

River Voices



A quarterly publication of River Network

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The Resource Abuse Movement and River Conservation Efforts

by Rita Haberman

Environmental protection advocates across the country are increasingly running up against organized, vocal opposition. Many of these anti-environmental efforts are part of a larger national effort that deceptively calls itself the "wise use" movement. A more appropriate name is the resource abuse movement.

WHAT IS THE RESOURCE ABUSE MOVEMENT?

The movement is a national agglomeration of over 250 groups sharing an underlying philosophy: weaken environmental protection to permit unrestricted access to all natural resources for economic use, benefit and profit. Throughout the country, they are working on unraveling environmental protections on a variety of issues: mineral and energy extraction in wilderness areas and national parks, logging in ancient forests, Endangered Species Act reauthorization, wetlands protection, private property rights protection, and several other issues.

The groups claim to be "grassroots" and "of the people for the people" but many of them are funded and led by major corporations and extractive industry interests such as Exxon, Honda, American Mining Congress, National Cattleman's Association, and National Association of Realtors. Strategists from the resource abuse movement are copying environmentalists' technique of grassroots organizing except they have access to self-interested corporate money and do not suffer from being restricted to charitable activities.

The national resource abuse groups go by deceptive names: People for the West, Alliance for America, National

Wetlands Coalition, National Inholders Association, Multiple Use Land Alliance, Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise to name a few. The resource abuse groups with local emphasis also have misleading names that include the words "friends," "conservation," "conservancy" and the like, mimicking those of environmental organizations.

A major reason for the successes of the resource abuse movement is their ability to capture media attention. By formulating exaggerated and false statements about the impacts of resource protection measures, they appeal to the fears of local citizens, and those fears make it into headlines. The mass of media attention has given the resource abuse interests considerable public attention and built their political clout.

IMPACTS ON RIVER PROTECTION EFFORTS

River protection is viewed as a threat by resource abuse interests. Rather than confront the real issues directly, they hire National Inholders Association or People for the West, who send in an organizer to terrify people about condemnation. There's a gap between the real issues (resource protection versus exploitation) and the pseudo-issues (land condemnation and federal control).

For example, an effort to protect the Pemigewasset River in New Hampshire through state and federal Wild & Scenic designation has met strong opposition. The state campaign was poisoned by distortion and intimidation. The primary opposition, a group called the New

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Inside River Voices:

Dealing with the Resource Abuse Movement ("Wise Use Movement") is the major theme addressed in this issue of *River Voices*. To help grassroots river activists grapple with this serious threat to river protection, we've put together a collection of articles, providing practical advice. "The Resource Abuse Movement and River Protection" by River Network staff provides background and examples. "Countering the Resource Abuse Movement" by Doug North examines four elements of appeal used by resource abuse interests and practical advice on how to counter them. "Addressing Landowners Concerns in River Conservation" by Chuck Hoffman provides practical advice on essential components of river planning, including considerations for adjacent landowners as well as adjacent communities. "Overcoming Public Meeting Disruptions: A Prime Target for 'Backlash'" by Pamela Stone describes how to plan your meetings to avoid disruptions, but if they occur how to minimize their impacts. "Friends of the Little River: Grassroots River Protection Despite Opposition" by Desmond Disney describes the story of how this Alabama grassroots group is protecting their river in the face of opposition and lessons they've learned in the process.

Other features in this issue include an introduction to the newest River Network staff member, Peter Lavigne, Director of the River Leadership Program, and how you can get involved in this new program; a description of other River Network services; a grant announcement; some interesting "Letters to the Network"; and a few other pieces.

We hope you find this publication useful, and we welcome your comments, ideas, and suggestions.



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River Network is a national non-profit organization committed to building local support for river protection. We believe that local people are the voice of America's rivers and that local action is essential for effective, permanent river protection.

