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MEMORIES of the WITCHHUNTS



A survivor sifts through the rubble
and finds the ashes still smoldering

IS THE
ENVIRONMENTAL
MOVEMENT
ON THE

Perspectives by
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ANGUS WRIGHT

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EARTH FIRST!

Move out the people and cars,
reclaim the roads and plowed land,
free shackled rivers

BY DAVE FOREMAN

The early conservation movement in the United States was a child—and no bastard child—of the Establishment. The founders of the Sierra Club, the Audubon Society, the Wilderness Society, and the wildlife conservation groups were, as a rule, wealthy pillars of American society. They were an elite band—sportsmen of the Teddy Roosevelt variety, naturalists like John Burroughs, outdoorsmen in the mold of John Muir, pioneer foresters and ecologists on the order of Aldo Leopold, and wealthy social visionaries like Robert Marshall. No anarchistic Luddites these.

When such groups as the Sierra Club grew into the politically effective force that blocked Echo Park Dam in 1956 and got the Wilderness Act passed in 1964, their members were likely to be physicians, mathematicians, and nuclear physicists. To be sure, in the 1950s and 1960s a few oddball refugees from the American mainstream joined the conservation outfits. But it was not until Earth Day in 1970 that the environmental movement received its first influx of real anti-establishment radicals as anti-war protesters found a new cause—the environment. Suddenly, in environmental meetings beards appeared alongside crew-cuts—and the rhetoric quickened.

The militancy was short-lived. Along with dozens of other products of the 1960s who went to work for conservation groups in the early 1970s, I discovered that a suit and tie gained access to regional foresters and members of Congress. We learned to moderate our opinions along with our dress. We heard that extremists were ignored in the councils of government, that the way to get a Senator to put his arm around your shoulders and drop a wilderness bill in the hopper was to consider the conflicts—mining, timber, grazing—and pare back the offending acreage. Of course we were good patriotic Americans. Of course we were concerned with the production of red meat, timber, and minerals. We tried to demonstrate that preserving wilderness did not conflict all that much with the gross national product and that clean air actually helped the economy. We argued that

we could have our booming industry and still sink oil wells in pristine areas.

Our moderate stance appeared to pay off when the first avowed conservationist since Teddy Roosevelt took the helm at the White House in 1977. Suddenly our colleagues—self-professed conservationists—occupied important and decisive positions in the Carter Administration. Editorials proclaimed that environmentalism had been enshrined in the Establishment, that conservation was here to stay. A new environmental ethic was at hand: Environmental Quality and Continued Economic Progress.

But although we had access—indeed, influence—in high places, something seemed amiss. When the chips were down, conservation still lost out to industry. But these were our *friends* turning us down. We tried to understand the problems they faced in the real political world. We gave them the benefit of the doubt. We failed to sue when we should have. . . .

I wondered about all this on a gray day in January 1979, as I sat in my private office in the headquarters of the Wilderness Society, only three blocks from the White House in Washington, D.C. I had just returned from a news conference at the South Agriculture Building, where the Forest Service had announced a disappointing decision on RARE II—the second Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (a twenty-month exercise by the Forest Service to determine which National Forest lands should be protected in their natural condition).

As I loosened my tie, propped my cowboy boots up on my desk, and popped the top to another Stroh's, I thought about RARE II and why it had gone so wrong. Jimmy Carter, supposedly a great friend of wilderness, was President. Dr. M. Rupert Cutler, a former assistant executive director of the Wilderness Society, was assistant secretary of agriculture over the Forest Service and had conceived the RARE II program. But we had lost to the timber, mining, and cattle interests on every point. Of sixty million acres still roadless and undeveloped in the 220 million acres of National Forests, the Department of Agriculture was recommending only fifteen million for wilderness protection from road building and timber cutting.

Moreover, damn it, we—the conservationists—had been moderate. The anti-environmental side had been extreme, radical, emotional. Their arguments had been

easily shot full of holes. We had been factual, rational. We had provided more—and better—serious public comment. But we had lost. And now we were worried that some local wilderness group might go off the reservation and sue the Forest Service over the clearly inadequate environmental impact statement for RARE II. We didn't want a suit—because we knew we could win and were afraid of the political consequences of such a victory. We might make some powerful Senators and Representatives angry. So those of us in Washington were plotting on how to keep the grass roots in line. But, vaguely, something seemed wrong to me.

