

**Reining in the Bulls with Michael Marx**  
**Interview with Glenn Hurowitz of Mighty Earth**  
**Recorded May 26, 2023**

**Name:** Glenn Hurowitz

**Current Title:** Founder and CEO

**Current Organization:** Mighty Earth

**Name of campaign:** Palm Oil Campaign

**Date(s) of campaign:** ~2011 -

**Target companies/corporations:** Wilmar International, Kellogg's, Unilever



**Summary:** The purpose of this campaign was to tackle the issue of deforestation, focused on the palm oil industry. Palm oil had destroyed more than 30,000 square miles of forest across Southeast Asia. It had destroyed habitat for tens or hundreds of thousands of orangutans and other endangered wildlife. The destruction of these ultra carbon rich peatlands was spewing carbon dioxide at the atmosphere, and there was very little going on to address it. As a result of this campaign, on December 5th, 2013, Wilmar announced the strongest forest and human rights policy of any major agribusiness. It banned deforestation, conversion of peatland and exploitation of indigenous communities throughout their global supply chains.

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00:04 Michael Marx:

Glenn Hurowitz, Executive Director of Mighty Earth. Welcome. I appreciate you being available for this interview.

00:11 Glenn Hurowitz:

Thank you so much, Michael. It's an honor to be included and to be with you. You've really been such an inspiration for our work. I'm happy to describe Mighty Earth. I founded it in 2016 with the goal of creating the most effective environmental advocacy organization in the world. We want to protect nature and create a secure living climate for all creatures. And, we've really tried to focus on delivering results.

We have a relatively business focused culture, we've brought the best from social change theory, from classical military strategy and from the business world, and applied it to campaigns on some of the biggest issues. Our central focus is nature, the core of the extinction crisis, which is my personal motivation to do this work, but also represents 37% of the solution to climate change. There have been some big gaps when it comes to nature especially so we have tried to focus on the areas that have the most potential to drive change.

01:27 MM:

Let's talk about one of your most recent campaigns, the Palm Oil Campaign. What was the overall problem and the harm that the campaign was designed to address?

01:49 GH:

I had worked previously on efforts to make trees worth more alive than dead. I led a coalition of major environmental groups and several large companies that were working on climate legislation to give an incentive for the protection of forests. We were wildly successful in getting large scale financial incentives for conservation included in the 2009/2010 Waxman Marky Climate legislation to the tune of \$12 to \$14 billion per year. Sadly, that legislation did not make it through the Senate, and I feel like if it had, it would've fundamentally changed the economics of forest around the world and probably meant, essentially an end to deforestation. Unfortunately, tragically, that didn't pass. So we needed to come up with a plan B. I knew about efforts previously, including some of yours, to use consumer influence, financial pressure, and engagement with policy makers and corporate decision makers to tackle the great issue of deforestation. Initially we focused on the palm oil industry. I knew that palm oil had destroyed more than 30,000 square miles of forest across Southeast Asia. It has destroyed habitat for tens or hundreds of thousands of orangutans and other endangered wildlife. The destruction of these ultra carbon rich peatlands was spewing carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, and there's very little going on to address it. While I was doing that exploration, these two 15-year-old girls, reached out to me. They were Girl Scouts, and they had done their Girl Scout silver medal research project about orangutans. They were upset to learn that the number one threat to orangutans was palm oil, and that the palm oil was an ingredient in the Girl Scout cookies they sold to raise money for their troop. So they reached out to me to say, can you help us talk to

