

# THE CASE OF RARE EARTH ELEMENTS



## **Stewards Group: You are the Executive Director of a Wildlife-Focused Environmental Advocacy Organization**

### **Your Background and Biography**

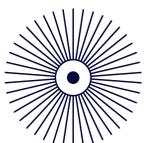
You lead one of the world's best-known international environmental advocacy organizations. Decades ago your organization became famous for protecting endangered species, working around the world to save from extinction tigers, elephants, rhinos, and similar "charismatic megafauna." Today your instantly recognizable logo still features an animal like that.

So what are you doing helping to lead a negotiation about rare earth metals?

You are here because saving wildlife takes a lot more than just stopping poachers. Back in the 1980s ecologists explained that the biggest threat to wild animals was habitat destruction. Whole ecosystems were collapsing as companies around the world made paper and lumber by cutting down old trees and replacing forests with timber farms. Your organization was convinced that governments alone were not doing enough to save the forests where so many animals lived.

In the early 1990s your organization responded by establishing the first sustainability seal, endorsing wood and paper products produced in environmentally responsible ways. You created a mechanism that brought producers, manufacturers, and consumers together to help the forests. A few years later your organization created a similar seal for sustainably harvested seafood, to stop the collapse of ocean ecosystems. While it is certainly challenging to make sure the seals are working as they should, you are convinced they improve the environment.

Today ecologists are explaining how anthropogenic (human-caused) climate change is endangering animals around the world. You figure the world needs to quickly deploy low-carbon energy technologies on a massive scale to avoid destabilizing the climate. Then your friendly rival, the president of another major environmental protection organization, asked you to help set up a Sustainability Seal for rare earths. They say the world needs a stable supply of these metals for a greener future. You hope this new seal



will ensure these key metals are produced in ways that do not seriously harm people or the natural world.

Your goal in the negotiation is to broker an agreement between the Producers, Manufacturers, and Consumers that will actually make the production of rare earth elements less destructive. You will not “greenwash” anyone with a Sustainability Seal that looks good on paper but does not really improve conditions around refineries and mines. But you are a little suspicious of the Activists; some of them have worked with your group on other sustainability seals, only to criticize and withdraw their support rather than keep up the hard work necessary to make a seal work better.

### **Your Role**

Your goal is to write a statement of guiding values that will set the standards for sustainable practices within the rare earth elements industry. Learn as much as possible from the experts to ensure you make the right decision. During this hearing you should do the following:

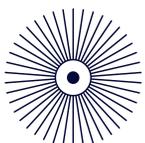
- Keep an open mind. Allow yourself to be persuaded by well-reasoned arguments and convincing evidence.
- Find out as much as possible about the issues so you can carefully evaluate the arguments presented. Consider what is in the best interest of the environment and our future.
- Facilitate discussion and cooperation within and among the groups. Your goal is to implement the best, most effective set of Sustainability Seal guiding values possible, which will require compromise between groups.

### **Your Assignment**

You will become the expert on the Consumers Group and report back to your fellow Stewards with an evaluation of the group’s position and arguments. Engage in the following activities as you conduct your research:

- Attend the meetings of the Consumers Group to learn more about its arguments and to plan for the hearing. Remember that you are an observer, so you should not participate in discussion.
- Write two questions you would like to ask the Consumers Group during the hearing.
- Write a one-page analysis of the Consumers Group’s main arguments and positions. What are its main concerns? Which of its arguments do you find convincing? Which are unconvincing? Why?

## **SOURCES**



## Group Sources

- Stewards Case Study: ["Working Outside of Government Regulation to Protect Human Health and the Environment"](#)
- Conniff, Richard. ["Greenwashed Timber: How Sustainable Forest Certification Has Failed."](#) *Yale Environment 360*, February 20, 2018.
- Sanders, Samantha, dir. ["A History of the Environmental Movement."](#) Commissioned by the Environmental Defense Fund. Green River Films and Kartemquin Films, prod., 2017. (Video, 4:30 min.)

## Individual Sources

- Mo, Karen, and Huma Khan. ["The Impact of Forest Stewardship Council Certification."](#) Research review, World Wildlife Fund, Global Forest and Trade Network, October 20, 2014.
- World Wildlife Fund. ["How We Work."](#) [wwf.panda.org](http://wwf.panda.org).