After RARE II, I left my position as issues coordinator for the Wilderness Society in Washington to return to New Mexico and my old job as the Society's Southwest representative. I was particularly concerned with the overgrazing on the 180 million acres of public lands in the West managed by the Department of Interior's Bureau of Land Management (BLM). For years, these lands—rich in wildlife, scenic, recreational, and wilderness values—had been the private preserve of stockgrowers in the West. BLM had done little to manage national lands or to control the serious overgrazing that was sending millions of tons of topsoil down the Colorado, Rio Grande, and other rivers; wiping out wildlife habitat, and generally beating the land to hell.

Prodded by a Natural Resources Defense Council suit, BLM began to try to get a handle on the overgrazing problem through a series of environmental impact statements. These confirmed that most BLM lands were seriously overgrazed and recommended cuts in animal numbers. But after the expected outcry from the few thousand ranchers leasing BLM land and their political cronies in Congress and state capitals, BLM backtracked so quickly that a fair number of knees must have been dislocated. Why were BLM and the Department of Interior so gutless?

While that question gnawed at my inwards, I was growing increasingly disturbed about the trends in the conservation organizations themselves. When I had originally gone to work for the Wilderness Society in 1973, the way to get a job with a conservation group was to prove yourself first as a volunteer. It helped to have the right academic background, but experience as a capable grass-roots conservation activist was more important.

We realized that we would not receive

Dave Foreman is one of the founders of EARTH FIRST! His novel, "Green Fire," will be published next year by Green Garden Press.

the salary we could earn in government or private industry but we didn't expect it. We were working for nonprofit groups funded by the contributions of concerned people. They gave us enough to keep food on the table, pay rent, buy a six-pack—we didn't want to get rich. But a change occurred after the mid-1970s. Now young people seeking to work for conservation groups were career-oriented, they had relevant degrees (science, law—not history or English), they took jobs in environmental organizations in the same light as jobs in government or industry. One was a stepping stone to another, more powerful position later on. They were less part of a cause and more part of a profession.

A gulf began to grow between staff and volunteers. We also began to squabble over salaries. We were no longer content to be paid subsistence, and the figures in our salaries chalked up our status in the movement. Berries and brie replaced Bud and beans.

Within the Wilderness Society, Celia Hunter, prominent Alaskan conservationist and outfitter, World War II pilot, and feminist, had been executive director while working in Washington. Celia instituted staff discussions, democratic decision-making, more equitable salaries, and emphasis on results instead of flash. But the governing council of the Society, controlled by retired federal bureaucrats, was not sympathetic; the council preferred a hierarchy dominated by a strong male figure (there was a definite undercurrent of sexism in the struggle).

The council found this strong male figure in Bill Turnage, an eager young businessman who had made his mark by marketing Ansel Adams. Turnage took over as executive director late in 1978, and within two years he had replaced virtually all those on the staff under Celia with professional organization people. The clique running things on the governing council also moved to bring millionaires with a vague environmental interest onto the council. We were, it seemed to some of us, becoming indistinguishable from those we were ostensibly fighting.

I resigned my position in June 1980.

But what of the rest of the movement? Were there any radicals anywhere? Anyone to take the hard stands? Sadly, no. The national groups—Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth, Audubon Society, Wilderness Society, and the rest—took almost identical middle-of-the-road positions on most issues. And then those half-a-loaf demands were readily compromised further. The top conservation staffs of these groups fretted about keeping local conservationists (and some of their field staffs) in line, keeping them from becoming extreme or unreasonable, keeping them from blowing moderate national strategy on a variety of issues.

For years I was a strong advocate of this

approach. We could, I believed, gain more wilderness by a moderate tack, we would stir up less opposition by keeping a low profile. We could inculcate conservation in the Establishment by using rational, economic arguments. The last thing we needed was somebody running amok. We needed to present a solid front. We all had to be on the same bandwagon. Even Friends of the Earth, which had started out to be the radical among us back in the heady Earth Day era, had gravitated to the center and, as a rule, was a comfortable member of the informal coalition of environmental organizations.

A major crack in my personal moderation appeared early in 1979, when I returned from Washington to the small ranching community of Glenwood, New Mexico. I had lived there earlier for six years and, although a known conservationist, was fairly well accepted. Shortly after my return, *The New York Times* published an article on RARE II, with the Gila National Forest around Glenwood as chief exhibit. To my amazement, the article included a quote from a rancher, whom I considered to be a friend, threatening my life because of wilderness lockups! A couple of days later I was accosted on the street by four men, one of whom ran the town cafe at which I had eaten many a fried steak. They threatened my life because of RARE II.

