

Sierra Club Oral History Project

VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP IN THE NATIONAL SIERRA CLUB, 1970s-1980s

Joe Fontaine

Conservation Activist, Consensus
Builder, and Sierra Club President,
1980-1982

Kent Gill

Making the Political Process Work:
Chapter Activist, Council Chair, and
Club and Foundation President

Interviews Conducted by

Ann Root
and
Becky Evans

in 1981, 1984, 1991, 1992

Underwritten by
the Sierra Club

Sierra Club History Committee
1995

Sierra Club History Committee Oral History Series

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Joe Fontaine

CONSERVATION ACTIVIST
CONSENSUS BUILDER
AND
SIERRA CLUB PRESIDENT, 1980-1982

With an Introduction by
Michael McCloskey

An interview conducted by
Ann Root
1981, 1984

Sierra Club History Committee
1990

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INTRODUCTION by Michael McCloskey

Joe Fontaine is the prototype of what a Sierra Club leader should be. He is a quintessential grassroots activist who came out of the club's deepest traditions of fighting to save nature near him against onslaughts. He is a team player who enjoys working with others to find a strength in unity. And he answered the call to national leadership when it came, but he was never consumed with ambition. He was always ready to help whenever asked. And he never quit; he is ever persistent and part of the action.

Joe was also the right person at the right time when he became the president of the Sierra Club. He helped rouse the club, stunned by a new administration ready to repudiate all we had worked for, to fight back. He barnstormed the country in the early 1980s in an indefatigable way urging our grassroots to action to combat the crisis posed by Secretary of the Interior James Watt. In a pastoral way, he ministered to the ranks who were in a quandry and legitimated the turn to electoral politics as the club developed its own Political Action Committee and began to endorse candidates. He reached out to other sectors in society to assure them that they could work with us. He pioneered new relations with labor and business alike. Joe engendered trust.

And this trust helped to unify the club at a time when it was sorely tried by external challenges. The grassroots and the staff rallied around Joe's leadership as the president of the Sierra Club. He was a figure who stands as the model of what the club longs for in a leader. And when he left the board of directors, he kept on working to save wilderness and giant sequoias in his own chapter. Joe should give lessons on how to do it right.

Michael McCloskey
Executive Director, 1969-1985
Chairman, 1985-

April 14, 1990
Washington, D.C.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Joe Fontaine's oral history is a valued addition to the Sierra Club History Committee's multivolume oral history project. It not only advances our goal of interviewing each of the past presidents of the Sierra Club, but it also furthers our attempt to gather documentation on the leadership, concerns, and major environmental campaigns of the club's network of local chapters nationwide. The first interview was conducted in 1981 during Joe's presidency of the club. It focuses on his introduction to the Sierra Club and his role in the Kern-Kaweah Chapter. The Kern-Kaweah, embracing some of the most spectacular areas of the southern Sierra, has consequently been involved in many battles of clubwide concern. Joe describes two of these--the campaign for the Golden Trout Wilderness on the Kern Plateau and the fight against a proposed ski development at Mineral King.

The second and third interview sessions reflect on the issues of Joe's presidency of the club during the first years of the Reagan presidential administration, from 1980 to 1982. The club-sponsored petition for the recall of Reagan's Secretary of the Interior, James Watt, provided a focus for these years and led to a dramatic increase in club membership. It was also a time when the club increasingly became involved in endorsing and supporting candidates for public office and when the board of directors grappled with the issue of the proper role of the club in working to prevent nuclear war. Many of the issues that Joe was concerned with on the national level and in his chapter were controversial ones. His oral history shows how his leadership style was one of building consensus, defusing hard feelings, bringing reason to bear, all without losing sight of the important principles involved.

Joe Fontaine was interviewed for the Sierra Club History Committee in 1981 and in 1984 by Ann Root, who was a club employee at the time and served as Joe's administrative assistant during his presidency of the club. Ann was especially well prepared to conduct these interviews of Joe. Having worked closely with him, she was familiar with the issues under discussion. In addition, she had received her college degree in history, had read widely about Sierra Club history, and had been trained in the purposes and procedures of oral history in a Vista College class and a History Committee workshop. Her interest, perspective, and professional capabilities are evident in the conduct of the interview. Ann is currently working with Trust for Public Land in San Francisco.

The interview was transcribed and edited for clarity and accuracy. Joe Fontaine reviewed the transcript, making an addition about his family history and only a few other minor changes. Merrilee Proffitt, a volunteer for the History Committee and University of California, Berkeley, student, did the final editing and proofing of the transcript. Interview tapes are available in The Bancroft Library. Bound transcripts are deposited at the Sierra Club's Colby Library, UCLA's Department of Special Collections, and in The Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley. Copies are available at cost from the Sierra Club History Committee.

Ann Lage, Coordinator
Sierra Club Oral History Project

April 10, 1990
Berkeley, California

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly. Use black ink.)

Your full name Joseph Boynton Fortaine
 Date of birth July 12, 1933 Birthplace Bakersfield, Calif.
 Father's full name William Hearst Fortaine
 Occupation Railroad worker Birthplace Keene, Calif.
 Mother's full name Gladys Irene Coomba
 Occupation Housewife Birthplace Bakersfield, Calif.
 Your spouse Paul Elizabeth Mathews
 Your children Joseph Benjamin Fortaine

Where did you grow up? Bakersfield Calif.
 Present community Tehachapi Calif.
 Education Bachelor of Art Biology UCLA
Master in Earth Science Education Cornell Univ.
 Occupation(s) High School Science Teacher

Areas of expertise Land use issues - National Forests,
National Parks, Desert Issues, Fundraising,
international Sierra Club organization
 Other interests or activities amateur Astronomy, rock
collecting, travel, backpacking

Organizations in which you are active YMCA, Most national Conservation
Organizations,

I THE MAKING OF A CONSERVATION ACTIVIST

[Date of Interview: 6 November 1981]##

California Heritage

Root: Joe, I see from your biographical sketch that you were born in Bakersfield and that your parents were also born in California. Who was the first one in your family to come to California, and how and why did they come?

Fontaine: My family history has been traced back to about 1500. One ancestor was Jacque Fontaine, a French Huguenot, who was imprisoned for his religious beliefs and fled France in 1683. His son, Peter Fontaine, was a minister in Virginia in the early eighteenth century. He had a son, Joseph, who crossed the Cumberland Gap about 1805 and went to Kentucky. Then my branch of the family moved to Arkansas.

The first member of my family to come to California, as far as I know, was my grandfather, who came in 1850 or '51 in a covered wagon from Arkansas. He was one or two years old at the time, and he arrived in El Monte, down in Los Angeles. That's where the family first got established, and then they moved to different parts of California. My grandmother, his wife, was born in the Mother Lode country, in Snelling, in 1867 or 1868. And so I'm one of those rare Californians who has roots here.

As a result of my travel as Sierra Club President, I was able to reestablish contact with some of my distant relatives in Virginia and Arkansas and learn more about my family history.

Root: Are there any family stories about why your grandfather came?

Fontaine: I intend to investigate that, but I believe they came at the time of the Gold Rush, the early 1850s, and I'm sure they were looking for new opportunities.

##This symbol indicates that a tape or a segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes see p. 64.

Life was hard in those days, and they were looking for new opportunities to improve themselves, so they came to California. They didn't come to get into the Gold Rush, into that kind of thing, but what they did was to establish a freighting business. They ran freight wagons between El Monte and the southern end of the Sierra, up in Kern County near Bakersfield, where Lake Isabella is now, and Havilah, places like that. So they ran a freight business between the southern end of the Gold Rush country and the Los Angeles area.

Root: This was your mother's people or your father's people?

Fontaine: This was my father's family. His name was Joe Fontaine, too, or Joseph Fontaine. There's been a Joseph Fontaine in the family, as far as I can tell, for at least five or six generations.

Root: And your son is named Joe, so you have an ongoing tradition.

Fontaine: Yes. There is a Joseph Fontaine, the first one I can find in our family history, who was born, I think, in 1748 in Virginia.

Root: Did your father grow up in the freighting business?

Fontaine: No, no. That didn't last long. That went on with my great-grandfather and his son, my grandfather. That went on a few years--I don't know how long--and then they just moved permanently up to Kern County, in the mountains east of Bakersfield. They did various things. They ranched for a while. They ran a combination store and hotel. Then, for a short period around the turn of the century, the family moved up to Washington, where they operated a fish hatchery. They moved back down to Bakersfield after that, and so there have been different things our family has done.

Root: What was it like growing up in Bakersfield? You said in your biographical sketch that you grew up there. What kind of a town was it?

Fontaine: Well, it was a much different town than it is today. Bakersfield was, back in the late 1930s and '40s when I was growing up, a small town and it didn't have the same characteristics it has now. It was a rural area. There wasn't much in the way of cultural activities like you have in the large cities. It was kind of backward, but it was nice for a kid growing up. I really enjoyed it. I didn't have many opportunities to get out and enjoy the out-of-doors, like a lot of kids do today, but maybe that was why I liked it so much, because it was so hard to come by. I don't know how to say what it was like then because, economically and all that, things were pretty depressed.

Root: How many people, approximately, lived in Bakersfield at that time?

Fontaine: Well, there must have been--there are probably 150,000 or 200,000, so in the late 1930s and early '40s, there must have been 40,000 or 50,000 people in Bakersfield. It was a smaller town. I could walk or ride a bicycle and easily

get out to the edge of town and get through town, and now it seems like you go forever. The city is expanding into farmland and subdivisions all over. It's just growing at a rapid rate. Of course, I guess the change may have been one of the motivations that caused me to be interested in conservation and join the Sierra Club--the rapid changes I didn't like.

Root: You remembered Bakersfield as a small town with lots of farmland around?

Fontaine: Yes, and of course my mother died when I was very young, when I was six years old. My grandmother raised my brother and myself for a while, and she talked about how it used to be when she was younger there. Of course, the changes between the time she was there and the way I saw it were probably just as tremendous as the changes there are between the way it is now and when I was a kid.

Root: You said that you didn't have many opportunities to get out into the country like some children do today. Why didn't you?

Fontaine: Probably my background and childhood were different than most people's. For one thing, my mother died, like I said, when I was six years old. Then my grandmother took care of my brother and me until we were, I guess I was twelve or something like that. Then she died. My father had to raise us from that point on. My father was unemployed part of the time. We didn't have a car for many, many years. We just didn't have money to get by very well, so we had no transportation or opportunities to go out and do things.

Root: So you didn't grow up camping and hiking around in the wilderness.

Fontaine: No. No, there were a few experiences when I was real, real young and somehow they left an indelible mark in my memory. I really enjoyed them, and the very few times I did get out, it meant an awful lot to me. I can remember one time, I must have been just three or four years old, going up into the mountains to stay at an aunt's cabin up in the Greenhorn Mountains, which is Sequoia National Forest now. For some reason, that really impressed me. It was the Fourth of July and the mountains were beautiful. I enjoyed it another time while my mother was still living. I can remember taking a ride up to Sequoia National Park just one day and coming back again. There were just a handful of things like that that I was able to experience when I was young. Yet they made such an impression on me that when I got older and had the capability of getting out and doing things that I just did as much as I could.

Root: As a boy, I know that you wound up studying geology and became a teacher. What do you suppose led you into that particular field?

Fontaine: My love of the outdoors, I'm sure. When I first started to go to college and began to think about a career, I just couldn't stand the idea of being dressed up in a tie every day and sitting in an office. It just sounded like the last thing in the world I'd want to do. So when I first entered college I decided

to major in forestry. For about a semester my first year of college I did major in forestry, but when I began to look at what that career meant, working for the Forest Service, I decided I really didn't want that kind of lifestyle. They move from one place to another, and I guess I've always been the kind of person that likes to put down roots and stay in one area.

I didn't like the idea of moving from one place to another, so I decided that maybe a better profession would be geology, because it was closely related. It was an outdoor kind of thing. It sounded romantic to go out and pick up rocks and run up and down the mountains doing the field geology and mapping and things like that. It sounded like a lot of fun, so I decided I'd major in geology, and that's what I finished college with, a geology major.

Then, when I got out of college and worked for a while in the industry, I found that working conditions were miserable. I didn't like it at all. It's not that I didn't like geology, but I didn't like the working conditions. So I decided to go into teaching.

Root: I know you worked for the oil industry for one year. What do you mean when you say you didn't like the conditions? Was it the industry itself or the oil company?

Fontaine: I have to tell you a little more about what happened there. When I first got out of college I was eligible for the draft. That was after the Korean War was low-key, but they were still drafting people for several years after that, and when I first got out of college and wanted to get a job, I was 1-A and could be drafted at any time. So the only job I could get was called mud-logging which is where you work out on the wells and you analyze cuttings and cores that they take up out of the wells when they drill.

Then I went into the Army. I told them to take me. I was tired of waiting to be drafted, not knowing. I wanted to get my life settled so I could plan something. So I told the Army to take me and draft me and they did for two years.

Then I came out and went back to the same job I'd worked in, at first, for about six months, then another six months after I got out of the Army. The working conditions were what I didn't like. You had to be in one place three or four days, and another place a week. Maybe the longest you'd be in one spot would be two weeks. Even on days off I would be constantly on call. I wanted to have my own private life, and be able to plan my own future and not have someone else doing it for me. So I decided that that particular job, in no way could I consider it a permanent job. I didn't like it because of the conditions. The work itself I didn't mind at all.

Then I had to decide, well, should I try to get a job as a geologist for an oil company--this was an oil well service company I worked for--or should I just think about another profession. When I was in the Army I'd done a

little bit of teaching because the sergeants and other non-commissioned officers, some of them were way below the educational standards that the Army required. So they had to do something to try to bring them up to the standards that the Army required or they would have to be discharged. So I did a little teaching, the remedial type stuff, and I kind of enjoyed that.

At the time I got out of the Army, the oil companies had a glut of geologists. They were cutting their staff in half. Some oil companies were totally eliminating their geologic staff at that time. So the only job opportunities with oil companies were to go overseas, and I didn't want to do that. I liked California and I wanted to stay there.

So I decided that teaching probably would be a better profession. So I quit my job with this oil well service company after I saved up enough money and began to go to night school to get a teaching credential. I substituted in the daytime in the school to find out if I could stand kids. I found out that I could tolerate them--I actually liked them, too--so I decided that I would go in to teaching and gradually worked my way into teaching by getting my credential through night school classes and substituting and that kind of thing.

Root: What year was that?

Fontaine: Nineteen fifty-nine. I was in the Army from 1956 through the early part of 1958. I started getting into the teaching thing in 1959.

Root: And you've been teaching ever since?

Fontaine: Yes.

Joining the Sierra Club, 1962

Root: I know that you are very interested in environmental education in your work with the Sierra Club. Did you have any ideas about that at that time, or was that a gradual awareness that that was a need?

Fontaine: Well, the idea of environmental education really came quite a bit later. Because at that time I wasn't married, I was footloose and fancy-free, and most young adults don't think about getting serious and working in organizations. So I was interested in finding someone to get married to, and I did. I guess I was married a year or less when I joined the Sierra Club and really got involved. After I got into the Sierra Club, of course, I was already in the teaching profession, and the two together naturally pointed me toward environmental education.

Root: You joined the Sierra Club in 1962. What made you decide to join at that time? Anything in particular?

Fontaine: Yes, there was a very definite thing. One of the things that I was doing, even before I got married, was working with youth groups. One of the ways that I decided to try to find out if I could stand kids or not was to work with the YMCA. I was doing some things with their youth groups, then that led to getting into the Boy Scouts. I was into these things before I got married.

So during my first year of marriage, I had taken a group of Boy Scouts out, up in the mountains near Bakersfield, up in the Greenhorn Mountains. On our return from an outing, I saw this area that looked like a war had gone through it, right next to the road in this beautiful area that I had loved all my life. I got out and looked around, and I found out that they were logging there. It wasn't ordinary logging; it was clearcutting. Everything had been stripped down to the bare soil. There were huge culls, and trees, and slash lying around. It looked awful. It just ripped up a beautiful area.

I really got mad. Those things had always bothered me. I guess it was building. Finally, it got to the point when I saw that that I just exploded. I just really got angry.

In the meantime, I'd been taking *The Roadrunner*, which is our local Sierra Club newsletter for our local chapter, not because I intended to join but because I really loved to get out in the mountains. I always looked at their outings list to get ideas of places to go. I went home and grabbed a *Roadrunner* and found a phone number there of someone I could call to find out what I could do. I called Lanphere Graff, the chapter chairman, and that's how I got involved.

I guess I joined the Sierra Club not because of outings or things like that; I got involved because I really got mad about what they were doing to land I considered to be partly mine. I got in for conservation and that's how it all started.

Root: Your work for conservation seems to run definitely all through your Sierra Club involvement. I noticed that you said you became chair of the conservation committee of your local chapter in 1963, which was only a year after you joined. You really got involved very quickly.

Fontaine: When I first made a contact with the Sierra Club, I just saw an advertisement in the newspaper. They were having a program, and I loved to look at pictures of the mountains, because I didn't get up there enough. So I went, and I found their newsletter, and I found I could subscribe for a dollar or two a year and I got involved that way.

Then when I made that phone call, they really grabbed onto me, because they were anxious to get help. The chapter was very small then. I

think we only had a couple hundred people, or three hundred, or something like that. There have always in Sierra Club been too few hands to do the work, so when they found someone who was really turned on and interested in trying to do something, they right away got me to come to meetings.

And it was very shortly after I joined, that the current conservation chairman became the chapter chair. I don't remember now how long it was, it must have been less than a year; about a year after I joined, he asked me if I would be the conservation chair. I was really apprehensive about doing such a big job. I didn't know whether I could handle it, just being that new to the Sierra Club, but I was finally talked into doing it. So that's how it happened. I wasn't elected; I was chosen by the chapter chairman to be the conservation chairman.

Root: Who was that?

Fontaine: John Harper. He's still a good friend of mine. He's moved out of the area now, but I still see him frequently and we correspond. He's a very good friend--he's one of the ones who really got me involved. There are a couple of other people who are still around in Bakersfield, who worked with me in those early days of my Sierra Club involvement.

Root: Can you give me their names?

Fontaine: Lanphere, Lanny, Graph is the one who's still a good friend of ours in Bakersfield. He was the chapter chairman when I joined. John Harper was the conservation chairman. As I said, not long after I joined, John Harper became the chairman and he asked me to be the conservation chair.

Root: Were you able to do anything about that area that you had seen clearcut?

Fontaine: No, because it was already clearcut. What I did was to write a letter to the Forest Service demanding an explanation. How could they justify such a thing? And they wrote back a long letter that justified what they were doing from a silvicultural point of view. If you consider our forests to be tree farms, then they could justify what they were doing. But I didn't consider our forests just to be tree farms. I considered them to be used for other things, too.

I had the feeling that their attitude was that the national forests somehow were primarily the property of the logging companies and that other people really didn't count for much. I felt that I should have just as much input and say so about what happens to the national forests as some logger or someone who owns a logging company, and that is not the way it was in the early 1960s. The timber industry had far more influence over the Forest Service than they do now. Just ordinary citizens had virtually no influence.

So the letter that I got back I felt, even though they were justifying what they were doing from a silvicultural point of view, was really a snow job, because what it did was to say that forests are really just for one use or tree farms and everything else has to take second place to that. I didn't buy that. It turned me off.

Root: You got angry. What did that do to their doctrine of multiple use?

Fontaine: Well that multiple use idea was just beginning to be promoted and I think they really weren't thinking in terms of what we would consider balanced use today.

Root: Do you remember whether or not they had to do environmental impact statements at that time on any kind of proposal?

Fontaine: No, there was nothing in the way of EIS's. The National Environmental Policy Act that required an EIS had not been enacted. What they would do is politely listen to you if you talked to them, and then they'd go ahead and do what they had decided to do anyway.

I don't like to generalize, because there are all kinds of people in the Forest Service. There are people who are just as dedicated and concerned about the environment as I am. And there are other people who believe the only good forest is a forest that grows trees that you can cut. There are just all kinds of people in the Forest Service.

You see, from the very beginning, my involvement and work in the Sierra Club involved working with Forest Service people. And I guess I have greater depth there, with the Forest Service, than any other agency or any other area of work in the club because that's how I started. And I very quickly learned that there are all kinds of people in the Forest Service, and I have observed through the years that there have been lots of changes, for the better primarily, I think.

Chapter Conservation Chairman

Root: When you became conservation chair of the chapter, and you started working with the Forest Service at that time, what were some of the first issues you were involved in? Do you remember?

Fontaine: Of course, logging and how it affected the land. The only alternative I could see to logging at that time was to try to do something to get areas put into the wilderness system. Shortly before I joined our chapter, the Forest Service had agreed to establish an area in the southern Sierra on the Kern plateau, called the Domelands Wilderness, and that was about 65,000 acres

of rocks and gravel and very few trees. There, to me, was an example of what could be done to protect the land from logging.

So the very first big project I got involved in with John Harper was analyzing the southern Sierra, and the Kern plateau in particular, and trying to come up with a wilderness proposal. It later became the Golden Trout Wilderness. It was the thing that I probably worked the longest and the hardest on throughout my Sierra Club career. It took over fifteen years to happen, but that was the beginning, way back then in the early 1960s when I first began to think about it.

Root: How did you go about preparing a wilderness proposal? That sounds like a pretty mammoth undertaking.

Fontaine: It was. What we tried to do in the beginning was to look at the maps, get out in the area, try to make an analysis of the area, try to find out as many facts as we could about it. Where was the timber? What were the mineral resources? What was the land like? In our own minds to make some kind of judgment about how much land should be in the wilderness, how many resources should be put in there. We made a big, long report that I still have a copy of somewhere at home, that John and I did together, of what eventually became the Golden Trout Wilderness. So we tried to do a complete analysis of the area and get as many facts as we could. Then we went through the hoops in the Sierra Club process as far as we could understand them in trying to get that to become an official position of the Sierra Club and trying to establish a Golden Trout Wilderness in the Kern plateau.

That's how we did it. We started by doing as thorough an analysis as we could of the area that we thought ought to be in the wilderness system.

Root: So you did your analysis before the club had established this as a priority?

Fontaine: Yes, that's right. See, back in the early 1960s it wasn't as clear as today how you establish a club policy and positions. Today, if a chapter has an area within its boundaries that it thinks ought to be wilderness, all they have to do is say that they think that it should be wilderness, and that becomes the official club position. But then that wasn't true. The Sierra Club was primarily a California organization and policy was established by the board.

It turned out there were some people, I think that they were on the board at the time, who were interested in the Kern plateau. People like Martin Litton and, of course, Dave Brower was interested in it. They were always pushing to have wilderness established on the Kern Plateau. So there wasn't a problem of any conflict within the club. Everybody agreed that it should be wilderness, but we didn't know the procedures in the club to get an official position, other than just getting moral support from people.

But that wasn't the difficult part. The difficult part was getting the Forest Service to listen, because at that time almost the entire Kern Plateau was de facto wilderness. There were few roads up into it, a couple of roads, but not many. It was almost all de facto wilderness. Every year we'd go and talk to the Forest Service and tell them about our ideas and why we thought that large parts of it should be kept as wilderness. We could go in and talk to them, but their minds were closed and shut. They had already decided that they were going to road the area and log all of it.

Each year the de facto wilderness was pushed back farther and farther. Each year they'd have more timber sales. More roads would be pushed into the roadless areas. We saw the area that qualified for wilderness shrinking every year. It got to be very frustrating, because we just weren't listened to.

Many times, even today, the Forest Service people really get angry or get their backs up when they hear us criticizing the Forest Service and talking about them as if they were the enemy. In those days they were. They just would not listen! We didn't count. It was the timber companies that really dominated things. There's been a change now. But many people in the Sierra Club, I guess including myself, kind of cut their teeth on this thing way back in times when the Forest Service was the enemy. It wouldn't listen.

And it's hard to change attitudes. I believe I've been able to do that because I've worked closely with them and known a lot of fine people that worked for the Forest Service. But there are still people in the Sierra Club who had those early experiences who still feel that the Forest Service is bad. That is changing, luckily. In those days it was much different. We were just ignored, and they went ahead and did what they wanted to. There was no requirement for an EIS or anything like that.

Root: I know that de facto wilderness was an idea that was popularized, I guess, by Dave Brower. Was the Forest Service at all accepting of that term back then? Did they call wilderness de facto wilderness?

Fontaine: No, I think that is a term that we coined. De facto wilderness meaning areas that qualify for wilderness classification but aren't officially classified. They're just roadless areas. Now we call them roadless areas because the Forest Service finally went through and did an inventory of those areas that were like that.

The Wilderness Act wasn't passed until 1964. So my first two years in the Sierra Club, there was no Wilderness Act, and the wilderness areas that existed were part of primitive areas. There were a few. I can't remember now. The Domelands Wilderness was established before the Wilderness Act, but it was one of the few. There just weren't many around. They were token type things.

We always had the feeling that if there was no other conflict and nothing else to do with the land, then they might consider wilderness. But if there was one stick of timber on it that could be cut then it was disqualified automatically from being classified as wilderness, and they were hell bent for leather to put roads in and get the areas all developed. We even had a feeling, this may have been paranoia or suspicion on our part, that maybe some of them were looking to the future and seeing that there was going to be more and more pressure to save areas, to set them aside as wilderness, and the only way to forestall that was to move as quickly as possible. Get into those roadless areas and get them roaded and developed so that they no longer qualify, and then they wouldn't have to argue about it anymore. That was always a suspicion that many of us had. I'm sure some people in the Forest Service probably did feel that way, but not all of them.

Root: Do you remember any of the people in the Forest Service that you were dealing with at that time? Any names?

Fontaine: Sure. We had a district ranger in Bakersfield, in the Greenhorn district of Sequoia National Forest named Jim Toland. I think that was his name. I think that was the district. I'm not absolutely sure of that. Jim Toland worked down there. I lost track of where he is now.

There was a Forest Service supervisor of Sequoia National Forest I never met, but I remember his name, Eldon Ball, because he's infamous for not being willing to listen and had his own mind made up about what he wanted to do. I never met him. I think he passed away. He had a heart attack or something. His successor, Larry Whitfield, is in Washington now.

And there was a forest supervisor named Jim James, who was supervisor in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He was one of those people in the Forest Service who began to listen to what we were talking about and had some sympathy for what we were saying and wanted to be fair about it. In fact, he made some recommendations to the regional office of the Forest Service that were in our favor, some things that we had asked for and the regional office wouldn't accept them. Because of that, and some other things, he was frustrated at the Forest Service and retired early. He now lives on the north coast of California.

So you see, even people in the Forest Service who would try to do things that were fair and balanced, we felt were frustrated at the political level and weren't allowed to do those things. That kind of changing process is still going on today. That takes me up to the middle 1970s.

Regional Conservation Committee Chairman

Root: Let's get back to your work in the Sierra Club process. You were conservation chair, and I know you were also regional conservation committee chair. Tell me about some of your early experiences as an RCC chair.

Fontaine: After I became conservation chair of the chapter, then I became the chairman of the chapter in the late 1960s. I began to meet some of the people working at the regional level in the club.

We didn't have RCCs then as such. We had an SCRCC that was kind of just an ad hoc fledgling type of organization in southern California. We not only worked on the Golden Trout Wilderness, but we worked on Mineral King. Mineral King is another issue which we tried to get the club to take a position on.

We thought we had to get regional approval before we could go to the board. So I began to know some of the people at the regional level by trying to get them to support what we were working on at Mineral King and on the Golden Trout Wilderness, too.

After I finished my term as chapter chairman, we'd go to the Southern California Regional Conservation Committee meetings. I became the chapter delegate and participated in the meetings, and they decided that they wanted me to be vice chairman and then chairman. I succeeded Harriet Allen.

The SCRCC had been officially established and was operating in the mid 1960s. When it became active and really a going organization, Harriet Allen was the chair. She's in the San Diego chapter.

Then after she was in there for two years, or whatever the term was, they elected me chairman. That went on until sometime in the early 1970s. I was chairman, I think, for two or three years. I don't remember now for sure. I'd have to look up all those records to find out.

Root: It was during your work with the SCRCC that the regional conservation committees in California became really established, wasn't it?

Fontaine: Yes, that's right. At that time I don't believe that there were any other RCCs around. I think it was just northern California and southern California.

Root: There were no other RCCs?

Fontaine: I don't think so, but again, those are records that have to be checked. Around the same time I was getting active in the internal organization

committee, they talked about RCC organization and all that. But it's my recollection that there were only two at the time. Then the RCC concept was expanded to the rest of the country because, like I said, in the 1960s the Sierra Club was primarily a California organization. I guess it was in the early 1970s or so that we began to expand in other parts of the country and that the need for RCCs in other places began to arise. At the time, though, I think there were only the two RCCs here in California.

And when I became chairman, before I was chairman too, there was a lot of conflict between the two RCCs, primarily because of the lack of communication. We didn't meet regularly, like they do now. When we talked about a California issue, who was going to speak for California, southern California people or northern California people, we had to find some way to arrive at a common position. There was a lot of conflict, and I was able to help work out a method that allowed the two RCCs to work more closely together.

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Root: Lowell Smith was the chair, then, of the Northern California RCC?

Fontaine: Right. When I became chair of the Southern California RCC, Lowell was the chairman of the north. I don't remember how long he was chairman, for a year or two, and then he was succeeded by Jake Miller. Jake was the Northern California Regional Conservation Committee chair and I was able to work with both of them. I generally have an easy time working with people, and we eventually were able to come to some accommodation.

It's interesting, it was one of those flaps; there were really a lot of strong feelings. Every time we'd have a meeting to try to resolve something, tempers would flare and all that. So finally we had a meeting in a library in Millbrae, here in the Bay Area, and we finally agreed, after long negotiations, about a very formal way to come to statewide positions on issues. We call it the "Treaty of Millbrae" because of all the fighting we had between the north and the south.

Then we had this very elaborate method for communicating back and forth to finally decide what our position was going to be on a given issue, so that we'd have a statewide position. And that was put into operation. Another suggestion that we had at the time was that we would have joint executive committee meetings between the two RCCs. We did have the two full RCCs meeting, together, too. Of course, those were expensive and difficult to do in California because of the distance involved.

As soon as people began to meet and talk regularly all those problems disappeared. They just melted away as if they didn't exist and very quickly the "Treaty of Millbrae," which set up this very legalistic, constitutional type apparatus to make decisions, was just sort of lost in

history because it wasn't needed. Once people started talking, we found there was very little conflict.

So now we have, twice a year in California, joint RCC meetings, and we all meet like a big congress and sit and talk and discuss things. It's very gratifying to me now, knowing how much animosity there was back in those early days, how they can tackle very controversial issues like S.B. 200 and the peripheral canal idea in California, and have long debates and discussions back and forth without any animosity and recrimination. We're able to arrive at a statewide position even though everyone doesn't agree on what the final decision is. Everyone feels that it was done fairly, and they can all support the outcome even though everyone didn't agree. I can just imagine, that would have been a totally impossible thing to do probably back in the early 1970s when the two RCCs were fighting one another.

Root: What year was the "Treaty of Millbrae"?

Fontaine: Oh, I'd have to look that up. It must have been 1972 or 1973 maybe. Somewhere around there.

Root: Why do you suppose it was so hard for them to come to an agreement before?

Fontaine: There are probably a couple of reasons. Some people have abrasive personalities, and there were some of those people, without naming names, that were around at the time. But I think the primary reason--I don't think that the personalities were the main reason--was just a lack of communication. We just didn't sit down together and talk, and when one group would say something, in substance and intent it may have been the same thing that the other side intended, too; but when you put it on paper and send it up through the mail, it doesn't always come out the same way that you intended. And I think it was just those kinds of misunderstandings that arose. Once what you put on paper and write down there is misinterpreted by the other side, then you become defensive about it and say, "Yes, that's right," and these things just naturally escalate into unnecessary conflict.

I guess I could say that one of my main roles in that stage of my Sierra Club activity was trying to negotiate and resolve conflicts, internal conflicts, in the club. It wasn't just the "Treaty of Millbrae," but there were a lot of things like that that happened that I was able to work on to get people to work together and quit fighting one another.

Lobbying for Golden Trout Wilderness

Root: Let's go back to the Golden Trout Wilderness. You said it took about fifteen years, all told, before that was finally achieved. And I know you worked on a wilderness proposal with John Harper, and then you took it to the regional level and then to the national level?

Fontaine: Yes, that's right. But getting those things approved in the club really wasn't the big thing. I can't remember now; we'd have to look back to the board minutes to find out if the board actually acted on a proposal. They probably did because Martin Litton was a big proponent of protection for the Kern plateau area. Every board meeting I can remember going to in those early days when Martin Litton was there, the Kern plateau always came up and was on the agenda.

So I had no trouble in getting attention from the board. I don't remember what resolutions they passed supporting the Golden Trout Wilderness. There was no problem there, getting them to support any protection for the Golden Trout Wilderness. If anything, it was always Martin Litton leading the charge to do even more.

When I said that it was fifteen years to get the Golden Trout Wilderness established, that's only the time I put in on it. There were local people down in Kern County area that worked on it far longer than I had, old-timers that are still around.

The one person that has done probably more than anyone else is a person named Ardis Walker who lives in Kernville, in eastern Kern County, in the southern Sierra. And he must have worked on it for forty years before they finally established it. He talked way back in the 1930s to the Forest Service and various people about protecting the Kern plateau and not logging it and things like that. But he wasn't listened to either, just like the rest of us.

I got involved on that issue in the early 1960s when I joined the Sierra Club, and it was fifteen years after I got involved before it finally became an established wilderness area, protected under the Wilderness Act. But there are other people, primarily Martin Litton, Ardis Walker, who worked on it even longer, because they were just around longer than I was.

Root: So its final protection came when the Wilderness Act was passed?

Fontaine: No, the Wilderness Act was passed in 1964, and the Wilderness Act provided for a national system of wilderness areas. Sierra Club people all over the nation worked hard, along with other people in other organizations, to get that act passed. Once it was passed, then it was a big, long task, and still is, to get more areas added to the system. The Golden Trout Wilderness is one of those we wanted to get added to the system in 1978. It

was part of a package of wilderness area in the Endangered American Wilderness Act.

There are just all kinds of things that came up along the way in those fifteen years, that we did. First of all, we had to think about stalling anything that would happen in the area that would disqualify it for wilderness. There are many things that we did there.

Root: Was there a lot of legal action? Or was there any legal action?

Fontaine: I don't think--we never did bring any legal action, directly, about the Golden Trout Wilderness Area. There was a little bit in this place called Horseshoe Meadows, where we did some things. But that was one little piece of it, not the whole Golden Trout Wilderness.

It was a matter of trying to keep the Forest Service from roading it, and developing it, and keeping things from happening to disqualify for wilderness, while at the same time we worked to try to get legislation to get it established. We got bills introduced, early on--I don't remember which year--but they didn't move. The final vehicle that got it established was called the Endangered American Wilderness Act. It was an act that established several wilderness areas all at one time. It passed in 1978, and was signed by President Carter.

I don't know how much of the history of the things I did on the Golden Trout Wilderness you want to discuss, but there is a whole long, long history of things. I've got letters at home and complete notes on the issue.

Root: I think I would like to know who was able to introduce bills in Congress for you. You had local congressmen?

Fontaine: We never had any luck with our local congressmen. At that time, when we first started talking about legislation, the local congressman was Bob Matthias, a former Olympic decathlon champion that had a lot of charisma and sex appeal, but really wasn't too interested in what we were talking about. But he said he wouldn't be offended if we went to some other legislator to try to get it done.

So we did. We went to a congressman in southern California--I'm sorry again, I've forgotten his name. He's not in Congress now; he was just there for two or three terms. He was a good friend of the Sierra Club and he introduced a bill, but it was not a serious bill that got hearings and began to move. It was just a bill and we could then point to it and say to the Forest Service, "Look, Congress is beginning to take a look at this area, and we don't think it's right for you to conduct what we call legislation by chainsaw. That you go in there and just road and log it, so that it's just a moot issue. That you've gone ahead and made a decision that really, properly belongs with Congress." That's one of the arguments that we used on the Forest Service.

So it was introduced by that southern California congressman. And I think we got another congressman, I've forgotten now which one it was, to introduce the bill, or co-sponsor it; I've forgotten now.

Root: How did you go about doing that? Were they sympathetic to you to begin with? Did you have to lobby them? Did you show up on their doorsteps?

Fontaine: We didn't have to do a lot of hard lobbying because there were congressmen who were sympathetic to our ideas to begin with. This is the advantage, I felt, of belonging to the Sierra Club, that we had a large organizations. I didn't know a congressman personally, but somebody else did, or a staff person did, and we were able to convince them to introduce a bill like that.

I've always been grateful to the Sierra Club for supporting the issues I cared about locally--our success couldn't have occurred if it weren't for the Sierra Club. It couldn't have occurred if it weren't for the local people working on it, too. The combination together is what puts those issues over. I really hope that our members now realize that if they're interested in their local issue, then they've got to support a strong national Sierra Club, because they can't do it by themselves. An office in Washington, or something like that, can't do it by itself either, but the combination of having a strong national organization that has credibility and a reputation for clout, along with local people really wanting something badly, it's that combination that puts it over.

I've always had that keen feeling about the club. Here's this strong, national organization that's helping me, on my local issue I care a lot about in my own backyard. That's why I feel so strongly about and am proud of the Sierra Club. Because of that kind of work that we're able to accomplish at both local and national levels.

Root: Tell me about your first dealings with any Sierra Club staff, national staff. When did you first work with national staff people in any kind of way?

Fontaine: The first recollection I have, in our area, was Mike McCloskey paid a visit down there.

Root: Do you remember when that was?

Fontaine: That was in the mid 1960s. It wasn't long after I joined the club. I can't tell you the exact year. It was 1965, or around there, because Mineral King was emerging as a big issue, too. And that was down in our area.

Mike made a visit down to the Kern-Kaweah chapter area, and I remember John Harper and myself going around with him. I think we met with some Forest Service people. So Mike made a visit down there, and that's the first time I got to know Mike.

A board member came down, too, which really impressed me. Lewis Clark, who is still doing things for us, was on the board at that time, and made a visit to our area, too. And then, early on, I can remember my first visit to a board meeting, where I didn't meet a lot of staff people personally, but I saw them in action, and saw the board in action, and remember how impressed I was. That was when our office was still over in Mill's Tower, over on Bush Street, and the board meetings were held in the library there, which is a much smaller library than we've got here. I can remember Will Siri, and Fred Eissler, and people like that being on the board. My first board meeting really impressed me. Meeting the staff people, I guess Mike was the first one.

Root: Why did the board meeting impress you? What about it impressed you?

