



AGENDA 21

The UN, Sustainability and Right-Wing Conspiracy Theory

*A Special Report from the Southern Poverty Law Center
Montgomery, Alabama*

APRIL 2014

AGENDA 21

The UN, Sustainability and Right-Wing Conspiracy Theory

THE SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER is a nonprofit organization that combats hate, intolerance and discrimination through education and litigation. Its Intelligence Project, which prepared this report and also produces the quarterly investigative magazine *Intelligence Report*, tracks the activities of hate groups and the nativist movement and monitors militia and other extremist antigovernment activity. Its Teaching Tolerance project helps foster respect and understanding in the classroom. Its litigation arm files lawsuits against hate groups for the violent acts of their members.

MEDIA AND GENERAL INQUIRIES

Mark Potok or Heidi Beirich

Southern Poverty Law Center
400 Washington Ave., Montgomery, Ala.
(334) 956-8200

www.splcenter.org

This report was prepared by the staff of the Intelligence Project of the Southern Poverty Law Center.

The SPLC is supported entirely by private donations. No government funds are involved.

© Southern Poverty Law Center. All rights reserved.

About the Report

This report was principally researched and written by Heidi Beirich, with contributions by Mark Potok, Janet Smith and Don Terry, who wrote about the plan in Baldwin County, Ala. It was edited by Potok. Russell Estes and Sunny Paulk designed the report.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	5
The Problem: Agenda 21 and the Right	7
The Players: Anti-Agenda 21 Activists	13
The Case Study: Baldwin County, Ala.	19

Executive Summary

At the conclusion of the June 3-14, 1992, United Nations Conference on Environment & Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, President George H.W. Bush and the leaders of 177 other nations signed a document known as Agenda 21. At the time, it was seen as a perfectly sensible planning paper, a nonbinding statement of intent aimed at dealing with sustainability on an increasingly crowded planet.

But in the 22 years since that day, at the hands of groups like the John Birch Society, Agenda 21 has been transformed in much of the American public mind into a secret plot to impose a totalitarian world government, a nefarious effort to crush freedom in the name of environmentalism. And it isn't only extremists pushing this conspiracy theory — in January 2012, the Republican National Committee bought into the propaganda, denouncing Agenda 21 in a resolution as a “destructive and insidious scheme” that is meant to impose a “socialist/communist redistribution of wealth.”

The demonization of Agenda 21 began among extremist groups like the John Birch Society, the same outfit that was effectively ejected from the conservative movement after accusing President Dwight D. Eisenhower of being a communist agent. The Birch Society and an array of other radical-right groups see Agenda 21 and virtually all other global efforts as part of a nefarious plan on the part of global elites to form a socialistic one-world government, or “New World Order.”

To listen to such groups, Agenda 21 will lead to a “new Dark Ages of pain and misery yet unknown to mankind.” It is “a comprehensive plan of utopian environmentalism, social engineering, and global political control,” the “most dangerous threat to America’s sovereignty” yet. It will “make our nation a vassal” of the UN, result in “the destruction of our lives,” force rural areas’ “population [to be] decimated,” and lead to having “90% of the population murdered.” The end, these critics all agree, will be the imposition of “a collectivist world government.”

Agenda 21 is not a treaty. It has no force of law, no enforcement mechanisms, no penalties, and no significant funding. It is not even a top-down recommendation, seeking instead to encourage communities around the world to come up with their own solutions to overpopulation, pollution, poverty and resource depletion. It is a feel-good guide that cannot

force anyone, anywhere, to do anything at all.

Yet Alabama has passed a law meant to outlaw any effects of the plan. The legislatures of Kansas, New Hampshire and Tennessee all passed state resolutions condemning it. Similar needless laws have been approved by one chamber of the legislatures in Arizona, Missouri and Oklahoma. And political fights over it have broken out in at least half a dozen other states and countless local communities.

The fears generated in such places are ridiculous to the point of utter absurdity, but they have had an important real-world impact. In communities like Carroll County, Md., politicians have been voted out of office for supporting local plans. In Baldwin County, Ala., all nine members of the Planning and Zoning Commission quit in disgust after the County Commission killed their plan “on a pretext so devoid of relevance and merit as, in our opinion, to elicit only ridicule,” as they wrote. Prominent politicians like former House Speaker Newt Gingrich and Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) have contributed to such outcomes as they denounce the plan that Cruz has claimed would “abolish” golf courses and paved roads.

Virtually none of the outlandish claims about Agenda 21 are true. Yet, as with all such baseless propaganda, the hysteria over it has had the effect of poisoning any kind of rational discussion of the very real challenges we face — challenges that are essential to tackle head-on in an increasingly complex and stressed world.

It’s time to finally call out the conspiracy theorists. The politicians who spread falsehoods about Agenda 21 and its effects need to be shamed by other politicians, by editorial boards and other commentators, and by the citizenry at large. The business community and organizations like the Chamber of Commerce, which know better, should speak out publicly about the real purposes and usefulness of

planning and sustainability. The media needs to stop reporting on Agenda 21 as if it were a bona fide controversy and plainly state the facts about the plan. And communities around the country, some of which have

abandoned work on sustainability plans because of the heat, need to be encouraged to return to or start to develop such plans in tandem with responsible groups like the American Planning Association.

AGENDA 21

The Problem: Agenda 21 and the Right

In Carroll County, Md., all five county commissioners were swept from office for supporting the plan. In Missoula, Mont., police had to be called in to quell an uproar over paying dues to an organization to help implement it. And in Albemarle County, Va., the harried board of supervisors quit paying those dues and even backed out of a related national agreement.

From one end of the country to the other, a 22-year-old, entirely voluntary United Nations planning document known as Agenda 21 has increasingly come under bitter attack from a wide array of far-right fear-mongers. Led by nearly a dozen extremist groups and their propagandists, the plan — a document meant to help local communities deal with overpopulation, pollution, poverty and resource depletion — is being pilloried as a secret conspiracy to impose global governance. The end point, these ideologues insist, is the destruction of freedom and the onset of tyranny.

Already, the results have been shocking.

At least three states — Arizona, Missouri and Oklahoma— have considered laws, each of which passed one chamber of their legislatures, to halt the purportedly noxious effects of Agenda 21; Alabama went all the way, passing a 2012 law that was signed by Gov. Robert Bentley. Major political battles have broken out over it in Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Montana, Ohio and Texas. Even the Republican National Committee, in January 2012, denounced Agenda 21 as a “destructive and insidious scheme” to impose a “socialist/communist redistribution of wealth.”

Agenda 21 is not a treaty. It is not a legally binding document. Even its recommendations do not come from the top down, but are meant to encourage local



President George H. W. Bush signs a United Nations accord on climate change in 1992.

communities to come up with their own solutions. It does not have the slightest power to force anyone, American or otherwise, to do anything at all.

And it was signed, in 1992, by President George H.W. Bush and the leaders of 177 other countries — nations representing 98% of the world’s population.

