

The Sierra Club's Profitable Descent into Leftism

BY BRENDA WALKER

The Sierra Club was once an honorable organization, and not that long ago either. A few decades ago, it was truly bipartisan, as befitted a group trying to protect wilderness. Conservatives were not shunned as members, but were welcomed as part of the team. One example was life-long Republican Dr. Edgar Wayburn, who helped save more than 100,000 acres of scenic wild places during his 103-year lifetime. He was a five-term president of the Sierra Club during the 1960s. But it's inconceivable that a member of the GOP could be elected to that post in today's organization, which has been fundamentally corrupted by left-wing political influence and millions of dollars with ideological strings attached.

How corrupt is the Sierra Club today? It has become so debased that it has done nothing to combat the destruction of parts of treasured national parks like Yosemite and Sequoia by invading Mexican drug gangs. The cartels have moved into public lands in the United States and set up toxic marijuana plantations that environmentally degrade protected places that are supposed to remain pristine. But the Sierrans have made a political marriage with open-borders Hispanic Democrats, and maintaining good relations with political allies is now more important than what was once the Club's prime directive.

The impetus for the loss of integrity was simple greed. In the 1990s, the Club came across a deep-pocketed donor with an interest in the environment, one David Gelbaum, a Wall Street investor who had made hundreds of millions of dollars. He was willing to be a generous funder to the Sierra Club, but with one stipulation. As he was quoted in a *Los Angeles Times* article ("The Man behind the Land," 10/27/04), "I did tell [Sierra Club Executive Director] Carl Pope in 1994 or 1995 that if they ever came out anti-immigration, they would never get a dollar from me."

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That restriction posed a problem, since existing Sierra Club policy dating from the 1960s recommended a steady-state population for the United States and recognized immigration's being a major cause of increasing human numbers. In 1969 the organization expressed hope that American population could be stabilized by 1980. In 1970 the Club endorsed a resolution from Zero Population Growth (later renamed "Population Connection") that included support for actions that would "bring about the stabilization of the population first of the United States and then of the world." In 1989 a Sierra Club policy specifically noted that "Immigration to the U.S. should be no greater than that which will permit achievement of population stabilization in the U.S."

But with big money beckoning in return for the disavowal of the clear connection of environmental harm with excessive immigration and population growth, Sierra leadership folded like a cheap lawn chair. In 1996, the Club rescinded its previous population policies that could be seen as related to immigration levels. The elite management team probably rationalized that enormous environmental good could be done with great riches, and therefore merited dispensing with integrity about an increasingly controversial topic.

And the Club was very well rewarded indeed by the generous David Gelbaum; the organization received over \$100 million dollars in a couple donations over the years 2000 and 2001. In any normal circumstance, such a transaction would be considered a bribe and roundly condemned. But the Club leadership kept the source of the new riches secret, until the 2004 *LA Times* article revealed Gelbaum as the sugar daddy. Even after the dots were connected, however, the liberal press couldn't bring itself to recognize an Enron-sized environmentalism scandal of an iconic organization.

Of course, any honest and educated environmentalist understands that human overpopulation is a great danger to sustainable natural systems. If you care about preserving wilderness, protecting species, and having enough water, then piling in another hundred million people every few decades into the high-consuming United States is not the way to go.

Starting in 1996, a concerned group of grassroots members became alarmed at the Club's reversal on long-held population policies. Your humble correspondent was a member of this group, known for a time as Sierrans for U.S. Population Stabilization until threatened with a lawsuit for using the Club's name (despite existing Gay Sierrans, Sierra Club Seniors, etc.). The acronym SUSPS then became the operating title (SUSPS.org online).

We spent untold volunteer hours working to return the Club to its former sensible, environmentally appropriate positions. We gathered member petitions to qualify candidates for the Board of Directors and pose policy referendums for the membership's consideration in the annual Club-wide elections. We succeeded in getting several fine environmentalists elected to the Board, although our important population initiative of 1998 failed to make the cut.



The late David Brower, an avid conservationist as well as founder and first executive director of the Sierra Club, resigned from the Sierra Club Board in 2000. "The world is burning and all I hear from them is the music of violins," he said.

Had SUSPS members known in the beginning that the Sierra Club had been bought and paid for, I doubt we would have spent eight years trying to reform a morally bankrupt and dishonest institution.

By 2004, Club management began to fear that democracy might win the day because of SUSPS' strong slate of candidates. Carl Pope and his leftist cronies

MoveOn.org and the SPLC launched a most reprehensible smear campaign of false accusations, with the help of a compliant liberal press. It took a truly supine media to accept and recite the idea that the former Democratic Governor of Colorado Dick Lamm and former Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Frank Morris were racist right-wingers. But the press swallowed the Sierra propaganda because who would think that the virtuous environmentalists would be fighting dirty for their faction's selfish greed. So the Sierra management's approved slate of obedient toadies swept the election, and the SUSPS candidates lost under the barrage of inuendo and outright lies from the left-wing establishment.