Fontaine: Oh, I think how articulate people were, their strong feelings about the things they believed in, their obvious capability. Walking in and hearing all these people talk in such an articulate and effective way about issues that I had felt so strongly about myself. They were saying things that I felt all my life, but never had the capability of articulating. And here was somebody who I could have a lot of respect for, saying things that really meant a lot to me. I guess that's why it made such an impression. I was awed by what I saw and heard.

Mineral King Controversy

Root: What about Mineral King? That's one of the biggest fights that the club was involved in, back in the late 1960s and the 1970s. Lewis Clark came down, Mike McCloskey came down. They were there to look at Mineral King?

Fontaine: I think so, although I don't remember for sure. They might have been visiting around to help local chapters get going too, like we still try to do today. I don't really remember the purpose of the visit. I remember that those are things we talked about.

The biggest issue, like I said, that I worked on was the Golden Trout Wilderness, because there were only a couple of people locally down there in the Sierra Club, along with old-timers like Ardis Walker, working on it. So I felt I personally had the most influence on the outcome of an issue on the Golden Trout Wilderness, but when it came to Mineral King, the whole club got in the act there, and although I think I played what was an important role, I wasn't the only one who really worked hard on it. The club, nationally, worked hard on it and all kinds of people worked on it, and of course, we finally succeeded. So even though I played a big role in it, and did all through the whole issue while it was an issue before the club, I didn't, by myself, do as much as I did on the Golden Trout Wilderness.

In 1965, the Forest Service decided that they were going to look for someone to develop the area as a ski area, and they proposed a prospectus, and that, as you mentioned earlier, there was no requirement for an Environmental Impact Statement then. Even then, they didn't follow their own procedures. That's why, I think, we were able to stall off development for so long, because they didn't really pay attention to what they were doing. They just were going ahead and doing something they thought they ought to do, without following all the rules.

Before the Forest Service decided openly and publicly that they were going to develop the area, those of us in the local chapter, particularly John Harper, more than myself, began to take a look at that area and become interested in it. John Harper had been up to the area and visited it and fell in love with Mineral King. I don't remember my first trip to Mineral King--I've been there so many times--but I liked the area too. And so we decided that we would try to get club attention to it, because we kind of heard rumors of development. You'd hear all these rumors around--that must have been 1963, around in there. We thought, well, we're only just us two or three people down there in Bakersfield; we can't hope to stop the big giant Forest Service from developing Mineral King if these rumors are true. But if we can just somehow get the whole club interested in it, then we can be a lot more effective.

So John and I began to travel to southern California, because we thought at the time that we had to get the SCRCC first to recommend protection for the area. We felt it should belong in the National Park and our goal was to get it into the Sequoia National Park and get it protected. And we thought we had to get approval from the SCRCC, and then the Board of Directors. At the time, the Forest Service hadn't announced that they were going to develop the area, so there was no big rush. It wasn't a critical thing. I don't remember what issues the club was working on then, nationally, but there were a lot of important ones that were brushfire type things that they had to work on. So there was a lot of, I don't want to say bureaucracy, but a lot of delay in trying to get the club to take a position.

In the meantime, while we were trying to work it up through channels to get the club to take a position to protect Mineral King, the Forest Service announced, with their prospectus, that they were going to accept bids for development of the Mineral King area. When that happened, then right away, because then it became a brushfire, we got national attention quickly and easily, and things developed from there.

That was how we got started in it. Again, there's all kinds of history about the different steps we took. John Harper has written a book about that one. That was his biggest personal involvement. He's written a book about it, and I think it's out now and published.

Root: There has been a lot written, since the Mineral King thing, about the club's reversal of a stand that it had originally taken on Mineral King, back in the

1940s, when it approved development of the area as a ski resort. It seemed to split a lot of people, a lot of members, between those who approved of the club reversing its stand and those who didn't approve. Were you involved in that at all? How did you feel about that particular . . . ?

Fontaine: At the time I was just a new, lowly, Sierra Club member and I wasn't involved in a lot of the details. Some of the things had happened before I joined, some of those things were happening just as I was beginning to be involved. And so I'm not sure of all the details. Since then, since I've had to defend what we did on Mineral King, on various occasions, I've tried to get the story straight. A lot of it is hearsay on my part, and I'm not sure of all the details, but I can tell you what I know about it. I'm sure that most of it's accurate.

One thing that happened was that there was a proposal to develop the San Gorgonio area, down around Los Angeles, around the same time, earlier, actually, than the Mineral King proposal. The people of southern California were very much opposed to that, and some people suggested that instead of developing the San Gorgonio, why don't you develop Mineral King as a ski area.

Now that part is always thrown up to us by the ski interests, by saying that the Sierra Club said, "Why don't you go to Mineral King and develop a ski area, then when we went there, you changed your mind, you weren't honest; you were dishonest and said later, 'Don't go there.'" And they still say that to us. I don't know if they were Sierra Club people who said that. There was an organization called the Defenders of San Gorgonio, and I know *they* said it. There were probably some Sierra Club people who said, "Go to Mineral King." I don't know if the Board of Directors actually took such a position. I've heard they did, and I've heard they didn't. I suppose it would be easy enough to go back and check in the board minutes to find out. So it was pointed to as an alternative to San Gorgonio, before there was any serious suggestion that Mineral King be developed.

There is another part of that early history, too, well before I joined the club. In the late 1940s, right after World War II, I guess the Sierra Club did take a position supporting skiing at Mineral King, but at that time, they were thinking about a rope tow type of operation, just a small thing. The Sierra Club itself has, I guess, the longest rope tow in the world, up at Clair Tappaan Lodge, and so the Sierra Club wasn't opposed to skiing and still isn't. A lot of our people ski, and so they supported a small scale ski operation at Mineral King.

But then, when the Forest Service issued their prospectus in 1965, and the bids came in, suddenly, instead of a small scale operation, we were talking about, in 1965 dollars, something like a \$35 million thing there, not counting the access road. The Disney Corporation was the successful bidder, and they talked about a \$35 million destination resort, high in the Sierra. We thought of it as being a Disneyland in the Sierra, and we

objected to that very strongly. So, when that prospectus was issued and the bid was accepted from the Disney Corporation, then suddenly it became an issue in the Sierra Club, because we had supported skiing on a small scale, and there was this talk of it being an alternative to San Geronio.

It came very quickly to the board of directors; we didn't have to worry about going through channels anymore. The board took it up and there was a difference of opinion. Some people thought that maybe what the Sierra Club should do is to try not to oppose the overall development because it was too big and we really couldn't do that, but maybe we could have an influence on trying to mitigate the effects. Trying to cut down, on size. Trying to keep the lift towers off of the ridges, so you couldn't see them from Sequoia National Park, and things like that. That's what the argument was about.

The Kern-Kaweah chapter, the two or three people who were really doing anything down there, felt all we could do by ourselves was try to go to the Forest Service and convince them to take away some of the more obnoxious parts of it, try to mitigate some of the effects. But then when it became a debate at the board of directors--I wasn't at the meeting, but John Harper was--as I recall, there was this debate about whether we should just try to mitigate the effects or should we oppose the whole thing. The board was leaning toward just working on mitigating the effects of it, when Dave Brower got up and made one of his effective, impassioned speeches that we were the Sierra Club, and it was wrong to put a huge ski resort in Mineral King, and we ought to oppose it. And that convinced the board to do that.

Those of us down in the Kern-Kaweah chapter, at least myself, certainly were grateful that the whole Sierra Club was behind us now and we felt then that we did have a chance, maybe, to do more than just mitigate the effects. Maybe there was a chance to block it. But during those early years of the Mineral King campaign, it didn't look like we had much chance, because as was usual, the Forest Service was going ahead and doing what they wanted to do without asking the people. It wasn't until we went to court--this was one of the first legal cases the Sierra Club took--to try to block it, that we began to get some glimmer that we really could maybe stop it after all.

It was just a slow escalation in our feelings that we felt more and more optimistic, as time went on, that we could stop it. In the beginning, it looked like it was almost hopeless, but we were going to try. We kept working on it, it got more and more hopeful, and we kept making more and more progress. In 1978, we won.

It's really ironic that the same year that the Golden Trout Wilderness was signed into the Wilderness system by legislation, Mineral King was added to Sequoia National Park, and we even beat back the efforts of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power to build a huge nuclear power plant in Kern County. The three biggest victories we ever had in the Kern-

Kaweah chapter--even in the future I can't foresee anything as great a victory as those three things--all happened in the same year.

Root: That must have been a banner year.

Fontaine: It really was.

Root: How did you feel about all those three things happening in one year?

Fontaine: Oh, it was great. We were just elated. Everything coming together at once like that, it was just a tremendous year. There's no question that in the Kern-Kaweah chapter, which is a chapter much smaller than many of the groups in the Sierra Club--with, of course, the help of the national club--but we were able to win three victories of just tremendous importance. It was the nuclear power plant I mentioned, that you may want to talk about later; I don't know. At the time, if it had been built, it would have been the biggest nuclear power plant in the world. The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power wanted to build it in Kern County. The Golden Trout Wilderness turned out to be 306,000 acres. We got out our old maps when we first started doing that report I mentioned, and we found out that we got about twice as big a wilderness area as we thought we might be able to get in the beginning. And then Mineral King, which had been bitterly fought over for years. They all came together the same year and it was just a real high.

Nuclear Power Plant Proposal for Kern County

Root: Tell me about the nuclear power plant. That didn't get built at all?

Fontaine: No, they withdrew the proposal. Of course, that came up and then was resolved in a shorter time frame. I suppose that issue went on for two or three years, something like that.

The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power wanted to build a nuclear power plant up in Kern County, so they went up and bought land. Their image is really poor in Kern County, because we had an example on the east side of the Sierra of what they can do to an area when they took over the Owens Valley. They're like absentee landlords. They practically own the Owens Valley and the local people up there really resent it. And the people in the southern San Joaquin Valley looked at the Owens Valley and then they thought, well, maybe the same thing will happen in Kern County. So the issue was not only an environmental issue, opposing a nuclear power plant, it was also an issue of local control on the part of the people of Kern County.

The environmentalists organized in Kern County, and formed a coalition with the farming interests to oppose it. And the issues that finally helped us succeed were local control, where was all the water going to come

from to cool the nuclear power plant, and the issue of nuclear power. Those three things combined to defeat it.

What finally happened was that people organized, farmers and environmentalists, like I said, and began to talk to the board of supervisors. The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power had hearings in Bakersfield, and we all would go and make our speeches and oppose it for the various reasons that we had. Finally, the board of supervisors was convinced that they should put an advisory referendum on the ballot in Kern County to find out how people felt about the nuclear plant: should it be built there or not?

In the meantime, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power had been trying to do a "p.r." job on us to tell us how good it was going to be for Kern County, and there were some local interests who wanted it too. They worked hard. And finally, when the ballot was held, the proposal was defeated 2 to 1. It was a resounding defeat, and because of that, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power just totally withdrew. They knew that if the local people were that much united in opposition to their proposal that they just wouldn't get anywhere, and so they withdrew. It was a total victory for us.

As far as I know, it was one of the first referendums done on a local nuclear power plant. In fact, I think they haven't done very many of them, because I think that most nuclear proponents know that if they let the local people vote on whether they wanted it in their area or not, they wouldn't have it. I have no doubt about what would have happened in the Diablo Canyon nuclear power issue if they had let the people in San Luis Obispo County vote on whether they wanted that power plant or not. There's no question about what would happen. So they didn't try that again because the local people generally don't want those things. They just resoundingly defeated it in Kern County.

Root: What was the name of the coalition that you formed with the farmers?

Fontaine: Gee, I've forgotten now. We had a name, but I don't remember the name of the coalition. I remember a lot of the people who were active in it. It was really good to work with people. We don't agree with many of the farmers on water issues, but we sure could agree with lots of them on the nuclear power plant.

Root: Do you remember some of the farmers that you worked with at that time? Who were they?

Fontaine: Yes. There was one named Dave Bryant, who was one of the leading persons in the coalition. Another farmer was Jim Neufeld. I got to know him fairly well. I haven't talked to him recently, but we made a lot of what I would consider useful contacts.

I've always felt that farmers, people in agriculture, should have a common alliance with the environmentalists and the Sierra Club. We may disagree on water development issues, but on the basic idea of keeping prime agricultural land in production, I would think that people who are farmers would have a common interest with us in trying to accomplish that goal. If a farmer wants to be a land speculator and get the highest price for his land and sell it and get out of farming, then, of course, we don't have much in common with that goal, but when people are farmers and want to remain farmers, we should have strong ties with them and work together with them. I think in many cases we do. We sure did in that nuclear power plant issue.

Root: Well, on that note of victory, shall we end this particular session?

Fontaine: [Laughter] Yes.

II SIERRA CLUB PRESIDENT, 1980-1988

The Alaska Lands Act

Root: Joe, why did you want to become president of the Sierra Club, and can you tell me something about what period of time you covered in your presidency?

Fontaine: I don't think I ever really started out thinking I wanted to be president of the Sierra Club. I think if I'd known twenty years ago, when I first joined it, I might someday become president, I might have gotten scared off and not joined at all. I was never ambitious to be the president of the club, but in the year prior to my first term, a lot of people asked me if I would consider it. As I thought more and more about it, I think I got interested in the idea. As I thought more and more about what I could do and what it meant to be president of the Sierra Club, I became more and more interested.

By the time the board had its annual meeting in May, I was very eager to become president of the club and have not been sorry since that I did. But I don't think there's any one particular reason, it's just that I felt very strongly about the club and what it stands for. I felt that I could make a contribution for those things I felt very strongly about by being the leader of the club.

Root: What year were you the president of the Sierra Club?

Fontaine: Denny Shaffer has just finished his term in May; he served two years, so I went out as president of the club in 1982 in May. I served for two years, so that means I must have started in May of 1980.

Root: Some of the issues that the club was involved in when you were president are the Alaska lands legislation, the Watt petition drive, and the tremendous membership growth. Let's start maybe by talking about the Alaska lands legislation. Can you tell me what the Sierra Club did to encourage the passage of the Alaska lands legislation and perhaps discuss what your role was in that area?

Fontaine: The Sierra Club was part of a large coalition of all the environmental groups that were working on that particular issue. Although we didn't play the only role in there, I think we played a key major role in it. If it had not been for a membership organization like the Sierra Club, then I don't think the Alaska Lands Act could have passed in anywhere near the form that it did. It wouldn't have been nearly as much of a victory.

I think our main contribution to that effort was the fact that we do have a membership organization; we have a lot of activist people in the club who are willing to put their personal time and effort into that kind of a project. The first thing I can remember, just off-hand, about our participation in that was a meeting we had at Clair Tappaan Lodge. I can't remember when; it was well before I became president. We talked about the Alaska Lands Act, and we talked about the kind of strategy we might use and how long a project it might be and what might happen.

I remember we sat out on one of the wooden porches at Clair Tappaan and talked about this. At the time I'm sure none of us realized how big a project it would actually grow into. Remembering what people talked about, what they thought was possible, how many units we could have in the protected wilderness and national parks, I think that we actually achieved far more than we thought we could when we first started on that project.

Even though, toward the end, there was a letdown on the part of people because everything they wanted included in it didn't get in at the last minute, when I think about what we thought was possible when we had those first meetings, and what we actually got in it when we finally had the bill enacted and signed into law, we exceeded our expectations in the beginning by a large amount. So I think we can all feel really good about what happened in the Alaska Lands Act.

As far as my role personally is concerned, there were all kinds of things I was doing. I played a role in it, but I was not the main leader. I think everyone would agree that Ed [Edgar] Wayburn was the single most important person in the club that contributed to that effort, but certainly there were just thousands of people all across the nation. We had groups; every chapter had coordinators and people who worked on the Alaska Lands Act. It was just a massive effort by many, many people all across the country. And not only the Sierra Club, but the other conservation organizations as well.

Ed Wayburn was one of the key leaders, and of course the people in Alaska themselves made contributions to the effort that went far beyond most of the members down here in the lower forty-eight. I played a role, too. As leader of the club I was able to be the spokesman of the club several times. At certain key points, as key votes were coming up at certain parts of it, I was in Washington to either offer testimony or lobby for particular parts

of the bill, or both. I sat in on many of the strategy sessions, but I was not one of the key people making the tactical decisions from day to day about what can we expect to get in this national park or that wildlife refuge or whatever.

Those kinds of decisions had to be made, I think, by the people who lived in Alaska and knew the land better. I did appreciate that I was able to play a role in it.

One of the most exciting parts I can remember in that effort is one summer, in July when there was a key vote coming up on the Senate floor, and we were back there lobbying. I've forgotten what the particular issue was then, but I can remember sitting up in the Senate gallery after we had all done our lobbying two or three days prior to this debate that was going on. I can remember Senator Tsongas and Senator Hart sharing the effort to move the legislation through the Senate. They were so effective; I was really impressed how effective they were in overcoming the objections of Senator Stevens from Alaska and moving the bill ahead. It was just an exciting time to be back there. I'm grateful that I was able to be a part of what I guess I regard as the biggest conservation victory of the whole century.

Root: What do you think there was about the Alaska issue that made it so important to the club? What were the issues involved that made it of such priority to the club?

Fontaine: I think if you look at our membership and find out what motivates them right down in the deepest part of their soul, you'll find out that many of our members, probably most of our members, really care about land-use issues. The Sierra Club started over a land-use issue in Yosemite National Park, when the club was founded back in 1892. Throughout the club's history, those issues like protection of national parks and wilderness areas, protecting our public lands, have always been right at the core and heart of the Sierra Club.

Even though in the '60s and '70s we broadened our horizons and began to be more concerned about various kinds of pollution, and the urban environment, and the environment of the work place, and things like that--which I think is proper for the Sierra Club to be involved in--I think that those land-use issues like those involved in the Alaska conflict are the things that really motivate us probably more than anything else.

Obviously, here's Alaska, with this huge land mass up there, the last really true frontier in this nation, and decisions were going to be made about its future. It's really the biggest single piece of land this country had to make those decisions about. I think that probably motivated people more than anything else, because our members really feel very strongly. You note that time and time again when we choose our priorities, wilderness and national parks and those land-use type issues, especially public lands, have always

been right at the very top. Nothing's ever been more important to our members than that.

Club Policy on Nuclear Arms

- Root: Let's move on to some of the things that you were doing as the president in board meetings and executive committee meetings. The executive committee's debate--I believe it was in 1980, not long after you had become president--on whether or not to ratify the appointment of the club task force on the environmental effects of military action was one of the longest in memory. Can you tell me what the issues involved were and why it was such a controversial one for the club?
- Fontaine: It was and still is to a certain extent. A lot of people still haven't accepted that that's the proper thing for the Sierra Club to be involved in. No one can deny that the environmental effects of a nuclear war would be the most devastating thing that could possibly happen. There are lots of things that we've worked on that wouldn't have nearly that effect.

On the other hand, whether it's the proper role of the Sierra Club to work on those particular issues or not has been very controversial. Obviously, the people who thought we should be involved in that are very concerned about the possibility of nuclear war. I think it was the September board meeting, in my first term as president, a group of people came to talk to me, asking if there isn't some way that the club could be involved in this issue, because they felt so strongly about it. But I realize whenever in the past we had touched on anything that involved a military type of issue, there was always this feeling on the part of some of our leadership and some of our members, too, I guess, that if we're talking in terms of national defense and those kinds of things, that's just really so important to the nation and the security that we can't worry about environmental things when those kinds of things are being discussed. So there was that feeling, too.

I think another thing that concerned people about getting into that issue is because of the image that the Sierra Club might have if it did get involved in those things. I guess there's a popular conception on the part of a lot of people that people who work on nuclear issues, and are anti-war, and all that, are somehow kind of radical people who are almost, I guess you'd say in some people's terms, a lunatic fringe out there. They didn't want to see the Sierra Club in any way associated with that kind of person.

I think it was more a feeling not so much that they weren't concerned about the environmental effects of war and nuclear war in particular, but what might happen to our image if we associated with people who were like that. I think that was really the main controversial thing.

The people who came to me and asked if we couldn't be involved in that issue didn't advocate that the Sierra Club suddenly stop doing everything else they were doing and work only on nuclear war. They didn't want to do that at all; they had very limited objectives when they first talked to me. But still, there was that fear on the part of many of our leaders that somehow the Sierra Club would suddenly become an anti-war group. We'd drop everything else we were doing, and our image would suffer, and we'd lose members, and we'd lose contributions from donors, and the Sierra Club would just go down the tubes.

There was that fear, and it went on. We took very, very small steps at a time. That whole issue went on and on, well over a year. I think the people first came to me in September of my first term, which would have been September 1980. We didn't take any official action or decide to do anything, as I recall, until I think it was November of 1981, over a year later.

Finally, after a long, agonizing debate on the part of the executive committee--I can remember sitting in the Marines' Memorial, and it got dark and we thought we'd never get through this. We'd had several other controversial issues on our agenda. Finally, the executive committee decided that, well, yes, maybe we should get into this and have a committee on it.

Then finally the full board didn't take the step to establish an ongoing standing committee on it, I think, until May of 1982. They finally decided yes, we will have a standing committee, a charge had been developed, the committee was appointed and went to work.

Even after the committee was appointed, there's still this lingering hesitation on the part of our members for us to really get into that issue very much. Some people feel it's okay to have a little committee over here doing a few things, but we really shouldn't allow that committee to go too far, because if they do we're worried that the Sierra Club's image will suffer, and we'll be grouped somehow with these way-out lunatic fringe types.

So it had to be handled very carefully. I have not expressed any of my own personal opinions on this, I'm just trying to characterize what did happen and the different factions and how it was finally resolved. I suppose, internally, it was probably one of the most difficult issues that I had to deal with while I was president.

Root: You mentioned different factions, and you've also mentioned that people approached you about organizing that committee. Can you elaborate on that a bit? Who made up the different factions? What views did they represent? Was there a particular group of people that were more interested in seeing this committee than any other?

Fontaine: The initial concern about it came from the San Francisco Bay Chapter, and that still is one of the main leading areas of the club for concern about this

particular issue. The people who initially contacted me were a combination of staff people that worked here in San Francisco and volunteer leaders from the Bay chapter. They came to me and asked, "We realize that this is controversial in the club, and we aren't asking that the club drop everything and work on this issue. What we would like to do is to find out from our members how strongly they feel about this issue. We'd like to find out from our members whether they feel this is an appropriate issue or not for the Sierra Club to work on."

So we devised a questionnaire that we mailed out, as I recall, to some of the club leadership across the nation to just get their response about whether they thought it was an appropriate issue. That was just the very small first step in getting into it, getting our feet wet.

I can't remember all the details of what went on, but it was excruciatingly slow, I'm sure, for the people who felt we should be in on the issue, and yet I don't really think we could have moved much faster because of the resistance to it. It's my opinion that if there's an issue like that which you think is proper for the club to work on and it is controversial, if you try to move too fast, it'll be counterproductive and you'll get people reacting against you. You may do your cause more harm than good. So I felt it was important that we move very slowly. The first effort was just to question our leaders about whether they thought this was an appropriate issue or not.

All during this time, there was dialogue going on, as I recall, among the different board members about, yes, we should be doing something about this; or, no, we'd better put this behind the wall in a closet and not bring it out at all. There were those different kinds of opinions that went around.

Gradually, as more and more discussion occurred, the dialogue broadened to more and more of our leadership, and we got diverse opinions from around the country. The executive committees of some of the chapters and groups thought that, yes, we should be in it. I can remember seeing letters from donors saying that "I would give more to the Sierra Club if you were involved in this issue."

On the other hand, there were other chapters and groups who said, "No way, you're going to destroy what we're doing. We're not going to be able to keep working for the things we've been working for, because people will get the idea that the Sierra Club is a way-out type of group. They'll quit contributing to the club and go elsewhere and just drop out." So the dialogue went on.

Information was passed around about the nuclear issue. I can remember it being discussed at the RCC meetings here in California. One night I was down in the Angeles chapter, visiting the chapter, and they had a conservation committee meeting. On the agenda that night was this issue. I just couldn't believe--the place was filled to overflowing, standing room only.

I had to stand out in the hallway and try to cock my ear to hear what was going on inside. It was really a hot issue in the Angeles chapter. There were a lot of people down there who felt that there's no way that the Sierra Club should ever get involved in this. And there were other people down there in that chapter who felt just as strongly that it is a proper issue for the Sierra Club to get into, and we shouldn't duck the issue; we should get into it.

That was just a microcosm of what went on clear across the whole club. After a lot of dialogue and, as I said, over a year of this, the executive committee finally decided, all right, we will do something about it. I think the decision in November of 1981 was to appoint a small task force, not a permanent standing committee, but a task force to draw up a possible charge and list some of the things that the committee might do if we had a standing committee, submit them to the board. Then finally, after that was done, the board did decide to have a standing committee. Of course, you need to check these dates out, but I think it was May of 1982 when they finally decided to establish another standing committee on this issue.

The committee has met now several times. I am a member of the committee. Bob Girard was appointed as the first chair. I feel that the committee has made progress and done a good job. We haven't really done a lot on the issue. We've had some articles in *Sierra* and done some educational type issues on it. We've done very little lobbying; we have not tried to influence decisions about this issue directly.

Once the board established a committee, the committee recommended some policy positions on the issue, and the board adopted them. I think we've made progress, but it has been slow.

Ronald Reagan's Election

Root: That's great. I'd like to read a quote that you said in November 14, 1980. This is from the minutes of the board of directors' meeting at that time, and this is from your president's message. It says, "I do not intend to see the Sierra Club roll over and play dead." This is, of course, right after the election of Reagan. "I know you don't either. I also know many of you enjoy the fight almost as much as you do the victory. Let's pick up the pieces and fight back. If we are right, and I firmly believe we are, we will move forward. I am in this fight for the duration, and I don't intend to quit because of a temporary setback. The secret of our success has always been people who are committed to a cause and who never give up, no matter how long it takes."

My question is, after the election of Reagan in 1980, which was of course of incredible importance for the club, how did the club's leadership react? How did they and the club in general react to the election? Can you

maybe expand on that to how we ultimately capitalized on the election in some ways?

Fontaine: Well, I could give you a long answer. We all have to admit that, and I think that my reaction was typical probably of most Sierra Club members, I was very depressed after the election, because Jimmy Carter had been a good president as far as the environment's concerned. There had been a lot of positive, forward movement. Then suddenly, here was Ronald Reagan elected, who was coming along trying to roll back all these environmental gains we had worked so hard for for so many years.

I was depressed for a while. But I did bounce back. One of the first things that we did--I think it was at that same November board meeting--we went down and met with the Hoover Institute at Stanford. We went down and met with them because they were very conservative people; much of their thinking, I think, had gone into Reagan's philosophy. Some of them were so conservative they were Libertarians. That type of people. What we wanted to do was talk to the people that thought along those lines philosophically. We wanted to talk to them directly and find out how they reacted to the various conservation issues that we were concerned about.

As we had our discussions with them for several hours, we found that there are a lot of things in the conservative philosophy they held that supported our environmental goals. There are a lot of things that go on in this country that subsidize operations that are environmentally destructive, and they felt that they agreed with us on those things.

I'm talking about things like dams, for example. Should the government build a dam that is really just a pork barrel type of thing? Or, if the dam really is needed and is going to provide some protection from flood and that kind of thing, why shouldn't the local people just go ahead and build it themselves? Or for example in timber sales. We know that many of the timber sales in parts of this country are subsidized by the taxpayers. They don't pay their own way. We found that on issues like that, the conservatives in the Hoover Institute agreed with our philosophy and our goals there.

The problem is that I think the kind of conservatism that is actually practiced in Washington by many of our political leaders, including Reagan, is not that kind of ideological conservatism, it's more of a pragmatic type of conservatism that, if I can use a little rhetoric, would be more of a socialism or welfare for corporations or for big business and things like that. It's all right to spend taxpayers' money or government money to subsidize those kinds of operations, but it's wrong somehow to do the same thing for an individual.

There's that kind of philosophy, which I don't believe, in my opinion at least, is what I would call honest conservatism. We felt that when we talked to people at the Hoover Institute that we were getting an honest

expression of conservatism, an idealistic kind of conservatism, much of which agrees with our philosophy in the Sierra Club as far as our conservation goals are concerned.

People try to label the Sierra Club and conservationists and environmentalists as liberal extremists and that kind of thing, out on the lunatic fringe of the liberal movement. But that's just not true at all. Many of the things that we believe in for protecting the environment are basically conservative things. We found we had much in common when we talked to those people.

Anyway, that was our first attempt to try to see how we were going to deal with the new administration. And it didn't seem all that hopeless. But then, when Ronald Reagan began to appoint people, we began to get a clue about what kind of conservatism he was going to practice.

Of course, when he appointed James Watt, instead of being depressed, we started getting madder. I think that the anger that welled up in us was actually beneficial to us, because we got so angry that we began to counterattack, and I'm just really proud of how we've been able to fight off the attacks against the environment. Not only have we been able to fight off those attacks against the environment from the Reagan administration, we've actually been able to move ahead.

Just issue after issue, Reagan and his kind of conservatism, which have been trying to roll back the environmental gains that we've made over all the years, have just been foiled in one thing after the other. In things like the Clean Air Act and the wilderness, we've actually been able to move ahead on it.

There was a period of time when we had setbacks, but we were able to counter those efforts and then move ahead. Even though I'm not trying to say everything right now is a bed of roses with the current administration, it's been amazing how we've been able to fight back. I think basically the reason is because we are really a product of what makes America tick; we're a basic, grass-roots organization that comes right from the heart of America. We're made up of ordinary citizens across the nation, and when a president who has a philosophy that's alien to what Americans want for their environment, or for any other basic goal the American public has, or tries to go against the grain of what the American people want, he's not going to get away with it. Not as long as we have a democracy.

With organizations like ours to let the people know what's going on and draw attention to what the president's trying to do, he's not going to get away with it. So we succeeded because of our militant approach and because the American people agreed with us, I think.

I don't know how much more detail you want to go into; there's an awful lot that went on.

Root: Well, let's go back to this discussion that you had at the Hoover Institute, which sounds very interesting. How did that get set up? You say "we"; who attended that with you? How was that arranged?

Fontaine: Well, Gene Coan, I believe, was the person who made the initial contact. I know Paul Swatek went down; I was there. Some of the members of the board, and I honestly can't remember which board members were there. I don't think Mike went there, because it was during board meeting weekend, and everybody couldn't get away. I know Carl Pope went, too.

But I can't remember the other individuals; there were probably seven or eight of us all together. We went down in two or three different cars. It was a fairly large group. There were seven or eight of us and about an equal number from the Hoover Institute.

We had an easy, free-flowing dialogue and we were very frank, and I came away from that feeling that all was not lost. It was only a few days after the election; Reagan had just been in for a short time, and we didn't know how far down the axe was going to fall. We came away from that feeling that all was not lost, because if this is the kind of conservatism that we're going to have to deal with for the next four years, there are some things where we can make some progress.

But, as I said before, unfortunately, I think the kind of conservatism the administration put into practice is not the ideological or idealistic kind of conservatism that we heard from those people at the Hoover Institute.

Root: Do you remember, at this point, any of the people that you talked to down there?

Fontaine: No, I don't remember their individual names, but I'm sure we could get that information if you wanted it. I just don't remember. I can see them, but I can't remember their names.

Root: So after the initial shock wore off, and you thought at first, well, this isn't going to be so bad, and then Reagan was inaugurated and began to make some of his appointments, how did you as the president work with the staff and other volunteers to begin to have a plan of action about how you were going to go about combatting these kinds of things? It seems to me that there were lots of areas involved in testifying before Congress, for example, on political appointments, or those kinds of things. Can you comment on how that all got going?

Fontaine: Our strategy evolved, because we had to find out what we were dealing with. We didn't know just what all was going to happen, just what approach Reagan would take. To digress just for a moment, when Reagan was governor, several of us had a meeting with him, had a luncheon with him. If I could evaluate his administration here in California when he was governor,

it wasn't all that bad, I would say, as far as the environment was concerned. It was not what we would call good, but it was kind of a mixed bag. There were some good things that he did.

At that meeting, my recollection of it is that he didn't seem interested in environmental issues. The comments he did make showed that he really didn't know very much about it, either. He thought that environmentalists like the Sierra Club were all those young people that go along the roads and pick up cans to make it more beautiful; it was a beautification kind of thing and that's about as far as it went, as far as he was concerned. He didn't have much interest, and he didn't care much either.

But, his administration wasn't all that bad, because he had appointed some people who did care: Ike Livermore, for example. So we didn't know what to expect from Reagan as president.

But when Reagan began to announce his selections for the various environmental posts, we were really alarmed, because they were so bad. James Watt, of course, is the one that we hear so much about. How we dealt with that particular appointment might be an example of how we developed our strategy.

Always in the past when a president had been elected, what we did was to try to have some contact or communication with the president and offer suggestions for the various posts that we cared about as far as the environment was concerned. We would make suggestions about various people that could be secretary of Interior, or director of the National Park Service, and that kind of thing. It was very difficult to have any contact or input into the Reagan administration. Ike Livermore was on the transition team, and of course we would contact Ike, because he was the person we had known here in California and had been a good environmental influence on Reagan. He was on the transition team.

But then when it came to actual selection, Reagan, we felt, made appalling choices, like James Watt. So once we found out James Watt was the selection, we began to look into his background. I did not meet him personally, but I know that Mike McCloskey did have a meeting with him; I think it was in Denver, where his Mountain States Legal Foundation was based.

James Watt said things like, "Yeah, we want to talk to you and we'll have some communication. We won't agree on everything, but there will be some things we can agree on," and that kind of thing. That turned out to be just talk, because when it came to action and decision making, James Watt did just the opposite. It was almost as if he wanted to fight us. He wanted to challenge us in everything that we'd done.

So we were left with the choice of just ignoring him or fighting back. We have never been noted for ignoring the situation when we don't like it.

So when his appointment came up for hearings in the Senate, we opposed his appointment. We made our reasons clear in the hearings and our statements and things like that.

During all that time, if you want to talk about what my role was, as I say, I did not meet James Watt directly; I was doing a lot of traveling as president, but Mike and I stayed almost in daily communication about that issue as it developed. Mike kept me posted; I called Mike, and I was in daily touch with the club staff on what our position was going to be regarding Watt.

This had to go all the way from the beginning when we first heard rumors that it might be Watt, and who the other people were and what position we might take as these various people were being considered by Reagan. As it developed, it became clearer and clearer that Watt might be the choice. Watt was the choice. I was in daily contact with Mike, and Mike was in touch with a lot of the other people in the club who were concerned about this particular issue.

We evolved our position. When the time came for the Senate hearings, it was very clear to us from the comments that Watt made, in spite of the fact that he said he would work with us, that it was going to be just a confrontation the whole time he was in.

We decided to oppose his nomination. Then once he was nominated, there were a lot of misgivings.

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Fontaine: Watt was confirmed by the Senate as the secretary of the Interior, then he began to select people for the various posts in Interior, like the undersecretary for Parks and Wildlife Refuges and various appointments like that. They were all people that we'd had trouble with in the past. We realized our worst fears were coming true.

There was just one outrage after another. Almost every single day you could pick up the paper and here was something else that Watt either said or did that was an outrage, an insult, to the environment. Day after day, these things would happen. The press was picking it up. We just didn't do this by ourselves; the press began to pick up on how confrontational he was and how abrasive and how anti-environmental he was.

In spite of everything he said, I just think the record shows that he did everything he could to undermine protection of the environment. This just went on day after day after day. You couldn't look at television or read a newspaper without finding out something new: here's James Watt again, doing something more.

Finally, that led to our petition campaign and the whole thing that came after that. James Watt, of course, is the biggest example. There was just one appointment after another in the administration along that line. In virtually every key environmental position where Reagan had to make an appointment, he picked someone who had had a history of opposing the environmental controls and that person, then, was chosen to administer.

James Watt was director of the Mountain States Legal Foundation. In that position, his foundation had brought law suits against the government to try to nullify environmental legislation and regulation.

John Crowell was appointed as the undersecretary of Agriculture for the Forest Service. Here was John Crowell, who was a former attorney or employee of the Louisiana-Pacific Lumber Corporation, now was the head of the Forest Service, the undersecretary of the Forest Service, and he was administering the very agency that his former employer depended upon for their timber supply. Of course, he had made his living as a lawyer trying to fight the regulations that the Forest Service had had to assure that we had sustained yield and took care of our forests.

Thorne Auchter was appointed the director of OSHA: Occupational Safety and Health Administration. His company--I want to be sure I've got my facts right--his company, I believe, had been cited by OSHA for violations. Yet he was appointed as head of that particular agency.

Ray Arnett, here in California, was Reagan's Fish and Wildlife director here in California when Reagan was governor, was appointed the undersecretary of the Interior for National Parks and Wildlife Refuges. Ray Arnett has been a long-time advocate of trophy hunting and that kind of thing. Just more recently there was an article in *Time* magazine where he used terms like calling environmentalists "tree huggers" and all kinds of sarcastic language like that. He has been known as an opponent of environmental protection. He was appointed to his position.

The list just goes on and on and on of people who were appointed to positions in the government that had a history of opposing the laws and regulations that they then were responsible for carrying out. It's trite to say, but the fox in the henhouse was true of almost every--that description was true of almost every environmental appointment that Reagan made.

It wasn't hard to make our case. James Watt and people like that like to say the press got onto them and there was some kind of a conspiracy, I guess, between the environmentalists and the liberals and the press and things like that to crucify them and make personal attacks. That wasn't the case at all. We were attacking their policies, and James Watt and people like him couldn't distinguish between attacks on policies and personal attacks. If you disagree with me, you're attacking me personally; that was the attitude.

If you want to talk about name calling, I could name several instances where James Watt referred to environmentalists as "extremists" and almost to the point that you're unpatriotic. Just on and on and on, there was so much rhetoric that went on then that he was his own worst enemy. I'm surprised he lasted as long as he did.

Campaign Against James Watt

Root: Let's talk about the Watt petition campaign, since we've gotten onto Watt here. How did it start? Whose idea was it? What was the impetus behind it? What did we hope to accomplish with it?

Fontaine: Like most things, I don't think any one person can claim credit for conceiving the idea. The person I can remember who probably came up with the specific idea of having a petition, I think, was Carl Pope. But all kinds of people had all kinds of input into it, so the idea developed. A whole lot of people made contributions to the concept.

From the beginning, we did not expect that if we gathered a million signatures calling for James Watt's resignation, that the next day when we presented those petitions, Ronald Reagan would say, "Okay, James Watt, all those people don't like you out there, you're fired." We were trying to draw attention to James Watt's policies and what he was trying to do, hoping that if the public were to pay some attention to what he was doing, we could somehow smoke him out and bring attention to those things that the public wouldn't stand for.

That's what happened. That was just one thing. There were just all kinds of things that happened. But I believe that probably our petition campaign was the biggest single thing that led, finally, to the resignation of James Watt.

