

Since he was a child, Pedro Monteiro has felt a deep commitment to environmental causes.

October 26, 2003

When it comes to the environment in Broward County, engineer Pedro Monteiro is hard to ignore.

He's among the people who spoke out at public hearings against pumping sewage and other waste underground. And he's one of the group pushing to add plants to sand dunes at central Broward beaches, part of a larger plan to slow beach erosion from Dania to Fort Lauderdale.

"Even though the U.S. Department of Agriculture has offered free dune vegetation and free labor to plant it, that's still not part of the beach-widening project," Monteiro said in frustration.

Concern for the environment is why the 37-year-old consultant -- a leader of the Broward Chapter of the conservation group Sierra Club -- is organizing against free trade in the Americas.

He's hoping the protests can persuade governments to drop a controversial provision that was part of the 1993 North American Free Trade Agreement, or NAFTA, that links the United States, Canada and Mexico.

The provision lets companies sue governments in certain cases over new laws they see as blocking free trade and "expropriating" corporate profits.

Under the provision, Virginia-based Ethyl Corp. sued Canada for banning a gasoline additive that it made. Canada settled for \$13 million and withdrew the ban. Now, Canada's Methanex Corp. is suing California for almost \$1 billion for banning a gas additive that the Canadian company makes.

Monteiro worries the "investor rights" provision will discourage governments from passing laws that protect the environment. Lawmakers might worry about challenges and payments to companies for profits lost.

"Corporations think in terms of short-term profits, and to sustain the environment, we need long-term thinking," he said.

Monteiro wants to see trade pacts include more input from environmental and civic groups, and less input from big business.

"The FTAA is being negotiated by an elite group, and they're not allowing civil society at the table," he said. "So, they leave us with no alternative but to protest in the streets to be heard."

Concern for the Earth came early for Monteiro, who was born in England to a Portuguese engineer and a nurse. Growing up in Brazil, he remembers watching sea explorer Jacques

Cousteau on TV and being especially moved at age 11, when his parents read to him a speech by Native American Chief Seattle about how people and their souls are linked to the land.

After moving to the United States in 1979 and earning his masters' in engineering at Florida Atlantic University, Monteiro became active on environmental causes, working with Greenpeace and other groups. In 2000, he joined the San Francisco-based Sierra Club and now leads its conservation committee for Broward.

Speaking at public hearings and protesting FTAA are just part of Monteiro's environmental commitment.

He's a vegetarian, partly for reasons of conservation. For every calorie of meat on a plate, he says, it takes more than 70 calories of energy to put it there, including making feedstock, slaughtering and shipping the refrigerated product. Vegetables, in contrast, take less energy to produce.

"And we should be eating food grown locally," Monteiro said. "When we ship food across the globe using nonrenewable resources like petroleum, it will catch up with us in the long term. If we convert South Florida into urban sprawl and lose our farm land, we'll be in a position where we must import, and we lose our food security."

Monteiro will be protesting against the FTAA with a host of environmental groups, including Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace, who will be sending representatives to Miami from across the Americas.

"Carry signs and get the word out to the mainstream media about the real effects of FTAA and NAFTA," he suggests to those concerned about the environment. "And of course, be peaceful."

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