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Sierra Club Oral History Series

J. Michael McCloskey

SIERRA CLUB EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CHAIRMAN, 1980s-1990s:
A PERSPECTIVE ON TRANSITIONS IN THE CLUB AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

With an Introduction by
H. Anthony Ruckel

Interviews conducted by
Ann Lage
in 1998

Underwritten by
the Sierra Club

Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the Nation. Oral history is a method of collecting historical information through tape-recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The tape recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is indexed, bound with photographs and illustrative materials, and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and in other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

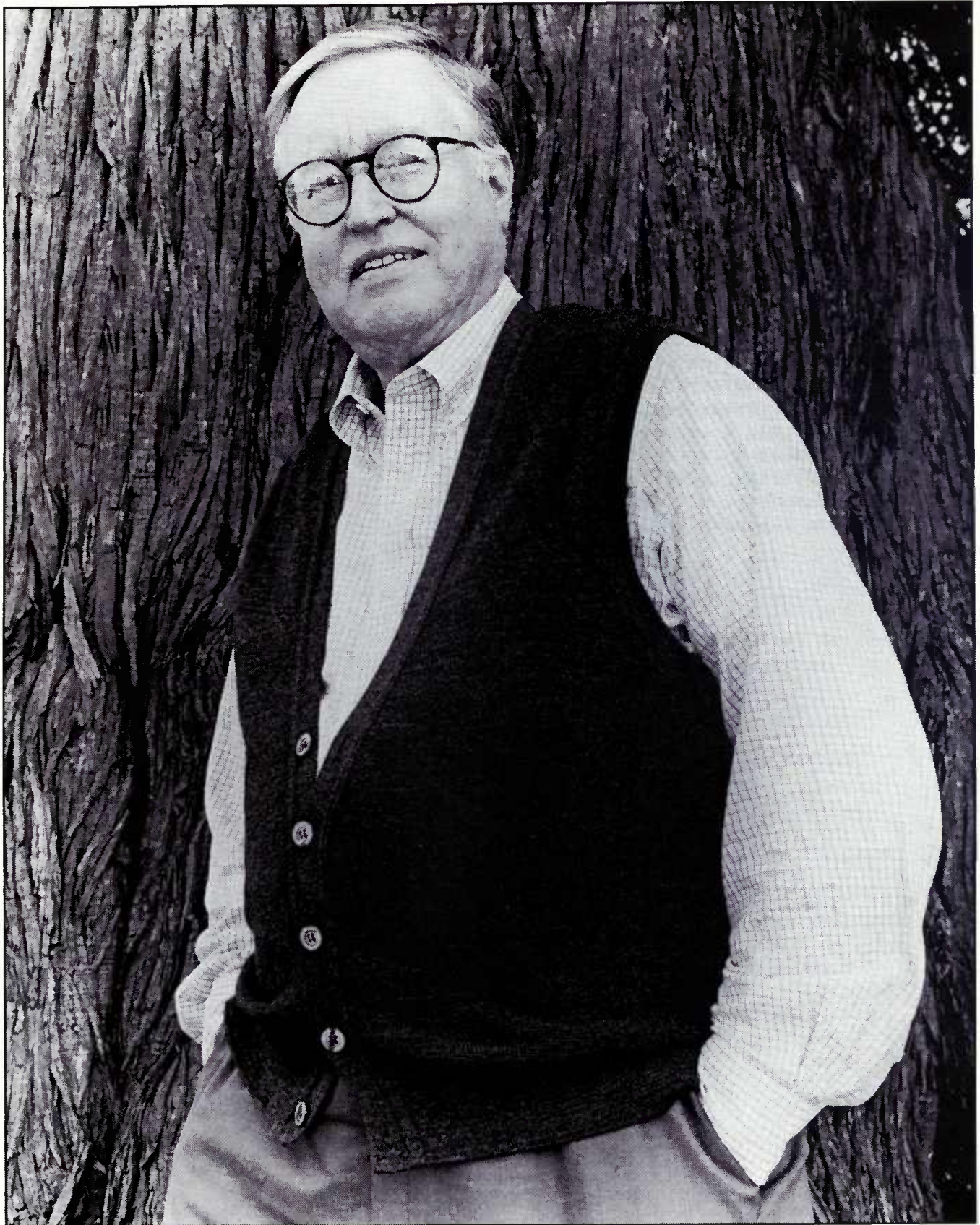
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Mike McCloskey, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, spring 1998.

Photo by Nancy Kittle.

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Sierra Club executive director during Reagan administration: James Watt, passage of wilderness bills, club growth and organizational issues; executive directors Douglas Wheeler, Michael Fischer and Carl Pope; role as club chairman, 1985-1999: representing the club in Washington, D.C., working on nonprofit regulatory reform, international trade issues, reflections on Clinton administration; Sierra Club international program: park protection, human rights issues, biodiversity; trends in environmental movement: radical environmentalism, market solutions, social policy issues, attitudes toward wilderness; changes in the club's environmental strategies; Sierra Club internal affairs: transitions in volunteer leadership, chapters and the national club, relations with Sierra Club Foundation and Legal Defense Fund; divisive issues in the club: ancient forests, zero-cut logging policy, immigration and population control; wife Maxine McCloskey's environmental activism: the Whale Center and ocean habitat protection. [This oral history updates 1983 McCloskey volume.]

Introduction by H. Anthony Ruckel, Past President, Sierra Club.

Interviewed by Ann Lage, 1998, for the Sierra Club Oral History Series, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

TABLE OF CONTENTS--Michael McCloskey

PREFACE	i
INTRODUCTION by H. Anthony Ruckel	iv
INTERVIEW HISTORY	vi
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION	viii
I FACING THE REAGAN CHALLENGE IN THE 1980S AS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CHAIRMAN	1
James Watt and the Reagan Administration's Assault on the Environmental Movement	1
Increased Public Support for the Club, and the Passage of Wilderness Bills	3
The Emergence of Radical Environmentalism	5
The Group of Ten	6
Ansel Adams Rallies to the Support of the Club	9
The Return of David Brower: A New Handbook, and Concerns for Disarmament	10
Building Professionalism in Fund Raising in the Early 1980s	11
Increases in Membership and in Staff	13
"Federalizing" the Club: A Shift from a National to a Regional Focus in Organizing	14
Issues in Club Organization	16
Accepting the Position of Chairman, 1985	18
Selecting New Executive Directors: Looking for Someone Outside the Organization	21
Executive Director Doug Wheeler, 1985-1986: A Poor Ideological Match	22
Returning to San Francisco as Acting Executive Director	24
Difficult for Outsiders to Learn Club Culture	25
Executive Director Michael Fischer, 1987-1992: A Different Management Style	26
Baby Boomers Expect Collaboration	28
The Job of Chairman	30
Emerging Environmental Issues in the 1980s	31
II THE EVOLVING ROLE OF CHAIRMAN: ENGAGING IN THE POLICY DIALOGUE IN WASHINGTON AND TRENDS IN CLUB CAUSES	33
Policy Advocacy, Fund Raising, and Lobbying	33
Collaborating and Studying Issues for the International Program	36
Participation in Policy Dialogues: Market Solutions	39
Defending the Nonprofit Sector Against Assaults by the Right	41
Affinity Credit Cards	43
Working with Legal Firms, and the Uniqueness of the Job	45
The Need for a High Level Club Representative in Washington	46
Planning Efforts in the National Club	49

	Writing about Wilderness	52
	A Shift Away from Wilderness in the Club and Public Agencies	53
	Conservation Biology: New Imperatives for Management	55
	Wilderness as Mental Construct	56
	Emergence of Radical Forest Activists, and Working to Save the Sequoias	59
	Doug Scott and Divisions over Ancient Forests	63
	The Clinton Administration's Approach to Logging in the Northwest, and the Club's Zero Cut Policy	65
	The Changed Character of Club Leadership	68
III	THE SIERRA CLUB IN TRANSITION	71
	Personality Conflicts and the Dwindling Power of the Board	71
	Committee Reorganization and the Diffusion of Responsibility	73
	Public Relation Campaigns versus Lobbying	76
	Less Money for Lobbying, More Spent on P.R.	78
	Local and Regional Entities Becoming Isolated from the National Organization	81
	Setting Priorities Becoming Problematic	82
	Organic Institutional Growth versus Engineered Solutions	84
	A Changed Presidency and Decision Process on the Board	86
	Fiction Over the Population Issue	89
	The Club's Environmental Strategy in Transition	91
	Relations Between the Club and Its Sibling Organizations	96
	Different Perspectives in the Club and the Foundation	97
	The Club and the Legal Defense Fund Go Separate Ways	101
IV	THE SIERRA CLUB, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE	106
	Relationships with Republican and Democratic Administrations	106
	Sustainable Development and Collaborative Management	110
	The Clinton Administration's Wavering Environmental Agenda	113
	Consideration for Appointment as Chief of NPS, and Reflections on Leadership Positions in the Clinton Administration	118
	The Club's Evolving Electoral Endorsement Program	121
	NAFTA, WTO, and Governing the Environment by Global Economic Imperatives	126
	The Fast Track Process for Negotiating International Agreements	130
	The Commission on Environmental Cooperation in Disarray	131
	Cooperating with Labor	132
	Division in the Environmental Movement	133
V	THE SIERRA CLUB INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM AND OTHER INVOLVEMENTS	137
	The International Program: Reforming the Environmental Role of the U.S. Government on the World Scene	137
	World Heritage Site Designation as a Tool to Reform International Lending	141
	Volunteers and the International Program	143
	Getting Involved in the Environmental Problems of the Arctic	145
	Setting Priorities: Individual Interest, Science, and the Precautionary Principle	148

Protecting the Human Rights of Environmental Activists Worldwide	152
Reflections on Serving in the IUCN	154
Standing Firm on Principle: Protecting Parks and Biodiversity in Ecuador and Japan	158
Establishing Corporate Accountability: Setting Environmental Standards and Promoting Responsible Investment	162
Beyond Compliance: Improvements Not Required by Law	171
Natural Value Mapping: The Beginning of a Trend	173
Adjunct Assistant Professorship at the University of Michigan	176
More Thoughts on Defending the Nonprofit Sector	178
VI DIVERSITY IN THE SIERRA CLUB AND IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT, AND FINAL THOUGHTS	183
Problems with Diversification of the Environmental Movement in the 1990s	183
"What Comes Next?": The Search for a New Agenda	187
Reflections on the Immigration Issue and Factions in the Sierra Club	191
Defining a New Club Policy on Social Issues	193
Efforts to Diversify the Club's Staff and Membership	196
Outreach to Church Groups, and the Sierra Club as a Church	199
Maxine: Wife's Activism in Protecting Whales and Ocean Habitat	202
Setting the Record Straight: Responses to Statements in Other Oral Histories	205
Stance on Nuclear Power in the 1970s	205
Early Cautiousness Concerning James Watt	207
On Hiring Decisions	208
Assuming the Directorship in the Wake of David Brower	209
Summing up Thirty-eight Years as a Sierra Club Employee	211
Looking to the Future	214
TAPE GUIDE	216
APPENDIX	
Notes used in planning the oral history	217
"Social Issues and the Environment," by Michael McCloskey	231
Resume, J. Michael McCloskey	243
Publications of Michael McCloskey Since 1960	248
Chronological List of Achievements of Michael McCloskey in the Field of Conserving and Protecting the Environment (January 1999)	268
SIERRA CLUB ORAL HISTORY SERIES LIST	271
INDEX	276

PREFACE--Sierra Club Oral History Program to 1978

In fall 1969 and spring 1970 a self-appointed committee of Sierra Clubbers met several times to consider two vexing and related problems. The rapid membership growth of the club and its involvement in environmental issues on a national scale left neither time nor resources to document the club's internal and external history. Club records were stored in a number of locations and were inaccessible for research. Further, we were failing to take advantage of the relatively new technique of oral history by which the reminiscences of club leaders and members of long standing could be preserved.

The ad hoc committee's recommendation that a standing History Committee be established was approved by the Sierra Club Board of Directors in May 1970. That September the board designated The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley as the official repository of the club's archives. The large collection of records, photographs, and other memorabilia known as the "Sierra Club Papers" is thus permanently protected, and the Bancroft is preparing a catalog of these holdings which will be invaluable to students of the conservation movement.

The History Committee then focused its energies on how to develop a significant oral history program. A six-page questionnaire was mailed to members who had joined the club prior to 1931. More than half responded, enabling the committee to identify numerous older members as likely prospects for oral interviews. (Some had hiked with John Muir!) Other interviewees were selected from the ranks of club leadership over the past six decades.

Those committee members who volunteered as interviewers were trained in this discipline by Willa Baum, head of the Bancroft's Regional Oral History Office (ROHO) and a nationally recognized authority in this field. Further interviews have been completed in cooperation with university oral history classes at California State University, Fullerton; Columbia University, New York; and the University of California, Berkeley. Extensive interviews with major club leaders are most often conducted on a professional basis through the Regional Oral History Office.

Copies of the Sierra Club oral interviews are placed at The Bancroft Library, in the Department of Special Collections at UCLA, and at the club's Colby Library, and may be purchased at cost by club

regional offices, chapters, and groups, as well as by other libraries, institutions, and interested individuals.

Our heartfelt gratitude for their help in making the Sierra Club Oral History Project a success goes to each interviewee and interviewer; to everyone who has written an introduction to an oral history; to the Sierra Club Board of Directors for its recognition of the long-term importance of this effort; to the Trustees of the Sierra Club Foundation for generously providing the necessary funding; to club and foundation staff, especially to Michael McCloskey, Denny Wilcher, Colburn Wilbur, and Nicholas Clinch; to Willa Baum and Susan Schrepfer of the Regional Oral History Office; and last but far from least, to the members of the History Committee, and particularly to Ann Lage, who has coordinated the oral history effort since 1974.

You are cordially invited to read and enjoy any or all of the oral histories in the Sierra Club series. By so doing you will learn much of the club's history which is available nowhere else, and of the fascinating careers and accomplishments of many outstanding club leaders and members.

Marshall H. Kuhn
Chairman, History Committee
1970-1978

May 1, 1977
San Francisco
(revised March, 1992, A.L.)

The Sierra Club Oral History Program, 1978-1992

Inspired by the vision of its founder and first chairman, Marshall Kuhn, the Sierra Club History Committee continued to expand its oral history program following his death in 1978. In 1980, with five ROHO interviews completed or underway and thirty-five volunteer-conducted interviews available for research, the History Committee sought and received funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities for a major project focusing on the Sierra Club of the 1960s and 1970s. In a four-year period, NEH and matching Sierra Club funds made possible the completion of an additional seventeen major oral histories conducted by the Regional Oral History Office and forty-four volunteer-conducted interviews.

Oral histories produced during and following the NEH grant period have documented the leadership, programs, strategies, and ideals of the national Sierra Club as well as the club grassroots at the regional and chapter levels over the past thirty years. The work of the club is seen in all its variety--from education to litigation to legislative lobbying; from energy policy to urban issues to wilderness preservation; from California to the Carolinas to Alaska, and on the international scene.

The Sierra Club oral history program, together with the extensive Sierra Club papers and photographic collection in The Bancroft Library--a collection of 1325 linear feet of archival records, more than 34,000 photographs, and films, tapes, and Sierra Club publications, all recently processed and catalogued--help celebrate the Sierra Club centennial in 1992 by making accessible to researchers one hundred years of Sierra Club history.

Special thanks for the oral history project's later phase are due Maxine McCloskey, chair of the Sierra Club History Committee 1988-1992; Ray Lage, cochair, History Committee, 1978-1986; Susan Schrepfer, codirector of the NEH Sierra Club Documentation Project; members of the History Committee; and most importantly, the interviewees and interviewers for their unfailing cooperation.

Ann Lage, Coordinator
Sierra Club Oral History Program
Cochair, History Committee
1978-1986

Berkeley, California
March 1992

INTRODUCTION by H. Anthony Ruckel

This is a tough job introducing a giant among us. You ponder, you remember, you come up with half a dozen approaches, and all the time you worry about the inability of your prose to measure the man. Finally, you are looking at your best effort. You know you have to run with it. I find a great deal of comfort in the certainty that others will be called upon over the years to attempt the same thing, as the story of the modern environmental movement and the Sierra Club's part is told. Maybe all of us together will be equal to the task...

Almost two decades are covered in this volume, decades of storied campaigns and of great accomplishment--many threats to our environment overcome, many laws passed, many places protected--but also decades which have taught us with increasing certainty that our planet's ecosystems, the web of life that sustains us, are under constant and increasing attack from our technological consumptive society. Of course we know that the ethos we embrace and the policies we adopt will ultimately tell the story. And, we all know Mike's contributions on the national and even international stage.

The leadership in this environmental quest falls to a few committed national citizens' groups, preeminent among them the Sierra Club. People, banding together in common purpose, must pull us through. It is fortunate for all of us that Mike chose the Sierra Club for thirty-plus years of his professional life. It is indeed fortunate for me personally. As a leader in the club during much of this time, I, like so many others, sought guidance from those with more knowledge, more experience, and, especially, greater wisdom. Here it gets personal, for no one meant more to me at this level than Mike McCloskey.

Mike has a wonderful talent for communicating, for expressing large ideas in understandable language. He always goes to the heart of complex issues, from new political realities to changes in the ever evolving role of nonprofits. He draws upon years of experience to place complex issues in perspective and to guide us to better solutions. In short, when Mike speaks, people listen. I learned early that listening to Mike immeasurably increased my ability to make at least decent decisions and, occasionally, borrowing on his strength, and in company with others, to make profound decisions. On a very personal level, listening to Mike was a damn good way for this leader to avoid making mistakes.

All this is a great deal and, indeed, my ramblings barely scratch the surface of the lasting contributions of Mike McCloskey. But one more subject must be mentioned, and here Mike is truly unique: his ability to tell us who we are, where we are, and where we are likely to

be going. This talent has played a central role in our reaction to the sudden change in our political position in the 1994 elections, which installed an anti-environmental Congress. It guided us as we built up our envied environmental political education program reaching out to the voters and matured our "hard money" campaigns. There are so many more examples.

A moment in the late eighties come to mind often. The board of directors recessed its meeting at a small lodge at Yosemite, stretched its legs, and found a path leading to one of those marvelous Yosemite Valley overlooks. Mike and Ed Wayburn drew together at the railing and began talking. I moved closer. Together, and back and forth, pointing to the falls, naming landmarks and trails, and discoursing on the faults of park management and what needed to be done. What the Sierra Club needed to do. Muir and Colby. Thinking, plotting, confidence and conviction in their voices. Things the club must do. Good things. Things that the club would do. There was no doubt.

What a moment! Listening to the authorities, the real experts. We have prevailed so many times because Mike was there. We will prevail in the future because Mike has in so many ways shown us how.

H. Anthony Ruckel
Past President, Sierra Club

August 1999
Denver, Colorado

INTERVIEW HISTORY--J. Michael McCloskey

When Mike McCloskey retired in 1999 as Sierra Club chairman after thirty-eight years of service, he was the staff member with the longest span of employment in club history. He joined the Sierra Club staff in 1961 as its first field representative, covering the Pacific Northwest for both the club and the Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs. He came to the Sierra Club's San Francisco offices in 1965, and following a brief stint as assistant to then president Will Siri, he was chosen as the growing club's first conservation director. In 1969, after the storied departure of executive director David Brower, Mike McCloskey took over the top staff position, serving as executive director for seventeen years of tremendous growth in club size and effectiveness and significant accomplishments in environmental protection. Since 1985 he has served the club as its first and only chairman, headquartered in Washington, D.C., with a broad and diverse set of responsibilities fashioned for his unique background and capabilities. He is widely respected as a leading environmentalist within the club and among the broader environmental community both nationally and internationally.

During the early 1980s, Mike McCloskey recorded an oral history for the Regional Oral History Office's Sierra Club History Series, covering the years 1961 to 1981. In 1997, as his planned retirement date approached, the Sierra Club asked ROHO to undertake a second oral history, to focus on his final years as executive director, his role as chairman, and his perspective on the environmental issues of the 1980s and 1990s.

Among Mike McCloskey's great strengths as a leader are effective strategic thinking, a prescient sense of emerging issues, cogent analysis, and an ability to place contemporary events in a larger perspective. These strengths were apparent in planning for the oral history, as well as in the rich contents of its final text. We planned interviews via email exchanges, beginning with Mike's comprehensive outline for suggested topics to be covered. This list and subsequent modifications, all reprinted in the appendix to the oral history, provided the structure for our interviews, as indicated in numerous references in the text.

In researching topics for the oral history, I had the benefit of the Bancroft Library's forty cartons of McCloskey papers in the Sierra Club collection, covering the years 1951-1981, as well as recent additions to the McCloskey papers from his years in the club's Washington Office. These recent additions were especially valuable for the sections on trade issues and nonprofit regulatory reform. Minutes of the club's board of directors' meetings and recent oral histories with club volunteers Edgar Wayburn and Denny Shaffer and former executive director Michael Fischer provided additional lines of questioning for the McCloskey oral history. Also important in framing this oral history was my association with Mike

McCloskey and his wife, Maxine, in my capacity as coordinator of the Sierra Club History Series and chair of the club's Library and History Committee. (Maxine, in fact, had been a most effective chair of the Sierra Club History Committee and staunch supporter of the oral history program.) I had frequently relied on Mike over the years as a resource for planning other oral histories in the Sierra Club and related environmental series.

Mike and I met on five occasions when he was in San Francisco for meetings and other commitments, for two-plus hours each time from February 7 through May 5, 1998. Interviewing took place in the Colby Mountaineering Room in the Sierra Club's national headquarters, an attractive room displaying the club's extensive collection of mountaineering literature and fine art.

Mike's spoken words required only minimal editing to produce a readable transcript. Assistant editor Carl Wilmsen made a few suggestions and requests for clarification and provided headings and an index to guide the reader. Mike McCloskey reviewed the transcript with care, making clarifications and a few additional remarks, but made no substantive changes. He proofread the final corrected and formatted text and provided the appended materials on his major accomplishments in thirty-eight years of conserving and protecting the environment. Tapes of the recorded interviews are available for listening in the Bancroft Library.

The Regional Oral History Office, a division of the Bancroft Library, has been documenting the history of California and the West since 1954. One of its first oral histories was with legendary Sierra Club leader William E. Colby. Since then it has produced twenty-seven major oral histories with club volunteer leaders and staff and assisted in coordinating the Sierra Club History Committee's extensive oral history project. The Regional Oral History Office collection also includes many related oral histories documenting forestry, parks, water and land-use issues, and other aspects of environmental history. The list of interviews in the Sierra Club series follows the appendix to this volume. Lists of other environmental topics are available from the office or on the Web site at <http://library.berkeley.edu/BANC/ROHO/>.

Ann Lage
Interviewer
Coordinator, Sierra Club History Series

August 1999
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

Regional Oral History Office
Room 486 The Bancroft Library

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Berkeley, California 94720

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly. Use black ink.)

Your full name J(ohn) Michael McCloskey

Date of birth April 26, 1934 Birthplace Eugene, Oregon

Father's full name John C(lement) McCloskey

Occupation professor Birthplace Dubuque, Iowa

Mother's full name Agnes Margaret McCloskey

Occupation teacher Birthplace Wesley, Iowa

Your spouse Maxine E. McCloskey

Occupation teacher Birthplace Portland, Oregon

Your children four stepchildren: Claire Johnson, Laura Johnson, James

Johnson, Rosemary Johnson

Where did you grow up? Eugene, Oregon

Present community Bethesda, Maryland

Education B.A., Harvard College; J.D., Univ. of Oregon

Occupation(s) association executive (see attached resume)

Areas of expertise environmental policy

Other interests or activities (see attached resume)

Organizations in which you are active (see attached resume)

INTERVIEW WITH J. MICHAEL McCLOSKEY

I FACING THE REAGAN CHALLENGE IN THE 1980s AS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND CHAIRMAN

[Interview 1: February 7, 1998] ##¹

James Watt and the Reagan Administration's Assault on the Environmental Movement

Lage: Okay, Mike, last time you were interviewed, it was 1981. It was either just after the Watt petition drive or in the midst of it because you did discuss it. We thought we'd pick up about that time and talk about the impact of the Reagan years and your final years as executive director. How do you want to start?

McCloskey: Well, let's talk about the Reagan years. In looking back upon that time, it's clear it was a definite transition. The 1970s had been a time of incredible progress for environmental programs. In retrospect, it is hard to believe that things happened as quickly and as favorably as they did. It was almost a whirlwind, but it all came to an end with Reagan's election in the fall of 1980. So, we began to learn how to be on the defensive and work out of a defensive posture at that time.

This time we faced a kind of a whirlwind from the other side: the Reagan administration proposing assaults on everything we had accomplished. We anticipated it with his election, but still it was disorienting to not know where the assaults were going to come from and just how great they would be. I remember [James G.] Watt proposing ultimately disposing of as much as 38 million acres of public lands and leasing tremendous areas of public lands for coal development or offshore oil development.

¹## This symbol indicates that a tape or tape segment has begun or ended. A guide to the tapes follows the transcript.

I remember Watt, the Interior secretary, telling me face-to-face at one point that, "We're so clever that we're going to change things that you're going to never be able to undo." He said, "I've served in the Interior Department before, and I know how to do things that will fix it for good."

Lage: What was the context of that discussion? Was that an informal or a formal meeting?

McCloskey: Well, when he was nominated, we geared up to oppose it. We had a face-to-face meeting. He met with a number of representatives of environmental groups in Denver, and we said the problem with him was he was not in the mainstream of environmental thinking; he was outside of it. He wanted to claim that he was within the mainstream, and we were outside the mainstream; so we got into this argument over what was the mainstream.

He and I kept up a dialogue from time to time. I remember another meeting in the cafeteria in the Interior Department with his aide, Don [Donald] Hodel, who later became the secretary of the Interior. A footnote on that: Hodel and I had both gone through Harvard together and through the University of Oregon Law School together. He was a year behind me at Harvard. He was the head of the Young Republicans, and I was the head of the Young Democrats.

Lage: So you'd actually known him?

McCloskey: Slightly, and we were both from Oregon back then. Then, we both decided to return to Oregon and go to law school in our home state. I went into the army for two years, so when I came back he was a year ahead of me. We didn't know each other very well, but we were aware of each other and aware of the fact that we had diametrically different views on public issues.

Lage: To come out of that same context.

McCloskey: Yes, so here we were now in the cafeteria of the Interior Department. Watt was secretary. Hodel, I think, was his deputy. Again, I was deploring what they were doing, and they were gloating over their power. That's when he told me about doing things that we'd never be able to undo. Later, we mounted a huge protest over his policies. We got 1.3 million signatures on petitions calling for his resignation; he wrote me--well, actually, it wasn't quite a letter; I was going to say a letter--he scribbled on the back of one of the Sierra Club's appeals that somebody had sent him: "It looks like I'm

your best recruiter. [laughter] You ought to want to keep me as secretary."

Increased Public Support for the Club, and the Passage of Wilderness Bills

Lage: He wasn't off the mark, was he?

McCloskey: No, he wasn't. He finally left in the fall of '83. Soon thereafter, our membership growth was in trouble, and our revenues went down sharply in '84. But in that period, 1980 to 1985, the Sierra Club's membership doubled. It went from 181,000 to 362,000, and our net worth did too, and our revenues.

Lage: A defensive posture doesn't hurt the organization.

McCloskey: That's what we learned to our great surprise. It had a reinvigorating effect on the movement. People rallied around, and they got damn mad that these things were going on. Of course, similar things were going on at the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] under Anne Gorsuch,² and in other bureaus too. Fortunately, during that period, we had a Democratic Congress, and the administration was not entirely of one mind about how far they were going to go--that is the Reagan administration--with Watt.

For instance, the greatest number of wilderness bills for national forests in given states were passed during those Reagan years.

Lage: Now that's very surprising.

McCloskey: It is.

Lage: Are you talking the whole eight years?

McCloskey: The eight years, yes, and looking at the period 1964 to the current date. This was a period of tremendous productivity with regard to adding to the national forest wilderness system. It was a way for the Congress to throw back a different agenda at Reagan--something that didn't have to depend on a lot of homework by the administration, that they could do themselves,

²Who became Anne Burford before resigning from the EPA in March 1983.

and we fed them the proposals. Some of these ideas came out of a reaction to the RARE II process under Carter.

Lage: It had been in the works for a while.

McCloskey: It had been in the works. They were shaped by our activism on the ground, but Reagan signed them. I remember going many times to see officials at CEQ to plead that they not veto them. In the end, they didn't; so that was their way of not looking all wrong--of wanting to try and balance the scales a bit.

Lage: Now who did you say you went to to plead that they not veto?

McCloskey: The head of the Council on Environmental Quality [CEQ]. I'm trying to remember the name of the fellow who chaired it then [Al Hill]. He was actually from California, Marin County. CEQ was down to a corporal's guard during those days, but still they did exist, and it still was a place where we could make input into the White House.

Lage: So you kept up your efforts to lobby the administration?

McCloskey: Yes, we did. Despite all of the hostility, I would see Watt from time to time, and we'd talk, and then the same thing happened under Hodel when he became secretary. We didn't have much contact with the intervening secretaries who came and went.

Lage: William Clark.

McCloskey: William Clark.

Lage: What's your take on Watt from those encounters and from observing him? Your take on him as a person.

McCloskey: I had some brief encounters with him during the seventies, I guess, under Nixon when he was head of the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. He did not strike me as a radical right-winger at all during that time. He struck me as a rather meek and mild personality. I was told that it was later that he became a born-again Christian and became fanatical.

Lage: Do you think that's what drove him, that kind of apocalyptic vision that he displayed at times?

McCloskey: That was our feeling at the time. Whether that's entirely accurate, I don't know. I'll tell you another interesting footnote. When I moved to Washington D.C., my wife was out house hunting. We decided to look for a town house, and she

was shown one that had all these biblical inscriptions on the walls. She asked, "Well, who's the owner of this?" And they said, "James Watt." [laughter] It would have been decent enough for our purposes, but we thought that was too much to buy the condo that James Watt owned.

Lage: That's quite interesting. [laughter] That would have made for some good stories. So, the Reagan years brought the movement into a defensive posture?

The Emergence of Radical Environmentalism

McCloskey: It also brought another interesting thing by the middle of the eighties. The radical-right posture that captured that administration provoked, within the environmental movement, a radical response from the left. We began to see groups like Earth First! emerge, and the deep ecology movement, and U.S. Greens; to some extent Greenpeace exploited that tendency too. So, the environmental movement, at that time, began to get a new radical flank that has continued to be very active.

Later, some of the toxic activists, such as Lois Gibbs and her types of groups, emerged as part of that too. It was actually a rather complex development. In the early seventies, at the time of Earth Day one wing of the movement had expressed itself through a lifestyle emphasis involving voluntary simplicity, and communes, and things of that sort. They very quickly parted company with the more pragmatic, policy-oriented component of the movement and essentially dropped out, with one exception and that was with regard to some of the protests over nuclear power plants proposals: the Clamshell Alliance and things of that sort.

Lage: We can come back to that.

McCloskey: Yes, so we got drawn into some of that. However, with that exception, it [the Nuclear Protestors] ceased to be by the mid-seventies a component affecting public policy. But by the mid-eighties, this whole new flank [radical environmentalism] had emerged in a very active and vocal way and that began to have quite an impact on the politics of the environmental movement.

Lage: How about within the club?

McCloskey: It has. It emerged in the mid-eighties. Well, for a while with concerns over management of forests, and Dave Brower

became the symbolic leader for a lot of those interests. He moved it for a while toward concerns with nuclear weapons and disarmament. We had proposals and petitions before the board, and candidates run, as you may recall. Then, certainly at a much later time in the nineties, it came back to the forest issue.

Some surveys at the time suggested that about 15 to 20 percent of the club's membership in the mid-eighties had deep ecology views. The phrase "deep ecology" may not be the best way to capture what I'm talking about, but the poll was worded in that fashion. The fact that we had 20 percent of our people with views that were sympathetic to the radical flank may explain why we have so many petitions in the club today.

With 15 to 20 percent of our members holding deep ecology views, that's a substantial number of people--maybe fifty to a hundred thousand people in the club, depending on our membership size at a given point, but it also explains why most of their efforts didn't succeed. Majority support wasn't there. There were four-fifths who did not hold those views.

- Lage: Who still held the pragmatic approach that I see you sort of symbolizing?
- McCloskey: I do. But I think most executive directors, and conservation directors have.
- Lage: I think we should talk more about this in the overall scope, maybe, towards the end, maybe, don't you think?
- McCloskey: Fine.

The Group of Ten

- Lage: Let's get back into the Reagan administration if there's more to say. We were positive with wilderness bills; a lot of things were defensive.
- McCloskey: One other interesting thing came out of that period, and that is the Group of Ten. The national environmental groups were, as I said initially, disoriented and somewhat in a state of shock by how thoroughly everything they stood for was rejected by an administration in power. So, in the early eighties, the executive directors of the principal national environmental groups decided they ought to start meeting together and

coordinating strategies. Somebody thought of it as "drawing the wagons tightly around the camp fire."

We had casual contact over the years, but we had not had a mechanism to try to coordinate strategy. In the fifties and sixties, the National Resources Council of America had played somewhat that role, but it had fallen by the wayside and was no longer a central organization during the 1970s. So, the Group of Ten was invented in the early 1980s and that later expanded into the Green Group in the 1990s. It, at that time, was limited to ten organizations. The club was part of it. I went to the meetings, and my successors did.

It was supposed to be an invisible organization with no secretariat, and no staff, and no structure--just a quarterly meeting to coordinate strategy. An environmental grant maker was associated with it [Bob Allen of the Kendall Foundation], and he developed some funding for an idea to have a series of big conferences around the country in the early eighties to try to rally the public.

All the executive directors were supposed to go to those, so I went to some of them. I wasn't convinced that they were playing that central a role because the Sierra Club was out mobilizing millions of people to sign its petition and was doing grassroots organizing. People were standing near malls, or supermarkets, and at subway stations, and other places getting anti-Watt signatures. So, some of us felt that it was much more effective to be organizing rather than just having conferences. For some of the organizations, though the conferences were probably more than they otherwise would have done. These became kinds of rallies. They were ecumenical in nature within the movement.

At any rate, the Group of Ten did decide to do a series of pamphlets collaboratively, which attacked the record of the Reagan administration, and helped develop a counter force--a sort of a high command. That has been a feature ever since. There have been critics of it, but it was a useful product of those times.

Lage: When you say critics, are these the critics that come from the smaller groups?

McCloskey: Yes.

Lage: Or the big groups?

McCloskey: At that time, the critics also included the groups that were not part of it. For instance, Defenders of Wildlife was excluded. I championed opening it up to more, but the National Wildlife Federation, particularly, and, I think, the National Parks Association, and some others felt that our process would be diluted by having too many at the table, and we'd begin to get too many different agendas, and they wanted to strictly limit it.

Lage: How did the club sit in the spectrum in conservative, to liberal, to radical?

McCloskey: None of the radical groups were part of it.

Lage: So you had the more mainstream wing.

McCloskey: Yes. Under my typology in addition to the radical camp, there's the mainstream camp, and also the conservative camp. I now put groups like Nature Conservancy, and certainly most of the hunting and fishing community, Ducks Unlimited and groups of that sort, in the conservative wing. As time has gone on, the Environmental Defense Fund has come to have one foot in the conservative camp and one foot in the mainstream camp.

The mainstream groups, as I see them, are all pragmatic groups that still work largely through influencing public policy and still have a degree of faith in governmental solutions. The radicals do not. They are totally disillusioned with the government, and tend to be more ideologically rigid, and more demanding in terms of what they expect in their agenda. The conservatives also are very skeptical of governmental solutions, but work through other means, buying land or education, for instance.

Lage: What about the Environmental Defense Fund? Why do you put that in the conservative camp?

McCloskey: They have embraced a lot of market-like solutions, not that those are necessarily objectionable. In embracing them, they also give aid and comfort to the critics, of governmental regulation.

Lage: I see.

McCloskey: In that way, ideologically at times they are part of the right-wing critique of EPA, for instance.

Ansel Adams Rallies to the Support of the Club

Lage: We're probably off on a new track here, looking at your outline.

McCloskey: Well, let me mention one other anecdotal tidbit from the Reagan period. One of the interesting personal things to me was that Ansel Adams emerged in that period as somebody who was caught up in the fight against Watt. In a full-throated way, he complained about what Reagan was doing. He even met with Reagan and told him he was wrong. I used to get handwritten cards from him every couple of weeks cheering us on. I just read his biography and spoke at an opening exhibition of his work from his latter years at the Smithsonian in Washington. During his earlier period, he was very outspoken--as in the fifties; when I first met him in the sixties on the board of directors in the Sierra Club, he had become a critic of Dave Brower's administration of the club, and I don't recall him saying very much that suggested that he was outraged over general trends at the time.

So, in my perception, he kind of slipped out of the mode of being somebody who was in a high state of agitation about environmental trends. But here he was now in the early eighties very much so, and fully energized, and in the thick of the fight. At that time, he was more associated with the Wilderness Society. He had become somewhat disillusioned with the club when he resigned from the board after leading the anti-Brower faction in the '68 election. He was, now, as you might say, in communion with the club again, and writing me these nice little cards and notes, and he came around to the club's offices from time to time. I remember one time when he autographed all of the restored Adams' photographs the club owns.

Lage: I remember that ceremony.

McCloskey: Yes, that was another nice footnote to that period.

Lage: Yes, he kind of came back into the fold.

McCloskey: That's right.

The Return of David Brower: A New Handbook, and Concerns for Disarmament

- Lage: Now, you mentioned Dave Brower, who also came back on the board of directors.
- McCloskey: He was on the board of directors during that period. In the meantime, he had founded two more organizations and left one of them behind, and had gone on to Earth Island Institute.
- Lage: What did he bring back to the board?
- McCloskey: The main thing I remember was he got us to put out another handbook. He had an abiding conviction that there was nothing better to boost membership than to have a handbook. So, we got a nice new handbook out of his championing that project during that time. I think we can probably use another, one of these years.
- Lage: In another ten years.
- McCloskey: He, however, was preoccupied with his other projects and other promotions. As I said earlier, he was lending his name to the disarmament movement, and was much concerned with things like nuclear winter and so forth. I think he was reacting to the defense buildup of the Reagan administration: Star Wars and all of that.
- Lage: Right, it's hard to put ourselves back into that time now that the Cold War is over. There was a tremendous defense buildup.
- McCloskey: The Reaganites think that's how, quote, "they won the Cold War." There was a huge outpouring of defense spending.
- Lage: Was it your thought that the club shouldn't get involved in nuclear disarmament issues?
- McCloskey: I had no problem with expressing concern about issues such a nuclear winter. I did not think, though, we could play a very influential role in issues of that sort. I also was not impressed with the strategic thinking or organizing abilities of the anti-war movement. We had some encounters with Physicians for Social Responsibility and some people from them came to our board meetings. I scouted out some of those issues. What was not clear to me was just how much of our resources Brower wanted to devote to those issues. We did develop an effective committee on the environmental impacts of

war under Anne Ehrlich's leadership, and I was all for what they were doing.

Lage: And they opposed the missiles in the Great Basin.

McCloskey: Yes. The MX missile basing project. I thought that was well conceived and there were good environmental reasons for doing that.

Lage: It wasn't just disarmament.

McCloskey: That's right. In general, I had felt that we should find an environmental basis to most things that we do, particularly if we're going to devote resources to them. Recently, I have written a paper for the board on handling issues of this sort. It's a think piece on social issues and the environment, and, in fact, the board, in a few weeks, will be addressing those questions. It's clear that the issues are not easily divisible into water-tight boundaries of saying what is and what is not environmental, and ideas of sustainability involve connections between them, yet we can't do everything. People have joined the club because they believe it's an environmental organization. There are challenging questions about how far we go beyond things that are clearly and demonstrably environmental in nature.

Lage: I have that in my file, and I think it would be a good appendix, that piece on the environment. [See Appendix]

McCloskey: Okay, all right.

Lage: It really lays it out.

McCloskey: Good.

Building Professionalism in Fund Raising in the Early 1980s

Lage: Now, you were executive director. Let's get into your role and your concerns more internally perhaps as executive director during those years, the final years of your seventeen-year reign, shall we say.

McCloskey: In the period of 1981 to '85, as the club's membership grew rapidly and our revenues grew, we realized we needed to be more professional in how we went about fund raising. During the seventies, we relied primarily on Denny Wilcher to solicit

donations. I inherited him from Dave Brower. He was an engaging fellow with a twinkling eye who went around to see major donors and cultivated them and that worked very well. He handled a portfolio of two to four hundred major donors. I might add, I don't think our major donors have ever been cultivated as thoroughly and well as Denny did.

We realized by the early eighties that this was not a one-man job. We needed the whole organized effort. So, we hired Audrey Berkovitz to set up a development department, and she hired a professional staff.

Lage: Now, all of this comes with the story about the foundation, which I think we've covered. Let's just have it as background.

McCloskey: Yes, well, a lot of those donations were deductible donations which went through the foundation; not all of them were, though. We began to do mass appeals to our membership on a regular basis. The Craver firm advised us in writing the texts of those. Audrey also developed a program aimed at about 50,000 major donors; those were people who donated more than a hundred dollars, or maybe it was five hundred dollars, and that group of club donors became the central focus of a whole series of organized solicitations.

We struggled through that period with how to deal with the high dollar donors and never got a good systematic process going to replace what Denny had done. Denny left us in the middle of this process.

Lage: I didn't realize Denny was a cohort from the days of Brower.

McCloskey: He had been helping Dave. Initially, he was brought in to help with book sales and distribution.

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McCloskey: He had started to do this major donor cultivation as a sideline for Dave, and I kept him at it. He was quite good at it. He was kind of a rebellious, idiosyncratic character, but he had no hesitation about calling people up cold and charming them into a relationship, and keeping them up to date on club projects they were interested in, and asking for money. He got a lot.

I wish we had found somebody like him in later years. We had all sorts of people assigned to that job, but they came and went with great regularity. About the time they finally began

to learn something about what we did, they were lured elsewhere. That's another story.

At any rate, that's, I think, one of the great developments of the club administrative apparatus: the birth of our development capacity during those years. During the late seventies, we experimented with some direct mail and things to promote membership, but we got into the solicitation of donations in a big way at that time.

Lage: So it came before the centennial campaign, this program to pursue the larger donors?

McCloskey: Oh, yes, that was half a dozen or more years before.

Lage: Was this pushed from the staff side, or from the volunteer side, or was it one of these mutually developed things?

McCloskey: I think the initial idea came out of the volunteer side. I forget exactly which committee we had at the time, but the conversations that we had led us to the realization that we were becoming a very different club. We were soon going to have over \$20 million in our budget, and we needed to stay up with the times. We were also getting advice continuously from the Craver firm about how to improve our fund raising. I think they suggested some things along these lines.

Lage: Were they helpful overall?

McCloskey: They were very helpful during that period. This also began another whole pattern of bringing in outside consultants to advise and guide what we did on things that were very technical in nature, or where there was a whole professional lore about how you did it--expertise that we couldn't hire very easily.

Increases in Membership and in Staff

Lage: It's such a dramatic change in size and scope from, say, when you started as executive director.

McCloskey: Well, when I started, we had about 70,000 members and only a \$3 million budget, and negative net worth. When I left, we had 360,000 members, the net worth increased five fold, even in constant dollars, and we had a budget of nearly \$20 million.

Lage: How about the size of staff? Do you have figures on that?

- McCloskey: The staff, by then, had reached nearly two hundred--those who worked for the national staff.
- Lage: That excludes the chapters?
- McCloskey: Yes, that did not include the chapters. When I became executive director, the staff was less than half that size.
- Lage: It's not a tremendous growth in staff, considering how big the club got.
- McCloskey: No, in general, the staff growth did not keep up with growth in the size of membership and budget. I have some figures in my old files on those. To some extent, computers may have helped obviate the need for a proportional growth in staff. Also, program was not directly tied to it. I mean you don't change the number of lobbyists you have in relationship to the number of members you have. So, some of our program was involved in serving members, but some of it was delivering program. I mean the book staff doesn't increase in proportion to membership either.

"Federalizing" the Club: A Shift from a National to a Regional Focus in Organizing

- Lage: Shortly before the last oral history, you sort of rearranged your conservation staff. Brock Evans left, and you had Doug Scott as the director of federal affairs, as well as John McComb. How did that team work out, that team approach to conservation? And Paul Swatek.
- McCloskey: They worked out very well. The staff in Washington and in the field, I think, was in as good a condition as it had ever been in terms of its capabilities and professionalism. In many ways, the patterns that have endured were established at that time--in the first half of the eighties.
- One thing that was done in the late seventies that's only been changed in recent years was that the field staff were "federalized". Doug Scott became conservation director, or the equivalent of that. We needed a system to manage our field offices. We began to get quite a few of them. The system that he developed was to have them be organizers on behalf of the national legislative program.
- Lage: Rather than a regional approach?

McCloskey: That's right. Instead of serving primarily the chapters, and the RCCs, and helping them organize to achieve their goals, he focused them on organizing the membership to support the national legislative program. In retrospect, that was controversial, but it did provide a means to organize them as a cohesive force. He was very good in getting them to do outreach, and set up phone trees, and things of that sort.

Lage: To support whatever was going on in Washington.

McCloskey: That's right.

Lage: You said in retrospect it was controversial. Was it controversial at the time?

McCloskey: It happened so gradually that I'm not sure how many people realized that this whole staff was being taken in the new direction. It was just two years ago, about 1995 that a decision was made to stop that. They are now focusing, not on delivering support for the national program, but toward organizing in the different regions on behalf of more generalized goals, and developing public support in a broad sense for environmental programs.

Lage: Away from even local legislative--

McCloskey: That's right. In fact, in a recent staff meeting, a number of our Washington lobbyists expressed great surprise to learn that an official change had been made, and they felt rather abandoned. So, this marks the coming and going of a pattern here.

Lage: Does this say something about less hope that there can be changes made on the federal level, or what?