I was not afraid, but I was irritated—and surprised. I had been a leading moderate among New Mexico conservationists. I had successfully convinced them to propose fewer RARE II areas on the Gila National Forest as wilderness. What had backfired? I thought again about the different approaches to RARE II: the moderate, subdued one advanced by the major conservation groups; the howling, impassioned, extreme stand set forth by off-road-vehicle zealots, many ranchers, local boosters, loggers, and miners. They looked like fools. We looked like statesmen. Who won? They did.

The last straw fell last Fourth of July in Moab, Utah. There the local county commission sent a flag-flying bulldozer into an area the Bureau of Land Management had identified as a possible study area for wilderness review. The bulldozer incursion was to be an opening salvo for the so-called Sagebrush Rebellion, a move by chambers of commerce, ranchers, and right-wing fanatics in the West to claim all Federal public lands for the states and eventual transfer to private hands. The Rebellion was clearly an extremist effort, lacking the support of even many conservative members of Congress in the West. But BLM was afraid to stop the county commission.

"What have we really accomplished?" I thought. "Are we any better off as far as saving the Earth now than we were ten years ago?" I ticked off the real problems: world population growth, destruction of tropical forests, expanding slaughter of Af-

In a true Earth-radical group, concern for wilderness preservation must be the keystone

rican wildlife, oil pollution of the ocean acid rain, carbon dioxide buildup in the atmosphere, spreading deserts on every continent, destruction of native peoples and the imposition of one world culture (European), plans to carve up Antarctica, deep seabed mining, nuclear proliferation, recombinant DNA research, toxic wastes. . . . It was staggering. And I feared we had done nothing to reverse the tide. Indeed, it had accelerated.

And then: Ronald Reagan. James "Rape'n'Ruin" Watt is Secretary of the Interior. The Forest Service is Louisiana-Pacific's. Interior is Exxon's. The Environmental Protection Agency is Dow's. Already, the Reagan Administration and the Republican Senate talk of gutting the gutless Alaska Lands Bill. The Clean Air Act, up for renewal, faces a Government more interested in corporate black ink than human lungs. The lands of the Bureau of Land Management appear to our Interior Department obscenely naked without the garb of oil wells. Meanwhile, the Agriculture Department will direct the Forest Service in ridding the National Forests of those disgustingly decadent and diseased old-growth trees. The cowboys have the grazing lands and God help the hiker, coyote, or blade of grass that gets in their way.

Maybe—some of us began to feel, even before Reagan's election—it was time for a new joker in the deck: a militant, uncompromising group unafraid to say what needed to be said or to back it up with stronger actions than the established organizations were willing to take. This idea had been kicking around for a couple of years; finally last year several of us (including, among others, Susan Morgan, formerly educational director for the Wilderness Society; Howie Wolke, former Wyoming representative for Friends of the Earth; Bart Koehler, former Wyoming representative for the Wilderness Society, and myself) decided that the time for talk was past. We formed a new national group, EARTH FIRST! We set out to be radical in style, positions, philosophy, and organization in order to be effective and to avoid the pitfalls of co-option and moderation which we had already experienced.



DAVID JOHNSON

What, we asked ourselves as we sat around a campfire in the Wyoming mountains, were the advantages, the reasons for environmental radicalism?

¶ To state honestly the views held by many conservationists.

¶ To demonstrate that the Sierra Club and its allies were raging moderates, believers in the system, and to refute the Reagan/Watt contention that they were "extremist environmentalists."

¶ To balance such anti-environmental radicals as the Grand County commission and provide a broader spectrum of viewpoints.

¶ To return some vigor, joy, and enthusiasm to the allegedly tired environmental movement.

¶ To keep the established groups honest. By stating a pure, non-compromise pro-Earth position, we felt EARTH FIRST!

could help keep the other groups from straying too far from their philosophical base.

¶ To give an outlet to many hard-line conservationists who were no longer active because of disenchantment with compromise politics and the co-option of environmental organizations.

¶ To provide a productive fringe since it seems that ideas, creativity, and energy spring up on the fringe and later spread into the middle.

¶ To inspire others to carry out activities straight from the pages of *The Monkey Wrench Gang* even though EARTH FIRST!, we agreed, would itself be ostensibly law-abiding.

¶ To question the system; to help develop a new world view, a biocentric paradigm, an Earth philosophy. To fight, with uncompromising passion, for Mother Earth.