major environmental groups and get them to ask the Girl Scouts to stop using palm oil? I said, I'd be happy to do that. It's an important issue. But you would literally be the perfect poster children for this issue. I think Americans and people around the world care deeply about the fate of rainforests, fate of the animals that live within them, but they don't know what to do about it. These forests are thousands of miles away, and most people don't know how you could possibly impact it, even if from watching a nature film or reading about it in the newspaper, they find it deeply upsetting. And what I found really interesting about the Girl Scouts was that it was a bridge between this iconic American product and the deforestation that was happening in Southeast Asia. So we got a very small grant from the Packard Foundation, and we set about arranging a media tour for them. It really caught on fire. We had them on everything. There was a huge front page story on the Wall Street Journal about their effort. They were on Fox News, all the major morning network television shows. It really lit up the internet as well. And, we got some movement from the Girl Scouts and Kellogg's, which made the cookies to try to make the palm oil more sustainable. But the really interesting impact was when the Indonesian and Malaysian agriculture ministers publicly attacked these 15 year old girls. They said they were naive and they were misdirected. It was surprising to a lot of the conservationists and foundations who worked on these issues. The conventional wisdom was that because more than 60% of palm oil was consumed in developing Asian countries, there was little impact that anything in the United States would have. The United States only consumes about 2% of the world's palm oil. So its leverage was limited. The idea was always if you put in too strict sustainability restrictions in Europe or the US, they'll just sell more to China, sell more to India, et cetera. The reaction showed that they seemingly did really care about the image of palm oil in the West. So then, a number of large foundations asked me to develop a strategy to chart how one could end demand for deforestation based palm oil and other commodities. So, I set out to do that, traveled all around the world, meeting the leaders and leaders in the palm oil industry, NGOs working on the issue, sustainability consultants, financiers and what we found was that it was challenging. There were hundreds of Palm Oil producers. The largest of them actually had already implemented or announced a pretty good sustainability policy on its own plantations, but they only represented 5% of global production. So, going producer by producer would be very challenging. There was little direct leverage on these companies operating in the frontier in Sumatra or Borneo or Papua New Guinea. On the other end of the supply chain, there were thousands of companies that used palm oil and products like soap and shampoo and cookies and biofuel. The largest of them was Unilever, which only accounted for 3% of the world's consumption. So, similarly, it would take a long time if you just tried to go consumer company by consumer company to address deforestation connected to palm oil. What we found in our analysis, however, was that there were these big agricultural traders that sit astride palm oil and many other commodities. Cargill, Uungi (?), Iowise, several others, (8:00) the largest amongst these was Wilmar International. It was a Singapore, it is a Singapore based company. It's Asia's largest agribusiness, and it controlled an estimated 45% of the global trade in Palm Oil. That's an enormous market concentration. To us, this was partly good news because in theory, if you could change the market leader's policies, if they could ban deforestation, not only on their own plantations, but for any supplier that could send a signal throughout the industry and in principle, customers then wouldn't have to choose between being forest friendly and making a profit. If the largest company was providing a more

sustainable product, it could make a big difference. The only challenge was that Wilmar had a pretty terrible record when it came to environment and human rights. They ranked 500 out of 500 on Newsweek's global ranking of companies on sustainability. They were behind China, coal, India, coal, Monsanto, wow. ExxonMobil. And they had earned it. They had directly driven the destruction of hundreds of thousands of acres of forest across Southeast Asia. They bought from companies that engaged in millions of acres of deforestation.

I later saw a picture of the CEO of Wilmar with his foot up on a bulldozer. And behind him, thousands of acres of peatland forest destroyed in the background. They were very proud of that. At the time, the mentality was, this is development. We're building a new prosperous company and a prosperous Asia. So they also were known to thrive on opacity and, like many agricultural traders, known for being conservative. And so, on the one hand, it seemed like they had incredible leverage. And on the other hand, it seemed like a daunting challenge, but we thought, this is really the only way that you could change this industry. It's unlikely that government policy in these countries is going to be enforced. There's a lot of corruption. You have to go at the heart of the problem. I think in many cases, paradoxically, the companies most responsible for environmental destruction are also those best positioned to address it. So, we set out researching how could we change this obscure Singaporean agribusiness.

Just as we were doing that, Kellogg announced a joint venture partnership with Wilmar. Kellogg really prizes its reputation for sustainability. Uh, they have a foundation that supported sustainable food programs, and here they were getting into bed with the literally, company ranked worst on sustainability of any major company in the world. So, initially we reached out to Kellogg, but then we also started to do a campaign. We looked at how we could move Kellogg, how we could move Wilmar. We did grassroots organizing. We partnered with Green Corp, the field school for Environmental Organizing, which I'm an alumnus. And our organizers went to Michigan, where Kellogg's is based. They went on college campuses and asked students to go up to Kellogg recruiters and say, we don't want to work with you if you are in bed with this company that is bulldozing the rainforest. We recruited hundreds of volunteers in the communities where Kellogg's executives lived and put up lawn signs saying things like "What would Tony do?", referring to Kellogg's Tony the Tiger mascot. Part of the theme of our campaign was that Tony the Tiger was concerned about the fate of his Sumatran Tiger cousins.

We also worked with investors in Kellogg's and Wilmar. There was a decisive moment in our campaign where our allies at Green Century Capital Management got on the earnings phone call with the CEO of Kellogg's and asked him "why are you jeopardizing your multi-billion dollar brand for a joint venture partnership with this company that has this terrible reputation when it comes to the environment?

The next day, the Bloomberg story covering the earnings call was not about the Kellogg's having a boost of 6 cents per share, but rather about the risk that this partnership was presenting to their brand and the CEO said he would address it. So we created what we like to call "a perfect storm." There was starting to be pressure from customers, from investors and others. We had great allies at this organization called Rainforest Foundation Norway, and they work in Norway

to protect rainforests. Norway has the largest pension fund in the world. And this organization's advocacy had actually just gotten them--while we were launching the campaign--to divest from Wilmar and 23 other palm oil companies that engage in deforestation. That one investment wasn't going to change the company alone, but it sent a signal to Wilmar executives that perhaps other institutional investors might not be far behind.