River Network has three programs:

the **River Clearinghouse** to provide local river activists information and referrals on technical resource and organizational issues;

the **River Leadership Program** to assist state river conservation leaders in developing strong state river coalitions and strengthening grassroots river conservation in their state;

the **Riverlands Conservancy** to acquire outstanding riverlands and convey them to the public for protection.

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Hampshire Landowners Alliance (associated with the national Alliance for America), falsely condemned the state rivers program as a confiscation of private property despite the fact that the program governs instream issues. Nothing in the state bill would override local zoning and land-use regulations. They labeled State legislative proponents of the bill "ecoterrorists." The state bill passed last year but the legislation included some major concessions related to hydropower. Now the Pemi National Wild & Scenic campaign is also facing serious opposition. The National Park Service (NPS) is the lead agency in the study process, and opponents have incited landowners by telling them that NPS is involved with the intent to create a new national park accompanied by significant private land condemnation.

The Washington National Wild & Scenic Rivers campaign is another example of the work of the resource abuse movement, funded largely by timber interests. Sparked by the 1988 Oregon Omnibus Wild & Scenic Rivers Act which designated 40 rivers into the national system, resource abuse interests worked quickly to see to it that a similar event wouldn't happen in the State of Washington. Under the name of the "Washington Rivers Coalition" with the motto, "Keeping Our Rivers Ours," Chuck Cushman, head of the National Inholders Association, has riled up local opposition throughout the state to the proposed national designations. They keep a steady flow of mail indicating their opposition coming into the offices of the Washington Congressional delegation. The "Coalition" also lobbies hard each year to oppose the inclusion of any new rivers into the state rivers program, claiming state designation is a precursor to national designation.

There are, however, also some stories of river protection advocates overcoming opposition. Most notable, perhaps is the 1991 designation of the Niobrara River in Nebraska as part of the National Wild & Scenic Rivers System ("The Wise Use Movement," February 6, 1992, refer to references listed on page 12). Cushman was brought in by local resource abuse interests, presumably water development interests, as a outside organizer to direct their resistance to the designation. This was at least the third time that Cushman had been imported to the region for similar activities; his previous work focused on defeating two efforts to establish national parks in prairie habitat. Because of their previous

experience with Cushman and his tactics, local grassroots responded aggressively to Cushman's arrival, successfully getting the media to focus on him and his tactics rather than on what he falsely claimed the designation would do to local residents. Through the media, they spotlighted Cushman, exposing his past practices, picking apart his published statements, aggressively countering his claims, and revealing his funding sources.

The stopping of Two-Forks Dam in Colorado is another success story ("The Wise Use Movement," February 6, 1992). The outcome was ultimately determined by a favorable U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ruling, spearheaded by Administrator William Reilly despite tremendous political pressure from within the Republican Party and the White House. Reilly's decision, based on a rationale assessment for the costs and benefits of Two-Forks, was politically possible because several environmental organizations, particularly Environmental Defense Fund and National Audubon, orchestrated a campaign involving grassroots organizing, legal maneuvering, and scientific analysis. The ability of Audubon and its local chapters to make grassroots commotion nationally and locally was a key part of overcoming resource abuse efforts. It made it clear to Reilly and others that a significant fraction of the active electorate was committed to stopping Two-Forks.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

In this era of political degeneration, manipulative media tactics, and economic hardships, there are no easy victories for river activists. As river advocates we need to be aware of the likelihood of "backlash," prepare for it, involve all concerned parties, and address landowners' concerns. We need to get accurate, easily understood information out early before resource abuse interests rile up opposition by spreading misinformation. Perhaps most importantly, we need to educate our communities and our public decision-makers about the values of rivers. We must make it clear that rivers are a public resource deserving of protection against those seeking short-term economic gain. The collection of articles in this issue of *River Voices* provides detailed practical advice for grassroots river activists on how to deal with resource abuse interests. #

Letters to the Network

River Network encourages you to use this column as an opportunity to share your ideas, information, and successes with river activists throughout the country.

Taking the "ism" out of the environment

There's a very natural human tendency in dealing with conflict over complex issues to simplify an opposing view.