By the time James Watt actually, finally resigned, it was almost anticlimactic, because by using that petition campaign and drawing attention to what James Watt was doing, we were able to block most of the things that James Watt wanted to do.

A lot of the things he did inside the department were damaging, and those policies are still there, the internal things that he did. As far as re-organizing the Department of the Interior and demoralizing the staff to the point that the good people just left--they just couldn't stand it any more and they left--those things did happen, and you can't undo that kind of damage very easily. It's going to take many years to put things back together again. It's always easier to tear something down than it is to build it up.

But when it came to things that obviously exceeded his statutory limits, things that he tried to do that he didn't have legal authority to do, we were able to go to Congress and go to the courts and block him every time. For example, when he tried to open up wilderness areas for oil and gas leasing, Congress just was going to have none of that. The conservatives and liberals alike just told him, "You're not going to do it." He tried to do it in Montana, and he tried to do it in Wyoming; he tried to do it in New Mexico. Every time there was almost unanimous rebellion among the legislative delegation from those states saying to James Watt, "You're not going to lease our wilderness areas in our state for oil and gas drilling."

We've always had a difficult fight in getting new areas added to the wilderness system, but once they're established, then they're accepted by people, and any threat to them people really resist very strongly.

So, those are the kinds of things he tried to do. Offshore drilling for oil here in California is a good example. The state of California, the Sierra Club, other environmental organizations, virtually every community up and down the coast here in California entered a lawsuit to prevent James Watt from leasing those areas offshore for oil and gas drilling. He tried to describe that effort, "That's just a bunch of environmental extremists out there trying to be selfish and not think of the national interest and trying to stop something that we've just got to do for the national interest." If you were just talking about the Sierra Club, then maybe he could get away with that somehow, but when it was virtually every community up and down the coast, the state of California, all the environmental organizations, everybody getting onto him about that, he could hardly say that was a vocal, loud minority that didn't have the support of the general public.

When he tried to do things that he didn't have legal authority to do, he was blocked every single time. Yet the man would go around talking to various groups around the country, saying, "Congress has never disagreed with me. I'm getting along with Congress well. It's just these environmental extremists around here trying to have demonstrations and picket me and things like that. They're just a lunatic fringe, a minority out there. When it comes to Congress and the true environmentalists in this nation and the general public, they support everything I'm doing." He was a man who could go around and say that black was white, white was black, and believe it himself.

I believe that James Watt, in his own mind, believed that what he was doing was right, what he was saying was the truth. But he must be a master of self-delusion, because no one else felt that way about him.

Root: What role did you as president have? You mentioned the various delegations in Congress opposing Watt when he would suggest or propose invading wilderness lands for some purpose. What role did you have as president in working with Congress or working with the public in fighting those kinds of things?

Fontaine: Well, one thing I did was to go around--when I was president I tried to do a lot of travel. I tried to get to as many chapters and groups as I could across the nation. I worked out kind of a method of travel where I would call the various chapters and groups that I was going to visit, or had been invited to visit, and say, "All right, I can be in your area at a certain time and I'll do whatever you'd like me to do when I come there."

When I would get invitations to various chapters and groups, I'd set up maybe an itinerary of maybe ten days, where I could take two weekends and a week. It was just a series of one night stands when I made one of these trips. I'd be in one town one night and another town the next night, until I couldn't stand it any more.

But what the local people did was to really use my time. They arranged interviews with newspaper reporters, television interviews, radio spots, all kinds of things, so that as I travelled around, the reporters were always asking me these questions about James Watt doing this or James Watt doing that.

I think one of the most effective things I was able to do--because I was president of the club--it was news that I was coming to a particular town, and the message that I would always leave was, well, these are the things that the administration's trying to do and this is what the Sierra Club feels about this issue, and this is what we're trying to do about it.

Just invariably, I felt that we had good press coverage. I was very happy about that. I hear people say that, well, the press misquoted me on this, or that was exaggerated, that was taken out of context. I cannot, in the press reports I saw and the results of these things I saw on the air or on television or whatever, I do not remember once where I felt a reporter deliberately tried to distort or change what I said. There were times when they misunderstood or got the facts mixed up somehow, but I never in one case could find an example of where they deliberately misrepresented what I said. It did not happen.

Root: There was tremendous excitement about the Watt petition drive by club members all around the country, and by other organizations. This all culminated in Watt Week, when the petitions were presented. You were there for that. Can you tell us about that week, what it was like, what went on?

Fontaine: I'll never forget that, because that was probably the most exciting thing I did while I was president. I've just got to believe that that was the culmination of the time I was president. That was the most exciting thing.

It was just amazing to see how the campaign electrified our members, because you can imagine when Ronald Reagan was elected and all these things that he'd been saying about what he was going to do about de-

regulating the nation, getting rid of all these environmental controls, and unshackle the country and let them get rolling again--people were really depressed. And then Reagan began to appoint people like John Crowell and James Watt and all the others. Members were really down and worried.

But then, the Watt petition gave them a way to fight back. And it was just electrifying to see how people felt about that. It was so exciting, because when you ask someone to sign a petition: "Yeah, James Watt, that so-and-so, yeah, I'll sign that petition." We got all kinds of responses about people saying, "Not only will I sign it, but give me half a dozen of those petitions; I'll get them filled out and mailed back to you."

It began to catch on with our members all across the nation. They got excited about it. The petitions began to roll in here to the office in San Francisco. Each day there was a table--I don't remember how big it was, probably six feet by three or four feet or something like that. The mail each day at the height of the campaign would come in, and the petitions coming in would fill up that table about two feet high every day. We were getting thousands and thousands of signatures every day on that Watt petition campaign.

Our members out there in the chapters and groups knew that was happening, and the response was so gratifying to them, because it told them the public was behind what they were doing; they didn't like what James Watt and President Reagan were doing, and there was something we could do about it. When that kind of campaign gets going, people get really turned on and excited about it.

That just built to a peak. We actually exceeded our goal of a million signatures. I think we had a million one hundred thousand, something like that.

When we went back to Washington with them, all these had been sorted out by state. It was too big a job to try to sort them out any farther than that. We sorted them out by state and then during Watt Week, delegates from each of the chapters--I think there was somebody from every state except one or two during Watt Week--just walked up and down the halls of Congress with these petitions. We tied red ribbons around them and took them into Congressmen's offices.

I remember the California people back there had a big, bright, canary yellow wheelbarrow. They obviously couldn't carry all those petitions from a big state like California, so they wheeled them up and down the halls of Congress in this wheelbarrow. We'd pass each other in the hallways carrying these things around. We took them into our Congressman's office, into the Senator's office.

People really got high on it. There was a lot of excitement. It's just hard, unless you go through that kind of experience, to understand the

fevered pitch that it got to, because the response we got in almost every, not all Congressmen's offices--some of them thought James Watt was the best thing going--but in most cases, we'd go in and get a sympathetic ear. In some cases, they'd say, "Right on! Sock it to him."

So that just built on itself, and then finally, the last day of this big event, "Watt Week," was when we presented the petitions on the steps of the Capitol to Senator Cranston, representing the Senate, and House Speaker Tip O'Neill, representing the House. They came down and I got to make a speech for the Sierra Club, and Rafe Pomerance got to make the speech for the Friends of the Earth. They helped us on the campaign, too. Then Senator Cranston and Tip O'Neill made their speeches. All the press was there; it got national TV coverage that night.

I remember everybody was holding their breath that there wasn't going to be a plane crash or an earthquake or some big disaster and scoop us on the front page of the papers or off the national news that night. That didn't happen, and we got national coverage. It was just such an exciting time.

I remember Rafe and I that evening, I can remember, had a debate, if you want to call it that, with a guy named Baldwin, who was Watt's press secretary. He declined to come down to the TV studio to debate us directly, but what he did was to debate us--he was on the telephone and we were down there at the studio being photographed on television. So we had this debate at long distance with him.

It was fun to listen. It was one of those programs where after they broadcast the program, then the people who are listening phone in and they vote about which way they believe. There are questions posed to them. And we won by a huge margin. The people across the nation who watched the program voted that James Watt ought to go. [Laughter] He ought to be out. They didn't like what he was doing. So we felt good about that.

Just all kinds of things happened that week. The people I run into now and then who were back there for "Watt Week" still talk about it. It was just an exciting time.

Root: Was there any response from Reagan after the petitions had been presented?

Fontaine: They tried to ignore it as much as they could. Anything they did to respond to it would just draw more attention to it, so from their point of view the smartest thing they could do, which is what they did, was to try to ignore it. But people like Baldwin, as I say, would debate us on TV. They couldn't just completely ignore it, because the reporters and the press would keep pressing them on it. I don't remember what their responses were, but they were just minimal: "Oh, yeah, oh, those guys are extremists, the way-out types, we don't have to pay any attention to them."

But I'm afraid they did have to pay attention, because by dramatizing what Watt was doing with that Watt petition campaign, then when Watt tried to do things that required legislative approval or things that the legislature could do something about, right away they jumped on it.

Certainly the press and the cartoonists and all those people were publicizing what James Watt was doing, but I think, probably more than any single thing, our petition drew attention to the problem. We kept a huge bulletin board in the conservation department covered with the latest James Watt cartoons. Later a whole book of James Watt cartoons was published. Even though I try to say to people, and I still feel this is true, that even though Reagan did not fire James Watt the next day because we didn't like him--none of us really expected that to happen, but the real impact has been that those policies that we don't like have been blunted and in many cases reversed. Without our petition campaign, we wouldn't have been able to do that.

Look what Congress is doing now: the Clean Air Act. The Reagan administration at first tried to gut the Clean Air Act, to get something through that didn't mean anything, to let industries go ahead and continue polluting. But they couldn't do that; in fact, now we're on the defensive in strengthening the Clean Air Act.

Watt's attempts to lease areas offshore for drilling, and in wilderness areas, his attempts to disqualify areas from wilderness review in our public lands--all kinds of thing he tried to do that we were able to block and stop. Probably the biggest single reason we were able to do it is because of that Watt petition campaign that drew attention to James Watt and would not permit him to do those things in the dark, without the light of day.

Forging Bonds with Organizations Outside Conservation Sphere

Root: Let's talk about some of the other responses that the club had to various Reagan policies. I'm thinking in particular of the coalitions that the club formed with other organizations. I know that you personally were very interested in this area, forming coalitions as a means of reaching club goals. Can you discuss that, and do you have any feeling about how successful a program it was? I'm thinking specifically--and you might want to expand on this--about coalitions with the National Association of Homebuilders, for example, and some of the issues involved were the Clean Air Act and OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Act]. I know that you personally met with Cesar Chavez to talk with him about perhaps forming a coalition. Can you give me some feeling about that?

Fontaine: That's another big area. I feel good about the progress we made in working with other groups as common interests. Of course, the Alaska coalition is one example of one kind of coalition, where it was a coalition of various environmental organizations that were fairly closely allied and had similar interests.

We began to look into the possibility of creating coalitions with organizations that had some things in common but not everything: with labor, for example, or with different parts of industry and that kind of thing. I guess maybe the one that I feel the best about, I think we've made the most progress with, is the OSHA Environmental Network, as we called it. Brock Evans had a lot to do with helping me get started on this. Brock had been in contact with some labor leaders and introduced me to them.

We had a meeting in Chicago. I think that was in January of 1981, where we talked about the possibility of creating a coalition with labor. We decided that was a good idea. There were representatives from various labor organizations from the Midwest and that part of the country. We decided to call our organization the OSHA Environmental Network, because obviously when it came to occupational safety and health, there were a lot of things that we did care about.

The Sierra Club has been accused so often of being concerned only about fish and trees and birds, and we really don't care about people. That is just absolutely not true. I think the record shows it. But this was a tangible way for us to show that. We do care about the environment where people work, their workplace environment, and the urban environment where people live.

The pollution that comes out of those factories is going to be far more damaging to the person in that factory than it's going to be to someone who lives a few miles away, or to someone who's up in the mountains and doesn't like the dirty air to drift over the mountains and ruin their view. So we care about the effects of those sources of pollution on the people who work around it. They're going to be the ones the most severely affected.

I was surprised to find, for example, that the people we met with when we were creating this coalition with labor, that the people in the steel industry, the steelworkers, were even more militant about needing a good strong clear air act than the Sierra Club was. And that's natural if you stop to think about it, because those steelworkers have to work right next to those sources of pollution; their lives are shortened if they have to breathe the stuff too much and have their health affected.

So it was natural that we would care about the environment of the workplace and the environment where their families live, too, the kinds of materials that the workers had to handle. One of the things that we support labor on was called the "right to know." Why shouldn't a worker have a right to know what's in the containers that he's handling? If there's something

toxic in there, he should know what it is, so that if there's a spill or an accident, then he'll know what he should do about taking care of himself and preventing any injury to himself.

But the management and many of the industries have resisted, for reasons that I just can't fully understand--they want to keep trade secrets they say, and it would cost too much to label everything. But here they're playing with people's lives, so certainly we're going to support labor when they want to know what kinds of materials they're handling.

On the other hand, the Clean Air Act was the other part. We called it the OSHA Clean Air Act at first. We called it the OSHA Environmental Network, but the Clean Air Act was the other thing besides OSHA that we worked on in the beginning. Like I said, the steelworkers cared about clean air, and certainly all the workers do. Most workers in factories and most people who belong to labor unions live in urban areas. Those are the areas that are impacted the heaviest as far as air quality is concerned. So we had a natural alliance with them on that.

Another way the Clean Air Act works with labor, if you stop to think about it, was what happens in many industries is that in heavily polluted areas, the law requires them to clean up as much as they can. A cheap way for them to get out from under that is to move to what we call the sunbelt, to other parts of the nation where a state may have environmental laws that are less strict. So they can move down there and manufacture things more cheaply--more cheaply as far as money is concerned but not as far as people's health is concerned--make more profits and get out of the areas that are more heavily controlled.

At the same time, it turns out that labor is much less organized in the sunbelt and those areas that are growing more rapidly, so by making a move like that they not only get out from under some of the environmental requirements that they have, but they also were able to move into areas where labor was not strong. They could have their way with their workers. There's another example of why it was natural for labor and the environmentalists to work together for those things.

That coalition developed. We've tried to make the most of the activity at the state level. There are networks not in all the states, but I think it's twenty or twenty-five right now, states that have an active environmental-labor network going. It's just going well. I just can't say how happy I am that we got that going.

The other one you asked about is the statement of purpose or agreement we came to with the National Association of Homebuilders. You'd think, well, how could the environmentalists ever talk to homebuilders, because they're just natural opponents. The environmentalists sue the homebuilders when they want to subdivide an area. Those elitist environmentalists have got theirs made; they don't want

anybody else to come around and live out in the suburbs with them. That's the image that a lot of people try to pin on us.

But we did feel it was worthwhile talking to the homebuilders, and we found that there were a lot of interests that we had in common. For example, we found that higher densities in some residential areas make sense from the environmental standpoint because it helps reduce urban sprawl. Some people don't mind living in condominiums and higher density dwellings. From the homebuilders' standpoint, that saves on materials and saves energy, too, because you don't have so much space to heat. So we found that we agreed there.

Another one would be mass transit. If mass transit is available, then you can have a higher density area where people will live. Their homes or dwellings can be of higher density because there's a transportation network to serve them. They don't have to drive for miles and miles out in the suburbs.

One of the reasons that developers like to move out to do their development is because there are less restrictions out there. This raw, new land is cheaper for them to develop. But if we can help them overcome some of the unnecessary restrictions on developing land closer to the center of the city, that's to everyone's advantage, the homebuilder and the Sierra Club, too.

So we found, as we investigated the things we're concerned about that affected the environment, there were many places where the homebuilders and the Sierra Club had a common goal. So our initial contacts began; it was in my first term as president. I was invited to speak to the executive committee of the National Association of Homebuilders in Las Vegas. They were having their big convention. They usually have about 50,000 people at one convention, if you can imagine. There are only two cities, they tell me, in the country that can handle their convention: Las Vegas and I think was Dallas-Fort Worth or maybe it was Houston. Only two places that have the facilities to handle them.

Anyway, they invited me to speak to their executive committee, which I did. Then we formed a liaison group of environmentalists and people from the homebuilders' association, people from the Sierra Club and the homebuilders. Over a period of a year we put some things down on paper about where we agree, and we sent various versions back and forth between the board of directors and the homebuilders executive committee. These papers went back and forth, back and forth until finally we agreed on the wording. We have a statement now; it's about a page and a half of areas where we agree on how the environment should be protected when development occurs.

We haven't really put that to as much use as I'd like, but it just really was, I think, a real accomplishment where we were able to talk to some of

our traditional opponents and find out that we didn't have to practice confrontation all the time; there were things that could be resolved through negotiation. Now that we have the communication with them, I'm hoping that we can use that to get things going at the local level. It's certainly useful to have a statement of agreement at the national level between organizations like the Sierra Club and the homebuilders, but to really put that into effect, I think, local groups and chapters have to be in contact with local builders, so that when a project comes up they can work together to mitigate the effects of that development and not have to go to court and sue about it. But they negotiate their differences.

I know that's occurred in some cases, but I would wish that we could do far more. With our urban committee that we have, there are some things going on.

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Fontaine: Our contacts with Cesar Chavez and the United Farmworkers grew out of a contact one of the members of the Sierra Club Foundation trustees had with Cesar. She arranged a meeting between myself and Cesar Chavez. It was, I guess, an outgrowth also of our OSHA Environmental Network, where we had our coalition with labor. We were trying to find out if the United Farmworkers might be interested in working at the state level here in California on issues that affected farmworkers.

The particular thing we were talking about was the use of pesticides in agriculture and how it affected the farmworkers and the environment as well. One issue, when I met with Cesar Chavez at his headquarters in Keene, California, that we talked about was the effort to move the regulation of pesticides from the Department of Agriculture to the Department of Health in the organization of the administration here in California, the state administration.

We agreed that was a goal that both the Sierra Club and the farmworkers had had. But we really didn't get that coalition or that joint effort off the ground. We had invited Cesar or one of his assistants to come to one of our joint RCC meetings that we have here in California twice a year. For some reason or another, the meeting did not come about. We thought one of his assistants was going to show up at our meeting in San Luis Obispo, where we have those meetings, and she didn't show up, and the initial contact kind of dissipated.

I think there was probably a little bit of reluctance on their part to pursue that. I didn't want to pursue it if they weren't that interested, so it dropped there. But at least I did have that contact with Cesar Chavez, and we did find that we had that kind of common interest. But it just didn't develop into any kind of an effective coalition or joint effort.

Root: Why do you think they had a reluctance?

Fontaine: Well, I can only speculate on that. I really don't know what their reasons would have been. I did talk to some of the people in the labor movement that I had gotten to know through the OSHA Environmental Network, and they expressed the feeling that Cesar Chavez kind of likes to run his union as kind of a lone wolf operation. They really don't like to work too directly with other organizations. I don't know whether it's a matter of suspicions or what. But anyway, that seems to be his style and the style of that particular union.

If they weren't interested in working directly with an environmental organization, then of course we couldn't pursue that or push it if they didn't want to do it. We have lots and lots of things to do. If that avenue didn't work, then we had other things to pursue.

Root: You mentioned a leader who arranged the meeting. Who was that?

Fontaine: She was a member of the board of trustees at the Sierra Club Foundation at the time. I can remember the name later, but I'll supply that name for you later. It'll probably come to me later in this interview [Meliss Wade].

Root: Let's go on. It was during your presidency in 1981 that the budget controversy erupted over the possibility of selling paintings and other fine art works belonging to the club to carry the organization through a cash flow crunch. Can you discuss this controversy and how it was resolved?

Fontaine: Well, it wasn't only an effort to get through a budget crunch that we considered selling the paintings. Around that time, I don't remember which ones, but there were some paintings that were stolen, too. There was a real question about the security here in the club office, about whether we could secure those paintings and some valuable books and other things that we had. I don't remember how many thefts we'd had, not only of art works, but typewriters and things like that.

So at the same time we were having the budget crunch and were thrashing around trying to find ways to provide some extra income, we also were having the problem with security of our paintings and other art works and our valuable books. So this is an idea that was suggested; I honestly don't remember who suggested it, but I think it was being given fairly serious consideration by the board. I don't think the board ever would have taken a step like that, though, without having full discussion and dialogue within the club.

It really didn't have to go that far, because the History Committee let us know right away that they thought that was a terrible idea. There was such a negative feeling about doing anything like that. It was the club's heritage to have these things, people felt, and it just was not acceptable to even consider selling them to get us through a temporary budget crunch.

So the board dropped the idea and we managed to get our way through the financial crisis as we usually do, without having to touch the paintings. Now, I don't think there's any question about whether or not we're going to keep those paintings. They are going to remain a part of the Sierra Club. As far as I know right now, it's still a question of what's the best way to secure them.

One thought, as I recall, to how that might be done is to keep them in the possession of the Sierra Club but perhaps let them be on display at The Bancroft Library [at UC Berkeley], something like that. I don't know where the situation stands right now. I do know that for a while we kept those things under lock and key, where they were not accessible to our members or to the public, for security reasons.

Root: Going back to the Watt petition drive, do you think that Watt would have resigned without the club's pressure, that is, without any petition drive at all?

Fontaine: Well, that can only be speculation. I don't think that without the petition drive, and the other things that we did, there would have been the pressure on him to resign. The final thing that caused him to resign was an indiscreet statement--what I guess he thought was a joke--about the ethnic background of people and the physical disabilities people had. I don't think that alone would have caused him to resign. I think the president might have privately reprimanded him, but I don't think he would've resigned just because of that one remark, without the kind of pressure we brought to bear about what he was doing beforehand.

It wasn't just the petition drive, that was the biggest single thing we did, but all the things that Watt did that were contrary to previously established public policy, we kept drawing attention to. Whenever he would try to lease wilderness areas for oil and gas drilling or do some leasing of offshore areas for drilling, all those things that he did and tried to do to reverse previous policy that we had in this country to protect the environment, we kept drawing attention to them. The biggest single thing we did, of course, was the Watt petition drive.

All those things together, I think, brought pressure on him, so that finally, when he made those indiscreet comments, that was just the straw that broke the camel's back. I think the attention we brought to those things he had been saying and trying to do throughout his previous tenure in office were the things that really caused him to resign.

The only regret I have is that it took so long, number one, and number two was that the final straw that broke the camel's back was not an environmental issue. But without all those environmental policies that he tried to push and we publicized, I don't think he would've resigned when that final comment was made.

Negative Reaction to James Watt Caused Dramatic Membership Increase

Root: It seems that the Watt petition drive galvanized the club in several ways. One is that the membership growth of the club was stupendous during that period of time. And the other is the politicization of our members and leadership. Can you comment on the connections between these two things and the Watt petition drive?

Fontaine: Certainly James Watt was his own worst enemy, and his abrasive way of going about doing things is what I think did galvanize our members. Not only did it galvanize our members, it brought many more people to us. During the period of the sixties, I think people in this country had gotten used to the idea that the Congress had passed laws to protect the environment, and they had an administration which was sympathetic with the purposes that Congress had in mind when they passed that legislation, and that the environmental programs established by Congress were being carried out in good faith by the previous administration, the Carter administration.

Then when the Reagan administration came into office and people like Watt were appointed, they tried to reverse all those things that had been established over such a long period of time by such hard work. When the general public saw what was happening, I think they just flocked to us, because in the previous administration people had felt things were going pretty smoothly and organizations like the Sierra Club are doing okay, but I don't really have to put out a lot of commitment myself because things are going okay. I'm satisfied with it. I think this is what the general public felt.

Then, when they saw people like Watt attacking those policies and those programs that had been established over a period of time, I think they became alarmed. When they saw that groups like the Sierra Club were trying to do something about it in a very effective way, I think they felt, well, those people need my help. I think that was the general attitude.

So we had a tremendous upsurge in membership. I think it's that fear that the environmental programs that everyone supported in general were being jeopardized that brought people to us, because they felt the Sierra Club could do something about it. I think that's been proven correct that we did.

I forgot the second half of your question.

Sierra Club Endorses Candidates for Public Office

Root: The second part--it seemed that aside from the growth in membership, one of the ways in which the Watt petition drive galvanized the membership and the leadership of the club is through "politicizing," if you will, the membership and the leadership to engage in political kinds of activity.

Fontaine: I think that's correct. People in the club, even before Reagan was elected--but I think that brought the issue to a head--I think people in the club began to realize that if we wanted to really get good environmental laws passed and we wanted to get them carried out in a way that they were intended to be carried out when Congress passed those laws, that we were going to have to have good people in office, people who had good environmental positions. We could beat our heads against a brick wall forever trying to get policy changed, but that wasn't going to happen unless people in elected office and appointed office were people who were sympathetic with environmental programs.

So we knew that we had to get in and try to help get those kinds of people elected. So we began to consider endorsements for political office. I think the first time we did it--I think it was in the fall of 1978, the November elections of 1978--the board permitted the California chapters to endorse candidates for state office here in California.

That was just an experiment to see whether our members would accept endorsement by the Sierra Club for people running for public office. We did that; we endorsed several candidates running for the assembly and the senate here in California. In California the general membership supported that very strongly. Not only did they support it, nearly all those people that we endorsed and supported and worked for in that election won, too. It made a big difference.

So we felt that it was such a successful experiment here in California that we should do it nationwide. So we expanded that effort at a later time to public office nationally.

I think I'd better make a correction. It wasn't 1978, it was 1980 that we made that experiment here in California. And that did work so well in 1980 that in 1982, in the election when only House members and Senators were up for re-election in the national Congress, we did endorse some of those candidates at that time. There was no presidential election in 1982.

But that turned out well, too. There was just hardly a complaint at all from our membership about the fact that the Sierra Club is now endorsing candidates for political office. I think our membership in general is sophisticated enough to realize that if we want to continue to make advances on the environmental front in this country, we're going to have to have people in office who have good environmental positions, who are willing to

support environmental protection. So it didn't turn out to be nearly as controversial as we thought.

It's my sense that actually the board of directors was behind our membership on that particular case. The board of directors was moving ahead very cautiously and taking very small steps toward this big step for the Sierra Club in endorsing candidates for political office, when our membership out there was anxious to get on with it.

I remember, during the discussion of whether or not we should permit California chapters to endorse candidates for political office, that the main problem we had was not convincing the California chapters to do it, they all wanted to do it, but it was trying to convince the chapters from around the rest of the nation that you have to wait. We're not going to take this big step and let this go on clubwide until we try it out in a smaller area here in California.

I think the grass-roots membership was ahead of the board on this particular issue, and they were anxious to get on with it. I feel very good about it. During the latter part of my term we began to endorse candidates for political office, in 1982. I remember the first official endorsement we did was with Congressman Sid Yates in Chicago. We had a press conference; I was there, and Congressman Yates was there, and we announced to the press that we were taking this first step in endorsing the candidate for national office in that particular race.

He had a hard primary, and not only did we just have the press conference, but our members actually got out and walked the streets and walked the precincts and got out and worked for him. He won that primary and then won the election that followed in November.

That was just prior to the time that I went out of office, and then Denny Shaffer, who followed me in office, took up the effort in the Sierra Club leadership in endorsing candidates and trying to help them get elected. But that was the beginning of it in 1982 on a national basis.

Root: Why do you think the board was more reluctant than the membership or other leaders around the country to get involved on a larger scale?

Fontaine: I think we were worried that it might be divisive; we might start losing members. We've had profiles done of the Sierra Club in the past and we know that we have Democratic and Republican members alike; we have conservatives and liberals in our organization. We had people of all political stripes who belong to the Sierra Club. We were worried, for one thing, that if we endorse a candidate for public office, then all those people of the other political party, whichever case it might be, would be offended by the fact that we endorsed someone not of their party. We were worried that there might be a lot of controversy and maybe large-scale resignations in the club.

We were also concerned that we didn't become captive of one political party or the other. As it turns out, most of the candidates we have endorsed have been Democratic candidates that belong to the Democratic party. A lot of people have interpreted that to mean that the Sierra Club is another liberal, left-wing type of organization that only endorses liberal candidates. They've accused us of only endorsing Democrats.

Well, that's not true. I don't think anything could be further from the truth. The environmental movement is not a liberal versus conservative issue. It cuts right across political lines and I think it cuts across ideological lines, too, as far as conservatives and liberals are concerned. The environmental movement has support from all segments of society in this country. It just turns out that with present leadership in the Republican party, it's hard for a good environmental Republican to stand up and disagree with the president. The president--President Reagan, I'm talking about--has been one of the biggest disasters in the history of the nation as far as the environment's concerned, in my opinion.

It's hard for a Republican in office to defend the record of the administration, yet because an incumbent might be a Republican, they're either embarrassed by the Republican administration's environmental record or they just don't want to talk about it.

I believe the Republican party has a history of supporting environmental protection in this country, a proud history. Teddy Roosevelt was one of the best environmental presidents we've ever had, and he was a Republican. But I think the current administration has turned its back on previous history of the Republican party and is trying to turn back the clock as far as the positions of the Republican party are concerned.

Therefore, Republicans who are not courageous enough to speak out against that don't say anything about the environment, and consequently it makes it easier for their Democratic opponents to gain support from environmental organizations, particularly the Sierra Club, because they're able to speak out and criticize the Republican administration.

But the environmental movement in this country is not liberal or conservative; it's not captured by the Democrats or the Republicans. It's bipartisan, and I think that's properly so. We've endorsed Republican candidates and worked hard to get them elected, but it is a fact that the majority of the candidates we've endorsed have been Democrats. I think that's primarily because of the Republican leadership in Washington.

Root: I have read comments that there was discussion about whether or not the political arena was a proper forum for the Sierra Club to be involved in. Do you have any comment on that?

Fontaine: Well, I can offer my personal opinions about it. I think if we don't recognize that we have to get good people into office who support the environment, we're just going to be ignored and left on the sidelines. Unless we can show some clout in the electoral process, then those people who are elected to office are going to go ahead and do just what they please and pay attention to the people who do help them get elected.

If we don't recognize that, I think we take the risk of just being ignored on the sidelines and not being taken seriously as an important movement in this country.

The tactics that organizations like ours use have to change over time; any organization that doesn't remain dynamic and changing and meeting new conditions is going to wither and disappear. As the tactics we've used in the past to advance environmental protection become less and less effective, we have to look for new tactics. The one that seems to make sense to me right now is to try to help good environmental candidates get elected.

We can work for wilderness, and we can work for clean air, and we can work for clean water and all these other things, but unless there are people in Washington in the decision-making positions who are willing to listen to us, we can talk and talk and talk all we want; it won't make any difference. We've got to have people there who are willing to listen to us. The only way they're going to be willing to listen to us, given the system we've got today, our democratic system in this country, is to help those people get elected who are willing to listen.

If we don't do it, then our opponents are going to get their people elected. We know that if our opponents' people are elected to office, we're not going to be listened to.

Root: You retired as president just before the 1982 fall elections, I think.

Fontaine: That's right.

Root: Looking back at the whole '82 election scenario, how successful do you think it was as a full-fledged experiment for the club?

Fontaine: I think it was very successful. I can't remember the exact numbers, but I think it was something like--it was between 60 and 80 percent of the candidates that we endorsed and supported were elected in that particular election. Granted, some of those people who were elected were ones who were not in a tight race and would have been elected anyway, so we probably didn't make the difference. But there were a large number that were in a tight race, and we did help make the difference.

In fact, I could mention the race, for example, of Senator Stafford in Vermont, a Republican, by the way, who's been a key person in the Senate. On the night of the election, after it was clear that he had won, he

acknowledged publicly, during his victory speech, that it was groups like the Sierra Club that helped him get elected. Without our help, he admitted that he would not have been reelected.

So there were a lot of races like that across the country where we did give the candidate the extra margin to become elected. I feel good about that. I think we did have an impact; I think the proof of that is the fact that in this election year of 1984, at least in the areas that I'm familiar with and still working in, the candidates have been coming to us, asking to meet with us and asking to have a chance to tell us about their environmental positions.

That's happened several times locally in the area that I live in, and I'm sure it's happening nationwide, too, because we did show that we do have clout and could have an influence on the outcome of the election. Now the candidates have recognized that and they're coming to us rather than us having to go to them with hat in hand. I think they recognize that we can have an influence in the outcome of the election, and they want our support.

Sierra Club/Grass-Roots Democracy

Root: You once quoted Dick Sill when he made the point that the club could become a leader of an important social movement. Would you reassess that comment? Does the environmental movement qualify as a social movement, and what has been the club's role in leading it? Do you feel that we have failed anywhere? That's a big question. You can bite it off in chunks if you want.

Fontaine: I do believe we're an important social movement. James Watt has accused us, when he was in office, of having a hidden social agenda; we really weren't out trying to protect the environment, we were trying to promote social change in this country. But I don't think that's true. I think he totally misunderstands us if that's what he thinks we're all about. We certainly do have the environment in mind when we're doing our work.

But I think there is more to it than that, too. I think that one of the things that we're doing in this country is making the ideal American way work. We in the Sierra Club are just ordinary citizens, and we live in a country where a democracy and a republic are supposed to be in effect, where ordinary citizens can help participate in the decision that are going to affect their future. We don't live in a dictatorship.

In my opinion, democracy is still an experiment. We don't know whether it's going to work or not. Our founding fathers, over two hundred years ago, set up a system of government where people elected their leaders, and if they didn't like them they could recall them. I think that's a good

system. But whether it's going to work on a long-term basis or permanent basis or not, I don't know yet.

But if it is going to work, it's going to require that the average citizen be informed about his government and the decisions that the government is making and participate in those decisions and not allow leaders to make the decisions for them in the absence of any input from the public. If we allow that to happen, if we allow our president and our Congress to go ahead and make decisions without trying to influence them from the grass-roots level, if you will, then I think we're headed toward a dictatorship and that democracy isn't going to work.

I think the Sierra Club is as American as apple pie. It's groups like ours, like the Sierra Club, who get in there and participate and try to influence the outcome of decisions, that will make democracy work. We're a group of people who do care about our future, and we want to have some say-so about what happens. We aren't willing to let other people make those decisions that are going to affect us and our children and our children's children in the future without some input on our part.

We are demanding that we be governed by our own consent and not be governed by people who are callous and disregard the feelings of the people. So by being involved in the decisions that affect our future, I think we're making democracy work. Of course, we work in the area of the environment. When it comes to making decisions about how our public lands are going to be used or what kind of air we're going to breathe or the quality of the water that we're going to drink, we demand that we take part in that decision. It affects us and all the rest of the people in this nation.

We're not willing to let the powerful and the influential in this country, by virtue of the fact they have a lot of money or they're the head of a powerful industry or they're a government leader of some type, make that decision for us without our input. We think that the people in this country have a right to that.

I guess I believe very strongly in my feelings and my background that I have a right to speak up, and my opinions should be given just the same kind of credibility as anyone else's in this country, that I count just as much as anyone else. I'm an equal among many other equals. I'm not willing to accept that other people are willing to make decisions that affect my future without me having some say-so about it.

Perhaps that intense feeling of independence and sense of wanting to control my future that I have comes from my family's background. My ancestors came to this country and to California very early. They were pioneers in every sense of the word, faced many serious hardships and helped make this country what it is. I have inherited a very strong sense about the value of the individual and will never give up the right to try and shape my future and that of my family.

I think that really goes right to the core of what the Sierra Club is like. I could just use an example in my own community. When developers come in and want to have a subdivision here or a subdivision there, or the chamber of commerce says that we want to bring in this kind of industry to our community, or the Forest Service and the timber industry might say, "Well, we need to have a timber sale on this piece of public land somewhere," I believe I have a right to say something about that. I don't think I should be shut out of a decision that affects those things. I'm not willing to allow that to go on without some say-so in it.

Facing the Challenge of Leading the Sierra Club

Root: What was the most fun you ever had as president?

Fontaine: Well, saying that my experience as president was fun, it's not quite the right word. It was a very difficult thing to do. It was the biggest challenge I every expect to face in my life, and I can say that I enjoyed a lot of it. But it wasn't without having a lot of pressure at the same time.

I would say the most exciting thing I did, if I can not use the word "fun"--fun was part of it, but I think exciting might be a better word--was the presentation of the Watt petition and that whole campaign of collecting those signatures.

There were a lot of other high points that I had, too, during my term as president, but that was probably the single most exciting thing that I did.

Root: Would you share some of the other high points?

Fontaine: I feel really good about some of the new directions the club has started to take during the time that I was president. As I mentioned before, I think that any organization that becomes static and doesn't evolve and change and meet a change in needs runs the risk of becoming stagnant, withering, and disappearing, and becoming unimportant. The Sierra Club is no different than other organizations; it has to continue to change and be dynamic and evolve and meet changing conditions as they occur.

The Sierra Club, when I first joined, and, I'm sure, prior to that for many, many years, had been primarily an organization that the members were concerned mainly just about land use issues, things like wilderness and national parks and things like that. Those are still at the core of what, I think, Sierra Club members care about and are at the very core of what I care about, too. Those are my personal priorities.

But I'm proud to be part of a Sierra Club that has recognized that there are responsibilities to the environment that go beyond just allocating land use, our public lands. I think that moving into the area of clean air and clean water and other pollution type things was important to us when we got into that in the late sixties and early seventies. Then recognizing that we had to think about the total environment beyond just that, the environment where people work and where they live: those things are important, the environment of the workplace and the environment of our cities.

So I'm proud that during the time I was president we were able to develop coalitions with labor, to show that we just weren't interested in trees and fish and birds and didn't care much about people. That is not true. The reason I, myself, work for protection of the environment--and I'm sure the reason that our other members work for protection of the environment--is because we do care about people.

If we didn't care about people, maybe the best thing we could do is sit back and let people destroy themselves and hope that some of nature would survive and go on without us, that somehow the human influence in the world is evil. I don't believe that. I think there's a place for people in the world, and I want to see people survive and have a decent environment to live in. So that's really the basis for that.

I believe that we need to look at the total environment and not just the little, narrow segments of it. So I feel good about the fact that we developed coalitions with labor, we developed that statement of understanding with the National Association of Homebuilders, and we really were reaching out to other segments of society to show that we had a lot of common concerns.

I wish that there had been more time and I'd had more energy--I don't suppose it was a lack of energy; it was a matter of time; I was so busy doing things--I wish that we could have had more of a dialogue with minorities, too, so that we could do something more about inner cities.

##

Root: Joe, I'd like to go back to an area that we talked about earlier: the controversy that the board hashed out when getting the military effects committee established. You said, when you were talking about that issue, that that was one of the most, if not the most, difficult issue that you dealt with as president. Could you elaborate a little bit more on that, why that was so difficult?

Fontaine: When I say it was difficult, I think it was difficult from an internal point of view in the Sierra Club. It wasn't so difficult, I felt, externally. I mean, that issue is not hard to defend, to say the least. But within the club I think it was controversial because a lot of people thought it was an inappropriate area for us to be involved in.

