

WHITEPAPER



The "Ripple" Effect: How Scaling Actions in Surf Culture Create Healthy Oceans

Most people are never taught that viable alternatives to exploitative capitalism exist — yet some economic models generate profit while protecting the earth's greatest natural resources. Understanding those models matters because your daily choices as a buyer, maker, and community member are where real change begins. While large corporations often resort to greenwashing, individuals and local communities can act immediately, authentically, and at a scale that compounds over time.

I. Why the Current Model Fails

Our current notions of business and how many leading companies are structured have created a dynamic of conflict with sustainability. The conflict is that big corporate models struggle with circularity because investors and stock markets often reward volume of new products sold, rather than the repair or longevity of old ones. This is why many companies, such as Patagonia, one of the most profitable sustainable companies, have remained private. Its founder, Yvon Chouinard, decided to focus on purpose rather than going public to avoid the pressure and pitfalls of Wall Street, which prioritizes short-term profit over environmental sustainability. Patagonia is one of the most exemplary stewards of how consumers will choose responsible products if they are designed responsibly and sustainably, rather than participate in a throw-away culture. His company is proof that circular economic models can be just as profitable and offer viable alternatives to the traditional capitalist models, which use linear economic models. While the linear economy relies on a "take-make-waste" cycle that exploits finite natural resources, the circular economy offers a restorative alternative.

The ocean is a prime example of a resource suffering from depletion and pollution due to the global focus on a linear economy. However, fish populations have to be managed for overfishing, waters need to remain free of toxins, and climate change needs to be controlled to limit the impact on the ocean's health. However, instead of viewing the ocean as an endless resource to be depleted, businesses are starting to recognize the ocean's power, if renewed and sustained, to be a powerful economic resource to improve livelihoods and bring economic prosperity, forming part of a movement called the Blue Economy. Valued at an estimated \$1.3 trillion, this approach views the ocean not as a resource to be mined until empty, but as a renewable ecosystem that, if managed sustainably, can provide food, biotechnology, and energy indefinitely. It faces challenges, including global coordination through maritime laws, public policy, as well as climate change and pollution that impact its health.