McCloskey: Well, it also grows out of Carl Pope's feeling that this is the thing that we most need to deal with. We're on the defensive because of a Republican Congress, and a more conservative mood generally. What is needed to create a momentum for the environmental cause is to organize public opinion, and that needs to be done locally. Most environmental groups, the mainstream ones, have come to that conclusion. So, Carl has developed a whole series of programs along that line.

He regards this as building demand for our product and thinks that you don't need as much attention to the lobbying side of things if you change public opinion. He cites what happened with the re-authorization of the Clean Water Act a couple of years ago because public opinion had been organized

in a reaction against what the 104th Congress was trying to do in 1995. We're getting ahead of ourselves considerably here, but that change of focus from legislative lobbying to creating public demand is the source of this idea that the field staff ought to be reassigned in a different direction. There are some continuing issues on that, and we may come back to them later in this interview.

Lage: Yes, let's do that because I think it is very significant and probably significant that the trend in the eighties was to federalize.

McCloskey: Well, it was about 1979 that this federalization, as I call it for short, occurred. It got into high gear during this early eighties period that we're talking about.

Lage: Was it effective in your opinion?

McCloskey: It's hard to disentangle it. It was effective in stilling the voices of the board who felt the field staff was not adequately managed. Now, it clearly was managed, and managed with great rigor. It's a different question to ask as to what they were able to deliver. It's hard to disentangle because Doug was very good--along with Carl Pope, who was one of his assistants --in mobilizing a whole orchestrated series of initiatives, publicity ventures, and appeals to our membership.

Among all of these simultaneous initiatives, this was only one of them. We achieved, I think, our purposes, as on these state wilderness' bills, which was Doug's big focus. So, it's hard to sort out what in this bundle of initiatives worked, and what was decisive; maybe it was all of them together.

Issues in Club Organization

Lage: Yes, most likely. What were your main concerns, in those final years as executive director, about the club? Where did you spend your time? I guess that's what I'm getting at.

McCloskey: I spent a fair amount of time helping to solve problems relating to the build up of the development initiatives, and helping to define what an appropriate strategy was to deal with this defensive period. Plus the growth itself in the club led to lots of administrative issues. I might add, through all of this period, the pressures on balancing the budget every year

were tremendous. They were never-ending, and they were very wearing.

As I may have pointed out in my first volume, in two-thirds of the years when I was executive director, we developed surpluses, and the net worth grew fivefold. There were a number of years when we ran deficits. There were treasurers of the club, and other board members, who were extremely concerned about fiscal issues. Phil Hocker and Denny Shaffer were both treasurers during this period, and were very outspoken, and very focused on what they felt should be done. So, a fair amount of my time went into dealing with their agendas.

Lage: And their agendas being budget process?

McCloskey: Well, they dealt with budgets. They also had feelings that the accounting department wasn't everything it should be, and that different parts of the administrative apparatus ought to be organized in different ways. I actually don't remember all of the issues, but dealing with their concerns was a major preoccupation. In 1984, or late '83 going into '84, when Watt and Gorsuch were let go, suddenly the club's revenue fell. So, I threw on the breaks in spending. This led to some degree of unhappiness in the volunteer ranks--that suddenly there were freezes on spending, travel, and committee work.

We did get out of that period in the black, but it took a toll in terms of criticisms, like, "Why didn't you plan better?" They also began to be aware that some of the senior staff who were baby boomers had very different expectations regarding management, and with regard to management style. I was from an earlier generation, who believed that people ought to be put in charge and given the authority and tools to do the job, with fairly full delegations made to them, and that they were held accountable, and that they should have a fair degree of say in making the tough choices.

I see in retrospect that people in the baby boomer generation had expectations of a different style. They wanted a style that was much more collaborative and interactive, and that style prevails today. As they see it, a person who is the executive director, or the director of a program, is mainly a convener of senior people who will collegiately decide what should be done. It has gotten to the point today in some of our offices that they meet every day for hours to decide what should be done.

Lage: This sounds familiar to me also in the university library.
[laughter]

McCloskey: It was never clear to me how, if I were accountable in the end, this would work if I didn't make these final decisions.

Lage: Yet, you described just a minute ago that your style was to give someone a lot of authority.

McCloskey: I tried to hire strong, good people, but I reserved certain strategic questions. I would get lots of input, but in the end, I decided what we would do. This didn't fit the style of the boomer generation people like Doug Scott and John McComb and some would say Carl Pope, though he was less involved, and Allen Smith, the controller. I could see they had a whole different set of expectations.

Some of them got friendly with treasurers. Phil Hocker and Denny Shaffer were very forceful, outspoken personalities. So, this led to some restiveness along with the budget pressures of cutbacks in '84, and led to the question of what were my plans. I had been executive director for fifteen years, this was longer than most of my contemporaries in the movement. It's now 1984, 1985, and I've been there since 1969. People on the board of directors started asking me what my intentions were about how long I intended to stay as executive director.

Accepting the Position of Chairman, 1985

Lage: You were still a young man?

McCloskey: Yes, I had gone into the position at a fairly early age, and thank god I had the energy at that age to carry me through endless challenges. [laughter] Some of them also began to wonder whether they could do better. I had this older management style, and I came up from the grassroots as a conservationist, but I was not a trained manager.

Lage: You hadn't taken management training along the way?

McCloskey: I hadn't taken management 101 nor accounting, nor computerese. So, these were reasonable questions. I started exploring options with the board as to what my options might be, and this went back and forth through the summer of 1984 and the spring of 1985. Gradually, the idea emerged that there might be a way to move upstairs, so to speak, and become a senior policy officer of the organization without having to be responsible for day-to-day management, without having to be responsible for

balancing the budget, and worrying about personnel problems. The more they talked about that, the more attractive that began to sound to me.

Lage: It sounds very attractive as you describe it.

McCloskey: I had done the other things. I thought I had done pretty much what I could in terms of the management side of the club. I looked back at that time in my years, and I thought my happiest years were when I was dealing with conservation policy.

Lage: Had you had to fairly well delegate that in the end?

McCloskey: Well, throughout the early eighties as we grew, the management side became more and more demanding, and we had some officers who were more and more demanding about what they felt were needs that needed to be addressed. We brought in more and more consultants to help. I confessed I didn't have the background on how to handle computer programming, nor did I know the latest in development processes, but there were people who did. So, we brought them in, but we would get into endless fussing about whether the consultant was recommending exactly the right thing, or there might be some other way to do it, and getting another consultant to cast light on that.

This basically reflected their questions about whether somebody else might have more tools and background to address that end of our work. So, we went back and forth on that. Dr. [Edgar] Wayburn and Dave Brower felt I should stay as executive director and not succumb to the arguments of these people who thought I might be happier moving upstairs. I asked myself, "So, if I put in another five years fussing over budgets, where am I? It's not going to prove anything I haven't done already, and maybe we could do better."

Then, Denny Shaffer finally said to me, "It's up to you. You decide whether you want to stay on or accept this offer." I decided, finally, to accept it. There was then the question of what exactly the job description would be, and what the title should be. If it had not been for the fact that the bylaws specify who the president is, they would have given me the title of president and had the person we regard as the person who chairs the board be the chairman, and I would have been the president.

They thought it was just too hard to change the bylaws, so they gave me the title of chairman and kept the presidency as it is. They looked at other possible titles too. I remember somebody looked at the IUCN and said, "Well maybe,

director general," but that's kind of foreign and pretentious, so we decided not to do that.

Lage: Was Denny Shaffer's relationship with you a tense one, or was this done in a warm and friendly manner?

McCloskey: It was a bittersweet one. Denny's personality is such that he tends to quarrel with whomever in the organization is perceived to be somebody in a position of power or authority. Today, Denny and I have a very cordial relationship, but he has had somewhat of the same relationship with my successors as executive director. Phil Hocker and I, today also have a good relationship. He was executive director of the Mineral Policy Center, I'm now the chairman of the board of the Mineral Policy Center, and now he's left there. So, he and I were joking that when I was there earlier as its treasurer, I was far easier on him than he was on me. [laughter]

Lage: Interesting.

McCloskey: So, life goes on. I presented an award to Denny last year for his many years of service, and, indeed, there were many very important contributions that he made to the club in helping us to professionalize and upgrade our management and administration. As I say, in the final analysis, Denny said he wouldn't push the point if I really intended to resist it. I decided I was ready for a change.

I thought it might be interesting if I relocated to Washington, D.C. to represent the club there when the executive director was out here. I had not worked regularly there, though, I had visited there often as executive director and earlier. I also wanted to get out of the hair of the executive director. It was part of the understanding that I would not be involved with day-to-day management of the club. I decided in making the change to steer clear of expressing viewpoints about what the executive director did on day-to-day management.

I either directed my thoughts toward the larger framework for our work, or I would work on very specific things. I worked both ends of the spectrum, so to speak--either the very broad large framework that affected our work or trends of thought, or on very specific things where somebody in the organization asked me to help.

Lage: Was that something you conceived of?

McCloskey: Yes, I worked that out as it evolved over the course of time.

Selecting New Executive Directors: Looking for Someone Outside the Organization

Lage: Did you have anything to say about recommending your successor?

McCloskey: Yes, one of the understandings that got embodied in my job description is that I would be part of the team that would hire new executive directors. I was also supposed to evaluate them, but that never proved to be workable. It did prove to be workable to have me as part of the search committees, and I was part of the search for the last three executive directors. I was part of the hiring group and was part of the consensus in every case about who should follow.

Lage: I didn't realize that. Was there discussion in replacing you about hiring from within?

McCloskey: The first two executive directors had been chosen from within the ranks. As we had become large and complex, with many management questions arising, the thought had grown strong by the mid-eighties that we should go outside and find a top professional to run the organization. This idea was much in vogue at the time--that you could do better by going outside.

So we were looking for somebody at that time who had experience with the environmental movement but who also had experience with government. The thought at that moment, which was in the mid-eighties, was that with the Republican administrations in power nationally, it might be an extra bonus if we could find somebody who had a basis for doing better in lobbying in more conservative administrations.

Lage: Didn't that sort of worry you in terms of sending that person into the Sierra Club?

McCloskey: Well, the person we hired, Doug [Douglas] Wheeler, was somebody who had worked during the early Nixon administration in the Interior Department as one of the deputy assistant secretaries of the Interior. He worked under Nat [Nathaniel] Reed. On issues of Alaska, he'd been very supportive and very accessible. People thought highly of him. You may recall, during that period, there were some excellent environmentalists in different positions during the Nixon administration. It's very curious, but there were.

Lage: Better than you've had since.

McCloskey: Yes, and Nat Reed was one of them. He [Doug] was Nat Reed's deputy. He later went on to work for the National Trust for Historic Preservation and for the World Wildlife Fund. So, the thought was that here was somebody who had what we wanted. I was part of this consensus.

Lage: Had you known him very well?

McCloskey: Not well, but I had known him. I had dealings with him, and they had all been perfectly cordial and promising encounters.

Lage: Do you think the senior staff, like Doug Scott and John McComb, were resentful that they weren't considered? I have the impression that they had a little more careerism than the earlier generation. I don't mean that negatively.

McCloskey: That's probably true. Yes, I think it is true that there was a cadre there who were beginning to think of themselves as watchdogs of the club's future.

Executive Director Doug Wheeler, 1985-1986: A Poor Ideological Match ##

McCloskey: In the summer of 1986, I moved back to Washington, D.C., which was about a year after Wheeler came on. I didn't see the storm brewing over Wheeler very much while I was here. But soon after I left, it whipped up a fury.

Lage: Well, you stayed here for a time. I don't mean to interrupt you, but did you help in the transition?

McCloskey: Yes, I was around for a year after Wheeler came aboard. I turned it over to him in July, 1985. I stayed on a year; it took me roughly a year to arrange my affairs, and my family to move East. During that time, Doug and I had a cordial relationship. He was very deferential. He'd occasionally ask me for some kind of input, but he didn't consult me very much about what he was going to do.

What, of course, became apparent was that it was not a good match ideologically. His personal politics were further to the right than the club had been, if you can use those terms--left and right. He was much less willing to criticize business and to go head-to-head with them.

Lage: Did you realize that quickly?

McCloskey: No. Well, I began to see some signs of it. He asked me, I think, to do a paper for him on recreational fees that other people on the staff were pretty suspicious of. I was willing to give it the benefit of the doubt, but it was an indication. He turned out to be in the same mode as I had been with regard to staff management. That is, it was sort of a standard approach where decisions were not made collegially. He even did less consultation than I did, and I thought I did a fair amount.

Doug, and John, and others who had expected to get a new system, where they would all be involved collegially in determining what was done, were gravely disappointed. So, the outsider did not bring in the new management system and skills that they had been looking for, as it turned out. He had a somewhat rigid and, I am told, authoritarian style.

Lage: So, you were in the East when the storm--

McCloskey: Storm broke. And I don't have a feeling for the immediate precipitating factors, nor the chapter and verse of what happened during that period. I gather it was very traumatic, and the board was drawn into it, and there was great stress. Michele Perrault was defending Wheeler as club president at the time. Doug Scott and Denny Shaffer now, ironically, were critical of him. Again, to some extent, I think Shaffer was reflecting the close relationship he'd developed with John McComb and Doug Scott.

Lage: And Michele, what was she reflecting?

McCloskey: I think she had a commitment to change at the time, and felt a part of the decision that had been made, and wanted it to work, and was resentful of those who criticized it. She had good personal relations with Wheeler. Though, politically, I don't think they were that close at all, so it's kind of ironic. Shaffer was closer politically to Wheeler than Michele was.

Lage: That's interesting, it's so hard to draw the line.

Returning to San Francisco as Acting Executive Director

McCloskey: That's right. I think there are other explanations for those personal line-ups. At any rate, to my great surprise, I had not been long in the East before I got cries to help. Wheeler resigned, and I was asked to come back as acting executive director for six months.

Lage: Oh, it was only a six-month stay?

McCloskey: It was from October 1986 until May 1987.

Lage: What did you find when you got back there?

McCloskey: At first, I thought, well, I'm not going to have much authority during a period of this sort, but I found that Doug and Carl were overjoyed to see me back. They assured me that my presence was welcome.

Lage: And you looked very collaborative all of a sudden. [laughter]

McCloskey: That's right. They assured me that they wanted to work with me to put things right. The officers of the club were exceedingly friendly, and everybody rallied around, and I got a standing ovation when I came in the first staff meeting. It seems hard to believe. We were in a new location now over on Polk Street.

But that six months wasn't a very long time to be back, and my main job was to calm things down, to restore staff morale, at least in San Francisco where it had been traumatized, and to get into cordial working relationships with board members, and set up a process to begin a search all over again.

Lage: You'd lost some staff as a result of all the upheaval, right? Audrey [Berkovitz] Rust. Her name is Rust now.

McCloskey: Yes, she moved on. Some new people had been hired in public relations. So, there had been some limited change, but it was mainly about getting the ship righted and sailing in an agreeable direction, and it didn't last too long. I didn't relocate here; I merely stayed in various hotels. I would commute every week or two back to D.C. for a couple of days, and then come out and stay here for four or five days again, and then go back.

Lage: Did you see any major sea changes, other than everybody was so happy to see you?

- McCloskey: The main thing I remember is that I was mainly relating to all the department heads and helping to give them some interim direction as to what they were doing. I don't recall many of the specifics otherwise of that brief period.
- Lage: This sounded like a really major internal upheaval, with everything in disarray. From back in Washington, did it affect the work of the club on the federal level?
- McCloskey: Not really. What you would quickly find is that the Sierra Club has a nominal hierarchy but is really a polycentric organization. It has all these dispersed centers of power and activity, and they are able to keep going fairly well if no one is cutting off the money or sending down prohibitions. So, I think things went on there [in Washington] without much effect.
- Lage: It may be hard to assess what might have been missed in the process. I just can't imagine that Scott was thinking much about managing conservation during the upheaval.
- McCloskey: Well, you know, Doug Wheeler was with us only fourteen months. In neither the early nor the latter period of that time was he fully engaged because he was either learning or he was exiting. So, his impact upon the organization was rather slight because it just wasn't a long enough period to make change. It was basically a lack of a good cultural fit, as well as a disappointment in terms of a managerial style.

Difficult for Outsiders to Learn Club Culture

- Lage: You emphasized the political fit. I remember the incident when he changed the letterhead on club stationery.
- McCloskey: Oh, yes.
- Lage: He couldn't quite get the organization.
- McCloskey: Well, that's right. That's another theme worth exploring. For a while, officers had this idea that they would do better going outside the organization for an executive director. They thought we had become too ingrown and didn't realize the values of new blood, and wider sets of experience.

With Wheeler, and following him with Michael Fischer, they came to also realize that having somebody who doesn't know the ropes internally presents us with real problems. This is a

very complex organization that has its own culture in terms of how things should be done, and who makes decisions, and who should be deferred to, and which things are sacred, and so forth. It's not easy to learn that coming in cold from the outside, particularly, if you haven't been active as a member and a participant.

It was not understood just how many things of that sort there are. So, the people who came in from the outside just had no notion that the letterhead was not something that the staff changed at whim.

Lage: And you knew it without even thinking about it.

McCloskey: No. Well, it's interesting. When I took over from Brower, he had letterheads that were full of certain Ansel Adams photographs, and certain type styles. I decided that I didn't want the organization to continue to be thought of as Brower's creature. So, gradually, I did look toward changing the type styles and the images, but these were done in collaboration with the board of directors and different committees. They okayed the ideas that were shared: we looked at different pieces of art work; we could use this one or that one. I basically restored the use of the Sierra Club seals, which were our traditional images that spoke not of the books program but of the club's history and traditions. We used earth tones rather than stark black and white, and things that I felt were more expressive of our personality and philosophy. We put a Muir quote at the bottom of the letterhead, and things of this sort.

I did think it was part of the role of the executive director, as a club leader, to be concerned with such matters. I did it in a way that it was accepted.

Lage: And consulted others.

McCloskey: Yes, right.

Executive Director Michael Fischer, 1987-1992: A Different Management Style

Lage: Okay. Let's talk about the hiring of Michael Fischer and how that contrasted with the previous hiring of a new executive director.

McCloskey: When we went to find a replacement for Doug Wheeler, the board still was intent on finding somebody from outside the organization. They still had this idea that we wanted to get beyond being ingrown. This time they wanted to have somebody they were sure was a good ideological fit. After sorting through the options, Michael Fischer looked like a good bet. They also still wanted somebody who had some governmental experience, more varied experience than just working for an environmental organization.

He [Fischer] had been in California state government. He had a fine record in championing environmental causes, particularly, coastal conservation. He seemed to know our history and to be imbued with it. He was a hiker in the Sierra, so this seemed like it was a good bet. He was still an outsider: somebody who didn't come up through the ranks.

Lage: Was that a concern this time?

McCloskey: It was not a concern in hiring him because they thought that was what they wanted. By the time he left, after five years, opinion had swung back the other direction. He had many virtues, but he really didn't understand the idiosyncrasies of the club's internal structure. He had trouble understanding how to engineer consensus in the club, and to get things done.

Lage: When you say in the club, do you mean with the board of directors in particular?

McCloskey: Yes. Actually, I spoiled the board, I think, because I had worked very hard to collaborate closely with them. If I didn't collaborate enough with the staff, I offset that by collaborating very closely with the board, and paying attention to what they wanted. I made laborious notes at each meeting of everything that they suggested, and developed follow-up processes.

Lage: So, you really massaged the board?

McCloskey: I massaged the board, and the other two outsiders didn't have that model in their mind. They had the idea that they were running the staff. Volunteers ran chapters and other club entities, but they had their own domain. They felt the board, basically, should approve what they proposed and go along with it. The idea of collaborating with them to determine what should happen, overall, was not something that came easily or automatically to them.

Lage: It does sound like earlier there developed these parallel relationships between the lower staff and the board. You mentioned that Denny Shaffer had a good relationship with Doug Scott.

McCloskey: Well, yes, that's right. Different board members developed close relationships with different staff people; staff people were assigned to support different committees whether it be a finance committee, or a membership committee, or different conservation committees, or the publications committee. All sorts of informal lines of sympathy and common feeling developed between various staff people and volunteers. They often became or were board members.

So, board members got information and impressions from all these different sources and that shaped their view of how things ought to be done. It also shaped their sense of collaboration. When I was the executive director, I did that at the board level, just as other staff people were doing it with the publications committee, and the membership committee, and the finance committee. These outside executive directors didn't have that model in their minds; so the distance between the board and the executive director bothered the board, I think.

Baby Boomers Expect Collaboration

Lage: You came to be seen as the model executive director.

McCloskey: I suppose, but it wasn't that I was doing things differently than the staff came to be doing then generally. Of course, Dave Brower didn't have that relationship either. I did it that way because I learned a lesson from the problems of the Brower years in the sixties. Though, Brower thought of himself as somebody who came out of the volunteer ranks and was sort of empowered, I suppose, out of that experience to act on his own notions of what was best for the organization. I could see that wasn't working, and one needed to adopt a collaborative relationship. It was the collaboration at that level that I was always most focused on.

It was probably to my detriment that I didn't focus more on collaborating with staff. In retrospect, I can see that was a generational thing. I'm finding other people of my generation have the same reaction to people of the baby boom generation: culturally, that generation expects a very

collaborative relationship. Neither succeeding generations, nor former generations, have that same cultural fix on that as expected procedure.

Lage: You're finding the younger generation is not as collaborative?

McCloskey: That's right. So-called Generation X, and even those after them, don't have the same patience for endless office meetings and the lack of anybody being in charge, and making decisions, and getting things done. So, the boomer generation is a very big cohort and has a disproportionate influence, but it has its own cultural baggage. They assumed, because they're such a large cohort, that that is the way things now are. I'm of a mind to think that's the way they are. [laughter]

Lage: And it's going to change again.

McCloskey: That's right; it is changing.

Lage: That's very interesting. How did Michael Fischer, from your perspective, handle this collaborative process in terms of his staff?

McCloskey: I don't think as much as some wanted, but he did have lots of meetings. He had a very light hand on things. I think he tended to give people lots of leeway. He used lots of consultants too. Again, I was in Washington, D.C., and I was not here. I purposely distanced myself from those management questions because I didn't want to be developing impressions and judgements about all of that because that was what I was staying out of.

Lage: Did you stay on to help with the transition to Michael Fischer?

McCloskey: No. I briefed him for a couple of days, wrote a number of memos, and gave him my best advice. Both he and his successors did not consult me very much. My job description suggested that they might. In fact, in the evaluations of many of my successors, the executive committee was constantly imploring them to consult more often with me.

I can see that really isn't personally palatable to them. They were self-confident people of experience who thought they knew how to run an organization like the Sierra Club, and they didn't need the help of the "old guy" who left. In terms of human dynamics, that's perfectly understandable.

I saw no point in trying to force something if there is no audience for it. Besides, I had decided to stay out of it,

unless I was invited in. I found that usually after about their fourth year, they began to change their attitudes toward me and began to kind of hold out the olive branch a little more. We began to have dialogue, as they were more comfortable with the job, about broader strategic matters.

Because I didn't force myself, and I was not judgmental about what they were doing, the relationship usually got a bit better. By the fifth year, Fischer decided he had enough so that didn't go very far. I'm finding that now in my fifth year with Carl Pope, and our relationship is growing more open.

Lage: And he was your staff member.

McCloskey: Yes, that's right.

Lage: So that's even more complicated.

McCloskey: But I realized that the way my job had been structured had some very unrealistic notions: that I was sort of the senior guy who was supposed to advise a lot on strategy and be consulted frequently just was not workable. So, in many ways, I invented the job of chairman around what seemed to be workable and went off in some different directions.

The Job of Chairman

Lage: Should we talk about how it was construed first, and then how it changed? Whatever you think is important.

McCloskey: My job description was developed in January, 1986. It describes me as the senior officer of the club with the responsibility for providing conservation analysis, guidance, and leadership on policy and strategy, and that was to be both to the board of directors and to the executive director. The role vis-a-vis the board of directors worked out quite well. Through these eleven or twelve years now, I've felt my relations with the board have been very cordial, and supportive, and even interesting. With the executive director, it simply didn't work in that way for most of the time.

It went on to describe various activities that I was supposed to report on: conservation progress, plans, and strategies. All of that, in fact, is the normal job of the executive director. In my reports to the board of directors, I never talk about ongoing political events in Washington because

I realize that's for the executive director and the conservation director to address--that's what they're talking about. So, I talk about themes behind what's going on in Washington.

Lage: The longer view?

McCloskey: The longer view, with a bigger context. I talk about changes in conservation theory, new issues that are coming along, things that aren't on our agenda yet. In fact, one of my roles that I take some pride in is what might be called scouting out new ventures, finding issues that are cutting-edge ones, and getting the club to engage with them and pick them up.

For instance, climate change; I was the first one in the late eighties to see that this was going to be a big issue. I talked the club into embracing it, and raising money, and developing a program on it.

Emerging Environmental Issues in the 1980s

Lage: How did you perceive--

McCloskey: Well, what I found when I got to Washington, D.C., was that I, as a senior person in the environmental movement, got invited to all sorts of policy dialogues and think tank ventures in a place that was thick with them. Most of the regular staff was too busy with their immediate fire fights to have time for these. Besides, they were the kind of thing you tend to only get interested in if you've been around quite a while and you're beginning to see things in broader and broader frameworks.

So I started going to these because they seemed interesting to me. For instance, I think I went to an EPA retreat on climate and heard all of these papers by experts, and this was very interesting. Then, some people, frankly, cultivated me who were pushing the issue. They found an easy mark, but I listened, and took notes, and asked hard questions.

Sometimes, I began with a fairly skeptical state of mind and played the devil's advocate until I felt I had good answers for problems. For instance, at that time, there was still a body of people who thought global cooling was the problem. I said, "Well, how can we be having both?" Well, gradually, we disentangled all that.

Lage: Did you become alarmed about it?

McCloskey: I came to understand it was a very serious issue, and it was a broad over-arching issue, and I became very interested in the idea of geophysical systems being balanced. We had been talking heretofore largely about biological systems being imbalanced, and this was a new concept with geophysical systems. We had talked about Van Allen belts and things of that sort, but this was, intellectually, a big new dimension of environmental work.

It fed into the international dimension--that we can't solve all of our problems in our backyard--that there are bigger arenas in which they'll play out, both the destructive forces and the remedies. I was very interested in the international program and playing a role in it too. That was one example, another is trade. In the late eighties and early nineties, again, people approached me who were working in these areas who were desperate to get the environmental movement involved, and were seeing the impacts of trade agreements on the environment, and environmental laws, and programs.

Lage: What kind of people were these?

McCloskey: Well, one was Lori Wallach from Public Citizen.

Lage: Was she interested in the environmental impacts?

McCloskey: She was, but she was also involved in broader consumer issues, and labor issues, and others. I had also had contacts with some of the labor movement, the AFL-CIO, and they drew me into their orbit. I had been co-chair during the eighties of the OSHA/Environmental Network within the AFL-CIO's Industrial Union Department. At first, again, I was somewhat skeptical and asked a lot of hard questions, but I gradually sorted through the questions and the answers and became, once I got to the bottom of it, convinced that these were very serious challenges for us.

Then I got appointed to an EPA advisory committee during the Bush administration on trade and studied up on it and published one of the early little primers that the EPA put out on it. I realized there was a struggle between EPA and the U.S. trade office. EPA was struggling to be heard. By being in Washington, it made it really easy to respond to these overtures.

II THE EVOLVING ROLE OF CHAIRMAN: ENGAGING IN THE POLICY
DIALOGUE IN WASHINGTON AND TRENDS IN CLUB CAUSES

Policy Advocacy, Fund Raising, and Lobbying ##

Lage: We were talking about how you got involved in some issues the club probably may not have picked up on if you hadn't been there.

McCloskey: Yes, that was a whole thrust of my work that I feel has worked relatively well--exploring new ventures. I've also fallen into kind of being the Sierra Club's one-person think tank. I have a rather extensive library in my own right in the Washington office and at home, and pretty good research capabilities. So when problems come up as, "What should we think about this?" Or, "Should we be against this or for it?" Or, "How does it affect us?" They often turn to me, and I will research it and write something up.

I continue to prod club committees--that we need new policy on this or that, though, policy-making in the club has kind of dropped out of fashion right now. I'm trying to revive it, and I argue that to stay important the club has to be engaged with the cutting-edge issues of the day, and at least know where it stands. It's no good just drifting off and being bogged down in all the old issues.

Lage: Now, why do you say policy making has dropped off? Is this a conscious thing?

McCloskey: A conscious decision along this line was made in connection with the committee reorganization in 1995. An argument was made, and apparently accepted, that we had lots of policy, but we didn't have enough implementation, and that in the reorganized committees little attention would be given to proposing policy. The result has been that we haven't kept up on quite a few things, such as campaign finance reform. I had

to draft something, and finally the political committee is scrambling on their end. We've lagged behind in addressing utility restructuring and deregulation, and that poses threats, and there are a good many other issues too. In one of my reports to the board of directors in the past year, I called for them to reinvigorate the policy development process. The board readily agreed, but the rest of the system hasn't kicked in yet on that. Although, I'm still working on it.

Lage: Was part of this reorganization, as you understand it? Was the idea that the staff might take more roles in those areas instead of all the various committees?

McCloskey: I think the theory behind it was that Carl felt that the club was being asked to do too much. He believed that we had too long of an agenda, and developing new policy would merely stoke demand for more follow-through and programs on everything we made policy on, and he wanted to discourage this never-ending agenda building, and to get us more focused. I can understand that, but at the same time, when we're in a defensive posture, the attacks on things we have already built are coming from many directions, and some of them in the guise of new problems.

The whole idea of the reinvention of government is a vehicle for the regulatory rollback of EPA programs. These are threats, and we're supposed to be defending against the threats, yet we've been slow in understanding the intellectual and policy basis of the threats against us. Some are being sugar-coated as all sorts of nice ideas of reinvention. Recently I've been calling to the attention of the board, the problems of local collaboration as a way to make decisions on national forests à la the Quincy Library Group; I was the first one to call attention to that, and have written widely on it.

Lage: So it really sounds like it helps to have somebody who is apart from the fray, from the day-to-day--.

McCloskey: It turns out that, yes, when you're caught up on the front lines, you can't see the wider battle field, nor the ideas that are leading to the moves being made on the battle field. I think this is coming to be a useful role to be played. I think the board has some trouble knowing what to do with all of the ideas that I lay at their door step, but their reception is usually quite enthusiastic. Although, sometimes I kind of shop around and speak in dialogues with people here and there on the staff or on committees. In my later years I've come to be participating in all sorts of club committees. Not only the International Committee, but the Environmental Quality Team,

and from time to time the Finance Committee, the Board of Directors, and the Conservation Governance Committee.

Lage: I would say that would be the only way you would make waves, is that true?

McCloskey: It is. What I've also come to realize with the passage of time is that ideas usually are not picked up and acted on the first time they're thrown out. It takes many reiterations to gradually have them be absorbed by people and for people to get comfortable with them. If they're reinforced and studied from different angles, they finally begin to get some traction. So, you have to stick with them for a while.

Lage: Are there other things you want to mention that we might follow up on later?

McCloskey: Well, for instance, in the original design of my job, the thought was I would help with fund raising. I was always willing to help approach major donors but was rarely asked to do so. Partly, I think that was because we had such turnover in our fund raising staff, and many board members and officers were also disappointed that they weren't asked to help with the fund raising. I think many of the professional development people who were brought in did not have a habit of involving other senior people in the organization. For whatever reason, that didn't ever work much.

Lage: It would seem to be a natural.

McCloskey: Though I was often interviewed by new people coming into development about helping, but nothing ever came of it.

Lage: What about lobbying? Were you called to lobby?

McCloskey: Regarding lobbying, I had been involved off and on through the years, more often in a mode of cameo appearances with Washington lobbyists who particularly wanted to see senators. Sometimes those organizing meetings wanted the higher level officials from the organization. Or they'd act like it was difficult to schedule time for Mr. McCloskey with Senator So-and-So but "can we get them both together on such and such a date?" Something would be worked out. I was glad to do that, but I was almost never involved in consistent lobbying on a given issue. I was always sort of parachuted in.

Lage: As the executive director might have been, and the president.

McCloskey: Yes, that's right, the same way. Oddly enough, during the tail end of the Reagan administration and the Bush administration, I had a much more active role in lobbying officials in that administration and interfacing with them. Largely because, I think, Michael Fischer was not much interested in doing that, and the opportunities often came up on short notice.

It has been much less so with the Clinton administration. It's partly because Carl Pope was then the executive director, and he very much wanted to be in the center of the relationship with key decision makers in the Clinton administration. That was particularly true during the first term for Clinton. In the second term, I'm beginning to be more involved with certain departments: the State Department, and the EPA, and the Council on Sustainable Development, where I've long served as a deputy for Michele Perrault, who was appointed by the president to that back in 1993.

So there has been a fair amount of administrative lobbying. Sometimes I pursued projects that I had developed, as with EPA, in concurrence with our lobbyists in Washington and our environmental quality team.

Lage: Do you consult with them, the Washington lobbying office?

McCloskey: I always consult with the relevant staff person before I go out and do something. But with respect to lobbying on the hill, I do that on our regular issues only when I'm requested because, again, I don't want to get in the way of the regular staff and their plans, and I want to coordinate whatever I do.

Collaborating and Studying Issues for the International Program

McCloskey: If I might add with regard to the international program, it was expected that I would have a very substantial role in the international program, more or less as an ambassador for the club in the international realm. Some even thought I was taking over as the director of the international program, but I never did. That was Larry Williams' job. One of the most useful things that was done in setting up my job was to suggest that I be in the role of coach and counselor.

The idea of being a coach was a very helpful one in that it suggested a model, and that's entirely what I've been with regard to the international program and Larry Williams. Larry's skills are very much toward lobbying, and organizing,

and selling things. My talents have run more toward the conceptualizing and strategizing, and we made a terrific team.

His office is just across from mine. So, every day when we're both there, we usually chat. We often have lunch together. We'll talk about things that have come up. I'll make certain suggestions; sometimes he'll do a draft, and sometimes I'll do a draft, and we collaborate. A lot of the direction of the program emerges out of our discussions.

Lage: Now, that sounds like maybe the most collaborative.

McCloskey: It is, indeed. It also is personally fulfilling because we've known each other for years. We both come from Oregon; our relationship goes way back. We first met each other when we were both volunteers in the late fifties.

Lage: So he's not a young kid.

McCloskey: No, he's only a couple years younger than I am. So, this has worked quite well. I've sat as an ex officio member of the International Committee for ages. I often have a hand in a project or two. I've been scouting out the Arctic as a potential issue, a policy area for future development of the international program for the last few years, looking particularly at pollution and contamination of the biota in the Arctic.

From time to time, I've also followed issues regarding the U.N. Environmental Program. I was at a briefing the other day contributing ideas on U.S. policy on it. I'm sort of a generalist in that area.

Larry not only administers the four parts of our international program, but he, personally, has handled the part dealing with the multilateral development banks, such as the World Bank and so forth.

In general, that has worked very well, and I've also had various projects from time to time. Early on, I got involved in using interns to do research on natural values around the world. I led something called our Natural Values Mapping Project.

Lage: How did that come about?

McCloskey: Well, it came out of some research originating in UNEP in their GRID program in Nairobi in the mid-eighties. I got encouraged by the then U.S. deputy director [Peter Thacher] to proceed

with a project to estimate how much de facto wilderness still exists around the world, and that led to the 1987 study I did on the world wilderness inventory, which was the first of its kind. It was published eventually in Ambio magazine in Sweden, as well by the Royal Geographic Society in the UK.

I've been at work ever since then on a successor project dealing with estimating the amount of wild rivers left in the world--rivers that are undammed and pure. I am about to write up the results of six years of additional research now on that for the sixth World Wilderness Congress in India, which is coming up in the fall. I've been now a keynoter for three World Wilderness Congresses around the world. So I've had these projects.

I've also been the person in the office who's been in charge of our relationship with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature [IUCN] at their general assemblies every three years. I've often led our delegation, and often presided at U.S. NGO meetings. At the last meeting last year in Montreal, by the end of the meeting, I was holding a whole phalanx of voting cards for U.S. environmental NGOs who had come and gone and entrusted me with them. I was voting against the block represented by the Safari Club. We voted opposite ways on almost everything.

Lage: Are they the hunters?

McCloskey: They're the hunters and exploiters.

Lage: So the IUCN has two--

McCloskey: They have two factions. I've been on the Law Commission too for a long time. Nick Robinson, who founded our international program, is now the worldwide chair of the conservation law program of the IUCN. In recent years I've also been on the Parks Commission of IUCN too and have written some papers for them. One I did has just been published in the George Wright Society magazine.

In my think tank role, I have been grinding out policy papers in various journals. They all deal with things I believe the club should take an interest in. Sometimes they don't have an immediate effect, but often they are the source of ideas that gradually find some perches somewhere in our operations.

Lage: Well, they may have an effect in the larger world, besides in the club. [laughter]

Participation in Policy Dialogues: Market Solutions

McCloskey: That's true too. There are two other areas of my work in Washington I want to mention. I had been a part of many policy dialogues. I'm now part of one at the Aspen Institute that deals with alternative pollution licensing. I'm currently involved with another one on mitigation, policy. I'm trying to develop an overall policy for the club on mitigation in different realms: natural resources, wetlands, and so forth; and also another one on trading, as in pollution trading.

Lage: Is this coming close to the market solutions that you talked about?

McCloskey: They grow out of those market-based solutions and problems with them. I have become a leading critic of a number of the market oriented solutions. To some extent, I'm type cast as a defender of the classic old style EPA regulation.

Lage: Which is sort of falling out of favor, it would appear.

McCloskey: That's true. It's particularly falling out of favor in academia, and to a certain extent with the regulated community, but not entirely. Parts of the more conservative faction of the environment movement, as expressed by EDF [Environmental Defense Fund], has moved heavily in that direction. I'd say younger people who have taken a lot of economics classes tend to want to go in that direction because the economics profession tends to be weighted in that direction.

Lage: Why do you think it doesn't work? Is this the time to talk about this?

McCloskey: No, that's a very extensive conversation.

Lage: Too big?

McCloskey: Though I could give you an example. There's a lot of interest in something called the tax shift. A lot of neo-liberals have picked it up. Tim [Timothy E.] Wirth when he was in the senate, and Gary Hart, and others have embraced it. It's the idea that we should be taxing "bads" rather than "goods." Instead of taxing labor through income taxes, they assert that we should be taxing pollution. It's based on a whole series of assumptions, as is common with economic theory.

If all the assumptions were met, it's plausible that it would produce good effects by and large. But it's burdened

with all sorts of problems. First of all, taxes are one of the central issues around which partisan politics is organized-- i.e., tax levels. It's not as if this was some abstract academic issue; it's what the two political parties fight over all the time. Every change in tax levels is charged with great symbolic value and political significance.

With pollution taxes, the theory is that you adjust them constantly to keep them at a level high enough to encourage abatement rather than paying the tax and polluting. So, they assume that this is a non-political exercise that technocrats are in charge of. In fact, they aren't. Businesses tend to oppose pollution taxes because they see them as an additive tax, and they see themselves as being jerked around constantly by another burden on their businesses.

A lot of traditional liberals oppose them because they see them as regressive taxes that increase taxes on the poor. So, you have two major voting blocks very suspicious of them, and there's also a fundamental flaw in the logic of it. If pollution taxes are at a high enough level to cause abatement, then you're not going to raise much revenue from them. If they are to raise a lot of revenue, they need to be low enough so that people will pay the tax rather than abate. The prevailing theory of taxation is one of raising revenue, rather than achieving social purposes and social engineering.

Lage: Even though we do a lot of social engineering.

McCloskey: That's right.

Lage: But this carries it to the nth degree.

McCloskey: But that scares other people on the conservative side of the spectrum away from the idea of a tax shift. You are going to have very uncertain revenues--that is, if you are going to stop taxing things like labor, and tax pollution, as well as sin taxes. Working out how much reliance you'll have on them is terribly difficult in terms of having stable revenue streams.

A lot of these problems might have never been put to a good critique from those who both know the theory and the political practicalities. The practitioners tend to just walk around them, as some ideas that are patently implausible. Some of the academic theorists find no opposition or anybody who will engage them in debate; so they just build a whole structure of suppositions that, seeing no opposition, they assume constitutes the prevailing dogma.

Lage: Yes, that's interesting. But people like Tim Wirth who I thought was seen as something of an ally of the club.

McCloskey: He has been. The tax shift has been promoted by a whole generation of neo-liberals, and the Kennedy school at Harvard is a hot bed of this (Rob Stavens runs it); they did the Heinz-Worth study a number of years ago. Some of that interest has passed. At any rate, these are examples of the critiques I've been involved with on the President's Council on Sustainable Development. Now, they have a project on environmental management; I'm the co-chair of it. We're debating these things, as we did in the Aspen Institute.

So I'm involved in a whole series of these think tank dialogues. I was at the Brookings Institution the other day dealing with performance standards as a focal point and delivered the critique of that.

Lage: Performance standards for?

McCloskey: Pollution control. In place of technology based standards-- things such as best available control technology.

Lage: Wow, this gets you into a lot of technical matters.

McCloskey: It does. I might add that during my time in Washington, I had become quite involved with a lot of the pollution control policy issues. This was not an area that I had been much involved with in the earlier years in my career, and I'm finding it rewarding too. It's a different area. In the early years, I was very much involved with the natural resource and wilderness side of things. Then, there was a period when I was involved in energy policy, and mineral policy, and then international policy. Now, I'm much involved in pollution policy.

Lage: It doesn't get old then. [laughter]

McCloskey: Yes, I figure over the course of nearly forty years, I'll have covered the waterfront in terms of issues.

Defending the Nonprofit Sector Against Assaults by the Right

McCloskey: The other area, to conclude the discussion of what I've been involved with, deals with the regulation of nonprofit organizations. In my years as executive director, I realized

how critical that was to the club's financial viability. I remember us losing our tax status with the IRS in 1966, and our fussing over that through administrative appeals. Then, we lost our postal permit in the early seventies. That held us back in terms of using direct mail--i.e., being able to build our size in that fashion. We learned how important the Federal Election Commission was in the eighties when we got into electoral activity.

When I arrived in Washington, D.C., I was invited to participate in the work of the Independent Sector, which represents the nonprofit community. I joined their Tax Committee and later their Government Relations Committee, and later their Board of Directors. Then, I became part of a rump group of the more liberal faction that organized itself. It was the Advocacy Forum, and I became the chairman of it.

We generally pushed the Independent Sector to be more assertive in defending the nonprofit community against punitive attacks from the right--during the Reagan administration, and the Bush administration, and now in Congress with Representative Istook and others. The political right has had the theory that the welfare state, which in their parlance includes the whole environmental area, is propped up by federal subsidies to nonprofit organizations, which are the lobby for all of these things. If they can knock the props out from underneath the nonprofit community, the so-called welfare state will collapse.

Lage: It kind of goes against that points of light idea to rejuvenate volunteers.

McCloskey: Yes, but that was in a different era during the Reagan and Bush administration. That notion was to tighten the regulations on nonprofits, cut federal programs in the area of human services, particularly, and then to suggest that private philanthropy ought to pick up the slack and that was a viable way of doing it. Well, we're not working in the human services area, but I've learned enough to see that that simply wouldn't work. This was a political cover for that whole notion that the government programs should be drastically cut.

Lage: I guess what I'm getting at is that I would think that to be consistent, if you were conservative and wanted to cut back on government, you'd want to strengthen the private philanthropy.

McCloskey: Well, in reality, they didn't because they view a lot of the organized nonprofit world as the handmaiden of the welfare state. Now, there are the conservative and the right wing

nonprofits too. Occasionally we have teamed up with them on specific things. At any rate, during my time there, I became a leader in pushing for more aggressive defense of the sector, including the environmental part of it, because I came out of an experience in which we felt the club had been particularly victimized by federal regulators who viewed us as an easy mark.

Affinity Credit Cards

McCloskey: They constantly tried to make an example of us. We learned that only by fighting back aggressively could we defend ourselves. Oddly enough, one example deals with our affinity credit card. I forgot to mention that earlier. In the early eighties, we were in a search for more revenue which could be used to help our conservation programs and eventually identified affinity credit cards as a way to do that. I got us into that. I also got us into a product catalog, which we later dropped. One of those ideas--the credit card--was quite lucrative. We get three to four hundred thousand dollars in net revenue a year out of it.

Lage: Out of the affinity--

McCloskey: Affinity credit card, and it's growing--over fifteen years, we have earned now millions of dollars. It all goes to the bottom line of conservation. We thought it was a royalty and was not taxable, but in 1985 and '86, the IRS audited us and told us it was taxable. We sued in court to contest that, and that case has been in court now for a dozen years. We won before the Tax Court, but are now dealing with appeals.

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McCloskey: Just this past fall, I testified before the federal tax court in Washington, D.C., in the Sierra Club credit card case. We were now dealing with facts that are a dozen years old--in some cases going back twenty years--trying to remember specific factual situations. "When did you meet with this gentleman from this brokerage firm, and what did he say?" It was really difficult. Michael Fischer came to testify too. Oddly enough, for the tax years involved '85, '86, and '87, we had three different executive directors involved.

Lage: Did Doug Wheeler come to testify?

McCloskey: No, he didn't. We think we're in good shape. This is illustrative of the fact that I felt we had to fight back hard, and sue, and stick with it, and this is the leading case in terms of precedent on the taxability of the proceeds from affinity credit cards.

Lage: Well, there must be alumni--

McCloskey: College alumni associations from across the country are watching our case. Some others are following in the wake of it.

Lage: Has the IRS passed the same judgments on the other organizations?

McCloskey: Yes. This case deals with some very esoteric legal doctrines of the taxability of royalties as an unrelated business income tax, and passive versus active stances in the management of the enterprises.

Lage: Another area you've become familiar with.

McCloskey: This whole nonprofit regulatory area is exceedingly complex; much of it involves tax law and tax policy. I've become proficient in a fair amount of it and have become close to some of the leading lawyers on the subject. I might add that I found my associations with these people very rewarding. This was an area where I didn't have to check with anybody else in the club; I was the expert.