But the fears Agenda 21 has provoked plug directly into more than a century of far-right

worries about any international body imposing any kind of control on the United States. It is the latest iteration of the decades-long property rights movement, a movement that has included militant upsurges like the “Wise Use” movement of the 1980s and the militia movement of the 1990s. Taking the place of the communist bogeyman, the United Nations has become the fearmongers’ chief demon.

“Any time you get some sort of UN program that suggests any kind of change in the way people live, even if it seems outwardly benign and even voluntary, it’s going to be taken up by people with a conspiracist bent,” explained Michael Barkun, a Syracuse University political scientist and scholar of conspiracy theories.

The hysteria is palpable.

To Tom DeWeese, perhaps the leading critic of the plan, Agenda 21 will lead to a “new Dark Ages of pain and misery yet unknown to mankind.” To TV

and radio conspiracist Glenn Beck, it is the leading edge of a push for “government control on a global level.” It is an “anti-human document,” a “False Religion,” a mandate to “round up” Americans, a conspiracy to cut the population by 85%, the first step toward a “police state,” a “seditious new plan” for “totalitarianism.”

U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas), who led the 2013 government shutdown, even claimed it would “abolish golf courses, grazing pastures and paved roads.”

“The anti-Agenda 21 movement has had a demonstrable impact on land use policy in Virginia,” said James A. Bacon, a newsletter publisher and conservative activist who focuses on land use issues there. “The fixation on Agenda 21 creates a bizarre distraction from the very real challenge of articulating principled conservative positions on how to manage growth, development and the environment — issues that won’t go away just because we choose to ignore them. Sadly, just uttering the words ‘Agenda 21’ is sufficient in some quarters to shut down the discussion.”

Back to the Beginning

To be sure, when Agenda 21 was adopted at the so-called Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992, it was heralded as a key agreement, the first global effort to take on what was increasingly seen as a looming environmental crisis.

In a semi-official 1993 book explaining the plan, Daniel Sitarz described it enthusiastically as “a document of hope,” a “comprehensive blueprint for humanity to use to forge its way into the next century by proceeding more gently upon the Earth. As its sweeping programs are implemented world-wide, it will eventually impact on every human activity on our planet. Deep and dramatic changes in human society are proposed by this monumental historic agreement.”

Sitarz was being optimistic, to say the least.

Perhaps because the document was, in fact, so sweeping — even though it contained no requirements, enforcement mechanisms or even significant funding — it quickly came under attack from conservatives in the United States. In the years that followed, a surprising number of conservatives and right-wingers took on the basic premise of the plan, disputing the world’s scientists on such issues as global warm-



Tom DeWeese



Glenn Beck



Ted Cruz

ing, the ozone layer, rising oceans and a host of related problems.

Many of those opponents saw Agenda 21 as inimical to business and industry — it did, after all, focus on carbon emissions and related issues — and also believed that it represented an attack on property rights because it proposed to not allow owners completely unfettered use of their lands and businesses.

But to denizens of the radical right, particularly those involved in the growing antigovernment “Patriot” movement, it was worse than that. Agenda 21, they insisted, was merely the latest step in a dismal march toward a totalitarian, socialistic “one-world government,” or New World Order. This kind of conspiratorial thinking was particularly evident among certain Patriot groups that warned in the 1990s that the UN intended to turn most of America into a human-free “biosphere,” or gigantic wildlife preserve, necessitating the murder of most of the U.S. population.

After all, the far right had been sounding the alarm about all international agreements and controls going back to the League of Nations in the early 20th century and even before. Indeed, one Patriot website, Sovereignty.net, produced a “Timeline to Global Governance” that started in 1891 and included financial pacts, treaties, regional and international associations, plus, naturally, Agenda 21.

The Activists

Tom DeWeese, who heads an organization called the American Policy Center, was probably the first to focus on Agenda 21, launching attacks on it almost before the ink on the document was dry. To DeWeese, the plan is the “ruling principle of the revolution,” a sea change that will end with the imposition of “a new kind of tyranny,” something akin to both socialism and fascism. He believes that Agenda 21 is ultimately responsible for what he sees as destructive forces in American society, including multiculturalism, same-sex marriage and other cultural changes.

DeWeese produces materials including an anti-Agenda 21 kit, complete with workbooks, DVDs, and the book *Shattered Dreams: One Hundred Stories of Government Abuse*. Another one of the books he distributes includes a section on the “Delphi Technique,”

said to be a form of mind control to aid propagandizing.

For many years, DeWeese soldiered on almost alone, but as time passed he began to gain adherents, or at least his ideas did. DeWeese and the others saw the plan as a direct attack on the American way of life, a scheme to force Americans out of large suburban homes into urbanized, “pack’ em and stack ’em” apartment complexes, and to insist on mass transportation rather than individual vehicles — a way, in a phrase, to impose a collectivist ethos on a freedom-loving people.

Ultimately, many of those who followed DeWeese thought, the UN intended to create a kind of radical-left utopia, where guns will be banned, the UN will raise a global army to enforce its directives, and freedom will die as globalist planners impose their vision of social order, equality, sustainability and “smart growth.”

The John Birch Society — the ultra-paranoid organization best known for accusing President Dwight D. Eisenhower of being a communist agent and claiming that fluoridation of water was a nefarious attempt to poison Americans — also got into the act early, sending a correspondent to cover the original Earth Summit in 1992. Although it didn’t concentrate heavily on Agenda 21 at first, in recent years it has conducted hundreds of one-day briefings around the country on the topic.

In those sessions, many of which involve local and regional politicians, the JBS has shrilly warned about the perils of environmentalism. In 2008, for instance, it handed out cards mocking “The New False Religion, Worshipping the Earth.”

“Advocates of a UN world government have drafted an Earth Charter, which they compare to the Ten Commandments and keep in an ‘Ark of Hope,’ the group said in a comment about Agenda 21 with no apparent reference to reality. “Will you let the United Nations or any other group undermine the faith of your family?”

DeWeese and others are part of a network of radicals peddling essentially similar ideas about Agenda 21 (see profiles, p. 13). Michael Coffman, for example, is the executive director of Environmental Perspectives Inc. At a 2008 “Freedom 21” conference in Texas, Coffman described the plan as “[a]n anti-human



Political provocateur Glenn Beck may have done more than anyone to spread false conspiracy theories about Agenda 21, which he describes as part of a globalist plot to “suck all the blood” out of American communities.

document, which takes aim at Western culture, and the Judeo-Christian and Islamic religions.” He said it would ultimately lead to a communist redistribution of property.

Michael Chapman of Ed Watch, a group against public education, sounded similar at the conference. To Chapman, the plan is to restrict economic development, not so as to protect the environment but just to give more power to the government. “The new world theology is pantheism,” he added. “Nature is God.”

Another fairly well-known right-wing activist, John Bush of Texans for Accountable Government, cited Agenda 21’s alleged final goal when he tried to get his hometown of Austin, Texas, to drop a resolution meant to make the city more energy efficient. “Before carbon was thought of as the most evil thing in the world,” he said, “there were ... internationalists hashing out a plan to further their scheme for world government through the means of excessive environmentalism.”

Fox News, Glenn Beck and the RNC

Conservative commentators have enthusiastically joined the attacks, too.