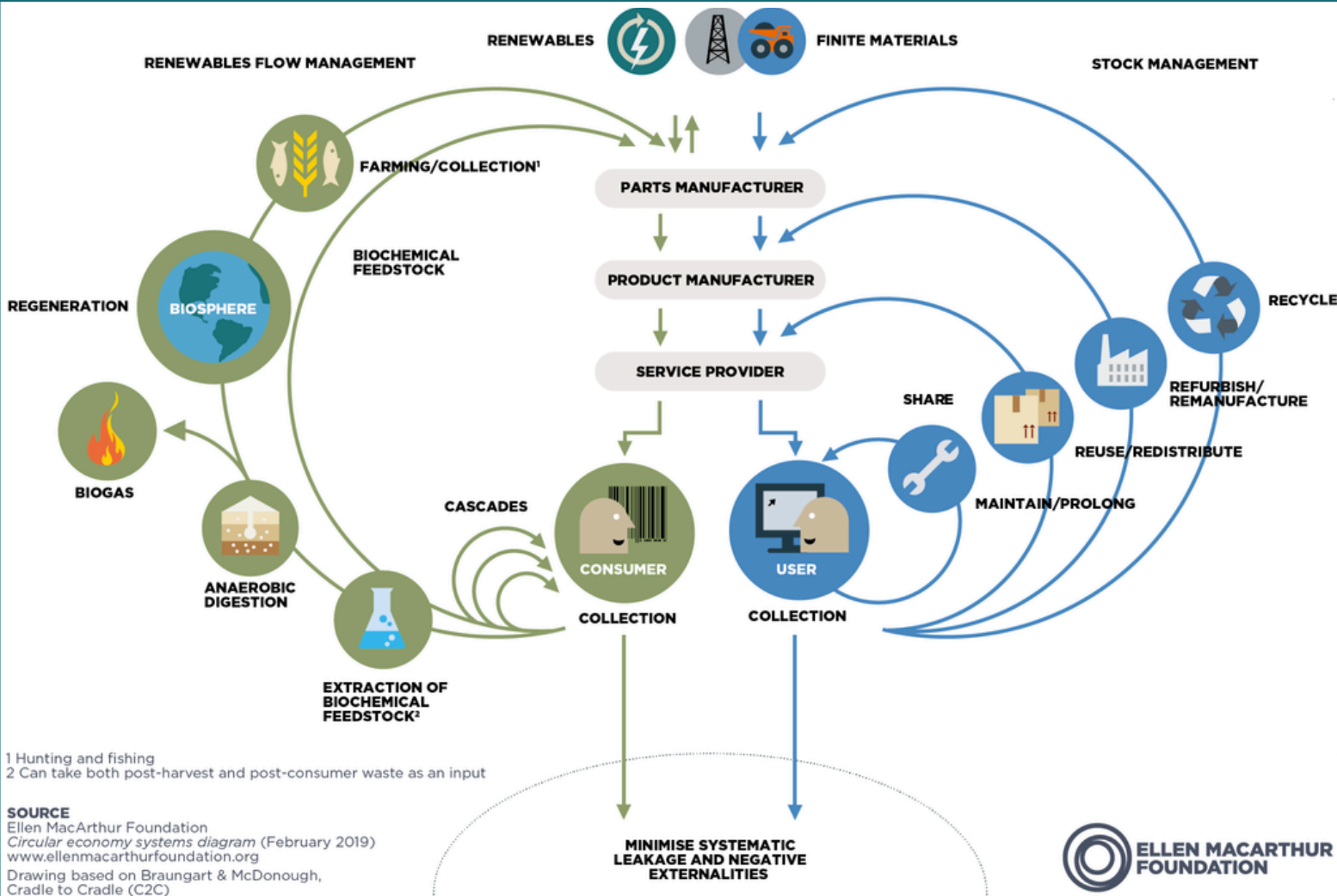


Image 1: Butterfly Diagram © Ellen MacArthur Foundation

II. The Circular Alternative

In order to support economic prosperity with renewable resources, particularly for the health of the ocean, our culture must change its economic approaches and models for consumption and move from the “linear economy” to the circular economy. The circular economy is based on three fundamental concepts: (1) the reduction and elimination of waste; (2) the circulation of products and materials; (3) the regeneration of natural resources and the environment.

One way to visualize the circular economy and how it operates differently from that associated with traditional linear capitalism is by the well-known Butterfly Diagram, established by the Ellen McArthur Foundation. For a short video further explaining the diagram and circular economy concept: [Click Here](#).

A connected concept to the circular economy, which focuses on how businesses produce goods and use resources, is how we behave and consume goods and products. Conscious Capitalism was founded by John Mackey in the 1980s as the co-founder and former CEO of Whole Foods Market, and then formalized in the 2000s with the academic Raj Sisodia in their book, "Conscious Capitalism." More than a concept, their efforts were to create a movement within businesses to promote a more ethical, stakeholder-driven approach to corporate culture. It is based on four major principles and was the foundational aspects of Whole Foods: (1) companies should have a purpose other than mere profits, called a mission; (2) companies should create value for all stakeholders, not just shareholders, and therefore include consumers and suppliers; (3) leadership should be ethically motivated and model consciousness; (4) promoting a conscious culture within your company that finds solutions which are both ethical and profitable.

By practicing these models, we move away from "greenwashing" and toward authentic, impactful behavior. While we may not be able to change bad actors in the corporate landscape, we can change our own behaviors, practice conscious capitalism, and act locally to help other businesses find solutions that remain both profitable and sustainable.



Image 2: Conscious Capitalism © Raj Sisodia

III. Making Change: “Start Where You Are” Philosophy

You don't need a degree or expert status to make an impact; anyone can drive meaningful change within their own community and daily life. The framework that makes this concrete is Pema Chödrön's "Start Where You Are" philosophy: by being present to your situation, however imperfect, small actions compound into meaningful impact.

