

Jeff Bezos announces \$1 billion biodiversity pledge

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Last month former Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos announced that he would allot \$1 billion to a conservation campaign aimed at the preservation of 30 percent of the world's biodiversity. Bezos, up until recently the world's wealthiest individual, declared on September 19 that his Earth Fund philanthropy would fund conservation efforts "where there is significant need and opportunity, as well as where there is a strong political commitment to nature."

The investment will be part of the "30 by 30" campaign which various conservation charities have announced. The campaign aims to protect 30 percent of the world's habitats by 2030. The Earth Fund investment will target "areas that are important for biodiversity and carbon stocks and will give emphasis to the central role of local communities and Indigenous peoples in conservation efforts."

The Fund will seek to develop regions in the Congo Basin of Africa, the tropical Andes as well as the tropical Pacific region, "where there is significant need and opportunity, as well as where there is a strong political commitment to nature." Bezos did not announce what specific projects the money would be funneled toward.

He received immediate praise from politicians, such as British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and President Ivan Duque of Colombia. President Joe Biden's special envoy for climate John Kerry declared that the pledge "comes at a pivotal moment as we seek to avoid the loss of irreplaceable biodiversity and further destabilization of the climate."

The announcement marks the first tranche of funding offered by the Earth Fund. Founded in 2020, Bezos declared its aim was to "explore new ways of fighting the devastating impact of climate change on this planet." To this end, the then-Amazon CEO pledged

\$10 billion of his vast wealth (calculated at \$198 billion, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index).

The Earth Fund was unveiled amid the public health and social catastrophe which has accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic. Officially, over 4.7 million lives have been lost, while other sources have estimated the death toll to be several magnitudes higher. In the United States, the global epicenter of the pandemic, over 700,000 have lost their lives.

While Bezos professes his sympathy for various species of flora and fauna facing extinction, the giant corporation he founded has taken advantage of the extinction of large numbers of human beings in the course of the pandemic. Amazon specifically has profited enormously from the shelter-in-place and remote working conditions that many in the population have adopted because of coronavirus.

In 2020 the corporation raked in \$21.3 billion in profits. In late July, the company posted a second quarter 2021 income of \$7.8 billion, which was an increase of 50 percent from the same quarter in 2020. Amazon expects this year's third quarter revenues to improve upon 2020's numbers by "only" 10-16 percent, a slowing growth, which *Variety* explains is a product of "the laws of large numbers" and the abating "surge of online orders a year ago."

The Fund follows other philanthropic efforts provided from the grotesque fortunes of America's billionaires. The *Washington Post*, which is owned by Bezos, notes that its boss "remains among the world's largest contributors to climate philanthropy." Aside from his climate pursuits, Bezos has supported numerous charity initiatives, including funds for the homeless and preschool services for low-income children.

Other wealthy benefactors to the climate cause

include former New York City mayor and Democratic Party presidential candidate Michael Bloomberg, “who has given more than \$100 million to the Sierra Club’s Beyond Coal campaign,” and Bill Gates, who “has led a for-profit initiative, Breakthrough Energy Ventures, which runs a \$1 billion fund focused on climate-mitigation technologies.”

While the Earth Fund’s investments may find their way to a few worthy causes, the vast wealth commanded by Bezos is a particularly crude expression of the degeneration of modern capitalist society, characterized by immense poverty and social inequality.

The *World Socialist Web Site*, describing the charity of one of Bezos’s fellow billionaires, wrote in 2010 that such initiatives represented “the return of the aristocratic principle.” Under this precept, “the population was essentially at the mercy of the great ones in society, who bestowed—or did not bestow—favours and gifts as they saw fit.”

The summer has been dominated by billionaire aristocrats venturing into space. Now, with the “green” ventures of Bezos and other billionaires, this principle has been extended to animal and plant life as well.

Due to criticism over Amazon’s own substantial contributions to global warming, the e-commerce giant introduced the Climate Pledge campaign in 2019. The campaign, which over 200 corporations have signed onto, boasts that its members account for “\$1.8 trillion in global annual revenues and have more than 7 million employees across 26 industries in 21 countries.” The *Post* notes, “Bezos unveiled the initiative after Amazon, for years, resisted revealing its environmental impact through CDP, formerly known as the Carbon Disclosure Project—a widely used framework for corporate reporting.”

The fortune behind Bezos’s Earth Fund has been made possible by the backbreaking exploitation of the Amazon workforce throughout the pandemic and before. Amazon’s workforce has surged from fewer than 800,000 workers in 2019 to over 1.3 million today. According to *Business Insider*, 1 in 153 American workers currently works for Amazon.

At the same time, Bezos’s stock wealth grew by \$75 billion in 2020 alone. According to *Yahoo Finance*, “\$1.7 million for Jeff Bezos is the same as \$1 for the average American.” Bezos rakes in an astonishing

\$3,715 per second, an amount which dwarfs the average American weekly income of \$984.

The conditions in Amazon’s warehouses give lie to the American oligarch’s humanitarian pretensions. A *Post* review of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) files since 2017 recently found that the retailer had more instances of injuries that “caused employees to miss work or be shifted to light-duty tasks” than other businesses in the warehousing industry.

In a recent exposure of Amazon’s abusive practices, the state of California recently passed laws which bar the company from demanding productivity from workers at rates which force them to forego state-mandated breaks and bathroom visits.

Rather than abiding by the oligarchic principle, the protection of biodiversity and the environment requires a massive redistribution of social wealth from the capitalist class to society’s producers. Only in a society in which social activity and life itself are freed from the intrusions of the profit system can a truly scientific response to climate change be mounted.



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