Dick Morris, the Bill Clinton adviser-turned-Fox News conspiracy theorist, excoriates Agenda 21 backers in his 2012 book, *Here Come the Black Helicopters: UN Global Government and the Loss of Freedom*. He accuses them of “cancelling out both free will for the individual and democratic determination of policies for the nation. Only their fetish has priority.” Fox News’ Eric Bolling sounds similar, saying in 2012 that a proposed White House Rural Council sounded

“eerily similar to a UN plan called Agenda 21, where a centralized planning agency would be responsible for oversight into all areas of our lives. A one-world order.”

Remarkably, there is also some opposition to Agenda 21 from the left, notably in the form of Democrats Against UN Agenda 21. The group, which hosted a major conference on the plan in 2011, is led by self-described lesbian feminist Rosa Koire, who came to the issue through battles over zoning in Santa Rosa, Calif., where she owns property. Koire, who wrote the popular book *Behind the Green Mask: U.N. Agenda 21*, claims the plan will ultimately bring on the economic collapse of the U.S. She reserves special animus for those who lobby for bicycle lanes, describing them as “testosterone-laden zealots” who are the “‘shock troops’ for this plan.”

Perhaps the most effective purveyor of the Agenda 21 conspiracy theory has been Glenn Beck, especially before he left Fox News in mid-2011. “Those pushing ... government control on a global level have mastered the art of hiding it in plain sight and then just dismissing it as a joke,” he said around that time as he waved a copy of the 294-page document. “Once they put their fangs into our communities and suck all the blood out of it [sic], we will not be able to survive.”

In 2012, Beck went further, publishing a dystopic novel with co-author Harriet Parke called *Agenda 21*. It purports to tell a post-Agenda 21 tale of America, a place where the beleaguered heroine is confined to a depressing apartment in a planned community, spending her days treading on a special pad to produce energy. In this world, children are taken from parents and raised in group homes, mating partners are assigned, and people recite pledges in honor of squirrels.

“[I]f the United Nations, in partnership with radical environmental activists and naïve local governments, get their way, then the themes explored in this novel may start to look very familiar, very quickly,” Beck writes in an afterword.

The most dispiriting aspect of the entire book may be Beck’s comment that “since those who speak about Agenda 21 are constantly marginalized as radicals or conspiracy theorists, I wanted to include a link to the official 2012 GOP platform.” Although that platform, by the time it was adopted in August 2012, dropped some of the RNC’s wilder language about communism from earlier that year, it still had this: “We strongly reject the U.N. Agenda 21 as erosive of American sovereignty.”

On the Ground

In this era of extreme political polarization, politicians with relatively large followings have jumped on the Agenda 21 bandwagon, simultaneously demonizing environmentalism, the United Nations and any kind of global planning.

During his short-lived presidential campaign, Newt Gingrich said that he would “explicitly repudiate” the plan signed by the first President Bush, who led Gingrich’s Republican Party until just two years before Gingrich became House Speaker in 1995. He described it as “interference from the United Nations.”

That was comparatively calm talk.

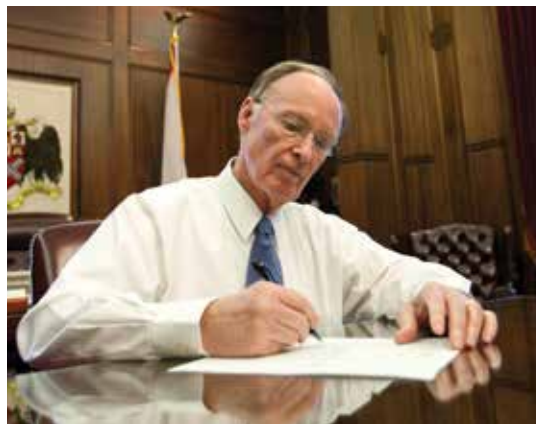
Introducing anti-Agenda 21 legislation that ultimately failed, Oklahoma state Sen. Sally Kern (R), already infamous for her wild-eyed anti-gay commentaries, said that the plan would destroy American property rights and result in a ban on cars powered by fossil fuel. Arizona state Sen. Judy Burges (R), an anti-Obama “birther” who also introduced an anti-Agenda 21 law that failed, said that the “sinister and dark” plan would require that certain “people should be rounded up.” Burges said it would force Americans from the land they own, ruin Arizona businesses, mandate a “redistribution of wealth,” and, in the end, “control every aspect of our lives.”

In Georgia, Senate Majority Leader Chip Rogers organized a four-hour, closed-door anti-Agenda 21 briefing in October 2012 for fellow Republicans that was delivered by “birther” Field Searcy. Attendees were told President Obama was using “mind control” techniques to push land use planning, and that the UN planned to force Americans from suburbs into cities and also was implementing mandatory contraception to curb population growth. Around the same time, after a debate about raising sales taxes to pay for transportation improvements, state Sen. Bill Heath (R) said Agenda 21 advocates wanted to “essentially conquer the world through limiting everything we do.” And a former state gubernatorial candidate, running for the Cobb County Commission, condemned plans for a jogging and biking trail along a certain highway, saying that it was the work of auto-hating backers of Agenda 21.

In Missouri, legislators cut funding for the Department of Motor Vehicles after it came to light that it had turned over a list of 163,000 residents with conceal-carry permits to federal investigators. The move followed testimony to lawmakers from Melissa Wilson, wife of state Rep. Kenneth Wilson (R), in which she said, “With this information going



AP IMAGES/DAVE MARTIN



AP IMAGES/ALABAMA GOVERNOR'S OFFICE, JAMIE MARTIN

to the federal government, I feel that I will be a target. With Agenda 21, I will be someone who will be put on a watch list.”

In Carroll County, Md., all five county commissioners were voted out of office over their support of the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), which supports Agenda 21 and helps local communities plan sustainable development. (The Huffington Post reported in October 2012 that 29 members of ICLEI had quit as a result of anti-Agenda 21 activism.) Local activist Richard Rothschild, who led opposition to the commissioners, said that Agenda 21 was “a direct assault on private property rights and American sovereignty” and “arguably an amalgamation of socialism and extreme environmentalism.”

In Missoula, Mont., police had to be called to calm a December 2012 government meeting where some \$1,200 in dues to ICLEI was under discussion. In Albemarle County, Va., the board of supervisors halted dues payments in 2012 to ICLEI and also withdrew support for a national agreement on climate change. In the Springboro (Ohio) Community City School District in 2013, the ACLU threatened action when officials proposed a “controversial issues policy” requiring that students of sustainable development also read about Agenda 21 conspiracy theories.

And in Naperville, Ill., two female opponents of “smart meters” — devices that measure electricity use in businesses and homes in order to rationalize energy production — were arrested in January 2013 as they tried to prevent installation. Opponents of the smart meters claimed without evidence that they were linked to illness and cyberwarfare, and endanger property rights and liberty in general.

There are almost too many of these kinds of encounters to count. But the most dramatic action

Although other states have passed resolutions and considered laws condemning Agenda 21, only Alabama actually enacted legislation meant to outlaw any possible effects of the UN plan. The law was proposed by state Sen. Gerald Dial (R-Lineville) and signed by Gov. Robert Bentley.