Many investors had gone to Wilmar and other companies and politely said, you know, we're concerned about deforestation wondering what you're going to do about it? And Wilmar would reassure them and say, oh yes, we take environment very seriously. We have these certification programs. We have a small orangutan conservation program. And for many of these investors, they fly back to Europe or America thinking they having ticked the box and expressed their concern. But now, suddenly you had the largest pension fund in the world divesting. And while that alone didn't have a significant financial impact, it made them fear that others might actually do something real. And so that was also a boost to our efforts. Just as all this campaign was kicking off, the deforestation in Southeast Asia reached a crisis level. In the summer of 2013, huge amounts of haze generated by the bulldozing and burning of forest for palm oil and other commodities started to go into the air. It's a typical seasonal occurrence in the region because of the vast amount of deforestation. However, this year, the winds blew it not just onto Indonesia and Malaysia where the deforestation was happening, but into Singapore which is where Wilmar was headquartered, and where many of the financiers of the palm oil industry are located. The airport was shut down because of the haze. People couldn't go to work. There was \$16 billion at least in economic damages. There was a lot of news attention, especially in the region, to this event. But the media coverage was generalized. They talked about the haze as a kind of almost natural phenomenon. So I went on TV and said, there is one company that is largely responsible for the haze crisis and is very well positioned to stop it. If they just instituted a policy to ban any of their suppliers from engaging in deforestation, that would set a huge precedent throughout the industry. We were happy that the media covered this. But two days later, I got a very defensive letter from Wilmar CEO Kwa Kong Hong, and on the one hand, it didn't seem immediately that this represented a big opening. However, from the research we'd done and from my own conversations with some people in Wilmar, their positions were not ideological. They wanted to make as much money as possible and have a prosperous business. And to me, that seemed like an opportunity. I said, you have been such a big part of Asia's economic success now. It is time to be part of its ecological healing. We also talked about the fact that there were 125 million hectares of degraded lands all across the tropics, where you could expand crops like palm oil without threatening native ecosystems. We talked about some of the smaller scale successes that there had been in expanding agriculture without deforestation, and how this could be deployed in the palm oil industry. I wrote all that in a letter back to Kwa Kong Hong. He emailed back to me. Then we talked on the phone a few times, and then, he invited me to come to Singapore. So I flew 24 hours to Singapore to go meet with him, walk in the door of their boardroom. He comes in with several other senior executives and proceeds to unload at me for 15 minutes about how unfair NGO campaigns are, and how unjustified all these attacks are. And I thought to myself, I can't believe I've flown 24 hours to listen to this. But once he got that off his chest, he was actually quite open-minded. And we spent three hours together that first day, he took me to lunch and I spent a lot of time

talking about the solutions, the fact that they could expand their business and expand the planted area without threatening native ecosystems. And I talked about some of the steps that would be needed to do that. He kind of treated me like a Chinese uncle. He said to me that the fact that I was vegetarian made him feel like I was actually dedicated to this work. His family came from a Buddhist tradition, and he saw that as a sign of sincerity. I think in the past, his interactions with environmental or conservation organizations had mostly been from groups going to solicit funds from him. And we were not interested in getting any money from them.

We wanted them to change what they were doing. I speak Chinese -- I started learning it when I was two years old. The Kwok family is ethnically Chinese, so we spoke some Chinese, and I think that helped a little bit to culturally create a connection.

One of the other things I emphasized was that they needed to have a credible implementation partner. We weren't interested in them just making a press release saying that they were going to change everything. We needed them to bring in an external partner. And we recommended the Forest Trust, an organization that had worked with other commodity agriculture and timber companies to reduce deforestation. They had piloted a technical approach called the high carbon stock approach with Greenpeace to set a standard for what could be developed and what needed to be protected. We wanted them to bring in a credible implementation partner who knew how to do it and could also talk to them about how they could do it based on experience. It wasn't just me from an advocacy NGO saying, in theory, you can expand without deforestation. It would be practitioners of good agriculture talking to them about how to implement it throughout their enormous supply chains. So that was the first meeting. They were open. We were continuing the campaign. We kept in communication with the CEO and others at Wilmar, and I went back to Singapore for a second meeting. There was another long dinner and at that meeting, the CEO agreed to bring in the Forest Trust -- they were very skeptical of this organization because they were known for advocating a very strong conservation standard. They'd heard criticism of that approach from other companies in the industry who feared it would limit their development. But ultimately, I said, look, what do you have to lose by talking to them? And so, he agreed. I arranged for Scott Pointin, who was the then executive director of the Forest Trust, to join us in our next meetings. And I felt that once I had that agreement, we were likely to succeed because Scott could talk to them in great detail about how to deploy these solutions. They'd worked with other companies to do it at a somewhat smaller scale. I thought that would be persuasive given Kong Hong's openness. I will say, when I first started talking to Kong Hong, and he was willing to consider our ideas, the executives in the room had their jaws on the floor. They couldn't believe that he was so open-minded. They'd never been able to imagine that he might be interested in doing things a different way and open to it. And I think some of them had actually seen the opportunity to do better but didn't feel like they had the scope to pursue it. So it was a fascinating example of why it's important to go to the top. I always try to go to the CEOs and then we can follow up with the staff. But if you can get the CEO buy-in, then you have license to drive implementation. And, that's absolutely critical. So Scott came into the conversations and talked to them about this. He was really helpful, very persuasive, very expert. But ultimately, Kong Hong and Wilmar had a huge concern. They did not want to be the only company adopting this policy. So what