They felt that the kind of people who are involved in that particular arena, people who were the anti-war groups and things like that, had somehow gotten an image of being radicals and that among the general public they sort of wrote them off as kooks or something like that. I think inside the Sierra Club, there were a lot of people who were concerned that we might be identified with those kinds of people, and we might be written off as kooks, too.

We've always been criticized by our opponents and characterized by our opponents as some kind of an extremist group. Instead of talking about the issues and discussing the issues, our opponents like to label us with derogatory terms and use a lot of rhetoric. We've always, because of that, been on the defensive to a certain extent. We've always been accused, for example, of being against something. That's not always true, but that's the way our opponents like to characterize us, and it's easy to fight us that way by trying to discredit us by name-calling rather than speaking to the issues.

So our members have had this feeling of being on the defensive, trying to establish an image of credibility with the public and an image of responsibility and that kind of thing. When we say that we want to have wilderness, for example, our opponents say, "Well, here they are trying to lock up the wilderness and lock up the resources; we need the wood in there; we need the minerals that are in those wilderness areas, and here are these nuts out there trying to lock it up for their own private playground."

So we've had to be reactive against that kind of image that our opponents try to cast us in. Then when people come along and say, "Well, the Sierra Club should also be concerned about nuclear warfare, because that's got to be the most devastating thing that could possibly happen to the environment," sure, everyone can give lip service to that, but of course that would be the most horrible thing that could happen to the environment. But--and I'm trying to characterize what I think was the feeling about people who felt we shouldn't get into this issue--but they felt that because the people who were working on that issue had an image of being radicals and way-out types, they were kind of the lunatic fringe. The Sierra Club shouldn't get involved in that because we'll be painted with the same brush, and we are already having trouble with our image of trying to project ourselves as a responsible organization. That would just put us farther behind in trying to project the image we want.

I guess that's really the feeling, that people had the fear that we would be cast, somehow, as radicals. But I don't think that's really a radical issue. If you stop to look at the positions Congress has taken about a nuclear freeze, for example, those kinds of things, I don't think it's radical at all. It isn't very radical for the Sierra Club to call for a nuclear freeze when Congress has done the same thing. And yet, in some quarters of the club, and some people who really haven't thought about the issue too much, they consider that to be a radical move. I think it's this fear of being cast as a

radical is why it was difficult, because you have to get people to think about an issue like that.

A lot of people in the Sierra Club, I think most of them, really haven't thought about it. They're thinking about their local park or their local wilderness area or their battle with a toxic waste dump or something like that, and they really haven't thought much about this. Their first impression is, oh, that's a radical issue; the Sierra Club shouldn't be involved in it.

The same thing happened, I remember, several years ago when the Sierra Club first began to move into the area of the urban environment and the beginning of our dialogue with labor. They thought, those are social issues and the Sierra Club shouldn't be involved in them. And yet, as time went on, and people thought about them more and the dialogue went on inside the club, people realized that those were issues that we should be involved in.

Over a period of time they were accepted by the membership. I think the same thing is happening to the military issue. Over a period of time and discussion of this internally within the Sierra Club, that more and more of our members realize this is an area that, even though it may not be the highest priority right now--I think that generally is assumed to be the case right now--that it is proper for us to take a position on it and be active in that issue. I don't know what kind of a priority it will receive in the future, but I do know that now it's not a high priority. I'm sure some people in the club would believe it should be a very, very high priority.

I don't know what else I can say about it, just that I think that change is always difficult, and the more rapid the change and the more drastic the change, the more difficult it is for people to accept. That was a big step for a lot of people to make in their minds, that we should be involved in the military and nuclear issue. Therefore, it has taken a lot of thought and dialogue within the club to become more accepted. But I think now it is accepted much more, although there's still a long ways to go, I think, before you can get the full club membership behind that as an issue.

Root: Would you comment on how you feel about the presidency of the Sierra Club and the style of leadership that you as president should show, or any president should show?

Fontaine: Well, the style of leadership, probably, is a very personal thing with each person that comes in as the president. Each person that comes in as the president has a different style and a different way of operating. Different personalities that appear there, naturally, are going to make the way the office of the president is conducted occur in different ways.

My personal style has always been one not to be--I don't believe in coming on strong and throwing out directions and orders left and right--I

believe that if you have good people in positions who are doing a job, as long as they're doing a good job, the best thing you can do is encourage them and get out of their way. So I felt, when I was president, that it was important for me to encourage people, to try to help their morale, but not try to second guess them on the kind of job they were doing.

If the job was being accomplished in an efficient manner, then I felt that all I could do was encourage those people and help them continue to do that kind of good job.

There are other people who feel more directive and feel they ought to be involved more directly in what goes on in the day to day operations of the club. I don't feel that way. I've always felt that what is great about the Sierra Club is the combination of volunteer enthusiasm we have in the club and the volunteer leadership and the really competent staff that we have, too.

The ideal way the Sierra Club ought to work is a partnership or teamwork between our staff and our volunteers. I've always felt that we have an extremely competent staff, people who are dedicated and trying to do a good job. What I try to do is to find ways that those people could be encouraged to continue doing that good job, and to work together more effectively with volunteers, to try to bring people together.

There always have been disputes in the club, and it has always been my feeling that most of those disputes, particularly those that occur between staff and volunteers, occur primarily because of a lack of communication. I think very seldom, if ever, are you going to find a volunteer or a staff person who really isn't dedicated to the cause that the Sierra Club stands for, the cause of protection of the environment. There's no staff person that would work for the salaries we can afford to pay if they weren't dedicated to what they're doing. And there's no volunteer who's going to put in all those hours at work on the phone and writing letters and reading all that mail if they aren't dedicated, too.

But quite often, because people do feel strongly about the issues, we do get into conflicts and clashes. I think that primarily occurs because people do feel strongly about things, and if effective communication doesn't occur, then people get at cross purposes and begin working against each other instead of against the opponents to the things we believe.

So I felt one of the main things I had to do as president, one of my main roles I had, was to try to identify those problems when they occurred and try to talk to people to help resolve them, and get people talking to one another, and get on with the business that we're all about. That was one thing I felt. I felt that a president ought to be a leader who encourages people to do good work.

I think the president also ought to be more or less a spiritual leader of the club, too, a person who can go out and talk to the groups and chapters out there. After all, the president is the top volunteer in the club, the chief volunteer, and he should be out there, or she should be out there, whoever the president happens to be, encouraging those volunteers to do their job.

I traveled as much as I could while I was president, trying to get around and visit as many groups and chapters as I could. I always had the sense that people way out there in small communities across the nation really appreciated the fact that I was able to get there and come and visit them. They didn't feel as isolated and alone as they would had someone not been there from the national level.

I think board members could do a lot more of that, too, but it's more difficult for board members to travel. But letting those people know that they're not just by themselves, that they're part of a large organization and together collectively, all the members of the Sierra Club and all the sub-units together, can have a very powerful influence in this country.

I gained a very strong impression, and I think probably only the president can do this, by traveling as I did, that we have a lot more potential for clout in this country than we really realize. I would spend day after day traveling from one group or chapter to another meeting with some of the leaders, and it just began to slowly make an impression on my mind that here we have organized groups and chapters all over the nation, every large city in the nation has at least a group, virtually every state has a chapter in it, and together, collectively, the influence those people can have is really tremendous.

But if each little group and chapter thinks that they're isolated out there, and they don't have any--they can't expect any--help from other members of a national organization, they're not going to have nearly as much clout as they can as part of a large, national organization.

That came home to me even before I was president very strongly in the battle we had over Mineral King, when the Forest Service first suggested putting a ski resort at Mineral King, which is now part of Sequoia National Park, thankfully. We were just two or three people down in the Kern-Kaweah chapter who thought we were going to have to fight this on our own. Here's the giant Disney Corporation and the giant Forest Service who together were going to develop Mineral King, one of the most sensitive environmental areas that we had in our whole chapter.

At first we thought we were going to have to fight the battle alone, that all we could do was maybe mitigate some of the worst effects of that particular project. But then the national Sierra Club board of directors decided they wanted to make an all-out fight against it and decided that they would go to court over it. We knew in our local chapter then that we were going to have help, and that we weren't by ourselves. By working together

locally with the national Sierra Club, we were able finally, after over a period of ten years, we were able to prevail. The ski resort was stopped, and Mineral King became part of a national park.

I think that experience could be repeated over and over again in this country. For those chapters and groups that have not experienced that kind of mutual effort between local and national, they don't realize the full potential they have and the power we have in this country. We're 350,000 members, and that may not sound like a very big organization; it sounds fairly large to me. But those aren't just 350,000 ordinary people out there. They're 350,000 people who care enough to join an organization like the Sierra Club. A very large percentage of them are active people who contact their elected leaders, who write letters and go to meetings and do things to try to push our goals forward.

Together, we really can have a large influence. I feel the role of the president of the Sierra Club ought to be one to encourage that kind of thing, to show the flag of the Sierra Club and come out and talk to the local chapters and groups and encourage them in what they're doing. Then, for the staff, I think the president ought to not be trying to look over the staff person's shoulder every time a staff person turns around, but the president ought to be there to encourage staff people and make them feel good about what they're doing, let them know they're appreciated and that we value their services and that together we are accomplishing things that mean a lot to all of us.

Root: Any last thoughts as we close this session out?

Fontaine: Well, I'm sure I have a lot of last thoughts. Maybe what I should do is think about it over the next several days and there may be some more things I'd like to say, but right now I have talked a lot and I'm talked out.

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Sierra Club Oral History Project

Kent Gill

MAKING THE POLITICAL PROCESS WORK: CHAPTER
ACTIVIST, COUNCIL CHAIR, AND CLUB AND FOUNDATION PRESIDENT

With an Introduction by
George Shipway

Interviews Conducted by
Becky Evans
in 1991 and 1992

Edited by
Merrilee Proffitt

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INTRODUCTION--by George Shipway

I first met Kent Gill in the late sixties and worked with him on various council projects through the seventies. We were both involved in internal organizational matters (he as council chair and a director, and I as chair of the Internal Organization Committee), since we both recognized the need for organizational efficiency and were doing what we could to promote it.

It was quickly evident to me that here was a person who knew and understood whereof he spoke, and one who was worth listening to. His operating manner was low key, with an air of confidence, which promoted understanding, cooperation, and productivity among those who worked with him. He seemed to have the ability to get people with conflicting opinions to listen to each other as well as talk to each other.

After two terms as chair of the Sierra Club Council, Kent was nominated for the board of directors. He had been such an effective and popular council chair, that when he failed to win election to the board, he was drafted to serve a third term as council chair. The following year, the council lost, but the board gained, an able leader when Kent was elected to the board.

He is one of the relatively few club leaders who has seen fit to continue a high level of activity at the national level over a span of many years. His involvement and experience in chapter, council, board of directors, foundation, and various committee activities gives him a perspective and breadth of understanding that makes him well qualified to participate in the Sierra Club Oral History Project.

Kent and his wife, Lois, have for many years been civic-minded individuals, and continue to be so by serving as museum docents, elderhostel instructors, and no doubt other activities that I am not aware of.

It has been a privilege to count Kent Gill as one of my friends.

George Shipway

April 2, 1993
Phelan, California

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Kent Gill served as Sierra Club president from 1974 to 1976 and as director from 1973 to 1979. He came to the board from several years of service on the Sierra Club Council, and he followed his board years with a stint as president and trustee of the Sierra Club Foundation and many other roles on club committees, including the Publications Committee, the Sierra Advisory Committee, and currently as chairman of the History Committee. In all of these capacities, Kent has distinguished himself as a mediator, a problem solver, a listener. He is known and respected for exercising a consensual style of leadership, bringing people together even in the face of potentially divisive issues. For his service to the club he has received the Walter A. Starr Award and the William E. Colby Award.

Kent was interviewed as part of the History Committee's series on Sierra Club presidents. This series allows us to document not only the trials and tribulations of the presidential term, but to explore the personal development of Sierra Club leaders, their early influences and mentors and their rise through club ranks to the top volunteer position. Kent's oral history demonstrates how his boyhood years on a Colorado farm, his terms as councilman and mayor of Davis, and his work with the Sierra Club Council all put a distinctive stamp on his contributions to the club. It also shows how the devotion of endless hours to the internal workings of the club grows out of an even stronger devotion to environmental issues, from Yosemite to Alaska to Kaiparowitz, from energy conservation to wildlife protection to air pollution abatement.

Kent was interviewed on May 12, 1991, and February 9, 1992, when he was in San Francisco for Sierra Club meetings. His interviewer, Becky Evans, is a Sierra Club History Committee volunteer. Becky is a former Sierra Club staff member and a long-time volunteer at the chapter, regional, and national levels. Her experience with the club is evident in her work on this oral history.

Kent graciously volunteered to act as his own editor of the transcribed interviews. He reviewed the transcripts for accuracy and chose the chapter headings. In performing this task, Kent used his organizational skills, which he has demonstrated so often in his Sierra Club leadership roles, by reordering the two interview sessions topically. This approach means that the transcript no longer follows the structure of the actual interview tapes; however, the subject matter is covered with greater clarity and cohesiveness, with minimal substantive changes to the text.

Another volunteer for the History Committee, Merrilee Proffitt, performed the final editing and processing of the interview. The tapes, and some supplementary documents, are on deposit in The Bancroft Library.

Ann Lage, Coordinator
Sierra Club Oral History Project

April 20, 1993
Berkeley, California

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly. Use black ink.)

Your full name Martin Kent Gill

Date of birth 17 February 1928 Birthplace Montrose, Colorado

Father's full name Charles Edward Gill

Occupation Farmer, then ^{state} conservation officer Birthplace Kansas

Mother's full name Lena Marguerite Hall

Occupation teacher Birthplace Oklahoma

Your spouse Lois Shirley Haverland

Your children Laurie Susan (1952), Kathleen Marie (1954)
Charles Howard (1955)

Where did you grow up? Montrose, Colorado

Present community Camp Sherman, Oregon

Education Montrose Co. High School (1945); BA, Univ. of Colorado, 1950; M.Ed., Univ. of Oregon, 1954; certificate of Advanced Study, Harvard University, 1969; graduate study, Univ. of California, Berkeley

Occupation(s) Teacher - English, history, junior high

Areas of expertise teaching of writing - co-author, The Writing Process in Action, linguistics

Other interests or activities Hiking, photography, writing

Organizations in which you are active National Council of Teachers of English, National Education Assn., High Deser. Museum, Bend, OR volunteers

I PERSONAL FOUNDATIONS FOR SIERRA CLUB SERVICE

Early Years in Rural Colorado

Evans: Kent, did you have a lot of outdoor experiences as a child?

Gill: I grew up in western Colorado. Hunting and fishing was part of my family's life. My dad had done a lot of that. He eventually, when I was a teenager, became a state beaver trapper and went on to be a game warden and conservation officer. So we spent a lot of time outdoors, but it was always for hunting and fishing kinds of purposes. We never went for a hike, unless it was a hike to get to a fishing or hunting site. And I don't think my father to this day really understands why one would just go hiking for hiking sake or just to enjoy the country, although I think he always enjoyed it.

Evans: Tell me more about family and about your schooling.

Gill: I was born in Montrose, Colorado, in 1928. My father was, I suppose, in those early years really not employed very much. But in the early thirties, when I was about five, he became a tenant farmer. I called him a sharecropper one time and he took that with great indignation. But we rented a farm and gave the owner a third of the crop. In my early years I went to school in a three-room country school--not the traditional one-room. I worked in the summer on Dad's farm.

We tended to move every year or two. We'd move to a different farm but always in the same little rural western Colorado community, one that was irrigated by one of the very early Bureau of Reclamation projects. A tunnel had been driven through the mountains from the Gunnison River into the Uncompahgre Valley, and that was actually what brought both of my parents' families to western Colorado--the new land that was opened by virtue of this irrigation project.

Evans: Is that northwestern or southwestern?

Gill: It's southwestern, Colorado, yes. So summers was weeding onions and working in the fields.

Evans: How old were you?

Gill: Oh, by the time I was seven or eight I was doing that. By the time I was eleven or twelve, my brother and I did most of that work. That was sort of our summer job. So we'd weed the onion fields two or three times, and I suppose we had four or five--

Evans: So this is during the Depression.

Gill: Yes. Looking back, I don't ever remember the Depression years as times of privation. I don't think my folks had any more than anybody else did--in fact, probably less in some ways. I do remember that if we didn't get some wheat harvested and sold by the time school started, we had to start school in our old overalls with patches on the knees because we had been crawling down the onion rows all summer. Some years we'd get the wheat sold soon enough so we could have new pants and new shoes.

I also remember that I was better off than some kids, because there were kids who came to school with their lunches in lard buckets, and they had lard spread on their bread rather than butter. We always had a cow or two, and so we always had butter, and we had whipping cream to pour on our breakfast cereal and good things like that. We always ate very well.

We would buy probably two hundred chickens in the spring, and we'd start these little baby chicks in a box behind the stove where they could stay warm in maybe March, April. Then by June these chickens would be big enough to eat. So we would harvest the roosters one a day.

Evans: For the family?

Gill: For dinner. And the pullets, of course, would be kept to be laying hens. So we would have, depending on the survival rate, approximately a hundred roosters, which meant that we had a chicken a day for about three months. That was fresh food every day. Mother--and finally when I got old enough I went and did it--chopped the chicken's head off, and bled it, and doused it in the boiling water, and picked the feathers off, and then we'd have meat almost every day--fried chicken, gravy. [Laughter] All these things that today we regard as being so unhealthy.

Evans: You didn't have other farm animals like sheep or pigs that would have provided meat?

Gill: No, not in the summer. You see we didn't have refrigeration, so we couldn't butcher a whole animal. We did have sheep, but we never butchered them. People in western Colorado never ate sheep. They were viewed as wool producers but not meat. I mean, you'd have to be really poor, or really from a different culture. We assumed that the Basque shepherders would eat sheep, but we wouldn't. I don't think I ever had lamb to eat until I was practically grown.

Evans: Did you have a cellar?

Gill: Yes, we had a cellar and we stored--

Evans: Root vegetables. And your mother canned?

Gill: --root vegetables and fruit in the summer, lots of canned goods down there. There was a place to keep the cream and the milk cool down there in some sort of a box with burlap soaked in water over it to keep it cool.

Evans: I'm just curious. I lived on a farm about ten years after you did. What about toilet facilities? I mean did you have running water or a well or a pump?

Gill: See we lived in several different places, four or five while I was growing up. We had wells in some of those places, and some of them we had cisterns, a big concrete tank sunk in the ground and we hauled the water out from town for that. In none of these places did we have water in the house. We always had to carry it in and then carry out the waste water. No bathroom.

We took baths in a galvanized tub in front of the stove in the kitchen. The pattern was that mother got to bathe first since we used the same water for everybody. And so by the time we got down to my little brother, he was the fourth one through the bath water, he must not have even gotten very clean.

Then in 1941, I think it was, Dad quit the farm and got a job as a beaver trapper. At that point we moved--the year I was a freshman in high school--we moved to town, and essentially I lived in town after that.

The year I was a freshman in high school I got a job at a little local grocery store and worked after school and Saturdays. That tended to be my pattern all the way through high school. That store went out of business early in the war years, and then I went to work for a hardware store for a couple of years. The last year I was in high school I worked in another grocery store that was in the same place where the first one had been.

So it was a matter of an hour and a half a day after school, I suppose, and then always on Saturdays. And in those days the grocery store stayed open until 9:00 at night; so I'd go to work at 8:00 in the morning and work until 9:00 at night. Saturday was the open night for all the stores. And then my buddies and I would go to the midnight movie at the theater after that.

We didn't do a lot of outdoor things as a group of young people. I had one friend who had a car--I didn't--and we did go fishing and, I presume, hunting a time or two. I remember going camping with him one time to a mountain lake, and we spent several days in a tent. But the outdoor stuff wasn't something that I grew up with except the activity with my father in his trapping and the family in terms of fishing trips.

College Years

Evans: What about your college years? Where did you go to college, and what do you remember about what shaped what you later did in life--not necessarily just the Sierra Club, but your work as a teacher and also your political involvement in the city of Davis.

Gill: There was a tradition in my family, not of the men but rather of the women, to seek some kind of higher education and then to teach. At the end of my high school years (1945) I went into a college training program that was actually the Army Specialized Training Program. So I was in that for a year, and then I was on active duty in the army. So by the time I came back at age nineteen, I was ready to make a serious career decision. When I was home during the school year, I had worked with my mother in her classroom a lot, and I really liked what I saw. So by the time I came back from the army in '47, I had pretty much decided I wanted to teach.

Evans: Where did you go to college?

Gill: I got my freshman year by the army paying for it in Brookings, South Dakota, at South Dakota State College. And then when I came out of the army I went to the university in Colorado at Boulder.

I remember the story my mother tells about a very dear friend of hers, a teaching colleague, who asked about us boys. When mother said that I was going to the University of Colorado, she said, "Oh, Lena, that's too bad. That's just a hotbed of communism over there." This was the sense of a very conservative community about the university.

Evans: When I went to the college, Boulder was known as a party school.
[Laughter] That's quite a change in a couple of decades.

Gill: It always was a party school, I think. Even then there were a lot of kids that came from California and from Illinois, and they were not all there to be serious students. I remember one of my wife's roommates played a lot of bridge and actually flunked out. She spent so much time at the bridge table that she didn't ever go to class.

Evans: So you met Lois, your wife, in college.

Gill: Yes. Yes. We actually got engaged while we were in college and got married immediately after college.

Evans: What did you major in in college?

Gill: I really must have known what was going to happen to me, because I took what was called a distributed major, which allowed me to take social science courses as the major focus, and English courses as a second focus, and then enough of the education courses to qualify for a teacher. And that actually is the kind of teaching work I've done a great deal. I ended up more in English than in history, but I always did both. Actually the University of Colorado education was very appropriate for what I ended up doing professionally.

There's one influence there that I'd like to highlight. Both my wife and I took our basic political science course from a professor named Clay Malick, and we both look back in our lives to realize that he was a very formative kind of influence. He was a liberal professor. I don't think he was communist, but probably much more liberal than my mother would have been comfortable with.

But he projected an enthusiasm for the American political system that I hadn't really ever encountered before. You know, I took it for granted, I suppose. But he really saw politics as the way to solve problems, and from that point on we were both extremely interested in political science and political activities, and I'm sure that led to my involvement, when we moved to Davis, in the local Democratic Club which was the springboard to the city politics sequence that I went through in the sixties.

I suppose Professor Malick viewed government as a way to solve problems. I mean it was a very positive sense of government being valuable rather than the contemporary view that government is some kind of an evil that we have to put up with.

Evans: Do you still share that opinion?

Gill: Yes, I do. I still have that enthusiasm for the political process. I'm uncomfortable with however many years we've had of Republican administration where that has not been their approach at all. And I guess that I also gained some confidence that you really can trust people collectively to make good decisions, and the way they do that is through the political process. And I think that was an important kind of philosophical frame for my work in the Sierra Club as well.

Evans: Trusting people to make decisions collectively.

Gill: Yes. We don't always make good decisions that way, but we still have to have faith that more times than not we're going to come out with good decisions by some sort of a democratic process.

Interest in the Sierra Club

Evans: Kent, could you tell me how you got involved in the Sierra Club and what things brought you into the club?

Gill: Well, in 1958 we moved from Oregon to California. In the last several years that I had been in Oregon I had hiked extensively with a fellow named Herb Kariel, a former Bay Area resident who was also teaching in the Eugene area. We had had some wonderful mountain experiences in the Three Sisters area of Oregon and out on the Coast Range. He always talked about the Sierra Club, what a great outfit it was. So when it became clear that we were going to move, he provided me with the signed application blank. In those days, one had to be sponsored into the Sierra Club. So he made sure that I brought a ready application blank when I came to California, and I sent it in right away when I got here. I'm not quite sure how I felt I could afford to belong to the Sierra Club in those days, because teachers' salaries were very low, but I did.

The very first fall--this was in the days of the California Outdoor Recreation Review or Study or Survey or whatever--the Mother Lode Chapter had volunteered to staff one of the points where they stopped cars leaving the mountains and inquired about their use--

Evans: Survey point.

Gill: Yes. It was quite an extensive survey. And I remember being up on old Highway 40, the highway to Reno, and the highway patrol stopped all the cars. The standard opening question was "Have you been in the mountains for recreation?" About 60 percent of the responses

were "Yeah, man, I've been in Reno gambling!" [Laughter] But we did find some people who had been up there for outdoor kinds of things as well. And that survey was really my first introduction to Sierra Club activity.

Following that, my family and I used the chapter outings program quite a bit and we started going to the monthly meetings they had. So that was my introduction into the Sierra Club. I was probably predisposed to be interested in the Sierra Club.

It was really when I had been living in Oregon that I became involved in outdoor things. I belonged to the Obsidians Outdoor Club, which is a local group, heavily outings-oriented but with a moderate conservation program. And as a wonderful model, retired University of Oregon professor and his wife, Karl and Ruth Onthank, were working on conservation battles in those days.

One of the big issues in western Oregon in the 1950s was the Three Sisters Wilderness area. There was an area that had been designated as a primitive area. The western extension of it came down out of the high country into the lowlands where there was some of that fine old-growth coniferous forest. And the logging interests were very anxious to have that exclusion deleted from the protected area. And, in fact, they did get it deleted. Areas that I remember hiking through that were just as primitive as could be-- it was very steep country--are now crisscrossed with roads and logging stands and clear-cuts. So that was an example of a place where we did not prevail. But the local folks in Eugene at that time were very deeply involved in trying to protect it.

Evans: Did you have contact with the club at that time? I mean, weren't they involved in that campaign?

Gill: They didn't seem to be very active. The Sierra Club in the Northwest in those years had no outings program. In fact, they deliberately deferred to the local groups--the Mountaineers in Washington and the Mazamas and the Chemeketans and the Obsidians in Oregon--to run the outings programs.

Evans: They were federation members.

Gill: Yes. I'm sure all these groups were members of the old federation. In fact, I was more aware of the federation than I was of the Sierra Club.

Evans: The Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs, for the record here. [Laughter]

Gill: But Herb was aware of some level of Sierra Club activity, and he

would report to me on that, but I didn't even think about joining the Sierra Club at that point.

Evans: So you came to California in 1958?

Gill: In 1958.

Evans: And so you moved to Davis at that time.

Gill: Yes, and then we stayed there for the thirty years that I worked in California.

Gill: What were the first things you did, aside from the survey you did? What kind of things drew you into the club and got you involved?

Evans: Well, at one of these Friday night meetings--I think they were Friday nights in those days--I got to talking to the person who was organizing the programs and was telling him about this Three Sisters Wilderness Area problem. At that time I had a very modest slide camera and had taken some pictures. And he inquired if I could do a program on that for the Mother Lode Chapter. So I borrowed slides from two people that I knew in Oregon and finally managed to put together a program about that area.

I had had the good fortune--I guess it was the very last summer I was in Oregon--to accompany a young man named David Simons, who was actually doing some work for the Sierra Club. His work eventually resulted in his personal proposal for a national park in the Oregon Cascades, which of course did not come to fruition at all. But he did underscore some of the conservation issues there. He was a photographer, and his work was published in the *Sierra Club Bulletin*.

Evans: A very good photographer, I understand.

Gill: Large format, black and white photographer. I was at loose ends that summer; I did not get summer work. So I had time to accompany him on a several-day ramble through the Three Sisters country.

Involvement in City Politics, Davis, California, 1960s

Gill: I don't recall whether I've alluded to this before or not, but in my years on the Davis City Council we had a city manager/city council form of government. This preceded my experience with the Sierra Club; so I was very comfortable working on our council and then as mayor in cooperation with the city manager. The city

manager really made most of the decisions regarding staff. The council didn't appoint police chiefs, for example.

Evans: This is the policy direction and then he implemented it.

Gill: Right. And that system seemed to me to be a very good one to have; you had the elected people representing those folks, and then you hired a person to carry out things and he did what he was told to do. And I remember very clearly, we hired a new city manager during the time I was mayor. We hired a man who had been fired as city manager at Fremont.

Evans: I think you mentioned that to me earlier.

Gill: I may have done that. The point that he made to us was that his tenure lasted only as long as the city council approved of him. He had no job security, and he should have none. And I've always contrasted that with these school superintendents that insist upon a four-year contract, which means if you don't like him you probably have to buy off three years of a high-priced contract.

So I took that model and applied it to my relationships with staff in the Sierra Club. I worked through the executive director, but I expected him to do what the board had said and have his people do what the board said, but not without consultation with them. You know, you don't just do this in a dark room and then walk out and tell them what to do. They're involved in all this process. They're very important people in terms of input of information, generation of ideas, development of alternatives, but then the real responsibility for making the decision comes to the board.

Let me talk a little bit more about the Davis City Council period, because I think it led rather logically to service on the Sierra Club Council and then Sierra Club Board. In the early sixties there was a very strong division in Davis referred to as the "town/gown split," which I think occurs in many university communities. And although I was not a university professor--I was a public school teacher--I did end up on the gown side of that division.

It was essentially, I think, an economic disagreement. The town faction, local businessmen primarily, had for a long time run the city government. And they were very anxious to increase the population of the town, which would result in better business for the small businessmen. There was a controlled growth faction that wanted to see the town grow slowly, although there really was nobody, I think, arguing for no growth at that time. They used a quality-of-life argument. We didn't have that term in those days,

but that I think is essentially what it was. If you could retain some of the small town characteristics, grow more slowly and, therefore, in a more rational way maintain amenities and services as you grew, that was smarter.

One of the early things I did when I went to Davis was become involved in the local Democratic club. It was really not an official party mechanism; it was just a group of people who got together and did precinct work and that kind of thing, but they called themselves the Davis Democratic Club. And in the early sixties--it was '64 when I was elected--only in the previous election had anybody representing this gown side been elected. The council had been nearly all local businessmen before.

Evans: How big was the council?

Gill: Five. These are non-partisan races, so the Davis Democratic Club couldn't be officially involved in it, but they were strongly interested in sponsoring candidacies and helping out on them. They had a little taste of the possibility of success. So I was encouraged to run and did and found the running to be much less distasteful than I had expected. And by the time the third and fourth year of my term came around, this group actually had a majority on the council. As the senior member of that group at that point, it was logical that I run for mayor, and I believe I was elected by a three/two vote, having to vote for myself, of course.

Evans: So the council elected its mayor.

Gill: Yes, elected its own mayor. And I think the style of leadership, if you will, that I used there is what I brought to the Sierra Club. And when you try to enunciate that, it includes being respectful of all points of view, giving all points of view a chance to be heard, and including what were clearly opposition elements on the council, encouraging members of the community to come to meetings. In Davis we had no trouble encouraging that because lots of people wanted to come all the time and the meetings went on far into the night.

II SIERRA CLUB ROLES

From Mother Lode Chapter to Sierra Club Council, 1960s

Gill: After I did the slide program for the Mother Lode Chapter on Three Sisters--once you do a program, then you're fair game to be asked to do other things. [Laughter] And the thing I was asked to do was to take over for that program chairman and to develop a schedule of presentations of some kind for these monthly meetings the Mother Lode Chapter had. Then I ran for and was elected to the Ex. Com. and served as chapter chair. And following that--the council was formed probably about the time I came to California--I was designated to attend meetings in San Francisco of the Sierra Club Council as the Mother Lode delegate, which is the thing that brought me into national club affairs.

Evans: How long were you a delegate in the council? How long were you a participant before you became one of the leaders and an officer of the council?

Gill: Well, I'm a little vague on that. But it must have been about 1965 or '66. My wife told me I was going to be in trouble on dates. She is very good on dates.

Evans: [Laughter] We'll have to talk to Lois, too.

Gill: Yes. So I just defer to her. I don't try to remember dates. I just say, "Hey, Lois, when was that?" And she's not here today, so we can't ask her, but it must have been about the mid-sixties.

Evans: Okay.

Gill: I was on sabbatical in the East in '68-'69, and I was on the council before that, but I may have been on the Ex. Com.

Evans: You came back to California in 1969?

Gill: Yes. We were gone just for that year. And that, of course, was a very critical year in club affairs because that was the Brower--

Evans: Yes, could you tell me your recollections of 1969 and the [David] Brower incident?

Gill: Well, since I was away I felt that I was on the periphery, but the controversy over Dave's management of club affairs was already, I think, fairly well delineated. And, of course, in '68-'69 the board election really hinged around whether Dave was to continue as the executive director or not. The election went counter to his position and he was asked to leave the club's employment at that time.

Evans: Were you outside of California at the time of the election?

Gill: Yes.

Evans: Were you active in the club? Did you get any perspective of what was going on in other parts of the country?

Gill: Well, I have a little story to tell about that as a matter of fact.

Evans: Okay.

Gill: I got a call from the New England Chapter. I really had not been very much involved with them back there because I was very busy in an academic year. But I was called to inquire if I could talk to the club about what in the world was going on in California with the election. And I said, "Well, really, I'm not the person to ask. Paul Brooks, who's a member of your chapter, is on the board. And he'd be the best person to explain what was going on." And the response was, "We asked Paul, and he said to call you." [Laughter]

It was a difficult position for me, because I really felt that Dave was going to have to go. That was a very tough decision I think for everybody. But we finally did have to choose up sides, because he and the board simply were not going to be able to reach any accommodation. And in spite of all the wonderful things he'd done-- And I think most club leaders, you know, would have certainly agreed to that, would have acknowledged the really substantial contributions he had made. The leadership in the big battles of the fifties with the Dinosaur National Monument business at Echo Canyon and then a substantial amount of credit for the development of the Exhibit Format books. Quite a few people will claim that that's how they got attracted to the club, people who became important in leadership roles later.

Evans: Like Denny Shaffer and Bill Futrell.

Gill: Well, Bill Futrell tells us a good story about picking up this book on somebody's coffee table and thinking, boy, what a great outfit this is. But, you know, I certainly was on the side of those people that felt that Dave's stewardship of the club was not sufficient, that he really was endangering the financial stability of the organization.

So I told the person who called me in Boston that I was partisan on this, that while I could speak to both sides, I would have to acknowledge in the beginning that I certainly would encourage people to vote for the directors who wanted to terminate Dave's time with the club. And they went ahead and said, "Okay." If I would be willing to do it and acknowledge that I was partisan, that that would be fine with them. So I did appear at the New England Chapter meeting and tried to sketch in for them what was going on in California. And Paul probably was in a difficult position to do that. As a local person who was in a position of having to vote on Brower's tenure eventually, that was a tough job for him. So I filled in for Paul Brooks at that time.

Evans: You said New England Chapter. At that time the chapter was several states, as I recall. Were there a lot of people there?

Gill: Well, as it frequently is in these urban-centered chapters, most of the folks were from a fairly short distance away. They were really folks from the Boston and the surrounding suburban area. I don't think there was anybody there from Maine or New Hampshire. I don't remember anybody from those states.

Evans: Okay. You were chair of the council which was growing in importance and stature in the club in the early seventies.

Gill: That was not without a controversy, however.

Evans: Yes, well, would you like to talk about that for a while.

Gill: At that time--and I don't really sense it very much anymore, although I don't go to every board meeting to know what they're saying--but there was, I think, a serious sense that maybe the council was something we could do without in those days. The thought being that if you elect a board of directors, which we did--we elected five people every three years--that that should be an adequate representation of the members' and the chapters'

interests. Of course, the council was formed in the first place to provide a forum for those voices. So in the early seventies there was considerable wrestling between the board and the council.

I remember one of my roles in those days was to come to the board and present some strong position that the council had taken on some internal issue--the member handbook being an example of that--trying to urge the board to a course of action. And the board did not warmly accede to all of those things. Of course, many of them had price tags, and resources are always limited, so the decision sometimes was to not honor those recommendations.

But at the same time there were questions about whether or not we couldn't just eliminate that whole expense of bringing in a delegate from every chapter and have that much more money to devote to conservation. And you know, I think underlying that was a little bit of the idea that here are two outfits that are trying to run the Sierra Club, and who's to be the one who calls the shots.

My sense always was that clearly the board was in control, but that they really should listen with attention and interest to what a body like the council would recommend to them. I don't think we were making frivolous suggestions at all. But I always tried to couch them in the terms of advice, so that at least we weren't publicly feuding over the turf. And I think generally speaking the board accepted it that way, but of course in many cases they were not either willing to or able to follow along with the things that the council wanted done.

Evans: Let's talk about your role on the council and how it possibly affected your role on the board and your perception of the club while you were on the board and your presidency.

Gill: I'm sure that it did have an effect. The council in those days could probably be characterized as a debating society, raising I think probably, what were rather critical issues of internal club politics and then talking about them, my memory suggests, endlessly. I was a pacer. I would get so tired of sitting in one of these hotel room meeting rooms that I would pace in order to get a little bit of blood flowing to the rest of my body; it was all in my legs at that point.

I certainly wouldn't fault the council for being that. It seemed to me that was an important role in those days. And, of course, the board did not really welcome--in my view--the kinds of advice that came out of those debates. We would come to some kind of conclusion with recommendations about organizational matters or outings matters, and the board was suffering with us, I think, to some extent.

But the council viewed itself as maybe the primary spokesperson for the grass roots. And that may not be the most accurate thing in the world because there are other grass-roots elements that come to national meetings and express their opinions as well.

Evans: There weren't that many at that time though.

Gill: That's true.

Evans: The committee structure wasn't as developed, and the Regional Conservation Committee structure was not developed.

The William Colby Award

Evans: You've gotten the Walter Starr Award, which is given to former directors, but you got another award from the Sierra Club in the 1970s, the William Colby Award.

Gill: Right.

Evans: And to active members, I think, this is probably considered the club's most important award because it's given to one of its own. Could you talk about what you think you contributed to the club that led to this honor--realizing, of course, that you're not a person to toot your own horn.

Gill: Well, I was astounded that I got it, and so I'm a little hard-pressed to say-- It grew out of my service to the council, which suggests that the Honors and Awards Committee felt that it was important that a strong representation of the council view be recognized. And one of the things that I guess I've had going for me is the ability to speak fairly strongly and persuasively. I don't feel that I'm doing too well on this tape at some times. [Laughter] But I did have the opportunity when I was council chairman to come to the board and pitch for what the council wanted. So I guess I would assume that the Colby Award is a result of a favorable reaction to that representation of the council view.

My memory, of course, is that the board didn't seem to always listen well or respond positively to that, so I guess I wasn't feeling that it was such a success. However, many of the things the council was arguing for, some reorganization that emphasized grass roots more, paying more attention to the council, some of these things have come to pass.

Evans: You got the Colby Award before you were president, but you were on the board.

Gill: Right.

Evans: Do you think that in any way this colored or influenced your role as president or your management style in the sense of it being a recognition of your efforts?

