Minneapolis-based General Mills came under fire for its use of unsustainable palm oil, a food commodity strongly linked to rainforest destruction in Southeast Asia. On the morning of January 19, 42 activists from Walker Church and other concerned community organizations joined RAN by unfurling a banner reading “Warning: General Mills Destroys Rainforests” on the main lawn outside of the company’s headquarters.

The action kicks off the latest phase of RAN’s Rainforest Agribusiness Campaign aimed at customers of agribusiness giant Cargill, the most powerful agribusiness and commodity trading group in the world, and the largest privately-owned corporation in the U.S. More than 100 General Mills products, including such trusted brands as Pillsbury, Betty Crocker, Stovetop Hamburger Helper and Toaster Strudel contain palm oil or palm oil derivatives directly purchased from Cargill, in direct violation of General Mills’ stated social and environmental commitments.

RAN is asking General Mills to publicly commit to sourcing only palm oil produced in a socially and environmentally responsible manner. Learn more at TheProblemWithPalmOil.org.
This past December, a few key members of RAN had the opportunity to attend the United Nations Climate Change Conference, or COP15, with the hopes of influencing politicians from around the world to make the right decisions on climate policy. While COP15 ended with the wildly disappointing, non-binding ‘Copenhagen Accord,’ most agree that Copenhagen signaled the start of a strong and unified Climate Justice Movement that ensured that the Copenhagen Accord, was indeed exceptional and RAN played a key role in coordinating international media attention to major environmental issues from the Canadian tar sands to Indonesian rainforest destruction.

Stay tuned as Rainforest Action Network prepares for the next meeting of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change this coming December in Mexico. In the meantime, RAN will continue to directly confront the sources of climate change, from the hollers of Appalachia to the tar sands of Alberta, and from the rainforests of Indonesia to corporate boardrooms across North America.

Dear friends,

This year marks the beginning of RAN’s 25th year. Since our founding in 1985, we have launched bold campaigns aimed at convincing some of the world’s most powerful corporations to do the right thing. With the odds repeatedly stacked against us, we have won some of the most important environmental victories of our time.

Flashback to August 1998. I was hired by RAN to run the campaign to encourage Home Depot to stop selling old growth wood. This was a new strategy for RAN at the time: in addition to pressuring logging companies directly, we’d test the use of marketplace pressure to reform a stubborn industry. It was my first job as a campaigner and a great opportunity to have a potentially powerful impact on a globally important issue.

Home Depot was the largest retailer of wood products in the world; we wanted them on our side. So we used every carrot and stick at our disposal. We took out ads in The New York Times, and engaged with the Dave Matthews Band and REM to help out. We hung giant banners from Home Depot headquarters and stores across the country. We worked with institutional shareholders and sympathetic employees. Every other week, Home Depot had to defend its unwillingness to change its practices.

It worked! In August 1999 Home Depot announced that it would phase out all sales of wood from endangered forests. Time Magazine called it the top environmental story of 1999, and it helped to protect more than 5 million acres in Britain Columbia’s Great Bear Rainforest.

In the years since, RAN has had an incredible run of success. Following Home Depot’s announcement, eight out of the top ten wood retailers followed suit. Home Depot was the largest retailer of wood products in the world; we worked with institutional shareholders and sympathetic employees. Every other week, Home Depot had to defend its unwillingness to change its practices.

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For a better world,

Michael Brune
Executive Director
Running for Human Rights™ stickers to runners at the Marathon Expo, and hosted a free screening of Cruide – the critically acclaimed documentary about the crisis in Ecuador. The activities were aimed at drawing attention to Chevron’s refusal to take responsibility for one of the largest environmental disasters in human history. Chevron’s arrogance was on full display after they removed a booth RAN activists had paid for at the Marathon Expo to distribute materials and made other attempts to interfere with free-speech activities during the marathon. The moves ultimately led to a public relations embarrassment for Chevron that was covered throughout the country and region including The Los Angeles Times, Business Week and Runner’s World.