I kept various club treasurers and club officials aware of what I was doing, and they were glad to have me do it; the foundation also. There is clearly a need to have this subject be tended. There are never--ending challenges, and a lot of it really affects the bottom line. We'd be millions of dollars poorer had we lost all of these cases permanently.

Lage: Was the club early in this affinity card development?

McCloskey: We were one of the early entries among nonprofits.

Lage: Did someone bring the idea to you, one of the cards?

McCloskey: Len Levitt, when he was our controller, and I in the early eighties decided to brainstorm about possibilities of ways of earning more money. We looked back on the calendars, which were very lucrative. They started back under Dave Brower in the sixties. We asked, "How can we develop some more things like the calendars, and that require even less creative energy

and management on our part?" Levitt identified the credit cards as a possibility that was coming along.

He found a broker who was putting together deals in that area. We got into dialogue with him, and reported to the board, and the board agreed to let us experiment. We had some rough spots in some deals that didn't go well, but finally we found one that did work well, and that took off. More and more other organizations came in because the banks were having difficulty finding new mailing lists to sell their credit cards.

They found a whole new field if they could team up with nonprofits and have access to their membership lists by offering them a cut on the transactions. They could sell more of their credit cards, and nonprofit organizations could generate needed income. You had to do almost nothing for it.

Lage: That's a great idea, even better if it's not taxed.

McCloskey: Yes, if it's taxed, we lose a third of the income we'd otherwise get.

Working with Legal Firms, and the Uniqueness of the Job

Lage: Do you work with legal firms in Washington, or here in San Francisco?

McCloskey: In Washington, mainly, with firms like Caplin and Drysdale, which is one of the leading firms, with Tom Troyer there particularly. Gayle Harmon is another I worked with at another law firm, and Tom Asher was another who had his own small firm for a while.

Lage: Did you help find those law firms?

McCloskey: No, they show up at meetings with the Independent Sector, which is the great meeting ground, the umbrella group. It has YMCAs and Red Crosses. There aren't many environmental groups that pay attention. The National Wildlife Federation has fairly consistently, and we have, but we're about the only ones that have consistently played parts in this.

Lage: If you weren't around would the club be taking part in that?

McCloskey: I don't think so. Most of our average conservation lobbyists know nothing about this field and have no interest in it. But it comes back to bite us. For instance, a new congressional regulation under the Republicans is that when you testify before a congressional committee you have to list all the government grants the organization has gotten, and make other various kinds of disclosures. I've become the in-house expert on how to do that because it grows out of this whole nonprofit regulatory business, and I know the background on it. I subscribe to various tax monthlies and other professional newsletters, and I have different law books on the subject, and now a whole network of associations.

It combines a little of my background and legal training with policy work, and political horse sense. There are not a lot of people who have this combination. And also my managerial background in the club helps, so I'm highly motivated. I know that it matters in the end.

Lage: You know the consequences.

McCloskey: The consequences, even though some people would find it rather dry material. Right now, I'm working in a policy group working on campaign finance reform policy.

Lage: Well, that's another one that's crucial.

McCloskey: It is where big money is basically undermining democracy. The club has been slow to get its act together on that. Again, I drafted something for the club's political committee; Chuck McGrady asked me to do that when he was its chair. So, I've now become kind of one of the drafting services on policy in the club too.

The Need for a High Level Club Representative in Washington

Lage: Is there any other thing we should cover today? We're coming to an end.

McCloskey: I think I've gone through my list of anything I can recall about the kinds of things I do in my work. It's not well understood broadly in the club, but the board of directors has been very supportive and seems to value it. Although, I think it's obviously a job built around my particular interests and skills, and I doubt that it will continue when I retire.

- Lage: I've been thinking as you're talking it's not something you can replace. You could not be replaced in this job with one person.
- McCloskey: Though I do think the club has a continuing need to have a high level figure in Washington, D.C. representing it. To some extent, the director of the Washington office can play that role but not always. There are some meetings at the White House and elsewhere they'll accept either the executive director or me as chairman, partly because they know who I am, partly because of my title. They won't accept the director of the Washington office. It's not critical that we be at all those meetings, but nonetheless it's symptomatic that there is a role for high-level representation there, and the fact that we're an out-of-town group, in terms of our base headquarters being elsewhere, does create a need. Once you try to fill that need of a high-level representative there, you then need to fill out the rest of the job description around something.
- Lage: It's interesting how your job was designed around you, and then it's become quite important.
- McCloskey: When it was designed, it was designed much more with the idea in mind that I'd be in San Francisco and a close collaborator with the executive director, but it has not played out that way.
- Lage: Oh, when it was designed was it thought you would stay in San Francisco?
- McCloskey: I don't think anybody had addressed that. I think that had been assumed. I don't think it was clearly addressed. It has many elements that suggests we would be working hand-in-glove. We haven't worked at cross purposes, but we've distanced ourselves.
- Lage: As you've described what you've done, it's probably just as well.
- McCloskey: Well, it's worked out well for me. I've enjoyed having the change of pace and the change of focus.
- Lage: Okay, let's stop here for now.
- [tape interruption]
- Lage: We just had a thought as we were chatting here.

McCloskey: One of the issues that comes up in the club is--should we spend anytime on non-priority issues? The assumption is it's going to take a lot of resources. An example to the contrary, though, deals with the re-authorization of the Environmental Education Act that EPA administers. Some of our volunteers, two women in Kentucky by the name of Claxton--Trista and Karen--had been concerned with efforts to weaken it. They had been sending me messages by e-mail; nobody else on the staff would listen to them. I'm sort of the court of last resort for listening to people in D.C. I listened to them and called over to somebody I knew from my days in the National Resources Council of America when I was chairman--Kevin Coyle, who now heads the Environmental and Education Training Foundation, which is an arm of the federal government.

I told him of some of the complaints about what was going on, so he came with an entourage to see me the other day. He walked through the whole program, and the re-authorization process that he's lobbying for. I had Trista's list of complaints about their weakening it, and we went through point by point. For some of them, he had the answers, for some, he didn't.

Well, finally, in response to going back and forth, he agreed to strengthen a couple of the points after I had argued that, based on Trista's input, that there were real grounds for concern. He said, "All right, before we get it reintroduced, we'll change that and correct the points you've raised." Presumably, he'll do that. Trista will certainly follow-up and tell me if he doesn't. It's an example of where it took an hour of my time. It's because I had associations with him, and because I was listening to a volunteer, and because I guess I'm in the position I am, that I probably have changed two critical features in the new bill that may very well go through Congress.

Lage: That's very interesting.

McCloskey: And it didn't need to be a club priority, and it didn't need a lot of money. So, when people talk about focus and needing to narrow the agenda, a question arises as to how to deal with cases of that sort.

Lage: I'm glad we put that on while it was fresh in your mind.

Planning Efforts in the National Club

[Interview 2: March 4, 1998] ##

Lage: Last time we talked about your final years as executive director and surveyed what you've been doing as chairman. You had a few more thoughts you wanted to add to that.

McCloskey: Yes, during these years we initiated a planning process in the national Sierra Club. It began about 1980. Bob Howard was the vice president for planning. He was on the board of directors. This continued for about a dozen years. Later, Rebecca Falkenberry became the chair of the Planning Committee. Finally, Denny Shaffer did. This was an interesting experiment. On the whole, I don't think it worked.

During the last few years when I was still executive director, we used it to set goals for everything. I shouldn't say everything, but a lot. We set broad goals for how we hoped to change society, and we set broad goals for the club as an institution. We set somewhat more specific goals that we wanted to accomplish over five or ten years, and then we set very specific objectives for each year and each department at the national level.

Lage: Sort of a strategic planning process?

McCloskey: Later it got more of a strategic character to it, but initially it was aimed at trying to undergird a management-by-objectives approach, which was how I attempted to manage things so that we knew what our objectives were each year in every department, including the board of directors, and that we head then in the pursuit of broader goals.

It was a classic process such as the American Management Association recommends for institutions. After a while, particularly under other executive directors, they dropped the effort to develop detailed objectives through this process for every department and staff operation, but the concern shifted more to the idea of strategic planning, trying to figure out what the changes were that we should pursue reflecting changes in society and the conditions in which we operated. This became much more of the emphasis under Falkenberry's chair, and Denny Shaffer particularly.

We also discovered that the board of directors and the club's culture was resistant to the idea of planning. The planning terminology turned a lot of people off. They wanted

to ad hoc it, and to be much more adaptive, and they liked flying by the seat of their pants.

Lage: Responding to--.

McCloskey: This whole muddling-through theory exists and is not without respectability. There was something to be said for that. Particularly under Shaffer, we changed the emphasis to focusing on the biggest trends we could find and identify, using very common language to describe what we were trying to do. We wanted to know where we wanted to go and why. We got rid of all the jargon. That helped.

The board of directors, by the end of the process, became somewhat committed to this process. We set midterm goals for five years out, and that was a helpful idea. People found very long-term goals so bland, to be almost meaningless. They found the annual objectives to be so nitty gritty that they weren't all that interested in them either. The five-year goals, or midterm goals as we call them, were somewhat interesting, and the board became committed to them in the early nineties.

However, after we solved the problem of board buy-in, we confronted another problem at the other end, and that was staff buy-in. These were invented by a committee of volunteers, with me continuing to work with them even after I was chairman. We had good rapport, and we enjoyed working together as a committee. We came, eventually, to have some impact on the board of directors, particularly under Michael Fischer and after that just as Carl Pope was beginning to be executive director.

The national staff felt very divorced from the process. It was not something they were inventing. The trouble was that later when the staff invented things, particularly the San Francisco staff, the board of directors didn't feel that they were involved, and that they had invented it. The classic problem of invention theory is that when you get into large institutions, you can't possibly have everybody inventing everything. You need to have a discrete group of people inventing things.

We never solved that problem, but gradually under Carl Pope's tenure as executive director, different processes were pursued. In some ways, they were more akin to what I did prior to 1980, which was to pursue various discrete reforms one after another, or improvements of specific operations.

Lage: In the club, not legislative objectives.

McCloskey: In the club, this was in terms of our own operations. I felt, and I think Carl feels, that as long as you have a never-ending series of reform efforts going on to update, to revise operations, to stream-line or modernize in order to change focus, you are gradually re-making the organization. You are leading it in certain directions, and that was probably more fruitful than trying to do everything in a comprehensive way that would have a superficial quality to it.

For instance, Carl worked with the board of directors in the early nineties to completely overhaul the club's structure for volunteer committees. Right now, he is revamping the system for setting conservation priorities. He, at times, has the national staff work together collaboratively to produce certain plans, but I can't see that they get much buy-in from the board of directors. They tend to be feel-good plans for the staff, and if the staff can implement them, and the board is not going to stand in the way, they may get implemented. I don't think anybody yet has solved the problem of how to get the board, and the national staff, and the national volunteer leadership echelon all together on big strategic changes.

Lage: And then you'd have an initiative from the membership bringing something else.

McCloskey: Well, that's true too. Maybe the piece-mealing of it is better. At any rate, for twelve years, there was a very conscious effort to try to introduce strategic planning into the national Sierra Club.

Lage: How did that relate with the budget process, which is just a yearly thing?

McCloskey: It didn't relate very well. People kept calling for that all of the time, but the fact of the matter is that most of the national budgeting is for things that are more or less non-discretionary. The discretionary amount of the budget is relatively limited, and it mainly involves a part of the conservation budget. Even less of it is discretionary today because even that budget is committed to foundation-funded and granted-funded projects where you agree for three or four years to do a certain thing.

Lage: Well, I'm glad to get your thoughts on the planning process because that comes up periodically. Denny Shaffer talked about it, and various people, but I didn't have a good grasp of where it fit in.

McCloskey: It's a story of things that have been tried.

Writing about Wilderness

Lage: You had a few more items left in this review of your role as chairman. We had gotten about down to your list on achievements and disappointments, under which the only one you listed was work on wilderness and forests.

McCloskey: Let's come to that. In the years I've been in Washington, D.C., I have been drawn back to the subject of wilderness at a fairly abstract level. Early in my career, I wrote on it quite a bit. One of my early law review articles was often cited as one of the more significant reviews of how the Wilderness Act came to be. I began to be invited to a series of symposia that the Forest Service Research Station in the Southeast, particularly, put on, and developed some papers.

One of them culminated in a taxonomy of wilderness values that they published, which was an effort to canvas all of the reasons that the wilderness was valued and to put them in some order. I think I probably did the most complete job of that that anybody has attempted. I did it in two different ways, and I like the second one that was published by the Southeast Experiment Station the best.

Lage: Did you do research on this, or was this sort of based on your experiences?

McCloskey: Well, I did. I had done a bit of that in my original 1966 Oregon Law Review piece. I did a literature review to look at articles and books that had been published in the intervening time. I found that there were a limited number of additional variations in thoughts on the subject. Then I thought of organizing the values in different ways, and I experimented with two different ways, both of which were published in articles. I found that interesting.

Then, the National Park Service asked me to talk to some of their key people about why the Wilderness Act applied to the National Park System. I did some further research on that and spoke to some of their planners in the Washington office. They asked me to prepare a full paper on it, which I did. It was later incorporated into a park service publication, and later was revised and published in the Journal of Environmental Law and Litigation as a major piece on that.

I might add that I asked Dave Brower if he could remember why, and he couldn't. I went back and looked at what was said in the Living Wilderness and the Sierra Club Bulletin at the

time and, again, delved into the literature and did some other analysis. At any rate, it was kind of fun to find myself working on that issue again. It included going to some of the agency wilderness conferences.

When I began my Natural Value Mapping Project, which was related to the international program, the first thing I did, as I may have indicated already, was to do a very rough reconnaissance-level survey of the amount of remaining de facto wilderness in the world. So, that was part of this new literature on wilderness that I was helping to generate. I think the wilderness inventory, the wilderness taxonomy, and the piece on the history of the application of the Wilderness Act to the National Park System were probably the three most significant things I developed during this period in Washington, D.C. Although, I did write some other things too.

A Shift Away from Wilderness in the Club and Public Agencies

McCloskey: I began to find, however, that the wilderness as a focal point for club work was beginning to fade. We were still, to some extent, on automatic pilot working on leftover wilderness agendas in certain states like Utah and Montana, but it was no longer attracting the heavy attention it once did. Doug Scott and Tim Mahoney had been the driving forces of the wilderness program in the club, but then they left the staff. We didn't even have a wilderness committee nationally.

Lage: Was there a sense there had been enough wilderness, or how do you explain that?

McCloskey: I think a number of things explain it. One was that many of the new activists in the club were not wilderness activists, they were forest activists. Their focus was not on carving out parts of the national forests as wilderness, for instance. It was on converting the entire national forests into a species of protected area of a different kind. Then, with the Clinton administration, and this ancient forests/spotted owl option nine thrust, the protection efforts there were on areas that often did not have wilderness qualities.

They did have ancient forests, but they had roads in them. They were being valued not because they provided opportunity for wilderness recreation, for instance, but more because of the ecological values associated with ancient forests--with all the new discoveries of different kinds of

species that were harbored in those forests. So, there was a shift in focus and a re-conceptualization of what kind of protected areas we were after, and that hasn't been resolved yet.

There was also the fact that the kind of pragmatic campaigning that the wilderness effort came to epitomize began to lose a constituency in the club. Again, Scott was the heart and soul of that. I'll talk a little later on that subject of the direction in which things have moved. In short, they moved away from a very pragmatic approach. Carl Pope led us toward emphasizing broad public relations and efforts at changing public attitudes, and others promoted a less pragmatic, more ideologically rigid approach.

In the meantime, I found by going to some of these agencies' conferences that the agencies administering wilderness, to some extent, had lost focus on the wilderness idea. They were talking more and more about manipulation, particularly with fire in wilderness areas. They were talking about trying to maintain certain vegetative associations. If too much brush was growing out, they wanted to burn away the brush. If we're getting too many species of one kind of tree and not enough of another, they'd like to, again, burn it and manage it.

Lage: More management.

McCloskey: Manage and manipulate wilderness. The Park Service, particularly, has moved in this direction. I think this originated with fire management and the Sequoia National Park area. If some people have their way, every tree that grows in a wilderness area in a park will only grow as long as a manager decides until they burn it and start the cycle over again.

Lage: What are they trying to do, preserve a certain time period of nature?

McCloskey: Well, some of them, I think, really do think what it's all about is maintaining certain vegetative associations, but others say what they're trying to do is reduce fuel loads that have arisen out of too much fire suppression. They're trying to set back the clock to get rid of the fuel build-ups and then let nature take its course in terms of "let burn" policy, as opposed to a prescribed ignitions.

Conservation Biology: New Imperatives for Management

McCloskey: Another thing that is at play here is the emergence of "conservation biology" as a major influence. The people promoting that have disdain, or many of them do, for the recreational and aesthetic tradition of wilderness. They see all landscape entirely in terms of habitat and ecosystems. They have been quite critical of the traditional theory of wilderness as a "hands-off policy" and of letting nature go where it will.

They see it as habitat that needs to be maintained in the maximum quality, and also want to manipulate it in various ways, albeit for, perhaps, laudable ends, but still it's manipulation. They also are critical of protected areas, whether they be national parks or wilderness areas, that are not of the right size, or they're not big enough, or they're not in the right location. I have a somewhat different view.

I view them all as reflections of ideas that were prevalent at certain periods of history--the parks representing more of a nineteenth-century fascination with romantic scenery, and wilderness areas, early twentieth-century ideas of areas that are refuges from human influence. They have a new preoccupation, which is having things all be built around keystone species and their needs, whether it be the grizzly bear or wolves. They have theories of how much habitat they need per breeding pair and so forth. They see wilderness as just a part of the acreage they need to pursue their theories.

Lage: Basically, a habitat.

McCloskey: Yes, and they aren't particularly interested in the earlier theories or the theories of the Wilderness Act of the mid-century. They are another force that's bearing on these agencies. The center in Missoula, Montana, that the four cooperating agencies maintain on wilderness research, is dominated by this whole idea of fire manipulation.

I find, to my dismay, that there's not much of a constituency in the club anymore which is focused on these things and paying attention and which is concerned.

Lage: The club, as you describe it, would seem to be influenced by these various points of view, by the people in the club rather than holding on to the traditional--

McCloskey: They are indeed.

Wilderness as Mental Construct

Lage: What about the views that I've seen a lot of in the academic setting of wilderness as a social construct? It's sort of implying deconstructionist theories.

McCloskey: Well, yes.

Lage: I'm not sure I understand what it means.

McCloskey: William Cronon at the University of Wisconsin has written quite a bit along these lines. He now claims he, to some extent, has been misunderstood. To the extent that I have delved into it, which is limited, I feel that he suffers from not understanding that wilderness doesn't represent the full repertoire of the environmental movement. It's one very limited component of it. He seems to be calling for a broader view evincing a protective attitude toward more of the landscape, and the cities, and social concerns, and all of those things. My answer to that is, "That's right, and we're doing it. We don't need his suggestions."

Lage: But we don't call it wilderness.

McCloskey: He ought to discover that. We discovered the broader agenda before he started writing about it. Particularly, that's much of the significance of Earth Day in 1970, and it gave birth to the modern environmental movement. It has been holistic, and it's gone way beyond concerns for wilderness, but still there are certain pieces of landscape that we're trying to protect as wilderness.

I might add that, in my own involvement, there was another thing that I did, along with Ed Wayburn. Through the 1980s, we campaigned to get the Parks Commission of the IUCN, (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) to recognize wilderness as a discrete category in their system for categorizing protected areas on the world scene. It was a long, difficult campaign. We finally succeeded, and so the first category of strict protected areas now has sub-categories A and B. A are areas like natural areas with no recreation allowed--preserved strictly for science with no roads. B are wilderness, no roads but recreation is allowed, and category II are national parks. The system goes on to less and less restrictive types of areas.

I've worked also, as I think I've mentioned before, with Vance Martin of the World Wilderness Congress to develop

interest in wilderness around the world. He and I jointly authored an article for the Journal of Forestry on the spread of the wilderness idea, and the statutes, and programs, and agencies, in a dozen or more jurisdictions around the world.

Lage: Are you defining wilderness, then, as roadless areas, basically? Is that what I'm picking up?

McCloskey: Yes, in contrast to Cronon, I believe that indeed wilderness is a--or, maybe I agree with him on this one--it's a mental construct; it's a concept in our minds about a prescription for managing certain tracts of land. It's legally defined. The U.S. provided the archetype for it just as they did for national parks, and just as Russia has provided the archetype for large strictly protected areas--Zapovedniki. Britain has provided the archetype for protected landscapes. These are culturally derived, and we manage them by a certain formula or recipe.

Lage: Culturally derived and legally defined.

McCloskey: Defined, that's right. In that article that we did for the Journal of Forestry, we looked at the degree to which different jurisdictions were trying to copy or model themselves on the U.S. formula and to the extent that they were deviating from it. In the pursuit of protected areas around the world, countries lock on to certain models that they wish to emulate, and they do that to varying degrees.

Nations, of course, can mix all the models and match them anyway they want. Usually, the users and visitors can make more sense out of them, and there's more discipline in their management, if they follow one of the most successful models because then you know what you should and should not allow to get a certain effect. And, of course, there is the wilderness idea that goes way beyond the legal limits for it that has all sorts of notions associated with it. In my taxonomy in earlier articles--you can go off in many different directions.

Usually, those ideas, whether they're ethical, or literary, or historical, or artistic, embrace a lot more than what would fall within the framework, strictly speaking, of our statutory wilderness in the United States. Nonetheless, there's a cluster of ideas associated with the practical application of wilderness.

At any rate, you're right. Cronon represents another source of doubt, of questioning, that has become prevalent. I find as my career winds down that one of the subjects to which

I had devoted a lot of early attention and, about which the club has been most successful, has moved into a certain ambiguous status. One wonders just how much energy will go into defending what we've achieved. We now protect over a hundred million acres; we started out with nine million acres in 1964.

Lage: That's amazing. When you tried to broaden wilderness to the international scene, did the word have meaning? I've always heard most cultures don't associate good things with the word wilderness.

McCloskey: That was one source of resistance to it, particularly from some people in Latin America. What I found out are two things. One, countries that have a frontier condition and alpine areas, or frontier-alpine type terrain, as in Australia and New Zealand, can relate to the idea.

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McCloskey: We both have wild country and some alpine areas. Or, it can also be canyon country or desert country, but it's rugged, unsettled, unroaded country that also doesn't have much in the way of aboriginal or indigenous peoples living in it anymore. It also makes sense in northern Scandinavia; the Finns have a wilderness system in the northern part of Lapland. Though some of the Lapps, native Lapps, are doubtful about it, but it makes sense in northern Norway, and it makes sense in Spitsbergen or Svalbard as they call it. It makes sense in Canada too.

Lage: Areas that aren't economically rich?

McCloskey: In South Africa it's been applied too. The equatorial countries have greater troubles with it, even though there maybe, as in the Amazon, fairly wild country. The indigenous populations, and in Central Africa too, complicate the idea of whether it's unsettled country or just unsettled by colonizers. Our response is it may not be the formula that appeals to everybody or fits everywhere. Again, it's a sort of culturally derived approach.

It may be more practical in the Amazon to pursue ideas of sustainable management or extractive reserves. I worked to get the IUCN Parks Commission to adopt a new category VI for extractive reserves, and it turned into some kind of sustainable reserve notion. It's still really not nailed down. At any rate, at the rural level, we weren't so much pushing wilderness as the answer for everybody, but as a category that is important, and is receiving recognition and use on a wider

basis, and has a place in a scheme for protected area designations.

To answer your first question, there were some people in Latin America who claimed that in Spanish there was no equivalent word for wilderness. Then, we found that Argentina, along the Andes particularly, has roadless blocks that are in national parks that are the equivalent of wilderness. We found also the word wilderness explicitly mentioned in both the French and Spanish editions of the 1940 Western Hemispheric Treaty, to which Latin American countries in 1940 found no objection--they then pledged to try to work to save wilderness.

Lage: And that was before it was so widespread here. [laughter]

McCloskey: That's right. That's right, we didn't even have a wilderness system then.

Lage: That's very interesting.

McCloskey: Well, so much for wilderness.

Lage: I'm glad that you went into that the way that you did. I think I asked you this before, but I just want to reiterate: all of these papers that you have produced over the years, which are probably not that easy to get to, do you have copies for the Bancroft?

McCloskey: During the next few months, I'm going to get copies of all these things and box those I have. I'm going through all my papers, and I'm going to give you one set of my published material and my unpublished papers, as well as other things, memoranda and so forth. [Papers sent to The Bancroft Library, June 1999]

Emergence of Radical Forest Activists, and Working to Save the Sequoias

Lage: Is there more to say about wilderness, or forests?

McCloskey: Well, I'll just mention forests. There's an odd thing. Early in my career, I spent a lot of time on forest-related matters. Once I moved to Washington, D.C., and changed jobs, I became viewed increasingly as an eastern person and didn't find much of a role in the club on forest matters, even though shortly

after I changed jobs western forest management became intensely controversial in the club.

In the mid-eighties, of course, a newer faction emerged both within the movement and within the club that was concerned with ancient forests and with total protection for the national forests. Doug Scott became the center of a lot of criticism in the club. Dave Brower actually associated himself with that new faction and was fairly visible in criticizing Scott, allegedly for excessive conservatism and pragmatism.

Scott, coming from Oregon originally, was very mindful of the power and influence of the then Senator [Mark] Hatfield and felt that it was politically impossible to ever get measures through to protect all or a substantial part of the forest, and even of old growth. These criticisms now, ultimately, have had something to do with Doug's leaving the club's employment and his feeling unappreciated and increasingly on the losing end of these arguments.

At first, I was disappointed that I wasn't utilized for any work on these issues. As the debate became more and more fractious, however, I changed my mind and thought, I'm glad I'm out of all this unpleasantness. [laughter]

Lage: You came to appreciate being back East. [laughter]

McCloskey: But I did one thing because I wanted to test it. There was in California an interest in saving more of the giant sequoias in Sequoia National Forest that were not protected in Sequoia National Park, and over half of them were not. I remembered being told back in the mid-sixties, by a senior official in the Forest Service's regional office, that even though the majority of the giant sequoias were in the national forests, we need never worry. He claimed that the Forest Service is absolutely committed to their protection, and that they were safe forever. And we didn't need to agitate to put them in the park. Millard Barnum was his name, and he was then the chief of recreation. This was about 1965 or 1966, and that stuck in my mind.

By the mid-1980s, the Forest Service was logging in and around the giant sequoias and leaving them standing all alone in a field of devastation. Activists in the club, and outside of the club, particularly in that area, were protesting this. Joe Fontaine was involved in some of these protests, and they gradually developed a campaign to want to put the rest of the sequoias in the national park. However, this effort began to be burdened by some of the disputes of the same kind that were happening in the Northwest between those who wanted to take a

harder line and those who were trying to do what they thought was practical and could lead to results. Martin Litton was associated with those who were taking a harder line.

Lage: Harder than Joe Fontaine?

McCloskey: Yes. So, they welcomed my involvement in the issue. For a number of years, I tried to play the role of peacemaker to get them together. I knew them. I knew Martin from way back when he was on the board of directors in the sixties. I'd worked with him on the Redwood National Park campaign. I had worked closely with Joe when he was club president and on the board for years. A woman by the name of Carla Cloer was somebody that Martin brought into the club as an activist on this issue.

They all struck me as good-hearted people who were trying to accomplish something that really did need to be achieved. We developed ideas to try to get a national monument, and by executive decree, a world heritage site, which I got the Bush administration to look at. I worked with both Martin, and Joe, and others to draft bills that were introduced in Congress.

They've been pending now for over a dozen years, and I worked with them on framing the concept of the legislation. Congressman George Brown is one of the longtime sponsors, and there were others before him. I also gave lead testimony at the only congressional hearing we ever had on the subject, along with Carla Cloer. When Martin Litton came to Washington, I often helped him in various ways as he made his rounds. I felt I made a contribution to reducing the fractiousness.

I thought a lot of it turned on the kind of issue that comes up again and again in history, which is the melding together, on one hand, of the people who have broad visions and a towering sense of outrage, with those who were practical and think in terms of how to move in a stepwise process, and how to get members of Congress to pay attention and to build constituencies.

The tragedy of those efforts was that we could never get the club centrally to put it on its agenda as a major campaign. But I am still hopeful.

Lage: The national club?

McCloskey: Yes, the national club. The sequoia issue is a first-generation reform issue of the kind that we dealt with in the sixties and seventies (along with the mining act reform). I felt that it was a story that, when told nationally, would be

very compelling. Indeed, Martin is the spark plug behind it, and he's in his mid-eighties now. He got publicity in the National Geographic, and from Turner Broadcasting, and in other places. So, the story has gradually been getting out. Our toughest knot was getting the national Sierra Club to ever want to do anything about it.

Lage: That's strange. It has almost a sea otter kind of appeal.

McCloskey: That's right.

Lage: The sequoia issue is a natural.

McCloskey: That's right, and it's on our seal. It's one of our symbols, along with the Yosemite Valley and Half Dome, of what the Sierra Club is.

Lage: Why was the club so slow to respond?

McCloskey: Well, it was almost too old-fashioned of a campaign for the appetites of our leadership today. At that time, they still were working very hard for the California desert bill and so they said, "Well, we can't have two campaigns for California-related things. We'll lay that aside until we get the desert out of the way." Then, there was almost the sense that, "Well, we've done enough for California for the time being. We've got to do something for other parts of the country."

Lage: Is this staff, or board, or conservation committee?

McCloskey: It was more the staff, and the sense that, "Well, we don't have some overwhelming demand from the grassroots for it." There was a demand from some people in California. We also, frankly, had great trouble with Congressman George Miller when he was chair of the House Interior Committee, or resources committee, because he had then been persuaded that we needed an ecosystem approach for the entire Sierra, and he felt we were thinking in too limited terms if we were talking just about a small part of the Sierra. We said, "We'll take it all. We'll take anything you can give us, but why wait for the toughest challenge, which is everything in the Sierra, when we've got a very discrete part of it for which the case is very strong."

Lage: Was the case made to add it to the Sequoia National Park?

McCloskey: That was the initial idea, or to have a national monument adjoining the park. Then, to reduce Forest Service opposition, that was turned into the idea of a preserve that the Forest Service would administer, so they wouldn't lose jurisdiction,

and that would not be an issue. It would be modeled on the Big Thicket and the Big Cypress preserves the Park Service administers.

There were also problems. There were in-holdings, and private homesites involved. But then, of course, the control of the Congress changed. The Republicans were in control.

Lage: So this was early nineties?

McCloskey: I've been associated with this from the mid-eighties through the mid-nineties. There are still bills pending. Not only are the times not propitious, but the national club never really made a commitment to doing anything about it. That was a disappointment, but I did demonstrate, at least to myself, that on one issue of this kind that there was a way to get these factions working together. One needed to understand that both were making contributions, and one had to play down the tendency to go at each other's throats.

I have no idea whether that would have worked more widely on other forest issues in California, let alone in the Northwest. It was my only recent involvement in domestic forest issues.

Doug Scott and Divisions over Ancient Forests

Lage: But did you get involved somewhat on the ancient forest issue? It seems to me that Ed Wayburn told me that you and he stepped in, for a minute at least, on the ancient forest issue.

McCloskey: We did at one point in the early nineties before Doug left. We got the board of directors to adopt a broader statement of policy in 1991 that reflected the positive values of old growth--that we wanted no more of it cut.

Lage: Did you feel Doug Scott was being a little overly pragmatic?

McCloskey: I think so. I think he missed the point that in the early to mid-eighties, the science had changed, particularly on old growth in the Northwest. More was understood now about how the ecosystem worked and how its health is dependent on the ancient forests. For instance, the value of lichen in collecting nitrogen to add to the rate of productivity of the whole system, and its value as habitat for species like the spotted owl, and all sorts of other things.

Those connections were not understood before, nor the whole idea of the destruction of its value as habitat through fragmentation when units got smaller and smaller, until some fragments are so small that there's no interior that's unaffected by drying and wind flowing through it. So, the minimum size ideas changed. I don't think Doug paid attention to those things.

There was a revolution in thinking that helped drive a lot of this. I think he was thinking primarily in terms of tactics and politics. Also, I don't think he paid enough attention to the value of the energy that the whole new group of forests activists were bringing to the cause. I felt, and I think Ed did, that it was critical that we become allied with much of that thinking so that that energy could be directed toward productive purposes, rather than just sort of play itself out unproductively.

However, it's become a worst-case example, though, of embittered relationships in practice. I don't know whether--if Doug had been different--whether it would have made any difference at all. We're still playing out the whole morality play here as to whether good will or different ideas would make any difference.

Lage: If those more extreme views can even be managed?

McCloskey: One thing I had found to my surprise is that the people with more absolutist agendas do think of themselves as pragmatists.

Lage: How is that?

McCloskey: I'm drawing on general notions of how these things work in the field of politics. One would not have thought that they would have, but I've talked to a number of them personally, and they said, "We're pragmatists." Chad Hanson did get his "no commercial logging" bill introduced in Congress. He and his associates have gotten Republicans to sponsor it also. They've done all the practical work of drafting a bill that was saleable at least to some members of Congress, and getting it introduced, and building up a list of co-sponsors.

It remains to be seen whether they will ever get it passed. You can still ask the question--now that some of these people with strong or more absolutist positions have been in business for a decade or more--how many areas have they saved, and what have they got to show for their efforts? But they're not just sitting off in an ivory tower. They are trying to organize. They are trying to go through practical steps. So,

they're a different breed--if they are pragmatists. I think they're still in the process of learning about how they see the world, and how they propose to operate.

The Clinton Administration's Approach to Logging in the Northwest, and the Club's Zero Cut Policy

Lage: Would you have anything to say about how that issue of no commercial logging was dealt with in the club?

McCloskey: Poorly. [laughter]

Lage: Just give a little background because the reader may not know what we're talking about here.

McCloskey: Let me interpolate something to connect it up with what I was talking about a few moments ago. When the Clinton administration came into office, they were facing a whole tangle of lawsuits that had pretty well interrupted timber sales in the Northwest national forests, particularly west of the Cascades. This affected some Northern California areas too that were all spotted owl habitat. They ended up choosing option nine that came out of studies they had commissioned, which removed about 87 percent of the old growth or ancient forests from sale.

I don't think people like Doug Scott would have thought there was any way in the world that anything approaching that number would ever have been achieved. I must admit, I was flabbergasted myself. We criticized it at the time because it was not 100 percent, or a higher number than 87 percent, but still given the fact they were politicians, it's amazing that they did it. Perhaps they did it--often, they said they did it because they wanted to get the courts out of the issues and that was the least they could do to satisfy the courts and to get the forests out of litigation and back into being managed by the Forest Service so that timber sales could proceed on the balance.

But for whatever reason, in general Clinton has been willing to do more in terms of changing Forest Service management than in any other area of environmental policy that he deals with. So there is something special about that area; I think, particularly in [Al] Gore's mind too. I think one of the factors is that they have concluded that they can carry Washington, and Oregon, and California particularly, while

still taking a hard line on the forests. They aren't ever going to get the intermountain states, but they have small electoral votes. What they can carry are the Pacific Coast states.

On the pollution issues, I think they worry much more about issues that affect the rest of the country, the East and the Midwest, the heavily industrialized areas. They aren't risk takers in that category. I think they think they're just too few people tied into the timber industry on the West Coast anymore to pose a major political risk. On the contrary, they think it's an electoral asset. So, I think that kind of calculation explains why they are more risk-taking on this issue. An example that flows in the same direction--since they're not going to carry the intermountain West anyway--they were quite willing to set up the Escalante National Monument to get elected. In the 1996 election, they were quite willing to go after Yellowstone Mine, north of Yellowstone too.

And, they were willing to make commitments about Headwaters Forest here in California. They thought it was good politics.

Lage: So, they carefully calculate the risks?

McCloskey: I think they do, and that explains to some extent why the unthinkable--back to the ancient forests of the Northwest--happened. But, I don't think the ruling mentality in the club in the mid- to late eighties, saw this coming--that the unthinkable would happen. So, we were already in a context where the conventional wisdom about what was possible and not possible didn't apply.

I think Ed and I had intimations, but maybe we were even late coming there, that science was changing, the politics was changing, the issue was changing, that there was a whole new group of people on the scene.

Well, to connect this up now with your question a moment ago, in the club, in the mid-nineties, we got caught up in this ballot petition with Chad Hanson, who was one of these new activists, and his associates.

Lage: Did he come out of the ancient forest issue?

McCloskey: He emerged with great intensity in this area. He's from Los Angeles. He went to law school at the University of Oregon in Eugene. Eugene is now a hotbed of this kind of activism. Southern Oregon is too. I don't know exactly what he was

involved with there, but he came out of that experience imbued with this feeling. He did hike along the entire Pacific Crest Trail one summer while in school and was outraged at what he saw in terms of the logging in the high country and its prevalence. I've done a lot of hiking there too, when I was a field representative in the sixties. I remember I was outraged too, and logging was everywhere even then.

Lage: So was Brock Evans.

McCloskey: So was Brock Evans. We had long been lamenting all this, but this was all news to him coming from Los Angeles--that these weren't protected forests. These were heavily ravaged forests. At any rate, he wanted no more commercial logging in the national forest. He got enough members to sign petitions to put this on ballots, and it was there on three occasions. On the first two occasions, it did not pass. The board of directors, every time, recommended a "no" vote. On the third try, it passed rather handily.

Lage: And, again, the board recommended a "no" vote.

McCloskey: It did. There were, in the meantime, bitter recriminations over whether, in the earlier times, the board had done various things that were unfair with counter propositions. Also, in the Midwest we had activists emerge in the club who were trying to stop all logging in national forests, in states such as Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. There were also some people in other eastern and north central states who had similar views. Of course, these were Weeks Act lands; reverted farm lands had been planted, and it was usually rolling country in the southern parts of those first three states.

Lage: Would they plant it as tree farms?

McCloskey: No. I don't know the exact history. Some of them were planted, and some just reverted. They were defaulted tax lands in the twenties and thirties, and earlier in some cases. These forests were not involved in any major timber industry; the Forests Service brought logging to their management. By the eighties, they now have grown for fifty or sixty years, and trees were large enough that you could cut them, and that was their mentality to always try to cut them.

So, these issues emerged. The people in the areas didn't understand that they were going to be subject to logging, so they were outraged. Those people brought a zealously to the issue that coalesced with Chad's people. So, the people in most positions of responsibility in the club, particularly from

the Northwest, and northern California, thought it was politically impossible to try to end all commercial logging. But, finally on the third time around, it did pass. Though Chad and his supporters campaigned hard for it across the country in club meetings. The board didn't have anybody campaigning for its view.

The Changed Character of Club Leadership

Lage: It's a little hard as a Sierra Club member to say, "Vote for logging."

McCloskey: It is, and something new happened here because, historically, most ballot measures that are heavily opposed by the board and the leadership echelon of the club don't pass. There's a small number of people, now down to about 11 percent, who do vote. They usually are the hard core of long-time, loyal members.

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Lage: We were talking about how the club handled this whole issue of ending commercial logging.

McCloskey: As often happens, the conflict of personalities becomes a major ingredient in how things are handled. Chad seemed to appear out of nowhere and demand deference. He was just out of school, and people didn't know him very well. He ran for the board of directors subsequently. He did get elected. Now, for about five elections, he's been running a slate and has been gradually electing people from his slate. Though most of them are proving to be independently minded people who don't see themselves as controlled votes on the board.

This is happening again in the spring of 1998. There are competing slates for other purposes, three slates in fact. Some think that there's a battle for control over the Sierra Club now in these contested elections. This is actually a more complicated election than the affair in 1968 when there were the Brower and anti-Brower slates.

Lage: That was pretty clear.

McCloskey: That was pretty clear. Now you get three choices. The no commercial logging--and that slate also increasingly stands for no grazing and no mining either on public lands. There's that slate. There's a slate that wants controls on immigration.

Then there's the slate that was nominated by the nominating committee that sort of reflects the establishment view. Though that slate was picked with an eye to its electability, it's not entirely clear where some of those people may find themselves ideologically.

So the issues of the control of the organization and its basic character, or personality I should say, are to the fore as never before. The board of directors has been changing as a result of the election of more and more petition candidates. These often are people who are relatively new to the club. They are unlike the typical director who for years and years was somebody that had been around a long while, and who had served in groups and chapters, and on national committees, and who has worked his way up, often through the council.

Now you were getting people elected to the board for whom this may be the first thing they had ever done actively in the Sierra Club. Or they'd served only in a limited way at the group level on some committee. Or they might have had some association with the international committee. Suddenly you have people playing influential roles in the club who know very little about the club. They are people who probably are as talented as people we've had in the past, but they are not as experienced.

Lage: And they haven't managed huge budgets, I would guess.

McCloskey: That's right.

Lage: Well, I don't know if managed is the right word--oversee.

McCloskey: Or been responsible for them. So, the club is turning out to be very different than it used to be. There is not the same level of experience on the board of directors. There's less philosophical cohesion, and in some ways, the board of the overall organization is more dependent on national staff than they've ever been.

Lage: As a result of these things here?

McCloskey: As a result of the election petition candidates, particularly. Also, some of the institutions we use to nurture leadership have been atrophying. We ended the Council as we had known it for thirty years. We now have a Council of club leaders that are people brought in once a year, but they don't interact with each other enough to develop a sense of participation.

Lage: So they don't have the sort of ongoing organization?

McCloskey: They don't have the ongoing Council that we had for years that was a training device. It was a way to move up the ladder of leadership in the club. It was an acculturation device to bring people in from chapters and to develop a sense of the common point of view and the common way of doing things in the Sierra Club; that has broken down.

We have cut the number of national committees in half, so we don't have as many opportunities to acculturate people through that mechanism. We've changed the nature of committees so that fewer of them are spending their time dealing with real-world subjects. More of them are working on administrative questions or supervising each other. By the late nineties, I think we had, wittingly or unwittingly, undermined a lot of the proven institutions to acculturate and develop leadership.

Lage: Now, you said wittingly or unwittingly. Do you think it is wittingly, or is it just to streamline the--?

McCloskey: There is a theory that some talk about that this is about centralizing power and increasing staff control. None of it is presented in those terms, but it may be having that result and that may or may not be intended. It's hard to know.

Lage: There are often unintended consequences to that. Well, that jumped us into some of your other areas, didn't it? [laughter]

III THE SIERRA CLUB IN TRANSITION

Personality Conflicts and the Dwindling Power of the Board

- Lage: We're starting up again after a little break. We talked about changes in the balance of power. Is there more to say about staff-volunteer relationships? Has that changed over the years?
- McCloskey: At the national level, a lot of the framing of those issues arose out of views that Denny Shaffer had for quite a few years when he was on the board of directors, basically for about a twenty-year period from the mid-seventies to the mid-nineties. He had lots of valuable insights about club management. He also did a great deal to build up the membership development process. He contributed a lot to strategic planning and to the fiscal soundness of the club.

However, he had a tendency to be very distrustful of centralization in the club and of staff having too much power. He had a tendency to want to quarrel with whoever was executive director. He did that to a degree with me, with Michael Fischer, and with Carl Pope. Other members of the board tended to either agree with Denny and follow his lead, or to resist wherever Denny was heading. So, for a long period of time, the national level staff-volunteer relationship issues tended to center very much on the dynamics of the relationships with Denny. They became hard to disentangle from his personality.

For instance, when Doug Wheeler left, Michele Perrault had been the president. She championed Wheeler, whereas Denny led the faction that wanted him to go. There was a period in time when Michele and Denny were clashing constantly.

Denny's apparent decision to no longer seek to be on the board has removed him as a flash point for those issues. As a matter of fact, a couple of years before his last term ended,

he'd ceased to have a very significant following in that regard.

Lage: You mean his own circle of followers were dropping?

McCloskey: Yes, they were dwindling. However, since they've left, even earlier in the nineties, quite a few members of the board of directors were tired of having the pot be stirred on issues of that sort. They came to view those issues as unreal.

Lage: This tension with the executive director.

McCloskey: I think the issues are much more complicated than that. I think there were some legitimate issues, but there was also an effort to create issues where there could have been harmony. Denny is a very complex person. I mean he often does have good insights, but they get mixed up with bad or political motives, or what were perceived to be that. At any rate, the whole issue got very complicated because it all got tied up with reactions to his personality.

Also, there was a whole generation of leaders who came out of, and were affected by, the Brower affair through the seventies and early eighties. Phil Berry and Michele, for example, are people from that period--people who were very possessive in wanting to maintain broad volunteer control vis-à-vis staff.

Lage: So they might have opposed Denny, but they had these same views about guarding against--.

McCloskey: They had the same views, but that generation has, with their exception, pretty much passed from the scene. So those issues of sort of playing off of flaws of Brower, have also ceased to be much of a dynamic anymore on the board. What is a factor now are reactions focused on Chad Hanson's personality and his ambitions. The agenda that Carl Pope has been pursuing has lots of implications for volunteer control and staff centralization, but very few people are responding to them in those terms.

Lage: You mean they're not on guard to see--?

McCloskey: I think, basically, people are tired out. They're sort of worn out on those issues.

Lage: I see what you mean.

McCloskey: Some people still are wondering about them, but to put it in a nutshell, I think the issue should be one of maintaining very strong volunteer institutions, not trying to make the staff weaker. I think the important thing is to try to make the volunteer institutions stronger. Or to keep them strong, and to keep a proper balance in the club between the two sources of ideas and vitality.

I fear right now that there are real problems on the volunteer side, not the least of which is that changes in American society are affecting us. People, professional people from which we draw our ranks largely, are working longer hours than they used to. Married couples tend to both be employed and working these long hours. There is less time for volunteerism. We're having more trouble filling our leadership slots.

We still have expectations that--this is particularly true of Michele's generation--that volunteers will want to do everything conceivable, but we're having trouble getting people to come forward to do them. Particularly when board meetings begin to be fractious as they are; well, they were for a while with Denny, and they are now with Chad.