The name—EARTH FIRST!—was chosen deliberately because it succinctly summed up the one thing on which we could all agree: That in *any* decision, consideration for the health of the Earth must come first, or, as Aldo Leopold said, "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

In a true Earth-radical group, concern for wilderness preservation must be the keystone. The idea of wilderness, after all, is the most radical in human thought—more radical than Paine, than Marx, than Mao. Wilderness says: Human beings are not dominant, Earth is not for *Homo sapiens* alone, human life is but one life form on the planet and has no right to take exclusive possession. Yes, wilderness for its own sake, without any need to justify it for human benefit. Wilderness for wilderness. For grizzlies and whales and titmice and rattlesnakes and stink bugs. And . . . wilderness for human beings. Because it is the laboratory of three million years of human evolution—and because it is home.

It is not enough to protect our few remaining bits of wilderness. The only hope for Earth (and humanity for that matter) is to withdraw huge areas as inviolate natural sanctuaries from the depredations of modern industry and technology. Keep Cleveland, Los Angeles. Contain them. Try to make them habitable. But identify areas—big areas—that can be restored to a semblance of natural conditions, reintroduce the griz and wolf and prairie grasses, and declare them off limits to modern civilization.

In the United States pick an area for each of our major ecosystems and recreate the American wilderness—not in little pieces of a thousand acres but in chunks of a million or ten million. Move out the people and cars. Reclaim the roads and plowed land. It is not enough any longer to say no more dams on our wild rivers. We must begin tearing down some dams already built—beginning with Glen Canyon, Hetch Hetchy, Tellico, and New Melones—and freeing shackled rivers.

This emphasis on wilderness is not to ignore other environmental issues or to abandon the people who suffer because of them. In the United States blacks and Chicanos of the inner cities are the ones most affected by air and water pollution, the ones most trapped by the unnatural confines of urbanity. So we decided that not only should ecocritics be concerned with these human environmental problems; we should also make common ground with other progressive elements of society whenever possible.

Obviously, for a group more committed to Gila monsters and mountain lions than to people, there will not be a total alliance with the other social movements. But there are issues where Earth radicals can cooperate with feminist, Indian rights, anti-nuke, peace, civil rights, and civil liberties groups.

the inherent conservatism of the conservative community has made it wary of snuggling too close to these questionable (in their minds) leftist organizations. We hoped that the way might be paved for better cooperation from the entire conservative movement.

We believed that new tactics were needed—something more than commenting on dreary environmental impact statements and writing letters to members of Congress. Politics in the streets. Civil disobedience. Media stunts. Holding the villains up to ridicule. Using music to charge a cause.

Action is the key. Action is more important than philosophical hair-splitting or needless refining of dogma (for which radicals are so well known). Let our actions set the finer points of our philosophy. And let us recognize that diversity is not only the vice of life, it is also the strength. All that would be required to join us, we decided, was a belief in Earth first. Apart from that, EARTH FIRST! would be big enough to contain street poets and cowboy bar bouncers, agnostics and pagans, vegetarians and raw steak eaters, pacifists and those who think that turning the other cheek is a good way to get a sore face.

Radicals frequently verge toward a righteous seriousness. But we felt that if we wouldn't laugh at ourselves we would be merely another bunch of dangerous fanatics who should be locked up (like the oil companies). Not only does humor preserve individual and group sanity, it retards hubris, a major cause of environmental rape, and it is also an effective weapon. Additionally, fire, passion, courage, and emotionalism are called for. We have been too reasonable, too calm, too understanding. It's time to get angry, to cry, to let rage flow at what the human cancer is doing to Mother Earth. To be uncompromising. For EARTH FIRST! it is all or nothing. Win or lose. No ruse or cease fire. No surrender. No partitioning of the territory.

Ever since the Earth goddesses of ancient Greece were supplanted by the macho Olympians, repression of women and Earth has gone hand in hand with imperial organization. EARTH FIRST! decided to be non-organizational: no officers, no bylaws or constitution, no incorporation, no tax status; just a collection of women and men committed to the Earth. At the turn of the century William Graham Sumner wrote a famous essay entitled "The Conquest of the United States by Spain." His thesis was that Spain had ultimately won the Spanish-American War because the United States took on the imperialism and totalitarianism of Spain as a result. We felt that if we took on the organization of the industrial state, we would soon accept their anthropocentric paradigm (much as Audubon and the Sierra Club already had).