During the week beginning January 25, Chevron went on the offensive again after RAN launched a series of ads in The New York Times and Washington Post challenging new CEO John Watson to save lives by cleaning up the 18 billion gallons of oil pollution in the Ecuadorean rainforest. Chevron immediately deployed the bullying tactics of their legal team in order to pressure both papers and Getty Images to have the ads temporarily pulled, claiming they lacked merit. In a major victory for free speech rights, RAN was able to substantiate both ads and get them back in circulation, much to Chevron’s chagrin. RAN activists also delivered personal copies to substantiate both ads and get them back in circulation, much to Chevron’s chagrin. RAN activists also delivered personal copies of the New York Times newspaper to directly to John Watson’s neighbors and employees near the company’s headquarters in San Ramon, CA.

There is little doubt that Chevron has already begun taking RAN seriously, but we need to build an even more powerful movement to change Chevron in the coming weeks and months. So far more than 300,000 people have signed a petition urging Chevron’s new CEO John Watson to clean up Ecuador. You can add your voice by signing the petition at www.ChangeChevron.org.

When you think of fashion, you probably don’t think of paper. It’s no surprise that most fashion companies weren’t thinking about paper either.

In fact, when we did some research into the fashion industry last summer, we found over 100 companies that were thoughtlessly using paper sourced from Indonesia’s rainforests in their copy paper, stationery and luxury paper shopping bags. Most of these companies just hadn’t thought about where their paper came from. Many, like H&M, were shocked to find out when we sent them letters.

Since those initial contacts, the fashion industry has blown us away with their sincere desire to stop using rainforest paper and start championing rainforests instead of destroying them. More than 20 leading fashion companies, including H&M, Gucci Group, and Tiffany & Co, have publicly committed to helping save Indonesia’s rainforests. Many of these are taking the next step, developing paper policies that reduce their paper use, maximize recycled sources and completely ban paper from endangered forests – using Forest Stewardship Council certification as a minimum bar for their purchasing guidelines, but exceeding certification standards by leaps and bounds.

Even better, PAK 2000, the source of much of this paper and Asia Pulp and Paper’s face in the North American luxury market, is now working to create their own responsible paper policy as a result of our campaign. The company, once almost entirely owned by Asia Pulp and Paper, is also working to financially separate itself from the Indonesian paper giant – one of the worst forest destroyers in the world.

Does all this make a difference? For the forest, it certainly does. Every industry that says no to products for rainforests is a major consumer vote in favor of saving one of the most important tropical forests on Earth. Commodities like pulp and paper, palm oil, soybeans and biofuels are now the major drivers of deforestation, as rainforest nations seek to expand production of exports. Communities-who rely on forests for their food and livelihoods—are replaced by corporations and endangered species like the orangutan or the Sumatran tiger are pushed further towards the ultimate edge. At RAN, we believe that we have to deal with consumer demand if we are ever to stop deforestation. As companies cancel contracts with bad actors like Sinar Mas and look for sustainable alternatives, we fuel the creation of a world based on conservation not on destruction.

Our work isn’t done, but the fashion industry has given it a big boost. We feel good about the champions that we’ve created, and look forward to continuing our campaign to make fashion free of rainforest paper.

PHOTOS: JOHN MCTISH / RAN; LOU DUBBETTER / JESUS

PHOTO: ERIC WATSON / RED LEAF MAGAZINE

PHOTO: DAVID GILBERT / RAN

PHOTO: DAVID GILBERT / RAN
The Washington Post recently reported that mountaintop removal (MTR) is becoming one of the most “in-your-face environmental fights in America today.” We would like to think we had something to do with that.

Last year at this time we set out to make mountaintop removal coal mining a cause célèbre, an issue stigmatized as a political pariah from Washington to California. While we are not there yet, the last four months have heralded a new, very much “in-your-face” era in the fight to end mountaintop removal.