— outdoing states like Kansas, New Hampshire and Tennessee, which all passed resolutions condemning Agenda 21 — came in Alabama. There, on May 16, 2012, after just a few minutes of debate, legislators voted unanimously for Republican state Sen. Gerald Dial’s S.B. 477, which says “the state of Alabama and all political subdivisions may not adopt or implement policy recommendations that deliberately or inadvertently infringe or restrict property rights without due process.” Of course, existing laws plainly already prevented such property seizures.

Whither Agenda 21?

Is Agenda 21 on the ropes?

For all the agitation, it’s not clear. A June 2012 poll by the American Planning Association, which has been shocked by the attacks on what seems like a perfectly sensible approach to planning, found that 85% of respondents didn’t know enough to make a judgment about Agenda 21. Just 6% said they opposed the UN plan, while half again as many — 9% of survey respondents — said they supported it.

What does seem clear is that the world is growing more complex and facing more challenges that really do require serious advance planning. Despite the barrage of anti-science propaganda, there is virtually no doubt among climate scientists and others that we face huge challenges related to climate change, rising oceans, and resulting disastrous weather events — challenges that it seems certain can only be effectively met by multinational action. In addition, there are major challenges related to population growth

and shifts in concentrations of people. By 2050, the Census Bureau expects the population to grow by 40% to 440 million people, and huge numbers of baby boomers are expected to very shortly begin moving to smaller homes and, in many cases, different parts of the country, as they retire.

There has been something of a backlash to the anti-Agenda 21 movement. In 2012, for instance, an anti-sustainable development bill was killed in Arizona after the state Chamber of Commerce lobbied against it, saying it could drive away firms with sustainable development plans, according to the Huffington Post.

“I think the Tea Party people who turn up shouting at planning meetings are heading for a McCarthy

moment,” said Chattanooga, Tenn., Mayor Ron Littlefield, in a reference to Communist witch hunter and Wisconsin Sen. Joseph McCarthy, according to the Post. “Many people are sick of their scare tactics.”

That may well be. But an enormous number of politicians, commentators, activists, conspiracy theorists and others have swallowed the story of the anti-Agenda 21 zealots, making any kind of rational discussion of the environment and related issues extremely difficult. And that is the basic problem. Dealing with the serious problems that confront our nation and our planet becomes incredibly difficult when the public discussion is poisoned with groundless conspiracy theories.

And the Nazis Join In...

Conspiracy theories about the Agenda 21 sustainability plan come principally from propagandists of the antigovernment and property rights movements. But neo-Nazis, never content to let a good plot theory lie idle, have joined in, too.

Consider James Wickstrom, who in other contexts has said that he would like to murder Jews by beating them and throwing them into wood-chipping machines. He dedicated an hour of online video to vilifying the Jewish “internationalists” he sees lurking behind the non-binding United Nations plan adopted in 1992.

“Agenda 21 is very evil,” says Wickstrom, a key proponent of the anti-Semitic theology of Christian Identity. “It’s extremely evil because it comes from the dark side. You see, the light side is Yahweh the Christ, which is truth, always truth. Then you have the dark side, which is Jewish international communism.”

The people behind RealJewNews, an outlet dedicated to attacking Jews, see it the same way. To them, President Obama and his allies, working to promote Agenda 21, are now in the final stage of implementing the “Jewification of America.”

And Stormfront, a major white supremacist Web forum run by a former Alabama Klan leader, has a

thread describing Agenda 21. “Let’s understand what our enemies are doing!” the thread starts. Another poster sets the tone with a typically unrestrained statement: “This is totalitarianism on a scale and degree UNIMAGINED and UNIMAGINABLE by most of us. 1984 is just ahead. *It is being implemented right now, while the White Sheeple and even we sleep.*”

It’s not much of a surprise that neo-Nazis and other anti-Semites would glom on to the Agenda 21 conspiracy theory. The radical right in America and abroad has long associated Jews with globalism and collectivism — Jews were accused by the Nazis of being behind “Bolshevism” and Henry Ford’s classic libel of the Jews was entitled *The International Jew*. The idea that the UN really seeks global control fits in with longstanding theories about sneaky Jewish plans for world domination.

“Anti-Semitism is basically a conspiracy theory,” says the American Jewish Committee’s Ken Stern in explaining how Agenda 21 is seen by neo-Nazis as a direct descendant of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which purportedly reveals a secret Jewish plot to take over the world. “It’s Jews conspiring to harm non-Jews, and that conspiracy explains a lot of what goes wrong with the world.”

AGENDA 21

The Players: Anti-Agenda 21 Activists

Agenda 21, the 1992 United Nations plan for sustainable development that was signed by the leaders of 178 of the world's 196 countries, is not binding and has no power to force any action at all. Nevertheless, in the hands of a dedicated cadre of far-right conspiracy theorists, it has been depicted as a key step in a secret plan to destroy property rights, redistribute wealth and, ultimately, force the United States and other countries in a tyrannical, one-world government in which bicycle paths and wildlife refuges will be vastly more important than human beings. What follows are brief portraits of 11 of the leading anti-Agenda 21 groups and their leaders.

AMERICAN POLICY CENTER

President: Tom DeWeese
Headquarters: Remington, Va.
Website: americanpolicy.org

The American Policy Center, which focuses on “environmental policy and its effect on private property rights” and “the United Nations and its effect on American national sovereignty,” was founded by Tom DeWeese in 1988. DeWeese was one of the very first on the radical right, if not the first, to attack the UN's Agenda 21 plan, starting almost immediately after its adoption at the 1992 Earth Summit in Brazil.

DeWeese doesn't mince words. He has described Agenda 21 as a “blueprint to turn your community into a little soviet,” pushed along by “a hoard [sic] of non-governmental organizations” that pressure elected officials to endorse the plan and enforce it through “non-elected boards, councils and regional governments.” “It all means locking away land, resources, higher prices, sacrifice and shortages and is based on the age old socialist scheme of redistribution of wealth,” he adds.

“It sounds so friendly. So meaningful. So urgent,” DeWeese wrote in a 2009 report. “But the devastation to our liberty and way of life is the same as if Lenin ordered it.” The plan, he adds, is a “complete agenda of control” that has been “wrapped in a green blanket, scaring us with horror stories about the destruction of

the environment — and so we are now throwing our liberties on the bonfire like a good old fashioned book burning — all in the name of protecting the planet.”

For years, DeWeese's center was the chief sponsor of “Freedom 21,” an annual conference of opponents of the plan that have attracted well-known right-wing extremists like Phyllis Schlafly of Eagle Forum (see below); Cliff Kincaid of Accuracy in Media; Joseph Farah of WorldNetDaily; Michael Shaw of Freedom Advocates (see below); and Michael Coffman of Environmental Perspectives Inc. (see below).

DeWeese, who has been close to a number of those in the Tea Party movement, offers an array of videos on his website backing up his contentions, along with DeWeese essays with titles like “Sustainable Development: The Evil Facing America” and “Putting Bicycles Ahead of People.” His center also publishes “The DeWeese Report,” occasional special reports, and legislative updates.