In keeping with that view, EARTH FIRST! took the shape of a circle, a group

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of thirteen women and men around the country who more or less direct the movement, and a collection of regional contacts. We also have local affiliates (so far in Alaska, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Arkansas, Maine, and Virginia). We publish a newsletter eight times a year and are developing position papers on a range of issues from automobiles to overgrazing. We also send out press releases. Membership is free, although we do encourage members to kick in ten bucks or more, if they can afford it, to help with expenses. We have not sought any grants or funding with strings attached, nor do we plan to have paid staff (although we hope to have field organizers receiving expenses in the tradition of the Wobblies).

And, when we are inspired, we *act*.

Massive, powerful, like some creation of Darth Vader's, Glen Canyon Dam squats in the canyon of the Colorado River on the Arizona-Utah border and backs the cold dead waters of Lake Powell some 180 miles upstream, drowning the most awesome and magical canyon on Earth. More than any other single entity, Glen Canyon Dam is the symbol of the destruction of wilderness, of the technological rape of the West. The finest fantasy of eco-warriors in the West is the destruction of the dam and the liberation of the Colorado. So it was only proper that on March 21, 1981—on the Spring Equinox, the traditional time of rebirth—EARTH FIRST! held its first national gathering at Glen Canyon Dam.

On that morning, seventy-five members of EARTH FIRST! lined the walkway of the Colorado River Bridge 700 feet above the once free river and watched five patriots busy at work with an awkward black bundle on the massive dam just upstream. Those on the bridge carried placards reading "Damn Watt, Not Rivers," "Free the Colorado," and "Let It Flow." The four men and one woman on the dam attached ropes to a grill on the dam, shouted out "Earth first!" and let 300 feet of black plastic unfurl down the side of the dam, creating the impression of a growing crack. Those on the bridge returned the cheer.

A few minutes later, Edward Abbey, author of *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, a novel of environmental sabotage in the Southwest, told the protesters of the "green and living wilderness" that was Glen Canyon only nineteen years ago:

"And they took it away from us. The politicians of Arizona, Utah, New Mexico, and Colorado, in cahoots with the land developers, city developers, industrial developers of the Southwest, stole this treasure from us in order to pursue and promote their crackpot ideology of growth, profit, and power—growth for the sake of power, power for the sake of growth."

Speaking toward the future, Abbey offered this advice: "Oppose. Oppose the destruction of our homeland by these alien forces from Houston, Tokyo, Manhattan, Washington, D.C., and the Pentagon. And if opposition is not enough, we must resist. And if resistance is not enough, then subvert."

Abbey then launched a nationwide petition campaign demanding the dismantling of Glen Canyon Dam. Hardly had he finished speaking when Park Service police and Coconino County sheriff's deputies arrived on the scene. While they questioned the organizers of the illegal assembly and tried to disperse it, outlaw country singer Johnny Sagebrush led the demonstrators in song for another twenty minutes.

The Glen Canyon Dam caper brought EARTH FIRST! an unexpected degree of media attention. Membership in our group has spiraled to more than a thousand with members from Maine to Hawaii. Even the Government is interested—according to reliable reports, the FBI dusted the entire Glen Canyon Dam crack for fingerprints!

Last Fourth of July more than 200 EARTH FIRST!ers gathered in Moab, Utah, for the first Sagebrush Patriot Rally to express support for Federal public lands and to send a message to anti-Earth fanatics that there are Americans who are patriotic about *their* wilderness.

When a few of us kicked off EARTH FIRST! we sensed a growing environmental radicalism in the country but we did not expect the response we have received. Maybe EARTH FIRST! is in the right place at the right time. Tom Turner, editor of *Friends of the Earth's Not Man Apart*, recently wrote to us to say:

"Russ Train once said, 'Thank God for Dave Brower—he makes it so easy for the rest of us to appear reasonable.' Youze guys are about to make Dave Brower look reasonable, and more power to you!"

The cynical may smirk. "But what can you really accomplish? How can you fight Exxon, Coors, David Rockefeller, Japan, and the other great corporate giants of the Earth? How, indeed, can you fight the dominant dogmas of Western Civilization?"

Perhaps it is a hopeless quest. But is that relevant? Is that important? No, what is important is that one who loves Earth can do no less. Maybe a species will be saved or a forest will go uncut or a dam will be torn down. Maybe not. A monkey wrench thrown into the gears of the machine may not stop it. But it might delay it. Make it cost more. And it feels good to put it there. ■