West Virginia Senator Robert Byrd, a former staunch proponent of MTR coal mining, summed it up well in a late 2009 op-ed when he said: “It is a reality that the practice of mountaintop removal mining has a diminishing constituency in Washington…Most members of Congress, like most Americans, oppose the practice, and we may not yet fully understand the effects of mountaintop removal mining on the health of our citizens.”

When a coal state senator publicly asked the coal industry to embrace the future and consider it without mountaintop removal, we knew we were doing something right.

But that wasn’t the only sign from the last couple of months indicating that the writing is on the wall for the devastating coal mining practice. A dozen leading scientists joined the call against MTR in a January 2010 report in the journal Science. Based on current peer-reviewed studies and water quality data, they concluded that mountaintop removal mining has a diminishing constituency in Washington…Most members of Congress, like most Americans, oppose the practice, and we may not yet fully understand the effects of mountaintop removal mining on the health of our citizens.”

Every day across Appalachia, the coal industry blows the tops off the mountains, clear-cutting entire forests, wiping out the natural habitats of countless animals and poisoning pristine rivers. As Stephen Colbert, host of Comedy Central’s satirical The Colbert Report recently put it: “You start with some boring, tree covered mountain and you turn it into an exciting, lifeless moon base.”

For a mere seven percent of the nation’s coal, the tradeoff doesn’t quite add up.

In the coming weeks, we will be launching a “Mountaintop Removal Pledge of Action” to catalyze a wave of momentum that can help stop mountaintop removal in 2010. At this key moment in the fight to end mountaintop removal, RAN is preparing to take our campaign up a notch and we need all the help we can get.

With the continued pressure of public campaigns like RAN’s, the increase in national attention and scientific consensus advocating against the practice, it is clear that the EPA—the agency that can take the lead in banning MTR—is feeling tremendous heat.

And we intend to keep it coming. With elections on the horizon and a very aggressive coal lobby in Washington, it is ever more important that we ride this incredible wave of attention and create the political space for the EPA to do the right thing on mountaintop removal. RAN is preparing to take our campaign up a notch and we need all the help we can get.

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In the coming weeks, we will be launching a “Mountaintop Removal Pledge of Action” to catalyze a wave of momentum that can help stop mountaintop removal in 2010. At this key moment in the campaign, we need everyone to escalate their efforts and actions to stop mountaintop removal this year. We are more sure than ever that the time is now.

Will you join us? Visit MountainPledges.org

Take Action! Call EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson and ask her to stop issuing mountaintop removal permits. (202) 564-4700

Make a donation today at RAN.org/give.
REMEMBERING A RAINFOREST HERO

Glenn Switkes, a great defender of rainforests and rivers, recently passed away from cancer. Since 1994, Glenn has worked with International Rivers, helping Indigenous communities resist dams along the Xingu River in the Brazilian Amazon, but he also spent many years at RAN working on oil issues throughout the Amazon. I spent a lot of time with Glenn in the early days when we were both getting our Masters Degrees. We worked together on two films, including the award-winning documentary *Four Corners: A National Sacrifice Area?* which revealed the impacts of mining on the Native Americans and desert landscapes of the southwestern United States. Glenn was a champion of a man with talent, courage, and a big heart. I along with many will miss him. His companionship was one of the great treats in my life.

Glenn Ross Switkes (1951-2009)

Founder of Rainforest Action Network

EVERY LITTLE BIT HELPS

RAN’s groundbreaking work would not be possible without the commitment of our supporters. We’re grateful for all of your support and we are constantly inspired by your stories.

Take this letter we received recently from 16-year old Savannah Kumar. Savannah has been adding coins to her donkey-shaped piggybank since she was six years old, and when it came time to crack it open, she decided to donate its entire contents to RAN. Thank you, Savannah - you’re an inspiration to us all!

Make a donation today at www.RAN/give.