CONSTITUTION PARTY

President: Frank Fluckiger
Headquarters: Lancaster, Pa.
Website: www.constitutionparty.org

The Constitution Party was founded in 1992 as the U.S. Taxpayers Party by the late Howard Phillips, who ran for president three times without ever gaining more than 0.19% of the vote. It is an essentially theocratic party, saying that its goal “is to restore American juris-

prudence to its Biblical foundations and to limit the federal government to its Constitutional boundaries.” It opposes almost all immigration, abortion even in cases of rape or incest, and the federal income tax.

The party, which at one point absorbed the American Independent Party (the vehicle for segregationist Alabama Gov. George Wallace’s own 1968 run for the presidency), is also very much against U.S. participation in international institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, as well as foreign aid.

So it wasn’t much of a surprise when, in 2012, the group took a position on Agenda 21 that described it as “a comprehensive plan of utopian environmentalism, social engineering, and global political control.” The resolution went on to say the plan was being “covertly advanced in local communities” and would attack private ownership of homes, farms and cars “as destructive to the environment.”

It also described Agenda 21 as leading to “socialist/communist redistribution of wealth” — words almost identical to those used by the Republican National Committee, which also denounced Agenda 21 in its own January 2012 resolution.

The plan has been repeatedly denounced at the local level by the Constitution Party as well. Bernie De Castro, the party’s Florida chairman, said: “Agenda 21 is the most dangerous threat to America’s sovereignty that is coming at us like a whirlwind and yet so few Americans are aware of this diabolical threat to them and their families.” The Hollywood, Fla., chapter invited Rosa Koire of Democrats Against UN Agenda 21 (see below) to speak at its June 2012 meeting.

The party’s Arizona chapter recently produced its own resolution on the plan: “We call for a return to the states and to the people all lands which are held by the federal government without authorization by the Constitution.” And its Allegheny County, Pa., chapter urged its members to attend a March 2012 presentation by the conspiracy-minded John Birch Society (see below) on Agenda 21.

CONSTITUTIONAL SHERIFFS AND PEACE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

Executive Director: Richard Mack
Headquarters: Higley, Ariz.
Website: cspoa.org

Richard Mack, who won fame on the far right for successfully challenging some aspects of the Brady gun control bill in the 1990s, formed the Constitutional

Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association (CSPOA) in 2011 with the goal of uniting law enforcement officers to defend the Constitution with “an emphasis on State Sovereignty and local autonomy.” As a practical matter, that means Mack has pushed the baseless theory that local sheriffs can nullify federal laws.

That antagonism to centralized power made the tough-talking Mack, who was once the public relations director for the extremist group Gun Owners of America, a natural adherent to ideas about the supposedly nefarious nature of Agenda 21. In fact, at the CSPOA’s first annual convention, held in January 2012 in Las Vegas, Mack hosted Tom DeWeese of the American Policy Center (see above), who spoke to the gathering on “Agenda 21 & the International Redistribution of Wealth.”

Joining DeWeese in his criticism of the UN plan were three sheriffs: Glenn Palmer of Grant County, Ore.; Gill Gilbertson of Josephine County, Ore.; and Jon Lopey of Siskiyou County, Calif. The sheriffs reiterated complaints, fairly common in the West, about the large proportion of land controlled by the federal government and logging, mineral extraction and grazing rights on public lands, and related them to Agenda 21 and its alleged attack on private property rights in America.

“This land is our land,” said Gilbertson. “Feds have no jurisdiction!”

The CSPOA’s interest in killing Agenda 21 was not limited to that convention. In June 2013, the organization held a similar session during its second annual conference. It was headlined “Nullify Now: Expose and Reject NDAA [National Defense Authorization Act, which includes a number of emergency detention measures disliked by many on both right and left]/Agenda 21.” Among the presenters for the session were Michael Coffman of Environmental Perspectives Inc. (see below) and Tom DeWeese of the American Policy Center (see above).

DECLARATION ALLIANCE

Founder: Alan Keyes
Headquarters: Herndon, Va.
Website: www.declarationalliance.org

The Declaration Alliance was founded in 1996 by three-time presidential candidate and former U.S. Foreign Service officer Alan Keyes, a protégé of President Reagan who has moved further and further to the right over the years. The Alliance says it is dedicated to the principles embodied in the Declaration

of Independence, but focuses heavily on gun rights, the “right to life” (Keyes opposes abortion in virtually all cases), and the repeal of the federal income tax.

Over the years, Keyes has adopted a whole series of highly controversial positions, saying that Jesus Christ would not have voted for Barack Obama, who he called a “radical communist” with a forged birth certificate; that homosexuality is nothing more than “selfish hedonism”; that state-sanctioned prayer should be allowed in public schools; that evolution is a false theory; and, during a stint as a U.S. ambassador at the United Nations, that he did not support the UN.

Keyes first came out against Agenda 21 in a 2011 blog post that charged that the government was allowing the UN to take over American treasures by designating them World Heritage Sites. He returned to the plan in an alarming 2012 fundraising letter: “Enemies who hate America, despise liberty, and want the United States transformed ... into socialism, are relentlessly advancing a seditious new plan — Agenda 21 — to make our nation a vassal of the United Nations.” He went on to say that it was “the most aggressive and ambitious attack on our nation to be put forward by the UN one-worlders” and theorized that it would result in the confiscation of farms, the end of private property and a ban on private ownership of cars.

DEFEND RURAL AMERICA

Founder: Kirk MacKenzie
Headquarters: Los Altos, Calif.
Website: www.defendruralamerica.com

Kirk MacKenzie, a business adviser and former broker, formed Defend Rural America at an October 2011 meeting in Yreka, Calif., held to fight American Indians and environmentalists who wanted to remove four hydroelectric dams on the Klamath River to help bring back the once-thriving salmon population. Although the group did not win that battle — the dams’ removal now seems likely — MacKenzie said the meeting had established a “new standard for grassroots activism.”

The organization is not solely focused on Agenda 21, although sustainable development and its alleged perils are discussed. Nita Still, a Montague, Calif., anti-Agenda 21 activist has pilloried the plan in searing terms on MacKenzie’s site, saying it “means the destruction of our lives” at the hands of “the Soulless Ones,” by which she seems to mean globalist environmentalists who believe in planning.

Sustainability, she writes, will mean taking “55% of the land for flora, fauna, rivers, streams and wetlands because they are Persons with Rights ... thousands of new housing, stacked upon each other in the Bay Area because the rural areas will be herded down the road to urbanism and their population decimated.”

Still has a particularly conspiracist bent, taking on many of the bogeymen of the antigovernment “Patriot” movement in her rants about Agenda 21. She says the plan reflects “the desires of the Illuminati and the Committee of 300, plus the Club of Rome, the Council of Foreign Relations, the Bilderberg Group, The Skull and Bones or the Order 322 and the Trilateral Commission” and more.