Along the way to its new identity, the Sierra Club lost many old members who were disgusted by the tragic devolution of John Muir's wilderness club into the leftists in hiking boots. However, the group acquired new associates which it appears to find quite agreeable, like MoveOn.org, the SPLC, La Raza, and George Soros. So there is no shortage of money, even if the potential membership pool is greatly diminished.

The Sierra Club, the Democratic Party, and Al Gore all claim to be deeply concerned about global warming caused by spewing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. But it's hard to take their worries seriously when all are quite happy with immigration-fueled skyrocketing population growth in the world's top resource-using country. If any of the climate worriers truly cared about global warming, they would be leading the charge for limiting immigration. By rapidly increasing the number of residents of America, Washington makes the United States an even bigger engine of pollution and greenhouse gases. Immigrants don't relocate to this country for the better recycling opportunities: they come hoping for an American level of material consumption (also known as "seeking a better life").

In December, we learned the results of the 2010 Census. The total population of the United State on April 1, 2010, was counted at 308,745,538, an increase of 27,323,632 over just 10 years. The science- and math-ignorant press did not think that was a big deal; in fact some media sources emphasized the slowdown, as did MSNBC's headline "Population growth slowest since 1940, census shows" (12/21/10). That assessment is certainly accurate, particularly from the rate of growth, expressed in percentages: the 2010 growth rate was 9.7 percent, compared with 13.2 percent from the previous decade. However, there is no increase in the natural resources like water necessary to support the additional 27 million people, and the loss of farmland continues to reflect the profitability of housing construction over

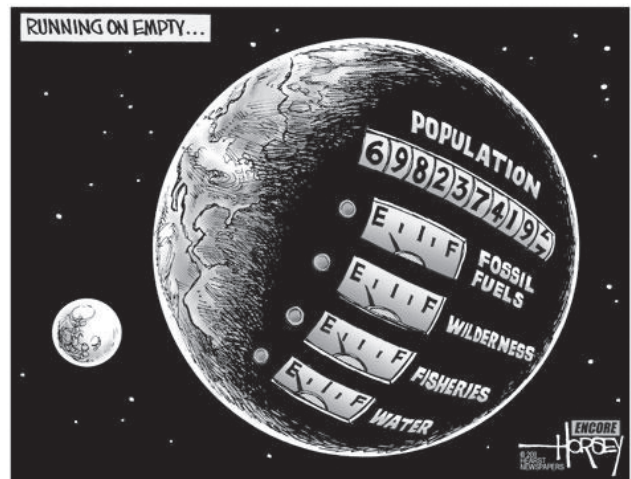
food production. If there were any environmental organizations pointing out the effect of continuing rapid population growth on natural resources after the Census announcement, it was muted at best.

Sadly, the degradation of the Sierra Club from a bipartisan science-friendly environmental organization into a semi-outdoorsy left-wing political group is bad news for the earth. Our planet needs all the friends it can get, judging by worsening species extinction, the collapse of major fish stocks like the North Atlantic cod, the enormous Great Pacific Garbage Patch of floating plastic, and many other symptoms of ill health. No matter what anyone’s opinion on the idea of human-caused climate change, the Sierra Club’s position on that issue or any other can no longer be trusted as genuinely environmental when the organization is now all about left-wing globalist politics.

A timely illustration of today’s Sierra Club priorities can be found in the campaign statements of the eight persons running in the 2011 Board of Directors election. There is not a single mention of population, not even that the global number is forecast to reach seven billion later this year. That’s a one-billion person increase since 1999, when the six-billion threshold was crossed, in just 12 short years. One might hope America’s top green organization would recognize the meaning of those numbers and provide much needed leadership and public education. But the Club is too politically correct to suggest how unprecedented human growth threatens our planet’s natural systems of replenishment. Elite Clubbers prefer to lecture Americans about resource use rather than acknowledge the whole picture, in which population and consumption multiply each other’s effects, as expressed by Paul Ehrlich’s I=PAT formula (Human Impact on the environment equals the product of P= Population, A= Affluence, T= Technology).

Another aspect of the current Club Board of Direc-

tors election deserves attention. One candidate is Larry Fahn, who was President during the decisive election when SUSPS Board candidates were poised to possibly take power. Fahn helped lead the shameful smear campaign against our highly reputable candidates, and he now states his pride in being a Club hatchet man, saying in his 2011 campaign statement: “I led the Club during trying times, the ‘hostile takeover attempt,’ when outsiders, anti-immigration activists like former Colorado Governor Dick Lamm, ran for several board seats. Lamm and others sued me over my leadership against them.”



It’s sad reflection on the current Sierra Club that being an enthusiastic purveyor of character assassination is now considered an advantage for gaining office. Interestingly, the late David Brower, an admired conservationist, resigned from the Board in 2000 because the Club leaders had lost all passion to save the earth. “The world is burning and all I hear from them is the music of violins,” he said.

Music would be an improvement at this point. The earth needs defenders now more than ever, but the Sierra Club is playing a different tune indeed. ■