Lage: And before that.

McCloskey: With Brower.

Some good people say, "I don't want to be part of a fractious board. I don't want to put in time there and to get caught up in all of that unpleasantness." So, we're having trouble recruiting solid people. Then there's always the question of electability. While the club still has a solid base in all of its groups and chapters around the country, I think the national board and the leadership structure there is facing lots of challenges.

Committee Reorganization and the Diffusion of Responsibility

McCloskey: Let me say a word or two more about the committee reorganization of five years ago. That was sold on the grounds of streamlining and sort of flattening the management pyramid. On the flattening question, it did the very reverse. We used to have about a hundred national-level committees and task forces, and they all worked on substance. They all reported directly to the board of directors. People, to a considerable

extent, who worked on them were self-selected according to their interests.

They were doing lots of solid work that went way beyond the official priorities because people were interested in it. They were making contributions in many ways. In some cases, they may have been "spinning their wheels;" there may have been some dead wood. In the aggregate, there were an awful lot of very dedicated people. The reorganization threw out most of the longtime leadership echelon. Particularly people over the age of fifty-five were summarily fired.

Lage: They're the ones who have the time.

McCloskey: Yes. Or demoted if they came back. Most of the activity slots in this new structure were for people who would not work on substance and real things; they were for oversight positions. We now have three or four levels of it. We have the board of directors. We have the conservation governance committee. We have strategy teams under them. Then we have the issue committees that have survived, many of which were combined to cover a lot of things. Then we have, to the side, some campaign steering committees.

Most of the activity slots were for supervising and overseeing other volunteers, and that's not very rewarding. Five years later, many of them are still groping to find what they should be doing. Instead of flattening the pyramid, they increased the hierarchy. To use the vernacular, we have lots of chiefs but very few Indians. We're having trouble recruiting people to fill these slots. We got rid of a lot of people who were doing productive work.

The reorganization was represented as not imposing any barriers to getting policy proposals to the board of directors, but in fact it is not working out that way. A lot of people in the higher echelons see their job as saying "no" to volunteers below them and saying you can't do this or that. Some are empowering, but a lot of them are not empowering. We have totally lost a sense of where policy making is lodged in the club. We have a muddle about technical definitions about what is a policy, what is a position, and what is a guideline. Well, under this new framework the board of directors only does policy. It does not do positions, and it does not do guidelines.

It's now become practically a theological matter to determine which is which. I'm doing a redraft on some of these things because people don't want to go to the board of

directors any more. So, the board of directors has hardly anything to do anymore on policy. It's been hidden below. Maybe the idea was to keep an enfeebled and less competent board of directors from having much to do with guiding the club any more because most of the decisions now are not made by the board of directors but by people at lower levels.

Lage: And it doesn't come up to the board for approval?

McCloskey: Well, there has also been a change of fashion with regard to policy. Somewhere at the same time that the reorganization occurred, it was decreed that we had too much policy, and we didn't have enough implementation, and we weren't doing policy anymore. As a result, there's a small clutch of people who are the keepers of the theology about the beauties of this reorganization who seem to know all the answers, that are not written down, about why it's done this way rather than that way.

I've tried to probe into this but you can't get clarity. They always have an answer that, as I say, isn't written down anywhere, and you can't find any record that this was officially decided as holy writ. They have the notion, "Oh, it ought to go here. It ought to go there. No, it doesn't go there anymore."

Lage: And it's all sound and fury.

McCloskey: It's like a shell game with peas. You never can figure out where the control is at any one moment; so we've lost any sense of who's responsible and who's accountable for making operational decisions and deciding what our stance is on matters of concern to us. Plus, the whole idea of being relevant, in terms of cutting-edge issues and new ways that things are seen, has been forgotten. Thus, we don't have committees paying attention to the emerging ideas and issues.

Lage: Like wilderness that we were talking about?

McCloskey: Well, that would have been an example. But on pollution, there's a whole change of thought away from the so-called command and control regulatory activities that were common in the seventies, toward re-invention ideas that the Clinton administration has come up with. I am now spending a lot of time working on those matters.

I've developed various suggestions about how we ought to respond. This is a big debate going on in the policy field, but it's hard to engage anybody in the club. I work with the

Environmental Quality Team, but they don't know whether they have the authority to approve anything, or whether it's a position, or a guideline, or a policy, or what it is. And then they say, "Go to the War on the Environment Campaign Steering Committee," but they don't know anything about pollution. So, they kick it back to the EQ team. The EQ team doesn't know whether a subcommittee should be handling it, or whether the full strategy team should be handling it.

In this case Carl likes what I have drafted. Most of our experts, who are former lobbyists, think it's great. Some of it has been published. Nobody can figure out who's responsible; so there's diffusion of responsibility. I find it really bewildering, as if we're not interested in being engaged anymore with where the action is. Which leads into the whole subject of what's happened to our lobbying.

Public Relation Campaigns versus Lobbying

Lage: It sounds like a good place to go next.

McCloskey: Not only has it become obscure about who makes decisions on what we stand for, it's also become less clear that we want to use our resources anymore to lobby for changes in public policy. First of all, we are raising more and more of our money in terms of deductible funds, 501(c)(3) funds. They are usually not available for lobbying purposes. They're often earmarked via grants for very specific projects. Some of them that Carl has been raising for our EVEC [Environmental Voter Education Campaign] campaign are for shaping public opinion broadly. But those efforts aren't connected up with specific issues in Congress, even generically.

Lage: Could they be?

McCloskey: They could be, but often most of those monies are spent on local group issues through organizers we've hired. The Washington staff, which we still have as lobbyists, feel increasingly unsupported. They are there to get results, or they were once told to, but it's very hard for them to find the back-up to get the messages out to our membership, to get messages from our membership and constituencies in to key members of Congress.

The funds for that kind of constituency mobilization are shrinking. The funds that we have for outreach, in theory, are

supposed to build the demand for the right kind of public policies, but they're spent in ways that often create only the most generalized form of public opinion. Some of them are used to generate calls through phone banks and through letters-to-the-editor campaigns. Some of that works quite well and still is productive. More and more of the money is going toward very generalized themes that don't seem to connect up in any tight way with affecting the decisions of Congress or the administration.

We generate campaign plans each year that often are dead letters soon after they're written, or are never even approved, and have little to do with what we actually do.

Lage: When you say themes, do you mean--?

McCloskey: Themes, like we're going to "protect America's environment for our families, for our future." These are broad P.R. themes that are motivators; they are the kind of things that might have something to do with emphases in an election campaign for members of Congress. Or they may emphasize, in a regional context, something about the importance of saving salmon and salmon habitat. It increasingly is hard to understand, though, how all of these things connect up and how they gain delivery of our public policy objectives in a direct way.

As Carl enunciates it, we're trying to create demand so that we can get delivery on our policy objectives. He even has a theory that they don't need to be connected up, that if we elevate the general demand for high quality environment that that will translate into restraint in the Republican Congress so that they won't try to roll back various environmental laws. He points to what happened with the Safe Drinking Water Act in the last Congress. It's true in this case that a decent law came out, even though we didn't lobby very much on the specifics of it.

It may be that at certain times things will work out that way, but the whole long-held theory of lobbying, that you define exactly what you want and you tailor make your tactics to the idiosyncrasies of the decision maker and you then mobilize the swing votes at critical moments to decisively influence decisions, seems to be increasingly rejected or neglected in the way things are being organized and money is being spent.

Lage: It sounds like they wouldn't have to be mutually exclusive. You could do the themes and the lobbying.

McCloskey: That's right. Not only could this be connected up, but right now there seem to be more and more missing links. It's not clear to me whether we're just making the best of a bad situation in terms of too little hard money--(c)(4) money--or whether we really do believe that these blunt-edge P.R. instruments we're wielding will get us all we want. I'm doubtful about that, but we're drifting in those directions.

Less Money for Lobbying, More Spent on P.R.

Lage: We'll soon find out. Why is there less and less of the hard money? Is that what we're going after?

McCloskey: This is not entirely clear. Recently, Don Morris on the club's Finance Committee asked for a complete breakdown of how we were getting our income in terms of what is deductible, non-deductible, or earmarked.

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McCloskey: What is clear is that generally the nineties have been a fairly static period in terms of the size of contributed income coming into the club. The eighties were a period of rapid growth. I did a study for the finance committee a couple of years ago, which developed a very interesting picture. I went back thirty years and looked at flows of revenues to the national budget.

What it showed was that the period of the sixties was a period of rapid growth in revenues. In the seventies, they tended to level off. The eighties were a period of very rapid growth, particularly in the early eighties, the '81 through '83 period with Jim Watt. Then, in the late eighties they rose again through 1990.

After 1990, revenues have not grown much, though they did jump up a bit when the Republican Congress was elected in 1994. The interesting thing to me is that we seem to have alternating decades of growth and plateauing in terms of our revenues. Why that's the case is not clear to me at all. It's a pattern that none of us has ever looked at before. I found that some of the other environmental groups that were similarly positioned with the club had experienced somewhat the same pattern. So I think it has something to do with public policy trends and trends in national administrations.

Those who had a different posture on national issues didn't follow that same pattern. Nature Conservancy didn't, but Audubon and NRDC did.

Lage: Does Nature Conservancy do well in times like this when there seems to be a lot of wealth?

McCloskey: Yes, though I didn't analyze them specifically, but I know that they didn't have the downturn in the early nineties when we did. In general, the patterns for our flows is that when there are lots of alarms and concerns about threats to environmental programs or to the environment, our revenues and membership go up.

Also, the press gives more favorable coverage to the issue during that time. When there are perceptions that sympathetic administrations are in power and that the threats have been removed or are being addressed, then people seem to be more relaxed and complacent, and the revenues cease to rise and may fall. Increasingly the drivers affecting us are: the complexion of national administrations, both the executive branch and Congress, and the degree to which there is sympathetic or unsympathetic media coverage.

Lage: So it's not that you're going after the--?

McCloskey: We began in the nineties with revenue that's not growing much. What we have been able to do, however--and Carl has pushed this a great deal--is to solicit more deductible gifts, some very large ones. We've been marginally more successful with foundation grants too. So the one part of our revenue picture that seems to be growing is one that's more restricted in terms of what we can do with it.

Plus, we have this whole second field staff that's growing up around the EPEC [Environmental Public Education Campaign] and EVEC program. It's likely in a few years to double our field staff--although these are not long-term employees. They're under a sort of separate framework. That means that most of the money we get is not flexible money; it's going into fixed staff commitments, for organizers. So, discretionary money that can be used for lobbying is the least available kind.

Plus, we're finding that we really are beginning to be hamstrung by the legal pattern that we chose to organize around ever since we lost our tax deductibility back in 1966. That is we're basically a (c)(4) organization with an allied set of (c)(3) entities. But that means that the cost of

organizational maintenance--the staff for handling accounting, and membership, and information services, and general services, and all of that--has to be paid for with hard (c)(4) money.

Most people think that money of this type should just be used for lobbying, with (c)(3) money used for those things. If we were a (c)(3) entity, that would be true. We should move toward an alternate structure of being basically a (c)(3) organization, with an allied (c)(4) entity that lobbies.

Lage: Which we were at one time, were we not? I mean that was the Trustees for Conservation.

McCloskey: We were, prior to 1966. Trustees for Conservation, yes, that's exactly right. With our current legal status, we cannot use foundation grants for basic organizational maintenance. By the time all of that's paid for, we don't have enough left for the lobbying work much anymore. So, we're trying to overcome that by using this (c)(3) money, and special grants for section 527 organizing that just deals with these broad thematic messages that don't connect up with legislation.

Lage: Is that the EPEC and EVEC business?

McCloskey: Yes, EPEC and EVEC.

Lage: You mentioned the field staff. They are working on the regional level but are not tied into the federal agenda?

McCloskey: Yes, that change occurred a number of years ago. I think, actually, it was made formal about three years ago that the field staff are no longer the delivery mechanism for lobbying goals at the national level. They have lots of regional responsibilities; they've basically been weaned away from federal lobbying. So the national lobbying staff is there but doesn't have the tools to achieve its objectives. They feel, frankly, somewhat abandoned, as sort of orphans in the system now, who once were the center of the system. Certainly, that was the system I built up.

It's true that they do have the daily electronic newsletter still called the WOE (for War on the Environment), which activates a certain number of people and gets out on the internet. Sometimes, Carl intervenes to make sure that phone banks are run and other very good activist things. But the old lobbying structure is in disarray.

Lage: A very big change, or evolution--what should we call it, a de-emphasis on lobbying?

McCloskey: I think a change in priorities.

Local and Regional Entities Becoming Isolated from the National Organization

Lage: I have always asked Sierra Club leaders about staff-volunteer relationships. Then a couple of people claimed that they thought the main tensions in the club were national-local, or chapter-national. Is that still the case, or was it ever?

McCloskey: I have the sense that the groups particularly are more isolated from the rest of the organization than they have ever been. To a considerable extent, they've always functioned as relatively autonomous units. But, as I mentioned earlier, I think the glue that holds the club together is weakening, witness the demise of the Council and the weakening of the mediating structures for people to climb to the national level through committees, and the lack of any national assemblies anymore. The whole set of institutions we've evolved to connect up the groups of the chapters and the RCCs [regional conservation committees], with the national, are atrophying and are being organized out of existence.

The RCCs are weakening too. A few of them, like the Gulf Coast one, still seem to be very strong, but others are less so. California is still strong. There are hopes that new bonds will be forged through the training academy; I know Carl feels that it has a critical role in trying to reunify the club. But it remains to be seen how much that will replace the older institutions we had.

We've been told a number of times that quite a few of the people now running groups are less acculturated than in the past, that they don't have much of an idea of the club's history. They don't have much of an idea of the kinds of things we've stood for, or how we've gone about our business-- the tradition of what I call tough-minded, responsible pragmatism.

Increasingly, the New York City group seems to be a very different organization. It isn't tied in. It doesn't reflect much of the club's character elsewhere, but that's been a problem of long standing.

Lage: That's gone on for a while.

McCloskey: Yes. I don't know that we're in trouble yet for lack of sufficient glue to hold it all together, but I think that quite a few of us have an uneasiness about what the long-term results would be of the disappearance of the glue.

Setting Priorities Becoming Problematic

Lage: Okay. Shall we go on to priorities?

McCloskey: Yes.

Lage: Problems in picking priorities, you've mentioned as an issue.

McCloskey: When we were an organization heavily focused at the national level on lobbying Congress, the priority setting process was very important. It was particularly important during the seventies when we were on the offensive and achieving all sorts of things and building the body of modern environmental law. We invented a process of priority setting at that time which has lingered on, but doesn't seem to be well suited to our current situation.

At that time, we would canvas our leadership around the country for ideas of what should be on our priority list for the next couple of years at the beginning of each Congress. The board of directors would, working with staff, pick a few things. Some then would be the biggest campaigns, and usually five or six others that would get lesser degrees of attention. We usually had a central pot of money for campaigns that was held back and allocated to whatever seemed to be making the greatest progress or showing the greatest promise.

Over time, various things changed. During the eighties, we got to be more and more on the defensive during the Reagan and Bush administrations. So, we have spent more of our time fire fighting and keeping bad things from happening. That's continued on into the 1990s, which will continue until we get rid of the Republican majority in Congress.

A number of our leaders think the process of asking chapters and groups for their input is a voting process and that the final choice can only be legitimated by doing what they suggest. This is put forth under an assertion of the need for volunteer control over the club vis-a-vis the staff. The problem has been further complicated by asking people what they were working on locally, as if that were a reflection of what

would be appropriate to do nationally, or reflect opportunities at the national level.

My view is that there are appropriate things to be done at every level, and you do need to have some idea of what's going on at the different levels. It may be quite different; or in some cases, it may be the same. Sometimes what's coming forward in the state legislatures and in Congress is the same, particularly nowadays. But there has, anyway, become a body of opinion that is highly intent on trying to hold the national organization to do what is voted on by chapters and groups.

Lage: In a formal kind of way?

McCloskey: In a formal way. Though the national staff keeps trying to emphasize that it's not intended to be a vote; it's merely a consultation process, and the board should make the decisions. There are people on the board, like Chad Hanson, who insist this has been a voting process, not even a preferential polling process but a controlling vote. This is at a time when we're not on the offensive. It's not as if we were going to go out and pass these things in the next Congress, such as "end commercial logging." Those are long-term propositions.

Thus there's an unreality hanging over the whole thing now. In my view, during this defensive period, we should be in a very flexible posture so we can shift our own resources back and forth to deal with threats to our vital interests. Or to take advantage of some positive opportunity with the Clinton administration that they may present to us, as we had last year on the Clean Air Act regulations where we moved to tighten them up. We did jump in, and I'm totally pleased that we did to rally public opinion to get them nailed down.

This new theory of what the priority process is all about would deny us the opportunity to do that, and deny us the time and flexibility at a time when we badly need it. So some people want to abandon the process. Some people want to nail it down. Some people think it doesn't make any sense anymore. There is great disarray about what's to be done. Plus, there's very little discretionary money that we're allocating anymore. We once had \$250,000 for the major campaign fund. Twenty-one or more years ago that was worth a lot more money than \$250,000 is now. Now, we only have about \$100,000. Some of that is allocated through committees, and it doesn't even really get held in reserve for the most promising opportunities.

Lage: Do you speak to these issues in the board? I mean, do you give your opinion?

McCloskey: I do sometimes, in my reports that I give to them. I have also spoken to them a number of times; I'm an ex officio member on the Conservation Governance Committee. I advise club officers such as the president, and talk to the conservation director and the executive director. I suppose I have as much influence as anybody else does. I suppose I am perceived as trying to hold on to the old patterns in a time of change. I also think we've learned a lot over that period of time.

Organic Institutional Growth versus Engineered Solutions

McCloskey: I forgot something I was going to say earlier when I was discussing the reorganization of committees, and in effect some of these other things too. That is that my view is that over time--through trial and error--we've gradually learned something about what works best. People develop working relationships around certain modes of organization. If they continue over a period of time, it's usually because they've found a way to make them work and to make the process rewarding. This view is sort of a sociological view of how institutions evolve organically over time and come to work.

In recent years, though, there has been a very different attitude. It reflects an engineering mentality where people decide that they're going to wipe the slate clean, get rid of all these institutions and work it out as if it were an engineering diagram; it's as if they weren't dealing with people but they were dealing with parts of machinery. And, they will suddenly say, "This is the new system, and on paper it looks like all the parts mesh. It should work, and we are decreeing that it's going to work."

What they left out of it is the human equation of whether people are motivated, in fact, to want to work in that fashion. What happens to the people that have long committed themselves to working within other frameworks and the human relationships among people who developed working understandings. I just don't believe that you can snap your fingers and suddenly engineer people into fitting in pigeon holes.

Lage: Create a different institution.

McCloskey: I think institutions tend to evolve gradually as some things wither away and other parts grow. For instance, in recent years we tried this eco-region concept. Somebody snapped their fingers, and this came out of Carl's bright ideas during the

centennial campaign. I thought it fine as a device to raise money for projects in regions. Some thought it was supposed to be a new regional structure, an organization like the RCCs. So, suddenly we had two competing regional structures. And in a couple of places, it's worked, but for the most part, it was something that didn't fit what people actually wanted to do.

Lage: I thought it was sort of a fund-raising device.

McCloskey: Well, it started out that way. Then, suddenly, there was effort to evolve beyond that. So, largely, it's withering away. There was also an idea for a Center for Environmental Innovation, but no money was raised for it. But quite a bit of effort was put into trying to set it up and make it work. We still are struggling with all of the major new committees out of the reorganization five years ago; we're still trying to make that work, and it isn't working very well. So, I think some of the people with this engineering mentality are beginning to learn that it's easier to sketch it out on a piece of paper than it is to actually make it work.

Lage: I thought the committee reorganization was partly to counteract the tendency toward bureaucracy and slow decision making. As you've described what's happening, the decision making is more problematic.

McCloskey: That's right. It's created points of delay, and more nay sayers, and has confused the picture of who's accountable and responsible and where leadership is supposed to be. I think it's making a bad use of human resources.

Lage: That's not a pretty picture. Is there anything to be said about the Peter Hart survey? That seems to come up so much.

McCloskey: In what context?

Lage: Sort of in defining priorities. Wasn't there a survey that showed what club membership really cared about? Or was this so long ago that it doesn't matter?

McCloskey: There were two Peter Hart surveys, and I don't recall a great deal about them.

Lage: Maybe they weren't terribly defining. I thought they sort of reiterated that most members cared most about wilderness and public lands stuff. I may be wrong about that.

McCloskey: What many people don't realize is that since the late sixties there have been more sociological surveys of the Sierra Club

than almost any other environmental group and maybe any other voluntary society. We've had a whole series of them. Peter Hart was only one of them in recent years.

For people who are unaware of all of those earlier ones, this may have loomed larger in their minds. It didn't loom as large in my mind because I didn't think it was all that well done. To some extent, it reiterated findings of earlier surveys. I think the most useful thing that came out of one of them was the need to tell more about the institution in the magazine. We weren't doing a very good job of explaining ourselves to our membership through our publications, and I completely concur in that. The magazine, at one time, drifted off to seeing itself as a newsstand magazine for the interested environmental public rather than as an organ that was designed to also communicate a lot about the organization.

Lage: Trying to compete with Outdoor or something.

McCloskey: Exactly, that was the mentality. I think progress has been made in addressing that problem. Although, it's a never-ending problem.

[tape interruption]

A Changed Presidency and Decision Process on the Board

Lage: Okay, we're back on. We're going to have some comments about the role of the club president in more recent years.

McCloskey: Each person elected to the presidency of the club defines it in their own terms and in light of their own situation. Increasingly, however, club presidents see themselves as people who should be on the spot, moving around the country explaining the national club to the membership in various localities, and being a national spokesperson for the club, appearing in the national capital and to national audiences. This makes the presidency a very demanding job.

To do that, you have to devote full-time to it. Many have had to rely on the club for a stipend to replace lost personal income. They had to take a sabbatical from their college job, or whatever else they do. Many people, by virtue of their livelihood, can't take time off to do it that way. So that increasingly made it difficult for people on the board to serve, even if they are otherwise ready to do it. We've been

fortunate, for the most part, in finding people who could do that, but each year the field seems to get narrower and narrower in terms of who on the board is ready to step into that role.

Lage: Partly because the board is greener, or because people are more reluctant?

McCloskey: Well, yes, there are fewer people who seem to be seasoned for it, or have the personal circumstances that would allow them to spend their time that way. I might add that one other thing that's happened is that presidents are investing less of their time in the organization of board meetings and board relationships. And executive directors are spending less time doing that.

I did spend a lot of time in working with club presidents to organize agendas, to follow up on board decisions at meetings, and on working on projects that came out of board meetings, making the whole board governance structure work. I don't think the board governance structure works very well anymore because it's not a priority for anybody.

Lage: So the president doesn't really function as the chairman of the board?

McCloskey: He is the presiding officer, but I had been asked by some presidents, Adam Werbach particularly, to be staff person for the board to help them organize projects and to follow through on ones. I find I would prepare analyses of their discussions and suggestions for the next steps. Sometimes there's a follow through, but often there is not the discipline to follow the thread of a set of decisions for more than one or two meetings, and then they lose interest, and they're off on something else.

Increasingly, the agendas for board meetings are lean because of the decision to de-emphasize policy. There are few policy proposals for them. They decided, in response to some of the remarks I made to them about a year ago, that they wanted to receive policy proposals again, but the Conservation Governance Committee is still struggling with whether it knows how to respond.

Well, I have about a half of a dozen policy proposals myself pending, that are stalled in the bowels of the structure. The board now is pretty much prey to passing thoughts that emerge in the day or two before the meeting, or the morning of the meeting. In fact, that's the way the decision to call for removing the Glen Canyon Dam came up. In

part the board was feeling it was never given anything important to decide, and Dave Brower gave it something to sink its teeth into.

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McCloskey: Also, I think, Dave was trying to reach back to his earliest days as an executive director in the fifties when he had acquiesced in the idea of damming Glen Canyon. Having later understood what was at stake, he has always had a bad conscience about it. And now he has come to realize that a great deal of water is wasted through evaporation there and that the water interests, as well as the ecosystem, would be much better off without that dam.

So there's a very practical argument for it that in many respects is reflective of the kind of careful work he did in the fifties when he found other engineering problems with upstream dams. Also, this was a decision, at that time, that reflected Adam Werbach's leadership. As a young person, he sensed that this would be a popular decision with young people.

I might add, as president, he has had a decisive influence in lowering the average age of club members. That age was going up for a long time. At one time, it was very low, right after Earth Day. And now, it's going down again, which means we're getting more young people, and that's a very good development.

In general, Carl Pope, as executive director, has not put a lot of effort into helping the club's presidents organize for meetings. Although, I think he's now doing a bit more. Club presidents have increasingly seen the job as one of being visible spokespeople first.

Lage: Adam was certainly sort of a green president, we could say without making a judgment. He had only been on the board a couple of years, aside from being so youthful.

McCloskey: That's right. However, he points out that he's been an activist in the club since his early youth, I think actually at the age of nine, so that by the age of twenty-two he had thirteen years of experience as an activist, as well as organizing college programs. I think he has done exceptionally well given his age, and he's blessed with a lot of common sense, and real skills in terms of public speaking and meeting management. But of course, there's a lot of experiences that you won't have had when you're only twenty-three or twenty-four, and seasoning, that will come in time.

Friction Over the Population Issue

Lage: Have the issues that we've talked about, that are somewhat controversial, like the immigration policy and the no-cutting in the forests, were they discussed at the board level before they went on the ballot?

McCloskey: There had not been much discussion on the no-commercial-logging issue, except to the extent of reacting to the ballot petitions. The only exception was the little bit of time that Doctor Wayburn and I got them to devote to the subject in the early nineties. So, I think they could be faulted with neglect of that issue.

On the immigration issue, I was asked along with Carolyn Carr about 1994 to mediate that issue. There had already been all sorts of rancor in the Population Committee over changing the composition of it.

Lage: Of the committee?

McCloskey: Of the committee. There had been friction between the population staff people and different people on the committee. What I see basically happening there is we had two cult-like groups in collision here who had broad views of how the world appeared to them. For some, the issue is organized under population theory. In many ways, it represented a dogma that is broad in its perceptions of the causation and impact of problems. They see it as a very central factor.

In recent years, around environmental justice issues and social issues, another cult-like group of people has emerged with a strong outlook on a whole series of connected issues. Their view of the world absolutely collides with the people in the population field. Some people think it's just the issue of immigration, but it's much wider than that. In some ways, what happened at the Cairo Conference marked a shift on the world scene and in U.S. population issues, away from an emphasis on controlling fertility rates, and controlling immigration, and a numbers-based approach, toward a broad theory of improving the status of women as the key to influencing what happens in terms of demographics. That latter view is more congenial to the people in the environmental justice movement, but this seemed to be seen as a repudiation by a lot of traditionalists in the population field.

Lage: Who come out of Zero Population Growth?

McCloskey: That's right. But Zero Population Growth, in the meantime, has been taken over by the new group.

Lage: I see.

McCloskey: And these are like doctrinal disputes; they are value-laden disputes. People have bitter arguments. I've seen them at meetings at different levels, in the club and outside the club, and these are just like two religions colliding.

Lage: Name calling.

McCloskey: Yes. Both of them are absolutely convinced that logic and rightness is totally on their side, and the other people are bereft of their senses. There's very little tolerance.

Carolyn Carr and I were on the same tack. We were asked by the board to try to mediate this issue. We came up with a draft policy that we brought to the board. We got it through the Conservation Governance Committee, or its predecessor; it was approved informally by the board of directors, but, it wasn't accepted by the then Population Committee.

It was basically a compromise that involved still holding on to some ideas of fertility control, but at the same time reflecting an effort to recognize the causes of immigration, and taking the view that it was not a matter of immigration, it was a matter of migration of the people who were already born on the planet. It's a question of them moving from one place to another. It was a question of environmental impact, and you needed to assess its impacts, and we pointed to international examples, like the transmigration project in Indonesia and the northern settlements policy in Russia.

Lage: You tried to diffuse the issue?

McCloskey: I tried to diffuse the issue, but the key players were not having it because they didn't want anything but their total view of the world. Then, I worked with Carl toward the idea of neutrality on the issue. At first, he was not persuaded, but he came around to believing that we were too divided to work productively on this issue, regardless of who was right, or who was wrong, or whether anyone was right or wrong. Practically, it was just an issue on which we could not productively work because too much of our constituency was unpersuaded and unreconciled.

Lage: Had he wanted to take the social justice--?

McCloskey: His first job was working as a Washington lobbyist for ZPG [Zero Population Growth] under the old regime, back in the early seventies before I hired him to work for the club.

Lage: Oh, I didn't know that.

McCloskey: He had a traditional, old-style ZPG view of this. That was his tradition, on which he drew for quite a while, but as he began to pay attention to the dynamics and the bitterness evident within the club, he came to be a strong believer that neutrality was the only way to survive. He believed we ought to use these energies for things on which we can agree. Besides, in general, he has been pursuing an agenda of reducing the number issues on which we work, if you don't have the money anymore. And, he wants to work at a higher level of generalization in terms of public relations.

Lage: You, at least, were successful in persuading the board to have the neutrality stand?

McCloskey: Yes. The board, now, is very devoted to that policy. In fact, it has overwhelmingly opposed the initiative that's before our voters in the spring of 1998.

The Club's Environmental Strategy in Transition

[Interview 3: April 7, 1998] ##

Lage: This is the third session of our second oral history with Mike McCloskey. We were working out exactly where we are in our outline and thought we'd start with some of the thoughts you have about the decline of pragmatism in the club.

McCloskey: The Sierra Club developed a character from the late fifties onward of defining success in what it did in terms of its ability to successfully affect and change public policy on the environment. During Dave Brower's period, this had a heavy emphasis in terms of his orientation toward public relations, and books, particularly, and advertising, but we took lobbying seriously.

During my time as executive director, the Sierra Club became primarily noted for its lobbying of Congress. To some extent, we became successful in lobbying state legislatures too. We proceeded according to a classic theory of lobbying in terms of defining the objective very carefully, orienting it

toward the idiosyncrasies of the decision maker and how he is best influenced (if it's Congress, or a key member of Congress, or it could be a member of the administration), and design the strategies and the tactics around that analysis of the idiosyncrasies and inclinations of whoever makes the decision.

During the nineties, we were facing a very different climate. We were facing a time when we were largely on the defensive. From the late fifties on, we had become increasingly optimistic, particularly in the seventies; though during the sixties we had a sense that we were moving from a time of constrained possibilities into a time where events were moving in our direction. We began to be more and more successful as public opinion went through a massive change in our direction in the early seventies.

Now we're in a time where we're unsure of the future. We're not sure how many more gains we can make. Our membership is not expanding. Our budget is not expanding much. The movement is racked by factionalism. In the Sierra Club itself, Carl Pope, as our executive director, has led us toward the idea that this is a time when we need to get back to the fundamentals of building a broader base of support. In that general supposition, I think he's absolutely right. Many others in the movement feel that way too.

What I've had doubts about is how far we move away from the theory and practice of lobbying as we practiced it for a long time. Carl has been saying to donors and others in the field that we no longer "do legislation." We only do "people, places, and things." And he has also said we've gone through a paradigm shift, that we're a different Sierra Club nowadays. He's talked about getting results in Congress through changing public opinion in the field. He gives as an example in the last Congress that the Congress passed a pretty good clean drinking water bill, and yet we never lobbied on clean drinking water. We did do a lot of projects in the field to build public support for a clean and healthful environment.

Lage: But you used to engage so strongly with the legislation itself.

McCloskey: That's right, the practice of lobbying always turned on identifying, at least in Congress, swing members of Congress and going into their districts and generating public pressure, constituency demand, in those districts around that specific piece of legislation or the amendments to it. It was very targeted and very custom designed to fit the specific situations. Carl purports to no longer believe that. He thinks you can do it through sort of a blunt instrument of

generalized public pressure on behalf of more environmental protection.

I certainly agree that a great deal more has to be done to rev up public consciousness and demand for environmental protection, but I'm not convinced that we can stop with that. I believe that we have to connect up the pieces, the links, in the chain between that generalized demand and specific understandings about a piece of legislation or an administrative decision coming up.

I'm not sure Carl really entirely believes what he's been saying. He just recently told our Washington staff that, "Yes, we still do lobbying, and yes we need to do the traditional things too." He may be either changing his opinion, or his opinion may be in transition. He admitted there was sort of a fuzzy logic between creating demand and getting specific results. I hope his thinking does continue to develop.

I think there are, in effect, two parallel paths. One is the broad, long-term business of creating demand and deepening public understanding of the causation of environmental problems. Carl, himself, emphasized that sometime back, but I think you still need to follow the classic theory of lobbying. Carl conceptualizes that whole end of it as "taking delivery" on the demand you've created earlier.

My view of it is that you should have an ongoing, never-ending program to develop demand, but you need to have this parallel process that follows that classic lobbying model and works through the implications of customizing strategy and tactics. So that if you have a few votes you need to pick up, you go into those districts and you concentrate on what it will take to change public opinion in that district. It's based on analysis of that district. We seem to be doing a lot of P.R. things right now that are very routinized. We have now, with the EPEC and EVEC money, a spring Earth Day push. We have a push in the fall, and we have a number of media events and stunts, and other activities.

They're all very generalized, and they're tied in, in some cases, to local chapter interests and concerns. But they rarely connect up with specific events in Congress. Certainly, I've been advocating that we move away from our traditional priority-setting process which was adapted to the time when we were on the offensive. We had to push things for a considerable period but would eventually, usually, succeed.

Now, I think we need to be much more flexible in moving back and forth across the spectrum to exploit opportunities, to defeat bad legislation where we can do so with our own resources. In some cases, there may be even opportunities to move forward that suddenly present themselves. For instance, Congress passed a moratorium on mining patents a few years ago and has been renewing them right through the Republican congresses.

Certain other things may be accomplished too, particularly in the executive branch--both with the new moratorium on roads in de facto wilderness areas and with the new regulations on smog and particulates that the administrative EPA promulgated last year. This is not entirely a time of defensiveness. I believe that we are moving now in this direction of a more flexible response to events in a defensive posture.

As the nineties have gone on, the theory and practice of our approach have been very much in a state of uncertainty and transition. It may take us a long time to learn how to be effective in the process of creating demand and changing public opinion broadly. We're far from knowing how much in the way of resources it takes to do that and to stick with it. We're learning a new business, and I think it's important that we do so. But I think it's also important that we not repudiate or abandon what we've learned so well about the more focused process of influencing public policy.

Lage: Was Carl's background at all like Doug Scott's? Was he involved in legislative lobbying?

McCloskey: No, not so much. His focus arises, I think, very heavily out of his experiences when he originated and directed the club's political action program, running our PAC [political action committee]. A lot of his ideas about shaping public opinion arise out of experiences in campaigns for elections where you use focus groups, and look at polling, and try to get control of the terms of the debate in terms of a few key bits of phraseology. I think that has a very important place in our tool kit. Carl is giving more emphasis to those things he's learned the hard way in his realm of experience.

He never, for any very long period of time, was in charge of seeing a legislative program through its entirety. He did work on clean air issues for quite a while in his early years on contract with the club. He was, for the most part, not an on-site lobbyist in Washington, nor did he oversee the on-site lobbying in Washington.

- Lage: That might have shaped his view. The other thing that may be implied in what you said about attending to lobbying that struck me in interviewing people like Doug Scott was how the club actually helped write legislation, really nitty gritty work in Congress.
- McCloskey: Oh, that's right.
- Lage: And, that takes tremendous expertise.
- McCloskey: I've been the author of first drafts of a number of pieces of legislation myself.
- Lage: So, if you don't write it, you at least have to--
- McCloskey: Well, that's just one part of it. That's thinking through the mechanics of what you want. It's the first step in the classic theory of lobbying, of knowing exactly what you want because you can't ask somebody to grant your wishes if you're fuzzy and unclear about them. You can't lobby successfully unless you know what you want.
- Lage: And that takes some good support from staff people in Washington.
- McCloskey: That does too, and then there's a whole set of things involved in running a campaign. There's a mythology that has developed more recently than in our classic theory and practice of campaigning, we were entirely "inside the Beltway types." Some charge we didn't reach out to where people lived, that we didn't think in terms of creating public demand.
- During my realm of experience, that was always a vital part of it. I think back to the Redwood National Park campaign when I was our chief lobbyist and worked with Dave Brower. We did everything you can think of. We published books on the subject, a number of them. We published a series of full-paged newspaper advertisements. We launched our campaign. I remember when I drafted our first redwood park bill; I remember we had the congressman introduce it. We had a video prepared with film clips that went out to television stations with pictures of the magnificent trees.
- Lage: It was very organic, holistic.
- McCloskey: That's right, we promoted newspaper articles all over the country. We knew we had to build public demand. It was a critical, even central, part of our whole effort. All through our classic glory days of the environmental movement when we

got so much accomplished in Congress, it always involved reaching out to members and constituencies in key congressional districts. That was just de rigueur. Now, the mythology is that we're "inside the Beltway" types who never get out where people live and never thought about public opinion. [laughter]

Lage: Carl says he does want to do traditional lobbying as well. Is that reflected in the budget of the club?

McCloskey: Well, he explained that the constraints on lobbying in Washington today, where we still have a very substantial staff, arise out of the shrinkage in 501(c)(4) funds available to the club, the so-called lobbying funds. Carl has been very successful in increasing deductible donations to the club, particularly from some major donors. So, the (c)(3) funds, the deductible ones, which cannot be used for lobbying for the most part, have been growing relative to the (c)(4) funds.

So, in a way, Carl had lemons and made lemonade. He's had a tough problem with shrinkage of funds available to support lobbying, so he's emphasized the things he could do with (c)(3) funds, such as work on shaping broad public opinion. I suspect, to some extent, what Carl wanted to do was to shock the club into behaving differently. Instinctively, we've developed a culture around lobbying in the classic fashion. He thought we had to put more emphasis on creating demand. So, he may have been hitting us over the head with a two-by-four, à la the Missouri mule story.

What he wants, and what he's saying, still has not entirely gelled. I think there's a certain amount of contention and confusion in the club right now about how to marry the old style and the so-called new style. I think there's a place for both, and they can be integrated. I've been talking and urging us to do more to effect a reconciliation of these claims than we have; i.e. an old style and a new style, with the assertion that we don't do the old style anymore. [tape interruption]

Relations Between the Club and Its Sibling Organizations

Lage: Okay. We're back on. We want to talk a little about the relationship with the Sierra Club's sister, or brother, organizations. I don't know how you might look at that, that's one of the gender issues. [laughter] The foundation and the legal defense fund.

You've talked in your previous oral history about the first sort of crisis between the foundation and the club. The orientation was changed with more control in the club's offices. Let's just continue and try to bring that up to date, as much as you've been involved in it at least.

McCloskey: Back in the late sixties, the club got drawn into a view at the time that it was best to spin off separate organizations to tackle various jobs, to decentralize and avoid getting too large and too bureaucratic. That seemed to make sense to me at the time. So I was an enthusiastic backer of spinning off the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund. The idea started with the Sierra Club. I, in fact, drafted the first memo along that line suggesting it about 1967. Tom Turner spells that out in his book on the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund.

Different Perspectives in the Club and the Foundation

McCloskey: The Sierra Club Foundation had obviously been spun off somewhat earlier, although it was only activated in the late sixties. What we didn't understand then is that as such spin-offs mature over time (just as a child grows up in a family), they want to go their own separate way. A process of divergent evolution seems to take place inevitably, even under the best of circumstances and with the best of good will. That has manifested itself in terms of our relations both with the Sierra Club Foundation and the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund.

As you said, I discussed in my first volume the problems that arose in the late seventies. One thing was corrected to a degree at that time, and that was that after that showdown between the club and the foundation, more of the trustees of the foundation were chosen from recent officers of the club, though there still were a fair number of trustees who were major donors. Though, by the time of problems in the mid-1990s between the club and the foundation, I would say the trustees no longer had any desire to become an operating foundation. I think they were very much devoted to the club's purposes.

Lage: When you say an operating foundation, you--?

McCloskey: Back in the seventies, ideas had developed in the foundation of tackling programs themselves, rather than just passing on funds to the club to do a program. There had been a problem with the foundation trustees wanting to make grants to outside entities, having little or nothing to do with the Sierra Club. There was

not the sense that they were holding this money in trust for the Sierra Club. There was the sense that it was their money to dispose of as they wished. Those problems are now largely gone, but different problems emerged, apparently.

I was not that close to them, but it appeared that as the club was raising large amounts of (c)(3) money that it routed through the foundation, its needs were to be very flexible in applying them to different purposes. The foundation was not sufficiently sensitive to those needs, nor on the timing of transferring monies, nor has the foundation ever been all that sensitive to times of financial crunch for the club.

When the club was reducing overhead and expenses, the foundation usually felt little need to do so and viewed itself as legally separate. It sort of marched to its own drummer in terms of moods, and times, and needs. This led to some friction. On the other hand, the club was not doing all it should. It was insufficiently sensitive to the need for good documentation of how it was spending the grant monies it got. I knew from some of my work in the nonprofit world and the regulatory world of Washington, D.C., how important that was.

The club had a bit of a cavalier attitude that its heart was pure and the monies were all being put to good purposes, and this was just a bureaucratic hassle to get all the documentation together. The foundation was insisting on it legally, as it needed to. So this led to friction.

Carl forced some of those issues. I admire Carl in some ways for never fearing to tread into the middle of every conceivable firestorm to try to set things right. This was one that probably could have been tolerated for a longer time, but he took it on. It's too early to tell what the outcome is going to be, in the sense of whether long-term operating relationships will change a great deal. But I hope the foundation will be less bureaucratic and more responsive, and that the club will do better in its record keeping.

Lage: Was Carl concerned with diminishing the overhead in the foundation?

McCloskey: He was. He thought they were spending too much on overhead-- that they were overdoing the bureaucratic processes.

Lage: Oh, I see. And they thought the club wasn't doing enough with the bureaucratic process.

McCloskey: Yes, that is the general contrast of outlooks--that the foundation is overdoing the bureaucracy and the club wasn't doing enough.

Lage: Were there any ideological issues here? I'm thinking of this New Mexico legal problem.

McCloskey: Well, that was hovering in the background. The club's board of directors was disappointed that the issue arose and gave the club's reputation a black eye, in New Mexico particularly. I think it felt that while the foundation may have been legally right, that it should have been more on the ball in seeing that those funds were spent for something that kept good faith with the original intent of the donor, even though the donor had signed off on their use for other purposes.¹

It was a complicated issue, but the club has always felt that greater effort should have been made to settle it and was resentful that it arose in the first place. The foundation felt that it had been greatly wronged and slandered and was caught in a crossfire between contending forces that had their own ulterior motives that they were pursuing. This conflict did color the differences in perspectives, but I don't think that could be characterized as an ideological issue. Again, it just arose from the differences of perspective implicit in where you're sitting and what you're doing.

Lage: Okay, well, that's interesting. I'm trying to think if there's more detail there I need to get from you. We're interviewing Gary Torre. I'm not myself, but a person in my office is. I want to be sure we get the right questions for him.

McCloskey: Gary, I think, is viewed as somebody who was brought back periodically to sit on the board of the foundation to defend

¹In 1991 Ray Graham, a donor who had contributed to a restricted fund of the Sierra Club Foundation which was established to fund activities that simultaneously promoted conservation and alleviated poverty in northern New Mexico, sued the foundation claiming that it had failed to utilize his gift for its intended purposes. When Graham lost his case in the California court, a northern New Mexico grassroots economic development organization, Ganados del Valle, conferred with New Mexico Attorney General Tom Udall who filed suit against the foundation in New Mexico. In 1995 the foundation and Ganados settled out of court. The foundation then brought suit against Graham for malicious prosecution. The foundation won this lawsuit, and Graham appealed. In 1999 the higher court upheld the lower court's ruling that Graham had been malicious in his prosecution of the Sierra Club Foundation. See Gary Torre oral history in The Bancroft Library.

their independence. He had been recruited onto the foundation in the early seventies, and periodically he would leave and come back, but he was almost like the lawyer for the defense. I think Steve regarded him particularly in that light. I saw him as a talented person who brought good will to the issue and was acutely conscious of their obligations legally.

I must say that in the legal context, this structure we've set up with a dominant (c)(4) with a satellite (c)(3) in a tandem relationship is fraught with high peril. The usual arrangement, legally, is to have a dominant (c)(3), with a satellite (c)(4).

(C)(3) is deductible, and (c)(4) is nondeductible. They're both tax exempt, but the (c)(3) is deductible. The (c)(4) is not because it's doing lobbying.

Lage: So we have a dominant (c)(4)?

McCloskey: Yes. We have a dominant (c)(4) with a satellite (c)(3). The usual arrangement is the opposite, that the (c)(3) is dominant and the (c)(4) is the satellite.

You find very few environmental organizations in the country or in Washington, D.C., that have the structural relationship we have. It implies a tension-filled relationship and a great deal of good will and record keeping to make it work. With this architecture, the IRS always worries that (c)(3) money is being bled away to be used improperly; the dominant (c)(4) is powerful enough to cause this to happen. If we had to do it all over again, we probably would have been better off to do it the regular way.

Lage: Now, how would that work? The Sierra Club would be deductible and would fund some--?

McCloskey: You'd have a satellite (c)(4) that would do lobbying, and it would in turn have a PAC associated with it. There are a lot of problems about how to make that work, given all of the history involved. I guess the point I'm trying to make here is that the legal structure we have chosen itself contributes a lot to tensions. Regardless of the personalities involved and the good will people bring to the job, it is inherently a difficult and uncomfortable structure. I see both sides of the problems that have risen here.

Lage: What is the Conable option? I keep seeing the Conable option mentioned as something the club should explore.