we did then was we convened a meeting, along with Unilever, which had an interest in finding more sustainable palm oil, of seven of the top companies. We sat around Unilever's Singapore headquarters. We gave presentations about the potential to produce palm oil and other commodities without deforestation. And then I remember we went around the table one by one. Each of the executives from the other companies said, Nope, there's no way we're going to do this. I remember one guy said, "So wait, are you telling me that if I have a boat going up the coast of Sumatra, and it is not filled with palm oil, that I will not be able to buy from certain suppliers because they've engaged in deforestation?" And we said, yes, that's exactly what we're saying. And he said, "well, no thank you." Another guy said, you're saying that we have to respect the rights of indigenous people, who claim they own the land just because they've been there for thousands of years. But we want that land for palm oil. And we said, yes, that's exactly right. And he said, that's ridiculous. So that was the state of the industry at this time. And it was very disappointing that despite our presentation and what we thought was the persuasiveness and willingness of Wilmar, the industry leader to go along, that we weren't making progress. Nonetheless, we talked to Wilmar and say, you've got to keep going. You may need to take a leap of faith. You may need to be the first, you may need to show leadership. If you do that, you'll have more customers come to you because they're feeling pressure from our campaigns and our allies to buy only from deforestation free sources. So they agreed to keep going. However, this unwillingness of other companies to go along became a huge obstacle. And I remember on Thanksgiving of 2013, I was sitting with my family at home in New York State, and I was explaining to my parents and my cousins what I had been doing, and how I had been really hopeful about the potential to drive an end to deforestation, not only in the palm oil industry, but really across commodity agriculture. And then that we had this obstacle that we couldn't get another company. And, Wilmar wasn't willing to take a leap of faith. And I said, I think this may take years. We're going to have to keep at it and grow and be persistent. It's going to be really challenging. I had been hopeful, but I'd become quite sad and cynical by that point. And then, as I was about to go to bed that night, I got a text message from Wilmar saying, okay, it's on. We'll do it. I think all the pressure had had an impact. I also think that Kong Hong himself wanted to have a more positive legacy. His niece had asked him about all the attacks on his company over their connections to deforestation. And I think he really saw the impact in China of air pollution and didn't want to create the same disaster in Southeast Asia. So, I bought a ticket to go to Singapore and two days later got on a plane, flew there, landed, and had an email from him in my inbox saying, I'm sorry, I can't do it. No other company is going to do it. How can you ask me to take such an enormous risk for this business that I've spent 25 years building? I'm so frustrated and disappointed. Fortunately, our volunteers in Michigan, had just held what they called the "Cereal bowl." More than 80 volunteers from across the state showed up at Kellogg's headquarters for a big rally. There were people dressed in Tony the Tiger costumes and the big boxes of cereal. And they delivered thousands of petition signatures to Kellogg's. And I had the photos from the event. It was really impressive because it was a cold Wednesday, in the middle of the day, and they had all these people turn out because they really cared about the fate of the Sumatran tiger, the other wildlife, the forest, the climate. We try not to threaten people. We have a principled conversation about, in this case, their opportunity to grow their business without deforestation. But I felt like our back was against the wall, and this was, you know, our big opportunity to change agriculture. And so,