This is where RipCycle began. Its founder noticed that discarded wetsuits had nowhere to go, with neoprene accumulating in landfills with no recycling path in sight. Rather than waiting for a corporate solution, they started with that single, local observation. The first moves were modest, including changing personal buying habits, organizing a small collection drive, and having conversations with local surf shop owners. Often, the most effective efforts are those that happen in your own zip code, your home, your school.

IV. A Plug-In Model: Partnering with Existing Businesses & Organizations

RipCycle's next step illustrates a principle that applies to any community effort: partner before you build. Rather than creating a new organization from scratch, the founders approached established nonprofits and surf businesses, plugging into existing networks to extend their reach.

Is there an environmental club in your school? Join it. If not, find one person and start one. In the age of Instagram and passion projects, it is tempting to think that change requires a grand idea. It usually doesn't; change groups grow from small community actions that gain credibility over time. Furthermore, local businesses are always looking for creative ways to contribute to their communities and drive attention to their unique offerings, so don't be afraid to "cold call" and simply ask a business manager if you could work with them.

It is often underestimated how willing local businesses are to support in-kind donations, promotion, or, in the case of RipCycle, actively partnering with them to collect donations and offer special discounts and events to help the coastal community reduce pollution. Conscious capitalism applies as readily to a local surf shop as to a Fortune 500 company, and the conversation often begins simply by asking the owner.