McCloskey: We have that for the Sierra Club Foundation. It arises out of a change in the law made in 1976 that allows tax deductible entities to do a limited amount of lobbying. To grossly oversimplify, to spend about 20 percent of their--

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McCloskey: --income on direct lobbying, and 5 percent on grassroots lobbying. It's actually more complicated; there's a one million dollar ceiling on it. That's for (c)(3), and the club is a (c)(4). So, we can't have it. Our foundation did take it, but it has a much smaller base to which it's applying those percentages. For administrative simplicity, it has spent most of that money on our population campaign; that's where all that space is taken up. So, once that's done, it's practically unavailable and unimportant to the club otherwise.

The Club and the Legal Defense Fund Go Separate Ways

Lage: What about the Legal Defense Fund? Did you get embroiled in any of that conflict?

McCloskey: Variations of it certainly arose during my time as executive director, and I have watched it since. I have watched the Sierra Club's board struggle. One of the interesting historical angles on that was that during its early years, it was agreed that their use of the name Sierra Club would be used under a license from the club. A licensing agreement was actually drafted that Phil Berry, about 1974, was supposed to get them to sign, but he never managed to do that. Some twenty years later, the issue came to a head. After great unhappiness and friction, it finally was signed, but under an arrangement whereby they could decide to drop the use of the Sierra Club's name, which finally, by around 1997, they decided to do. They changed their name to the Earthjustice Legal Defense Fund and decided to gradually drop the use of the name Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund.

All sorts of issues arose over the years. The Legal Defense Fund came to develop its own membership. None of us ever anticipated that. We thought it would just raise money and be a law office, but it became a membership organization very similar to the Wilderness Society. It didn't have a participating membership, but most of the other environmental organizations don't have a participating membership the way the club does. So they got fifty to sixty thousand members.

Those members often were solicited (at least for many years) through the use of the club's mailing list. So many club members also joined the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund--they became confused when they were renewing their membership about whether it was with the club or the Legal Defense Fund. They became confused in responding to appeals for donations, about which organization they gave to. They'd often write us back and say, "I already sent in my dues," or "I already sent in my donation. Why are you bothering me again?" We'd go back and try to sort it out, and it was to the other organization.

That problem, incidently, is happening right now in Canada where somebody used the name Sierra Legal Defense Fund; they dropped the word "club" out. The Sierra Club of Canada is experiencing exactly the same problems all over again.

Well, there were also problems over money. The Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund kept looking at the volume of its litigation, and how many of its cases involved the Sierra Club as a plaintiff, and kept thinking that the Sierra Club wasn't paying enough for the value of what it was getting in legal services. We often had obligations to raise between five and six hundred thousand dollars for them; they wanted it to be a million. Mind you, under the law, we could not give them that money. We had to ask our donors to donate that money directly to them. They'd say, "What we do for you is worth between one and two million dollars if you were paying legal fees, and you're paying only half or a quarter of what you should pay."

The club's rejoinder was that we made a major contribution to its finances through permitting the use of our name, which has tremendous good will and donor appeal associated with it. They were able to recruit these sixty thousand members and donations from the world at large because people think they're giving to the Sierra Club. So, we've already given you a very valuable asset. They didn't see it that way, and the club's budgets were always hard-pressed.

Another underlying issue dealt with the fact that they didn't represent us in most of the cases on our docket. We often had one to two hundred cases pending at any one time. The majority of them arose out of activities of our chapters and groups who would hire local lawyers and usually raised most of the needed money. There was always some fee that was waived or donated. For a long time, the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund acted as the administrator for that program. They had one staff person who would handle approval of the application to file the suit and check that it didn't involve any problems of precedent and looked at quality control and so forth. The

illusion was created that, in that function, they were somehow doing a lot of legal work. What actually happened, in usually about thirty to fifty cases, the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund lawyers would be handling the cases, but a hundred or more would be handled by the Sierra Club's local counsels.

So, when it came to the question of what kind of legal service are we getting, we said, "Hey, look, most of our docket are not your cases. We can run those cases without you." Eventually, we did. We hired our own administrator who took over that docket, which has nothing to do with the Legal Defense Fund. So toward the end of our relationship, we were running our own separate legal program.

They, in turn, decided somewhere along the line that they wanted to be the organization providing legal service to the entire environmental movement, not just to the Sierra Club. So, they began to take on many cases where the club was not even a client at all, although sometimes when there were many clients, we were one of them. They became less and less interested in collaborating with us to develop an overall litigation strategy on issues like forests, or wilderness, or pollution. They just called us out of the blue and said, "We're thinking of filing a case on this. Would you be interested in being a party?"

Lage: So they would make their own decisions.

McCloskey: Yes, it became more and more independent and separate. By the mid-seventies, we began to lose the collaborative element and the strategic planning element, and that declined into the eighties. The early years with Jim [James W.] Moorman and John Hoffman were years where we had a close relationship. They regarded themselves primarily as our lawyers. Once Rick Sutherland became the executive director, the relationship changed.

Rick had no background in the club. He did not even feel very comfortable with the club. He wanted to build his own national public interest environmental law firm, and he saw this as the chance to do that. He did a very good job in terms of building up that as an institution. He didn't place much value on its relationship with the club. As a matter of fact, at times, he showed a real degree of disdain for the club. So, that made the relationship additionally difficult, and it explained the evolution that I've just recounted.

Lage: Is this why you put the role of personalities in the list you made for this interview? I mean was that in his personality?

McCloskey: Yes, in contrast to the foundation. It was not so much a problem in the foundation's case of personalities, but in the case of the Legal Defense Fund, it was heavily so. Though Buck Parker, who was the number-two person at SCLDF, did come out of the Sierra Club from Portland, Oregon, and was always close to club. He was very much a buffer who tried to arrest the drift. There were senior lawyers there who really felt close to the club. They had local club activists as clients through the years, and they didn't agree with the decision to go their own way. But Rick was a strong personality, and he got his way.

Vic Sher came on later, and he tended to be somewhat in the same vein. Though there was an interim figure there, and Buck took over during some hiatuses.

Lage: This was after Rick's death?

McCloskey: Yes. Another complicating factor was that in the late eighties, the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund started to do lobbying on issues in Washington, D.C. Congressional offices would find that they had people coming in from both the Sierra Club and the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, say, on a forest issue saying different things, and they'd say, "Who speaks for the Sierra Club here?" Or they would say, "Yes, we've already talked to your guys. We don't need to talk to you again." We'd say, "But, that's the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund. That's not the Sierra Club."

I remember when this was begun and they first opened their Washington office, we had very elaborate discussions, and even signed an agreement when Jim Cohen was hired there to limit the lobbying they did and to provide that it would be coordinated with the club and not be contrary to our policy line. But that understanding got lost through the years too. I think, probably, in the end, that was one of the critical factors that led to the parting of the ways. For a while, they gave that up under our protest once we had a licensing arrangement with them. But, they didn't want to.

Lage: The licensing arrangement spelled out some of these relationships.

McCloskey: Yes, it did, but it also gave them the option of ending the use of the club's name and the constraints, which they finally did.

Lage: Did you think that was a good solution?

McCloskey: Yes. I regret it. I think they may regret it once they no longer have the power of the Sierra Club's name to help them.

Probably, in the end, it was the best solution because their ambitions were not compatible with the club's needs.

Lage: How did the complication of having Phil Berry sort of with a foot in both organizations contribute?

McCloskey: He was in the role of being one of the founding figures back in 1970-'71 in pulling it together. It grew out of the Sierra Club's legal committee in the late sixties when Phil was its chair--he's always been the chair--and Fred Fisher and Don Harris at the Lillick firm were friends of Phil's who he recruited onto the Sierra Club's legal committee. As litigation began to develop on a number of fronts, particularly in Alaska (on Admiralty Island), they began to carry these cases. They began to do more and more work pro bono, or at reduced fees. It was the three of them who came to the conclusion that "this is getting to be too much. We need to set up an institution to do this. We can't keep doing it, sort of on the fly from our law firm here and through donated time."

I had suggested the idea somewhat earlier, but it hadn't seemed right then to act on it. So Phil took the lead in getting the new Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund organized and was on the board from the start. He was there for many years, though increasingly as a dissenting member.

Lage: He seemed to think he could resolve it, but I guess wasn't able to.

McCloskey: Yes, that was the case. Phil was a long time in giving up his hopes for what he thought it was going to be at the start and reconciling himself to what it had become.

IV THE SIERRA CLUB, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Relationships with Republican and Democratic Administrations

Lage: We're back on after a little break, and we're going to talk about Washington. We've discussed a fair amount about relations with the Reagan administration, which you said were a little bit closer than some of the later ones. Should we talk about Bush and then get into the Clinton administration?

McCloskey: Yes, the odd thing about it, at least in contrasting the Bush administration and the Clinton administration in terms of my role, was that I was much more involved, in some ways, with the Bush administration than the Clinton administration.

Remember that Bush, when he came in and ran, said he wanted to be not only the educational president but the environmental president. He criticized [Michael] Dukakis for failing to clean up Boston Harbor. He also brought in [John] Sununu to be his chief of staff and [Richard] Darman to head OMB [Office of Management and Budget], who were extremely hostile to the environmental movement and cause.

The Bush administration had people who were more favorable. Mike Deland, the head of CEQ [Council on Environmental Quality], was a genuine environmentalist. Then, Bill [William K.] Reilly heading EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] came out of the environmental movement and had good credentials and tried hard. So, as an administration, it was very definitely divided. Even [Manuel] Lujan [Jr.], when he was secretary of the Interior, consistently tried to reach out to the environmental movement and to solicit input.

I remember I was cultivated to come and have lunch with a number of figures in the Interior Department. Deland would take me to lunch over in the White House mess. I was struck

when the Clinton people came in that all of that stopped. Partly because the Clinton administration had enough environmental people in it that it thought that it had internalized the process of understanding the environmental movement. Many of those in the Bush administration didn't think they understood it. But for electoral and political purposes, they wanted to look like they were trying.

The great irony is that the Bush administration, on the whole, was much more accessible, though not very sympathetic (though it had people here and there who were); and the Clinton administration was more sympathetic but not as accessible; people like [Bruce] Babbitt or Brooks Yeager felt that they knew us cold. They didn't need to hear us out; they felt they could recite chapter and verse of what we wanted and why we wanted it, without hearing from us.

Lage: Would they express that, or is this just the way you've come to explain it?

McCloskey: That's the way I felt about dealing with them.

Lage: Would you try to get appointments and not be able to?

McCloskey: Well, you could generally get appointments, but they reached out less. For instance, in CEQ, I had close relationships, during the Bush administration, with Deland and many of the staff people and great access to them. Even under the Reagan administration, we had some good friends in CEQ. It was sort of an environmental outpost. But under the Clinton administration, they first tried to destroy CEQ. Then, when it was finally reluctantly reinstated or re-staffed, it was with a very different outlook.

In earlier administrations, up to that time, CEQ had not only played a key policy role for every administration on the environment, it had an overview role with regard to all federal agencies that dealt with the environment. It had been a key place for reaching out to the environmental movement to both explain the administration and to get input and to explain to the administration the environmental movement's point of view. Under the Clinton administration, that outreach function has disappeared, at least as far as I can see.

It's not only a policy shop on the environment for the administration, but it does a sales job for the administration, constantly selling and justifying the administration's stances to the environmental movement. You don't have any sense that

there's a two-way street; I sense that they're not all that interested in hearing from us.

Lage: Do you hear that complaint from other environmental organizations?

McCloskey: That's a good question. I think I've heard it elsewhere, but I'm not sure everybody has the same take on that. I know that Carl has had a lot more of a relationship with Katie McGinty than I have. To some extent, the relationship has shifted.

Lage: Who is Katie McGinty?

McCloskey: She's the head of the council. She was a former aide to [Al] Gore. It also acts very much as sort of a defender (under Katie) of Gore's interests.

Lage: More political would you say?

McCloskey: Yes, very political. I contrast her to Michael Deland in their way of making presentations publicly too. Deland would come and talk about what's good for the environment. Then, he'd subtly weave in that they are doing things in that administration that were good for the environment, or so he would say. Katie will not talk about what's good for the environment. She'll talk about how the Clinton-Gore administration is doing such great things. It is an overtly political talk. It's so overdone--in terms of not being the kind of thing that an environmental audience will think appropriate. It just strikes you that there isn't any sense of understanding of the tone that's right for the audience.

Lage: That's not what you're there for. It's more of a public--.

McCloskey: I have had increasingly close relationships with different people in EPA over the last four or five years. This arises out of some things I've taken on with the President's Council on Sustainable Development. I've done more and more policy work on pollution matters. I've done less with the Interior Department. So, to some extent, my own role has shifted from Interior-related things to pollution things in the switch between the two administrations. I feel that Carol Browner, after Clinton's reelection, has become increasingly an independent force. In her first term, she was more toeing the party line, which was cast in terms of reconciliation with the business community. There's still a heavy legacy of that in EPA's programs as they have been shaped by the Clinton-Gore administration.

In the process last year of adopting these new clean air regulations, it was interesting that we had the two prominent women of the administration in conflict. Katie McGinty was criticizing Carol Browner, the administrator of EPA, as being out of control.

Lage: In what direction?

McCloskey: Browner wanted to adopt these tougher new clean air regulations, which is what the club wanted. Here we had the head of CEQ criticizing the head of EPA as being out of step with the administration, particularly with McGinty being close to Gore and Gore having to run for the presidency in the future. Why Gore's person wanted to send a message that he wants to do less for the environment (as something helpful to Gore) was very hard to understand.

Unless, it was in this context: Gore does seem to want to try to reassure the business community that he's not overly zealous on the environment. Because of his past reputation and writings, he feels that he may have the environmental movement all sewed up and what he now needs to do is to tone down his environmentalism and look more user friendly to the business community and to Wall Street. This may explain it.

At any rate, it has caused tensions with the environmental movement. As a result, we've become closer to EPA and less close to CEQ.

Lage: You mentioned, and I interrupted you, that Carl, I think you were going to say, was closer to Katie McGinty.

McCloskey: I think that he frequently communicates with her. I don't know how much is initiated by him or by her, but that is the channel of communication into the administration on what we want done on different issues. I suspect that we initiate a lot of that.

Lage: Do you want to talk just a little bit about Gore as a pre-candidate, candidate, and then as vice president?

McCloskey: Well, Gore presents a more complex picture on his environmental stands since he's been vice president. His passionate advocacy of the trade proposals of the administration, NAFTA [North American Free Trade] and GATT [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade], and on the tuna-dolphin issue, were all at odds with where the Sierra Club stood. Also on whaling, he's been favorable to Norway, and unsympathetic with an effort to prevent the resumption of commercial whaling. This may arise out of a personal friendship with Madame [Gro Harlem]

Brundtland, who has been the prime minister there. They've gotten to know each other in Globe circles (the Global Environmental Legislatures' Forum). But nonetheless, he took a stand that was at odds with the save-the-whale community. And on the trade issues, he presented the critical defense of NAFTA in the debates with Perot. We'll talk about NAFTA a little later and why the environmentalists, at least those in the Sierra Club, were so upset over it. He's preached it as a gospel, rather than treating it as a difficult issue.

Then his whole reinvention of government initiative dealt with EPA and traditional pollution control. I've come to believe that a lot of these reinvention ideas are overdone, and to some extent, misplaced in their focus. A lot of it is directed at trying to assuage business discontent with regulation by softening the regulations and their application in various ways. Almost none of it addresses the concerns of the environmental community. It all addresses the concerns of the business community. We think a lot of the regulations are not effective enough, that we've not achieved enough, that there is too much pollution still. It addresses none of that.

Sustainable Development and Collaborative Management

McCloskey: It also is very much cast in the context of collaboration, which is a theory of the Clinton-Gore administration along those lines--that you can't take action on pressing environmental problems until the offending industries all agree. So that gave us "car talks" (a dialogue between environmentalists and the auto industry on how to improve fuel efficiency)--that the key to progress lies in getting industry and the environmental community together to negotiate. If we can jointly come up with something to address climate change problems and CO₂ problems, then they will act on it. If they're deadlocked, then they can't do anything about it.

Lage: If the two communities can come up with a solution?

McCloskey: Yes, that was their solution for the first four years of their administration. Of course, it got nowhere. It is also the idea behind the President's Council on Sustainable Development. Michele Perrault was appointed to that, and I've been her aide on that through nearly six years now. I've played an increasingly prominent role in the debates in it. There, the idea was the United States couldn't do anything about sustainable development that came out of the Rio Conference

unless the major industries, who all were represented on this council, and the major environmental groups could come to terms.

So, we had been engaged in painstaking and painful negotiations over these years to agree on a tiny body of things, not many of which have gone anywhere. It's a forum for exploring relationships and ideas. I'm now the co-chairman of its Environmental Management Task Force.

Lage: Within the council.

McCloskey: Within the council, along with EPA administrator Browner and the vice president for General Motors.

Lage: Does the government play the lead role in this council?

McCloskey: It's sort of three-cornered in design, and they're one party, industry is another, and environmental groups are the other. The whole theory behind it is that you can't take any action until the offending parties concur. I think it's a disgraceful theory, and it's moving into all sorts of other fora, in terms of on-the-ground management in national forests, and others. That's collaborative management.

Lage: It sounds like a recipe for no action.

McCloskey: It is. Gore is enthusiastic about it. So there is a very different Gore emerging during these times than the one we knew in Congress, and who wrote The Earth in Balance. It's largely explainable in terms of his presidential ambitions, I suppose. It is eroding the enthusiasm of the environmental movement for his candidacy.

Lage: When you're participating in events of this Council on Sustainable Development, do you express your underlying dis-ease with the whole concept?

McCloskey: I have not--

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McCloskey: There you either play the game or leave. Nobody there is responsible for the game that they've been asked to play. The problem is that you either accept the mission of trying to influence the president or you reject it. It may be a difficult context, but you have an opportunity. If you're a pragmatic organization, you usually choose to play it.

I must admit, in a larger context, I'm also not that comfortable with the idea of sustainable development. It's a term which has no accepted definition. It has some evocative power to conjure up either transformational notions of completely changing the way the economy works and society works, which some more utopian environmentalists get greatly enthused over.

On the other hand, industry regards it as more palatable than the ordinary environmental prescriptions because it basically accepts development, and accepts continuing never-ending development. Albeit, it's supposed to be modified by the word sustainable. Then you try to track down what that does mean. That's where nobody can ever come to an agreement. There are hundreds of prescriptions and proffered definitions of it, but there's no agreement on it other than the one the Brundtland Commission came up with, which is a very limited environmental gloss and is very anthropocentric.

Lage: Anthropocentric, I see, rather than land-based.

McCloskey: It's all people-oriented. It's what you need to keep producing goods for people continuously into the future, but it says nothing about what happens to the biota, or to biodiversity.

Lage: It sounds like some of the concepts the Forest Service embraces.

McCloskey: It is. It's sort of sustained yield writ large.

Lage: Is the Council on Sustainable Development U.S.?

McCloskey: Yes.

Lage: Does it look at the United States or International?

McCloskey: It has an international dimension, but it is of the United States and focuses largely on it.

Lage: Does it look at issues relating to pockets of poverty, and things like Native Americans and Hispanics in the Southwest?

McCloskey: Not really. The theory of sustainable development, as it's been articulated in the council, is that it has three legs, as on a stool. One is environment, one is economy, and the third is supposed to be equity, meaning social equity. It is supposed to be equally concerned with poverty and problems such as you've mentioned. It has had very few representatives from that community on the council.

Ben Chavis from the NAACP was an initial appointee, but he left and was inactive, and was later let go at NAACP. Tom Donahue was there from the AFL-CIO. He participated actively in the first round. There was nobody participating representing labor in the later rounds.

Lage: So the social equity leg is short?

McCloskey: The social component is really just virtually nonexistent. We give lip service to it. At times, some in the environmental community have insisted that we do acknowledge it in theory, but we don't have the background to fill in the detail. The work really seems to involve efforts to find ways to reconcile environmental and economic agendas.

From the industry point of view, the pursuit of the economic agenda is supposed to be good for curing poverty. So, that's one of their justifications for more and more growth and productivity.

Lage: Well, that's all very interesting commentary on the Clinton administration, and sort of the temper of the times.

The Clinton Administration's Wavering Environmental Agenda

McCloskey: The Clinton administration itself has gone through all sorts of phases through the years. It might be worth a moment to say a little bit about that.

Lage: I think so, very much.

McCloskey: In their first few months in their first term, we felt a lot of optimism that this was going to be a great new day for the environment. A lot of our euphoria was merely born of our happiness that the Reagan-Bush years were behind us.

Lage: And also you had high expectations of Gore.

McCloskey: Yes, and hopefulness about what he would turn out to be. But by the end of the first three months, it began to be clear that our high hopes were misplaced largely, that this was an administration that thought of themselves as "new Democrats", meaning that they wanted to be a second business party. They didn't want to do things that caused distress in the business community. They thought a lot of new initiatives in the environmental field would.

A lot of their activities in the natural resources field, in their first few years, were devoted toward trying to settle outstanding issues; that is, the controversies that had been around a long time. Ironically, probably their biggest achievement, for which they'll be noted in history, they thought of in terms of merely settling a controversy. This was with regard to the ancient forests of the Northwest national forests, where about 87 percent of the ancient forests were put off limits to logging.

This was, in my view, a monumental achievement, one almost unthinkable in terms of anything any other administration had ever been able to tackle. Of course, at this time, we're talking about an ancient forest resource that had been vastly shrunk through logging over time. They thought of it in terms of settling the tangle of lawsuits over the spotted owl. Indeed, they did settle those, but it turned out to be a remarkable achievement. It remains to be seen whether it will hold over time.

Otherwise, a lot of the things they did were efforts--as in some of their wetlands policy, and the Everglades, and on pesticides--to find ways to adopt a mild environmental approach, or a "half of a loaf" for us and "half of a loaf" for the business community. It left a fairly sour taste in the mouths of the environmental community by the end of their first two years. Indeed, there was some evidence that in the 1994 congressional election, there was a much lower turnout of environmentally minded people than before. That may have contributed to the change in party control of the Congress in that election.

The assumption of control by the Republicans in the 104th Congress, however, led to such radical proposals for rolling back environmental controls that it caused the Clinton administration to oppose that. For the next two years, the Clinton administration seemed to be taking a stronger, harder line. Instead of cutting bad deals for the environment, people like Babbitt were launching scathing attacks on the Republican Congress, Carol Browner was too, and Clinton. Suddenly, they seemed to have "fire in their bellies" and be preaching the true gospel that we like to hear in terms of attacking our enemies in Congress.

So the second two years of the first Clinton administration had a very different tone and feeling than the first two years. Now, in their second term, though, things are less clear. Of course, at this sitting, we're a year and a half or so into it. Carol Browner at EPA is feeling more

liberated. I think the administration isn't attempting to exert as much control over cabinet secretaries as it did before. It is preoccupied by its own problems.

So some of the people in the administration are drifting off into a more pro-environmental direction. I think Gore's reinvention program has sort of run out of steam. Things like Project XL seemed to be stumbling badly.

Lage: Project XL? X-L, or Excel?

McCloskey: The letter X, and the letter L, capitalized. It's a program arising out of EPA's responsibilities so as to allow conventional pollution control requirements to be waived if a company will promise to come up with a more creative approach, which will be even cleaner than what they would have been required to do. It's supposed to encourage innovation, but it's not working out very well.

Lage: You sound very skeptical about the idea.

McCloskey: It's also supposed to identify its approach through collaboration with the community (another example of collaboration). There's been very little effective collaboration so far. The stake-holder processes have not been robust. There's very little innovation in the solutions being proposed, which largely represent a way for companies to find a cheaper way to comply. It is really a way to get out of doing a good job, which I think is going to be pretty much the epitaph for a lot of Gore's reinvention ideas in the whole area of pollution control. There's a great casting around now to find some new direction about where the future lies.

Also, with the departure of Mickey Kantor, the trade office now is not making much of an effort toward any reconciliation with the environmental community.

Lage: Was he more favorably inclined?

McCloskey: If not more favorably inclined, he was much more politically astute in recognizing that the administration had a problem when some of its major constituencies were (in fact, now the majority of the Democrats in the House of Representatives) disaffected from its policies. He was trying to find some way to achieve a rapprochement, but the current trade office people are technocrats with no political horse sense.

And Bruce Babbitt, in Interior, seems to be tired and disappointed that he didn't go to the Supreme Court and is

beset by his own problems. There seems to be a drift which has set in over there.

Lage: He was kind of an extolled figure, wasn't he?

McCloskey: He was a "poster boy" of the environmental movement too at one time. The picture that's probably emerging over all, as well as in the environmental field, is a lack of much leadership, or accomplishment in the second term. It's very true in the area of climate change, where they have labored mightily to produce a program that genuflects in the direction of the environment, while doing very little to displease the business community, and probably will achieve very little.

Lage: From what you say, it doesn't sound as if the controlling factor here is Clinton's problems on the sex scene. It sounds much more deeply rooted than that.

McCloskey: I think it is because the discipline that explained what they were doing in the first term was the imperative to be reelected. With that gone, that discipline is gone too. Gore still has that incentive, but he's not the president. His interests are not as manifest as were Clinton's.

Lage: It's kind of a discouraging scene.

McCloskey: However, I wrote a memo in 1993, soon after their election, comparing them to various administrations over the years and their handling of the environment. I predicted that they would be much like the Kennedy-Johnson administration, in that it was one that was somewhat favorably disposed, but politically insecure; a cautious balancing approach was the dominant impetus then. I think that's more and more true as I look over the Clinton-Gore administration; they're in the same mode.

Lage: Now, tell me more about the memo.

McCloskey: I did a report to the board suggesting this.

Lage: You're very good on these predictions.

McCloskey: I reviewed our relations with different administrations to look for different patterns. I was just struck in rereading it the other day that--oh, the one thing that I forgot to mention that I had in it was that I suggested that as the election of 1996 approached that we'd probably see them suddenly get interested in us again. And indeed, they did. What I had not foreseen was that it wasn't built around promises in the next term. Their credibility was so low that it manifested itself in terms

of what they were ready to do now, and did do, just before the election: the setting aside of Escalante National Monument, and committing to save the Headwaters redwood groves here in California, and to buy out the New World Mine north of Yellowstone.

Lage: That's right.

McCloskey: Which was related to the club's holding out in being willing to endorse him. The club was badly split in the summer of 1996 because of disappointment with his record to date, though fearful of what a Dole administration would bring. Some of us said, "Well, let's not rush into this. Let's think about this very carefully." As we delayed from July into August into September, their overtures began to get more and more intense about what we would like to see done. To our great surprise, they decided to do it now. They actually did it. So we got our quid pro quo up front rather than in terms of promises that we wouldn't see kept.

Lage: That probably wouldn't have been cashed in.

McCloskey: It was absolutely amazing. I think it was unprecedented--I know it was, in terms of how the Sierra Club was treated.

Lage: You probably didn't predict the '94 elections in that memo.

McCloskey: No.

Lage: Didn't that come as something of a surprise?

McCloskey: It did. As I say, I think some surveys suggested that the environmental vote dropped by almost half in some areas, in the 1994 turnout. I think there was deep disillusionment that played a role. Probably, we weren't alone. There were other similar progressive constituencies that were disillusioned, like women's groups and others that had had it and stayed home. I don't know that that entirely explains the '94 election. There are probably a lot of other factors too. Well, that probably ushers in the question here about the Sierra Club's political work.

Consideration for Appointment as Chief of NPS, and Reflections
on Leadership Positions in the Clinton Administration

Lage: Yes, it does, but let's just mention the fact that you were considered for the NPS under Clinton. Say something about that.

McCloskey: Oh, yes. After the 1992 presidential election, the environmental community in Washington, D.C., went into furious caucusing about making recommendations for appointments to the Clinton administration. We remembered that back in the Carter administration there had been almost three dozen people from the environmental community appointed. There were those who anticipated that it might be like that again. I think when it finally concluded there were only about half as many appointed as under the Carter administration. That probably is a reflection of the differences in the two administrations; one was heavily pro-environmental and the other mildly pro-environmental; it was Clinton compared to Carter.

Lage: Carter being the mildly--?

McCloskey: No, much more enthusiastic. He was a tremendously enthusiastic and committed environmentalist. Not everybody in his administration was equally so, but he certainly was.

Lage: But did you think he was before the election?

McCloskey: No, we didn't understand that. Nonetheless, that was part of the process of revelation--our conversion to being enthusiastic about him [Carter] arose out of seeing all these people drawn in.

But back to our story about Clinton in the late fall of '92. In the different huddles, peoples' names were suggested. Many people said, "Well, wouldn't you like to be in it?" I said, "Sure." So, they put my name in for a number of things, including the directorship of the National Park Service. I guess I was on the list for three things. When I was asked, "Which one would you really most like?" I said the Park Service. Mind you, this was not the administration, this was the environmental community.

Lage: Who?

McCloskey: Brooks Yeager and Gus Speth were both on the transition team and fed those names in. So, my name was put in through that channel.

Lage: A broader group than the Sierra Club?

McCloskey: Oh, yes. These were people from all the major mainstream environmental groups. And of course, many other peoples' names were put in too. We recognized that only a fraction of them would make it, but this was input. They weren't only people from environment staffs. They were people from all over the country that were on these lists.

It so happened that one of the Sierra Club's staff people, Bob Hattoy, was on the transition team and was posted to work in the White House on personnel matters. He took this suggestion regarding my appointment to directing the Park Service very seriously. One of the interesting things about it was, not only was I interested in national parks, but that particular post at that time did not need to be confirmed by the Senate.

So it was kind of a "freebie" in the sense of confirmation. There's a real question about how easily confirmed some people from the environmental movement would be. At any rate, it went in, and Bob pushed it hard. It got into the Washington Post--in the gossip column speculating who is on the final list. At least, the gossip column said I was on one of the final lists. I think I was probably never more than on Bob Hattoy's list. [laughter]

Lage: And the gossip column's list.

McCloskey: I did talk to Babbitt. I don't know whether it was an interview exactly, but we had a meeting. I gave him some of my ideas, but he made it pretty clear that he wanted Roger Kennedy to be the Park Service director. Kennedy had been the director of the National Museum of American History, and he had all sorts of ideas about bucking up the historical component of the national park system rather than the natural parks, which was a greater interest to me.

Lage: Oh, my goodness, I wonder why Babbitt voted, in a sense, for that.

McCloskey: Kennedy had had a television program on one of the educational channels. I think he thought that Kennedy would be a good salesman for the administration and would have a popular following. Kennedy was also a Republican. He had some idea that this would be good in terms of creating a more bipartisan support for Interior programs.

Kennedy proved to be a person that was well-disposed toward the parks. I don't think he had much of a profile as director, but I don't think, on the other hand, that Babbitt really wanted anybody other than himself to have a high profile in Interior. Kennedy came and went.

I don't think I was ever a serious contender, but I did appreciate Bob Hattoy's good support. At various times, my name has been suggested for other positions in government in the popular press. When I look back on it, I don't think any of that was ever probably realistic because I think I had become so symbolically associated with the Sierra Club that it makes it unlikely to get an appointment, not only because of the difficulty with confirmation, particularly now in a Republican-controlled Congress, but because of the sense that if you move into public office you need to be thought of as somebody who is going to be fair to all interests and not hopelessly biased. I think that I'm so heavily associated with the Sierra Club that I think most appointing powers would doubt that I could be viewed as objective.

Lage: How about yourself? How do you think you would survive a transition like that?

McCloskey: I think I could do the job very well. But I have come to understand that I'd cast my lot, and I am happy with my lot. The other thing is that as the years have gone by, though, their status has diminished. These jobs in government have changed drastically. When I was a young man, the legacy of the New Deal period was such that some of these jobs were regarded as jobs that cast a sort of heroic spell around them; they presented opportunities to do great things and have a prominent place in history. They provided a platform to speak to the whole nation and be heard.

After the Watergate period and the Vietnam War, the mood has changed toward them--there has been a sort of fall from grace of government, and government jobs, and politics in general. Now, many of the people who move into these spots practically disappear from public view. You never hear of them again.

Lage: Or, they become spokesman for the administration instead of for the parks.

McCloskey: That's right. There's been a steady effort by many administrations to exert tighter and tighter political control over all their appointees and their agencies. Though I think

the Clinton administration, by and large, did not want a lot of prominent spokesman for the administration and its agencies.

Lage: For the administration or for the environment?

McCloskey: Even for themselves.

Lage: Oh, I see.

McCloskey: I think, partly, it was because Clinton had such a chaotic policy-making process for so long; he waited so late to make up his mind about where he stood, that he couldn't put out the word early about what their policy line was, and thereafter to enlist cabinet secretaries and agency heads in selling that line; they just didn't have a line to sell until the last moment. I think the press and the world were no longer much interested in listening very carefully. And agencies in the natural resources field had lost so much prestige that these were not good platforms anymore.

The Club's Evolving Electoral Endorsement Program

Lage: Well, that's a sorry picture. Now, we'll go into the electoral politics of the Sierra Club. In your last interview, I think we had SCCOPE [Sierra Club Committee on Political Education] founded, but we have not discussed its subsequent evolution.

McCloskey: That's right. The Sierra Club political program might find its genesis in a meeting I had with then Iowa Senator John Culver in 1980. I was lobbying him on some issue. He was running for reelection, felt very endangered, and pressed home the point, strongly, that "Look, you fellows are in here all the time asking me to do this, asking me to do that. You never do anything for me." He said, "I'm not going to be able to be here much longer to do things for you if you aren't able to do something for me." He said, "What I need you to do is to help me get reelected and to say something good on my behalf in Iowa. If you guys are all completely silent, you're not going to have any friends left in Congress." He was defeated.

We didn't do anything for him, but I saw in that election a lot of our friends in the Senate, particularly, disappear. Success in lobbying depends on having champions who will advance your cause, introduce your bills, and speak up for it in debate, and enlist others to vote for it. Of course, you also need enough people to vote for it when the time comes.

The trends were then already pointing in a bad direction. We were losing friends, and we were losing champions.

I convinced the club to start experimenting with electoral endorsements starting around 1980. We first experimented in some California state elections to see if we could find a way to do this--that was not too internally divisive. We developed these rules about needing endorsements both at the group or chapter level and at a higher level, and that they needed to be by two-thirds margins so that this wouldn't just reflect the party line, or factional votes. We would take a careful look at their environmental records.

So, we got into it and developed a big program, and Carl Pope was the chief staff person for many years in developing and building up the program. It became a strong and substantial program during the eighties and is into the nineties.

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McCloskey: The Sierra Club is recognized as the most visible and probably influential political action committee of the environmental movement. The League of Conservation Voters [LCV] preceded it. It's based on a consortium of environmental groups. It doesn't have much name recognition value; few people know who it is or what it is. Most everybody knows who the Sierra Club is, and what it is, and what it stands for.

In a way, we've become the brand name in this field. The club is into far more elections nowadays than the league is. We usually endorse about two hundred candidates for an election in Congress, and we've made presidential endorsements a number of times. In some ways, we are a surrogate for the whole movement. It surprises me how often our endorsements are sought. In some districts, I suppose, it's not a desired thing, but more often than not, the members of Congress want it because they want an environmental seal of approval.

Our program has not been without its problems. We make donations to members that we endorse up to the maximum, often \$5,000. In this big-money climate, that's a drop in the bucket, and it doesn't get you a whole lot. I don't think we've gotten much in the way of improved access to members of Congress by our donations.

Lage: So, the maximum that a PAC can make is \$5,000?

McCloskey: Yes. Twenty-five hundred in the primary, and twenty-five hundred in the general.

Lage: That's very small.

McCloskey: It's very small. There's lots of so-called soft money floating around, but that's another subject. We've begun to have the sense that we're scattering money all over the place with little effect. Also, we've adopted a contextual basis for our endorsements so that we have not demanded an LCV [League of Conservation Voters] score of 75 percent or higher to endorse. We've gone for people with 60 percent ratings, if they were facing someone who had a 5 percent rating, because the contrast was sufficiently great. We've been very pragmatic in that sense. A number of observers have felt that we've been, perhaps, overly lenient and that we're not putting enough emphasis on quality.

Some of the people we've endorsed later have about a zero sense of gratitude. I remember lobbying Congressman Jake Pickle of the Ways and Means Committee, who we endorsed in the primary, a bitterly contested one. We made the difference in Austin, Texas, where there are a lot of environmentally minded people. He was unwilling ever to even hear me out on UBIT [unrelated business income tax] matters that we were lobbying on.

Lage: So it didn't even give you access.

McCloskey: I finally got access to make my case to the key staff person, but only with tremendous difficulty. I think that's not atypical. So there's been some rethinking of how we approach this. Also, we're beginning to learn that when we take a highly focused approach, as through independent expenditure campaigns, that we sometimes can make the difference, i.e., tip the balance.

Lage: Now, what's an independent expenditure campaign?

McCloskey: This deals with a special provision in the election laws that allows a PAC to spend a great deal more as long as it's not funnelled into the campaign in a coordinated fashion. You do it in an entirely separate and uncoordinated way. Some members of Congress are now complaining about these campaigns parachuting into the districts at the last moment with a flood of money and that they didn't know about it. Sometimes it's to support them, sometimes it's to oppose them. We did that with Ron Wyden in the senate campaign in Oregon, where it succeeded.

Lage: You mean the club would come in sort of with its own campaign?

McCloskey: Yes. We spent \$150,000 in the Wyden campaign. We had our own one with television and radio spots, pushing the environmental issue. For instance, he was a candidate who is not that comfortable pushing our issue. He was not inclined to do it, but we thought it important, and thought the contrast between the candidates was a very strong one. In certain swing suburban districts, we put in a lot of this money, particularly around Portland, aimed particularly at independents and Republican women who voted for him. There were only some 20,000 votes by which he was elected--the margin of victory--so, we, and probably some women's groups who also campaigned in the same vein, made the difference in that election.

Lage: But he himself wasn't that happy with it?

McCloskey: Well, he wasn't unhappy, but he wasn't stressing the environmental issue in his own campaign.

There were two or three other contests for the House around the country where we think we made a difference too with independent campaigns. This experience is beginning to suggest that when we target our efforts in promising campaigns and districts and run independent campaigns, we may have enough leverage to make a difference. There are real questions about the other cases, where we're just a drop in the bucket, as to whether we're accomplishing anything. There are even bigger questions about presidential campaigns where, in effect, it's one electoral district for the whole nation.

However, you have to bear in mind that in the last few elections, the environmental issue has become an important one, and the candidates have been anxious to either be thought of as environmentalists or to have our overt endorsement. So, we're learning things all of the time. I'd say with things like electoral work and with P.R. campaigns (of a broad and enduring character) that these are processes where the learning time is a long one.

I think we have to have many learning experiences to gradually become confident about what works best and what doesn't. I think the club ought to pay attention to its institutional learning process and husband it. Legislative lobbying over the years has gradually developed a lore. I do not think we ought to play fast and loose with, nor easily discard, what we've learned through the world of hard knocks and experience because this is extremely valuable experience that we accumulate.

- Lage: How does the club retain what they've learned?
- McCloskey: It's not done, for the most part, through things that are written down. It's more of a cultural kind of thing that certain individuals learned best, and through training exercises, particularly, this is passed on and perpetuated.
- Lage: I suppose the amount of turnover in the staff has a lot to do with this.
- McCloskey: It does, as well as with volunteer leaders who are around to keep passing on these oral traditions.
- Lage: Yes, right, they are oral traditions. Well, the other thing that keeps changing is the landscape. Electioneering has changed tremendously, as you pointed out, with the idea of the independent endorsements. It's not just the Sierra Club, but all your opposing interests.
- McCloskey: Oh, that's right. This gets into the context that's causing demand for reform in federal election practices. The unregulated money that's coming from, or through, nonprofits into elections, as well as these independent expenditures. There's an increasing sense that nonprofits are important players in elections. We're not the sources of the money; that comes from the business community and the people that have wealth, but they're being used as vehicles in various ways.
- I'm part of a study group in the Independent Sector (a consortium of nonprofits) right now studying those problems from the standpoint of nonprofits and how they should deal with them. You have a trade-off between their interests in free speech and their ability to spend money to broadcast their messages, versus the public's interest in not having huge amounts of money completely distort the electoral process.
- Lage: Has the club taken a stance on election reform?
- McCloskey: Not yet. I have drafted, at the request of Chuck McGrady of the political committee, some proposals, but the committee is still pondering them.
- Lage: Okay, do you want to pause a minute, or go right into NAFTA?

NAFTA, WTO, and Governing the Environment by Global Economic Imperatives

McCloskey: Let's go to NAFTA.

Lage: Okay, in looking at your papers about NAFTA, which were sent from the Washington office and have recently been organized at the Bancroft, it seemed like it was an issue that brought together so many of the considerations we wanted you to talk about, including some things you've already talked about: the Clinton administration, its evolution, and the club's relationship with other environmental organizations. Anyway, I just thought maybe you could talk about that issue, and how the club responded to it, and you in particular.

McCloskey: When the issue of NAFTA and trade first came to my attention, I was skeptical. I was not, at first blush, convinced it had much to do with the environment. I thought it might have just reflected somebody's enthusiasm. As I dug into it, I changed my mind entirely and came to understand it as embodying almost a paradigm shift with regard to the way the world was going to be run and governed in the future.

I saw our ability to act on environmental premises threatened, and the ability of the environmental movement to project a degree of control over what our nations do being undermined. I also felt that the world at large, particularly the establishment press of the East, almost totally misunderstood the issue. It thought this was an issue of reducing tariffs. It didn't understand the governance issue at all. In fact, there was almost a willful desire not to understand it. The issue really involves a desire to transfer control over much of what happens in our nation to new international entities that take their cues from industry-controlled panels and boards, such as the International Standards Organization and Codex Alimentarius and some others.

This development is very interesting because the idea of world government informed by an environmental conscience is getting almost nowhere. The UNEP [United Nations Environment Program] is withering on the vine. The United Nations, itself, is struggling as a concept. But a whole alternative theory is growing, and that is the World Trade Organization [WTO], and it's allied bodies, is coming to have more and more influence and control.

To turn to the domestic scene, the whole idea of life-cycle responsibility for products that companies produce has

led to some environmental legislation domestically that starts to look at how to implement that idea. For instance, we have laws that say that computer chips produced with CFCs as solvents cannot be sold. CFCs endanger the ozone layer.

Lage: We have such a U.S. law?

McCloskey: Yes, the U.S. has that law. That reflects our feeling that it's irresponsible to use CFCs, and they're to be phased out. We don't want products moving into commerce that are produced in that fashion. That goes to the question of how they are produced rather than the characteristics of the product itself. GATT and the WTO do not allow any restrictions that are based on the way the product is produced, only on the characteristics of the product itself. So the whole structure of trade policy is at odds with the life-cycle ethic of the environmental movement and is incompatible with it.

Thus, we find that the laws that protect dolphins from being taken in catching tuna run afoul of the WTO for the same reason--because they go to how the tuna are caught, rather than the character of the tuna. Under GATT and the WTO, you could ban tuna if it had too much mercury in it, but you can't keep it out of commerce because it was caught by destroying dolphins. Similarly, we have a law that says you have to have a turtle-excluder device when shrimp are caught in the Gulf of Mexico to protect sea turtles which are endangered, and that was just held to be a violation by the World Trade Organization for the same reason.

There are other things in the same vein, so this is a real conflict. It gets into complicated questions too of whether we're trying to tell other nations what to do. We say, "No, we're only trying to be environmentally responsible domestically in what we consume. We don't want to sell these things to our own people or to others, and we don't want you selling them to us."

But this has been twisted around in terms of Third-World sensitivities and is viewed as an example of eco-imperialism--that we're trying to tell Mexicans how to catch their tuna, and we're trying to tell Colombians how to catch their shrimp, and we're trying to tell Japanese who manufacture computer chips what they can't do with regard to things they ship to the U.S.

Lage: But isn't that the case, we are?

McCloskey: They have all these various effects, but it's a matter of how they are conceptualized. We have two different ways of

conceptualizing them. I have finally come to understand that one of the fundamental problems with the way all of these trade deals are conceptualized and organized is that they assume that the overriding interest of humanity is in facilitating trade and economic development. And they want to strike down all rules anywhere in the world that in anyway would hobble that. Whereas the approach we take domestically--and this is true in many of the other developed countries--is that in our politics and governance, we would weigh and balance competing interests and usually try to find some way of striking a balance.

The World Trade Organization, and NAFTA, and all these institutions don't allow that process of balancing to take place. They assume there is one issue that will triumph over all other competing issues, regardless of the circumstances or the competing equities. It's the inability to deal with competing equities that is, I think, one of the fundamental flaws in the way these trade agreements are thought of and written.

The other flaw is that they basically transfer the control from domestic jurisdictions to a world forum that is unaccountable and undemocratic. It's basically composed of delegations from trade and finance ministries from all the participating countries, and they have about zero interest in the environment.

Then, when you look at all of their advisory panels, they are composed of company people. So you've got a structure here that's blind to the environmental dimension and has transferred power from all the jurisdictions where the environmental dimension might be asserted to those where it's kept at arm's length.

Lage: How did you become aware of this? Was it just by following the news, or was there a person who brought it to you?

McCloskey: Well, Lori Wallach in the Nader organization, who is their trade expert, was the person who pulled together a great deal on this. Though early on, I was appointed to an EPA advisory panel. They were trying to figure out--and this was during the Bush administration--what EPA should say and do on this issue. So I did a lot of reading on it, and I actually did a cut and paste job of things that I gleamed from different sources that tried to cast the issue in a different light. I put them all together; eventually, EPA actually published that.

But putting all these quotes together began to create a pattern and a picture, and a deeper understanding. I had not

found one place before then that enabled me to see this whole picture. It was only when I pieced it all together, that I began to see something emerging. Lori Wallach had the best grip on it. Charlie Arden Clark from World Wildlife Fund [WWF] in Europe had been delving into it also.

Lage: Did the club embrace this as an issue?

McCloskey: It did fairly quickly. I was amazed at how well this went over. It seemed, at first blush, to be far afield from our normal work and a wholly new area. Everybody in the club who stumbled on it had to go through a process similar to what I went through from A to Z: "Why should we be trying to keep tariffs high; what does this have to do with us?" It really had very little to do with keeping tariffs high; it had a lot to do with defending vital environmental interests. I thought the club was able to rise to this challenge very quickly.