I sent him a photo of the rally and I said, respectfully, if you don't do this, the headquarters of dozens of your customers are going to look like this. He did not respond immediately, which was a good sign because he is the guy who kind of shoots from the hip. Two hours later, he wrote me back and said, all right, why don't you come in for dinner tonight? We'll talk about it. At that moment, Scott was on a plane from Switzerland coming to join us and got there in time for dinner. So we all went to a Chinese restaurant and sat with him, Jeremy Goon, their chief sustainability officer, Simon Siberrot, another executive, and we basically yelled at each other for two and a half hours. Very interesting. We were frustrated. They were frustrated. Finally, he said, look, if you can get one other company to go along, of any type, I will do it. Even if you can get Unilever to sign on, I will go ahead and do it. Now, the only challenge with that was we were not really on speaking terms with Unilever at that point. Unilever disagreed with our approach that we thought Wilmar should go it alone. They wanted to have the choice to buy from many different palm oil suppliers. If you only had one company committed to zero deforestation, that would lock them into purchasing from only that one company and potentially cause business consequences for them. On the other side, this was an opportunity to create a precedent in the palm oil industry and global agriculture to really drive down deforestation substantially. I didn't have much hope though, because they were quite adamant that they didn't agree with our approach. However, I wrote an email to Paul Pullman (sp?), the CEO of Unilever. And I said, I understand that you guys disagree with this approach. However, we are on the cusp of an enormous breakthrough, and you are the only person standing in the way of it right now. Paul Pullman had been a corporate spokesperson for leadership on climate and environment. And, I told that to him, but I said, I know there's a strategic difference, but this is a such an enormous opportunity. You can't put it aside. Five minutes later, we got a call from Unilever's chief guy in Singapore, and he said why don't you come down and meet with us tomorrow at our offices? We'll talk about it. I didn't have too much hope and we didn't get dressed up or anything. Scott and I just got in a taxi, went to the Unilever headquarters early the next morning, and Mark Engel, their chief procurement officer came in and he said, okay, we'll do it. We said, great. And so we called Kwa Kong Hong and handed the phone to Mark, and he said, yeah, we're in. We'll do it. And Kwa Kong Hong said, great. So we spent a lot of time drafting up a new policy. Suddenly out of nowhere, a phalanx of lawyers descended on us, from Wilmar and from Unilever. Spent the next few hours ironing out the details. And on December 5th, 2013, Wilmar announced the strongest forest and human rights policy of any major agribusiness. It banned deforestation, conversion of peatland and exploitation of indigenous communities throughout their global supply chains. So that was a huge breakthrough, a huge victory. And came about through the campaign.

33:49 MM:

One of the things that really distinguishes this campaign and this conversation underscores it, is how much interaction you had with the senior executive of more than one company, Wilmar, but also Unilever, et cetera. And I think it's really good insight into being able to have those conversations and to be confident in having those conversations because not everybody is.

34:22 GH:

Absolutely. I think even for younger people, knowing that what you're working on is important, and if you've got a certain amount of energy behind you, these issues can rise to the top of the pile for CEOs and other senior executives. It is possible to sit with them. I will caution that it is harder to get those meetings with American companies which tend to be, I think, a little more hierarchical and want you to go through the institutional channels. You still can but it can be a little harder than with Asian companies where the CEOs tend to be more hands-on, or even European ones.

35:08 MM:

I want to talk a little bit more about the campaign because it sounds like you did some power mapping of the company. You identified who some of its major business customers were. So there's a markets campaign element here as well. You talked about Kellogg's, Unilever, et cetera. Were there different tracks to the campaign? It sounds like you had Green Century Funds, so there was a shareholder track or component. Was that focused more on Kellogg or Unilever? It also sounds like there was a field organizing track. Obviously a few people are showing up at Kellogg! I'm assuming there was probably a digital track, too. Was there any kind of a legislative track, for example, to try to get policies even as a threat, that they're being considered or bills being proposed? I'm curious what the tracks of the campaign there were.

36:13 GH:

You're absolutely right. There are many tracks, and having multiple tracks is central to our approach. We call it "the perfect Storm." The perfect storm stands in opposition to a silver bullet. So, you know, we rarely see where one campaign tactic or approach or, article is going to change a major company's decisions. It's got to be a combination. And ideally, it's done in a compressed period of time. We're trying to concentrate force. It's a principle we bring from classical military strategy. We don't have the resources that the companies we're trying to change to do. But if we can bring focused attention to them; everywhere they turn, whether it's investors or, customers or the media asking about an issue-- it's a wake up call that will cause them to look at what would actually be the cost of changing their practices. Most environmental destruction is economically marginal. So, I find what we do is very often just a wake up call to get them to look at what would be the real cost of change. And typically it's low, and sometimes they even make positive economic returns. We worked with a lot of institutional investors. Green Century was certainly the lead partner, but I also had conversations with colleagues, with many other investors all around the world. We were in communication with several consumer companies, although the actual sort of advocacy campaign was heavily focused on Kellogg's, given their joint venture partnership and our reach. We didn't have an infinite budget to go after every company in the world. We did have some allies, like Union of Concerned Scientists and a few others that were working to reach other companies as well. There were allies that were, in general, sending this message to the supply chain. So there wasn't only pressure from us, or only in Kellogg's. I think that was where the most intense effort was. And I think the fact that we were able to concentrate this effort over time was really helpful. Wilmar's leadership rightly had a sense of crisis about this. You know, they were suddenly, in the course of a few months, seeing themselves on television in a way

