

Celebrating Women's Contributions to the World

By LOUISE FENNER

Women's role in the environmental or "green" movement is the focus of the 2009 Women's History Month.



Rachel Carson at her home in Washington, D.C. in 1963.

The life of the world-renowned American marine biologist, author and environmental advocate Rachel Carson is the inspiration for the 2009 National Women's History Month theme: Women Taking the Lead to Save Our Planet.

Carson's 1962 book *Silent Spring* brought worldwide attention to the harm to human health and the environment caused by the indiscriminate use of pesticides. She did not urge a ban on all pesticides, but called for more research on their safety, more careful use and tighter regulations. The federal government conducted a review of pesticide policies and, in 1972, eight years after Carson's death, banned the pesticide DDT in the United States. Carson and her book are credited with launching the modern environmental movement.

Every March in the United States, National Women's History Month celebrates the contributions of women to the nation's history and culture. This year's theme "honors women who have taken the lead in the environmental or 'green' movement," according to the National Women's History Project, an educational nonprofit group based in California. Carson is "the iconic model" for the theme.

For National Women's History Month this year, the history project asked for names of women who have shown "exceptional vision and leadership" in protecting the environment at the local, state, national and international levels. Rather than selecting only a few people from the 103 nominees, the group is recognizing all of them.

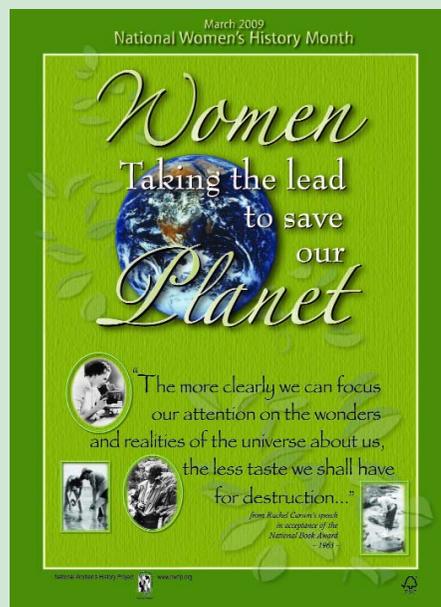
The Women's History Month honorees include scientists, engineers, politicians, writers and filmmakers, conservationists, teachers, community organizers, religious or workplace leaders, businesswomen and others who took action to help heal the planet—some by promoting legislation and education, and others by getting their hands dirty planting trees and picking up trash.

Some are historic figures, such as Ellen Swallow Richards (1842-1911), the first American woman to earn a degree in chemistry and the first person to undertake scientific water-quality studies in the United States, and Mollie H. Beattie (1947-1996), the first woman to head the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which administers the Endangered Species Act.

Most of the honorees are contemporary women:

•Lynne Cherry, author of *The Great Kapok Tree* and more than 30 other children's books that teach respect for the Earth;

•Sharon Matola, who founded the Belize Zoo and Tropical Education Center in 1983



Women's History Month poster.

For more information:

International Women's Day

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/iwd/>

National Women's History Project

<http://www.nwhp.org/whm/honorees.php>

to protect exotic animals that had been used in a documentary film but were too tame to be released into the wild;

- Margaret D. Lowman, a Florida biologist, science educator and pioneer in temperate and tropical forest canopy ecology, who runs a foundation for tropical forest conservation;

- Sally K. Ride, the first American woman in space, now a promoter of youth education in science and technology, especially on climate change;

- Shirley Nelson, leader of the Navajo Nation Trash Taskforce of Arizona, which helps communities solve solid waste problems;

- Lorrie Otto, of Wisconsin, a founder of the natural landscaping movement, which promotes biodiversity through the preservation and restoration of native plant communities;

- Alice Waters, chef and owner of Chez Panisse restaurant in California and head of a foundation that promotes healthy school lunches and educational programs such as sustainable school gardens; and

- Betsy Damon, founder of Keepers of the Waters, which supports communities in the preservation and restoration of their water sources. She works in the United States and China.

The origins of National Women's History Month can be traced to Sonoma County, California, where in 1978 the Commission on the Status of Women initiated Women's History Week. Two years later, President Jimmy Carter asked Americans to celebrate women's historic accomplishments in conjunction with International Women's Day. The U.S. Congress established the first National Women's History Week in 1981 and expanded it to a month in 1987.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, women account for 50.8 percent of the U.S. population (there are 154.7 million women and 150.6 million men). Women owned 30 percent of all nonfarm businesses in the United States in 2002. For every dollar earned by men, women earned only 77.5 cents.



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Women in the Obama Cabinet

Hillary Clinton



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The 67th **U.S. Secretary of State** joined the State Department after a 40-year career as an advocate, attorney, first lady and senator. As first lady of Arkansas for 12 years and of the United States from 1993 to 2001, Hillary Clinton advocated health care reform and worked on issues relating to children and families. In 2000, she became the first wife of a former president to be elected to the U.S. Senate, where she served on the Armed Services Committee, the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, and others. She was reelected to the Senate in 2006 and from 2007 to 2008 campaigned for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination, winning more delegates and primary votes than any woman in history.

U.S. Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis was a member of the U.S. Congress from California from 2001 to 2009, before joining the Barack Obama cabinet. In 2007, she was appointed to the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (the Helsinki Commission). In 2000, Solis became the first woman to receive the John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage Award for her work on environmental justice issues. Solis made history in 1994 by becoming the first Latina elected to the California State Senate. She also worked in the White House Office of Hispanic Affairs under President Jimmy Carter.



Hilda Solis



Janet Napolitano

Prior to joining the Obama administration as **Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security**, Janet Napolitano was midway through her second term as governor of Arizona. She previously served as attorney general for Arizona, when she helped write a law to break up human smuggling rings. And during a term as U.S. attorney for the District of Arizona, she helped lead the investigation into the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing.

The first African American woman appointed as **U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations**, Susan Rice brings to the job a career devotion to African affairs and eight years of experience in the Bill Clinton administration. She was the youngest U.S. assistant secretary of state, and specialized in African affairs, when appointed by Clinton in 1997. Rice was a senior foreign policy adviser to President Obama's election campaign.



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Susan Rice