Gill: Well, it suggested a kind of respect which it seemed to me I was able to utilize as Sierra Club president to get people to come together. I wasn't one who had a particular direction I wanted to take the club and come hell or high water it was going to go that way. Rather, I was trying to serve, I think, as a focus of club energies, and that meant getting a consensus among directors or some other club units as to what direction we wanted to go.

Evans: You were the captain of the ship sort of guiding, steering, balancing.

Gill: Yes, balancing would be a good term, I think, for it. And I think what the Colby Award was recognizing was that some of that quality was what the club needed. The Sierra Club has had an interesting experience in the last two or three decades, I think, of a fairly consistent direction with some very different people at the helm. Which suggests something about the fact that it's not the president's club or even the director's club, but rather it is an organization for all of us.

Board of Directors--Member and Officer, 1973-1979

Evans: You were on the board for how long before you were president?

Gill: I think only one year.

Evans: For one year. Let's see, were you vice president the first year you were on the board and then you were president from May 1974 to May 1976.

Gill: Yes. That sounds about right.

Evans: Let's talk about the role of the president. Of course, John Muir was the club's first president and there have been a couple of women presidents. Frequently, the president is a person who is a, excuse the word, "professional" person who is able to excuse themselves from many of their professional responsibilities. And

you were a little bit different than that. Can you talk about that?

Gill: Yes. When the possibility came up that the board might wish to have me serve as president, I was considerably concerned about that. The board does select its own president, and at that point there were a couple of other candidates who seemed to have several board members in favor of their candidacy. But I had been asked if my service was possible. And it seemed to me that in order to be Sierra Club president, one had to devote some time out of one's work time to the Sierra Club. So I made the inquiry "Would the Sierra Club be able to replace the salary that I would lose?" I was a breadwinner for my family and needed to have a full salary. And they agreed at that point to have me go on part time in my teaching responsibilities in the Davis public schools, and they would simply replace the salary that I would lose by doing that. And we talked about whether that had happened before or not, and I'm not sure that it had. That may have been the first time.

Evans: I heard a rumor that it had, but I'm not certain. We can check on that.

Gill: Earlier there had been the notion of the president not necessarily taking a lot of time off of his work but being given an assistant. I never was very much in favor of that idea, because it seemed to me that the president needed to relate to the executive director of the club, my model being my work on the Davis City Council where as mayor I had to relate to the city manager. He was not my assistant, but he was supposedly doing what the city council was telling him to do.

My perception of the role of president was that I was in a similar position to a mayor, a head of an elected board, the one who interfaced with the executive director and gave him some sense of where the board wanted him to go. I didn't consider myself superior to him, but rather more as an equal. In a final analysis case the board would rule, and in that case I would be in a position of telling him that it had to be this way, but that was not our ordinary day-to-day working relationship.

In terms of carrying out the president's role then, I stayed on my job 60 percent one year and 80 percent the next. I was able to arrange a school schedule so that I could come to San Francisco in the afternoon. I would do my work in the morning. So I practiced coming in once a week and having office hours. And Mike--Mike McCloskey, the executive director--had this interesting personal schedule of working at home in the morning, coming in and working in the office in the afternoon and in the early evening. So we would have our president/executive director conferences

between 5:30 and 7:00, and then I would catch BART back to Pleasant Hill and then drive back the hour back to Davis after that. I was able to use BART to stay out of the downtown traffic and not pay downtown parking fees, and I was using a little less energy, I thought--at least I rationalized that. And so every week Mike and I had a chance to sit down and talk about what was going on with the club.

I recall that relationship with a very good feeling. I don't know how Mike would speak of it, and maybe he has. [Laughter] He probably has. But I felt very comfortable in that role. It seemed to me that when there came times when the board would ask me to direct a course of action that that was very well accepted. And in lots of cases where there wasn't a clear sense of what the board wanted done, we had very comfortable conversations about the problems and reached an understanding very easily.

Financial Difficulties

Evans: You were on the board in the late seventies or the mid to late seventies when the club was having a lot of financial problems. I remember in particular a board meeting in 1978 where the board ended up meeting an extra day for its budget session, and there were some very unhappy folks. What is your sense of how the club deals with its financial situations and the cyclical problems it has with money?

Gill: It would make no difference how much money the Sierra Club could raise, they could find a way to spend more. So every year that I recall we experienced some kind of a budget crisis, sometime where expenses were outrunning budget or income was running behind budget. So we were really under financial tension all the time. And this, I think, is probably just part of the game. There probably wouldn't be any way of avoiding it, because there's no end of problems out there and there's no end of interest among Sierra Club members in trying to do something about them.

It seemed to me that when we finally got to the point where we had a really functioning Finance Committee which reported to the board, we moved ahead. Having some very fair review of budget done by what was essentially a subcommittee of the board with some augmentation of people who were not on the board, was a real step forward.

The staff comes in with the best cut that they can for a budget. We've had, I think, in recent years probably a little

tighter control over money. We've always had a controller, but we didn't always have control over things even though we had a controller. So the staff comes in with the best budget that they can come up with. But that doesn't always meet all the needs that the volunteers see. So then the original budget requires some adjustment to match up with those things. Then also the matter of trying to match outgo to income, based on our best predictions.

One of the things that's been a saving grace for us has been that the membership growth has continued. Not evenly, but pretty much over the last fifteen, twenty years we've had a growth from one year to the next, which always gives us a little more income the next year than we had the previous one. Then if our other fund raising is successful, why, we have a little more to work with.

But we always have needs in staff. We need new staff people, additional staff people to take on jobs that need to be done. And airfares go up, so the volunteer travel portion of the budget increases. So I don't think there's any escape from the tensions that go with those fall budget-setting sessions.

The Finance Committee, I believe, is meeting this very weekend. This is just at the beginning of the fiscal year. They're already looking forward to fiscal '92, and I think it's important that we have ourselves out that far ahead all the time. So the Finance Committee will have time between now and probably July or early August to work with the next year's budget. That presentation can be made to the board in September. And hopefully some of the dynamite will have gone out of the issue by the time it gets to the board. I think the most difficult budget meeting of the board I remember was the one over on the other side of the Bay. Is that the one you're thinking of?

Evans: In September 1978, the one at the Headlands.

Gill: Yes. Oh, that was just awful.

Evans: I remember it continued a day later. I was on the staff at the time. And my boss, who was John Higgins, when too much money was cut out of part of the salary survey or something, he wrote a note of resignation to Mike and left the meeting. The next year there were buttons out. You know, "I survived '78." And that's why I thought of it.

Gill: Yes. That is just an awful pressure to put on the staff. Essentially, during that little piece of time staff people don't even know whether they're going to have a job after the first of October.

Evans: That's happened more than once.

Gill: There has to be a little more security in this world than that, it seems to me, at least for people who are sort of on the middle and lower levels.

The Role of Staff and Volunteers

Evans: This might be a good time to talk about your perception, further perception of the tensions between staff and volunteers and also your own style as president of the club or as director, since you were on the board for a number of years and were president for two. And as I recall you were very popular with the staff.

Gill: Well, one of the situations that occurred that bears on this, I think, was the difficulty a Sierra Club president has in carrying out the relatively heavy duties that devolve on that person. Most of the Sierra Club presidents have maintained some kind of professional presence in their occupational field at the same time they've been president.

Shortly before my time as president there was a situation that arose in which there was a feeling on the part of the board that they should provide the president with very high level administrative assistants, maybe even to the point where the president should become sort of the chief operating officer of the organization, which would then eclipse the role of the executive director or would supersede it in some way. So there were quite a few tensions involved that kind of a situation, how you get the president to interface with the executive director.

I guess I've always had the feeling that the president really, as the spokesman for the board, probably has to be the person in ultimate command. On the other hand, the executive director is the day-to-day person and has to make a lot of the short-term decisions. And that's not an easy relationship to have at all.

Evans: At some point in the seventies there was a proposal on the ballot, and I don't remember the exact year, which determined the role of the executive director. And I believe that the resolution, the bylaw that was passed made the executive director the CEO as well as the executive director. So in a sense, he by definition had more say over the staff than the board had formerly had. I think there was an evolution.

Gill: Well, the board, I don't think, at least in the years of my more direct experience, really did not try to direct staff very much except through the executive director. In other words, priorities would be expressed to the executive director, and the board expected that those directives be carried out, but they didn't expect to carry them out themselves.

Sierra Club Foundation

Evans: One of the things that you have on the list is the relationship between the Sierra Club and the Sierra Club Foundation. I know this is something that has been everchanging ever since there has been a foundation. Would you like to talk about that for a while?

Gill: Yes. Actually during the mid-seventies, during my time as president on the board, that was a very severe problem. The Sierra Club Foundation had been put in place back in the early sixties by Dick Leonard and some folks anticipating that the day might come when the Sierra Club would lose its tax-exempt status and the club would need an incorporate body to receive the tax-exempt money.

Evans: That happened right after Glen Canyon?

Gill: Well, I think it was during the time of the Grand Canyon crisis.

Evans: Okay.

Gill: The club ran the big Sistine Chapel ad. And then the IRS [in 1976] suddenly discovered that the Sierra Club was not eligible to be tax exempt because of its political activity. So it was very farsighted and wise of Dick and the club leaders at that point to have established a separate entity that could receive tax exempt donations and then grant those funds to important eligible conservation activities. The law apparently at that point required rather separate identification, that it really be a separate organization. The Sierra Club Foundation had a separate board, separate officers, a whole fundraising and grant-giving kind of operation.

And in the seventies there was a lot of tension. It seemed to me it had to do with whether the club or the foundation was going to determine where the money was to be spent. Now clearly, from a legal standpoint, the foundation had the right to grant funds to whomever they wished, because they were not in the hip pocket of the Sierra Club. On the other hand, the Sierra Club board felt that the foundation had been established as a Sierra Club adjunct, was soliciting Sierra Club folks for donations, and therefore

should be primarily granting its money to the Sierra Club for Sierra Club purposes, and those were to be determined by the Sierra Club board. On the other hand, there was the Sierra Club Foundation that had its board, many of whom were former Sierra Club presidents, who were not always doing what the current Sierra Club board thought they should be doing. So clearly, that was a point of tension and contention.

The second issue had to do with the effectiveness and the efficiency of the foundation's fundraising activity. And there was some very pointed criticism, some of it fair and maybe some of it not quite so fair, that the foundation was not doing the job. There would be expectations at the beginning of a budget year about how much was to be raised by the foundation, and the foundation frequently did not meet those goals.

Evans: Were the goals--

Gill: Well, I'm not sure they were always reasonable. They may have been inflated. They may have called for more money than the foundation really had any likely hopes of being able to make. So this was another source of tension, that those foundation folks are not doing the job. So with this kind of a background, Ed Wayburn as the president of the foundation, and I, as president of the club, had innumerable personal conferences and joint board meetings and subcommittees formed with representatives from the two organizations trying to sort of adjudicate that whole issue.

It really wasn't solved until after my time as president. I was president of the foundation, actually, at a later point [1980-1981]. Then finally the fundraising aspects were largely subsumed into the Development Department of the club. The Sierra Club Foundation did finally accept the fact that they were primarily, if not exclusively, an arm of the Sierra Club. And it seems to me the present relationship really reflects that.

I think in the meantime there had been some easing of the interpretation of the laws regarding this relationship, so it was somewhat easier to have a close relationship. For a long time we were warned that if the relationship became too cozy then the IRS might decide that money contributed to the foundation would not be tax deductible. So there was at least a concern on the part of club leadership that we could jeopardize our ability to raise tax-exempt money at all. With the tax situation being different since '86, I'm not so sure where this all stands these days.

Evans: Wasn't there some problem, some discussion about the fact that some of the money that the foundation actually had in its budget was actually raised by the Sierra Club, since foundation money was

solicited by people like Denny Wilcher, who was the special assistant to the executive director?

Gill: Right. Denny successfully solicited very large sums of money some years which, of course, was delivered to the foundation, since that was where the tax-exempt money could go. And you can understand why Sierra Club folks who were expecting that money to be dedicated to their programs might feel sabotaged if the foundation board should in some occasions find other useful conservation purposes that were deserving of some help, too.

Evans: Not all the presidents of the club have become president of the Sierra Club Foundation.

Gill: Right.

Evans: Could you talk about the relationship between the club and the foundation from both the perspective of being Sierra Club president and being Sierra Club Foundation president?

Gill: You know, actually, I'm not sure my role changed too much. My agenda, if you could really say there was one, in terms of relationship with the foundation was to try to bring it closer to the Sierra Club without some major fracture. And because of the nature of the Sierra Club in the early seventies and with the Sierra Club Foundation being directed by a group of senior Sierra Club people--

Evans: Most of the board members were former Sierra Club board members.

Gill: Yes. What I'm really suggesting is that it was really just old-time Sierra Club folks. There was a real possibility that if the then-current Sierra Club board pressed the issue of control over the foundation too much, then that could lead to a break. And it seemed to me very important that the Sierra Club Foundation be kept as part of the Sierra Club family but that it be brought closer so that the kinds of frictions that had developed between the two would be relaxed.

Evans: What kind of frictions were they? What were the causes of them?

Gill: Who's going to call the shots? The Sierra Club Foundation had the money. Sometimes the money was raised by Sierra Club people but directed to the foundation because it needed to be tax deductible; yet the Sierra Club Foundation board really did have the legal control over the money. Once in a while there were cases where the Foundation would direct it outside the club. There were other cases, much more frequent, when the Foundation board would be inclined to direct funds to other than the club's most important

issues, because their interests as individuals, as a group even, was somewhat at variance with that of the Sierra Club directors.

Then there was all the difficulty over who was raising the money, and who gets credit for it, and how it's going to be directed that seemed to me really very unproductive. And I really can't take a lot of credit for bringing the two organizations closer together, although I think it did occur during my watch. For instance, consolidating the fundraising into the Sierra Club was a very important step.

Evans: The Development Department. Did that come about when you were president?

Gill: At the end of my time on the Foundation board. [Kent was on the Foundation Board of Trustees from 1975-1983.] Probably Denny Shaffer was more instrumental in bringing that about than any other individual.

Evans: As membership chair or when he was president?

Gill: No, probably when he was Sierra Club president [1982-1984] and liaison from the Sierra Club to the Sierra Club Foundation. The Sierra Club Foundation finally agreed to put a Sierra Club director ex officio on their board, and it was typically the president, I think, although maybe not always. And that was one of the moves that was designed to bring them closer together and to seek some conciliation.

As Sierra Club Foundation president, I viewed my role as support of the Sierra Club. I don't think Sierra Club Foundation presidents necessarily always have done that, although I think increasingly that's so. In recent times I think that's the way it's gone.

You know, there's the legal fiction that the foundation has to be separate, and that separation has to be honored and recognized because you get into trouble with the IRS if you don't and you could lose your tax deductibility. So the separation was important, but having the Foundation function to support Sierra Club programs according to Sierra Club priorities seemed to me to be very important. And I haven't followed it in great detail since then, but it seems to me that that's the way it's operating now. We do have the separate organization that deals only in the tax-deductible money, but that money comes to the Sierra Club for the purposes it designates and the Sierra Club Foundation does not insist on some other set of priorities.

Evans: Of course, the trustees are much broader in their membership now. There are people that are not former directors that are serving. In fact, there were a couple of recent presidents of the

foundation, I believe, that were not former Sierra Club directors. I believe Larry Downing is the current president.

Gill: I think so.

Sierra Club Publications

Evans: You've been involved with what used to be called the Bull. Com. It's not called that anymore.

Gill: *Sierra Advisory.*

Evans: *Sierra Advisory Committee.*

Gill: And I served earlier on the publications committee.

Evans: Could you talk about these either together or separately in terms of how you think these programs have evolved or developed and where they're going and what role they have in the club?

Gill: I think the issues are somewhat different, so let me separate them a little bit. Let's talk about the books program first. The books program, of course, goes back to Dave Brower's development of the Exhibit Format books. And we've already talked a little bit about the financial strain that the extension of that program put the club under around 1968-69. That problem of insufficient resources to develop the program as some people envisioned it dogged us for a number of years afterwards. So the whole notion of getting a good program that we could afford was an ongoing one. And there was, I think, a lot of debate about what kind of a book publishing program the Sierra Club needed and maybe even whether we needed one.

But we did see that there was a niche available in the book publishing industry, that there were kinds of things that we wanted to see published that the mainline publishers were not interested in. You know, issue-oriented and place-oriented books.

During the seventies, the notion of a general environmental book publishing program was developed in contrast to the somewhat exclusively Exhibit Format, large format, fancy coffee-table type books that were very expensive. And we continued to do a few of the exhibit formats over the years. But in addition to that we've done a lot of other kinds of things.

I'm comfortable with the Sierra Club's role in publication. It appears that for quite a long time the books program has been

fiscally sound, and therefore we have been able to put out anywhere from a few to a dozen or more books a year: guidebooks, how-to-do-it books, basic background information books on important issues--energy and air quality and toxics--some books that are philosophical about the environment, ones that are personal experience reports. We've done samples of all of those books in recent years. And of course, along with that for many years a successful calendar program that helped carry the financial load--the calendar program being a profit maker.

One of the problems has been how much of that do you try to do within your own staff? And since the days of Jon Beckmann. We've done the selection of authors and the contracting for manuscripts and the editing in-house. Then there have been a variety of arrangements for marketing the books, including partnerships with various mainline publishers to do a lot of that work.

I don't hear much about the book program these days in terms of controversy, so apparently that's become an accepted part of the club's program at this point.

Evans: The publications committee is normally composed of--I assume it still is--Sierra Club volunteers and publishing professionals.

Gill: Right.

Evans: From your experience on the pub. com. do you think this works? And what are its benefits and what are its drawbacks, if any?

Gill: I'm not sure I see drawbacks. It clearly, I think, is a benefit. You have volunteers who do the same kind of work as our publishing people do, who are able to advise and support them. Now I suppose you could get into a situation where one would be making counter-suggestions, but that doesn't seem to be a relationship that I know about. It's been a supportive one where the staff people can turn to the volunteers and get the benefit of their experience to go along with their own to make good decisions. But you also have at the same time the reflection of club leadership, volunteer leadership, about what are the important things to be publishing, how much can we afford, that kind of thing. So that's a good mix. And actually, that's the same kind of mix we're using on the Sierra Advisory Committee, too.

Evans: Can I ask you one more question about the books? What's your favorite Sierra Club book and why? If you have a favorite. I mean is it *Gentle Wilderness* or *In Wildness* or one of the others?

- Gill: Well, you've mentioned the two that I would have picked first.
[Laughter] I guess both of those go back to the Exhibit Format days, don't they.
- Evans: I guess I thought of *In Wildness* because you mentioned that Dr. [Eliot] Porter had died over the weekend.
- Gill: Yes. And, I'm very fond of *This is the American Earth*. I don't have a personal copy of that one and would like to. I'll have to do that someday. I presume I could probably find one around.
- Evans: Do you want give an arm and a leg? [Laughter]
- Gill: I also am very fond of the Grand Canyon book. It was published at the time that the Grand Canyon was endangered by the dam projects.
- Evans: You mean *Time and the River Flowing*?
- Gill: Yes, I think that's a magnificent book.
- Evans: It is.
- Gill: I mean the photos, but the text is also very, very attractive to me. And I bought a copy of the Sierra Club history.
- Evans: Oh, the Michael Cohen book.
- Gill: Yes. And I haven't finished reading it yet.
- Evans: I haven't either. [Laughter]
- Gill: But what I've read, I've really been very interested in, very fascinated by. And I'm not sure you pick a history book as your favorite. You respond emotionally more to the big picture books, which of course is a point in their favor. They do affect you at an innermost level.
- Evans: Of course, the history book was written from the perspective of the directors, which means there's a certain tone to it--not a bias but a tone to it.
- Gill: Maybe a bias, too. Except I'm to the part where it's just all about the old days. I find that very interesting, but it's not part of the Sierra Club I was involved in. It was a very different club back then.
- Evans: And it basically stops before it gets to your major involvement.
- Gill: Yes.

Evans: You were going to tell me about the *Sierra* magazine.

Gill: The magazine has a staff of ten or a dozen folks here in the San Francisco office, advertising folks in a couple of other places. It uses an advisory committee that is half volunteer and half professionals in the field. And once again, that seems to me to be a mix that works very well.

Evans: Who's on the committee?

Gill: The professionals are Garth Hite, who was formerly, I believe, with *Atlantic*; Bob Myers, who was with *New Republic*, I believe--he's now heading the Carnegie Council.

Evans: Of course Garth was on the publications committee, too.

Gill: Yes, Garth has served in both positions, and *Atlantic* has both books and magazines, I think. He offers expertise on the business side of publishing. Sally Reid, who is a former vice president/board member. Wendell Smith, who is from the Georgia chapter and has been very active in the council. His coming on the committee was because of the council's interest in a couple of issues that I'll speak about momentarily. And Barbara Conover, chair of the Ozark chapter and an advertising artist professionally. I'm chairing the committee at this point.

Evans: It sounds like a it's a small committee.

Gill: It is a small committee. It's been too small, I think.

Evans: I just wanted to get a sense of it.

Gill: Some of the magazine's issues over the years have been interesting, too. Let me mention the recent one, the recycled paper one, because that was a very hot issue even as recently as about two weeks ago, I guess. The current issue is printed on recycled paper.

Evans: I haven't seen it. I know it's just out.

Gill: The cover stock is not recycled, but the inside is all on recycled paper that is partly post-consumer and partly the trimmings that come up off the paper factory floor. I think this change has happened because the volunteers pressed. I don't think the magazine folks probably would have gotten this far as soon as they did if it hadn't been for pressure. But with the leadership of the Rocky Mountain Chapter and the concurrence of quite a few others, there was a strong campaign that the Sierra Club should be living its principles. The magazine's concern was that we were not able

to find recycled paper that would provide the four-color printing that we need to satisfy our advertisers and the quality of color picture reproduction that we wanted.

Evans: I know of at least one high-quality catalog--Smith and Hawken, I believe--which uses recycled paper.

Gill: Well, apparently the industry is responding to demand. It wasn't that it was technically impossible, it was just that they hadn't gotten around to it. We did experiment with paper, and we have found one that is available that I don't think I could tell if I didn't know that it was recycled paper. There's an interesting example of the volunteer opinion influencing a Sierra Club decision in a very direct and positive way.

Evans: Harley Jackson said the Colorado Chapter got major national press last year when they refused to sell the Sierra Club calendars because they weren't printed on recycled paper.

Gill: And I don't think they will be this year. But I believe that next year the club is expecting that we're going to be able to do the calendars on recycled stock. There is a significant technical problem here: the quality of material to do the high-quality work we want. Now some people say, "Well, we don't need that high a quality" and they're willing to compromise.

Evans: But you want to sell it.

Gill: But if we have to sell space to an advertiser, we have to deliver the quality that they demand.

Evans: If you want to print your calendars in Italy or wherever they're printed, and you've got to depend a little bit on the resources that are available in another country--

Gill: It may be that with enough lead time we could get the materials to them and they could still print it in Italy if that's where the price and the workmanship are available.

Now back to this whole business of the advertisers calling the shots. This has been a controversy for a number of years. Economics, once again, has influenced the Sierra Club to ask that the magazine develop more revenue from ads with the result that it costs the Sierra Club less to publish an every-member magazine, to the point that now in recent years we've been running somewhere around 50/50 ad pages and editorial pages.

Evans: That's fairly high, isn't it?

Gill: We all agree it is much too high. The committee has been arguing for 60 percent editorial, and we're better on the ratio right now than we have been. But it's still too high. What it results in is a magazine that is too heavy with ads, and it's too busy, and there is too little substance to it to really do the job with members. An ad may be a slight member service, but we're not publishing the magazine to provide advertising to our members. That would be foolish. But advertising provides a means by which we can deliver the copy.

The financial bind the board has found itself in has pushed us up to this more or less 50/50 ratio. On the committee, we have resolved that we simply have to continue to press for improvement in that. The magazine people would be much more comfortable with say 60/40, or 58/42 would be better than what we have. So we're looking for an improvement there.

The kind of ads we take turns out to be controversial. There are just no end of ads that members find offensive. And in fact, I suppose a no-advertising magazine would be the ideal in this case. Some of the interesting criticisms have been of automobile advertising. Of course, advertisers tend to want to advertise their recreational type vehicles with us because they have the notion, probably based on demographic information, that Sierra Club people use this kind of vehicle.

Evans: There are a lot of Sierra Club desert activists who drive Toyota 4Runners.

Gill: Exactly. Now the question comes up, do we dare show those vehicles off the road in an ad? And our policy has been that we will not accept an ad showing a four-wheel-drive vehicle off the road, because we simply don't want them tearing around as off-road vehicles. And we've lost some ads because of that. An auto ad agency comes in with copy, and we say, "We don't like that copy." Well, ad agencies don't appreciate that response very well.

Should we take ads from petroleum producing companies? Especially should we take image advertising from them?

Evans: We've had Chevron ads, as I recall.

Gill: Well, yes, there's a Chevron ad with the--

Evans: Owl?

Gill: Yes, and that's kind of an image ad. There was the owl and the butterfly, and Chevron is making a case in these ads that these

endangered species live on their refinery grounds and are being protected.

Evans: "People do."

Gill: And we've been increasingly reluctant to take that kind of ad. Then what about product advertising? We want to reduce the draw of petroleum, so do we accept somebody's ad that encourages us to use more? Well, there's a recent one--I think it's a Chevron again--that advertises a substitute for road salt that they claim is less damaging to the environment. Okay, we did accept that one. That decision wasn't made by the committee; it was made by staff.

I got a complaint recently about running an ad for a diploma mill, an outfit that is alleged in this letter to not have any solid academic program but just cranks out masters and Ph.D's to whomever will pay for it. Well, you know, I have a little problem with taking that kind of an ad, too. On the other hand, surely Sierra Club folks who might answer that ad are smart enough to know what they're getting. Maybe they're not looking for a solid academic program, but they're looking for a diploma. [Laughter]

Evans: Yes.

Gill: So how much do you protect people from themselves? I don't know. The whole business of advertising in a magazine is an extraordinarily interesting and complex one.

Evans: I remember one of the-- It may have been the very first issue where we had major advertising, and the back cover advertisement was for artichoke hearts. And it was so funny, because here was an artichoke heart on a silver fork. And I thought, "Well, that sounds like a Sierra Club WASPish kind of image." You know, here's this silver fork like the silver spoon in one's mouth.

Gill: It sure does. You see, we can't get away from that because our demographics studies say we are higher income, higher education level, and have a very heavy consumer demand in some kinds of merchandise. Advertisers aren't interested in us if we don't match what they are looking for. They don't spend what is a considerable sum of money to place an ad with us unless we project their kind of a market. So sure, the silver spoon fits right in, you see.

Evans: I have a question about the magazine. If you look at the cover, it is not obvious that it's a publication of the Sierra Club. In fact, one has to read fairly small print on the inside to determine that. Is there some reason for this?

Gill: Yes, there is. There's a whole story behind that.

Evans: I'd like to hear this.

Gill: Some time ago, I guess before I came on the committee, which is four or five years now, the staff, and I think probably with the concurrence of the advisory committee--I don't think this ever went to the board--conceived of the magazine as a general circulation environmental magazine.

Evans: Not a member organ.

Gill: Not as a member organ. And as a result, the cover's a good example of where they downplayed the Sierra Club. You see, it used to be the *Sierra Club Bulletin*, and it was changed to *Sierra* magazine--*Sierra* meaning just "mountain" if you want to take the most general view of it.

I think the present committee is uncomfortable with that, although preceding the present editor and certainly into his tenure, general circulation was generally what they were seeking. They recognized that it was a Sierra Club magazine, but they were also trying to appeal to a broader audience and maybe generate some outside subscriptions, to generate some newsstand sales, and sales in outdoor equipment stores and some selected bookstores--Walden and Dalton's. I think both of those stock the *Sierra* magazine. And in some cases they even feature it by giving it a privileged spot. So we generate some revenue and reach out to some people. But is the magazine an outreach or is it an internal organ?

The magazine folks just brought to our attention at our meeting only last week the fact that they have been discussing some major redesign--I think it would be fair to characterize--moving back toward a member-oriented magazine.

They're going to do more on the history of the Sierra Club during the centennial year. They plan to run a major historic feature about the Sierra Club in every issues. That will be nine of them. They're planning for a centennial issue which will be totally Sierra Club and Sierra Club history oriented. There will be more on Sierra Club activists. For instance, in the last issue there was this piece on Brant Calkin and a piece on Rose Strickland featuring her work on the BLM grazing lands.

And so it would appear at this point that for a variety of reasons--including letters to the editor and attitudes that have been expressed on the council floor and, I hope, a reflection of the advisory committee's concerns--the staff has redesigned to make *Sierra* more of a member-oriented magazine. The advisory committee applauded this. I think we are more comfortable with that kind of a magazine. And we presume that that will still attract the

advertisers, although this is going to be a tough year for advertising.

Evans: Do you feel that the staff is enough in touch with the membership and what's going on in the club to fully reflect the concerns and issues that are--

Gill: I think they're going to need some help on that, and that will be, I think, a role that the advisory committee will need to carry out. That will depend somewhat more heavily upon the volunteer members of the committee.

Evans: The thing that struck me was in the most recent issue. It's something you may have seen, article on LeConte Memorial being dedicated. There was no mention at all of the fact that this was a Sierra Club building, that the Sierra Club had built it, et cetera, et cetera. It looked like it was run by the [National] Park Service. Once in a while things appear in club publications that seem to dismiss the club's role in things. I know the committee chair's probably written a letter which you may have seen about that.

Gill: I think it's in this issue.

Evans: Oh, is it? Good. Once in a while one wonders why the links are missing. I realize it happens everywhere. It's just that it's one of those things that is kind of frustrating.

Gill: Yes, I don't think I have an answer as to why.

Evans: I think there's an excellent staff.

Gill: But you see, that is a reflection of a concept of the magazine that's looking outward.

Evans: But it's ignorant of history, and that's the reason I was concerned.

Gill: Well, you don't excuse ignorance. But you see, it may not be ignorance as much as concept. They may have known very well that Sierra Club keeps LeConte open five months a year and has volunteers and a staff person, but if you conceive of the magazine as an outreach, then that's not important.

Evans: Well, the fact that the Sierra Club built it and it was at one time where the John Muir trail started and it was also--

Gill: And Ansel Adams lived in it.

Evans: When you think about the fact that the first Sierra Club library was there, and the club's first office was there in the park, it's sort of ignorant of a number of factors which would have given a more accurate and personal linkage to the article.

Gill: And appropriate in a Sierra Club publication.

Evans: Especially in the I'm sorry, in the park's [Yosemite] centennial year.

Gill: Yes.

Juniper Group, Oregon Chapter

Gill: I worry about the fact that my own local group is just struggling along and doesn't seem to have anybody who's willing to assume leadership.

Evans: You mean in a general sense, or any specific--

Gill: We simply can't get people to assume the leadership roles, so we don't get anything out to the members. It's been six months since we've had a newsletter. We've had a series of meetings which were attempts to reactivate, and those seem to have fallen apart. Well, chapter folks have a responsibility to do something about this situation, because I presume we're still getting group subventions.

Evans: But it's not very much.

Gill: Well, yes, it's not very much. We who live there have a big responsibility too. I was hopeful that in our little local efforts at meetings, we'd identify some leaders. And I thought we had, but somehow there still isn't a sustained renewed activity. And yet we have really serious environmental problems there.

Right now, my major local environmental activity is taking place not with Sierra Club but with an ad hoc local group. Thank goodness we have the local group going, but the Sierra Club ought to be involved in these forest issues that we're struggling with. So I feel a gap there. The chapter is very busily engaged in forestry issues on the west side, and we're struggling along with our east side ponderosa pine forest issues on our own.

Evans: Maybe you need some foster parents. I know people in the San Francisco Bay Chapter assisted people in the Sierra Nevada in the valley chapters in making comments to forestry plans, et cetera.

Gill: We probably do, yes. One of the things that happened was that the national club hired away the local activist to become the Utah club representative, and what it did was to create a local leadership gap that at this point hasn't been filled. Then there were a couple of fellows who picked up after this fellow left. But now they've burned out, and there hasn't been anybody emerge yet to take their place. That's the kind of circumstance that the club encounters frequently, I think. Both chapter and national levels need to be cognizant of that problem and working on it.

For instance, the notion of having standards for groups which they must meet in order to get subvention is entirely sound. We shouldn't be getting a subvention over there, and maybe we're not at this point, because we don't deserve one. We don't have enough activity. I think we have several hundred dollars in the treasury, but nobody's spending it. Nobody's putting out mailings on east side ponderosa pine issues. Nobody's checking up on the forest supervisor's office. We do have a local ad hoc group that is just about to go to law with our forest district over the way they're doing their timber sales. But the Sierra Club ought to be involved.

Evans: I think sometimes the club is too involved in its own issues at its own level, whether you're a chapter or whatever, to monitor what's going on at another level.

Gill: I think that's true. I know that the chapter chairman is concerned about this situation. In fact, we've gotten warning letters and there's been notice about our status in the chapter newsletter. Clearly, the old-growth forest issues in the Willamette Forest on the west side are commanding most of their attention and probably should. It's probably a bigger problem. But if the Sierra Club's going to be strong, it has to have a local group there to respond to the local problems, too. And at this point the Sierra Club is not a player in our forest issues. And I guess I have to assume some responsibility for that myself, because I've lived there and I'm not doing anything about it. Rather I'm being active in this ad hoc local group, which has made some headway.

Evans: Is it an independent group, or is it affiliated with some other organization?

Gill: It's an independent group that we've called Save the Metolius. And we've got some favorable elements into the forest plan that was released in the late summer. We're now converting that organization into a non-profit organization, but we have no affiliations. We do have a lot of good support from people who are influential because there's a long tradition of people from Oregon caring about this place. Some of them are probably Sierra Club

members, but the activity really has nothing to do with Sierra Club. And that's okay, too. You know, Sierra Club doesn't have to be involved in everything. From my standpoint, it would be nice if it were, because I care about the Sierra Club. But I care also about our little local area and what happens to it.

Evans: And yet, as you said before, the Sierra Club has a very broad role already, so it's just as well some other organization is doing the job.

Gill: I think some specialization is desirable among the environmental groups. Certainly, the Sierra Club doesn't specialize very much, and I think there's a role for other kinds of groups to do specialization, both in terms of the kind of environmental work, maybe, and the places that they choose to exercise them.

Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund

Evans: You've talked about the foundation. Another member of the Sierra Club family is the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund which was started about the time you were getting really active in the council and was developing during your term on the board. Do you remember any particular thing about the development of the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund or any particular problems?

Gill: Yes, I remember the concern that the separateness of the legal defense fund could create problems even more severe than the ones that might have resulted from the conflict between the foundation and the board. And as a matter of fact, the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, although it carries the Sierra Club's name by permission, does not serve the Sierra Club exclusively nor has it ever. The concern that Sierra Club folks had in the early days was that there could be situations where the legal defense fund could be carrying a legal case that would be contrary to Sierra Club policy. And it seems to me that that possibility still exists. I don't remember any real big crises evolving during my time in the national roles, but there was always the concern that it might.

Of course, the legal defense fund has a completely separate board and there may be a few people who have served in leadership in both places. It has its own fundraising program, although in the seventies it received substantial grants from the Sierra Club Foundation on occasion. And it serves a wide variety of clients in addition to Sierra Club clients. They do carry cases for the Sierra Club, but they carry cases for the rest of the environmental

community as well. And that raises some really sticky problems of identity.

For instance, in Oregon right now the legal defense fund is carrying one of the forest cases where the attempt is being made to shut down the logging in some of the old growth forests because of the spotted owl. The Sierra Club in Oregon has taken a somewhat more moderate position than the "extreme environmentalists" up there. I'm sure that the community of foresters and loggers and lumber operators up there do not distinguish between what the Sierra Club is doing and what the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund is doing. In other words, they assume it's all the same outfit. But in this particular case the client is, I presume, the Oregon Natural Resources Council, which has taken a somewhat more radical stand on the issues than the Sierra Club has. So in that situation there is the potential for misunderstanding and possibly even a potential of conflict.

I've been concerned that we may have created something here that will get us in trouble someday where the legal defense fund folks, working independently and for their own perfectly good reasons, do end up on the opposite side from where the Sierra Club is. And there really is no way to prevent that. The laws involving the creation of these legal defense funds certainly makes it reasonable for them to be independent--in fact, probably expects them to be independent.

Evans: The club, of course, is still involved in approval of litigation, but I'm not sure whether it's all litigation or just Sierra Club litigation, because there is a process which involves the president and the executive director and the vice president for legal affairs.

Gill: Well actually the executive committee, I think, is still approving the legal agenda. But I think those are Sierra Club cases only. The excomm has to approve a Sierra Club entity undertaking a suit with the legal defense fund acting as their counsel. The defense fund takes on other cases as well without the Sierra Club having any right to review them. And that's the source of the possible conflict.

Evans: I think there's still some tension there, but I don't know what the nature of it is.

Gill: Well, it seems to me there's built-in tension into just the nature of the organizations, and it's probably one of those things that any set of leaders is just going to have to deal with.

The Sierra Club Handbook, 1969 and 1971: Importance of Institutional Memory

Evans: One thing that I was impressed with is the document that you worked on, which was the Sierra Club handbook. I still have the '69 and '71 editions. I think you were involved in this, weren't you?

Gill: Yes.

Evans: And I use them as a Bible for all sorts of things even though they are very much outdated.

Gill: You know, there was a handbook done maybe in the early sixties by Dave [Brower]?

Evans: Sixty-five, probably.

Gill: By the time I was a council officer it had become quite badly out of date. Say in the terms of listing the club chapters, there had been many new ones formed since that edition had been put out. And that became a controversy. The council was pushing really hard to get a revision, and the board was having trouble coming up with the money for it, which of course is an old, old story, you know. We run into that problem on a hundred or a thousand needs. And I think as much as anything else, to get the council to leave the issue alone, the board and Dave decided to go ahead and have a new one done.

They were looking for somebody to do it. As a teacher I had a summer off, so I put together the text for it. It was really just an expansion of the old one. I used quite a bit of the stuff that was in the one that Dave had done. There was some nice material on Sierra Club history in there.

Evans: Different format.

Gill: Yes, it was. We were going to the larger format by then. It needed a lot of updating on conservation issues, because the focus had changed on things by then.

Evans: The two dates that I have are 1969 and 1971. Seventy-one, I think, only updated the officers, so '69 was the one that was the one with the main revisions.

Gill: I think so. I remember that my daughter typed it for me. She was a junior in high school that year, I guess. So I didn't have to sit around and hit the typewriter all summer. We had a little bit of money that we could pay her for some of her time. That was a very interesting project to work on. And then, of course, the '69 and '71 ones went out of print pretty soon. With the expansion of the club membership so fast, we ran out. And then it was just a couple of years ago, or was it even last year that we finally got that handbook updated. And again, of course, the council had to fuss about it and indicate the need for it.

