



EDUCATION
INDEX

Knauss
Fellow
Calif. State
Fellow
Industrial
Fellow
CALFED
Fellow
Graduate
Trainee

Site Map

Think Green, Think \$Green 1989 Sea Grant Fellow Manages Clean Energy Indices



Robert Wilder

Credit: E. Dodge

young investigator award and a 1989 California Sea Grant State Fellow.

He holds a law degree from University of San Diego (1985) and a doctorate in political science from UC Santa Barbara (1991). He has been an assistant professor in political science at the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth and more recently a coordinator at the Nature Conservancy.

A tireless crusader for the environment, he also authored "Listening to the Sea: The Politics of

March 7,
2007 –
Robert
Wilder
won a
coveted
Fulbright
Fellowship,
was two-
time
recipient
of the
prestigious
National
Academy
of
Sciences

Improving Environmental Protection (Pitt Series in Policy and Institutional Studies),” available on Amazon.com for \$19.95. At his home in Encinitas, he has installed 20-plus solar panels. His car is also solar powered.

“I want to be relentlessly positive and show people that it is not just lip service to say that what makes ecological sense can also make economic sense,” said Wilder, who was a policy assistant at the Pacific Fisheries Legislative Task Force during his Sea Grant fellowship in 1989 and worked on fisheries management in Fiji during his 1992-93 Fulbright grant.



Robert Wilder (middle) rings the bell on the American Stock Exchange, on the first day of trading of a clean energy fund based on his index.
Credit: AMEX

To prove it, in 2004 he founded WilderHill Clean Energy Index (ECO), which tracks solar, wind and other low-carbon energy technology companies. Think of it as the Standard & Poors 500 of the clean energy sector. A year later, the mutual fund company Powershares Capital Management launched the WilderHill exchange-traded fund (AMEX: PBW), which now holds about \$800 million in net assets.

Today, instead of preparing lectures or writing grants, Wilder spends his days researching clean energy companies, deciding which to include in ECO and with what weighting.

He also now manages a second index, WilderHill Progressive Energy Index, which tracks companies developing technologies to reduce carbon emitted from burning fossil fuels.

“If a person cares about climate change, you also have to look at reducing carbon from the dominant energy sources coal, oil and natural gas,” he said, explaining why he created a second energy index.

Prior to founding ECO, Wilder was coordinator of the Nature Conservancy’s national coastal restoration program. Though he enjoyed the work, he felt frustrated that environmental groups could not do more to prevent harm.

“All this money we were spending was, I felt, going to be swamped by climate change,” he said. “The estuarine areas were going to be inundated by sea level rise. That is what the science was telling us. All this restoration work was going to be for nothing.”

“To really protect the ocean, you don’t want to mitigate or restore,” he said. “The smartest approach is to prevent destruction in the first place. We do the opposite. We mess up the shoreline, then we talk about restoring it.”

ECO has risen 45 percent since its launch in 2004.

This, he thinks, is proving a point that needs to be hammered in hard. “When the index goes up, it puts to rest the tired argument on Wall Street that environmental companies are a sacrifice. I think this really helps the environmental cause. People see clean energy can also be profitable.”

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