that they hadn't been used to, hearing from the CEO of Kellogg's, hearing from institutional investors, the pressure really was rising on them. And I suspect that they began to see it as an existential challenge. On the other hand, I also think Kong Hong really seriously did want to make a positive difference. And I wouldn't discount the conversations that I had initially and then Scott and I had with him. I think the fact that we came in with a solution-oriented perspective was important. I didn't reign abuse on him in those conversations. Even when he spent that first 15 minutes unloading on me, I kept my cool and talked about the potential and the solutions and didn't castigate him for past damage. And I think that helped create a constructive relationship that made him just be willing to consider what we suggested. He had not been really thinking about the environment before. He'd been focused on his business. And I think that was an important dynamic. The ability to have constructive solutions-oriented discussions with companies and government decision makers is something that I really try to inculcate in our team at Mighty Earth.

Campaigners are fueled in great measure by passion and sometimes rage, about the horrible abuses that we're trying to confront. It is hard to see an orangutan killed to make room for a palm oil plantation and not be really angry at the guys who did it. And it's righteous anger. On the other hand, in order to be constructive and make a difference for the orangutans, you have to approach these conversations with a very pragmatic spirit. Now I also say just because you're having a constructive professional meeting doesn't mean you can't go outside and speak to reporters, and blast (the company) and tell the truth about their record in passionate terms. But when you're with them, you should put that aside and talk about solutions because ultimately, we are interested in driving impact. We like to say we're obsessed with impact. And, that means we have to keep that in the forefront of our minds.

You asked earlier about government... At that time, the other effort that we and a couple of allies were working on was to limit food-based biofuels. One of the uses for palm oil is being burned in gas tanks. The demand for palm oil for food is so much that it's caused the destruction of tens of thousands of square miles of forest. There was, at the time especially, but even now, an effort to also use it for fuel. And that would create enormous additional demand, enormous additional stress on forests and climate. We were working in the United States. I'd been able to raise some money for our allies at the European Federation for Transport Environment to urge reform in Europe to not allow food-based biofuels, and especially palm oil. So that was out there and they're still working on it. And I think it was an important complimentary voice.

The other thing which we had started to conceive a couple years before that even was an effort to take the Lacey Act, which banned import of illegally logged wood into the United States, and extend that principle to agricultural commodities. We had commissioned the Center for International Environmental Law to write a paper analyzing the legal options for doing so for both the United States and Europe. Then we presented that at a gathering at Chatham House with UK and European policymakers, and many of the regulated companies. I remember that the policymakers were all very resistant to extending the scope of either the EU timber regulation or the Lacey Act to other commodities, basically saying, you know, we're so busy

with enforcing this law, how could you imagine that we could expand our scope? Fortunately, Fern, WWF and Greenpeace and a couple other organizations really took that forward for several years. But that goes way later than the time that Wilmar adopted its policy. Ultimately, *just in the last couple days, finally that policy has passed the European Unions*, so they have now banned import of products linked to deforestation. We've been involved for the past several years, although several other organizations really had carried it through up to the point where it became a serious legislative prospect. So now that's helpful and that legislation is codifying in law some of the voluntary requirements that we were able to start getting enacted a decade ago.

44:15 MM:

I would think also that, as we've seen before, markets campaigns like this one can actually build enough public support and education that that can then be turned towards trying to get those policies adopted. And particularly when it happens in Europe, then leveraging that to get it pushed in the United States, even though it's tougher, it's still...

44:39 GH:

Exactly. And I think the other dynamic that you see, and that is very much a part of our theory of change, is creating political realignments. In the case of the palm oil industry, once the companies agreed to protect forests and protect indigenous rights, they no longer had an incentive to lobby or bribe governments to weaken environmental protection. Indeed, they wanted to make sure that their competitors were subject to the same requirements that they had voluntarily adopted. And so they became more willing to support, or at least not oppose, improved environmental laws and enforcement.

45:15 MM:

I think this is one of the real evolutions in corporate campaigns. Originally it was really aimed at the company. It got the change from the company, then it moved to the next company in the industry. But, I think it didn't take long to realize that, wait a minute, once you've got the lead company, they want to make sure they're not disadvantaged in the marketplace relative to their competitors. If they can get a policy that applies to all of them, now we're going hand in hand with the company, and that's a powerful combination to go to these legislators.