What made it politically interesting, also, was that the labor movement, in defending its parallel interests, was already in high gear and greatly alarmed for a variety of reasons. So in the fight on it, we were able to ally ourselves with labor, whose arguments were very similar to ours, though on a different issue, but the mechanisms and problems were identical.

Lage: The structure of the problems.

McCloskey: Structurally, they were identical. So, they had a base of people they could appeal to in the Congress on the Democratic side. We had an overlapping but to some extent different set of people we could appeal to. When the vote was finally taken, NAFTA passed. We didn't win, but if fourteen votes had shifted, we would have won.

Lage: This was all under Bush, that it passed?

McCloskey: No, it was under Clinton. Bush laid the groundwork for it, but didn't get NAFTA through. Clinton picked it up, and this was a big push in his first two years. I think it was '93.

Lage: There were a bunch of side agreements that were key that Clinton dealt with.

McCloskey: Yes, Bush negotiated a lot of the groundwork agreements I believe, but it was finally pushed through under Clinton.¹ The process bridged the period between 1991 and 1993. The environmental side agreement was the key to subtracting environmental votes in Congress. People such as Nancy Pelosi and Connie Morella, who were normally strong environmental supporters in the Congress, voted for it, as did Ron Wyden up in Portland when he was in the House. These were swing votes, and we didn't get them then.

Lage: So they voted against labor and against the environment both.

The Fast Track Process for Negotiating International Agreements

McCloskey: They voted for NAFTA because they came from districts where international trade was very important, but the environmental vote in their districts also was very important. They were desperately trying to reconcile the two. I think Nancy Pelosi has since moved away from her enthusiasm for these trade agreements and didn't support fast track. In fact, that's what happened over the years on the fast track issue. New fast track authority has been sought in 1997-98 as a prelude to negotiating more international trade agreements. But Congress won't approve it now.

Lage: Give us just a general rundown on what fast track is. We're so used to tossing the term around.

McCloskey: Fast track authority is a decision by Congress with regard to how it will treat the vote on legislation to implement a trade agreement. The implementing legislation goes before both houses. Most of these trade agreements have not been treaties per se, though popular parlance uses that word; these are instead executive agreements. They do not require ratification by the Senate. They do require domestic legislation to implement them. A package of that is put together after they're signed.

Ordinarily, legislation like that can be debated and amended. But under fast track rules, they agree that no amendments will be allowed. There is sort of a behind-the-

¹President Clinton signed legislation implementing NAFTA on December 8, 1993.

scenes process with key committee members to sort of negotiate with the administration on the process of shaping this legislation, but when it comes up, a member can only vote yes or no. It means swallow it entirely as it is delivered, or not. The Congress can't shape it to its liking. This is allegedly necessary because other countries say that the democratic nature of checks and balances of the U.S. government is incompatible with international trade deals. Other countries may be authoritarian and can commit their government to implement them by fiat once they sign them, but the U.S. has this pesky congressional process where Congress has a will of its own and may not choose to do it. If the U.S. in implementing legislation wants to change something, the other nations would have to go back and renegotiate the deal, and they won't even talk to the U.S., it is asserted, if we have to do it that way. This is the argument.

Hundreds of other executive agreements are implemented without fast track authority, and indeed more trade agreements have been implemented without fast track authority than with it. But this argument is part of the current line.

Lage: But it was defeated.

McCloskey: Yes. They couldn't get enough votes in the House in the fall of 1997 to reauthorize a new fast track procedure. This was basically a vote on whether the U.S. wants to get into more of these deals, and Congress did not decide to do that. So the opinion is changing on these, and some of these swing members have shifted now. Getting them in line originally required an environmental side agreement, which promised all sorts of things, few of which have ever been delivered.

The Commission on Environmental Cooperation in Disarray

McCloskey: Under NAFTA, they did set up this very interesting North American Commission on Environmental Cooperation [CEC] in Montreal. I have been close to that since and have been on a board of visitors to evaluate it. I serve now on an EPA advisory committee on that subject.

It's been unclear from the start what the mission of this group would be. Some had interpreted it to be to try to assuage environmental concerns by doing various things for the environment in a collateral sense, such as to hand out monies to prepare an eco-region map of North America, and to study

different environmental problems, such as the decline of songbirds in North American fly-ways. That's the so-called green agenda. Others of us have thought the primary purpose was to figure out why there were so many conflicts between trade and the environment and how to reduce them. One of the things they were supposed to do, after a while, is to study the impacts of NAFTA on the environment in the three countries, particularly along borders. The Mexican government has been stone-walling doing that study from the start, and we still don't have it. Indeed, the Mexican government is becoming increasingly restive with it's whole commitment to the commission, and their trade ministry has displaced their environmental ministry in speaking for the government of Mexico on the subject.

Canada's commitment to the CEC is paper-thin. They got a special provision reflecting their ambivalence.

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McCloskey: In most of Canada, the environmental side agreement does not apply. Provinces must ratify it, and only three provinces have ratified it. They got some other special exceptions for the British Columbia timber industry. So Canada is allowed to play a major role in the CEC but has little adherence to it. Mexico is even less committed to it. It's primarily important to the United States. Once the fast track authorization went down in the House, the Clinton administration suddenly woke up to the fact that the main tool available to pursue a reconciliation between the trade and environmental agendas was the CEC. So, suddenly, they exerted themselves to get rid of the executive director of the CEC: he was a Mexican, Victor Lichtinger.

The day before he was pushed out, he fired the top ranking American official there, Greg Block from San Francisco, a lawyer who we generally thought well of. So, the commission is in turmoil at the moment.

Lage: I should say.

Cooperating with Labor

Lage: Is there anymore? Did you cooperate with the labor movement?

McCloskey: Oh, yes. We had interesting relationships with different parties here. We worked very closely with the labor movement

on the NAFTA issue, and indeed on the subsequent issues over the World Trade Organization, and on fast track. The cooperation over NAFTA was so close that in some ways it helped heal some of the breaches that had accumulated over the past twenty years: the conflict over the Clear Air Act, over ancient forest policy, and so forth.

However, the change in the leadership of the AFL-CIO meant that many of the people we had worked with there on NAFTA disappeared, although the new leadership there has some interest in developing a close relationship with the environmental movement. The number two person, Richard Trumka, comes from the coal miner's union [United Mineworkers Union]. He has real problems with our climate change agenda because of his worries about putting an end to coal mining. It's unclear where relationships will go in the future.

Lage: Your interests do not coincide across the board.

McCloskey: There has long been an interest in working together to combat the effects of toxics in the work place, which has been the issue that had brought us together the most. Also bringing us together is a general realization that we support many of the same people for public office, who tend to be more progressive Democrats, and that we are both major counterweights to the influence of the business community. But on specific agendas we're at odds as often as we are together. When we're at odds, they tend to take their political cues largely from industry--the industries they're associated with--so it's an odd relationship.

Lage: They'll see their mutual interests with the coal mining industry.

McCloskey: Their larger political interests are probably allied with us, but their more specific interests often are not.

Division in the Environmental Movement

McCloskey: As to other relationships during the NAFTA battles, the environmental movement, itself, was badly split. We were allied with the [Ralph] Nader folks and with the Humane Society of the United States, which is a big organization in the animal rights area, and with Defenders of Wildlife, and a number of other smaller environmental groups. A number of the larger

ones, including the National Wildlife Federation, and EDF, and NRDC, most disappointingly, went with it.

I'll say this, that almost all of us agreed on what the problems were and what the upsides were. We all agreed on the upsides and downsides. What we differed over was how much weight to give to the upsides and downsides. In the end, in terms of whether when you netted it out you came up with a plus or a minus, drove the decision on whether we recommended a "yes" vote or a "no" vote. If this had not been under fast track, we probably would have been all together in seeking improving amendments. But no amending process was possible, which is another evil of the fast track process. So, people who put a little different weight on pluses and minuses were driven to be on opposite sides.

I think the lines along which we split were symptomatic of something greater and larger here. During the conservative nineties, the mainstream part of the movement is increasingly split between those I would call the "accommodators" and those I would call the "standpatters." The accommodators are typically represented by EDF, but there are some others who fall into that camp all too often, like the Center for Marine Conservation and the World Wildlife Fund.

They argue that these are more conservative times. They play an insider's game in lobbying agency officials and administration officials. They say we have to expect less, and ask for less, and be satisfied with less, and be practical, and get what you can. When they give us what we ask for, in terms of asking for less, then we have to support their proposals. EDF is consistently undercutting the rest of the movement now by proposing and agreeing to deals that undercut the price that the rest of us ask for.

The standpatters are represented by the club, Defenders of Wildlife, and the Wilderness Society, and quite a few others.

Lage: Are these terms that you've given them?

McCloskey: Yes. We argue that, "Look, our values and our interests haven't changed at all. If these are more conservative times, then our job is to create more support for our positions and to do a better job of selling our positions. Let's make the best case we can, and build what support we can, and fight it out. You never know when you may still pull something off." If it hadn't been for those who were throwing in the towel too soon,

we might have picked up the extra fourteen votes and won. We finally did win the third time around on fast track II.

We help publicize the issues and build support for them, and we take on the tough cases and fight it all the way through. That's the way to fight our way out of more conservative, difficult times.

So through the nineties that's been pretty much the stance we've taken. It has split the movement increasingly. We split on the tuna-dolphin issue, as we did on NAFTA. At various times on superfund reauthorization, there have been some splits like that too. There are splits right now that are very difficult over the Endangered Species Act reauthorization. They manifested themselves at one time over mining law reform. (This is an update to my 1990 article on splits in the movement.)

Lage: It's interesting, as you present it, the club itself doesn't split over this despite--.

McCloskey: We had splits in the club, but not on this question.

Lage: Are these groups that are accommodators part of the Group of Ten?

McCloskey: Yes, these groups were all Group-of-Ten type groups.

Lage: How do the dynamics between the organizations go when you get together on a formal basis?

McCloskey: I am not a regular attendee anymore of the Group of Ten meetings (now enlarged and known as the "Green Group"). Now and again, I go to some on Carl's behalf, but they're not debated at these meetings. I know Fred Krupp of EDF feels that the Green Group is working together very well, and that these splits are not that evident or important. However, I see the evidence of the splits on the issues when we go to the hill and when we go to administration people; they are still there. So, I have to discount that. It may be that they find some way to damp them down when they're all in one room. Carl could probably tell you more when you interview him.

Lage: Most of these groups that you mentioned aren't membership controlled?

McCloskey: No.

Lage: So, is it a case for--?

McCloskey: I might add, the leadership changes have helped. The National Wildlife not only had the opposite position on NAFTA, but a position very antagonistic to us under Jay Hair because he cut a deal with Carla Hills, who was Bush's trade director, that if this CEC commission I mentioned was set up, they would support NAFTA. That was the price of their support. We only learned this many years later. Thereafter, in public debates and encounters, when we'd keep pointing to all of these unresolved problems, he would discount them and fire back vigorously.

He and I actually had a severe personal falling out over it. When he left National Wildlife and Mark Van Putten came in as his replacement, Van Putten had a different view, or at least wasn't caught up in any of Hair's deals. Their position is moderated now. In fact, most of those other environmental groups have now concluded that they didn't get what they bargained for in NAFTA, that the quid pro quo turned out to be weak or nonexistent. So on this fast track II issue, we were all united again. We feel vindicated by the fact that they kind of learned their lesson.

Lage: Do these groups have less of a strong internal culture that keeps them in a certain political mode? Do they change more when the top executive changes than the club?

McCloskey: I think that's true for most of the organizations that either are mailing-list organizations or, if they're not, have a tradition of strong executive control. They do shift back and forth with the personality of the top person. Also, some of them may be more collaborative among their top staff, but in many of them the CEO runs the show. I was surprised when somebody told me that even in Greenpeace the last executive director was a very strong personality who basically controlled the show. A lot of staff didn't agree, but they had to "toe the line." Similarly, I've seen this in Defenders of Wildlife. I approve of what Rodger Schlickeisen is doing. He's made all the difference in the world in that organization because of his strength.

Lage: That sounds like a contrast to the Doug Wheeler interlude here.

McCloskey: Well, the Sierra Club is so different in so many ways. We're a membership-driven organization, and the staff has a powerful influence way beyond the executive director in terms of the influence of many personalities.

Lage: Do you think we've come to a good spot to stop for the day?

McCloskey: I think so.



Mike McCloskey addressing the General Assembly of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, Buenos Aires, January 1994.



Mike McCloskey and Honorary Club President Ed Wayburn at Dr. Wayburn's ninetieth birthday party, Bolinas, California, 1996.



Mike McCloskey with his successor, Douglas Wheeler, at Sierra Club Board of Directors Meeting, San Francisco, 1985.



Larry Downing, Michelle Perrault, Maxine and Mike McCloskey at a Sierra Club annual banquet, San Francisco, late 1980s.

V THE SIERRA CLUB INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM AND OTHER INVOLVEMENTS

[Interview 4: April 8, 1998] ##

The International Program: Reforming the Environmental Role of the U.S. Government on the World Scene

Lage: Today is April 8, 1998, and we're continuing the interview with Mike McCloskey. We talked last time about trade. We thought this time we'd go into other international issues, and the role you've played.

McCloskey: When I moved to Washington, D.C., some thought I was taking over the international program. There were some major changes made in it at that time. It had been moved down from New York where Pat Scharlin had long run it since it was started back in 1971. I really wasn't headed for that role, but I changed jobs with the understanding that I would be much involved with the international program.

In about 1986, Larry Williams took over the direction of the staff component of the international program. Larry and I were long-time friends and associates. We had known each other in Oregon in the early sixties. He had gone on to a career with the Oregon Environmental Council, where he became its executive director. He then went to work for the Carter administration in the Council on Environmental Quality. When he left that, at the beginning of the Reagan administration, the club hired him as a lobbyist in the Washington office. He worked on water pollution and a number of issues. When we made these changes in the international program, he took over as its director.

This odd relationship I had with the program was probably only workable with somebody with whom I had this kind of relationship. I became, in effect, a senior counselor to him and to the program. He supervised the personnel and was in

charge of raising the money for it. There had long been an understanding that the program had to be largely self-financed.

Lage: Now, why was that, as opposed to other programs?

McCloskey: It was a little like the origins of the outing program in the club back in the early part of this century. It was thought to be all right if it didn't impose a financial drain on the club. The directors felt the same about the international program. Very few of our members knew much about it or had international experience. There was always a sense that it was something mysterious--off there in the distance, and that it might not be something people would want to put money into. If it was a free ride, if the program could raise its own money, it was all right. That's always been the attitude, unfortunately. The program has had significant impacts and enjoyed victories over the years.

At any rate, Larry had that responsibility, but he often came to me, and still does, with questions about how we might think about this program, or this strategy, or that, or what would I have to suggest. I seemed to complement the strengths he brings to the program. He's very good at raising money, and he has a very outgoing, winning personality, and makes lots of friends for the club and the program. I seem to be somewhat the idea man. So we've had that kind of relationship.

The program prior to 1985, as I said, had been in New York City. At the outset, Nick Robinson, who started the club's international committee and program, had the idea of focusing on the United Nations as an institution. It tended to lobby the U.N. as we would Congress, trying to pick up votes from small countries or ones that were not particularly informed on the issues. They might not be under instructions from their own foreign ministry.

They had some success with it, but by the eighties, many of us were more interested in where it was going. We started to pay closer attention to it. We came to the conclusion that it didn't have a clear picture of where in the future we should go with the program. More and more of the attention was being given to what the U.S. government did on the world scene.

Lage: More attention by whom?

McCloskey: In the movement. NRDC, for instance, and the club in the early eighties were both trying to reform the U.S. foreign aid program, with the USAID [U.S. Agency for International Development]. NRDC was able to lobby from its base in

Washington, D.C. We found that our international program in New York was somewhat at a disadvantage in doing that. Plus, not only was it not there, but it wasn't all that acquainted with how the Congress worked, although it was with how the UN worked.

We concluded that we ought to build on the strength of the Sierra Club in the United States, with our membership base here, and focus on reforming the role of the United States government in the world scene with respect to environmental policy. Larry was well equipped to do that because he had been lobbying the U.S. Congress for some time. And we began to have increasing success with that.

Lage: Can I just interrupt for a minute and ask how that decision was made? Was that a joint volunteer-staff decision, or international committee, or what?

McCloskey: The international committee approved it, and the executive director in San Francisco approved it.

Lage: Would that have been you at the time?

McCloskey: That would have been Doug Wheeler. Well, it started under me, and it was carried on under Doug Wheeler. I was a prime mover in it, but there were some others who believed in it. Nick Robinson, however, was ambivalent as it turned out. I thought, for quite a while, that he favored the change. The proposal for change went to the international committee, and they had a number of tumultuous meetings on it. We offered to let the New York staff relocate to Washington, D.C., and to continue to run the program. In the end, they declined, so there was a change of staff leadership.

Lage: So some of the tumult was staff turnover.

McCloskey: It didn't go to the board of directors; it went to the international committee, which, by then, was a well-established committee and had a lot of experienced people on it.

Lage: Okay, I didn't mean to interrupt you. I just thought that was an interesting thing.

McCloskey: The program operated much in that mode through the following decade. However, when the Republicans took over the Congress in 1994, the program faced something of a crisis. It had always relied on the control of the key congressional committees dealing with foreign relations by sympathetic members who were Democrats. Now, there were no longer

sympathetic people there. We couldn't turn to Senator [Claiborne] Pell in the Senate any longer, who we had endorsed (we virtually took credit for his last reelection campaign). Nancy Pelosi was no longer in a key position in the House, as she had been in her subcommittee. So, we faced a different situation. We're still struggling with that.

Some parts of the program still are lobbying Congress with a degree of success. The population program is focused mainly on U.S. appropriations for family planning aid abroad through the AID program. We have been responsible for doubling the level of the appropriations over the years. They've gone down a bit under the Republicans, but they haven't crashed back to where they once were. So that program still is able to lobby that, partly because there is bipartisan support for family planning.

Lage: Even with all the controversy with abortion and even birth control?

McCloskey: Well, they have limited the aid to certain countries, and it can't be used for abortion programs. A lot of mainstream Republicans have always been big on family planning. When you add those Republicans to the Democrats, it's managed to continue.

The trade program has had a harder time, but as we talked about earlier, fast track, as well as WTO and NAFTA all involved congressional action. And so we've had to continue to go to Congress. There the voting pattern has been very different. We have pursued a strategy of "both ends against the middle." It's involved getting the liberal Democrats together with the right-wing Republicans, who opposed trade deals for somewhat different reasons--protecting sovereignty was the motivation of the right-wing Republicans. The more liberal Democrats don't like their anti-environmental and anti-labor implications. So we would get substantial blocks of votes together from both ends against the middle on trade. Whereas with the population program, it's the moderate Republicans and the Democrats we go after.

Lage: Does the club go in to lobby these right-wing Republicans? Do we have much sway with them?

McCloskey: Well, some of them are very outspoken like Duncan Hunter, a Republican from the San Diego area, who will come to collaborative meetings on planning trade strategies with liberal Democrats. They clearly recognize that this is an odd-man coalition, but there they are.

Lage: It's not the only odd-man coalition in Congress. [laughter]

World Heritage Site Designation as a Tool to Reform
International Lending

McCloskey: No. The efforts to reform the World Bank and all of its associated institutions, lending institutions like the Overseas Private Investment Corporation of the U.S. and some others in that vein, are much more difficult now that control of Congress has changed. Larry got the Pelosi amendment adopted a number of years ago (named after Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi), which requires that environmental impact assessments be done before the World Bank makes loans, and the U.S. vote on the bank can't be voted until one has been produced.

Even though it's not a requirement that the bank needs to pay attention to, the U.S. is such a big contributor to the bank that they don't want to have a withdrawal of support from the United States. So they had gradually gotten into the business of doing those impact statements, and the club can take credit for that, as well as Nancy Pelosi. Barney Frank has been another member who has been very helpful in the banking subcommittee.

We had been more successful with administrative lobbying. Larry's been working on this Overseas Private Investment Corporation in recent years, getting them to adopt a set of environmental guidelines. Though it's a very obscure agency, it has some important roles, and we found a new form of leverage. For instance, Susan Holmes, on our board, has been much concerned about a mining project in Kamchatka. She works for the Harriman Institute at Columbia University that's concerned with global environmental questions. She's made a specialty of some things on Kamchatka. Actually, this story shows how a number of our interests overlap.

She went to an IUCN general assembly in Montreal where I was the leader of our delegation. She wanted a resolution passed that the IUCN would support world heritage status for a new national park the Russians had set aside on Kamchatka. I showed her how to get it passed, and it got enacted. Larry lobbied the OPIC, which is this Overseas Private Investment Corporation, to develop these environmental guidelines, which included a provision that they would not make U.S. insured loans to foreign ventures that compromised, or would

compromise, the integrity of national parks and world heritage sites.

Well, the Russians did get a world heritage site designation through for this Kamchatkan park. Then they shrunk the boundaries of it to accommodate this mine. But they can't shrink the world heritage designation, which is sort of a one-way thing--it's like a treaty that they're a party to, unless the other parties to it would agree to the shrinkage. So then the OPIC refused to make a loan for the mine, which a Canadian company was going to develop, because it violated their guidelines.

And, suddenly, lawyers in New York for this Canadian mining company were furious that this mine had been blocked. They looked into it and found that the environmentalists had invented a new form of extra-territorial control--a law review article was written on this.

Lage: That's the way they put it? [laughter]

McCloskey: Yes. There are also some big controversial mines in New Guinea, both on the Indonesian and the Papua New Guinea side. One of them has been the subject of a lawsuit in Australia by environmentalists against a mining company, which was domiciled in Australia. The settlement of that suit has provided the predominant force for mitigation of the impact of the mine in New Guinea. So, this is another example of this extraterritorial control--as a negative tool.

Lage: Or a positive stance.

McCloskey: From our point of view, it's positive. But for the mining company, it's viewed negatively.

Lage: Would this course of events make countries more careful about getting their parks designated as world heritage sites?

McCloskey: It might. In Australia, because of their constitutional structure, the world heritage site designation is proving to be exceedingly important. There they are almost like a confederation of states, with a very weak central government. What they call national parks there are actually entities set up by their states, which are very large. Most government takes place at that level. Environmentalists there have been very concerned about the state governments playing fast and loose with these so-called national parks.

So, from time to time, they have gotten world heritage designation on top of those parks. That makes it a treaty obligation of the national government to protect them from compromise. The supreme court of Australia has held that, once that designation has been applied, it entitles the national government to override actions by the state government that would infringe on the parks' integrity.

Australian environmentalists are tremendously enthusiastic about the world heritage designation as a powerful tool for them. Now we've found another powerful application in Russia, combined with OPIC. This is an illustration of how these somewhat obscure vehicles can be used for practical effect to produce the kinds of results that club members would want to see. Even though, when we talk about this, it seems tremendously obscure and remote.

Lage: And it also shows how much insider knowledge is necessary.

McCloskey: That's right, and it illustrates where we have an active volunteer, in the case of Susan Holmes, we've actually gotten an important result at the world level.

Volunteers and the International Program

Lage: Fascinating, well, that was a good example. What other examples should we pick here?

McCloskey: Well, you wanted to ask about priorities in the program?

Lage: Yes, how they're set and what they are.

McCloskey: Because of the requirement that the program largely raise its own money, most of the staff are supported by grants. The trade program raises almost all of its money by getting grants from major foundations; that's one of the four principal programs. The population program gets its funding partly from foundations and partly from major donors in the club. The program on environment and human rights, which is one of the most interesting and newer ones of the programs, is funded in a similar fashion.

The program to reform lending institutions, such as the World Bank and OPIC, has long been supported by foundation grants, although they have been gradually diminishing. That program has been going since the early eighties and is a very

mature program in its life cycle. It probably is phasing down. Larry is doing that work personally now; he used to have some people who were also working on it.

There are other lesser programs that are either done by volunteers or by me, and we'll get to some of them in a moment. I want to say something about the volunteers because some of them have done very interesting things. For instance, Beth Marks is a biologist who had experience in Antarctica. She had been enlisted by Anita Yurchyshin, who used to be one of our best activists on the committee (she has now left). Beth helped get the protocol for the Antarctic treaty that has imposed a fifty-year moratorium on mining there.

Well, Beth became totally wrapped up in that project and eventually was hired to run the Antarctica project of the Antarctica and Southern Oceans Coalition, of which we're a member. She used to work for Yale, but she's now working full time for this project. It has now moved into the club's offices as a tenant. So Beth, who has long been a member of our committee, now is a professional in the field and has an associated project. It's not a project of the club, but we're very closely associated.

Similarly, Bill Mankin from Georgia had been very interested in the fate of tropical forests. He, as a volunteer, went to the various sessions of the Rio Conference and the preparatory sessions--the so-called UNCED conference [United Nations Conference on Environment and Development] sessions. Out of that, he raised money from foundations to set up the Global Forests Project, which works on behalf of the three organizations: the club, the National Wildlife Foundation, and Friends of the Earth. He reports to their international directors and to Larry for us.

So Bill, who started as a volunteer, is now doing the same thing Beth is. He calls us frequently, and reports in, and sends us material. We counsel on strategies. We used to have a project in tropical forests within the club, but it's now, in effect, moved off and he's doing it for these groups.

Lage: He does the fund raising for that?

McCloskey: He does the fund raising for that. We have these two collateral projects on Antarctica and tropical forests associated with us. Bill runs around to world meetings of International Tropical Timber organization, including negotiating sessions in Geneva, and has a whole network of

worldwide activists that he stays in touch with. So, in a sense, we're part of even more here.

Getting Involved in the Environmental Problems of the Arctic

McCloskey: I might add a note on one other project that I've been involved in recently. One aspect of my job is to scout out new ventures, new programs, or opportunities for us to be involved in that might grow in future importance. Something I've stumbled on in recent years and have become interested in is the fate of the Arctic. We've already been doing the Antarctic. Now, the north polar region has problems of a different sort. Whereas Antarctica is a large continent surrounded by oceans, the Arctic is the reverse: an ocean surrounded by continents. Whereas Antarctica is virtually devoid of human habitation, there are five or six million people living north of the Arctic Circle.

It turns out that in the northern hemisphere a lot of the pollution from factories and agriculture, pesticides particularly, waft their way northward gradually. They evaporate and are driven by winds, and sometimes by currents, northward. Then they condense, and then they evaporate and volatilize again. It's been called the "grasshopper effect." Eventually, they get so far north that they can't evaporate anymore, and they stay condensed there.

So the Arctic Ocean is becoming a sink for the pollutants of the major industrialized land masses of the planet. There are getting to be very high levels there of persistent organic pollutants, such as PCBs and various harmful pesticides. It's affecting human health; it's showing up in mothers' milk. It's at or exceeding thresholds for safety in places in East Greenland, and Spitsbergen, and Northern Quebec.

Lage: So far from civilization.

McCloskey: The irony of it is that this region superficially appears to be the least touched place on the earth (after Antarctica), but it's heavily touched now. There's arctic haze in the winter time caused by SO₂ fumes from the central Asiatic land mass and Russian industrial areas in Siberia. There are also holes in the ozone layer that are growing up there and causing skin cancer and mutations in animals. Polar bear reproduction in places such as Spitsbergen has crashed because the PCB levels are so high. There are abnormalities and cancers showing up in

wildlife. It's an ecosystem in crisis. Not all of it is similarly affected.

Also, climate change is already having a major impact there that's intensified. Permafrost is beginning to melt, releasing methane and other gases, which will accelerate global warming. The ice cover in the winter time is diminishing, affecting habitat.

Lage: How do you become alerted, or how did you, to this? Where do you get your information?

McCloskey: Well, I stumbled on the fact that there is a project that started in the late eighties called the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy [AEPS], composed of the eight Arctic nations, including the United States because of our Alaskan holdings. It set out, in one of its major projects, to document this pollution. The U.S. State Department coordinates various U.S. agencies that participate in this and related projects of the AEPS (as it's abbreviated). This institution now has been turned into a successor institution called the Arctic Council, which is supposed to be a permanent coordinating body to address problems in the Arctic.

I helped stimulate the State Department to hold regular meetings with so-called NGOs, nongovernment organizations such as us, and to provide mechanisms so we could participate. I've been on the U.S. delegation to some of these Arctic meetings. I went to the conference in Norway last summer where they unveiled the results of this six-year study. I've been lobbying the U.S. State Department to be more proactive in developing a set of policy goals for reform in the Arctic. So far, it's been mainly study, but now the action phase needs to be developed.

Lage: Is this particular agency--can we call that an agency, the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy?

McCloskey: No, it was more of a study group. The Arctic Council is a new international institution.

Lage: So, they'll address the problem, and not try to cover it up, or--?

McCloskey: It's very unclear. The Scandinavian countries are probably in the most influential role here because they have mixed feelings. Norway is an example. It's putting a lot of money into these studies because it identifies itself as an Arctic country. It has a lot of people living in the northern portion

of the country. It's committed to keeping that portion of the country inhabited, yet it is subject to severe stresses. It also administers most of Spitsbergen, which it calls Svalbard.

But it's ambivalent. It doesn't want to admit to the world that, say, fish caught in its waters might be contaminated because it's a major seller of them to the world, and it's very proprietary about its rights to fish, and catch whales, and so forth. It wants to have it both ways. It wants to get the research done on these problems and get cooperation from the rest of the world that's sending its pollution up there. By the same token, it doesn't want to admit that it might be selling contaminated products.

This is typical. Canada has its ambivalences too, particularly because its substantial native population in the north is very oriented toward relying on its traditional bush foods, which often involve dependence on foods such as seal meat and so forth, which can be contaminated. Its natives are very fearful that safety concerns will turn out to be another device to make them move away from their native foods. So they had trouble making up their minds whether they want to admit the degree of contamination. They're virtually saying, "We're going to eat them no matter how contaminated they are, but we wish they weren't contaminated." The whole area is shot through with contradictions and ambivalences.

Russia realizes it's a major contributor to this contamination. It would like it also not to be having these problems.

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McCloskey: It feels it doesn't have the money to address change and remediation. Its attitude is, "If you send us lots of money, we'll use it to address the problems. In the meantime, we've got to do the best we can." The U.S. is blameworthy too. It failed to forward any of the evidence on contamination in Alaska to be included in the report because of pressure from some source: it's suspected the Alaskan congressional delegation, prompted to some degree, perhaps, by our native populations there who have the same concerns as their Canadian counterparts.

The U.S. has been participating, but dragging its feet with it, unwilling to put up much money for anything. All of the participation by U.S. agencies is sort of boot-strapped from other programs. The U.S. is supposed to soon take over

the leadership of it, but it really is directionless. So there's lots of work to be done and some important challenges.

Just recently I went up with some others to New York to meet with foundations to try to interest them in taking on this program. I hope we laid some ground work for better cooperation with some of the native federations, especially the Inuit Circumpolar Conference. This is sort of an illustration of things that I've been involved with.

Lage: You say you lobbied the State Department. Are there particular people there who are responsible for this?

McCloskey: Yes, it's the office of the assistant secretary for Oceans, Environment, and Science [OES], and people who worked there. That's the principal place where environmental things are situated in the State Department. Tim Wirth was an undersecretary at a higher level. Those people reported up to his office, but that office may or may not survive his departure. It has many other interests too.

Lage: It's hard to work your way through that morass, it sounds like.

McCloskey: That's right. OES, as it's called, has lots of old-line bureaucrats too who have learned not to push the environmental things very hard. So they are a problem too.

Setting Priorities: Individual Interest, Science, and the Precautionary Principle

Lage: Good heavens. We started this by talking about how we set priorities, or how priorities are set.

McCloskey: Oh, yes. Let me get back to that. Priorities are really not set the way they are for the rest of the club's programs because of the self-funding aspect. But interests such as the Arctic will grow with somebody who starts building the ground work. If money can be raised, then you have to sell the executive director, and staff leadership in San Francisco on it, and the international committee. Those things usually sort of happen gradually over time. Some interest begins to build up. A volunteer on the committee may push it, or maybe a staff person such as myself. Usually, it begins on a smaller scale and gradually grows with the funding.

Lage: Very organic.

McCloskey: That's right, it's organic. Things wax and wane gradually over time. We're, of course, looking in the international program for unoccupied niches where there's both good that can be done and nobody else is doing it, or there's still lots more that might be done if more participated.

Lage: Then, if you can spin it off to one of these other groups--.

McCloskey: Sometimes it's spun off that way. Sometimes it's done through some collaborative enterprise where four or five groups get together. We're now exploring the idea of work on POPS (the acronym for Persistent Organic Pollutants).

Lage: I think it's amazing you keep these acronyms in your head, to be honest. [laughter]

McCloskey: There's an endless list of them. Some people come to our meetings, and hear so many acronyms and they haven't the foggiest idea of what people are talking about.

There is an effort to develop an international convention to combat POPS. Many of them are endocrine disrupters, which is a whole new field of pollution concern. The tiniest amounts of them can have tremendous impacts in disrupting reproductive systems.

Lage: Maybe this is off in the so-called right wing, or whatever, but there are so many problems that seem so bad and then you have a group of people who say, "Oh, that's all undecided, it's not really scientific. There's no real proof that things occur like you just described, the disruption of the endocrine systems."

McCloskey: Well, yes, endocrine disrupters and climate change are two areas where the science is still emerging. This is one of the newer stories on the environmental beat in general, and particularly at the international level it's science-driven. It's the findings of scientists that give rise to concerns which are brought to the environmental movement, and we embrace them and move them forward.

To some extent, in the traditional field of nature protection, particularly where the focus is on aesthetics, findings by our own folks in the field drove the process. These issues are very different in that they are science-driven. It's also true that in the early history of the conservation movement there was a strain that (somewhat traced back to Gifford Pinchot) involved science or pretensions of science, but this is a different phase as the century ends, a

science-driven phase. It's also true in conservation biology, which is growing as an influence on traditional nature protection.

This means that the issues begin to rise and cause concern before everything is well-established and proven. As interest and concern grows, usually more research monies are generated through the federal government and from other sources. The research proceeds to either confirm or to disprove the hypothesis.

Usually, various industries fund institutes to try to "debunk" the emerging science. The chlorine-producing chemical companies set up the Chlorine Institute to try to deny that dioxin has any health effects and to show that chlorine is wonderful. They'll say the same for CFCs, and the same with climate change issues. Gradually, science will take direction and more and more of the scientists of the world come to agree. The dissenters, or outliers with different views, become more and more discredited, particularly as they're shown to be getting industry grants to support what they do.

Lage: How firm do you think the science has to be before the environmental movement latches onto it?

McCloskey: Well, this is another classic argument that divides us. Out of the international environmental movement, we have inherited the precautionary principle, first enunciated at the Stockholm Conference in 1972. There are many versions of it, but basically it says that when there are sufficient reasons for concern, we ought to err on the side of safety and not take chances until the safety of an agent is established, particularly where there are irreversible consequences, such as species extinction.

Basically, much of the American business community does not agree with the precautionary principle. They want the reverse notion--that a chemical should be presumed safe until overwhelming evidence exists that it's not, and you don't take action until then. We say take action early in the process, not later. We've got too many chemicals we're coping with already to keep introducing more and more new compounds all of the time. I go to meetings on pollution matters with the business community all the time, and after we strip much of the argument away, they come down to that; they reject the precautionary principle.

Back to your point about the endocrine disrupters, though, I think there's much of the science yet to emerge on

that. The book that Thea Colburn wrote is one of the blockbusters of our time on environmental science and suggests a different paradigm on pollution control. Because with endocrine disrupters, the tiniest amounts can make a huge difference.

The whole theory of toxicology of dose-response relationships and tolerance curves doesn't apply. The basis of that theory is that things are only toxic in terms of a dose that's sufficiently powerful. But here, tiny amounts, or having an organism exposed at a vulnerable time in its reproductory cycle to the tiniest amounts, may set off signals that are very harmful. So, it becomes more a matter of the timing of the exposure than the dose which is critical. This changes everything in terms of a regulatory response. The idea of tolerable, minute doses is not part of the story anymore.

It has expanded the area of concern vastly. Most of the regulation of toxics has grown out of concern with cancer, and cancer research, and the whole set of risk assessment rules have risen out of the focus on cancer. When you get to reproductory impacts, you get into a whole new field in terms of toxic impacts because the process works in very different ways. It's suggesting a whole new basis for concern and regulation.

So, it's having a big international impact. The North American Commission on Environmental Cooperation is trying to get rid of a number of important POPS in the North American continent. I think we'll be addressing this probably more through the American regulatory system in the future. A lot of the POPS come from pesticides. Many of those are wafting in from abroad. They involve pesticides such as malathion, that we restricted here long ago. We banned PCBs a couple of decades ago; they come from industrial processes. PCBs can come in accidentally now from abroad.

Some of these endocrine disrupters, Colburn asserts in her book, also can come from plastics that are used in beverage containers. As we see in our supermarkets, more and more of the beverages that used to be in glass bottles or cans are now in plastic bottles. The shelves are lined with plastic beverage containers. Well, some of them may have endocrine disrupters. For instance, the growing sterility in men in the developed world may be related. There are even more impacts upon women during their child-bearing years. I suspect we're going to have to get busy and address this plastic threat here in the United States.

Lage: It's so ubiquitous. What a job that would be.

Protecting the Human Rights of Environmental Activists
Worldwide

Lage: You mentioned the four programs: trade, population, reforming lending institutions, and then the environment and human rights. Is there something to say about that environment and human rights program?

McCloskey: Steve Mills started that a number of years ago. It grew out of the fact that I turned over to him a program which I started through a little publication called Earthcare Appeals that featured appeals from different grassroots environmental groups around the world for help to protect nature reserves, whether it was a national park or a biosphere reserve or whatever. They were often in the tropics.

As Steve worked on that, he found that it was hard to get enough data and facts on the natural values at stake, but that quite often, particularly in the tropics, we had native populations that were resisting the logging, or the pipelines, or the dams that would destroy their habitat, as well as habitat of various other biota. So, Steve began to see that one could also present the very appealing case of these peoples who were being endangered and threatened, and that often it was a central government that had sold logging concessions to some big foreign logging company, or they were building a gas pipeline to get the oil to some other country.

They were just being exploited and their central government never gave a thought to their survival or welfare. They often had no recognized rights to their native homelands. So, Steve said look, "We can achieve our goals of protecting nature here if we combine that concern with championing their human rights."

At first, I wasn't quite so sure, but I said, "Well, why don't you experiment with it?" and he did. Gradually, he began to have considerable success. He championed people in Sarawak in South East Asia, and people in Burma, and Kenya. The leader of the green movement there [Kenya] was imprisoned by the government. He has taken on the case of the Ogoni people in Nigeria, where Ken Saro-Wiwa and other leaders were executed. He's taken on the case of the Russian, Alexander Nikitin, who had been a submarine commander who wrote a book on Russian

carelessness in scuttling old nuclear submarines in the Arctic Ocean, with concern about the potential for contamination. He's gotten involved in nominating people for the Goldman prize. In over a half of a dozen cases, Steve has built this into a powerhouse program.

Lage: And he's a staff member?

McCloskey: He's a staff member. He started out as just an administrative assistant for me and Larry. But, he's now won the "McCloskey" prize, which is a staff designated prize for the best conservation work of the year by a staff member.

Lage: How great. Now what was his interest? As you described it, it seemed that the human rights was just an angle. Is that what it is?

McCloskey: It started out that way. I later wrote a paper on the environment and human rights. Our board asked for it when it supported Steve's program on Nigeria. They asked, "Well, this sounds good in this case because they executed environmental leaders, and we need to stand up against that, but where is all of this leading, and what's the philosophical justification for doing this? We're supposed to be an environmental group; why are we doing human rights work?"

The basic suggestion I made in the report was that the environmental cause depends on political freedom to be able to exist and to advance. We need freedom of speech. We need freedom of assembly. We need personal security. Civil and political rights that have been so hard won in the United States, that we now tend to take for granted, are anything but common in much of the world.

In Burma, the woman who won the election has been under house arrest now for many years. She was part of the protest over the decimation of some of their tropical rain forest for a Union Oil pipeline. And Wangari Maathai in Kenya was arrested and put in jail for a while because she was viewed as a threat to the authoritarian government. She was a leader of the green movement there. We entertained her in Washington. We also set up the Chico Mendez award commemorating the rubber tapper who tried to preserve the Brazilian rain forests. We award that periodically to people who lead these protests.

At any rate, it's become very clear to a number of us close to this program that we have to work to maintain these civil and political rights or our movement can do no good in much of the world. Our leaders will be dead, or in a prison,

or totally intimidated. The leverage to combat oppressive government is an outcry from the world community because these countries generally depend, some very heavily, on international investment, on help from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, or on tourism. They have to sell their products abroad. While they may wish that they could thumb their nose at the rest of the world and do what they want, in practice, most of them are quite concerned with maintaining a modicum of good will among the rest of the world. We've found that we can make a tremendous impact here.

In the case of Nigeria, Steve has organized a boycott in the United States of Shell stations. Some of our local chapters and groups are out walking picket lines around Shell stations.

Lage: Was that initiated by Steve?

McCloskey: Yes, by his program. Even after some of the American groups interested in civil rights in Africa, with whom we first worked, have sort of dropped by the wayside, we're still at it --protesting oppression in Nigeria.

Lage: Has this program tackled anything relating to China?

McCloskey: No, we haven't yet.

Lage: Environmentally or human rights?

McCloskey: I think, potentially, we could. To some extent, what we take on depends on the accidents of who we stumble upon, who contacts us, or we find out about them and are able to contact them. Steve deserves 99 percent of the credit for the success of the program.

Lage: Well, that's a very interesting part of the club you don't hear about as much.

McCloskey: Let's take a break.

[tape interruption]

Reflections on Serving in the IUCN

Lage: Okay, we're back on to finish up this section on international work with something about the IUCN, and your role there.

McCloskey: Recently, I was interviewed for a history of the IUCN--the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. It was organized in 1948, and it's having its fiftieth anniversary. A former director general is writing it.

I have been active now for eighteen years in the IUCN. Before then, starting in the seventies, I oversaw people who looked after our relationships with it.

It's a strange organization. It's the only one I know of that combines representation by governments, by scientists, and by NGOs (environmental groups). It's supposed to be an organization, at least it began that way, to champion the rights of nature throughout the world, and look after nature reserves particularly. It's become many things since then. Particularly in recent years it's done a lot of foreign aid work for Nordic countries promoting sustainable development in Africa and Asia.

It has a number of commissions attached to it: a species survival commission, a commission on environmental law, and one on protected areas and national parks. Every decade it puts on a World Park Congress. I have been to all four of them. They started in 1962. I have spoken at the last two. I'm a member of the Commission on National Parks and Protected Areas, now called the World Commission on Protected Areas. I also am a member of the Commission on Environmental Law. Nick Robinson is now the chair of that. I was once the vice chair of it. It's a worldwide commission composed of environmental lawyers, and it's done a lot to draft environmental laws for developing countries.

The Commission on National Parks tends to look after the standards for national parks and protected areas. It has a classification system with model specifications for each type. Many countries in the world try to match those specifications, and again, there is some interlock between lending institutions, environmental criteria, and the IUCN's categories. Ed Wayburn and I did get them to add wilderness to their categories in the late eighties, after considerable effort.

The IUCN has general assemblies, now called congresses, every three or four years somewhere in the world. I've been to seven or more of those and have often been the chair of the U.S. caucus of environmental NGOs and have played roles in many of the assemblies. I did that at the last one in Montreal, where I was the chair of the Sierra Club delegation. Throughout them, a lot of people come and go, and they have

voting cards. Most of the U.S. groups gave me their voting cards, and I was holding up a whole dozen voting cards when we voted. It's run very much like international assemblies are at the United Nations.

All the delegates have votes, both the government delegates and the NGOs. They have two houses, so to speak, and then the NGOs vote in their own. They both have to agree to pass anything. I've worked on the resolutions committee, and the statutes were revised at this past assembly. Nick put me on that, and I got a new provision in the by-laws, or statutes as they call them, to try to keep the organization from being taken over by commercial interests.

Lage: Had that been a threat?

McCloskey: Increasingly, we've seen the Fur Institute of Canada try to get in, and the Tasmanian Forestry Association, South African oil developers and so forth.

Lage: To get in as an NGO?

McCloskey: To get in as an NGO. The provision that I got in the revised statutes provides that sustainable development and conservation have to be a principle aim of the organization and a major component of its work. Some of these fur institutes and others say, "Well, we've got a conservation committee." They can show that they had the little provision in their by-laws that said they were interested in conservation.

Lage: What have they done? [laughter]

McCloskey: They haven't done much about it. So I hope that will arrest the takeover efforts. The fact that they're trying to take it over indicates, I think, that it has some impact on the world scene. It's primarily a standard-setting organization for nature and sets up models of good behavior and proper treatment of protected areas, and that's its real role. It's not so much an action organization.

Lage: Does it, then, lobby governments to take on--?

McCloskey: Very little, because it's composed of governments too, and that makes the governments very nervous. Occasionally, we've been able to prompt them to do that. Right now, my wife is heading up a project for their parks commission on the high seas. She's trying to develop a set of standards for protected areas on the high seas that might be set up around things such as sea

mounts where there often are endemic species, and in some cases endangered ones.

Lage: Sea mountains?

McCloskey: Sea mounts, they're called. They are mountains that rise from the sea bed up maybe close to the surface, but they're in international waters.

Lage: They provide habitat.

McCloskey: They're especially valuable habitats. There are other things of interest too, such as thermal vents and things of that sort.

Lage: So it relies on the governments to voluntarily--.

McCloskey: But there's a fair amount of attention paid to IUCN standards. I've been in the thick of efforts to protect something called the New Delhi principles, which were first articulated at an IUCN parks meeting in New Delhi many years ago, which establishes the inviolability of national parks and nature sanctuaries: that they are not to be places where oil drilling, and logging, and commercial exploitation occur; that you can't have a respectable national park on a world scene and allow those things.