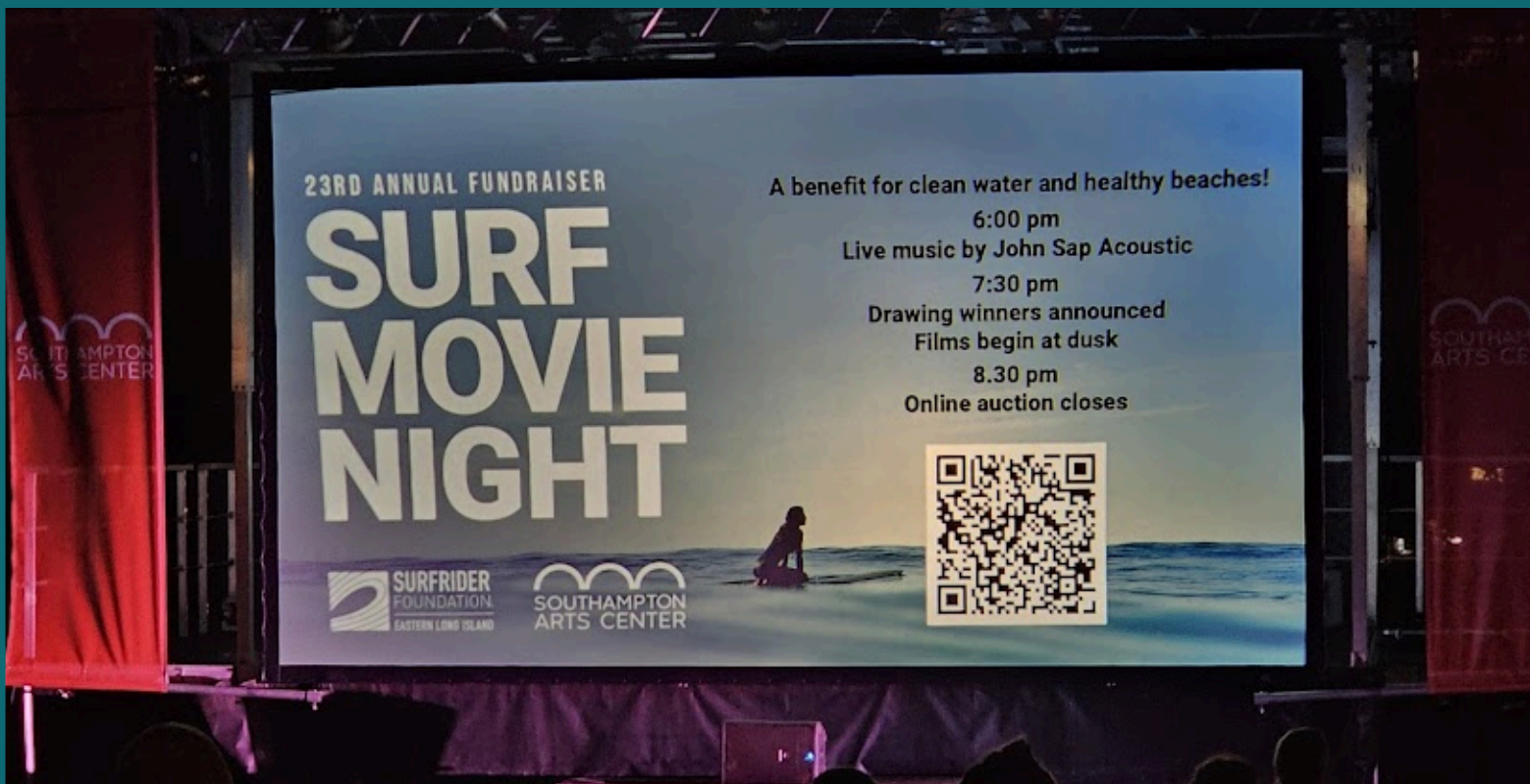


Image 3: Scaling RipCycle's Impact, Surfrider's Movie Night, Southampton Art Center, 2025.

V. Create The Ripple Effect: Impact & Scale Your Community Effort

What RipCycle found, and what any community effort will discover, is that the first partnership opens the door to the next. Word of mouth in surf communities travels quickly as one shop makes a referral, one nonprofit introduces another, and the idea spreads beyond its starting point. The critical milestone for RipCycle was finding a trusted partner in the Black Surfing Association (@black_surfing_rockaway), where collected wetsuits would be redistributed and genuinely used rather than wasted in storage. That partnership transformed the effort from a collection drive into a true circular system. The Surfrider Foundation's Movie Night, including a wetsuit recycling drive, followed, and this community-wide initiative would not have been possible without the credibility built through my earlier partnerships and relationships.

VI. Earth Day Month: A Call to Action - Simple Ways to Get Started in Your Community

Help keep the ocean healthy by following these simple steps to turn small actions into big changes.

Step 1: Partner with Nonprofits to Amplify Your Contribution

These are just some organizations that are both effective and active regionally. Find one or two that are doing meaningful work in your community and join them, start a new initiative, or just volunteer. Bring others along with you to scale your impact.

- Surfrider Foundation's Chapters: www.surfrider.org
- The Ocean Cleanup: www.theoceancleanup.com
- Oceana "Take Action": www.oceana.org & www.oceana.org/takeaction/
- Climate Change Project: www.changeclimate.org
- Ecochallenge: www.campus.ecochallenge.org

Step 2: Be Part of the Solution & Consume Responsible Products

- 1% for the Planet: www.onepercentfortheplanet.org
- Surfd's Best Sustainable Brands: www.surfd.com
- Sea Beyond: www.prada.com
- Turtle Project (Sustainable Sportswear): www.turtlproject.com
- Lava Rubber: www.lavarubber.com

Step 3: Small Behavior Adjustments Make Big Changes Over Time

- Support Behavior Change for Sustainability:
www.ecochallenge.com
- Support Different Economic Models for Businesses:
www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org
- Choose B Certified Corporations:
<https://www.bcorporation.net/en-us/>

Step 4: Scale Your Efforts

Making your initial impact grow and scale doesn't require massive fundraising or donations. It often just requires grassroots efforts, connecting with others to motivate a movement, and to educate the public through sustained, consistent efforts. Scaling your mission often takes time and communication, but if you maintain your focus, it can grow to create a real impact in your local and regional community. If needed, one can use crowdsourcing tools and strategies to create a more formalized platform, intensify one's impact, and expand one's mission.

- Collaborate with Others: www.mckinsey.com
- Create a Social Media Campaign: www.seagoinggreen.org
- GoFundMe: www.gofundme.com



RipCycle
www.ripcycle.org
Contact Us!
Founder, Theo Vara-Quan
Email: Theo.quan25@gmail.com

*All Content and Photographs ©RipCycle
Images Courtesy of Credited Sources*

www.ripcycle.org