Evans: And David Brower was one of the people that really wanted it to happen this time.

Gill: That's right. Well, yes, I think he saw the need for this publication to establish a ground floor with members. You know, some of them, a lot of people, probably didn't read it very carefully, but I'm sure quite a few did. And you were able to lay out a little bit about how the club works and where it's been and what it really values. So I was very pleased to have a chance to work with the handbook, because I think it was important. And I continue to think that. If you're not going to do it in a member handbook that you deliver to a person when that person joins, then you very well better do some stuff like that in the publications that go out to people so that they have a sense of the organization.

Evans: I think the institutional memory is really important, and that is one of the few things that is concrete for someone to hang onto and to look at. Even as brief as it is. You may want to talk about this a little bit--I'm talking about what club members know of the institutional memory.

Gill: Yes, exactly. We see that, I think, all the time. People come on board, let's say in leadership roles, and they really don't know what's gone on before, and they suggest the same things that either were tried and didn't work or things that were the standard procedure that have been eliminated because of a problem with them. And if you don't have a record of where you've been then what else is a person to do?

Other Conservation Activities

Evans: Let's talk a little bit more about your formative years and how your outdoor activity, perhaps, as a youngster fed into the work

you did in Davis on the city council. Also what you're doing now a little bit in conservation.

Gill: Well you hope old former Sierra Club presidents don't just go to pasture and never be heard of again. And actually we have a Starr Award that the club gives to a director who has continued to be an active person in Sierra Club affairs.

Evans: The Walter Starr Award.

Gill: And I suppose because of my work on the Sierra Club Foundation I was granted that honor one time.

Evans: Oh, I should know that.

Gill: Much to my pleasure and surprise actually. Well, let me start more recently. I've tried to stay in touch with Sierra Club, but I've deliberately turned down invitations to be considered to go back on the board. I viewed one of the club's problems being too many people staying on the board too long. I strongly feel that some turnover there is healthy. Now I gather this election there are some people who are strongly opposed to that point of view and think we need more of the institutional memory and experience on the board. And I agree that there's certainly some advantage to that.

So what I've tried to do is to tailor my activities since into other kinds of Sierra Club roles. I've served on the Sierra Advisory Committee and I'm serving on the History Committee, and I find those to be very rewarding in smaller roles--sort of organizational roles both of those, not really conservation ones. And at home I try to be busy on conservation issues.

III WORKINGS OF THE SIERRA CLUB

Organization and Reorganization, 1970s

Evans: In terms of your time as council chair, what do you remember most about that? What changes happened, and what changes do you think you had an impact on?

Gill: Not that we got much change done but we did get a lot of questions raised. Well, one of the things we ought to talk about is the whole internal organization of the club. During the time I was in council leadership positions and while I was on the board as well, there were extensive discussions about internal organization. There was a study group we referred to as the IOC, internal organization committee, made up of mostly council folks, I suppose, but was really a club committee.

Evans: Bob Howard was on it, as I recall, at one time.

Gill: George Shipway and Mary Jane Brock and Marty Fluharty. Sue Miller was very helpful and instrumental in those studies. And we went on for years studying alternative organizational patterns for the club and trying to come to grips with a way that would be more efficient, more economical, more democratic.

And finally, in about '78, I think, the internal organization committee finally came out with an analysis of the current system, which essentially we still have, plus three models of changes--ones that could be accomplished, sometimes with considerable upheaval and by-laws changes. We tried to analyze each of these as well. Then other people in the club came along with other alternatives. I remember Paul Swatek had one and Holly Jones and Sandy Tepfer in Eugene, Oregon, had one. And the board wrestled with all of these.

One of the features of those plans--maybe not all of them--was the notion of an annual assembly, which of course is a regular feature of the organization now. The November meeting always includes that. I think the motivating factor may finally have been

California corporate law rather than internal studies, but the notion of a national assembly offered some sort of grass roots representation and an opportunity to advise the board in some very direct way on a few issues.

Evans: So it's still fairly structured.

Gill: Today the ones that have resulted are highly structured and usually single focused. Usually there will only be one item that's considered; some item of critical significance to the club becomes the thing that they talk about at that meeting.

Evans: Let's talk a little bit more about the work of the internal organization committee and the proposals and what happened or didn't happen to them.

Gill: Well, one of the proposals was going to be the elimination of the Sierra Club Council, because that would save both money for transportation and possibly board time. They wouldn't have to deal with recommendations on those subjects.

The RCCs [Regional Conservation Committees] were sort of in the building stage at that time. There had been regional conservation committees mostly without staff or support other than just very modest financial support. These groups were limping along trying to study regional problems and come up with some recommendations to the board, during the early part of the seventies. So the organizational schemes that came out of these organizational studies, of which there were several, did look at the RCCs.

And one of the things that happened, actually, during the seventies was a much enlarged role for the RCCs and a delegation of regional policy to the regional conservation committees, which really meant then that they were to do some pretty thorough study. They were to have some very solemn deliberation about what was the best course within Sierra Club policy parameters about a problem that was regional in nature, because the board by and large was indicating they were not going to be able to consider those any more.

Evans: They didn't have time.

Gill: That's right. There's no way they could call the shots on everything, everywhere. So the RCCs were encouraged and a framework was set up so that the whole country was covered with RCCs. I think liaison between regional offices, which were really branches of the conservation department, and the regional conservation committees were strengthened, so that in some ways, at least in some of the regions, the conservation staff people in a region became support for the RCC. I'm not sure that's entirely in place at this point, but at least that was the theory.

So there were plans calling for regional councils to deal with both external and internal matters. In those days and still today, we have a person from every chapter come to the big meetings and we have a representative of each RCC. The idea here was that if you had a regional council--maybe you'd have ten of those across the country--then that would be ten people who would come to the national meeting, to make recommendations to the board about both internal and external matters.

That plan, of course, was never really even too seriously considered. As I recall, that was the plan that the internal organization committee by a very narrow margin was favoring. There was strong consensus we needed to do some changes, but there wasn't a consensus for how to change.

The refinement of the RCCs came along later. So really, I suppose, the council was the only sort of direct communication from chapters to the board. And you know, we've talked a lot over the years about the Sierra Club being a grass-roots organization, but I'm not sure it's always been viewed that way by all the people who have been in charge of it.

And I wonder even in the early days when I was on the council, then when I was chair and coming to the board to express the council's views on things, that sense of sufferance that I experienced there doesn't suggest a lack of confidence in the grass roots. So I wonder if the club really wasn't more of an elitist organization at that point.

Evans: Well, Sierra Club at that time, as I recall, was still a highly California organization.

Gill: Of course it was.

Evans: The balance of the executive committee in the early seventies was primarily from California, though the presence of Larry I. Moss and then of Bill Futrell and Ted Snyder when they got on the executive committee changed it. I'm not sure they were mutually exclusive, but there was the inner five, which was the ex comm, and the outer ten, and there was also a group that was called the East Bay Bloc; not necessarily ex comm members, but people who were northern Californians.

Gill: Well, they were people with relatively long experience in the club. Some of them carried official offices, some were directors, and some probably weren't--they were just well-known Sierra Club folks who probably had served on the board at some time. Those people were really influential.

The big burst of membership after Earth Day [1970], of course, involved increased membership in all parts of the country, and so we really were finding viable Sierra Club units springing up in the midsection and the East and the South. So the club really, I think, becomes truly a national club during this time and probably as a result of that burst of membership. I'm not sure when people like Futrell and Snyder came into the club, but probably before that a little bit, but not a lot.

Evans: Not a lot.

Gill: And it's interesting to speculate. Did the club's going national emphasize the grass roots nature of the organization? It probably did.

Evans: There were members in places other than California that wanted to be heard. And issues developing outside of California, whether you're talking about preservation of the eastern wilderness, or timber in the Southeast, or mining issues, that kind of thing, or development of water, water issues in the East Coast. These issues were there. And since there were members there, they brought them to the board, because the board made a lot of decisions about conservation at that time.

Gill: Well, and there's an interesting split between urban issues and traditional Sierra Club wilderness issues that came along during those years as well. And oftentimes, those more specifically urban interests were expressed as strongly by people from other parts of the country as they were by Californians at least.

Evans: It did take a long time for those issues to get on the front burner, or even on the stove, in a sense.

Gill: Right, and it was not easy. And once again, it was the democratic evolution of those issues that allowed them to finally come to the top, I think. It did require a lot of wrestling on the part of club units to come to any sort of a decision about whether these were good. And they finally, I think for the most part, got their share of attention.

Evans: Of course, a lot of them are issues that are important because people live in cities and they have to deal with clean water, clean air, transportation, those kinds of things.

Gill: Right.

Evans: The club structure has been described as Byzantine. Maybe it's just gotten more and more involved, and people are just too busy doing what they're doing to spend the time--

Gill: Well, there was some feeling on the part of those of us working on internal organization in the seventies that, my goodness, wouldn't it be better for us to take all this energy and put it to saving some landscape somewhere or solving an environmental problem somewhere? You know, the irony in my Sierra Club life is that I spent it in San Francisco meeting rooms. Every once in a while I'll be flying to a meeting and I'll talk to somebody seated next to me in the airplane and I say, "I'm going to San Francisco for a Sierra Club meeting." And the person expresses astonishment. "I thought you'd be hiking somewhere." [Laughter] And, of course, if I really had my absolute druthers, I would be hiking somewhere. But that's the price Sierra Club folks pay.

Evans: There was, as I recall, a committee--and I'm not sure where it came from--that was to look for ways to reorganize the club's structure [1971]. The impetus seemed to come from the then-president Ray Sherwin, who wanted a high-level presence at headquarters. And as I recall, a proposal came forth which involved this senior staff person being the arm of the president at headquarters. There was a lot of controversy about it. What do you recall of that?

Gill: Well, what I recall is that there was a compromise on that. One idea was to have paid president. The idea that emerged was that you didn't really put into the president's seat a fully paid member of the board, but rather you allowed the president to hire a mid-level executive as an aide. I remember Jack Townsley was the one who came on in that role. Of course, Ray as a judge undoubtedly found that it was difficult to spend as much time here as he might have wanted to, so Jack Townsley was installed in the club office as a surrogate for the president.

I was not close to that situation. I can imagine that there were some frictions between that assistant's role and the role of the executive director, regardless of who the personalities might have been. I don't think that's ever been repeated.

Evans: I believe that Mr. Townsley was succeeded by Max Wynn.

Gill: That's right, but still during Ray's term.

Evans: I don't believe that Mr. Wynn was as strong a personality as Jack Townsley was.

Gill: Well, you know, by the time I came along I depended very heavily on Susan Miller, who was certainly not being paid at an executive level, although she certainly did quite a bit of executive-type work.

Evans: This is Susan Miller, for the record, who was the board's staff secretary at this time.

Gill: Right. I don't know what subsequent presidents have done to have a presence here in the office when they were not immediately available.

Relationships and Roles

Evans: The seventies were a time that the club started spending more time focusing on the tenure of the people, the roles they were serving. This was also the time that the Clair Tappan Lodge committee had some new leadership. Do you think there was a trend for the board to make people's tenure shorter?

Gill: Yes. And this was at the council's urging, I think probably after my time on it--the setting of some kind of term limitation. It was during this time that the term limitation on board members and the automatic sabbatical every seventh year was put in place. The whole notion was that there should be some turnover in these jobs that you should move people into leadership positions through some sort of training role and experience, but then you open up top positions by moving leaders out at some point. I think the same time limit was at that point applied to committee chairs and maybe even committee members. Stewart Kimball, I think, was--

Evans: He had been the outings committee chair for many years.

Gill: --the outings committee chair for many years, and it was during that time that he finally relinquished that role and new people were brought in. But that was certainly not just in the outings program but in other kinds of club operations as well. And limited tenure seemed to me like a good idea.

Evans: When you were president of the club, I recall some tensions between the staff and the volunteers, possibly at the professional level staff, but probably through staff. Could you talk a little bit about this?

Gill: My guess is that ever since the Sierra Club has had any significant number of staff that that tension has been present. And I think it probably is still present to some extent. In fact, I can think of some recent examples as well as some historic ones. This is a price I think we pay for a healthy volunteer movement. It seems to me that we've been able to attract staff people who are deeply committed to what they're doing and are very good at their work.

Staff members are not only knowledgeable about the issues, but they're knowledgeable about how to go about affecting a change or

developing a program that would produce a positive result. On the other hand, you have people in volunteer leadership roles who have responsibilities for these same issues who are also knowledgeable and skillful. So it seems to me there is bound to be some tension. And I always saw this tension as productive rather than unproductive and tried to channel it in productive directions.

It seems to me in the final analysis, staff has to take the policy calls from the volunteer decision-making leadership. And I haven't seen very many cases where that wasn't true. In the final analysis, staff people would either do what the club had asked them to do or they'd seek employment elsewhere. There may have been a very few cases where dissatisfaction very well may have caused staff to seek other places to carry out their environmental interests.

But with that as kind of a bottom line, it seems to me that if there is some tension between those two elements, that can be designed to somehow heighten the efforts on both people's parts. At least, that's the philosophy I worked on.

Price of Commitment to Sierra Club for Volunteers and Staff

Evans: Do you think that as an organization we expect too much from our volunteers? Do we expect too much from our staff?

Gill: Well, yes. I think we expect too much of both, because we have such high expectations. We expect more of ourselves as individuals than we can probably expect to carry out. And that must be frustrating at times, particularly for the paid staff people. You really don't contract for more than eight hours of their day, and yet in many cases they put in more hours a day than that and then attend meetings on the weekends which is when the volunteers can come.

So I've always tried to be appreciative of the work the staff people do and understanding about their discomfort when the expectations are higher than can be reasonably met. Yet you don't want to say, "Well, don't do it," because it so desperately needs to be done.

And for volunteers who have other full-time jobs, the same thing is true of them. Much of the volunteer work is done after hours and on weekends. All the weekends I've spent in Sierra Club meetings with all these other folks, we have to realize that all these people are putting in one seven-day week on top of another one, which is pretty grueling.

Evans: Do you think the club needs to spread around some of its volunteer roles, its major committee roles, so that, for instance, a director who lives in Alabama or Ohio doesn't have to come to San Francisco three weeks out of four? Is there something that could solve the problem?

Gill: San Francisco or somewhere else.

Evans: Or somewhere else.

Gill: You know, I've had two Sierra Club weekends in a row, and I saw Sandy Tepfer at both of these. Well, sure, I think some spreading around would be good. For instance, the notion of limiting the length of time people can stay in jobs--the board limit of six years on and you have to take a year off. The members last year rejected the notion of two years off. That principle seems entirely sound to me. The board itself needs to spread around its roles, and I don't think they do that well enough, and I know we had that problem when I was president. You know, there are the eager beavers that will take on more, and there are the people who are either shrinking violets who won't step out and take on these roles.

And I think that same principle needs to apply at the committee level, regional conservation groups, even probably at chapters. Burnout is a real problem that we've encountered. We've really worn out both staff and volunteer people. The rather gloomy record of broken marriages both during and after their terms among Sierra Club presidents I think is a suggestion of the fact that we do expect too much.

Evans: Well, Douglas Scott, who's leaving the club's employ as associate executive director, has been on the staff for seventeen years. And before that he was with the Wilderness Society. And I wouldn't be surprised if burnout isn't one of the factors in his seeking some other lifestyle.

Gill: The San Juan Islands will probably look very good after all these years in Washington and San Francisco in an urban setting.

The number of Sierra Club folks who are urban residents is interesting to me. I would be interested in the percentages, and I don't have them. Perhaps people who live where the needs are the greatest maybe tend to be the ones who join the Sierra Club. You know, the urban environment is the one that is the farthest gone, so to speak. Although many of the Sierra Club interests are not in the cities. The traditional ones have been out in the country.

Evans: And we have city members who are very eager to work on saving the nation's forests or their parks when they're a long way from them.

Gill: Exactly. Of course, I presume a lot of those folks are forest and park users on occasion.

Evans: On occasion, yes. [Laughter]

Gill: Maybe on many occasions.

Nature of Club Leadership

Evans: One of the other things that you wanted to talk about was the nature of the club leadership, which is very diverse and probably comes from all parts of the spectrum of society.

Gill: Well, it may not. But there are some characteristics that I can probably talk about a little bit having worked with a lot of these folks. In the first place, I suppose it would be fair to admit that it hasn't always been easy to work with Sierra Club leaders.

Sierra Club people, because of the kind of dedication that it takes to get to a leadership position, tend to be very effective, but also very uncompromising. They have their principles and their interests, and they're very reluctant to give in on those. To the point that deliberative bodies in the Sierra Club--from chapter ex coms to Sierra Club Council to Sierra Club Board of Directors--can have very, shall I say, dynamic meetings, strongly expressed opinions, strongly held opinions, reluctance to give in.

I think I tended to play my role in the Sierra Club in terms of trying to mediate some of these differences that have occurred. I did not have a pet conservation issue. And I hope that my contribution to the Sierra Club and my limited opportunity to be of help was in terms of getting competing interests together, solving problems where folks were of different points of view. And as I say, that wasn't always easy.

I can remember being entirely fatigued at the end of a board meeting. I felt like I had been sitting on a volcano for a day and a half. And it might have exploded at any minute, and if we got through to the adjournment without the explosion, I felt that we had a very successful meeting.

Evans: Were there any particular problems you can think of that you thought really explosive?

Gill: Well, I think most of the things we've already talked about. Oftentimes there would be problems involving personalities, which of course in public sessions are very difficult to deal with because you need to avoid naming names, and yet everybody knows the name that goes with the charge of incompetence or intractability.

Perceptions of the Sierra Club: A Positive for Every Negative

Evans: Kent, you've been a member of the Sierra Club for a long time and it's changed a lot, but I suspect that the public's perception of the club is never accurate as to what it is. Could you talk about this a bit?

Gill: I've been in a position to be in touch with the views the outsiders have of Sierra Club, and it might be fun to look at some of these perceptions, some of which I think probably are fair and some of which probably are unreasonable.

The Sierra Club is very frequently characterized as being a negative organization. "You're always against everything. Why aren't you ever for anything?" And so a number of times when I've made public presentations for the Sierra Club, I've tried to head off and block that kind of criticism by pointing out that if you oppose a dam, you're for a river; if you're against a clear-cut, you're for a forest; if you're against a road, you're for a wilderness or a park. In other words, trying to point out that at times when we're negative on development proposals, that that really is being positive. And that point has been well received, even if reluctantly in some cases.

I run into the charge that the Sierra Club is a radical outfit. And I've always been glad that there were environmental groups that were more radical than we so we can project a somewhat more middle-of-the-road kind of image. You know, if Earth First didn't exist, we might have to invent one, because we really are more "reasonable" than they are.

It seems to me the Sierra Club has always been for change, but change in an orderly way. We depend heavily on legislation. We seek changes through the courts. And I don't know how anybody can argue against those kinds of actions. Those are in the best tradition of the way the American society has performed. Even within the club we tend to use democratic procedures to decide what we're going to do, how much of it we're going to do.

And so it seems to me that it would really be unfair for people to charge us with being radicals. Some of the anecdotes that I've mentioned today have demonstrated that people perceive us as being unreasonable, that we won't compromise; we're never satisfied; we're implacable in the face of some kind of a problem. And once again, I've always tried to block those criticisms by suggesting that we're always involved in the give-and-take of a legislative process. The whole point of lobbying is you make your position as strongly as you can, but you assume that the result is probably going to be somewhat less, because there are competing interests that have to be reflected as well.

I've always thought that it was a mistake for the Sierra Club to compromise too much, that we should establish a principle, a position based on that principle, and then we should hold firmly to that. Then people who are elected to legislative office or who sit as judges are the ones who have to make the compromise. Sierra Club has a role. That role is to present an environmental position as strongly as it can. Congressmen have a role. It's their role to mediate competing interests. So it's not incumbent upon us to compromise, and the compromise comes at some other level. And that's how I've answered the argument against being unreasonable.

Sometimes we're criticized as being amateurs. This very morning on the television there was a discussion of a current California ballot measure. This gentleman was maintaining that the environmentalists, which in California include a very active group of Sierra Club people, are simply misinformed. We must be uninformed to maintain that we need to be doing things about toxicity in our environment, about global warming, about the ozone layer problem, because those are really not even factual. In other words, we're just naive amateurs rumbling around here basing our actions on partial fact or falsehood.

Sometimes I think those charges could be made. We don't always have enough information. We're not all experts. So it's incumbent on us to seek the best kind of information we can, to study the issues as thoroughly as we can, and then to present as professional and accurate a view as possible. But most of the time I think the Sierra Club is pretty well prepared.

Evans: You know where the word *amateur* comes from don't you?

Gill: What?

Evans: Latin: *amo*, *amas*, *amat*, someone who loves what they're doing, I suspect. They do it for the love of it and not for remuneration, I'm guessing.

Gill: I glad to have a Latin scholar in my presence here.

Then there have been those that say we hide behind procedure and regulations too much, that we use bureaucratic dodges to get our way, we use court injunctions to block forest cutting or some sort of a development, that we use the bureaucracy to our advantage, and we go to court and get some impractical, unknowledgeable judge to rule in our favor. And the only response I can give to people who see the Sierra Club as relying too much on bureaucracy and procedure is that that's the way our society is set up. And we take advantage of what things in the society will work. I think we do those things, and I don't apologize for them.

Now frequently, people say--particularly Sierra Club folks--that we try to do too many things with too little resources, and I won't try to argue that one.

Some see the Sierra Club as this monolithic organization that issues these edicts out of Polk Street in San Francisco, and devil take the poor man. It seems to me in this campaign on the California environmental initiatives, there's been that kind of a allegation.

For instance, there was a charge this morning that the Sierra Club was financed with Rockefeller Foundation money. And we may have taken Rockefeller Foundation money, but we also take \$35 from each dues-paying member. And so when people argue that we're a top-down organization, it seems to me they're just dead wrong; that we do have an elected board, and this board is responsive to the membership by virtue of what the chapters say to the board, in terms of what the council says to the board, what the RCCs say, what the members say with their votes. It's not a small clique run out of this symbolic "Mills Tower," but it really is a democratic organization that works from the bottom up. And people who charge us with being an elitist kind of a group, it seems to me, fail to recognize that.

Now on the charge that we're economically elite or socially elite, I suppose we are subject to that charge. Our studies of our own membership suggest that we certainly have above average income on the whole. We're somewhat embarrassed to admit that once upon a time we had sponsorship requirements for membership. Even at one time you had to have two people sign for you before you were allowed to come into the Sierra Club. We tend to live in upper-middle class neighborhoods, and we tend to be professional and managerial in occupations. So I suppose that in some ways we are that kind of an elite. We probably could cite our efforts to expand our membership and maybe answer the question a little bit that way.

Then we're oftentimes charged with being elitist in terms of the fact that we want to preserve the wilderness for our own playground, and that we're doing this in ways that's harmful to other people, that we want to save the old growth forests and thus deny the logger and the lumber worker a job.

Evans: After we build our redwood decks. [Laughter]

Gill: Yes, do we dare admit that John Muir lived in an all redwood house? [Laughter] And we use our redwood hot tubs, you know. And I suppose once again, we would have to admit that to some extent that charge may be true. But when you look at a lot of the environmental issues that we work with, you know bad air affects everybody. And water pollution affects everybody. And toxic wastes affect everybody. And so as we moved away from our traditional issues of wilderness and parks, it seems to me the charge is much less likely to hold water. It's much less likely to hold water in the energy field than it is in wilderness protection; although I presume if you really did a study, probably Sierra Club people use more than the average amount of petroleum, too.

Evans: Well, a lot of us don't even own cars.

Gill: Good for you!

As I said earlier, the price you pay for democratic organization is spending a lot of time in hotel rooms. You have to thrash through all these things. In retrospect, it seems to me the time we spent on studying and trying to come up with a proposal for changes in our organization maybe wasn't wasted even though there wasn't a lot of change, simply because the decision not to change was deliberate, and then we put that behind us and decided we're going to make do with what we had.

There are a lot of strengths in the organization the way it is now. It does have a very strong grass roots component. Even though my little local group is just as defunct as it can be at this point--I hope that isn't true in too many places--and chapters do tend to operate sometimes better and sometimes not quite so well. Basically the club is able to carry on and involve people and identify priority issues clearly. And so the organization we have I think works. We do get changes in the board which result in changes in policy. We have people rejected as board candidates because their position is not accepted by the members. You know, the whole thing of one-issue candidate that we've had several times in the eighties is a good example of that. And I think in almost every case they've been rejected. So the members have not gone for whatever the special issue was. It was too narrowly based somehow.

Weaknesses in Sierra Club Organization

Evans: You talked about the strengths of the club. Is now the time to talk about what weaknesses you perceive, or do you want to leave that until later in the discussion?

Gill: Yes, we can go ahead and talk about that a little bit. Well we're very slow moving. It takes a tremendous amount of time for a decision to run back through this whole Byzantine organization, which does, of course, sometimes require that when emergencies occur the system be short-circuited and somebody, a president or an executive director, make a tough decision and then hope that it's supported.

I suppose the amount of money and effort we expend on superstructure, on organizational stuff, is something of a disadvantage. I'm sure Sierra Club leaders may be a bit envious when they look, say, at an outfit like the Wilderness Society where the decisions can be made fairly cleanly and they don't have to pay too much attention to member opinion. When you join the Wilderness Society, you buy into a program and the people who run it.

Evans: It's certainly a staff-dominated organization.

Gill: Yes, I think so. I presume there's a role for the officers, but I'm not even sure how they get elected or selected. Anyway, in the Sierra Club we just have to go through all this "democratic" process. And if an emergency presents itself, then we do have a mechanism to get a quick decision, but then that decision has to stand the scrutiny of a board of directors sometime following. If they don't like it they can scold the person who made it. So I'm sure we would at sometimes wish we had a simple organization with less need to go through all these machinations. But, you see, that's also strength, the fact that a lot of people have an opportunity to be involved in a decision.

Evans: I think that takes us into another question I wanted to ask you. The Sierra Club, among the major organizations, is the one organization that is dominated by its volunteers, not by its staff. Could you comment on your view of the club structure, not in a structure sense, but the way the club works as a volunteer organization and whether you think it is better or whether its values are better than the other organizations?

Gill: Well I didn't choose the Sierra Club on the rational basis that it was a volunteer-run organization. I suppose that I was pleased when I discovered that it really was. I came to the Sierra Club as my environmental affiliation--and I think I may have alluded to

this before--by virtue of my good friendship with Herb Kariel in Oregon and his constant reminders to me that the Sierra Club was a really good outfit. It was only after I got involved in it a while that I really realized that the Sierra Club was run from the bottom up rather than the top down.

The volunteer-staff dichotomy is always a source of tension, it seems to me. You want to hire strong-minded, very capable people to serve in your paid positions. Certainly the presidents and many of the people who serve on the board are equally strong-minded for the things they believe in and for the solutions they see to problems. So it seems to me we've always experienced this tension between the two phases, two elements of the club.

Evans: Do you think it's positive?

Gill: Well, I've tended to view it that way, but I could think of examples where it probably didn't work out too well.

Sierra Club Leaders and Leadership Styles

Evans: You were on the board and you were president in the 1970s which was a very strong environmental decade, but there were some changes that took place in the club at the time. Dr. Wayburn, of course, was active as president in the sixties and was still on the board in the seventies. Can we talk a little bit about him and about some of the other leaders of the seventies, club leaders that you worked with?

Gill: Sure. There will be some personalities that come very swiftly to mind. I suppose first I would mention Dick Leonard, who of course is the honorary president of the club now, and in those days was already sort of a senior person, not carrying a lot of day-to-day responsibilities in the club, but a person--

Evans: He was honorary vice-president at the time, wasn't he?

Gill: Probably, yes. And during some of that time I think he actually was on the board. But I just remember Dick so fondly in terms of what a warm, supporting person he always was, yet he was so strongly principled about the importance of environmental action. As a model of philosophy, he was very important to many of us and, I trust, probably even to the current generation of Sierra Club people.

Ed [Wayburn] is probably a good example of the Sierra Club following the personal interests of leaders, because several of the issues that Ed was so deeply concerned about became priorities that the Sierra Club, in following his leadership, mounted major campaigns for and succeeded.

We could mention the Alaska issue, which really pertains up to this time, although the big legislative battle in Congress was resolved a good many years ago now. Then there was Ed's interest in the redwoods. The Sierra Club mounted a campaign with other groups and other interests as well, but the Redwood National Park in whatever fractured state it's in did result. And then, of course, the whole urban park movement maybe springs from Ed's interest in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area here in the Bay Area, which was, of course, another campaign that was successfully waged.

Evans: And that park will be twenty years old this year.

Gill: Isn't that amazing?

Evans: It is.

Gill: A lot of this has to do with Ed's ability to make connections with influential people in Congress. Phil Burton, a San Francisco Congressman, may be notable among those. So Ed is an interesting model of leadership where strong personal interests carried the club in an important direction, I suspect.

Evans: Well, there's also the continuity of leadership. I mean, Ed's involvement in Alaska early on. There's been a major Alaska battle in the last year or so which Ed was involved in. So you have the continuity of interest and leadership; it means you don't have to retrain someone to get to the next step of the battle.

Gill: I imagine that's a real strength to the Sierra Club.

We probably ought to mention in reviewing leaders of the seventies what was sometimes affectionately and sometimes not so affectionately called the Southern Mafia. I hope these gentlemen will not take umbrage at that term. We had coming to the Sierra Club board in the seventies a group of very strong people from the South. Bill Futrell, who was an attorney. Ted Snyder, who we referred to as a country lawyer out of South Carolina. And Denny Shaffer, a businessman out of North Carolina. All of these gentlemen eventually ended up as club presidents. Very different in some ways in terms of style, but each a very strong personality. I don't think it would be quite fair to characterize them as carrying out narrowly personal agendas as Sierra Club presidents.

It seems to me they were attempting to make the club as strong as it could, yet part of that involved an expression of themselves as well, I think.

Evans: I think all three of them were very much involved in the formation of new chapters--Bill in the formation of the Chattahoochee Chapter or--. I've lost track of which ones they were. But he was very instrumental in chapter formation as was Denny Shaffer, and so was Ted.

Gill: Ted had a lot of grass roots connections. And you'll recall Ted led that Congaree Swamp campaign in South Carolina that did eventually end up to the area's benefit.

Evans: Bill Futrell was very instrumental in the creation of the Delta Chapter, which started out as a group attached to the Lone Star Chapter. And Ted was very involved in the formation of the LeConte Chapter. I believe Denny Shaffer was one of the first people his chapter sent to meetings out here. I think part of it had to do with the fact that when these chapters were being formed there were very few members, so there were strong personalities around which the chapters were built.

Gill: Snyder succeeded Futrell as president, and I think there was, maybe Joe Fontaine from California before we went to Denny Schaffer. It certainly seems to me that they illustrate the growing national nature of the Sierra Club, probably accurately depicted as a California-based organization up through the early seventies. But with these three terms of non-Californians as president in the later seventies, it seems to me clearer that we have to be considered a national organization.

Each of these people, by the way, having come out of their own Sierra Club chapters, having been instrumental in getting them going, really do reflect a grass-roots kind of character to the Sierra Club. And maybe there's some friction between the notion of these people representing grass-roots interests in their strong presidencies, but my guess is that that flow is fairly natural.

Evans: I think it's interesting that Futrell was basically supportive of the council and Denny Shaffer came from the council, but Ted did not. Ted almost came directly as an RCC person, I believe.

Gill: I believe so. And out of conservation rather than organizational interests.

Evans: Which is interesting, because Bill Futrell had been involved in several conservation issues. Ted was involved in the Congaree. But Denny came forth initially mostly an organizational person,

bringing in membership and in finance. So he's been very active in the political issues with the club.

You mentioned these three following your presidency, but there was a president between you and them, Brant Calkin. As I recall, that was--if you care to talk about it--there was a compromise here in terms of who was going to be president that year. Do you remember that?

Gill: I don't remember the details of that, but the Sierra Club presidency is frequently a matter of compromise. I don't know whether other presidents have talked about the May meetings and the pre-meetings, where this matter of the presidency is always hashed out, but we frequently have the pre-meeting or retreat of some kind away from the city. I remember one over on Mount Tam particularly where there are little--I'm trying to think of a word--little political gatherings, little rump sessions--

Evans: Caucuses.

Gill: Caucuses maybe is the good word, trying to decide where to go with the presidency. We've tended once we elect a president to give him a second year, so the second year usually isn't controversial. But the first one typically is, and the Sierra Club presidency is not who's available so much as it is the result of some sort of compromise. There may be two strong candidates, and then somebody else emerges as somebody that's acceptable to both sides. So there's a lot of politicking and give and take involved.

I don't recall a lot of the details of Brant's succession to the presidency, and he didn't stay long.

You know, one of the leaders I remember from the late sixties and seventies is Dick Sill, who of course is deceased now.

Evans: Would you like to talk about his role?

Gill: Killed in the line of duty, I guess. Wasn't he flying his airplane on a Sierra Club mission at the time he was killed?

Dick was frequently in a very decided minority on the board. He came from Nevada, a physics professor, and was well-informed on nuclear issues by virtue of his profession. He was looked to by Sierra Club people as somebody to help advise us on our opposition to nuclear energy as an energy source.

Evans: Probably, I don't remember.

Gill: Yes. But he also had a strong interest in organization. And he wrote the famous document in Sierra Club history known as *The Future of the Sierra Club*, published at his own expense, I believe.

Evans: With a yellow cover.

Gill: Yellow cover, and so we referred to it as the "yellow peril," in which he made some fairly radical proposals about Sierra Club organization, most of which were I think not viewed very positively. I remember innumerable votes where Dick would be all by himself in a minority or maybe with one or two other people. I would think that service on the board must have been very frustrating for him, because he really was not in the mainstream of Sierra Club thought at that point but was nevertheless diligent in pursuing his principles.

Evans: There was another very colorful director, a purist who was on the board during your tenure, and that's Martin Litton. Could you talk about Mr. Litton a bit?

Gill: Yes, Mr. Litton was a wonderful gentleman. He was a journalist?

Evans: He worked with *Sunset* magazine at one time.

Gill: Worked for *Sunset* magazine, but I think his real love was the Grand Canyon, and he initiated dory expeditions through the canyon which he operated for many years.

Evans: Grand Canyon Dorries.

Gill: In fact, the dories are still operated through there, but probably he's no longer involved.

Evans: He sold the operation and he has another business now.

Gill: Yes, he was an environmental purist, I think. He was a spokesperson for the cleanest kind of a solution to environmental problems. He frequently expressed a notion that if human beings were defiling a place, then the human beings had to go. And, of course, it's a little difficult given the nature of us humans to close us out of everywhere. But he would have had us out of the Grand Canyon probably, certainly out of the wilderness. It was probably important to have a voice like that on the board.

Evans: He used to turn the lights off at board meetings because he thought they were unnecessary.

Gill: That's right, because they were burning energy unnecessarily. I think Dick Sill did that at some point, too.

Evans: Oh, did he?

Gill: Yes.

Evans: I remember meeting at what was then the Jack Tar Hotel in that room that was almost all windows, and Martin would go turn the lights off.

Gill: Well, we had plenty of light coming in through all those windows, so why not? [Laughter]

Evans: Are there any other leaders of the seventies you can think of that you'd like to comment on? Both staff or volunteer

Gill: You know, it's dangerous, because you're going to leave out somebody who's very obvious and important.

Evans: Well, obviously they either touched you in some way or they didn't.

Gill: Right. That's what we're looking for.

Evans: That's probably the criteria.

Gill: Well, I should say a little more about Susan Miller, a staff person, the one who served as my assistant here at the office during the time I was president. Very dedicated to the Sierra Club, to environmental issues, and certainly one who was extremely important to me to help me carry the burdens of that office. I worried about the fact that I put too much on her and asked her to work too hard, but she was always a real good sport about that and was extremely helpful. I've been interested to see her involved subsequently in real honest-to-goodness environmental issues rather than the health and welfare of the Sierra Club.

Evans: She served a number of years as a volunteer, as a strong volunteer for the Hawaii Chapter, and you may know she now works for NRDC [Natural Resources Defense Council] as their primary staff person in Hawaii. She's not the only personnel. I know there are I think three or four people on the staff.

Gill: So she's gotten to stay in environmental work.

Evans: She has, and of course, what she learned during her years in the club, I think, in terms of organizational skills have carried her well into her current vocation.

Gill: Let me say a little bit also about Washington staff during those years. Our Washington staff seems to come and go a lot. And I'm sure the Washington office is a stepping stone in environmental

employment. And I don't know that I even want to mention people specifically. I just remember very fondly and proudly the kind of service those people performed.

I got an opportunity to go back and actually work the halls of Congress a little bit with them, and that was really just an extraordinary experience to see the dedication and the expertise and the energy and the amount of time that those people took. We weren't paying them near enough, of course, for the kind of service they were doing, but maybe you don't ever pay enough for that kind of thing. Very long hours and very careful study, careful analysis of the personalities involved and the opportunities that were available, and then really working on those. So I think it's important that we all recognize that kind of expertise.

Evans: Well, some of the people like Brock Evans went on to Audubon. Doug Scott of course, was at the Wilderness Society and came to the Sierra Club. He worked for the Sierra Club for a while first, didn't he?

Gill: Doug, I think, came out of the Northwest office to Washington.

Evans: He came out of the Northwest office. Linda Billings went to EPA after she left the club.

Gill: Linda's one of those that I remember very distinctly and individually as one of these really strong, dedicated people.

Evans: And Russ Shay now works-- . I don't know whether he worked in Washington that long, but Russ Shay now works for Senator Wirth. So there is a transition.

Gill: And John McComb, of course, came out of the Southwest Regional Office and came to the Washington office sort of towards the end of the time that I was involved. Really good people, and insofar as those people went on to other organizations it seems to me the Sierra Club played a role in their development, and we can be pleased with that contribution as well.

The Power of Economic Considerations

Gill: I guess one of the truths I discovered in Sierra Club work is the overwhelming importance of economic considerations. All too often the profit and loss statement or the ability to make something come out even seems to dictate what the environmental conclusion will be. In other words, a degradation of a natural area will result

because economics requires this development or negative economic factors preclude its being protected in some way. I guess I hadn't realized this truth in American society--my textbooks never taught me that; maybe life's experiences should have but hadn't earlier--of the overwhelming importance of economic factors in all kinds of human decisions.

Evans: Maybe sometimes if we have the resources to do our own economic work we could disprove some of the things that are set against us; because in some cases like ballot measures, one side says it's going to cost too much, but the health costs or other costs are never really developed well enough by the environmental groups.