45:49 GH:

Absolutely, and the EU deforestation regulation, I think, is one of the most significant conservation laws of the last 10 years. We're trying with a whole bunch of allies to pass similar legislation in the United States as well. We're actively engaged in that effort as we speak.

46:11 MM:

When you step back and look, what were the overall results, where does the Palm Oil campaign results stand now in that industry?

46:24 GH:

I think the important thing to say is as soon as we won the policy from Wilmar, we pivoted to call on their competitors to do the same thing. We immediately launched campaigns focused on the other major palm oil companies, and we worked with several allies on that, Greenpeace and many other groups. Once we had the momentum, the other groups, I think felt like this was a live effort and redoubled their own efforts. And it worked. Within a year, together, we were able to get companies representing, we believe, more than 85% of the industry to adopt the same forest and human rights protections across their whole supply chain. Ultimately, about 32 of the major traders adopted those policies. It was really rapid success. And, we wanted to make sure it was rapid. We thought one of the principles we see is that you are the scariest the moment after you've had a big victory. I think the other companies looked and said, wow, they changed Wilmar, the biggest agribusiness in Asia. They're going to be coming for us pretty quickly. And then they got a letter from us immediately saying, it's time to change. And their customers started calling them, and banks started pulling loans from them. So with that momentum, we didn't want to ever just change Wilmar. We were interested in driving change across the whole industry, and we pivoted very quickly to make that happen.

47:52 MM:

I want to underscore that because I think one of the big lessons learned from this and other campaigns is that when you get the leader, suddenly your fearfulness to the competitors goes up, the norm in the industry has changed. It goes up. So they're much more likely to fall in line thinking that, well, they're not going to be at a competitive disadvantage anymore because they're doing the right thing and the biggest guy is not. Good lesson learned. Are there other big lessons learned? And I'm thinking both positive and negative lessons learned since we're engaged in these giant field experiments to protect the earth and its health. We want to learn from them. Lessons learned?

48:46 GH:

For us, implementation, implementation, implementation, that's the central focus. I think getting those commitments was a critical first step. But in many ways, it really was only a first step. We continued to find for two to three years afterwards that all of those companies that had made these big commitments to end deforestation were still buying from suppliers who were bulldozing thousands, or in some cases, tens of thousands of hectares of forest. So even three years later, we caught this company called Carindo, a Korean Indonesian joint venture and found that since 2013 when Wilmar had adopted its policy, it had destroyed about 50,000 hectare of forest. And they were still supplying Wilmar as well as several of Wilmar's peers. So we knew from that and other instances that we had to keep up the focus on implementation. The good news was, we found that when we would just send an email saying, we've identified deforestation in your supply chain from this company, the companies would act really quickly on it. They cut off Carindo and several other major deforesters in response to us filing evidence like that. And the lesson we took from that was, and what the companies told us, it makes a big difference when we get that email from you, because we can go to that supplier and say, it's not us doing this. Mighty Earth is forcing us to do that. And they had the political cover, to enforce their own policies, and that insulated them from political blowback from suppliers

going to the government and saying, Wilmar or whoever is abusing us. We saw that we needed to systematize that approach so that we could stop deforestation at the 10 hectare level before it got to the 10,000 hectare level.

50:54 MM:

The implementation piece is really important. And it's one that many times there's the personalities that go after the company, and then there's the personalities that do the implementation, but they're not always in the same organization.

51:08 GH:

Exactly. And actually I would say we thought that we were not necessarily the group to be the primary drivers on implementation because we saw ourselves as a campaign organization. We were really good at advocacy campaigns, not necessarily at satellite monitoring, supply chain analysis, financial analysis but we saw that it needed to happen. And one of the things we did, which I do think we were sort of felt ourselves capable of, was we convened meetings with the executives of all the major palm oil companies as well as paper companies and rubber companies. And we got them to commit over time, it was very hard, to improve standard operating procedures so that when a deforestation alert came in, we ultimately got them to agree to act within 48 hours or two weeks, depending on what the situation was. That was very hard work. It involved many trips to Kuala Lumpur and Singapore, sitting around a large table with 20 palm oil executives whining at me for two days until finally, I have to say like, you've got to address this issue. You can't leave here without any success to show. And typically what would happen is Wilmar would say, okay, we'll do it. And then the guy from Simon Darby, Simon Lord would say, yeah, we've got to do it. Everybody else got on board and then grumblingly, they would go along. It was a lot of hard work but that was successful to keep up the industry-wide momentum. We didn't think that we should be the organization to do the satellite monitoring and analysis, but we couldn't really find somebody else to do it. So even though it was not in our comfort zone, we decided it had to be done. And we initiated this rapid response satellite monitoring project to monitor every month, 22 million hectares of forest across Southeast Asia for deforestation. We worked with partners like 8 Environment and Map Hubs on the technical elements of it. But we would file alerts every month with the 32 top palm oil companies. It was really successful and a really important ingredient to the success. There were 260 supply chain discontinuations that came about through the alerts filed under that system, more than 50 new 'no deforestation' policies. And I think most importantly, it created an expectation on the ground that if you engage in deforestation, your customers are going receive an alert about it quickly, and they're going to cease supplying from you, you will also lose access to global capital markets. And, it systematized those commitments and made it real. I think that combination of forces, the initial policy commitments, the agreement to standard operating procedures and finally, independent satellite monitoring combined to make a dynamic where deforestation was not the norm anymore. We've seen deforestation for palm oil decline more than 95%. We have seen through similar campaigns, deforestation for rubber go down more than 90%. And our allies have secured similar progress in the Southeast Asian pulp and paper industry, where we've seen 90% plus declines in deforestation. So this model is really working across multiple industries, and it is the reason why Indonesia's deforestation