We've seen that happen in the State of Washington during this past legislative session with a well-organized attempt to abridge local government control over the growth management process, especially over using wetlands and the siting of industries.

The rallying cry seems to be that "environmentalism" has gone *too far*.

What exactly, is this "environmentalism"?

Is it a belief held by those who care more about plants and animals than about human beings, or perhaps the soft-hearted who want to save every plant and animal? Is it a belief held by the well-to-do who don't have to care about other people's jobs and security? Is it a belief held by the weak-willed who willingly hand over individual liberties to government bureaucrats?

Our group, People for Puget Sound, doesn't think so.

We'd characterize our supporters as people from all walks of life who care about living things because they care about the future. When our fish, shellfish and birds are in trouble because where they live and breed are in trouble, human beings are in trouble. Those problems aren't somebody else's problems; they're everybody's responsibility.

We also know that our supporters believe that laws and regulations should be fair and should serve people's common good. Good government and fairly administered regulations don't come easily. They come from good economics, good science, and a healthy dose of humor and common sense, and the good politics that comes with people's willingness to work out a common future.

It's important to recognize that people get scared and angry when the future is uncertain. Political opportunists jump in.

Nothing will guarantee the future. But those working to protect the environment can find new strength by beginning with what people hold in common. Our task, by word and deed, is to work toward a common future through individual and collective responsibility. In that, we can't go *too far*.

Sincerely,

Mike Sato
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Organizing a National Gold Boycott

Dear River Activists,

Special privileges granted by the 1872 Mining Law to the hardrock mining industry have resulted in a hundred years of unparalleled pollution in the West. The saga continues as the greatest gold rush this country has ever seen spreads across our western public lands with the help of modern technology and Sir Cyanide. Mining has ruined many thousands of miles of our rivers and streams, and the new technology is vastly increasing the size of mining operations. These companies dump 100 pounds of cyanide on 50 tons of ore to extract 1 OUNCE of gold! Cyanide (over 100 million pounds used last year) is extremely toxic to marine life, and trout are among the most sensitive.

Now faced with reform of that antiquated legislation, mining corporations have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to finance a bogus "grassroots" campaign to drum up support for jobs, prosperity, and The American Way Of Life. The "People for the West" and other "Wise Use" groups actually support corporate profits at the expense of the environment and public health. People like us who truly care about protecting public lands and maintaining the health and safety of our families have been unfairly cast in the role of villain. Our communities have been polarized by ugly rhetoric and misinformation.

We're not gonna take it anymore and

neither should you! The time is right for a NATIONAL GOLD BOYCOTT. It worked on the fir industry; it worked on the tuna industry, and it will work on this issue. We are focusing on gold for two reasons: the danger to our nation's waterways from the massive use of cyanide, and because 86% of gold production is made into jewelry (hardly a strategic mineral). The public is not generally aware of the 1872 Mining Law and the incredible lack of regulation of the hard rock mining industry. WE HAVE TO GET THE PUBLIC'S INTEREST.

Here's what you can do to help:

1. Send for and print 10-1,000 copies of our GOLD BOYCOTT posters and post them in your areas. It's easy, fun, and almost free! We will send you four different posters, copy ready. Please enclose \$1 with your request to cover postage, and if you can, a few more bucks will help with #3 below.
2. State your concerns about the negative impacts of gold mining in a letter to the editor or your local newspapers urging a NATIONAL GOLD BOYCOTT until the 1872 Mining Act is reformed.
3. We are also seeking financial backing to place a full page ad calling for a GOLD BOYCOTT in a national periodical such as the *New York Times*. Let the public decide; is the massive destruction of public land and the resulting pollution worth a tiny amount of shiny gold? If you can help, please write checks to Montana Environmental Information Center and marked for National Gold Boycott.

These are our proposals and we know you will have some great ideas too! Please join us in this exciting and worthwhile project. Feel free to contact us with your ideas. Support of every kind is welcome.

Thank you very much,

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