“They have planned for the whole world to have 90% of the population murdered by abortion and aborting life by disease, famine, wars, wrecking of the economy, industry, technology, giving vaccines and medicines which cause disease and a slow death,” she writes. She adds in her essay that proponents “can also manipulate the weather and cause earthquakes [and] volcanic eruptions.”

The planners, she said, are “more concerned with animals and the environment over human beings.” She adds that the “United Nations is a front for all that is happening in our lives,” aided by a group of international bankers.

DEMOCRATS AGAINST UN AGENDA 21

President: Rosa Koire
Headquarters: Santa Rosa, Calif.
Website: www.postsustainabilityinstitute.org

The vast majority of opponents of Agenda 21 come from the right, mostly the far right. But in the case of Rosa Koire (pronounced CORE-ee), a self-described lesbian feminist and longtime forensic commercial real estate appraiser specializing in eminent domain evaluation, the criticism is ostensibly coming from the left.

Not that it’s very easy to tell.

The main difference between Koire, who runs the Democrats Against UN Agenda 21 website and is executive director of the closely linked Post Sustainability Institute, is that she says the UN wants to “erect Communitarianism” — as opposed to socialism, or communism — “as the dominant form of world governance.” Communitarianism is a system of cooperative groups that practice some communist principles but are generally less centralized than historic communist states. She also claims that the Democratic Party has been hijacked by socialists.

After that, Koire sounds like most Agenda 21 fear-mongers. “[Y]our local government is in the process of controlling where and how you live, what you eat, what your children learn, and what laws you will live under.” She also says on her website that the Agenda 21 plan means “to inventory and control all land, all water, all minerals, all plants, all animals, all construction, all means of production, all energy, all education, all information, and all human beings in the world.”

Koire authored a 2011 book, *Behind the Green Mask: U.N. Agenda 21*, where she says the plan aims “to protect the rights of future generations and all species against the potential crimes of the present.” She says “the rights of the individual are called self-ish and those who would fight for them [are] slurred as immoral.”

Like right-wing critics, she sees the plan as aiming to create regional governmental bodies (such as the European Union) as merely “an interim stop on the road to globalization” that will eventually lead to a one-world government.

EAGLE FORUM

President: Phyllis Schlafly
Headquarters: Washington, D.C.
Website: www.eagleforum.org

The Eagle Forum was formed in 1975 by conservative anti-feminist Phyllis Schlafly, who created it out of the remnants of her Stop ERA group, which opposed the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The group has long been involved in a wide array of highly conservative causes, many of them having to do with women and the family — opposition to abortion, sex education in public schools, working mothers and feminism in general. It also favors English as our official language, assimilation of immigrants, and the right to bear arms. Finally, it opposes international oversight by the United Nations.

In that vein, the Eagle Forum came out relatively recently against Agenda 21, forming the Agenda 21 Task Force to lead the battle. The forum says Agenda 21 seeks to destroy “the morals of our nation,” diminish the role of parents, boost communist values, and, ultimately, turn America into a communistic state.

The UN, the group says, wants to impose taxes to build a huge operating fund that will, in the end, help turn the organization into a “de facto world government.”

The Eagle Forum hosted a conference on Agenda 21 in Sacramento, Calif., in 2012. Speakers included Michael Coffman of Environmental Perspectives Inc. (see below), Michael Shaw of Freedom Advocates (see below) and several sheriffs.

Cathie Adams, president of the Texas Eagle Forum, wrote in a 2012 newsletter that “Agenda 21 DENIES the U.S. Constitution’s Fourth Amendment guarantee of property rights and DISAGREES with America’s Founders that fee men operating within free markets are the best stewards of the earth.” “Americans are at a crossroads,” she added. “In November, we must replace all elected officials who support Agenda 21 with those who choose FREEDOM.”

ENVIRONMENTAL PERSPECTIVES INC.

President: Michael Coffman
Headquarters: Bangor, Maine
Website: www.epi-us.com

Michael Coffman founded Environmental Perspectives Inc. in 1992 as an “educational-research organization” that aimed “to sound a warning to America and the Christian church of serious threats to our freedom.” More specifically, the group focuses on the dangers of “insidious property rights infringements.”

“The effort on the part of the international community to create a world government and religion has far reaching implications,” the group says on its website. “Our goal is to help people understand the consequences to them and our nation if our politics are driven by a belief that big government is the answer to everything and that nature is god and humans are destroying it.”

Coffman has written several books on related subjects: *Environmental Perspectives: The Dawn of Aquarius or the Twilight of a New Dark Age*; *Saviors of the Earth: The Politics and Religion of the Environmental Movement*; *The Birth of World Government*; and *Dreamkillers*, “a fast-paced novel that provides the horrifying saga of how a town in Maine savaged a sick widow in order to take her land by using smart growth regulations.” He has also produced several similar DVDs, including “Global Warming: Emerging Science and Understanding,” which claims to explain “that man literally cannot be causing global warming.”

Coffman also offers copies of a DVD entitled “Endgame” produced by Alex Jones, America’s leading conspiracy theorist. According to Coffman’s blurb,

it “penetrates the history of the global elite’s effort to create world government.”

FREEDOM ADVOCATES

President: Michael Shaw
Headquarters: Santa Cruz, Calif.
Website: www.freedomadvocates.org

Originally called Freedom 21 Santa Cruz, Freedom Advocates was founded in 2000 by Michael Shaw, who says he had earlier participated in the Local Agenda 21 program run by Santa Cruz County, Calif., during the 1990s.

Shaw’s group focuses on the idea that Agenda 21 “is being implemented on the local level in order to establish a collectivist world government.” It claims that under the plan, “political recognition of inalienable rights is denied.”

Shaw was long a regular at the “Freedom 21” conferences hosted by Tom DeWeese’s American Policy Center (see above), attending in 2007, 2008 and 2009.

“Environmentalism is not about saving nature,” Shaw said at the 2008 conference. “It’s about a revolutionary coup in America. It is to establish global governance and abandon the principles of natural law.” He predicted that sustainable development policies will require a “police state” and ultimately “turn America into a globally governed homeland where humans are treated as biological resources.”

In 2012, Shaw appeared on the propaganda video “Behold a Pale Horse,” which featured far-right country singer Charlie Daniels. “America is in peril,” Shaw said in fairly typical remarks. “A globalist regime has begun undertaking a transformation of what is America.” Later, he got down to specifics.

“The only way this is going to be defeated is to understand the nature of what has enveloped our country,” he said, adding that Agenda 21, along with its many other nefarious aspects, calls for an 85% reduction in the population.

THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION

President: Jim DeMint
Headquarters: Washington, D.C.
Website: www.heritage.org

The Heritage Foundation, created in 1973 by three arch-conservatives discontented with President Richard Nixon’s embrace of big government, grew over the decades to the point that *The New York Times*

once labeled it “the Parthenon of the conservative metropolis.” Since former Sen. Jim DeMint (R-S.C.) took over from leader Edwin Feulner in April 2013, it has grown more conservative still.

The group says in its mission statement that it was founded to “formulate and promote conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense.” Starting in 2011, it began to take on Agenda 21 as well.