The Sierra Club has repeatedly insisted that those principles be honored and be reiterated in the various world park congresses. I have achieved a certain degree of recognition as the leader of the environmental caucuses at these world congresses. As I said, in Montreal, I sat up near the front and would hold up all these voting cards to vote yes or vote no. Somebody from the Safari Club was sitting not far behind me with his block of voting cards to always vote the opposite of the way the Sierra Club suggested.

Lage: Is that primarily a hunting organization?

McCloskey: Yes, that's primarily comprised of big-game hunters, but it has attracted a lot of right wingers.

So on votes on the degree of acceptance of commercial activity and the place of commercialism they go with the commercial side, and we go with the anti-commercial side.

Lage: Oh, this gets very complicated.

McCloskey: I am now recruiting more people to take over my role vis-à-vis IUCN.

- Lage: Yes, this is what I'm wondering. Who's going to do IUCN? Ed Wayburn has been active also.
- McCloskey: Ed has been active too. Although with his problem with hearing, he's been a little less active lately.

Standing Firm on Principle: Protecting Parks and Biodiversity in Ecuador and Japan ##

- Lage: Okay, we're on. We're back after a break. We have just two more things to talk about on the international scene. You've mentioned a couple of national parks that you were involved with.
- McCloskey: When I first moved to Washington, the international program was less developed (as it was being reestablished there). One of the ideas I had was to reach out and help local environmentalists who were defending nature reserves abroad. I mentioned that in connection with where Steve Mills took that program.

But before he took it there, I got involved in three cases abroad. One dealt with the Yasuni National Park in Ecuador in the late 1980s and early nineties. It was being threatened by oil development by an American company, Conoco, which was owned by DuPont. We were asked to help by a small environmental group in Quito. We agreed to see what we could do to put pressure on the American company to withdraw. This grew into an immense conflict.

NRDC got involved trying to pursue a different angle. They were trying to keep oil drilling out of a broader area in the Amazon and were working with some of the native peoples. They got involved with DuPont in negotiating a financial settlement. Robert Kennedy, Jr., was doing that. We took a hard line, that this park was not for sale. That no amount of money would suffice to make oil development all right in it--the New Delhi principles established that this was inappropriate. If Ecuador wanted respect for its national parks, it had to live up to the principles and cancel the oil drilling.

Well, the government fiddled around by expanding the park in certain areas where there was no oil and shrinking it where there was, and we said that still wasn't good enough. This was a manipulated process. It all got very difficult, and a split

developed between us and NRDC because we wouldn't negotiate on money. The president of the DuPont corporation came to see me in my office and said, "We want to settle this. What will it take?" He said, "I will even set up an oversight board and make you the chairman of it. And you can go down there and stop oil drilling and development at anytime you see the least thing to object to."

Lage: That's quite an offer.

McCloskey: He said, "How could anybody refuse that? That gives you total power over this." I said, "We don't want total power. We want no oil drilling in a national park, not in Yasuni, nor in any park, anywhere, anytime."

Lage: So, your principle was protecting the park.

McCloskey: Yes, the park.

Lage: And, the concept of national park.

McCloskey: Well, this just amazed everybody. This was written up later in The New Yorker, and in a book, and turned into a case study at the Harvard Business School. And is now a celebrated case. We put some heat on the DuPont company; we had a letter-writing campaign, and finally they threw in the towel and backed out. However, they turned over their rights to another small American oil company that went ahead with it.

Lage: Oh, my goodness. Another one that didn't care about the--.

McCloskey: It didn't care. It was Texas outfit, Oryx.

Lage: So it was not a victory in the end?

McCloskey: So the drilling did take place, but it was an interesting campaign for a lot of the lessons to be learned.

I was also involved in another one in Japan in the same period. There is a town of Zushi, near Yokohama, where the American navy had some property near a naval base, and they had stored ammunition there for many years. They decided they wanted to build a housing project on it. It was one of the largest tracts of surviving native low-level forests in Japan and was very rich in biodiversity. Earlier, I'd helped the Wild Bird Society in Japan fight off some other threats from expanded U.S. military facilities there.

So they asked for our help, and we got into a very intense relationship. I traveled there a number of times. Of course, this involved the U.S. Navy, so they needed a U.S. partner. We lobbied the State Department and lobbied the Defense Department and went around in Congress and appealed for compromise.

It was a marvelous example in Japan too of empowerment. The old administration in this town was thrown out in a spirited election. Then the environmental activist who was leading protests was elected the mayor. The protestors took over the city council. A whole network of housewives who were outraged about this lobbied door to door, and petitioned, and signed up folks, took over the town government. But the central government would never give in. Finally, some minor compromises were struck. But it seemed an awfully important example of how one could encourage environmentalists abroad to stick up for the rights of nature.

Lage: They did it in sort of an American-style way.

McCloskey: That's right, and this case was particularly important because, on the world scene, one of the big missing things is that Japan, with all its economic power, does not have a strong national level environmental movement. At the international level, they contribute almost nothing. They don't lobby their government. They rely still, paternally, very much on U.S. environmental NGOs and the U.S. government to push them in the right direction. It's very strange that they say, "Well, you foreigners, in America you can say all sorts of things we wouldn't dare say."

So, I've been drawn back to Japan a number of times over the years--most recently to help celebrate the last major surviving wild river in Japan on a remote island. I just wrote an introduction to a book that's being published to celebrate that river, the Shimanto River on Shikoku Island.

Lage: Back to Quito for a second. What was the monetary settlement going to be? Was that going to be a benefit to the native people?

McCloskey: Yes, the NRDC was pursuing it. It would have had many millions going into some trust fund, but the oil development would have been allowed.

Lage: So the oil development would have allowed a portion of the profits to go to the native people?

McCloskey: That's right. Well, first of all, we didn't want anything to happen in the park. Outside of the park, we had major concerns about the disappearing biodiversity if there was too much oil development there. Though we really didn't make a study of that. I was not convinced that washing your hands of the biodiversity impacts, and just getting a pot of money to build clinics for local peoples, was the way to address those concerns.

Lage: Do you get involved in this third world-first world conflict and charges that Americans aren't sensitive to the needs of undeveloped peoples? Has that become a strong--?

McCloskey: Yes, it comes up again and again, and it's a major problem. Some environmental groups say American ones will only go in if all of the local environmental NGOs can get together and agree that they want the help and agree on what they should do. We've taken a contrasting approach that we will intervene to help if at least one credible environmental group in the country wants our help, and we believe they're right. So we're willing to be at odds with other environmental groups. Whoever you're at odds with, they'll call it eco-imperialism. But I do believe you need to be partners with some credible group. You can't just do it on your own.

Lage: I suppose the eco-imperialist charges could be maneuvered by industry as well.

McCloskey: Oh, that's right. I mean we were criticized for standing in the way of a settlement that would have brought all that money to some of the native peoples. I maintain the issues are separable. We were not involving ourselves in the issues outside the park. NRDC could take the lead if it wanted to in figuring out what to do there, but they should leave the park out of their deal.

I might add this: the point about the park principles. We felt that through making principled stands of this sort that we help broadcast the message about the sanctity of parks and nature reserves. Even though we are going to lose some, fighting for the principle would, in the long-run, probably improve practice more broadly. Indeed, as I said, this case example has moved into literature now. Now, year after year, students at the Harvard Business School are studying that case, and new entrepreneurs who will be running companies in a number of years are exposed to our point. They'll be thinking about this.

Establishing Corporate Accountability: Setting Environmental Standards and Promoting Responsible Investment

- Lage: We can talk a lot more I'm sure on these international issues, but since we're under the gun here, we can move here into the business-environment interface.
- McCloskey: Yes, why don't we do that?
- Lage: It seems to follow to a degree.
- McCloskey: In the late eighties, I began to think about the fact that our traditional strategies have all depended on using public policy, using government as an instrument of reform. I began to take a greater interest in pollution issues at that time too. Indeed, I've done a lot of work since I've been in Washington, D.C., on those at the high policy level. But I began to think about the fact that you could, particularly as a result of this case that we experienced in Ecuador with DuPont, influence the policy of companies directly. We didn't lobby any government, certainly not the American government, and we ignored the Ecuadorean government. We were negotiating a settlement with a company, or we had the opportunity to. Actually, we managed to get DuPont to back out because they were too concerned with American public opinion and the reaction of their customers.

We had another experience in Brazil with financing for a major dam there. Citicorp, in New York, was thinking of supplementing World Bank money by lending money to build a major dam there. We heard on a Friday afternoon that they were going to be meeting over the weekend to consider the loan. We fired off a wire to them urging, in the strongest terms, that they not do that and giving them all sorts of reasons in terms of public policy, and arguing that it was even contrary to that bank's own policies.

We learned on Monday morning that they decided not to do it. We had also been asked to support a boycott of skiing in Austria if the Austrian state utility went ahead to support a dam on the Danube that Hungarian environmentalists were much opposed to. We didn't go high enough in the club to get all the approvals we should have gotten, I guess, but we sent off a letter saying we supported them. It turned out to generate headlines in the Vienna newspapers saying: "The Powerful U.S. Sierra Club Is Leading a Boycott of Austrian Skiing."

- Lage: That must have made quite an impact.

McCloskey: The state utility backed down and removed Austria from the funding of this dam. Well, experiences like that suggested that influencing corporate behavior was not always a matter of a huge expenditure of time, money, and effort. The mythology was that you have to launch a boycott, and that these entailed a huge drain of resources, and they were hard to win, and this was a very unproductive way to use your resources. We just had had a bunch of experiences that suggested that that was an oversimplified view of the world. Sometimes a little bit of leverage at the right time and right moment, under the right circumstances, could cause a company to change course, particularly if you're able to see into their own minds--were they uncertain about whether to do it themselves, or were they just on the edge and we just tipped them over the edge? This developed a more sophisticated understanding of the context in which these decisions are made.

So I began to suggest that we might open a second front, so to speak, in addition to all of our public policy work, in which we would explore developing direct relationships with businesses that were doing things that concerned us--to try to find ways of influencing their behavior that afforded us sufficient leverage. My point was that there were many tools on the spectrum between a boycott and getting in bed with companies, and that we ought to explore how to do that. I advocated this at our international assembly in Ann Arbor at that time and started writing on it and exploring the idea. It lead me to get involved in the beginning of the nineties in a couple of projects, the CERES Coalition in Boston and the Council on Economic Priorities in New York. I was a founding member of this--.

Lage: CERES Coalition?

McCloskey: Yes, C-E-R-E-S, Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies is the name of it.

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McCloskey: It grew out of something called the Social Investment Forum which is a consortium of brokers who sell stock to customers who are interested in social responsibility. Many of them had been active in the campaign against companies operating in South Africa in the eighties during the time of apartheid. They cooperated with church groups. When that was over, they were excited about what they had accomplished, and they were ready to move on to another issue.

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McCloskey: When the Social Investment Forum found that in the nineties its customers who were concerned with making socially responsible investments were concerned more with the environment as an issue than any other social issue, they found they didn't have enough data on corporate environmental behavior to do a convincing job of selling their product. They reached out to the environmental community and said, "Let's put something together that will enable us to get this data from companies."

One thing led to another, and eventually, CERES was established with the idea of first setting forth a series of principles for responsible environmental behavior by companies: a code of conduct. Then, they asked those companies to file annual disclosure reports on all of their environmental impacts. That came about, and it's been a slow process. There are now some eighty companies that have signed its principles, including big companies like General Motors, Polaroid, Bethlehem Steel, and Sun Oil Company.

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McCloskey: They signed the agreement to abide by the principles and to make the disclosure reports. They send advisors and observers to the meetings of the board of directors. No company is on the board of directors; it consists of people drawn from the environmental community largely and the social investing community. It does have some people from the environmental justice movement, particularly a substantial group of people from the church community.

The National Council of Churches has their Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, ICCR. It runs an annual drive at shareholder meetings to get companies to sign the CERES principles. This is what they did earlier in the anti-apartheid campaign with regard to what were called the Sullivan principles.

The churches have a considerable body of stock that they have invested in the stock market. I think, all together, the CERES coalition represents about \$15 billion worth of investments. So, they get these votes. On the apartheid issue, their votes often ran 3 to 5 percent of the shareholders supporting them. The average on the environmental issues is much higher; it's been about 7 or 8 percent. In some cases, it got up as high as 13 percent. So it's been a very successful effort.

Also, there are abstentions in addition to that. So those are high enough that companies respond. What happens is

that companies at first resist the petition to join CERES. Usually, after a number of years, if the vote is sustained, they then agree to negotiate to try to come to a settlement. Eventually, they join CERES. So that's the process.

I might add that right now with CERES, it looks like they've turned the corner toward becoming more viable and successful in their recruitment of substantial companies who do pay fees. The jury is still out as to how much leverage they're going to exert toward inducing companies to improve their performance. After initially attracting some of the small clean companies, they've attracted a lot of mid-range performers. They're neither the worst, but they're not the best either.

Lage: So when the companies cooperate, they cooperate by making information available, but are they improving their--.

McCloskey: Yes, it's really designed to facilitate disclosure. CERES now has to bear down more on that end of the process. I made a speech the other day making a number of suggestions along that line and pointing out that they've slipped a little in terms of having the best product on the market. Monsanto's latest report provides the best format. It's not necessarily the cleanest company, but it has, I think, the ideal disclosure format in its report. It discloses total burdens to the environment and how they are spread across different media, air, water, land, injection, transfers, and so forth. Then, it breaks that down by its various plant sites; so you get a total picture. Some of these companies, now, are setting reduction goals. Monsanto wants to have a 92 percent reduction over five years. It has succeeded only in achieving 67 percent reduction. But the fact is that they have set the targets. They're making the total disclosure, and they're working to achieve them.

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Lage: They [the eighty or so companies] signed the code of conduct, now do they file a report?

McCloskey: They're filing their reports with CERES. Next week I'll be at one of their conferences, providing the results of some of my studies of those reports.

Lage: Ah, that would be the key.

McCloskey: There is a lot that we can find out from those reports. This has been a major activity now for eight years. I've been on a

number of their committees and played a central role with regard to trying to keep them from straying from their purpose. It's also now bringing in some company people to participate in a number of their committees. It's turning out to be a very interesting institution. Some people view it as providing a kind of green-scramming cover for some companies, like General Motors, which is not doing a very good job in terms of public policy. Some think CERES is just concerned with factory pollution, and not with their public policy or with their products. The reality is somewhere in between.

CERES started out with a lot of small "good-guy" type companies like Ben and Jerry's and Tom's of Maine. Now, it's gotten in a lot of these larger companies that are mid-range performers. They're neither the best nor the worst in terms of their pollution efforts. There's some evidence that many of them are trying to improve; whether they're improving fast enough is a good question. Many of their public policies still leave a lot to be desired. CERES never set out to confer a seal of approval. It was designed to elicit a pledge of allegiance on their part to abide by these principles and to disclose what they were doing so we could see whether they were abiding by them. It has taken a long time to make progress, but we are gradually making headway.

Lage: Then are they publicized?

McCloskey: Well, it's not as much as they should, and I'm pushing to publicize them more. However, they've gotten into something called the Global Environmental Reporting Initiative, which is pushing the idea of full disclosure by companies on a worldwide basis. That's very important because there are some counter trends to prevent doing that. The International Standards Organization, ISO, has come up with some rules called ISO 14001 that involve going through the right management steps and being viewed as a good performer, with no emphasis on what a firm actually does--with no disclosure, and no third party auditing. EPA was on the verge of buying into giving waivers and special dispensations to such companies. I wrote a key paper that pointed out just how wrong that could go. So, I've been involved as a critic of the ISO process, which is tied into our trade program.

The Council of Economic Priorities in New York is interesting, too, because they do something a little different. I have been on their advisory board. I was also on a couple of their awards committees.

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McCloskey: CEP, as it's called, was formed by people who had been stock analysts on Wall Street and wanted to encourage Wall Street to be conscious of social responsibility factors, including the environment. Alice Tepper Marlin is the long-time leader of CEP. So they became specialists in doing the kind of research a stock analyst would do on a stock, on the environmental and socially responsible investing side of the equation. I encouraged their work in the environmental area.

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McCloskey: They have one committee that gives awards to the companies that are the best performers environmentally and socially, and another to the worst. I've been on both their committees; I'm on neither now.

First of all, they produce a book called Shopping for a Better World, which has consumer products listed. You can take it to a supermarket, and it will tell you in terms of the environment whether they get an A, B, C, or D rating.

Lage: They're grading the company and the product?

McCloskey: The company and the product, and you can also see the ratings on other social concerns. It may be on labor, or women's rights, or animal testing, and things of that sort. The Sierra Club eventually published a version of that for them in hardback form. They also have been developing the techniques to take the kind of disclosure material that CERES is developing and do something with it. One use of them is to help pick the worst companies.

This is interesting. When they started that, they'd ask companies for more data and to meet with them. A lot of bad companies wouldn't give them the time of day. They wouldn't come to meetings. CEP is tied in with a number of Wall Street investment counselors who look at their findings very seriously in terms of recommending investments, because there is some evidence that the better environmental performers are more profitable.

Lage: Yes, I've seen those scales.

McCloskey: Right now, companies have turned completely around on this. They're bringing box loads of information. They're wanting to send their top people to meet with them for days on end. They're practically overwhelming CEP; it uses a lot of graduate students and others who come in on donated time.

I finally got off the awards committee because they were sending me too much material; I just couldn't assimilate it all. They're developing averages for different industries in terms of releases to the environment for the oil industry and the chemical industry and so forth. In the rating data, you're going to see this one's releases are above average, meaning they're worse, or this is a below average, or this is way down, and why is this way up? They just did one on fifteen oil companies operating in the United States. It was very interesting to see who was the top and who was at the bottom. A CERES company turned out to be the top; that is, was the most responsible. Some international rating agencies have found the CERES disclosure format to be the best in general use.

Speaking again of the CEP awards program, if a company is found to be among the five worst in the country, they don't let them off the list until they meet certain criteria for improvement. The company keeps coming back and saying, "We've done this and done that, can't we get off this list now?" They say, "Oh, there's one more. You haven't done that." Some would stay on for three or four years before they can finally get off the bad list.

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McCloskey: Some companies would work for a number of years to get off that worst performers list. This became a real lever to induce companies to improve and to get out of the cellar. Alice got a lot of publicity for her worst ratings list. The Wall Street Journal and other periodicals and journals in the field gave it extensive coverage. It had some impact, I think, on Wall Street. Certainly, it's become more and more well known.

Lage: Was it followed by organizations like Calvert Investing?

McCloskey: Yes, I think they did.

Another thing happening in the late 1980s was that the business press was saying the decade of the nineties was going to be the "green decade", and that business was now going to embrace environmentalism in a big way.

It didn't turn out to be quite like that. Too many businesses tried to do green marketing on the cheap by merely making slight changes in packaging and didn't really change their manufacturing processes to make them safer or better environmentally. Thus, green marketing got a bad reputation in the nineties as a kind of "green scamming". Nonetheless, different experiments proceeded in the nineties.

I made it my business to involve myself in a number of them. One was Greenseal. It was an effort by the environmental community to develop a seal that would indicate which products on the market were most environmentally benign or acceptable. It did not claim they were perfect, but of their class which were the best. This grew out of the Council on Economic Priorities [CEP] in New York which provided the leadership in organizing Greenseal. I was one of the founding members of their initial board of directors, along with Denis Hayes.

They offered me the chairmanship of it, but I was leery of making that much of a commitment. So, I suggested Denis Hayes, and indeed he was willing to do it for a while. Then he recruited me on the board as sort of payment for turning it down myself and getting him to do it.

Greenseal has now over 300 products that have a certificate. It's had a rough go of it, but it has done its work in a thorough manner. It developed technical specifications for each product; long-lived light bulbs would be an example. And it put out drafts to the industry and to the environmental community, and they would be revised a number of times in light of input.

It made a special deal with the Underwriters Laboratory for it to act as a scientific testing laboratory. Once it put out the specifications, it invited submissions by companies. They then (that is Greenseal) would take their submitted product and turn it over to the Underwriters Lab to see if it met the specifications, and, indeed, to determine which were the best that were submitted.

It pioneered eco-labeling in the United States. There's also a parallel process called certification. In the field of forestry, for instance, there's a certificate for forests that are determined to be sustainably managed. The Forest Stewardship Council has been the organization that pioneered that. Bill Mankin, representing the Sierra Club as well as some other groups, was our representative on that. There are some other certification processes too.

The supposition there is that the market is anxious to have credible green products, and that the only way to get credibility would be to have people with environmental credentials doing the judging rather than having the business itself telling us how green it is.

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McCloskey: This is exerting real leverage, and it's direct. It has nothing to do with government.

Lage: It does have to do with knowing that the people care, the population.

McCloskey: Well, what we've got to do more of is to get the public involved to look at these reports and to simplify this information and make it more user friendly. I'm convinced that there's a lot of potential here. I've also learned the hard way that this is a long haul. It is going to take a long time to perfect these institutions and to get them to be taken seriously. I've also been trying to stimulate interest within the club in this idea. There is a name for this; it's called "corporate accountability". There's a network in the club of people who are interested.

My belief is that for this work to be effective we must employ a "carrot and a stick" approach. For instance, as with CEP, you criticize firms when they're doing bad things, and then you try to get them to improve. When they do improve, you recognize that by taking them off the list. Some may improve so much through the years that you may eventually give them an award for being a top performer. You try to leverage them along through continuous improvement.

Some of the people in the club's corporate accountability network, however, are preoccupied by the stick approach, and they don't want to use any carrots. I believe it won't work in the end unless you have both. Because you can criticize when there's a basis for it, but you also need to recognize improvement. It's the prospect of that recognition and approval that will help move them along. I still think the jury is out as to whether this approach, which I've been pursuing, is going to take root in the club and will get a following over time. I'm convinced the potential is still there. I think we're learning lots of useful things.

Lage: It sounds like a trend of the future. I heard an NPR opinion piece today saying that as more and more people get into the stock market, his feeling was that they would be less interested in opposing things like global warming that might affect their own personal profits, but it could work the other way. They'll put more pressure on the companies they invest in.

McCloskey: There has been a shift in thinking about environmental investment. Early on it was dominated by the so-called idea of green investing--by focusing on companies that would sell

pollution control equipment or that would do remediation of superfund sites. It turned out that, typically, a lot of these remediation companies were really garbage companies that were opening toxic waste dumps. Because of this, there was a backlash against such investment. As we were pushing the idea of pollution prevention, rather than end-of-pipe controls, we didn't want to be stuck promoting the lesser approach rather than the better approach.

Some of these so-called green stocks didn't do very well. So there's been a disenchantment with green investing as it had been thought of. The alternative approach is the one of finding who the leaders are and investing in those firms to encourage and reward the best environmental performers. There's a growing body of empirical evidence that those companies are indeed often more profitable because they're generally more alert, and aware, and looking at everything they do. Many companies are finding ways to make pollution prevention pay and be profitable, through avoiding waste, or finding profitable uses for it, and avoiding discharges.

There's a lot going on in this regard. Michele Perrault and I gave a major briefing about a year ago to the board of directors on it. I think people, though, are still so preoccupied with the traditional approach they haven't quite gotten their minds around how this all works.

Beyond Compliance: Improvements Not Required by Law

McCloskey: This leads to a final observation, and that is that in the pollution control area the great opportunity lies in the area of what's called "beyond compliance"--the things that can be done toward change and improvement that are not required by law. Naturally, we'd like to tighten the laws, but the political climate has not been too encouraging.

Many companies, big ones, are beginning to realize that efforts to prevent pollution and to make drastic changes often can be very profitable, and that it pays. Many of them have not caught on to that yet, but I think there is a lot of opportunity to explore what the attitudinal, and managerial, and organizational barriers are toward achieving this improvement, particularly if it does pay. I've collected quite a few anecdotes now regarding companies that have done dramatic things that have paid off handsomely.

Lage: So we're working within the market system.

McCloskey: Well, we're trying to find ways. I believe the environmental community has neglected the opportunity here to opt to go beyond compliance requirements, and that this, now, at least in the pollution field, is where the greatest gains can be made. I don't think it involves being held back by government regulations. I don't think they've done that at all.

Some people are bogged down, like Bill [William] Ruckleshaus and some of his admirers, in thinking that the regulatory interface is where the action is. I don't think it is at all. I think pollution prevention and "design-for-the-environment" and things of that sort are not being held back by regulation. They're being held back by imagination and perception.

Lage: Is Ruckleshaus saying that regulation actually impedes progress?

McCloskey: Yes, his mantra is that the regulations are too inflexible and that we need to move toward performance measures that are flexible. While, under certain circumstances, there may be a place for that, I don't think that's where the big pay off is.

Lage: It sounds like a very fine line that you walk in trying to reach out to these companies, or get the companies to reach out to you.

McCloskey: There's another thing that I've learned and that is that within companies, there usually are competing cultures and teams. Many of the big companies have hired a lot of people trained in environmental science and engineering for their environmental staffs. These people are genuinely interested (most of them) in making improvements. Sometimes, top management encourages them; sometimes it doesn't. There are often people in manufacturing that are fighting it, kicking and screaming every step of the way.

People who I've gotten to know on the environmental side in companies are very much looking for support and encouragement. They're wanting to reach out to other like-minded people in their industry and in the environmental community. There are times when they are going to disagree with us on public policy. Usually, the public policy is not controlled by them. It's controlled by a public policy staff that has access to the CEO. So one learns that there are all sorts of wheels within wheels and competing considerations. I think we need to be as sophisticated in learning how to work on

this second front as we have become about politics and public policy.

Lage: Do you know how the National Council of Churches got drawn into it?

McCloskey: The National Council of Churches was brought into the anti-apartheid fight because in many ways that fight was a moral one. I'm sure Bishop Tutu in South Africa reached out to his colleagues in the United States. The Sullivan principles were named after a churchman. I don't know the details of all of that, though.

The CERES executive director, now Bob Massie, was in the thick of that fight, and he has just written a major book on the subject. We'll get into this in another topic, but the churches have also developed a lot of interests in the environmental topic. So it was not a great strain to shift gears in this direction. I might add that the ICCR's base is among the more liberal Protestant denominations, but it also includes a number of Catholic religious orders who have stock holdings and some Jewish groups. It has a wider constituency than one might think.

Natural Value Mapping: The Beginning of a Trend

Lage: Okay, the big one we have left is changes in the environmental movement. Do you want to pick up a couple of the other smaller ones, natural value mapping?

McCloskey: Oh, that was one of my international projects--well, let's do that. Yes, that is somewhat related to the international part. You'll probably have to move it over.

Lage: Okay, you've mentioned it briefly initially, but I don't think we got into any great detail about exactly what that project was.

McCloskey: This was one of my longtime projects that fell into the international area. It began soon after I arrived in Washington, D.C. We were pursuing ideas of helping local environmentalists abroad defend their nature reserves. The question arose as to, well, that's fine for the little that has been set aside, but what do we want to have set aside? What are our ultimate goals on the world scene? I had a lot of experience domestically with the Forest Service's RARE I and

RARE II survey programs. So the thought developed, "Well, how much wilderness still remains around the world."

So I plunged into a survey using Defense Mapping Agency worldwide topographic maps, which show a lot of detail in the areas most remote from human development. I had some full-time volunteers and for a while I had some paid staff time.

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McCloskey: In 1987 I was the keynote speaker at the World Wilderness Congress in Denver and presented the results of the this study. It showed that one-third of the land area of the planet was still undeveloped in blocks of one million acres or more. However, over half of that was in the Arctic, Antarctic and in deserts. If you looked only at the biologically active regions of the world, it was about 13 percent.

This paper was a reconnaissance level effort. It basically eliminated areas where road nets existed, or communities, and incorporated some setbacks from that. It called for people in all countries to do refined studies in their own countries. This study focused on de facto wilderness; it has nothing to do with what is legally set aside.

It was the first time that such an undertaking had ever been attempted. The final result of the work was published in Ambio magazine in Sweden, and later in a revised form by the Royal Geographic Society in the United Kingdom, and it was reported on in the New York Times.

Lage: Was it a surprise? Were the figures a surprise to anybody, or to you?

McCloskey: They struck me as intuitively about right. Some of the variations of that study were also turned over to the GRID [Global Resource Information Database] Program of UNEP in Nairobi. It's been reproduced in different forms a number of times around the world. It gave rise to what now is a new whole mini-movement toward natural value mapping. Australians have gotten very enthused about wilderness mapping in Australia. Norway did a study, too. It all looked very similar to mine in format and style. New Zealand has done some work, too. At the next World Wilderness Congress, we're having a whole meeting of people who are doing these kinds of studies. The World Resources Institute here has done some that are more sophisticated but narrower in their approach. World Wildlife Fund is doing some mapping, too. So, right now, it's very chic

to be doing natural value mapping under different names. I'm pleased that I had some role in stimulating this trend.

I am completing my "last hurrah" now in that area, which is a reconnaissance level survey of wild rivers of the world in lengths of fifty kilometers or longer.

Lage: Using the same Defense Agency maps?

McCloskey: Yes, using the same basic technique. This has been going on since then; it's taken six years to do it, all accomplished through the volunteer work of interns. This winter, we completed the research. Now, I have to write it up to go to India to present it at the congress this fall. It's been interesting to get into this. I'm satisfied now that many other people are pursuing these ideas in greater depth and with greater sophistication.

Somebody, a deputy director of UNEP, told me early on that one of the problems in this field was that very intelligent researchers will constantly invent techniques for doing studies of this sort that are very sophisticated, and very costly, and won't work for most of the places involved because the input data doesn't exist. What are needed at the start are very simple, elementary surveys and to work by successive approximations. So, you get a rough estimate to start with, and then you refine it in terms of data that actually is available to get to where you can get an overall world view of a concern.

In the first survey, we did send out results to government agencies and NGOs around the world. A number of them responded. Most of the data we got back indicated we were close. The margin of error was not very substantial. We made some revisions, but the general picture was as we found it.

Lage: So they would take your figures and check it against whatever they had done.

McCloskey: Yes, what they knew. I remember, we got some feedback from Norway, and Finland, Kenya, and Chile, and a number of other places.

Lage: So your method seems to work, at least as a first cut?

McCloskey: Yes. For publication in Ambio, it was peer reviewed by scientists.

Lage: Where did you say the idea came from?

McCloskey: As best I can tell-- Well, I was musing about what are we trying to save on the world scene. At an IUCN conference, I think it was in Costa Rica, I ran into Peter Thacher. He was the American deputy director of UNEP, who had taken an interest in the GRID Program. He told me about things they were trying there. He encouraged me to go ahead with this.

Lage: Well, I think it also points out the value of the job you've held that gives you that latitude to sort of go where the spirit moves you.

McCloskey: Yes, I appreciate having that latitude. I hope it has been useful.

Adjunct Assistant Professorship at the University of Michigan

Lage: You had mentioned on your initial outline the University of Michigan relationship. Tell me about that.

McCloskey: One of the aspects of my job was to try to anticipate trends in the movement and bring larger perspectives to the attention of the board and staff. In the mid-eighties, I was asked to give an address at the University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources and the Environment in Ann Arbor. I did so, and I got acquainted with their then dean, Jim Crowfoot. We hit it off very well. He asked whether I'd like to become an adjunct professor there in the school. At that time, I was just changing jobs, and I said, "Well, give me a year or two until I get relocated to Washington, D.C., and then maybe we can talk about it some more."

I pursued it when I got back to D.C., and they gave me the appointment. I took it with the idea that I'd just go there a couple of times a year for a few days. I hoped to tap into some of the latest thinking that was going on in the field. They were regarded as one of the top schools, particularly in awarding masters degrees in environmental science, and in public policy. The public policy part was the part that I became associated with. I became an adjunct assistant professor of public policy in the school.

Over the years, I taught a few short courses there, one of them with the business school. I've gone most years to give a few lectures and to meet with students. I've done some counseling. It has not been a very substantial draw on time.

I didn't get as much intellectual stimulation out of it as I had hoped.

Lage: Now, why is that?

McCloskey: One thing I found to my disappointment was the public policy people were divided into, in effect, two camps. There was one program they called "advocacy" that really was steeped in teaching Saul Alinsky type of techniques for putting on local demonstrations. That did not suit my background, and I didn't particularly identify with that, though there is a place for those techniques.

The other public policy part that was more conventional focused on agencies such as the Forest Service. I came to find, though, at the time, that the leading people associated with that were into this more accommodating style or approach that I have decried elsewhere. They were enthused about collaborative approaches and all of the latest pet phrases such as ecosystem management, and sustainable development, and a lot of things that I thought didn't have much substance to them and were ways of putting a fancy gloss on bankrupt policies.
[laughter]

So I found myself falling in between these two camps. One, which was, you might say, more to the left and one more to the right. There didn't seem to be much in between that I could relate to well.

Lage: It sounds like they needed that thrust in the school, the thrust you represented.

McCloskey: And they didn't have much of a sense of how sophisticated lobbying really was done. Though often that's why they had me come in to give lectures on those things (in the course of certain courses). I suppose I valued the relationship in some ways because it sort of affirmed my status in a different way-- that was in addition to spending a lifetime just working for the Sierra Club.

Lage: What did you do at the Business School?

McCloskey: Well, they were organizing a new program on the greening of business. I presented a short course on management of nonprofit cause organizations. We did a little exercise, when the Sierra Club's finances were in trouble, on what you would do if you were an M.B.A. consultant coming in to turn the Sierra Club's finances around. We formed teams of students-- all studying the problem and coming up with ideas.

- Lage: Maybe this has already happened, if it hasn't, it will--management students studying the Sierra Club. Because it's such a fascinating, complicated--.
- McCloskey: Oh, yes. I remember, we had one group of Stanford M.B.A. candidates many, many years ago come in and look at us. I think, at another time, some Berkeley students helped.
- Lage: They'd have to get really enmeshed in the culture to be able to do much good. Wouldn't you think?
- McCloskey: I think you've got your finger on it. That's what all of them left out, understanding the cultural limitations.

More Thoughts on Defending the Nonprofit Sector

- Lage: We have another section here we're going to wind up with--the work in the broader nonprofit world.
- McCloskey: Through my years as executive director, I got a lot of exposure to the impact that government regulation had on the Sierra Club. We lost our tax deductibility in 1966, which was affirmed after appeal in 1968. We soon thereafter lost our postal permit and that impeded our ability to recruit new members until well into the seventies. We got into a drawn out lawsuit over whether we owed taxes on our affinity credit card. We also got into problems with the Federal Election Commission and the corresponding state commission here in California which covers those questions.

I found that not too many people in the environmental movement in Washington, D.C., had much sensitivity to those questions. When I got there in 1986, I was quickly drawn into the work of the Independent Sector, which is a consortium of nonprofits concerned with defending their advocacy rights. Over time, I was drawn onto their board of directors, and onto their government affairs committee, and their tax committee, and others.

I found that I'd played an important role in urging them to take a vigorous stand in opposing any encroachment on our rights of advocacy. We talked earlier about the need for civil and political rights. Your advocacy rights can be substantially undermined if you have no money to spend on it. I began to see that the Sierra Club and the environmental movement are part of a broader nonprofit movement.

So I moved into a leadership role there championing our rights. We faced a whole series of challenges over the years. There had been a big one under the Reagan administration before I got there, that I vaguely knew about, that involved efforts to hamstring what groups receiving federal grants could do (A-122 battle). It was termed, in later years, the Istook amendment. In fact, while we fended off the Istook amendment generally, one aspect of it was passed affecting 501(c)(4) groups, which says they are not eligible any longer for federal grants because they are viewed as advocacy groups.

For 501(c)(3)s, the current law is that no grant monies can be used for lobbying and advocacy. The Istook amendment would have gone beyond that to say that if you receive a federal grant, you cannot even use your own monies for lobbying and advocacy beyond some very narrowly circumscribed limits.

Lage: Almost every group lobbies and advocates to some extent.

McCloskey: That's right. This idea comes from right-wingers who are really after more liberal groups, including environmental groups. We spent a number of years fending off changes in unrelated business income taxes, UBIT for short, that would have tried to tax profits from our book program and our calendars. This basically involves taking away a third of your profits. We thought our books were already related to our purposes. If they're related to your tax-exempt purposes, you don't have to pay taxes on them, but they would have changed the definitions.

Lage: But you did fight that off?

McCloskey: We did fight that off. The chambers of commerce were pushing that because they regarded nonprofits as a major competitor. They wanted to clip their wings. A long time was spent on regulations, implementing the 1976 law which permitted (c)(3)s to do some lobbying. Anyway, the rules for the lobbying charities came out of the 1976 tax act--

Lage: Oh, the Conable option?

McCloskey: The Conable option. We ended up with forty pages of regulations, which Independent Sector [IS] negotiated with the Internal Revenue Service. I played an active role in shaping the proposal that was made. And to try to make it more realistic, we ended up with a complicated series of tests--some in terms of a grassroots component, and others for direct lobbying. These involved working with tax lawyers. Some of them have become close friends, like Tom Troyer of Caplin and

Drysdale, who, actually, was advising the club recently and the Sierra Club Foundation. It's been very rewarding work in terms of a number of personal relationships I've developed. It's expanded my horizons about seeing causes within causes.

Lage: Are there other groups that are most like the Sierra Club, nonenvironmental, I mean, that you've found common cause with?

McCloskey: Well, I should mention this. I found there were a number of groups that were of common mind with me. For a while, when I first arrived there, we found so much conservatism in the Independent Sector that we formed a caucus within it. We called ourselves the Advocacy Forum. We had our own separate meetings, and we'd invite staff from the Independent Sector. I was made the chair of it. That caused them so much concern that they brought more and more of us into the center of their affairs. They grew more responsive.

Lage: That's good. Who were the other groups in the advocacy, or some of them?

McCloskey: A person from OMB Watch, Gary Bass. I'm now on his board. Somebody from the Alliance for Justice, and Mark Rosenman from the Union Institute.

Lage: Okay, I'm amazed you can remember these things.

McCloskey: I can't remember all of the rest of them. We had some labor unions that were involved too. Oh, yes, the National Wildlife Federation had different people represent them. They participated too. We have a common view on these issues too, so they were good allies. The whole set of people, however, that were in charge of the Independent Sector when I arrived have now retired, as I soon will be, and I am finding the scene changing rapidly.

Lage: Is the thrust changing or just the faces?

McCloskey: It's hard to tell. I think right now, the thrust has not changed, but the nature of Independent Sector is that it represents large mainstream, traditional charities. It has some more liberal groups that challenge it like the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy. Then, it has businesses in their ranks too that are more over on the right, and some in the center like the Red Cross and the YWCAs.

Lage: Their interests are quite different.

McCloskey: But still, they're opposed to the Istook amendment. They are opposed to paying more UBIT taxes. Well, we had the whole bunch lobbying in a big fight over the new lobbying registration act and over conflicting definitions of lobbying. Lobbying on international programs got caught up in that too. For instance, one thing we didn't get rid of was some new language on treaties; this was language left from an early draft that's now part of the regulations. It says that the earliest work in influencing an administration on the shape of a treaty is considered lobbying.

Lobbying used to be just trying to influence the legislative branch. In some laws, now, it extends to the executive branch, with certain limitations. Then you have this one big exception for treaties where it's all encompassing--from the conception on. Then there comes the question--are these trade agreements treaties or not? Technically, they're not. We have people arguing now about whether we can use grant monies to lobby a future multilateral agreement on investments [MAI]. So, these things come back to catch us all the time. I have a whole batch of these manuals in my office, and people come in all the time to ask me--can we do this or can we do that? They argue with people out here, and I give them the pages of the workbooks to cite.

Lage: So, you're subject to the same kind of regulatory oversight that the businesses complain of.

McCloskey: That's right. It's kind of ironic. You can find some consistency here in their behavior because the business lobbies, and the most conservative members of Congress responding to the business lobbies, are those who are trying to hamstring advocacy groups.

Lage: With more regulation.

McCloskey: With more regulations to basically keep them from being as strong and outspoken as they are.

Lage: Yes, so it's an important area.

McCloskey: But it's a specialty. Most people don't have the background to see the danger. They know the particular cause of their own association, but they don't know how the regulatory and tax laws impinge on their viability as organizations.

Lage: You'll be hard to replace on that front, I can see.

McCloskey: Well, it probably won't happen.

Lage: Why don't we stop for now? We're being kicked out of the room as well as your having to get your flight home.

McCloskey: Okay.

VI DIVERSITY IN THE SIERRA CLUB AND IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL
MOVEMENT, AND FINAL THOUGHTS

[Interview 5: May 5, 1998] ##

Problems with Diversification of the Environmental Movement in
the 1990s

- Lage: Do you think we should turn to updating your 1991 article, "Twenty Years of Change in the Environmental Movement," which I thought was very fascinating? There have been almost eight more years, seven more years, to cover. So let's talk some about that, how you see things having changed this decade.
- McCloskey: Well, let me cast this more in terms of the changes since my last oral interview, focusing on the eighties and nineties.
- Lage: Okay, that's fine.
- McCloskey: The movement has undergone a number of changes. As a maturing movement, we now see that the spectrum of opinion has become very wide, much wider than it was. There are more extreme views along that spectrum now as the ends of it widened out. This has created more niches, more diversity in viewpoints within the movement; there are more players occupying those niches.

Sometimes organizations that had been virtually identical in their views have now moved apart to a degree, such as the Natural Resources Defense Council and the Sierra Club; for the first ten or fifteen years of NRDC's existence, we and they were virtually identical in the stands we took on everything at the national level. Now, in the nineties, we're seeing some daylight between us. We're still close, but they sometimes have a position that's a bit different than ours. That was true, for instance, on NAFTA.

They supported the enactment of it on the final vote, and we did not. And there are some other things too. It's a much more complex movement. In the article to which you referred, I laid out a hypothesis, which is generally accepted now, that the movement, by the end of the eighties, had split up into three camps: a conservative camp, a mainstream camp, and a radical camp. That terminology is now generally accepted. I don't know whether I originated it or just borrowed it early on, but it's in use now.

The people within each of those camps largely relate to each other and not to people in the other camps. They have their own world view. Generally, the people in the mainstream camp look to the government and public policy for solutions; the people in the other two camps don't. Indeed, they harbor a great deal of hostility toward the government. Now, one of the things that has happened has been that the mainstream camp has begun to break up into two camps within that camp.

Lage: Was this in the nineties?

McCloskey: This is a nineties phenomenon. Not everybody accepts that this has happened. I believe that it's beginning to be apparent. For purposes of convenience, I will call one camp the "standpatters" and the other the "accommodators."

Because the nineties have generally been a more conservative time politically, there has not been as much opportunity to move forward as in the past. Even during the Reagan period, we had Democratic Congresses, and we got a lot of wilderness legislation through. During the Bush period, we had a Democratic Congress, and Bush was willing to sign bills on clean air, the Superfund, and other things.

The nineties are more difficult for a variety of reasons. The accommodators are willing to accommodate to the reality, they say, of a more conservative period. They are lowering their horizons and expectations and want to play largely an insider game of negotiating the best deal they can get. That's what, basically, NRDC and particularly EDF did on NAFTA.

The standpatters include groups such as the Sierra Club, and Greenpeace, and a number of others who say, "No, we're not willing to accommodate to more conservative times. We're still going to demand what we think is needed, and we'll make a case for it to the public at large. If the decision makers aren't receptive, we'll make the fight regardless and let the chips fall where they may. On things like the tuna-dolphin issue, the split was very apparent.

On most of the issues, the Environmental Defense Fund is in the accommodators camp, in fact in the lead. They constantly underbid us on the hill by going in and offering to give environmental cover to suboptimal solutions. Then, people on the hill can say, "Well, look, the environmental movement is scattered all over here. EDF's imprimatur is good enough for us." They threatened to do that on the endangered species legislation.

Lage: Do you talk to EDF about this?

McCloskey: Oh, yes.

Lage: How is it managed and controlled?

McCloskey: Fred Krupp is the executive director or the chief executive.

Lage: Does it have a membership base?

McCloskey: Yes, it has a membership base, but they are just nominal members who send in their dues. There's no participating membership. It used to be run like a law office, as NRDC is.

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McCloskey: It's become more tightly managed under Fred Krupp, who is a big advocate of developing alliances with the business community. That's very different from what I was talking about earlier, which was engagement, which meant you had dealings with them. Sometimes it was from a critical vantage point.

Krupp is now trying to balance his approach more, with efforts on some occasions to criticize business as well as to cooperate. He may be having second thoughts about leading the accommodators camp. On public policy, he is taking a stand which undercuts many of the rest of us in the environmental community, particularly the standpatters.

This is a reality. There are many other results of these changes in the movement. With these conservative and radical camps, we have people who have no faith in governmental solutions anymore. They propagate the notion that it won't work, and it can't work, particularly people on the conservative side.

Lage: Tell me who are some of the conservatives.

McCloskey: Well, they run across a wide spectrum. EDF has one foot in that camp as well as one foot in the mainstream camp. It will say "you've got to use market-like mechanisms."

In that camp, we have The Nature Conservancy, which openly embraces the business community to get money from them. When their people participate in policy dialogues, they try to outdo the business community in putting forth views congenial to the business community.

Lage: Do they get involved in policy in Washington?

McCloskey: Not a great deal, but in many ways they give aid and comfort to the people in the conservative camp. To some extent, the World Wildlife Fund has a foot in that camp, though not always. They are sometimes in the mainstream camp.

Lage: What about the Trust for Public Land?

McCloskey: The Trust for Public Land does not (even though the whole land-buying community is something different), but they ally themselves with the mainstream camp very clearly. The Center for Marine Conservation is in that conservative camp on wildlife issues. They are very vocal, as they were on the tuna-dolphin conflict.

The extreme far right would include Ducks Unlimited and even conceivably the National Rifle Association, though it doesn't have much to do with conservation anymore. It did at one time. In the traditional hunting and fishing community, Trout Unlimited now would be in that camp.

Lage: Trout Unlimited had been allied with the club in various issues the club has been involved in over time.

McCloskey: Well, they've changed their character back and forth over the years. At one time, they were very much a mainstream group.

