the survival of the species. The rights and interests of individual animals are not a concern to some environmentalists. However, hunting cannot be considered acceptable to animal rights advocates because killing an animal, whether it is for food or trophies, infringes on the rights of the animal. This applies whether or not the species is endangered or threatened. To an animal rights activist, the life of a single animal matters.

Similarly, environmentalists often talk about "conservation," which is the sustainable use of a resource. Hunters also use the word "conservation" as a euphemism for hunting. To animal rights advocates, animals should not be considered a "resource."

This difference in philosophies causes [People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals](https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-animal-cruelty-127560)to refer to the World Wildlife Fund as the "[Wicked Wildlife Fund](http://www.wickedwildlifefund.com/" \t "_blank)." WWF is not an animal rights group, but works to "conserve nature." According to PETA, WWF has demanded more animal testing of [genetically modified organisms](https://www.thoughtco.com/genetically-modified-organisms-pros-and-cons-127662) before they are approved for human consumption. To WWF, the potential threat of GMOs to the environment and to human health outweighs the lives of animals who are used for GMO safety testing. Animal rights advocates believe that we cannot exploit animals in laboratories by conducting GMO testing, or in any other testing, regardless of the possible benefits.

According to PETA, WWF also does not oppose the killing of seals for fur, since they do not believe that the practice threatens the survival of the seal population.

### Wildlife

While the deaths of individual animals are not usually considered an environmental issue, environmental groups do sometimes get involved in non-endangered wildlife issues. For example, some environmental groups work to protect all whale species, even though some whale species - such as minke whales and Brydes whales - are not endangered. The protection of large, iconic animals like whales, panda bears and elephants will probably always be championed by some environmental groups regardless of their survival status due to the popularity of these animals, which gives them a high profile.