

# Earthtrust: Electronic Mail and Ecological Activism

by Don White



**E**ARTHTRUST, A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION, was set up to deal with international wildlife protection and environmental problems that fall between the cracks of local and national environmental movements. Recent Earthtrust programs include shutting down Korea's illegal whaling operations, expeditions to South America to save Amazon wildlife, acoustic and communications research on whales and dolphins, and groundbreaking work against deep-sea gillnetting fleets. Earthtrust solved the perennial overhead problems confronted by most international organizations by creating an electronic network of campaign workers who use electronic mail to leverage their local efforts into an international program.

Earthtrust volunteer workers are assigned an Earthtrust electronic mail account or are encouraged to open a personal electronic mail account. In cases where the volunteer will be doing a significant amount of program work, Earthtrust provides the basic electronic workstation: an inexpensive computer, modem and printer. This station costs Earthtrust well under \$1,000, and transforms the volunteer's house into an Earthtrust "branch office." That volunteer may then keep in daily communication with other Earthtrust campaigners and the main office in Honolulu. People who are thousands of miles apart can co-author reports and compare data very inexpensively.

By enabling professional people to do good environmental work in their own homes, Earthtrust has tapped into a huge "people resource" of folks who choose not to move to Washington, DC, or other large cities (where most large conservation organizations are based) in order to work on conservation projects. Previously, if people wanted to do such work, the cost of relocation meant that the conservation group would have to pay high salaries. Organizations developed high overheads; this limited the number of persons who could be involved in the effort, and limited the number of issues that could be addressed. These factors have been the most important limits to growth in the national environmental movement.

Has Earthtrust found a panacea? As the organization's director, I'd say electronic mail comes darn close. Our organization has accomplished goals over the last two years that rival the achievements of organizations with 20 times Earthtrust's annual budget. ■

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