That year, it described the UN plan as being part of a vast power grab. It has also described how zoning policies related to the plan “limited real estate development to higher-cost homes in order to ‘price out’ moderate-income households, which included a disproportionate share of minorities.” It warned that the plan’s unwelcome effects were being felt at the local as well as national levels.

A paper published by the foundation in 2011, authored by Wendell Cox, Ronald D. Utt and Brett D. Schaefer, warned that Agenda 21 advocates “work to impose land use regulations that would force Americans into denser living arrangements, curtail freedom of choice in housing ... and compel people to pay more for their houses and give up their cars” for public transportation and bikes.

JOHN BIRCH SOCIETY

Chief Executive Officer: Arthur R. Thompson
Headquarters: Appleton, Wis.
Website: jbs.org

Shortly after founding the John Birch Society (JBS) in 1958, wealthy businessman Robert Welch set the tone for his archconservative organization for decades to come when he accused his fellow Republican, President Dwight Eisenhower, of being a commie patsy. By the early 1960s, JBS, the grouchy grandpa of the far right, was also attacking the United Nations as a den of socialists, communists and insiders plotting to take over America.

So it should come as no surprise that these days the Birchers are at the head of the paranoid parade marching against Agenda 21, the non-binding UN resolution passed and signed by more than 170 world leaders, including another American Republican president, George H.W. Bush.

“Agenda 21 seeks for the government to curtail your freedom of travel as you please, own a gas-powered car, live in suburbs or rural areas, and raise a family,” the society charges on its website. “Furthermore, it

would eliminate your private property rights through eminent domain.”

“Choose Freedom,” the website declares. “Stop Agenda 21.”

From its headquarters in Appleton, Wis., about two miles from where the remains of serial libeler and Sen. Joseph McCarthy are buried, the society produces slick anti-Agenda 21 pamphlets and DVDs, shipping them to JBS chapters and supporters across the country. The society also relies on staffers like Hal Shurtleff to get the anti-Agenda 21 word out.

An Army veteran and father of five, Shurtleff is the indefatigable field director of the Birch Society on the

East Coast. Since 2011, not long after JBS began its anti-Agenda 21 crusade in earnest, Shurtleff has conducted more than 70 presentations in public libraries, rec center basements and hotel conference rooms about the perils to freedom of Agenda 21.

From California to Maine, other JBS chapter leaders have been doing the same.

“We have established a good network of freedom activists who know how to identify Agenda 21 initiatives,” Shurtleff says. “We use Facebook, social media and E-mails. There are dozens of Facebook pages dedicated to Agenda 21 as well as hundreds of Tea Party type groups.”

AGENDA 21

The Case Study: Baldwin County, Ala.

BAY MINETTE, Ala. – Call them the Baldwin County 9. On Nov. 16, 2012, the entire nine-member Baldwin County, Ala., Planning and Zoning Commission quit in protest and disgust, casualties of the ongoing right-wing war being waged across the country against local smart-growth and anti-sprawl initiatives.

The mass resignation was a drastic and dramatic decision that did not come easily to the men and women on the commission. They were not a band of radical, anti-development tree-huggers, although one was a registered forester. They were respected residents of the community, who had, over the years, put in hundreds, if not thousands, of volunteer hours performing their civic duty, trying to help guide and manage the explosive growth of Alabama's largest county. The commission members included a certified public accountant, a real estate appraiser, a grant consultant for rural communities and two retired military officers, one of whom is the second highest-ranking official in the Alabama Republican Party.

But that August, as comparisons to The Communist Manifesto, talk of conspiracies to snatch away property rights, and warnings about citizens being herded into “rail cars” filled a government meeting room here, the Baldwin County Commission, which oversees the sprawling county by the sea, rescinded the Planning and Zoning Commission's masterwork, an award-winning, comprehensive development plan known as Horizon 2025. The plan was killed, according to the group letter of resignation, “on a pretext so devoid of relevance and merit as, in our opinion, to elicit only ridicule on the part of any serious knowledgeable observer.”

The pretext was Agenda 21.

“It was the principal issue,” longtime Baldwin County Commissioner Frank Burt, who voted to rescind Horizon 2025, told the Southern Poverty Law Center. “People began to study Agenda 21 and the more people became aware of what is happening, not just in the U.S. but throughout the world, they didn't want anything like it. The plan [Horizon 2025] just fit right into Agenda 21's overall plan. Nobody

ever tied it together before. You can clearly see it is all part of the same plan.”

Chances are, however, unless you belong to the John Birch Society, one of the Tea Parties or some other rightist collective, you have no idea that Agenda 21 is considered a grave threat to truth, justice and the American Way – and apparently to life in Baldwin County, Ala. Odds are also good that you, like most people – with bills to pay, kids to raise, conspiracy theories to ignore – have never read a word of the 22-year-old, almost 300-page United Nations document or even heard of it.

Agenda 21 is a non-binding UN resolution – a proposal, a global guide – designed to encourage, not mandate, nations to pursue conservation, “sustainable” green growth and land use development efforts. It was passed and signed at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 by more than 170 world leaders, including President George H.W. Bush.

'All Government is Bad'

Yet, to the American right, Agenda 21 is a sneak attack on the sanctity of private property, another footfall on the long march to One World Government that is destined to darken our bright skies with black helicopters. It is a UN-inspired conspiracy that seeks, in the words of the archconservative John Birch Society, which is at the forefront of the opposition to Agenda 21, “to curtail your freedom of travel as you please, own a gas-powered car, live in suburbs or rural areas, and raise a family.”

Local initiatives and plans such as Horizon 2025, which was also nonbinding, are simply Agenda 21 in disguise, harmless looking spies laying the groundwork for a foreign invasion. “The conspiracies are real,” one man told the County Commission meeting. “If you want to ignore them, ignore them at your own peril.”

In recent years, Agenda 21 has become an effective rallying cry, organizing tool and bludgeon that right-wing groups have been using to beat back local sustainable growth and anti-sprawl initiatives, including everything from bike paths to smart meters on home appliances. The attacks have caught city councils, planning commissions and smart-growth advocates across the country off guard, leaving them scrambling to mount a defense.

“I had not heard about it [Agenda 21] before they [the county commissioners] started touting it,” Arthur C. Dyas, a member of the Planning and Zoning Commission for 16 years, the last few as chairman, told the SPLC. “Our plan had nothing to do with Agenda 21. I called one of the county commissioner’s hands on it and he just about shouted me down. By, God, this was all about Agenda 21 and the United Nations. And I’m like, ‘What are you talking?’”

“It made absolutely no sense to me,” Dyas continued. “I like to believe that he really didn’t think it was about Agenda 21, that he was just using that to beat our brains in with it. But I’m not sure. I’m not sure whether he believed it or not. I just think it was really sad and a disservice to the people of this county for the County Commission to have rescinded it.”

The award-winning Horizon 2025 was replaced a year later, in October 2013, by a substantially shorter plan, “with a lot fewer words,” County Commissioner Burt said. “The new plan,” he added, “is more direct and to the point and just easier to understand. It’s more concise. Our United States Constitution is a pretty short document, too.”