Gill: Yes, and you see, one of the things is we are limited by our economic resources to develop the data. I've also been interested, say, in the Nature Conservancy approach, where they actually develop resources that allow them to purchase pieces of property. And, of course, that's something we've seldom had the resources to do nor the will to do, probably. And then they bus those properties off to some public agency and recycle the funds in order to do another job like that. I guess my sense is that that's probably an important adjunct to the environmental movement, to have a group like that that seem to have access to some very significant sums of money that they can use this way and then act as holding agents until a public agency can come up with the wherewithal to procure some of these places.

One of the things from my years in Davis politics, which I don't think I'd ever learned in academic contexts--maybe you have to learn this sort of thing from experience--was the overwhelming power of economic forces in political decisions. And I think that's one of the problems the Sierra Club always runs up against. There is so much power behind the economic interests in the interests of developers that it is really tough to counter them. And I originally encountered that on the city council.

People would come in with subdivision proposals. And of course there is tremendous profit to be gained, and therefore a tremendous economic power. And even a city council that was really trying to slow down growth would find itself just swept away with these things.

Well, one of the things we did while I was on city council was to approve a very large annexation to the city on the theory that it was better to have the growth take place within the city boundaries under its control than it was to be a suburban growth under county, rules which at that time were pretty loose.

Well, that area is finally twenty-five years later, nearly all urban, all developed. It did grow very slowly. I think there may be one or two big farms left within this space. I don't know how those people felt paying city taxes all this time. But it was a technique for slowing down growth, but the juggernaut of economic pressure was behind all this. I suppose we could have tried to fly in the face of facts, but it seemed that Davis was going to grow. The university was making policy that said it was going to grow, therefore the people that are needed to serve it have to be housed locally, and that means you need shopping centers to serve them, et cetera.

To translate this to my Sierra Club experience: the Sierra Club is always standing in the way of the economic juggernaut, trying to stop it or slow it down. One of the reasons we don't always prevail is the fact that there is terrific pressure from the economic interests. I am surprised, for instance, that we have so far managed to stop this Arctic Wildlife Range Oil drilling, because of the economic pressure from the oil companies. They have the direct line to the president these days. And people criticize us sometimes for taking advantage of parliamentary maneuvers.

Evans: You do what you can.

Gill: You do it however you can, right.

Evans: I thought you meant internally within the club.

Gill: No, no, I was thinking more of us against the outside world, because the economic interests want more oil wells and open pit mining and urban sprawl. You know, the economics point in those directions, and it's up to people like the Sierra Club folks to hoist some flags of danger.

So when I came to the club presidency, I had made this personal discovery about the inexorability of economic forces--not in any defeatist fashion, because I think we still have to try.

And then also I held the notion of respect for all the interests. You know, I can remember those long, difficult sessions at board meetings where somebody else would raise a hand and want to talk on an issue, and the time was getting away from us and it was time to come to a vote, and I had to make the decision about hearing one more voice on this issue. And I tried to make the judgment as to whether or not it was going to be a different point of view, a new point of view.

If someone had another idea, then it had to be heard in spite of the fact that we were running out of our weekend of time and

needed to get on with the last items of business. That meant trying to structure an agenda so the more important things came first. And I think there is an art to agenda making. [Laughter] You can influence results by whether you put things when people are fresh or when they're fatigued. Unfortunately, some of these financial crisis sessions took the entire amount of time and we were fatigued before we finally got to the decision making on issues. Sometimes those decisions weren't as good probably as they should have been.

IV ISSUES--PRIORITIES AND RESOLUTION

Yosemite

- Evans: Kent, I know you have deep interests in Yosemite and the Sierra. Could you talk about your interests in the Sierra, Yosemite, and the park system and your involvement in these issues over your tenure in the club?
- Gill: That's a tall order. I've spent five summer backpack trips into the north part of Yosemite, many trips into other parts. I've spent a lot of time in Yosemite National Park. It is one of the dearest, grandest places on earth for me. As I mentioned to you earlier today, I want to emphasize to you who worked on Yosemite issues, that it is extraordinarily important to me that the Sierra Club exercise the most responsible kind of stewardship that they can and work for what is best for that place.
- Evans: And you've been an active as a regular volunteer for at least the last two summers at LeConte Memorial [in Yosemite], which is very important to the club's public relations program.
- Gill: Right. My wife and I have much enjoyed since we retired coming down to spend a week or two at Yosemite each year, to greet the public, present evening programs there, and do Sierra Club outreach.
- Evans: What was your first introduction to Yosemite?
- Gill: In 1950 I visited Mesa Verde National Park in southern Colorado, and as my bride and I sat on the porch one afternoon at the lodge, there was this very impressive group of gentlemen sitting nearby, widely traveled, as it turned out. They had been "everywhere," four or five national parks each. We were very impressed. And

they were talking about their favorite park. One's favorite was the Grand Canyon and another one's favorite was Yellowstone.

And these are all very wonderful places, but the consensus they reached that afternoon was that Yosemite was the absolutely prime place in the national parks system. And their reason for choosing this, based on what seemed to me to be extraordinarily wide experience, was that it had so many different values, such a variety. There are wonderful forests, that marvelous valley with the huge cliffs and the waterfalls, and the beautiful high country. There's a litany of things you could list.

And certainly that's been our experience there. And so we are so very concerned with what happens to it. Three million people, they say, will visit it this year. And most of those three million people come to the valley only.

Evans: Which is only seven square miles.

Gill: Almost all of the people who come to Yosemite come to the valley, even though they go somewhere else, too. So what happens there and how that place is managed is so terribly important. Sierra Club folks generally and certainly those here in California particularly participated in the 1970s in that massive public input series that the Park service ran about how we wanted our park managed.

And as a result of that, this general management plan was developed that really did call for a reduction in the cars, in the one-way traffic and the bus system. But also a reduction in the number of overnight places and better control of the traffic, both automobile traffic and foot traffic. And there was just a whole list of things that were going to make the valley less heavily impacted by this large number of people. It was also gradually going to change our habits in how we use Yosemite, because we weren't going to have that private car to go everywhere. And, of course, Americans are so attached; it's almost like the auto is an extension of their own bodies.

However, by 1990 only small parts of that general management plan have been put into effect. As of last summer when we were there, the Park service, through at least semi-official channels, was issuing apologies for why they weren't going to be able to do a lot of these things. "There wasn't enough money," and "it wasn't possible," and other excuses.

So I'm very anxious that the Sierra Club be in the forefront in protectorship of a place that they've been so long identified with and involved with by seeing that general management plan through to some kind of fruition. That certainly means the

reduction of a number of overnight spaces. For instance, after having been there two years now as volunteers and living in Lower River Campground, we think Lower River Campground should be abandoned. Absolutely the whole thing should be removed. That would at least be the 17 percent reduction in overnight spaces in camping. The very ground and river bank are worn out.

Now this poses a real problem, because during the time we were there in September, that campground was mostly full most nights. On weekends it was absolutely 100 percent full. So there are people who want to come. Now I, for one, am going to volunteer to take my turn for a chance at Yosemite if I have to, but I don't know whether other people are willing to do that or not. You know, if you want to go to Yosemite, you want to go. You don't want to wait until your turn comes up in a lottery or you get put on a waiting list. And yet, if the place is so popular, maybe some sort of a phasing of the visitation there is important. Now, they tell us that a couple of times they've actually put into effect the ban on day use.

Evans: It's when so many vehicles are in the park. I think it's 5,000.

Gill: There aren't any parking places, yes.

Evans: They stop it for a number of hours.

Gill: So they have tended to turn people away on very limited occasions, and we wonder if maybe some things like that aren't going to have to happen more. Now one of the problems, of course, is do you also reduce the number of spaces the concessionaire has?

Evans: That is part of the plan. That's what the 17 percent reduction is, actually. I think it's in accommodations--

Gill: I do too. I think it's not in campgrounds.

Evans: There is supposed to be a campground reduction with some of those sites moving into the higher country, so it would not be a total reduction, but just moving.

Gill: You know, the Merced River frontage in the upper end of Yosemite Valley is extremely heavily impacted. And we really ought to get the campsites back from that river's edge. Now I don't know whether the Park service has this in mind or not, but--

Evans: They're aware of the impact. I think studies have shown there's a problem.

Gill: And in fact, I understand the Park service is going to try to do some river bank restoration in the near future, and that's highly desirable because it's in bad shape. You know, we were there in the fall, and so you've got all that river bank exposed, because the water's very low. And it is just awful. The erosion is setting in and tree roots are showing in all kinds of places. Clearly the river is widening in places, and yet there sits Housekeeping Camp, right on the prime river site, as does the Lower River Campground--Upper River, too.

You know, maybe at least we ought to pull that riverfront row of campsites out. So somehow an outfit like the Sierra Club--and I'm sure lots of other organizations need to be concerned and interested in Yosemite--they have to do some real good work in encouraging the Park service to carry out their plan, maybe plus doing even some more. I don't know.

Evans: What is your opinion about why the GMP hasn't been implemented?

Gill: Well, I'm sure part of it's fiscal, but I think it's a lack of will. I have to fault the Park service officials down there. I don't think they've been at all diligent about moving forward on that. My own sense is that they could have put some of that plan into effect. There are parts of the plan that don't require a lot of money. Granted, budgets have been lower. I'm just appalled at what they've done to their interpretive program.

Evans: It's been decimated.

Gill: Yes, absolutely decimated. I had students down there the last year I worked, and one evening the only evening program in the whole valley was at Yosemite Lodge. I did not troop my kids all the way over to Yosemite Lodge to see that. The night before we paid to have them participate in the--

Evans: Lee Stetson?

Gill: Yes, the one about the Hetch Hetchy.

Evans: "A Conversation with the Tramp," you mean?

Gill: "A Conversation with the Tramp." That's the one. We paid our \$3.00 or whatever the admission was, but the next night we didn't get to go to a campfire program. And yet I remember when my children were small we went to a campfire program every night we were in Yosemite and we went on ranger hikes, and that was an extraordinary part of these kids' upbringing.

Evans: Well, Mike Findlay, the superintendent, says that some nights in the summer he has one naturalist program for 7,000 visitors in the valley.

Gill: See, that's why I would argue that our LeConte programs ought to be advertised more heavily. We might get more people there than we wanted, but somehow the things that the Sierra Club does at LeConte Lodge deserve to be called to the attention of the visitors. You said that you thought sometimes they had been, and it may be that we don't get our copy in on time.

Evans: Yes.

Gill: But the park visitor deserves to know that that's available.

Evans: I think Yosemite in many ways as a very visible park is the bellwether of what happens in other units of the parks system. And what happens when the Yosemite concession contracts are renewed in '93, I think it is, will certainly have an impact. But there are other contracts that are up for renewal in the next three or four years.

Gill: Yes, in the meantime or coincidentally.

Evans: Yosemite's contract renewal is up in the next few years. Do you have any sense about what might come out of that as someone who's in the park fairly frequently? Or what you would hope to come out of it?

Gill: Well, I understand Superintendent Findlay at Yosemite has said that they're going to be lots of tougher bargainers this time around. And it seems to me that's absolutely the least for us to expect. I don't think I carry a big brief against Yosemite Park and Curry Company. When I go there I use their services extensively, and it's not a badly run operation. But you see, last year there was the rumor that they wanted--and I guess probably more than a rumor--that they wanted to establish an employee housing center in the park to replace the tent cabins that their employees presently use.

Evans: They have some somewhat substandard wooden--

Gill: Yes, and I would recognize that their housing units are substandard. But the idea of housing all those people in the middle of the park in the middle of the valley does not seem to me to be a good use of that space. Just as I'm not sure that Lower River Campground is a good use of that space either. I guess I'd be willing to forego both of those.

The concessionaire/Park service relationship there, though, does bother me. It's appeared to me over quite a long time that Yosemite Park and Curry Company through whatever corporate arrangement they're in at the moment has been extraordinarily influential. And only when people like the Sierra Club folks have blown the whistle on some kind of a sweetheart deal have these things been revealed to the public and then pulled back.

In some ways YPCC has done some environmentally desirable things. And I don't know all the history of how the shuttle bus system came into being. I don't know whether they were forced to do that or whether they were graceful enough to do it by some other means, but that's a marvelous system. And we almost never use our vehicles once we get there. We use the public shuttle system altogether because it takes us where we need to go when we want to, or things are close enough we can walk. But I do wonder a little bit about that relationship.

Evans: Contrary to the general management plan, there has been a sizeable expansion in the number of income centers in the parks since 1980. And probably in almost every case, the Curry Company has said, "May we do this?" And the Park service has said, "Yes." So the Park service is at fault when you talk about addition of, say, the fudge stand or the place where you can rent video tapes and that kind of thing. And there have been a number of things--the raft rentals. There are a number of things that have been increases in income for the Curry Company that the Park service has said yes to.

Gill: It seems to me a park ought to have only park-oriented facilities. Everything that's in the park for the concessionaire to sell ought to be oriented to what people need to be able to be there. And how anybody can argue for a video tape rental at a national park just baffles me.

However, I am reminded of my very first visit to Yosemite. We were in the tent cabins at Camp Curry. And the couple in the next cabin were playing cards. One of the people in their group called to them and said, "It's time for the firefall." And they couldn't even go see the artificial firefall because they were too busy playing cards.

We have observed people in the campground. There were these little roundups, these RVs where several of them circled and made themselves a little enclave. There were, I think, two couples, each one in their own RV. It was just across the road from us. They were there for ten days, which very nearly gets to be the limit you can stay in the campground. We only observed them leaving the area of their little enclave only to go to the bathroom and one time to go out to dinner, apparently. They went over and

took the shuttle bus. Other than that, the hours we were there, they were always there. Now in view of the fact that we had our campsite burgled the year before, we were glad they were there. But wouldn't they have been as comfortable at Golden Gate Park in San Francisco or in their own backyards?

Evans: Or at a Forest Service campground, for that matter.

Gill: Yes, they could have been down the Merced somewhere or someplace out around Big Oak Flat. They didn't need to be in Yosemite for what they were doing. And yet, when I say that, I'm imposing my style of life on somebody else. I'm saying that my style's okay--living in my little tent and walking everywhere--and theirs with their RV and not going anywhere or doing anything is somehow faulty. And I recognize that that's not really the way we operate in this country, that their way of coming to Yosemite is in some ways as valid as mine.

Evans: You talked about getting in line to use the park, and I think one of the other problems, a factor, is that a majority of the park users live in northern California. A majority may be only day users. I attended the centennial celebration, and in front of me was a couple who lived somewhere fairly close to the park and this lady was telling someone--I think it was a reporter--that she had been there thirty-eight times in the last two years. Now, to me that's fine to have the park in your backyard, but--

Gill: Pretty lucky, isn't it?

Evans: But maybe the people who use the park that way, maybe that's not fair for the people who live in New York or a visitor from France or someone else.

Gill: Yes, it would be a shame to foreclose the visitor from afar in order to accommodate that person.

Evans: And maybe they only come in for day use. But thirty-eight times in 100 weeks, that's, you know, coming every three weeks or something like that.

Gill: And yet I'm not sure I want to foreclose that person--

Evans: Well, I'm not sure either, but we may have to get in line to visit the park in the future. I don't know what the answer is.

Gill: And you know, there are park users and there are park users. And maybe we need not to coerce them but maybe educate that you come to a park for a certain kind--

Evans: For the park's sake.

Gill: Yes, for the park's sake. And you don't come there just to have a place to be. And somehow, if you could get that idea across without being coercive, you might do the park some benefit. I'm not sure there need to be three million people go to Yosemite. But as I've been there quite a little bit lately and have seen what goes on, I wouldn't have wanted my student group to have been foreclosed that experience, because they had an absolutely wonderful time. They were thirteen- and fourteen-year-olds, and they were there under the right circumstances at the right time, and I think the impact that we made on the place was relatively small. I wouldn't want to foreclose the visitor from France. You know, the amount of international visitation there is just extraordinary these days. We heard more French than we did English part of the time this last September.

Evans: But the visitor from France or Germany may not be able to get in because he can't get a campsite or a room.

Gill: Do we let the person in who can afford to pay Yosemite Park and Curry prices for the rooms in contrast to the person from, let's say, Modesto who drives up for the day? It's really very complicated.

Evans: Yes.

Gill: And it's sad to think of a place like Yosemite foundering in its own popularity.

Evans: Well we're loving it to death, I think.

Gill: Yes, and in the summer it must just be frightful.

Evans: If the person from Modesto has to leave his car somewhere near the gate and take a shuttle, he may have second thoughts about coming to the park as frequently.

Gill: You know, I think I've heard it proposed that the only people who drive their cars into the valley are those who have reservations. And that would be either campground or overnight rooms. And that would make sense to me, but then you'd, of course, have to have the shuttle service that would bring in the day user, and you'd have to have a parking place for people to park. And who wants to take another piece of Yosemite and turn it into a parking lot?

Evans: Well, one of the proposals the club has is to extend the shuttle service first to the end of the valley where Bridalveil is, et cetera, and then to extend it within other parts of the park. So

if you wanted to go to Glacier Point, you could take a shuttle, or if you wanted to go to Tuolumne Meadows you could take a shuttle so that you cut some of the cars out of the park.

Alaska

Evans: You mentioned earlier the Alaska film. Could you talk about that a little bit? It deals with the club's publishing program, its films, and also maybe its purist perspective on things.

Gill: Right. During the seventies, of course, the Alaska National Interest Lands issue was a very, very big one--in fact, it was probably the big one of that decade--trying to seek a designation of a great many of the Alaska lands to some sort of preservation status. And there are a number of interesting aspects to this film project.

In the first place, the Sierra Club has never been terribly successful as a filmmaker. Over the years we've done a few films. In fact, the film on the North Cascades was very influential on me. I saw that early on; I went to the North Cascades several times, grew to love it; and I really trace Sierra Club influence, through the film, to a building of an interest for me and, of course, for the designation of that area as a national park.

Well, what we were hoping to do with an Alaska film was to build the same kind of a constituency and a consensus for what the Sierra Club was proposing in Alaska. And there was a donor. I don't have any idea now who it was. Maybe it was several. But money was gathered together to do an Alaska film. Some people were hired to put one together.

We had a big premiere. We had a big premiere here in San Francisco, and people were very unhappy with the film. [Laughter] Here we were spending a good amount of money, a lot of effort had gone into the planning of the film, and these people had spent I suppose a couple of summers getting the film put together, and then the result was not viewed very favorably.

Evans: Was less than good.

Gill: Well, and you know I always wondered if that was a fair judgment of that film. I personally didn't react so strongly about it. I found it quite interesting. It showed me some places that I had not seen and probably won't ever see. It demonstrated some of the values of Alaska wilderness I thought fairly effectively. But I

don't think the film was ever really released. My memory is that it was put back on the shelf.

Evans: I think that it was re-edited.

Gill: It may have been, and maybe a new script written for it.

Evans: During your time on the board was the time when, as you said, the Alaska issue was very prominent, and the club's membership in Alaska was growing, but there were some controversies about the club's program on Alaska and the Alaska Task Force. Could you talk about that a little bit?

Gill: It was a grass-roots effort really, coming largely from the volunteer side. We did finally put in place up there an Alaska rep, a staff person. And there was a lot of interest in Alaska from stateside people. I suppose Ed Wayburn and Peggy would come first to mind. They "discovered" Alaska and found it to be the marvelous place, as many of us do when we finally get to go there. And when Ed takes hold of an issue, he takes hold of it with about 110 percent, you know, very vigorously and with a great deal of interest.

Evans: He's still doing that at eighty-four or eighty-five.

Gill: Bless his heart. But there were people in Alaska who were also very interested in the issue, and so there was a difference on whether--

Evans: Was it style or substance?

Gill: Well, I don't think it was substance. I think it was more over who was going to call the shots. And so there was some disaffection, I suppose, over how the Alaska task force was going to function. We really had delegated to them pretty much the business of making recommendations about which parts of that national interest land should go to what kind of a purpose. And so the concern, I think, the club controversy there was about who was going to call the shots.

Evans: So wasn't the task force expanded at some point?

Gill: I think so, yes.

Evans: To include more Alaskans, and I think Joe Fontaine was actually--

Gill: Yes, I think actually that it was simply enlarged with the idea that you'd get a more diverse range of views. As I recall during

some of that time the task force actually had a staff person, maybe only part time.

Evans: Well they still do.

Gill: All right. Now how does that interface with the club's so-called representative in the field in Alaska?

Evans: I believe that currently that the Alaska staff, the Alaska Task Force person serves as Dr. Wayburn's secretary and does the Alaskan newsletter, the *Alaska Report*, among other things. What other Alaska related things she does I'm not sure.

Gill: But you might expect that that would grow out of the Alaska office and the official club representative there. And you see, I think that illustrates the kind of tension that there was in this situation. And it's not all a good example of staff versus volunteer. Maybe it's more volunteer vs. volunteer.

Evans: I think what it points to is Ed Wayburn's strength as a leader and his ability to raise funds for those things he thinks need to be done.

Gill: And, of course, where the funds go, so goes the effort. I mean, the funds are so critical to being able to mount an effort. And after all, if you're instrumental in raising the money, shouldn't you be able to call the shots on how it's spent. You see, that's the argument that would be made in a case like that.

Evans: I'm certain that not all the money raised goes to the staff person, but I know that this person is primarily Ed's arm on the staff and does whatever things he might need to have done.

Gill: But you see that you're talking about that situation in contemporary terms. We're really thinking we've got now a fifteen-or-so-year period where this kind of situation has had a chance to work itself out.

Wildlife

Evans: You mentioned the spotted owl. How about wildlife issues? This is something you've expressed an interest in.

Gill: Well, yes, this was another kind of interesting controversial thing during my years on the board. The Sierra Club seems to be made up one group of people who came out of a hunting and fishing

background and therefore were interested in wildlife as game and another group that believed in animal rights. Neighbors of ours reported to me when they discovered my Sierra Club affiliation that they'd quit the Sierra Club because we were too soft on wildlife issues.

During the seventies wildlife people, ones who were really interested in the wide spectrum of wildlife and the effects of habitat destruction on that wildlife, had a fairly difficult time getting their points accepted. The wildlife committee wasn't supported very much. There was even controversy about whether we should have one.

Evans: Why was there controversy about whether or not there should be a wildlife committee? That seems to be integral with wilderness and public lands issues that we've worked on.

Gill: Somehow I think we separated them and we thought wildlife was not integral to those things. I think we've become more sophisticated.

Evans: We weren't into habitat protection in that sense, in the scientific sense?

Gill: Well, we were into protection of the land but not necessarily as habitat for the wildlife. We went through several wildlife committee chairs who really made a valiant effort. I mentioned Bob Hughes and--

Evans: Mark Palmer?

Gill: I was thinking before Mark. Stuart Avery, who was such a wonderful fellow and so intense about the Sierra Club's doing more on wildlife issues. The situation that stands out in my mind was after my presidency, and it had to do with the Sierra Club's position on the condor. It was during that time that the Audubon Society and the Fish and Wildlife Service seemed to be cooperating in the captive breeding program. And Les and Sally Reid come to mind again here. Les was on the board at that time, and he argued strongly that the condor should be left wild.

Evans: And allowed to die if that's what was going to happen.

Gill: If that's what was going to happen.

Evans: Of course the Reids have been very active in the preservation of condor habitat in southern California.

Gill: Right, and that was their argument then. I mean, they expressed the habitat argument relative to wildlife as well as anybody we've

had. And Bob Hughes, I believe, was chairing the wildlife committee at that time, and he reflected in this meeting in Washington, D.C., the scientific opinion that the only way the condor was going to be salvaged as a species was if we went into the captive breeding program. And if I remember the vote right, fourteen of the board members went with Les and I went with Bob. [Laughter] I think I was the only one in the minority on that vote.

Evans: You were right.

Gill: Well, I probably was, but I think now I wish I had sided the other way, because there's a cleanliness to that argument that I like.

Evans: Purist, yes.

Gill: Yes. And we're not going to save all the species, and if somehow we don't preserve a place for them to be, I'm not sure having them in a zoo is a good way to preserve them. But at that point I voted for the scientific view, and Les persuaded the rest of the board to go the other way.

Evans: Do you regret that vote?

Gill: Well, no, because it didn't make any difference in the long run. I don't know that we're having a success of the captive breeding program.

Evans: But they've just released the first two wild condors into the wild.

Gill: Well, but I don't have a lot of confidence they're going to make it, you see. [Laughter]

Evans: Well, that's true. That's true.

Gill: And until we know that they do and that they can survive and-- You know, there are a lot of interesting things there about who teaches them or how do they get taught? Is it all instinctual?

Evans: Apparently they have some condors from the Andes that they've transplanted into that area to help them learn their skills.

Gill: In fact, we asked Sally about that issue yesterday at a little break that we had.

Sierra Club Expansion: Membership and Agenda

- Evans: The next thing I was going to ask you was about the growth of the club. As you recall, something we may want to get back to later when we have some membership numbers, but certainly when you came back to California and you became active again in 1969, the club was changing in terms of its local structure a great deal. There were a lot of new chapters that were formed.
- Gill: And the whole business of forming groups to accommodate people who were some distance from the urban centers was going on at that point. And, of course, it was only the next year that Earth Day gave such a big boost to membership. You know, in reviewing my notes, I find references to the club membership during the time I was an officer that we'd reached this astronomical figure of like 140,000, which compared to our over half a million now, it looks like pretty small potatoes.
- Evans: The current membership downstairs is posted as 629,000 or something.
- Gill: Isn't that amazing?
- Evans: Yes.
- Gill: And to think that 25 percent or more of those people drop out every year and you have to replace them plus provide for growth. It's an interesting question as to why those folks drop out, isn't it? What motivates one to join and then not renew the very next year? And of course, if you get them to renew the first time so that they're second-year members, then they don't tend to drop out very much. And I think that's been the pattern. If you can get past that first year with a new member and get them to renew once, then they stay with you for a while.
- Evans: You know, at one point in the seventies or eighties, some very large percentage of the club's membership was members who have been members less than three years.
- Gill: You know, that's still a really big problem, it seems to me, for the Sierra Club. You think that your people know what's going on, but they don't. They don't have any background unless they've picked it up, say, in a conservation issue they may know generally something about it; but they have really very little sense of club tradition because they are very recent members. That's why I've been concerned about maintaining a good publication that really does some work in reiterating the traditions of the club, that serves as a record.

Evans: Of course, a record is one thing when you've got five hundred and six hundred thousand members. It's hard, even though very few of those people are leaders, they have trouble really communicating with one another in a meaningful fashion.

Gill: Well, I think I'd come back to the fact of the importance of some sort of regular communication. I suppose people, if they're going to spend as much as Sierra Club membership costs--you know, it's not a poor man's organization--there must be some community of values. They must already have a sense that the Sierra Club somehow stands for what they think is right. But without some detail to go along with that, it seems to me new members are in a kind of trouble. And, unfortunately, we don't get very many of them to become very active.

Growth as a Motivation for Change

Evans: Did the growth of the club motivate the need for change in club organization?

Gill: Well, growth was one thing. A much broader Sierra Club program. I suppose up until 1970 on Earth Day, the Sierra Club was still primarily a California mountain organization. In reviewing for this interview I came across a little piece I wrote which I called "Down from the Mountains" about how the Sierra Club was leaving the mountains to become involved in a much broader range of environmental issues. Certainly, the fact that we were looking at problems of air pollution and water pollution and toxic waste and population and all these things really did call for a little different kind of organization.

Evans: I remember the 1971 board meeting and wilderness conference in Washington when Paul Swatek and I tried to get the council to support an urban environmental policy.

Gill: And isn't it interesting that that was controversial?

Evans: It was very controversial. It did not pass.

Gill: It didn't.

Evans: There were some very strongly held opinions.

Gill: That we should be a mountain organization.

Evans: Well, that we were already for that.

Gill: Well, you could argue for that. You could say that the Sierra Club ought to specialize in that element of environmental matters. But the new people that we were attracting as members and the new people that were coming through the ranks as leaders had a broader range of interests. And as long as the Sierra Club is going to be a volunteer or a member-oriented organization, it needs to be able to respond to the things its members think are important.

But organizationally, I think, the move for change in the seventies was a result of that kind of change in the club, both in terms of numbers of members and in terms of issues they were interested in. And as a matter of fact, you see, we really didn't change very much. And I think we've been fairly effective in the twenty years since. So maybe organization isn't absolutely the most important thing.

Setting Priorities

Evans: How did the Sierra Club determine what its priorities were?

Gill: The whole business of priority setting I think is an interesting one. In the seventies, when I was involved with the national level, there was a lot of work done on that to try to devise a mechanism so that on the one hand we would be able to focus on what was the most important to us, recognizing that we didn't have the resources to do everything. And that's probably another one of the weaknesses, by the way, that we tried for too long and I suspect still try, to be the environmental organization for everybody, to be every man's environmental group.

Neighbors of mine, when they found that I was a Sierra Clubber, said, "Oh, we quit the Sierra Club because--"

Evans: In California or in Oregon?

Gill: This was in Oregon. "Because you were soft on hunting." They're animal rights folks, to the point where they don't even believe in using animal products--no meat and no leather, as far as I know. And we were just too soft an organization on their issue. But we really did try there. You know, recognizing that we had both hunters and animal rights folks--

Evans: A lot of folks are hunters.

Gill: Well, we tried to straddle that one, and you see when we did that we lost these folks because we were too soft. But if we had come out too hard against hunting, we would have lost the hunters. So

in terms of trying to accommodate that range of opinion in the club, that's a weakness. We try to do that and we aren't able to. So we fail some people, and then they perceive that we're not their organization. They probably don't support other things we believe in as strongly, even though they might be inclined to, because they already have a negative sense. So I think trying to be too many things to too many people has been a weakness.

You know, if a strong spokesman for an issue gets to the national level, say, in leadership position and can lobby and speak very strongly for an issue, it's really hard to turn that person down even though there may not be a consensus on the part of club leadership. That's a big thing that we ought to be dealing with.

Evans: The priority-setting practice involves a lot of people extensively. Do you think it works?

Gill: Well, I think we still tend to probably identify too many issues. But since my pet issues might be the ones that would get left out if we narrowed it, maybe I wouldn't be too strongly in favor of narrowing it too much more.

One of the things I was interested in, and I guess I would give Mike McCloskey the major credit for this, was sharpening up criteria for priority issues. For instance, what the members think is important is clearly a criterion. But there are a lot of other things that come along, too. Are there resources in the club to take on an issue? Is it timely? Is this the right time to bring an issue to the fore? Is the national legislative scene or the national judicial scene ready for this one? And Mike made a strong argument that some times are not right, that maybe you've recently been through a battle in Washington in the Congress or with the president's people on an issue; this is not the time to bring it back. Or maybe it hasn't been visited for a while and this is the time to really hit it hard again.

Evans: Of course, those criteria don't always reach the member who will vote for an issue and don't understand why the board hasn't--

Gill: Yes. And then, of course, there is that democratic element of using some sort of a leadership memorandum, something that goes to chapters and to RCCs, so in a sense they vote on a list. I would be more comfortable with that voting if I thought that they really were looking at all the criteria. You know, if we don't have resources, either human or financial, then there is no use in calling an issue a priority. Of course, I suppose if you select an issue, then you can get busy and work on developing the resources, although sometimes you need them ahead of the time rather than after the selection. But if you had people who vote really

informed about what criteria they ought to be working with-- I have a feeling that the polls tend to reflect a lot of people's personal or pet issues.

Evans: Well, their own interests, quite basically.

Gill: Yes, the things that people are really concerned about. And the thing that I thought Mike contributed to that discussion in the seventies was that it's more complicated than that. We have to look at other factors in addition to what we're most personally concerned about. For instance, my own personal concerns, because of my own background and my own recreational interests, was always on wilderness and park issues. And I would be very, very reluctant to see the Sierra Club give those up from a personal standpoint, but also from a historical one, because that's where we've been strong historically. But the modern Sierra Club is not just a mountain group anymore. So, you know, I have to agree that other kinds of issues do need to be taken on and they do need to be put fairly high on the priority list.

Evans: There is some limitation due to the fact that the priority list really applies to staff, both Washington staff and regional staff, and if you have a limited number of staff members or if you have staff members who are specifically expert in some issue that you can't always shift gears unless you have a lot of money at that time.

Gill: Well, we have to recognize that staff people have their pet interests as well--things that they're good in, things that they like to do. And if you don't play to those interests some, then they're not as effective for your work. That's always been a problem with the Washington office. We've never had enough people with the right sense of expertise, I don't think, to cover all the things that we want to do there. Usually somebody has to pick up a second- or third-level priority issue as an additional assignment, one that they're probably not too keen to do and one that they aren't maybe the best informed on. And that's a weakness, of course, too, because you don't get as strong of people, as strong a representation, if they aren't really keen about it and good in it.

Moving to Bush Street Headquarters

Evans: One other major thing that happened during your presidency and during your time on the board was the club's move from its long-time headquarters in Mill Tower to new space at 530 Bush Street, which, of course, has now been superseded by other headquarters.

Gill: Which are now too small, I understand.

Evans: Which are now too small. This also has to do with the growth of the club and the growth of the staff.

Gill: I think it's kind of an interesting thing, because it does illustrate what's happening to the Sierra Club over these years. The Sierra Club was in Mills Tower at the time of the earthquake-- 1906. Sierra Club records were destroyed in the subsequent fire. So the Sierra Club was identified with 220 Bush, or Mills Tower. That was the Sierra Club, you know. And yet, space that we were able to rent for a reasonable amount at Mills Tower just became unavailable to us. As the club grew and we needed a larger staff, we simply had to either go out of house or move. And yet we were once again, I suppose, in a sense sort of defying tradition or bucking tradition at least. And so making a decision to move up to 530 Bush Street was not an easy one. With the help of the Storek brothers, architects and developers, who were club members and interested in what the club was doing, we located new space in what was, ironically, a former PG&E substation. Its advantage was that it was built to extraordinarily high earthquake standards. Our best guess in the mid-seventies was that we could stay there for quite a long time. We did not adequately perceive the Sierra Club growth.

Evans: Had the board already set the goal of 500,000 members by that time, or was that later?

Gill: I think that must have been quite a bit later, because we really thought we were good there for quite a long time. But we've been in this building [730 Polk Street] now four or five years?

Evans: Five or six.

Gill: Five or six years. So, you see, that second Bush Street site only lasted us ten years. That was a rental site, of course. One of the reasons, of course, for moving to Polk Street was that we could use that limited partnership approach to buy our own building, in which we would be gaining some equity. .

Evans: Wasn't there an option to buy at 530 Bush Street?

Gill: I think so, but I think we perceived that that building really was not adequate, even if we took over the rest of the building. So here we've moved again and now we're already having to site some of our operations out of the building. The Books Department has gone.

Evans: Back to Bush Street.

Gill: Yes. And so what is the club going to do now? Do we buy the building next door? And I'm not even sure there's one available. Having the club's office all in one place seemed to me to be a real advantage. Of course, the legal defense fund was never at that same site, I believe.

Evans: I think you're right about that.

Gill: I would much prefer to see the Sierra Club Foundation in the same building. In appearances it looked like part of the same operation, and appearances do make a difference, I think.

A Look to Future Growth and the Importance of Quality Membership

Evans: Do you have any sense about the club's optimum--I don't mean in sense of large size. Best in terms of staff, in terms of membership? There's been a very large growth recently in development staff because of the centennial operation. That's accounted for part of the expansion of the staff here. Do you have any sense of the club setting its own limits as we ask others to do with their expansion?

Gill: I don't know how you do that. You can set a limit as to what your goal was, and then when you reached that goal you could quit promoting membership as vigorously as we do now with all the direct mail and other kinds of things. But without reverting to a previous exclusive kind of stand, I'm not sure how you could limit the membership. And I'm not sure I would be in favor of it. The notion of unlimited expansion generally, it seems to me, is a principle that the Sierra Club ought to be opposed to, because we certainly aren't in favor of unlimited population growth or unlimited economic growth. I'm not sure that principle is applicable to the Sierra Club membership. But it makes me a little uneasy for us to forever keep a goal out in front of us of a couple hundred thousand or so ahead of where we are and be really expending a lot of resources to get there.

On the other hand, I'm working these days more closely with the magazine program, and over a half a million members, maybe even more this year, is going to make advertising easier to get and worth more. Somehow there's a threshold of a half million for the magazine that makes the bigger advertisers more receptive because we have a larger potential market for them and audience for them. So there are some reasons, I suppose, to want to continue to grow.

And numbers do count when you go to Congress and legislatures to be able to say that you are representing an organization of over a half a million. In California I don't know what the membership is these days, but I suppose somewhere between a third and half of that number counts to the California legislature. Those numbers do make a difference. So you can't ignore numbers.

I guess I'm more of a proponent of wanting to do something about quality of membership and range of membership. If we could increase the number of people who were active in that half million, and if we could make some major progress in some parts of the population that we don't reach very well these days, I think that would strengthen the membership fully as much as increased numbers. So in terms of priorities, I would want to see us emphasizing range in quality and composition as well as numbers. I guess I'm not willing to totally give up on numbers either, because those are important, too.

Evans: The club is working right now on outreach to minority groups.

Gill: I think it needs to continue to do that. In a state like California which is becoming increasingly diverse ethnically, it's really an embarrassment that we don't attract people from ethnic minority groups more than we do. And I'm sure that's partly economic.

Evans: You mean on the part of the potential member.

Gill: Yes, that our membership is a bit pricey for folks. And maybe they're not tuned into our issues enough, so that means we need to make a greater effort to communicate why environmental matters are important to each and every one of those people out there.

Evans: I'll get you an issue of the new *Yodeler*. It's got a cover article on that. You might find it interesting.

Gill: Oh, I would, indeed.

Evans: We're talking about getting the members more involved. I think traditionally we haven't had a lot of people involved in the club. Do you have any ideas how we might go about that?

Gill: Well I think the real secret is what happens at the chapter and group level. Other than the national club having a priority of really strong, active local units, I don't think there's a lot that can be done from the national level. I guess I would see some role for the *Sierra* magazine. Since I'm closely involved in that I'm more aware of what the potential would be there in terms of informing people of the background information and knowledge they

need to be able to work on issues, the understanding of why the issues are important, and how the member can be effective.

In terms of *Sierra*, we've thought about the fact that we need something more timely. In fact, we've been talking about that for twenty years, and we still don't do a very good job of keeping the member involved in current national legislative issues. The national news report goes to just a handful of people. So *Sierra* is not the best vehicle for making the member at large more willing to become active in the letter writing and the legislative contact and the writing letters to newspaper editors. A lot of the responsibility to involve people where they are occurs at a local level. Involving them in outings is certainly a way for members to connect.