now is at its lowest level on record. It's still too high. There are other drivers of deforestation like state backed development projects that we're working on with our allies. But it has dramatically reduced deforestation. It's a gigaton skill, climate success. There are thousands of orangutans and tree kangaroos and Sumatran tigers that are alive today because of it. I think it shows the power of these industry transformation campaigns. I would just close by saying my major frustration is that this model has not been more widely deployed. We've tried to do it in the meat industry, which causes more deforestation than the rest of agriculture combined. We have had some progress over the last year and a half on it, but it's a trillion dollar a year industry, and we need campaigns that are commensurate and scale to that challenge if we're really going to tackle it. But I do see this as having tremendous power. We've had great success on driving change in the steel industry through this process as well. I hope that on these and other issues, it can really be scaled up.

55:53 MM:

I think it's one of the reasons why when I looked at the palm oil campaign, I thought this is really a seminal campaign, in part because it sets a model for how the campaign can be a catalyst for an incredible and diverse ripple effect. Not just across the industry but on related industries as well. Anything you would've done differently, in retrospect, given what you've learned from the campaign?

56:31 GH:

I wish we had moved to systemization earlier. I wish we had had the resources essentially to do more of that satellite monitoring earlier. I think we could have set up that system maybe a year or two earlier, and we could have avoided additional deforestation from that. One of the other things I will say that we did that I think was important and helpful was we quickly pivoted from doing campaigns in North America and Europe to focusing them almost exclusively in Asian markets. The conventional wisdom was that the Asian markets are very price sensitive, not very knowledgeable about environmental issues, don't really care, you won't be able to make much progress. In fact, we found, in some places at least, the opposite, so many of the remaining rogue deforesters were based in Korea. We were able to work with Korean partners, like the friends of the environmental movements there. We worked in Japan and even in Indonesia itself. And we found that that was really important because that was where the remaining market after a few years for deforestation-based palm oil was. It was going outside. We had never had presence in Korea, but we moved quickly to established partnerships and presence there and it paid off in a huge way.

I was just trying to think of other things I wish we had done differently. I would say the challenge, especially early on, was relative to many other environmental issues I'd worked on in the international campaign space, the coalition work was not always very smooth. Most issues I'd worked on, we have a very collaborative relationship with coalition partners. That was not always the case on the palm oil issue. Now, of course that didn't stop amazing progress from happening. But I don't exactly know how to have addressed it. I think there were personalities involved that were maybe a bit more challenging. And then also it was so international that I'm sure the cultural differences played a role in that but I often felt caused sort of unnecessary

friction and it was a kind of friction I hadn't been exposed to in my working coalitions in the United States.

59:00 MM:

One of the things that you remind me of is that because the United States is and businesses here are the customers for so many of the suppliers that are international, it really is possible to have impact on companies in Asia or in Africa or in South America, as we've learned in the past, by going after their customers in the US. Yours is one of the unique cases where you could actually have major negotiations and interactions early on in the campaign with the company that's the real target of the campaign. That's unusual.

Glenn, thank you for taking the time for this interview. It was really good.

GH:

No, thank you! So glad you're doing this.

MM:

This is definitely one of the seminal campaigns in the last 10 years and it's really been great to get your insights into what was happening behind the scenes. What really makes it different is the interaction with senior level executives which we don't always get. And then the other is the implementation piece, which I think is so critical as follow up in these campaigns if we're really going to leverage the investment that foundations and our people have made in terms of their time and money. It's been great. Thank you very much.

60:58 GH:

Thank you. I'll say again, I think the model you created, inspired a lot of what we did and we were just trying to bring it to new areas where it needed attention. So, thank you for that.

61:08 MM:

Well, you've definitely taken it to the next level which is why I wanted to talk to you. Thanks!