Since the death of Horizon 2025, Baldwin County has become a sort of Rorschach test. For those who believe Agenda 21 means the beginning of the end of American freedoms – from property rights to gun ownership – Baldwin County was a triumph of the will of the people. To supporters of smart and sustainable growth, such as Cara Smallwood, one of the Baldwin County 9, what happened that day in Bay Minette, the county seat, was “simply crazy.”

“I felt we were being demonized by the County Commission,” Smallwood told the SPLC. “They were beating the scary government drum. It’s the age of the Tea Party, all government is bad. That’s why they threw an amazing, award-winning plan into the trash.”

A Plan to be Proud Of

For years, the Planning and Zoning Commission tried to get a handle on the county’s explosive growth.

Retirees were flooding in to take advantage of the miles of sandy white beaches, piney woods, warm weather and relatively low cost of living in Baldwin County on the Gulf of Mexico. Young families were also flocking to Baldwin, clogging the roads and causeways as they commuted back and forth to nearby Mobile for work. From 1990 to 2000, the county experienced a 42.9% increase in its population. Meanwhile, subdivisions were popping up everywhere, with little consideration given to how the many projects fit with each other, the environment and the future. “There was no control over development,” said Dyas, the former chairman of the planning commission. “It was a train wreck.”

There was so much development, going up so fast, that Planning and Zoning Commission meetings would sometimes start at 6 in the evening and end at 4 the next morning. Next, the meetings were split in two: subdivisions on the first Thursday of the month, zoning on the third. “Hell, we were still going from 6 until midnight, 1 o’clock,” Dyas said. “It was unbelievable.”

In 2009, after days of public hearings held by the Planning and Zoning Commission, thousands of man- and woman-hours, and hundreds of thousands of dollars, the Baldwin County comprehensive plan was adopted by the County Commission by a vote of 3 to 1. “The comprehensive plan was just that, a plan,” Dyas said. “It was not a law. It was not an ordinance. It was a plan, something to use as a guide in future development of a given area.”

The following year, the Baldwin County Planning and Zoning Department was awarded the Alabama Chapter of the American Planning Association’s 2010 Outstanding Planning Award for Horizon 2025. In its newsletter, the chapter praised the plan, saying “Since its adoption, environmental concerns and livability are now also considerations when development is proposed.”

“As for developers,” the newsletter added, “the plan lends stability to the development process – there is now a guide for where development can be located, how it can be developed and its best and most compatible uses. The plan is intended to provide foresight and remove some of the guess work from development to ultimately allow the realization of the County’s vision.”

But by then the great recession had already swept across America and development projects from Maine to California to Baldwin County came to a screeching halt. Bulldozers now sat still and silent

in the Alabama sun. Planning and zoning meetings went back to once a month. At some meetings there were no items on the agenda. One meeting lasted a record six minutes. “That’s how fast it tanked down here,” Dyas said. “So, the plan really never had a chance to be fully implemented into the process here in Baldwin County.”

Still, two new county commissioners, who were elected after running on a platform opposed to the plan as too restrictive and intrusive, vowed to rescind it as soon as possible. Now the balance of power was reversed, setting the stage for the Aug. 7, 2012, meeting and the end of Horizon 2025.



Attendees at the August 7, 2012, meeting of The Baldwin County Commission applaud Commissioner Frank Burt Jr.’s denunciation of Horizon 2025. By the end of the evening, the commission had trashed its own comprehensive development plan.

Black Helicopters and Baldwin County

Baldwin County officials said the meeting on the fate of Horizon 2025 was called because there was concern that the county’s comprehensive plan did not adhere to Alabama’s new anti-Agenda 21 law, which went into effect in January 2013.

In the days leading up to the meeting, fliers were distributed warning of the “massive land grab represented by Horizon 2025.” More than 30 people signed up to speak. Many carried small American flags. Most wanted to see the plan killed.

Craig Skaggs, a retired lobbyist for DuPont, was one of the few to speak in support of retaining the plan. He must have felt like Davy Crockett at the Alamo – or maybe Alice in Wonderland.

Skaggs called the state’s anti-Agenda 21 legislation “needless” and the attacks on Horizon 2025 as a U.N.-inspired land grab “pure poppycock,” following “the lead of the conspiracy theories at the Wisconsin-based John Birch Society.”

“Do we really want,” he asked, “rampant growth based on only the changing political whims of county commissions or greedy land interests that often control our politicians?”

Ricky Richardson, of Fairhope, Ala., said Agenda 21 and Horizon 2025 are a “duplicate” and worried about “Americans that kept their blinders on and when they were marching them into the rail cars they still didn’t understand what had happened to them.”

Richardson said he applauded the Baldwin County Commission for essentially snatching off its blinders and “being on top of this and realizing that this is a movement coming from a global initiative and being promoted through local government.”

He left the podium to sustained applause.

Boyd Little and his wife Catherine took the podium and told the meeting that they opposed the comprehensive plan “because we really don’t understand what all is taking place with it.” Little’s buddy and neighbor, a blind farmer named Arthur Frego Jr., said he also could not understand the plan and warned that if “this magnificent maze of paperwork goes through it’s going to be mandatory.”

“And instead of the old reading, writing and arithmetic you were taught in school,” Frego said, “it’ll be rules, regulations and restrictions.”

Another speaker compared Horizon 2025 to *The Communist Manifesto* and pointed out that Karl Marx’s handiwork was supposed to be merely a guide, too. “Can the plan,” he urged. “It’s draconian. Can that baby?”

Ken Freeman told the audience that he had driven for six hours from his home in northern Alabama, where he owns a cattle ranch on the Tennessee River, to plead with the commissioners to rescind the plan. Freeman is the chairman of Alliance for Citizens Rights, which, he said, has worked on property rights and constitutional issues for more than 15 years. He said he travels the state, taking complicated subjects like Horizon 2025 and translating them into simpler terms, or “Bubba Talk.”

For example, Freeman said the black helicopters people are always talking about aren’t actually black. “They’re green with black numbers on them,” he said.

“The people who accuse us of being the black helicopter crowd,” he said, “there must be a lot of black

helicopters these days” because earlier that spring the Republican National Committee drew up “a very strong anti-Agenda 21 resolution.”

A watered-down version of that resolution was eventually included in the party platform for the 2012 presidential election. “We’ve got black helicopter people everywhere,” Freeman said.

Before the final vote was taken to “repeal, rescind and void” Horizon 2025, Robert James, chairman of

the Baldwin County Commission, looked out at the audience. “This is just a start,” he said. “You need to stay involved. It’s important. And it’s nice to come here today and see so many people that have that passion. But use that passion for more than just this one issue.”

Then the plan was killed, the audience cheered and filled the room with a warbled version of “God Bless America.”



MEDIA AND GENERAL INQUIRIES

Mark Potok or Heidi Beirich

Southern Poverty Law Center

400 Washington Ave., Montgomery, Ala.

(334) 956-8200

www.splcenter.org

The SPLC is supported entirely by private donations. No government funds are involved.

© Southern Poverty Law Center. All rights reserved