The 1970s: Environmental Decade and Sierra Club Growth

Evans: The 1970s, which we've been talking about, was really an environmental decade. Could you talk a little bit about it in terms of your recollections about the major issues of that decade and your involvement and maybe the public's involvement in them?

Gill: Well, there was a very considerable expansion of Sierra Club role during these years. I suppose up until the time of Earth Day or so--I mean, that's a good watershed date to keep in mind--the Sierra Club activity was still pretty largely wilderness, national parks, mountains oriented. And that's the decade when--and I think I alluded to that earlier--this down-from-the-mountains concept, that the Sierra Club did take on a lot of other roles. But it would be inaccurate, I think, to represent that this was done easily.

What we discovered was that we had advocates for certain kinds of issues coming to the fore as leaders, often times in chapters. Then by virtue of their efforts at the national level and by presentations to the board finally getting their issues accepted as mainline issues. Clean air and water, and toxics, and waste disposal--you know, all of these were not issues of the sixties, and by the eighties I think they were pretty firmly accepted as Sierra Club responsibilities. So it certainly was a decade in which there was expansion of role.

We talked before about the assessment of priorities, and this was always a really tough one because we didn't even have enough resources to do everything we wanted to do, so we always had to make choices. And it must have been very discouraging for some of

these people when their choice of issue was relegated to a lower priority status for several years running. I would have to give credit to them; their diligence did pay off in many cases because these things have become more the mainline issues.

Evans: Well, sometimes a lot of these people will find some other way to get to Washington on some other committee's buck so they can do the work. Like going to a board meeting in Washington annually and doing the lobbying then.

Gill: Yes, and staying a couple of days. Yes, exactly. And of course the decade of the seventies is, I suppose, the time when the big overarching energy issue, which of course is still very, very alive for the Sierra Club today, was accepted by the Sierra Club as a major responsibility. That one may have been so obvious that we didn't have as much trouble with accepting that.

Evans: You probably didn't have trouble accepting the issue, but I think in terms of policies, we're still thrashing out some of that stuff and we have been for almost twenty years.

Gill: And times change on these things, of course. But, yes, it's not easy to know what to do. How do you work through a situation where a society is heavily energy consumptive, and particularly petroleum energy consumptive, to get some sort of a different mode. What the Sierra Club's had troubles with only reflects society's problem, I think. It's not that we are in any way unique in that. Clearly nobody knows how to get through this matter with any degree of confidence.

Evans: I was at a program ten days ago where Michael Fisher, the executive director of the Sierra Club, was the speaker. And it was an international flavored program, and someone asked him about the club's work in population and also about the fact that Americans are so consumptive and how does the club teach its members, preach to its members about this. And Michael's confession was, "No, we do not tell our members as much as we should not to consume." So it's still a problem.

Gill: Yes, I'm not sure that we've ever really taken recycling on as a major issue. You know, a lot of our Sierra Club people are interested in that and work at it maybe in their other selves, but recycling I don't think has ever been a major priority.

Evans: Of course, the best thing is not to buy it in the first place, but most of us don't do that.

Gill: I suppose. The Sierra magazine has an article in their file now, and they're deciding what to do with it, which even questions

whether the Sierra Club should have a magazine, because that's consumptive of forests and introduces chemical wastes into the water. Our very use of paper does bad things environmentally. So it's a good question how far one drives one's principles.

Evans: Well the Sierra Club has always generated a lot of paper, and, of course, some of that now is done electronically, but when it's done electronically it cuts other people out of the information loop, so that's a problem.

Talking about the seventies and the fact that it was an environmental decade, and we'll put aside the fact that even though it was a Republican administration, actually a lot of things got done in those years.

Gill: Well, we had a Democrat toward the end of that decade, so--
[Laughter]

Evans: That's true, we did, we did.

International Programs

Evans: Kent, one of the things that's developed over the last twenty years is the club's involvement in issues that are not domestic issues, international issues. Would you like to touch on this and maybe how this is sort of an example of how people bring their issues to the fore in the club?

Gill: Okay. Yes, having international involvement and international membership was not an easy decision for the Sierra Club. There were folks who were really strongly opposed. We weren't doing a full job of covering domestic issues; how could we possibly siphon resources off to deal with international ones? At the same time, most everybody would subscribe to the argument that--what was the Adlai Stevenson line about the earth is just a little spaceship circulating in the void and this is all we've got? And nobody argues with John Muir's notion that everything is connected to everything else. But because of the resource limitation argument, moving into international environmental affairs and trying to develop international Sierra Club units was not without controversy at all.

And it's an interesting example, I think, of how if a committed, fairly small group of members has a strong interest,

that interest is probably going to be responded to. In fact, the international involvement of the Sierra Club was brought to the fore by a relatively small number of people who actually had some access to funding on the outside. They brought their interest in the issues along with a little bit of funding, so Sierra Club leadership found that very difficult to turn down. The interest was actually brought forward by a single member.

Evans: Who was that?

Gill: Nick Robinson from New York City. And there were certainly others who had shown a strong interest in involvement in this. And so here was an issue or a set of issues that was not part of the Sierra Club program that was added, albeit gradually. It included the establishment of an office with staff and funding special projects outside the country, because of these strong expressions of interest by a fairly small number of people. I think one of the secrets here, of course, was the fact that those interested were able to generate some funding, so an international program was not reducing other Sierra Club programs.

Evans: Of course, that staffing has now been absorbed at the Washington office.

Gill: Into the Washington office, right. There has been that change--the move from New York City to Washington. But we still do have some activities in other parts of the world. And given the concern for global warming and ozone layer problems (which this fellow on the TV program this morning reassured us was just a fiction). Actually, environmental problems don't know national boundaries, as the Canadians will testify to as they suffer from our acid rain.

Evans: You ran an international outing one time. Could you tell us about that? You went to Norway.

Gill: Yes. During the time I was on the board, I chose to participate in, not lead, a foreign outing. One of the responsibilities I felt as a board member was being supportive of different parts of the club program, and direct participation is a good way to be supportive. So my wife and I chose to go on a two-week trip on the Hardangervidda in Norway, the mountainous plateau north and west of Oslo. It's actually the site of the only remnant of the old continental glacier outside the Antarctic and Greenland.

Our participation in that outing did illustrate one of the problems that the outings program has. It was an outing that was designed to go with about fifteen participants, and as it developed, once we arrived on the scene and started hiking, some of the members of this party were really not capable of doing the

hiking that was called for. The mileages were fairly long and elevation gains were fairly significant. About half of the party-- they dubbed themselves the sickly seven--discovered at the end of the first day and then again at the end of the second day that they really could not keep up with these long days of hiking. Thank goodness the days were very long. In fact, we were close to the point where it was really light twenty-four hours a day.

But what had happened here, I think, is that the trip leader may have accepted people on the trip that were really not qualified, in order to make the trip financially feasible. And whether he knew enough about them to realize their lack of qualifications or whether that just developed is not clear. Maybe the participant questionnaire wasn't sufficient.

But at the end of the first week, the decision was made by the leader to divide the party and take the so-called sickly seven on an easier trip to an operating farm and to a ski resort, and the rest of the party resumed its originally scheduled hike. It turned out to be a wonderful second week, so the trip was redeemed. And at the end of the trip we all met at the head of a lake, a lake very much like Lake Chelan in Washington, and rode the lake steamer down and had our last night together in a little Norwegian town. But I was struck by the fact that economics probably had interfered here with sort of a rational conduct of that trip.

Investment Politics

Evans: One of the things that occurs to me is that you were president during some very formative years. What were some of the key board votes and some of the issues you recall in your presidency, both internal and in conservation issues.

Gill: Well, there are some issues that come to mind that are not necessarily the big things having to do with the environmental battles. Often times those were the easy ones, with a lot of unanimity of thought on those. You know, it was clear that we were interested in park preservation and wilderness, and it was not difficult coming to a decision that we ought to do something about Alaska. Some of the details of how it should work out were controversial. But there are some interesting issues that are maybe a bit peripheral to that but illustrate some interesting things about the Sierra Club, I think.

During the mid-seventies there was an expose of the Sierra Club--I believe in the *Los Angeles Times*--about their investment

policies. Some reporter had dug into our portfolio and discovered that some of our archenemies were represented in that portfolio. And that raised a really interesting question: Did the Sierra Club really believe in its principles? How could they live on the income gained from investments in polluters, rapists of the land, that kind of thing? And I think that was a real embarrassment to the Sierra Club. You know, people who were crafting environmental policy were not paying any attention to what the investment advisors were doing. And the investments were being made--

Evans: On the basis of income.

Gill: Yes, on the basis of the strength of the investment as an income producer, as a capital increaser. And the result of that was that the club, with its egg on its face, got busy and decided that it really should not be investing in polluters. And we even directed a bequest stating that stock in polluting companies would have to be sold within a relatively short period of time.

Evans: Of course, there is the controversy about participating in corporate board meetings as minority stockholders.

Gill: Well, Dick Leonard always used to tell us that we should do this. I don't think we ever really followed up very thoroughly. The idea was that if you held a single share, you were entitled to privileges at the stockholders' meetings at which you could challenge the management of the corporation about its environmental policies. I can remember a couple of instances where people individually reported doing that, but I don't think the Sierra Club ever really took advantage of that opportunity. That's an interesting one, I think. Although a single stockholder's voice at a meeting probably isn't going to sway management of General Motors.

Electoral Politics

Evans: You sort of opened the door to something that I think has really been a large change in the club in the last ten to fifteen years, and that is our activity in politics.

Gill: Yes, indeed.

Evans: Certainly since the arena that we work in is the political arena, changing laws, for some people electoral politics is a natural next step for us. But there has been a great deal of controversy about

the club's involvement in political activism. Would you like to talk about this for a while?

Gill: Yes, because I think the development of the electoral political activity for the club has taken place since the early 1970s. In reviewing things for this particular occasion, I ran across some council minutes in which the strongest possible expressions of opinion were made about how the Sierra Club must keep free from partisan politics, that somehow we dare not take a stand on any political race that pits Democrat versus Republican. It would be divisive to the club. Probably in those days it certainly would have gone contrary to club tradition and maybe even to what we were legally permitted to do.

However, club leadership has debated those issues during the seventies and come to the conclusion that we simply had to be involved. I think the case for taking stands on issues that come before voters in terms of initiative and referendum is fairly clean. Our participation in nonpartisan races was relatively easy, but since the national political scene and that in all the states is a two-party political system, we had to be very careful. And so we developed a mechanism to allow us to be involved in political races in a responsible way, I think, and that has not been easy. And I think we've probably made a few mistakes along the way. But we have in place now a system which I think does fairly well. Some races we decide to stay out of for good reason and others we deem as unproductive for our effort. But in some cases, even the presidential races, we have decided to endorse and actively support a candidate.

Evans: What do you think about the potential pitfalls of being perceived as a partisan organization?

Gill: Well, as a matter of fact, we do endorse more Democrats than Republicans. And so the charge that we're being partisan, I think, could be fairly made. We counter that by demonstrating a very careful analysis of voting records and of public stands so that we can show that we're not choosing on the basis of a political party but rather on the basis of the likelihood that the person is going to be favorable to our issues. As a matter of fact, we do endorse Republicans, but we endorse more Democrats, I'm sure.

Evans: About 45 percent of the club's membership is supposed to be Republican--the last numbers I heard--which is a sizeable percentage.

Evans: Of course, it used to be that the Republicans were the conservationists.

Gill: A long time ago, right. And yet there are lots of Republicans among our Sierra Club membership. So there was the concern that we would be dividing ourselves when we endorsed a candidate.

Evans: I think this becomes most obvious when the presidential races would become involved. It's more visible in the public eye, and it's also more visible to our members.

Gill: It will be interesting to see what we will do in 1992 on that, when the candidates finally shake out and we know who they're going to be. But I'm sure people decide their political affiliation on a much broader range of issues than environmental ones. And so a member might not expect that the Sierra Club would endorse all the candidates that they otherwise might feel comfortable with simply because the club is looking at a limited range of issues. I think these kinds of criteria for Sierra Club decisions have to be made clear to members. They have to understand how this process works and what's the intent of it.

You know, a Sierra Club recommendation is not any kind of an order to a member to vote a certain way. We're simply saying, "From an environmental standpoint, it appears to us on the basis of our ability to understand these people, our interpretation of the questionnaires they answer for us, that this candidate is more likely to be favorable to our issues than the other one. But, you know, you've got economic considerations, social considerations that go far beyond what we're recommending on, and then you call you own shot with your vote based on that." Is that too idealistic to expect intelligence on the part of voters? I don't think for Sierra Club members it's too much to expect.

Evans: Is the club very visible in Oregon now that you've moved to a different state where--

Gill: I don't think so. In fact, I'm not sure endorsements ought to be made deliberately very public. A candidate may decide to publicize a Sierra Club endorsement if he thinks it's to his benefit to do so. And I think we have to allow him to do that and we have to go along with it. In the current race, in the Senate race, the Sierra Club did not endorse between Hatfield and Lonsdale. There is a very sharp political division there on an environmental issue.

Evans: I'm getting lots of Lonsdale mailings. [Laughter]

Gill: Are you really?

Evans: I haven't responded to any, but I--

Gill: Well, I imagine they've been trying to seek money out of state, because Lonsdale was a very definite underdog, and it now looks like a fairly close race. But the Sierra Club did not endorse in that one. Lonsdale, on the forestry issue, it seems clear to me had much more promise. But the incumbent Senator has a fairly distinguished environmental record on some other issues and some very important committee assignments as well.

Evans: Was it Hatfield that helped put in that section in the law about the--I can't remember what it's called--one of the sections about the old growth things that passed in the Congress a couple of years ago?

Gill: He's been very instrumental in everything that's been through the Senate lately to plump up the cut from the National Forest and limit environmental appeals of timber sales.

Evans: This is the one the court said was not constitutional.

Gill: I have to hold that against him, you know, taking away what I perceive as a right. But Hatfield was very good on wild river bills and he was behind the Columbia Gorge set aside. So it was probably a good race for the Sierra Club not to take sides on, because it really was not a clear-cut case of one candidate being markedly superior in a broad range of issues. And I think it's maybe important for the Sierra Club not to endorse in races where the candidates can be perceived as each having strengths.

Evans: Well, we could revisit this one after the election next week.
[Laughter]

Gill: Yes, we'll probably have more to say on it. It looks like Hatfield will probably win.

Evans: One of our members said that the environmental endorsements are gold but the Sierra Club's is platinum. And it's amazing to see in the California races now--not just the candidate races but the initiative measures that the club's name is prominent. And in some of the endorsement articles where they list the endorsements of candidates, the club's name is at the top. It's really interesting to see that.

Gill: That raises a very interesting result of this political involvement: not only are you able to affect outcomes, which I think is the original motivation, but you may raise the stature of the club in public perception. And that would be, I think, a wonderful secondary benefit.

Evans: The other benefit, of course, is to raise the issues that the candidates may not raise in their own debates.

Gill: Right, exactly. And you sharpen up candidates' reactions to issues by saying, "We'd like to look into your record and your thoughts on these issues beforehand." I think even just a submission of questionnaires to candidates may be beneficial in the long run to our issues, because we have the opportunity to raise the questions before a candidate ever gets into the seat where he or she's voting on things. There are a number of benefits. I certainly have been strongly supportive of what is somewhat tricky ground. You know, it was new territory, and there are some real pitfalls, so we've got to be careful. But it seemed to me something we had to do. Since our tax-exempt status had disappeared on us for other reasons, we might as well take advantage of it. You know, if we were still tax-exempt, we couldn't do that kind of thing.

When we're talking about politics we're really talking about partisan politics here. The club has, for a long time, been involved in legislative politics trying to get bills through Congress, and that seems to be a legitimate public interest group activity. But if that group then takes on the attempt to try to influence who's going to be elected to those positions of responsibility and power, particularly in a situation where you have partisanship by political party, you run into some real problems.

The Wise Use Movement

Evans: There's a growing movement now in this country, which probably started with the Sagebrush Rebellion in the early eighties. Organizations are now forming which are pro-development. They include the National Park Inholders Association, other organizations. How do you see what is described by some as the waning of the environmental cause and the coming to power of those who are opposed to preservation and are much more into "wise use," as they call it.

Gill: Yes, let's put "wise use" in quotes, because "wise use" means our use. In fact, I'm clipping newspaper articles about these birds, not because I fear them but because I think we need to keep track of them. Some waxing and waning by interest groups I think is likely to occur. We've experienced that before, and I don't think we need to have real concerns about that.

I don't think I see other organizations coming along as a waning of our influence so much as it is a reaction to the fact

that we do have influence. And so people who are opposed to Sierra Club principles are coming together to try to oppose those. And you know, it's not just Sierra Club, but it's the whole environmental movement. No, I've read several things lately that suggest this kind of reaction, I think, to what environmental groups have been doing for twenty years. And that's the way this system in our country works.

I guess I do see that we need to be countering that movement in some way though. We shouldn't just go to sleep and not pay any attention to it. For instance, I think it's one of the things *Sierra* magazine needs to deal with. We can't assume that all of our members are noticing these articles as they come by in the paper. And we can't be sure that everybody's newspaper is carrying these articles, so I would hope that we would keep ourselves informed about who these people are and what their interests are so that we can do the best job of dealing with this.

I think there's some danger in these people, but I don't see it--the fact that they exist--as a sign of Sierra Club weakness, more maybe as a sign of Sierra Club strength. And I don't take credit for the Sierra Club for this at all. I mean, all those other good environmental folks that are our colleagues are involved as well.

Outings Program

Evans: What would you like to add to the record about the outings program during your time with the Sierra Club?

Gill: It seems to me, although outings have been questioned from time to time as a part of the Sierra Club program, that they clearly have an important role. You can engage people in something they enjoy doing and, therefore, they're available to do something you need to have them do.

One of the things I remember was that the conduct of the national outings program was sharply controversial. The council, because of the interest of some of the delegates in this issue, had come up with some recommendations about how the outings ought to be operated that were different from the way they were being run. So there was another kind of turf battle. There was the volunteer committee that was running the outings programs and doing an awful lot of work. Those were very hard-working committee people because they didn't have high-level staff support. They were really running the show, with people there to handle reservations. So it

was a tough job with a long tradition, going clear back to what, 1904 or whenever the first outings were [1901].

Evans: What were the issues that had to do with the outings program and the way it was run and how were they resolved?

Gill: Well, one of them was an ethical one, having to do with the numbers of people that would be allowed to go on outings into national park back country, wilderness, that kind of place. And there was the feeling on the part of some of the people who were working with us on the council that the Sierra Club of all organizations should not be running large trips with high impact into back country.

Evans: This was the time the Wilderness Impact Study was also being conducted, as I recall.

Gill: Yes. In fact, the impact study was one of the outgrowths of this concern. The question had been raised, and then the counter-question was, well, do large groups really impact the country more than small groups? You know, if you're going to have a hundred people, does it make a difference whether they're in one group or six groups, say? The council was arguing that the Sierra Club should be setting the example for smaller particles on the argument that that would be less impact. Now there's impact on the country, which I think was the thing that was motivating us, but it is a little bit hard to argue. I mean, if you've got a foot in the boot stepping down on the flowers, does it really make a difference whether it comes in large groups or small groups? Same number of feet. Same number of footsteps.

Evans: There was also the question of the aesthetic feeling of being in a place with lots of other folks.

Gill: Well, that wasn't really the argument we were using. We were using the argument that it was not good for the country. It may be that the more important question is that maybe it's not good for the participants. But on the other hand, you see, the tradition of the club had been the base camp trips, say, which was the original model, I suppose. Or would that be more likely a high trip model?

Evans: A high trip, but also in the fact that John Muir said, "Go out and enjoy the wilderness."

Gill: Yes, and you see, it was during those years that we finally took "render accessible" out of the purpose statement of the Sierra Club. We no longer felt that we needed to work on that. But the economics of the outings program argued for allowing larger groups of people, if they chose to, to sign up for trips, because you had one leadership cadre, and that same cadre could handle more

numbers, but you still you had the expense of the cadre. So the outings people were I think somewhat under the pressure of trying to run an economically-feasible trip program, although Sierra Club outings have never been economical in my view.

Evans: You mean not economically--

Gill: Well, they're not low-priced. They're high-priced trips, yet at the same time they haven't made a lot of money for the club, although I presume the outings program is still delivering a little overhead money to the club. That was an argument a few years later over whether the pricing of the trips should allow the outings program to cover some of the club overhead on the theory that the executive director, the board, various entities in the club outside the outings department itself did have to spend time on the outing program. You know, overhead costs of headquarters and that kind of thing--.

Evans: Let's talk about the cadre, from what you recall. As I remember, the outing committee has been a fairly large committee, that many of its members were in place for a very long period of time.

Gill: Yes, the tenure of some of those people was fifteen, twenty, maybe even more years than that. And I think it's understandable how those people were defensive when the council came along and recommended some changes in the way they ran their program. They had what they felt was a successful program. Lots of people had enjoyed those outings, and many people went back year after year. They could demonstrate, I think, a kind of success. And so I'm sure the criticism from the council was not welcome. And I think that group of people had some representation on the board and many of the people on the board were folks who knew these outings leaders very well, so they had a little trouble coming to grips with the council's criticism.

Evans: There was a member from the outings committee who was a representative at the council, and I believe that still may be the case, that there was an actual representation on the council.

Gill: I don't remember that.

Evans: I seem to recall at one point it was Jon Edgington, and it was for some years.

Gill: All right. Yes.

Evans: I believe that in recent years it may have been Cal French, but I believe there's been someone designated. And there's been a fight about that, too.

Gill: Yes, but that kind of liaison I think makes sense in terms of organizational structure, that you do allow people or parts of the club to be represented. And, of course, I think we would have always welcomed somebody from an organization like the outings committee to come and speak to the council.

Rather interestingly, this number business was not solved internally. The limits were imposed by the Forest Service and the Park service shortly thereafter. And it always bothered me that the Sierra Club did not come to grips with this fully themselves but rather had to have their feet held to the fire, so to speak, by the federal administrators of these areas.

Sale of the Soda Springs Property

Evans: I remember in the early seventies when the club finally sold the Soda Springs property [in Tuolumne Meadows, Yosemite National Park].

Gill: Oh, yes.

Evans: Do you remember that? The Soda Springs property was sold to the Park service, and we had bought it earlier in the century--I think possibly even maybe to develop it at one time. But eventually we came to the point we were going to hold until the Park service could afford to buy it. Well, a year or so after the Park service bought it they closed the long-used campground at Soda Springs, and there was a real tussle in the northern California area about the Park service's "promise" to have kept that campground open.

Gill: You know, my memory of that site, that Soda Springs campground, is that it was just pounded to death. There were also promises to run the Parsons Lodge, the little stone building there, as a visitor center.

Evans: Yes.

Gill: I think the Park service has honored that agreement sometimes and sometimes not. It's been open sometimes when I've been there; other times it's not.

Evans: I think that has to do partially with their funding problems.

Gill: Probably, although they did promise. I mean, that was part of the deal. And actually the selling of that site was very controversial in the club.

Evans: Ah, could you talk about that?

Gill: Yes, you bet. The Sierra Club had used this site, which I think was probably a homestead sometime in history--which accounts for the fact that it was not in the Park service ownership in the first place--as a staging area for trips and a visitor center.

Evans: It's certainly an inholding of some kind.

Gill: Yes, an inholding. And the Sierra Club, I think, by this time was generally speaking opposed to inholdings in parks, but here we were the owner of one of them. Yet there were members who had fond memories of their own use of Soda Springs and Parsons Lodge. And the history and the tradition said, "Keep it," whereas the club policy, generally speaking, would say, "Get it into the Park service's hands so they can have the whole park instead of just part of the park." At the same time we would be arguing against Yosemite West, or the inholdings at Foresta in Yosemite National Park, here we were the owner of a piece of property inside the park ourselves.

Evans: Section 35.

Gill: Yes. But that was a tough decision and there was a lot of wrangling in the leadership ranks about whether we should sell it.

Evans: There was also a lot of concern about where the purchase money would go, wasn't there? Do you recall that?

Gill: Yes, but I don't remember what was finally done with it.

Evans: It seems to me it was divvied out in some fashion. I don't know what the amount was.

Gill: Yes, it was less than \$200,000.

Evans: It was \$106,000 or something like that, but there was some wrangling about how it should be spent. I'll have to do some research on this. Maybe I can look it up and ask you about it again later, because some of the money was going to be used for like a one-time-only kind of expenditure.

There was some wrangling about whether or not the payment for the Parsons Lodge property should go into the general fund or be used for some special projects.

Gill: Yes, that's an argument we've had on many occasions. Every once in a while a big donor would come along with a good-sized chunk of money. And the question always was, "Should we just put this into

the general fund"--because we were always short of operating funds--"and then not have any real way to make that up the next year, or should we devise a special project for it?" The problem we had with the Parsons Lodge/Soda Springs money has been duplicated many times. And if somebody has a special project, then that person argues, of course, for devoting money to the special project.

Evans: I think Ed Wayburn got some of the money for Alaska, but I don't remember. [Laughter]

Gill: Well, that was a good cause to devote it to, no doubt. But the person who had the stewardship of the whole club in mind might be arguing for the use of that sum to make up the current year's deficit, which always seemed to be lurking there by about May or June.

Evans: I think that Parsons Lodge, when it's kept open, is staffed by people from Yosemite Association or staffed by somebody who's basically a volunteer and not really a Park Service interpreter. It has been open, but I don't know whether it's open during the whole season; but I know it has been open.

Gill: They do keep something open up there, but I don't think it's the Parsons Lodge. I think it's the ranger headquarters. That's the building that's open in the winter.

Evans: But I have been to Parson's in the last few years and found it open. I mean they've had dances there and things like that, so I'm not sure what else is going on.

Gill: Yes, I have too. But I've also been there when it's closed.

Evans: That's true. For years I had the key to the bear locker, or whatever it was called. That building that was behind. I don't know how I got it, but I had it for years. I finally gave it to somebody.

Kaiparowitz Power Project

Evans: A lot of your activity in the club has been in primarily internal organization, organizational kinds of things. You were involved in some energy issues in the seventies and particularly in the Kaiparowitz hearing. Could you tell us about that?

Gill: Yes, and I suppose reviewers of this oral history might not know about the background of the seventies or particularly the

background of the Kaiparowitz issue. The Sierra Club, of course, in the seventies was deeply involved in energy issues involving protection of places like the north slope of Alaska and off-shore areas to keep us from going just hog-wild on drilling every place and was pushing largely for conservation measures as a way to ameliorate the energy supply situation. And of course, one of the alternates if you don't use oil is to use coal for the generation of electric energy.

So a consortium of utility companies, including ones from southern California, conceived of using the extensive beds of coal in southern Utah near Bryce Canyon at a site referred to as Kaiparowitz as a place to extract the coal and have a huge coal-fired power plant. There were some existing plants in the northern Arizona area like this. This one would be within sight and virtually sound of Bryce Canyon.

So the Sierra Club folks from that region--and this was largely a regional effort--undertook a real campaign to head off the development of that resource. And at one point they conceived of a press conference on site, and on site in this case meant at Lake Powell at the Wahweap Lodge across from Page, Arizona.

Evans: Wonderful place! [Laughter]

Gill: There's a big lodge there, and it had a meeting room. So they assembled some of their volunteer experts. Larry Williams, I remember, spoke on air quality. Ed Abbey came. Dave Brower came as the representative of Friends of Earth. And it was really a very well-qualified group of people who could speak on a wide variety of issues involving coal mining and power generation. We got reporters from some of the Rocky Mountain newspapers and I believe one or two national newspapers.

Evans: Anybody from southern California since the energy was going to go to them.

Gill: I don't think the *L.A. Times* got there. [Laughter] Anyway, we arrived. We flew up in this little puddle-jumper airplane--Dave Brower and I in the same airplane. This, of course, was after Dave had founded Friends of the Earth and after his departure from the Sierra Club. When we arrived, we discovered that the local folks, southern Utah, Kane County folks, had gotten word of this meeting, and they had decided to demonstrate at our meeting. And we had no idea how this was going to go, but a half hour or so before the press conference was scheduled to convene, a significant number of local people, like a couple hundred, which for that part of Utah is a passel of folks--

Evans: Especially fifteen years ago.

Gill: --with wives and children arrived in a motorcade. And they had signs. So they came into our meeting. We had assembled this panel on the stage and the reporters were seated on the front row in the audience. And so I made my little statement and Dave made his. I guess the two of us were representing the sponsoring organizations. At least some other environmental organizations somehow were involved and had representatives there. After the opening statements, the reporters were given an opportunity to raise questions.

We were heckled in our opening statements and they tried to shout us down. I was chairman of the meeting. So the reporters were asking the questions, and these people kept interrupting. I finally announced that if they wanted to seat a couple of "experts" on the panel they could respond to the reporters' questions as well, but only questions from the reporters were going to be accepted. And they rejected that opportunity.

Well, as it went on, the questions were asked and they were answered by the environmental experts, but the points of the locals weren't getting raised. So they finally had a little huddle and they agreed to seat two of their "experts." Then the press conference proceeded, and questions were asked about local economic impact of the coal development, which were the things that they were concerned about. Actually, it turned out to be a very fruitful exercise for us, but it also gave them a chance to get their points across.

The bottom line with them was, I thought, extraordinarily interesting. Their children had gone off to Salt Lake City and Las Vegas and Los Angeles because there were no jobs locally for them. And they'd married and were having families, and they weren't ever going to come back to southern Utah. And these people felt very badly about that. They felt that somehow life in the world had let them down. And what they wanted was jobs that would attract these families to come back. I haven't any idea what jobs they thought there were going to be in a coal mine and in an electric power plant that were going to attract people who were probably professionals and trades people and skilled workers. But this was the hope they held. And, you know, those aren't bad motives really.

Evans: Certainly not.

Gill: They're just unrealistic. Or at least that was our view. But the afternoon proceeded and at 4:00, I suppose, we broke up. A couple of the southern Utah folks who had come to what they called a

rally--we called it a demonstration--came up afterwards and said, "Well, we're surprised. We didn't think you people would be fair to us," and acknowledged that they thought that maybe they had been treated fairly. And in fact, the newspaper articles that resulted from that event did report the rally and the concerns these people had.

Now the end of this story, of course, is that, for reasons that may or may not have had to do a lot with our environmental position there, the plans for that power plant were dropped and the area, the coal mine, the coal resource there is undeveloped at this point. So that's a battle that was won, but the thing I'm always reminded about with these environmental issues is that they're never won permanently. Who knows what's going to come along next year with another plan to utilize that coal.

Evans: There's some other proposal right now right near Bryce.

Gill: You see, you never win them for sure. You win a short-term victory, but you have to be eternally vigilant because it might be back on your plate before long. One of the things those people said that afternoon, is that there wasn't any pollution from the Navajo power plant at Page. From the very place that we were seated we could see the huge funnel of smoke from that smokestack. There was this big, brown stain out across the sky, of course, which is a standard feature in that country.

And what are there, two of those big plants? Coal has been developed on the Hopi and Navajo reservations--mostly the Hopi, I think--and the notion was to use these slurry pipelines to carry the coal to where they were going to burn it. And, of course, the slurry operator uses the scarce water resource and burning the coal fouls the air. We were contending that this southern Utah country with its multitude of national parks and very important natural sights really deserved to have Class I air preserved. And yet these folks couldn't see any air pollution.

Evans: Well the Navajo plant befouled the air and the visibility at the Grand Canyon.

Gill: Have you seen the satellite photos where the funnel of smoke extends clear out across central Colorado?

Evans: Of course, there are plants and mines in southern Arizona which befoul the air in the southern quarter of the state as well.

Gill: You'd think we could come up with better technology, but maybe we just don't afford to use it. That may be the real problem.

Evans: That's probably true.

Gill: I think probably economics did in the Kaiparowitz plant as much as anything else: somehow the people who might have bought the bonds to build that plant decided it wasn't a good investment, or the people in charge of the power companies decided that that was not going to be significantly cheaper energy for them. Who knows what economic considerations may have gone into it as well. But clearly the vigilance of the southwest Sierra Club people was an important factor in calling a wide range of problems to the attention of the country. There was a real chasm in value structures here.

Evans: There was a later proposal which was called Son of the Kaiparowitz a little bit later in the seventies, and I think that the southern California folks worked with the people in the southwest on that, because the Los Angeles area was going to be one of the major recipients of the power.

Gill: Yes, the Los Angeles Water and Power I know has been one of the big purchasers because of the tremendous need for power down there with all those folks.

Project Independence

Evans: One of the other energy issues you have on your agenda is something about energy conservation in Houston?

Gill: Well, yes. During the seventies President Nixon projected a concept called Project Independence, that the United States should become independent of foreign oil by undertaking certain production enhancement measures. Actually, it was a germ of an energy policy. Which, of course, in 1990 we still don't have, leaving us right back in the same bind that we were then but with the Middle Eastern crisis that's upon us. Project Independence was subjected to a series of scrutinies around the country in public hearings, and the Sierra Club made a point of appearing at all of those hearings. There were probably a half dozen or a dozen of them around the country.

The conversation at the club leadership was that maybe the most critical of the hearings was in Houston, which of course is the heart of the oil industry. So we decided that I should go and present the club's position at that hearing. It was held in one of the large hotels in Houston with one of those huge ballrooms, and I would suppose that 95 percent of those present were oil industry people, representatives of big oil companies, representatives in

Houston of some of the drilling companies, the wildcat folks, the ones who had been responsible for the development of the oil industry in the country for the last twenty or thirty years before that.

And, of course, I came on with a strong "Let's cut down on the amount we use. Let's conserve energy. Let's be environmentally sensitive about the places that we develop." And I didn't get booed very much, although there were some obvious responses to some of the things that were in my hearing statement. But the big message that I had was that our salvation could be not increasing production but it could be reduction in consumption. And I described some things that we could do that would reduce the amount of energy that was needed, the amount of oil extracted or the amount of coal mined, like increasing mileage on cars to something over twenty miles per gallon and some things that today are just standard features of our lives.

And the tenor of that meeting was that the Sierra Club and Mr. Gill were just wild-eyed dreamers, that this was not even possible, that we couldn't save enough energy to get ourselves to first base let alone around the base pads. And I remember one representative of a wildcat operation particularly who accosted me on the way out and told me what a fool he thought I was. And I would love to see him again today while driving my forty-mile-per-gallon automobile which he told me wasn't possible. "You couldn't possibly have an automobile with room for more than two people and get better than eighteen, twenty miles to the gallon," which, you know, suggests something about the frame of mind that I suppose is still held quite widely, that there really isn't that much margin.

And, of course, there isn't as much margin now as there was because people in the environmental movement have insisted that we improve our efficiency and conserve energy. I don't use electric energy in heating my house. I use the sun instead and a little bit of wood along the side. I mean, we may enter the time when we're not allowed to use wood, the way things are looking these days [Laughter] with the smoke befouling the air. So there we were, just fifteen years ago, I suppose. I think our sense of how much energy makes for a good life maybe has shifted some, and I think in a positive direction.

Evans: Do you think it's going to shift any more?

Gill: It's got to. It seems to me we absolutely have to do more, and I think there's still a lot of energy wastage--terrific amount of wastage. You know, people still think they have to get in their car to go to the corner market. I have lived most of my professional life in Davis, which is a bicycle town.

Evans: More bicycles than people, aren't there?

Gill: About the same number. But at my school, there was only a six-unit bicycle rack for the teachers, and it very seldom had more than two bicycles--mine and one other. And some of these people--many of these people--lived within easy bicycling or even walking distance. My wife had the same experience at her school. So even among what I would assume are fairly sophisticated, fairly responsible people, we are still not using energy very efficiently, because bicycle power is so extraordinarily cheap and available.

Evans: It's one of the most efficient. I think part of the problem, and maybe you would like to expand on this, is a problem with leadership. In the seventies for all that's been said about him as a president, Mr. Nixon did sign a lot of legislation that was environmental--maybe not all the things we would want--but we really haven't had any environmental leadership since Jimmy Carter. And even now when we're engaged in, in a sense, potential war for oil, the administration talks about drilling and not about conservation.

Gill: And there's not a sign of an energy policy. The latest rumor I picked up was that there was a draft policy rattling around in the current administration in Washington, and all it called for was opening the Arctic Wildlife Refuge and going into the offshore areas, which are the things that the Sierra Club has been most dedicated to defending, but very little evidence of any attempt to conserve or to use less polluting, more readily available sources. I don't know that we have any national policy that encourages a shift to more natural gas, for instance. You know, where are we? Certainly, I presume, the Sierra Club is pushing hard for these things, but we're not getting a response from the political leadership. And, of course, our problem these days is we're not getting much response from our political leadership in any way, and that's very distressing, because the Sierra Club does have a dedication here to solving these things by political means.

Reaching out to Labor Interests

Evans: You mentioned to me earlier the club's attempt to work with labor.

Gill: Right. Les Reid, who at a later time became a member of the board, was argued strongly in the mid-seventies that the Sierra Club needed to reach out to labor. He was a machinist, I believe, and was very actively involved in his own union and had served as shop steward. He also cared deeply about the Sierra Club, and he wanted to see the Sierra Club get closer to unions. And we did find some

community of interest in issues about the safety and health in the workplace.

I remember one particular one having to do with working conditions in refineries. Shell Oil Company is the one that comes to mind; I don't remember the details.

Evans: There was a Shell strike in Martinez, I believe--

Gill: I think so.

Evans: --that the club got involved in.

Gill: And of course that is a really sound environmental issue, and the union and the Sierra Club could be on the same side. On the other hand, there are plenty of instances where it's very difficult to build a community of interest. Sierra Club activities frequently go contrary to full employment in certain kinds of occupations, because you're really trying to see less development rather than more.

And so it was an on and off kind of situation, and I think the years since that time it's really continued to be that way. There have been some times when we've had good, strong alliances with specific unions on specific issues, but overall I don't think we've ever really gained a whole lot of support from unions on some of our mainline issues.

Evans: I think the main one has probably been the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers, the one that we've had liaison with.

Gill: Right, and you see that has to do with that health and safety in the workplace issue. In the Northwest right now it's very difficult to reach any rapprochement with the timber workers unions, the mill workers unions, because they see the Sierra Club as one of the evil forces that's threatening their jobs. And so even on some other issue I'm sure we would have very little success enrolling their support.

Evans: Is there any communication going on, meaningful communication now, in the Northwest about these issues in terms of the fact that a lot of these jobs have been moving outside of the country for years and that the environmental movement is not the pure villain here?

Gill: Well, and that improved technology has reduced the number of people that it takes to put out a certain number of board feet. That keeps being spoken about, but the workers tend to be very deaf to that. They feel so economically threatened, I think, that it's very difficult for them. They focus on the spotted owl and anybody

who supports the spotted owl is the villain. They can't hear any of this other stuff, and it's very unfortunate.

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