Problems abound with our traditional reliance on public policy; we are cast in the role of defending well-established programs. This makes us look like part of the establishment. Some of the programs are lagging and not performing very well. So we look too much like apologists for the status quo.

Lage: Are these governmental programs?

McCloskey: Yes. Problems with governmental programs such as the Superfund are cited. Interest in these exceedingly bureaucratic programs, again like the Superfund, seems to be waning. There

has been lots of cynicism about government ever since the days of Watergate and the Vietnam War. It's a characteristic attitude of the boomer generation, which now predominates in American society. So this makes it a hard sell, to keep pushing our traditional product.

Moreover, we have people in the radical camp who have cast themselves as overt critics of mainstream groups. Their stock and trade is to berate us and to claim that we are all sellout groups.

Lage: Now, give me some examples of these groups.

McCloskey: Well, Earth First! has been the most well-known example. Lois Gibbs' toxics clearinghouse [Citizen's Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste] is another. There are toxic activists all over the country that she has organized that tend to view groups such as NRDC as their enemy. To some extent, we're tarred with the same brush, though not as much.

The deep ecology people are pretty much into this camp; some of the environmental justice people are too, but not all. They kind of span the boundaries between mainstream and radical groups. Greenpeace was a more radical group in some respects, but now has developed a major footing in the mainstream camp and has lobbying programs. It's going through a lot of tribulations in trying to redefine its identity. It's been moving more in the mainstream direction.

"What Comes Next?": The Search for a New Agenda

Lage: Do you have a sense about what causes those shifts; is it internal or external pressure? Is it change of leadership?

McCloskey: Certainly, changes occur with leadership changes, but that often reflects changes on the board of directors, or reappraisals of the effectiveness of what they're doing or changes in the marketplace. They may have stopped getting good responses to their appeals. They may try different things and move in different directions.

Lage: Fund-raising needs maybe?

McCloskey: The eighties were, I think, kinder to the radical camp than the nineties have been. The eighties were partly, I think, the product of a counterreaction against the Reagan administration and Watt, and that kind of far-right conservatism. They went

in the other direction in reaction to that--to say if there's going to be far-right anti-environmentalism, there will be a far-left anti-far-right phenomenon.

But the nineties haven't given them a Watt and a Reagan administration to rebound off of, and the political climate has been less encouraging in general. So some of those groups in the radical camp have gone through considerable change. Of course, there was the great falling out when Dave Foreman left Earth First!, and Greenpeace has moved more into the mainstream camp. Lois Gibbs has been, I think, more comfortable working with groups such as ours on the fight against NAFTA and has developed a more diverse set of relationships.

Groups are constantly repositioning themselves on this spectrum, trying different things. There's also competition within the mainstream groups, now, in terms of attracting followers, and money, and publicity.

Lage: Would you say it's a more competitive scene than it used to be?

McCloskey: It's much more competitive.

Lage: Within the groups?

McCloskey: Yes, because the bubble sort of burst in the early nineties--after Earth Day II and the Rio Summit. Media coverage of the environmental movement dropped off a lot. Some think by as much as 50 percent. It's been sporadic and not too intense throughout the nineties. The general question that people keep asking is "Well, what comes next? Where is the whole movement going?"

There have been all sorts of nostrums proffered. Fred Krupp was pushing his own "third wave" notions that accommodation was the wave of the future. That hardly seemed to capture general support. Another theory is that we're going back to the grassroots, and the grassroots groups is "where it's at." Lois Gibbs has pushed that notion, and some of the radical groups have criticized all the mainstream groups for not having grassroots. I constantly point out that the Sierra Club is a grassroots organization. True, we have staff, but we have 400 state and local units. We're as "grassrootsy" as you can get.

Lage: How do they respond to that?

McCloskey: They brush that off and say, "Maybe, there are exceptions and you're one, but mainstream groups in general are out of touch."

So there's that notion. There also is this revolt against the supposition that visionary ideas aren't saleable. Some feel this is not the time when you can realize great visions of the future. People like Chad Hanson and his followers in the Sierra Club think that's not true; they believe it's just because we haven't been stalwart and energetic enough in organizing to promote these visions. We'll see what happens there.

In terms of the radical camp, part of their world view all along has been the contention that the people lack "fire in their belly," and they weren't pushing hard enough for the big gains.

Lage: We have certainly heard that from Dave Brower in criticizing the club.

McCloskey: But there have been a lot of other people in the radical camp who also say this--that's generally been one of their stock propositions. However, what is beginning to be new with Chad Hanson and his followers (Chad is now on the board of directors and been electing a number of followers to the board) is that their focus is toward governmental solutions.

So that's a break from what had been true of a number of people in the radical camp in the past. They now are trying to get Forest Service law changed to ban commercial logging, and maybe if they have their way, grazing and mining too. So this is interesting. While there are arguments about whether they're pragmatic enough, they're showing that they can actually get out there and draft bills, get them introduced, line up cosponsors and do practical things to move an agenda. This is going to be very interesting to watch over the next decade--to see how far they're able to get with their visions.

Lage: A more radical vision but returning to the pragmatic means.

McCloskey: That's right. This raises questions about what's going to happen to the rest of the agenda of the seventies. While considerable progress had been made, there are a lot of things that didn't get completed. Some old style reforms, such as repealing the 1872 mining law, remain to be completed.

There's still a lot of wilderness we'd like to get into the wilderness system. In the pollution area, there are all of the nonattainment areas that still haven't met national standards; we've got a lot of them. We have all the old coal-fired power plants, pre-1970 plants that are supposed to clean up to a degree under the Clean Air Act of 1990.

But still, they ought to be closed down. They were exceptions which have now gone on for nearly thirty years. Some of them are forty and fifty years old. There's the challenge of shutting them down. There are all the problems of run-off from agricultural areas; that's the source of most of the remaining water pollution. There are still thousands of Superfund sites to yet be cleaned up, costing billions.

There's more, but I have the sense that we are not being successful in getting a younger generation to embrace an older vision to complete this work. This agenda hasn't totally died. The club is still preeminently, among organizations, laboring at this agenda. But the agenda that seems to excite the younger generation is the one they invented, such as with the no commercial logging agenda.

So I think there's a big question mark about where completing the seventies agenda will get--partly because a lot of it is enmeshed in bureaucratic approaches that have not excited any enthusiasm.

Lage: It takes endless patience and follow up.

McCloskey: That's right. So, wrapping this up, I wonder about whether the strategy the Sierra Club has adopted for the nineties and the immediate future is going to move either the new agenda or the old agenda. It is now concentrating on people and places and organizing locally.

I think that's good organizing strategy. However, it's not clear to me whether that is going to translate into moving these federal agendas, or just how that's going to happen. It may be that it will get a cadre of people "champing at the bit" to turn their attention to these federal agendas, but I'm not at all sure that it will play out that way.

Lage: Do you still think that's where the attention should go, to the federal agendas? In your 1991 article, I sensed a certain despair on your part, that the bureaucracy was so difficult to move that maybe that wasn't the arena.

McCloskey: I think the clock is ticking in terms of leveraging this huge federal establishment that we helped build to make any major gains. I think there are still some gains to be ground out, but I think it's going to be a slow, grueling process, as indeed a lot of it has been in the past.

I don't think we ought to join those who constantly berate the federal establishment. I think that's self-

destructive, and I would fault some of the other mainstream groups for too often acquiescing in that criticism, some of which is undeserved in terms of claiming more things have failed than have failed. I mean, our air and water are cleaner. That's happened as a result of things we did starting in 1970. There are fewer toxics being released, and we do know a lot more.

I think we have to be constantly looking for new sources of leverage. I had suggested this whole second front in directly engaging the business community as one where we could work to some extent; that was borrowed from the radical camp. There may be things we can borrow from the conservative camp too in terms of finding ways to buy interests in land. Perhaps using public institutions to aid that process through things like the California Coastal Conservancy and the Tahoe Conservancy, as examples.

I think the new millennium is going to bring us into a real time of change in the movement. It will be very interesting to see where things, in fact, do go.

Reflections on the Immigration Issue and Factions in the Sierra Club

Lage: Do you have any comments on this last election [spring 1998]? In the Sierra Club's last election, the immigration proposal was defeated, along with all the candidates that supported that issue, it seemed to me as I looked over the results. However, several of the forest people were elected [on a no-commercial-logging-on-public-lands plank].

McCloskey: Indeed they were, and that has been steadily happening through the years. Some of those people stay with Chad Hanson, the organizer of that faction, and some drift away over the course of time. So he's had a hard time building steadily toward a majority. He has been successful in electing his people; they are already having a considerable impact on the club's future.

In some ways, they may represent the future. The immigration issue, to some extent, represents our past. The people who brought it up tend to be of an older generation that embodied the orthodoxy of the sixties and seventies. They feel betrayed that the club is not willing any longer to pledge allegiance to that orthodoxy.

They forget that it was their orthodoxy, but the club never did cross that particular bridge. While we pledged allegiance to the idea of stabilizing our population, it was only through controlling fertility, and we never agreed that it should be done also through controlling immigration. Now many believe that you need to view the population problem in a global perspective. I think it's very complicated, as people try to assess the impacts of people on different parts of the planet.

In some ways, that ballot contest reflected a collision of two different theologies. One theology was that of the population movement, which overlaps with the environmental movement, but is not entirely congruent with it. In some ways, intellectually, it traces its origins off in different directions. The environmental justice movement, to some extent, an outgrowth of the civil rights movement, is a movement which partly overlaps the environmental movement, and partly has its own sources of inspiration elsewhere. Both of them collided in the club on this issue. This became practically a theological debate.

Lage: On this issue of immigration?

McCloskey: Immigration. That's one reason the debate was so impassioned and so difficult. It was a sixty-forty vote; as a practical matter, the club is too divided to be effective on the issue, regardless of which side can muster a majority in a small vote on any occasion. It was just one of those things that we're not going to be effective on because we don't have a shared view.

Lage: Where does the anti-logging camp fit into your theological scheme? How did they fit with the environmental justice people?

McCloskey: At least so far, on our board of directors, they have voted in the same way.

Lage: As the people concerned with environmental justice?

McCloskey: Michael Dorsey, speaking for the environmental justice people, has been voting as part of Chad Hanson's faction.

Lage: But sometimes these anti-grazing, anti-logging people aren't sensitive to the needs of poor communities.

McCloskey: There are those who believe that these are two very different movements, and this is just happenstance that they are in a

political alliance, at the moment, in the Sierra Club. We will see. It's very early in this whole new story that's unfolding.

Lage: I understand that Earth Island Institute kind of split up over environmental justice issues, is that something--?

McCloskey: I don't know about that.

Lage: Well, one group within it, the Urban Habitat Program headed by Carl Anthony, left Earth Island Institute.

[tape interruption]

Defining a New Club Policy on Social Issues

Lage: We're back on after a break. We're going to talk a little bit about race, gender, and religion questions.

McCloskey: Yes, under the broad heading of social policy and its different manifestations. I might add that in the nineties I was asked at various times to pull ideas together on how far an environmental organization ought to involve itself with matters of social policy.

This came up in around 1993 when I was asked to prepare a paper for a summer retreat of the board of directors, and later it was revived in 1996-97. Finally, in February of 1998, the board of directors came to closure on the issue and adopted a policy that I had drafted based not only on my own paper but on their various discussions.

It basically said that we would get into social issues if there was a strong logical link between our environmental interests and beliefs and some social policy. For instance, if the solution to an environmental problem was also the solution to a social problem. It also said that we would try to buffer any adverse impacts of environmental policies, for instance, on the poor. An example would be higher energy prices as a rationing device; in that case we would want to have lifeline rates for low-income people.

This has provided a framework for expressing a broad approach to different social issues. In my paper, I listed a long list of social questions the club had gotten into over the years, from abortion, to a 160-acre irrigation limit, to lifeline rates. Carl Pope provided another list that was more

up-to-date of things we've gotten involved with in the 1990s. They made clear that for a long time, the club has been getting into issues of this sort. It just didn't have any consistent framework for trying to provide some order in all of this.

There were two broad views of what we should be doing in this regard. When I put out the draft policy for comment, the views were split down the middle on this point. One group of people wanted us to be very restrained in how far we went in this direction, feeling that we're an environmental group and it's inappropriate to get very far from our moorings.

The other world view came from people in the environmental justice movement, including our own environmental justice committee. Their view was that there was no dividing line between environmentalism and social issues, that they were all of a piece. They all dealt with what could be conceived of as different manifestations of justice issues, justice to people, justice to biota, et cetera.

Lage: But they do conflict sometimes, it seems.

McCloskey: Yes. But anyway, speaking of their view, they wanted us to just operate on a case-by-case basis. Some also believed that we should act as if we were sort of a nascent political party with a broad reform agenda, of which environment is the centerpiece, but we would address all sorts of other things too. We would see ourselves as a sort of a progressive political party, and that we shouldn't be acting like some things were off our agenda. So, we had varied world views on this subject, but the board at least now has a basis for finding its way on such issues.

Lage: Was this second world view very well represented on the board?

McCloskey: No, it wasn't. It was mainly the environmental justice committee and a number of people associated with it who wrote strong letters along those lines. Some of those people were also on the environmental quality strategy team. They've made representations of that sort too. It had some of the feeling of the immigration debate, with very different views of the world. One was a pragmatic view, and the other was a doctrinaire view.

Lage: Does the policy the board took come down in the middle?

McCloskey: It allows us to get into what some view as nonenvironmental issues if there's a strong logical connection. They didn't want us to get into political back scratching, such as "if you

support my issue, I'll support your issue." Or reflect a view that we're all allies in the same embryonic political party here, and as long as they're all good causes, we'll support them. They said, "We won't do that, but we can get into practical alliances, but no 'back scratching'."

Lage: Do you think the environmental justice movement that we hear so much about has had an influence on the club?

McCloskey: It certainly did on the immigration issue--

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McCloskey: --in catalyzing the board's opposition to the ballot proposition and in its defense of the board's earlier position of neutrality.

Lage: Do you think this position the board just took on social policy was a line drawn in a different place from where it might have been drawn, say, ten years ago before environmental justice was talked about so much? Or do you think it's pretty much in club tradition?

McCloskey: At the summer retreat of 1993, the board was split down the middle on whether to have a policy or whether to just ad hoc its way all along, and just do it on a case-by-case basis.

In the intervening years, support grew for the idea of having a policy since they ultimately did adopt one. If one associates the ad hoc approach with the environmental justice viewpoint, one would have thought they would have lost some ground there. I'm not sure exactly the same forces were at work. The new policy does legitimize getting involved with social issues, but subject to restraints.

What originally gave rise to the request to do the paper was discomfort over endorsing a ballot proposition in Colorado that was perceived to be in support of gay rights. Some board members felt that a good case for that had not been made, and that we needed to rethink what we were getting into.

There were also questions raised when in the international program we got into the human rights and the environment program, and supporting the Ogoni people in Nigeria. The question was raised again about where does all this stop? How far should we go in this direction? Again, I was asked to do a paper, which I did. I think that reassured the board that we had a focus, which was not open-ended, but again had a tight environmental relationship and rationale.

Efforts to Diversify the Club's Staff and Membership

Lage: Have you seen any changes in ethnic diversity within the club membership and staff over the past twenty years or so, or is it still predominantly white?

McCloskey: I remember when I was executive director in the early eighties, we were beginning to get more sophisticated about what our compliance requirements were with regard to EOC [Equal Opportunity Commission] requirements. We did an examination of the ethnicity of our San Francisco staff in comparison to the composition of the community here. We had only about half as much minority representation as we wanted to have, and needed to have.

So, at that time, we began to do recruitment through channels that we hoped would increase our minority hiring, and that was through advertising in different places where we thought we would come to the attention of people we were hoping to get. It was, at least during that time, slow going.

If we were focused in the seventies at all on improving our diversity, it was in the gender area--where we began to hire quite a few women as managers of different programs. And, indeed began to hire some women in the field program. Mary Ann Erikson in Los Angeles was an early female field representative.

Lage: So this was a conscious effort it sounds like.

McCloskey: Yes, as was Laney Hicks in the northern Great Plains. They did quite well and showed they could do the job as well as men could. There was some concern about their safety in being on the road so much and being in a lot of backwoods areas, but Laney Hicks seemed to thrive on it. Mary Ann did too, though by being from southern California she was more oriented toward media work in the metropolitan area; it didn't involve quite so much rural travel.

But yes, we worked consciously at that time to bring in people such as Fran Gendlin as the editor of Sierra; Audrey Berkovitz Rust to head our development program; and Peggy Hynd, Rosemary Maune and a number of others. In fact, when I stepped down as executive director, we had as many women as heads of programs as men.

Lage: So that's a success story.

McCloskey: It is. I wished we had started focusing earlier on the need to hire more minorities, but we started at that time and planted the seeds.

Lage: Has there been improvement do you think?

McCloskey: I have not looked at the figures in ensuing years. My impression is that things here have grown somewhat in that direction, but they are not markedly different.

Lage: That's what it appears.

McCloskey: I do know we have a number of well-regarded black men in our field program. Bill Redding in the Midwest office, and John McCown in the environmental justice office in the Southeast, and there are others, in Texas, women. They stand out as bringing ethnic diversity into the field system.

Lage: So some action, but not--?

McCloskey: That's right. In terms of my own role, I remember working with Bill Futrell when he was president in the late seventies to try to recruit more blacks into our membership. We had a committee for this purpose; Willie Hyman, a black member, was chair of it, along with some Native American representation.

We went to the NAACP annual convention with some specially prepared brochures and tried to recruit black members at that. Ultimately, we sponsored the City Care Conference in Detroit with the Urban League. That effort led to developing a program on the urban environment. At the outset, it was with the expectation that that would bring more minorities into the club. Though, I don't think it really worked out that way. Neil Goldstein ran that program out of New York City for a number of years.

Later, I worked with the Ethnic Diversity Task Force when Vivien Li headed it. We worked on some policy matters. In more recent years, I worked closely with Mary Ann Nelson during her time on the board of directors.

Lage: She was a black woman, as I recall.

McCloskey: Yes, a black lawyer from Boston.

Lage: Did she have a particular agenda to increase diversity in the club, would you say?

McCloskey: No, I was not aware of such an agenda. I think she saw herself, as the first black person on the board of directors, as a role model, and if she was successful it would be easier for others to be successful. I think she has been successful. She ended up as secretary of the board of directors.

At the last board meeting, when the immigration issue was so controversial, she was challenged in her role as secretary over a number of judgments that she made about how the ballot would be handled. I thought she defended herself very ably. I really enjoyed working with her.

Lage: Well, those are a few changes, but not dramatic.

McCloskey: No, it hasn't been. Michael Fischer did the most to promote these concerns. During his time as executive director, the concerns assumed a high profile. In fact, as the environmental justice movement was beginning in the mid-1980s, there were some very critical letters that were sent to the club and other environmental groups. Michael had the good sense to reach out to them and to develop a relationship.

I'm glad he did that. I think he helped turn something that could have been a real problem into an opportunity. I think the subsequent development of the club's own Environmental Justice committee and program grew out of those seeds that he planted.

I may mention one other thing. In the mid-1980s, after I became chairman, I reached out to the National Council of Churches because I understood they were beginning to be interested in the environmental issue. They had just developed a committee they called the Eco-Justice Working Group. I became a member of that and served on it for a number of years.

One of their projects was to sponsor a film focusing on the work of Ben Chavis for the United Church of Christ in North Carolina involving an effort to block placing a waste dump in a poor black community. I remember being interviewed for a film trailer to help promote the film. In many ways, that was the beginning of the organized environmental justice movement.

Lage: That's what I always understood.

McCloskey: So, I had a connection to that. I can't claim a lot, but I was part of the group that helped sponsor some of his early work.

Outreach to Church Groups, and the Sierra Club as a Church

Lage: Do you have more to say along the lines of the religion tie since we've been talking about the National Council of Churches?

McCloskey: Yes, there was a period in the late 1980s when I became quite interested in the development of this interest by the church community in environmentalism. I went and spoke in some conferences they put on.

Lage: When you say they, the National Council--?

McCloskey: The Eco-Justice Working Group of it, yes. It was clear that in churches such as the Presbyterian church, and the Northern Baptist church, and the Episcopalians, and the Catholic church also that there were people thinking deeply about how the environment fit into their theology. A number of fine books were being written.

They were much focused on trying to refute the Lynn White thesis from the 1960s that Christianity was the source of anti-environmental thinking, particularly in the biblical injunction to multiply and to subdue the earth. Those were very interesting exercises to try to develop an alternative green theology.

I also found it interesting that the connections I had with the National Council of Churches persisted, even as I phased out of the Eco-Justice Working Group, I phased into another relationship through the ICCR [Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility] in the CERES work. In one way or another now for well over a decade, I've had connections to the National Council of Churches and its work.

As the nineties have progressed, it has also become apparent that the interest in environmentalism has spread beyond the liberal Protestant community to some of the more evangelical groups. They are now coming to grips with it and are developing their own framework. We found in some of the efforts to reach out to hunters and anglers that we've also been able to reach out to the evangelical community as we've tried to mobilize pressure on the Republican Congress from a different part of the political spectrum.

Lage: Now, somehow that surprises me because I think of them in connection with "James Wattism," and the apocalyptic vision.

McCloskey: Well, some of it is. The Christian Coalition in many ways is our opposition. They draw on more conservative Protestant sects, particularly, but they have not got a hammer lock on all of them. Some of the evangelical groups do take seriously their view that all of creation was the handiwork of God, and remember Noah's ark and feel care and concern for all of God's creatures. So, out of that creationism-type of theology, they think that the good Christian has to be concerned with treating all of creation in the right way.

The churches have increasingly been an ideological ally. They've had trouble coming to grips with how much practical work they're willing to do. Some groups, like the Methodists, always had a social action agenda. I worked, at various times, with Jaydee Hanson in Washington, D.C., who ran their social action program. He's a club member, and they've helped practically on a number of environmental issues, but a number of the others are not sure how far they want to go into this field of practical action. After a while, I put less effort into it and moved on to other things.

Lage: Is there a core within the club that speaks that language? Is there a committee, or board members that have connections to traditional religions?

McCloskey: Not many. I think some of our surveys have shown that a majority of our members are not active church goers. Although I remember when Bill Futrell was president, he was very interested in our relationships to the religious communities. But the sort of areligious attitude of the average member maybe speaks more to the fact that in some respects the Sierra Club, itself, is a religious institution.

Lage: Tell me what you mean by that.

McCloskey: Well, you can look at the trappings of a religion or a church and find many in the Sierra Club. We have a theology of sorts, albeit a loose one. I was reading a recent book by Max Oelschlager on the theology of wilderness. He's a theologian. It's quite an impressive piece of work. He clearly speaks of Muir's theology of wilderness, examines it as a theologian would.

We are the heirs of Muir's theology. It's basically a kind of biocentrism. We clearly have moral and ethical underpinnings for much of what we do, particularly in work such as on the Endangered Species Act. We care about the continued existence of all life forms. There's an ethical or moral premise that they have a right to exist.

Within the Sierra Club, there is the sense of the sacred, a reverence for nature. We have a way of worship. We commune with sacred places on our trips. Some scholars now think that Muir held a number of the mountains in the Sierra and the Cascades, like Mount Shasta and Mount Ritter, to be sacred places.

We honor such symbols and images in our work through our emphasis on photography in our calendars and traditional books.

Lage: They're our icons.

McCloskey: These are icons. There are paintings of mountains here that could be viewed as emblematic of the nature that we revere. There's the question, Oelschlager gets into it, of whether Muir was truly a pantheist or merely was looking at nature as evidence of the work of the creator. I don't think we have to answer that question.

Lage: Just the fact that it's asked is meaningful.

McCloskey: Yes. There have been some sociologists who have seen three different cultures in the Sierra Club all intertwined. One of them is the culture of religion. Another is the culture of politics. The third is a culture involved with sociability and fraternal relations.

Lage: Well, the church also provides a place for that, fraternal relations and sociability.

McCloskey: It does. And, if you get into a church like the Methodist church, you have even the social action. The way people come to meetings seeking connections, finding it a rewarding and central activity in their life, all is very similar to what people get from an organized church and religion.

Lage: So maybe it's a substitute church for these irreligious members.

McCloskey: Yes. At first blush, it doesn't look like a church. It isn't organized along churchly lines. But if you look below the surface, you find many hallmarks of religion there.

Lage: Do you come out of a religious background, or follow an organized religion?

McCloskey: I don't anymore. I grew up in a Catholic family.

Lage: Oh, you did. Irish?

McCloskey: Yes, well no, my mother was of German ancestry. So it was Catholic on both sides.

Lage: But you haven't been active?

McCloskey: I guess I've found the Sierra Club as my religion.

Maxine: Wife's Activism in Protecting Whales and Ocean Habitat

Lage: Shall we turn to the personal questions of family and retirement and all of this?

McCloskey: Surely. Well, maybe I should say a word or two about my own family.

Lage: I think that was missing in many respects from your earlier oral history.

McCloskey: All right, perhaps we did a little about my own first years. My wife Maxine and I are both life members of the Sierra Club. When I married her, she was a widow with four children. We introduced all of our children to the Sierra Club, and some of them are members still. None of them are active, but they're still interested.

Maxine has had her own long-standing environmental interests and has pursued them for a good many years. She remembers early on being interested in animals and animal welfare. She got further interested in conservation when she ran the state office for a U.S. senator in Oregon many years ago, Richard Neuberger, who was quite noted for his interest in conservation. This was back in the 1950s. When we moved to California in 1966--.

Lage: When did you marry?

McCloskey: In 1965. She taught for a while in various junior colleges. She taught American history and political science. After a while, she got interested in the campaigns to save whales. She became associated with Joan McIntyre's Project Jonah. The club, incidently, published a couple of her books on cetaceans. When Joan left the project, Maxine took over as president of it for a while.

She tells a story at that time when they had a campaign to get Russia out of whaling that they collected signatures of

children on petitions to Russia to stop whaling. She and somebody else from the Project Jonah drove our station wagon up to the Russia consulate in San Francisco to deliver them. She went in, and they didn't know what to make of them. At any rate, they unloaded many boxes of these children's petitions. Later, when she got home, she got a call from the FBI wanting to know what business she had with the Russian consulate. She told them it was delivering children's petitions to get them to stop whaling.

That led her to start her own organization called the Whale Center. It was run for about ten years in the East Bay out of an office on Piedmont Avenue. She had a staff of four or five people and a budget of about a half of a million dollars. They worked on influencing U.S. policy on whaling. She was on the U.S. delegation to the International Whaling Commission [IWC] meetings for six years under both President Carter and President Reagan. She also attended a number of scientific meetings; these are all international meetings.

Her Whale Center also ran whale-watching trips. It was a pioneer in getting them going in the San Francisco Bay Area. When we finally moved East in 1986, she turned it over to others, but they didn't apparently have the same knack. It finally went out of existence. When she was in the East, she continued to be active on not only the efforts to save whales and cetaceans but other issues involving sea life and marine matters.

Ultimately, she came to be involved in club work on those issues. She was the chair of a a marine subcommittee of a larger club committee on coastal matters in the mid-nineties. Eventually, this led her to become interested in the idea of promoting protected areas on the high seas. She now heads a project on that for the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, IUCN. It operates as part of their parks commission on marine protected areas on the high seas, and is drawing scientists together from around the world to investigate the idea. She and I have developed a paper on the subject.

Lage: Does that represent a shift in your thinking from saving individual animals to habitat?

McCloskey: It is an evolution from focusing on a specific species to their habitats on a wider and wider basis. The idea of protected areas grew partly out of her interest in applying the wilderness concept in the oceans, and partly from the idea that the IWC developed of a southern ocean whale sanctuary, which

showed that something might be done in the international waters.

She also became quite interested, as you know, in the history work of the club, including this whole marvelous program of oral histories. She has been active on the history committee of the club.

Lage: And as chairman of the committee.

McCloskey: And she served as its chair for a number of years into the centennial period, around 1992. At that time, the two of us worked together, and with the committee, to develop a list of volunteer activists over the last few decades who deserve to be remembered in our chronicles as people who had done outstanding things, and we secured some recognition at that time for those people.

She also contributed to a number of the things that were done to celebrate our centennial in 1992, including a musical stage production--a children's musical. It was put on for the board of directors at a meeting in Washington, D.C., at that time. Finally, she was recognized for all of this work through receiving the Colby Award from the club a few years ago.

Lage: Very nice.

McCloskey: Maxine often says she is only able to put up with all of my time away because she believes so strongly in what we're all trying to do. So she's been a marvelous helpmate.

Lage: I would think so. Not everyone would put up with it.

McCloskey: That's right. [laughter]

Lage: That's probably true of most club marriages. They have to have some meeting of the minds on this issue.

McCloskey: We both share a lot of interests, but it was also good that her interests were not exactly the same as mine. We often joke that I take care of the land, and she takes care of the water. We stayed out of each other's hair, but we were very interested in what each was doing.

Lage: Yes, that makes it a good match.

##

- Lage: Maxine should have her own oral history, but if that doesn't come to pass, we'll have a little summary.
- McCloskey: Good. I forget whether we mentioned the subject on personal matters of my possible appointment to public office. Did we cover that before?
- Lage: You mentioned the consideration of the National Park Service. You thought that this may not work because you're just too closely identified with the club.

Setting the Record Straight: Responses to Statements in Other Oral Histories

- McCloskey: Okay, it's covered then. Recently, I had an opportunity to spend a little time in the library looking through various oral histories. They dealt with what others have done over the years. I want to spend even more time with them on retirement. I did check the indexes to see what they had to say about me. [laughter] I thought I might say a few additional things in light of what I saw. In general, I was--.

Stance on Nuclear Power in the 1970s

- Lage: Now, do all these people get a chance to respond? [laughter]
- McCloskey: If you'll let them. In general, I was reassured that what I did seems to have been appreciated. There were a few points, however, that did emerge. Somebody asked the question of whether I really was enthusiastic about opposing nuclear power. The board of directors chose to do that in 1974. I thought I might explain the viewpoint I had at that time.

This struck me in the early seventies as a difficult issue for the club to come to grips with. Laurence I. Moss was the president at that time, and he was a nuclear engineer; I worked for him as executive director. He was very pro-nuclear. Will Siri remained a strong influence on the board and had been a club president. He too was a strong supporter of nuclear power [and was a physical scientist].

Also, this struck me as a very complicated issue in a technical sense. It was not an easy issue to talk about with

confidence, particularly in light of the fact that the president of the organization was a nuclear engineer who could speak about it with great competence and depth, and so could Will Siri.

Also, there did not seem to be a great deal of interest among our activists in spending time on this issue, though there were clearly some who wanted to work on it. We'd just gone through the first of two energy crises that bracketed the 1970s where the emphasis was on finding clean sources of ample energy.

We had been through a number of bruising fights against hydroelectric dams. We were now concerned with how dirty coal-fired power was. With the new Clean Air Act of 1970, we were trying to phase down the amount of coal that was being burnt, and to clean it up. Nuclear power is perceived to be clean burning, but the problem was both on the front and back ends of the nuclear fuel cycle.

Given those factors, I was not anxious as executive director to have the club spend too much time bogged down in coming to closure on the issue of whether we should formally oppose nuclear power or not. This is what other people sensed. As it happened, we finally did come to grips with it on a split vote. I think I was right. Over the years, we never did, subsequently, spend a lot of time on it.

I then tried to redeem myself by making forthright speeches to audiences of nuclear engineers and walked into the lion's den.

Lage: So did you come to embrace the idea at that time?

McCloskey: I had no problem with opposition on the merits. I thought it was a misapplied technology that was overly complex and that the people operating plants were not sophisticated enough most of the time to deal with all of its problems. The problem to this day of what to do about the spent fuel has not been solved. So I think there is a sound case to be made in opposing it. I just felt that it was likely to be a difficult issue to gain closure on and that it was not likely to be something we were going to spend much time on anyway. I had no problems on the merits of what we did.

Early Cautiousness Concerning James Watt

McCloskey: Another question that's been raised relates to the time in 1980 and 1981, when the Reagan administration was coming to power and Jim Watt was nominated to be secretary of the Interior. Questions have been raised about whether I held back in opposing Watt's nomination. It's true, I did very briefly in the early stages.

This was what was going through my mind. We had developed a pattern throughout the 1970s of opposing almost every nominee to be secretary of the Interior. This began with Wally Hickel under Nixon, and it continued with Rogers C.B. Morton, and even when Carter came in and nominated Cecil Andrus. Brock Evans said something then, before we got our act together, that sounded critical of Andrus. He said it to the press, which antagonized Andrus.

By the end of the seventies, I was worried that we were on automatic pilot on this and responding in a knee-jerk way, without really trying to figure out what we were doing in this regard. Actually, Hickel didn't turn out to be all that bad, and Rogers Morton turned out to be something of a hero in the initial withdrawals in Alaska. Shooting from the hip as we did with Cecil Andrus dogged us for a number of years before he got over being mad at us.

By that time, I was feeling that we should not shoot from the hip. Let's be thoughtful and get the facts. I went to a meeting that Watt had in December of 1980 to renew acquaintances. I had known him when he had been under Nixon. He was director of the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. He did not strike me as a reactionary fire breather at that time. In fact, he struck me as rather meek and mild.

Tony Ruckel, who was then in our Denver Sierra Club legal office, however, had been watching Watt closely as he had organized the Mountain States Legal Foundation, which was a right-wing litigating outfit. He told me that Watt had really had a personality change and had really become a hard liner of the far right.

Once I had gotten that briefing, then, I changed my mind. I said, "Okay, we've looked at the situation. We've talked to him. We've talked to people who have been following him, and we got some other advice." We decided that we should oppose him and oppose him strongly, and we did that. But I wanted

this to be a more thoughtful process and that we should not just shoot from the hip.

It turned out it was the right thing to do. It was probably the wrong thing, earlier, to oppose Rogers Morton, certainly. It really was the right thing with Hickel because we may have turned him around in part by that process. But I think it was not the right thing to just do this automatically without knowing what we were talking about.

On Hiring Decisions

McCloskey: Another issue that was raised early in my tenure was the charge that I made a number of weak appointments and had trouble having strong people around me as employees. There's truth in that in the first couple of years in the sense that I didn't always make the best hirings, but there were extenuating circumstances.

When Dave Brower left in 1969, and I was asked to take over, over half of the staff walked out. We had nobody to run the magazine. I was the only one left in the conservation department. The executive staff was nonexistent. It was only in accounting, membership, and outings where we still had a staff. There was nobody to run the books program. So I was faced with an emergency where I had to restaff in a hurry to get things operating on even the most rough-and-ready basis.

Lage: Did the board leave you free at that point to make those appointments?

McCloskey: They did with some of the lower-level ones. They were very much involved in the higher-level appointments. The club was practically in receivership then, with the new board of directors, and the executive committee particularly, wanting to keep its hands in virtually everything.

So, in some respects, responsibility was shared with regard to some of those early appointments. But as time went on, a number of them left. I think the quality steadily improved. That did take time. I would point to a number of employees that I hired that certainly can't be called unqualified or weak. People such as Brock Evans, John Zierold, and Allen Smith, Fran Gendlin, Chuck Cluson, Jonathan Ela, Doug Scott, and Carl Pope.

Carl is now executive director. Doug Scott and Brock Evans both became associate executive directors. I'm proud of the people of that calibre that I hired. But it took time, and it was not possible to accomplish that overnight.

Assuming the Directorship in the Wake of David Brower

Lage: John Zierold was certainly an interesting person.

McCloskey: Indeed, I'm very fond of John. We still stay in touch. Another question was raised with respect to my skills as an executive. Some felt I had shortcomings, though everybody seems to acknowledge strengths in the conservation field.

Even a critic such as Ray Sherwin thought I had "a great many talents as an administrator." Dick Leonard said, "The Sierra Club was fortunate to have an executive of such experience, knowledge, and temperament as Mike McCloskey." So I'll let the record stand there with what others thought.

Finally, in those early years in my tenure as executive director, there were those who had doubts about whether I could handle public relations functions well enough. Somebody, comparing me to Brower, said, "But, can he make headlines?" This was during a time when people were still getting out from under the shadow of the Brower years.

During my time, the emphasis I placed was on making news for the Sierra Club, not for me. I remember in those same early years, 1970 through 1973, carrying box loads of news clippings from all over the country into meetings of the board of directors (including big stories) and passing out the clippings to show them that we were very much in the news and the media--more than we'd ever been.

Lage: But more in the name of the club.

McCloskey: That's right. As to the question of my manner, Dick Leonard said, "Mike was hard-hitting and pulled no punches." Even when Phil Berry first served as club president, he complained that I was taking too many speaking engagements from him and that I was getting too much attention.

Lage: You had a fine line to walk.

McCloskey: Right. Apparently, he thought I could handle speaking engagements. He thought I was doing too much of it. Then, Bill Futrell, later when he was club president, wanted me to do more speaking and meeting with the club chapters rather than outside groups. So, apparently, he had no question about my ability to do that.

It's ironic that Phil complained that during my tenure, he said, I had more power than Brower ever had, but that I didn't quarrel with the board of directors.

Lage: That presents a confusing picture in many ways.

McCloskey: Well, obviously, different board members and club officers saw me in different ways.

Lage: And at different points in time also. Going back to that earlier time, did Brower's executive directorship, and how it came to an end, cast a shadow for a number of years?

McCloskey: Yes, it did, I think, for about the first five years that I served. The memory of Dave Brower worked in different directions. Some people were so fearful that whoever was executive director was going to be grabbing power and not listening to the volunteers that they had trouble seeing that I was not Dave Brower at all.

If you go through the oral histories, almost everybody acknowledges that I did work meticulously with the board of directors to respect their wishes. At the same time, there were others who were having trouble with working their way through the tradeoff that Dave was flamboyant and, they felt, made headlines, but he was not docile or controllable. Some people wanted to have it both ways, and they couldn't work their way through the tradeoff. It worked out one way or the other way, but you weren't going to get both together.

By the mid-seventies, most of the people on the board of directors were new and had not been through the Brower affair and were no longer looking at things through that lens. That is when we began to deal with Ted Snyder, Bill Futrell, Denny Shaffer, and others--people were focused on the business at hand and not the past.

Lage: That's true. They really hadn't had experience of the Brower years. Okay, well, that was an interesting clarification of what's been said in previous oral histories.

Summing up Thirty-eight Years as a Sierra Club Employee

Lage: We wanted to discuss your legacy.

McCloskey: Cumulatively I served longer as executive director than anyone else, seventeen years. I did it on two occasions, sixteen and a half years the first time and six months as acting executive director the second time when Doug Wheeler left. I will have had the longest span of employment of anybody with the Sierra Club when I retire in the spring of 1999. I will have been an employee for thirty-eight years.

I have a number of firsts. I was the first field representative for the Sierra Club, the first conservation director, and the first chairman.

I thought I might list some of the hands-on things I've done through the years in conservation that I feel proud of. Early on, I developed the first proposal for a North Cascades National Park in Washington State. It was a prospectus that was fairly long. Eventually, everything in that proposal came to receive statutory protection from Congress.

Lage: In the '68 legislation, or over time?

McCloskey: Over time, including the 1968 legislation and many subsequent things. It proved to be a very good blueprint for what needed to be done. In 1963, I did organizing in the district of Wayne Aspinall, who was then the chairman of the House Interior Committee, that led to breaking the logjam on the Wilderness bill, springing it free from committee, which allowed it to pass. It was my organizing work in his district that was the key to the eventual success of the Wilderness Act.

Lage: Oh, I see.

McCloskey: Because he wouldn't let it out of committee.

Lage: Was that when you were conservation director?

McCloskey: No, that was as a field rep who was asked, on special assignment, to go in there.

Lage: I see, because that wasn't your area.

McCloskey: It was all kind of cold-call type organizing. Then in the mid-sixties, I was our chief lobbyist for the establishment of the Redwood National Park, and it turned out to be history's most

costly park--at \$1.3 billion. You would think that would have been politically infeasible, but we got it done.

I also was the person who instigated the first litigation in the Mineral King case that liberalized the rules of standing for future environmental litigation; that opened the gates to environmental litigation.

Lage: Was the standing to sue an idea that you instituted, or did that come out of the lawyers'--?

McCloskey: It came out of the case as an accident, but it was the case that did it. I also was the chief witness from the environmental community for the enactment of NEPA, the National Environmental Policy Act, in the Senate in 1969.

Lage: Was that partly an accident too?

McCloskey: It partly was, but it was also an issue I took seriously and wanted to do. I prepared for it and was complimented by the chief of staff of the committee as delivering some of the best testimony that they'd ever received. The father of the act, a political science professor in Indiana, remembers that I played that role.

Lage: When I said was it an accident, I meant did you realize at the time how far-reaching that would be?

McCloskey: No. We understood it was something of a broad nature that we hoped would be therapeutic, but we did not foresee the way the environmental impact statement would come to have power.

Then, in the early seventies, it was an idea that I had that led to the Forest Service starting its RARE I wilderness inventory process. I took to the Council on Environmental Quality the idea that all de facto wilderness areas of the national forests be put under a moratorium on logging and roads. It's very interesting because twenty-five years later, now, we have the Clinton administration doing that very thing. It led, at least at that time, to finding out what there was in the way of de facto wilderness. Then, later, the imperfections in RARE I went on to cause the Carter administration to do RARE II.

I was the only consistent club leader through all the years that were involved in getting the Mineral King enclave added to the Sequoia National Park, and take satisfaction that that last remaining piece of John Muir's agenda for that park finally got accomplished in 1978. I also was the instigator of

litigation under the Forest Service's RARE I program on its inadequacies that caused them to start to prepare environmental impact statements of wherever they were proposing to log in de facto wilderness. That became the standard focal point for many years of subsequent litigation and efforts to save Forest Service wilderness.

In a very different arena, I worked with Ed Wayburn to persuade the IUCN to expand its categories for protected areas to include wilderness. We were a team that lobbied that through, but it took quite a few years. We have written, and talked at international fora subsequently, about wilderness as an ideal.

In 1987, I prepared the first worldwide inventory of de facto wilderness around the world that was published by the Royal Geographic Society in the UK, and in Ambio in Sweden, as well as covered in the New York Times. I am now completing the first global estimate of the remaining number of wild rivers, those that are free flowing and pure.

In the 1990s, I played an important role in rallying the nonprofit sector to defend itself in tax and regulatory matters. In the last few years, I have played a pivotal role in building defenses against those who would undermine or roll back U.S. pollution control laws, both in the President's Council on Environmental Quality and elsewhere. Those are the things that give me the greatest satisfaction, and I think will have the longest lasting impact.

I also would like to talk about legacies I leave to the Sierra Club as an institution. During my seventeen years as executive director, the club's membership expanded fivefold. Also, its net worth in constant dollars expanded fivefold too. We had a negative net worth when I took over as executive director of a minus \$300,000. Sixteen years later, I left the club with a substantial positive net worth.

I believe I provided leadership to build the Sierra Club into the premier environmental lobbying organization of this country--an organization that has been in the forefront of more successful environmental battles than any other group. I tried to nurture a culture in the club of not just taking a stand but of making a difference.

I wanted the Sierra Club to become the organization that can get the job done. I tried to attract both visionary people and practical people and to get them to be able to work together.

I tried to make this an organization that got results.

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McCloskey: I believe that the members own the Sierra Club and that the staff serves them. I've always wanted them to be trusted to play that role loyally.

My final thoughts are that I've been awfully lucky to have been in the right place at the right time. I got into environmental work before it was fashionable. I've held a series of ideal jobs. I only feel bad that I've asked the club to pay me through the years because I'd like to do this anyway.

Lage: Don't feel bad. [laughter]

McCloskey: But, in early years, they didn't pay me much. [laughter] I had the good fortune to be the executive director during the glory days of the environmental movement in the 1970s. This was a time when the body of modern environmental law was enacted and when the shape and form of the environmental enterprise in the United States was developed. I was at the helm of the Sierra Club during that time, and the club was in the vanguard.

I was proud that the club's name was in the newspaper, even if mine wasn't. I would say, though, that Backpacker Magazine recognized me as one of the top ten environmentalists in the United States, so I'm not totally unknown either.

Looking to the Future

McCloskey: As to the future, the challenge is to prepare the groundwork for the next new time when breakthroughs can be made--to keep the Sierra Club together, to avoid being split up into warring factions, to find the right mix of idealism and pragmatism, to find ways both to dream and yet to move forward, and to accomplish things that are real. I'd like to be known as someone who did a lot to help the Sierra Club make America's environment better.

Lage: Very nice summation. Now, let me just ask you one question. When you retire, is there any chance you'll stay on with the club in a volunteer role?

McCloskey: I don't expect to disappear. I want to do different things. I want to do things on my own agenda that do include some writing. I expect to always be part of the Sierra Club in various ways. After thirty-eight years of attending board meetings, though, I think I'd like to have more of my weekends for myself and my family.

Lage: I don't blame you. Do you think you might continue your involvement with these many other environmental or semi-environmental groups?

McCloskey: I'm a member of the board of directors right now of a number of environmental groups. I'm going to prune that list a bit; I've decided to drop some and to continue with others for the time being. I'm committed to staying on as the chairman of the Mineral Policy Center for a couple more years, and there are some other ones I think I'll stay active in for a while. Then, I'm looking forward to getting involved in the community where I choose to live.

Lage: Are you going to stay in Washington?

McCloskey: No.

Lage: Where are you going?

McCloskey: We will probably relocate to Portland, Oregon, where my wife grew up, and where we have a number of children and grandchildren.

Lage: That sounds very nice. Okay, shall we end this at this moment?

McCloskey: Yes.

TAPE GUIDE--J. Michael McCloskey

Interview 1: February 7, 1998

Tape 1, Side A	1
Tape 1, Side B	12
Tape 2, Side A	22
Tape 2, Side B	33
Tape 3, Side A	43
Tape 3, Side B not recorded	

Interview 2: March 4, 1998

Tape 4, Side A	49
Tape 4, Side B	58
Tape 5, Side A	68
Tape 5, Side B	78
Tape 6, Side A	88
Tape 6, Side B not recorded	

Interview 3: April 7, 1998

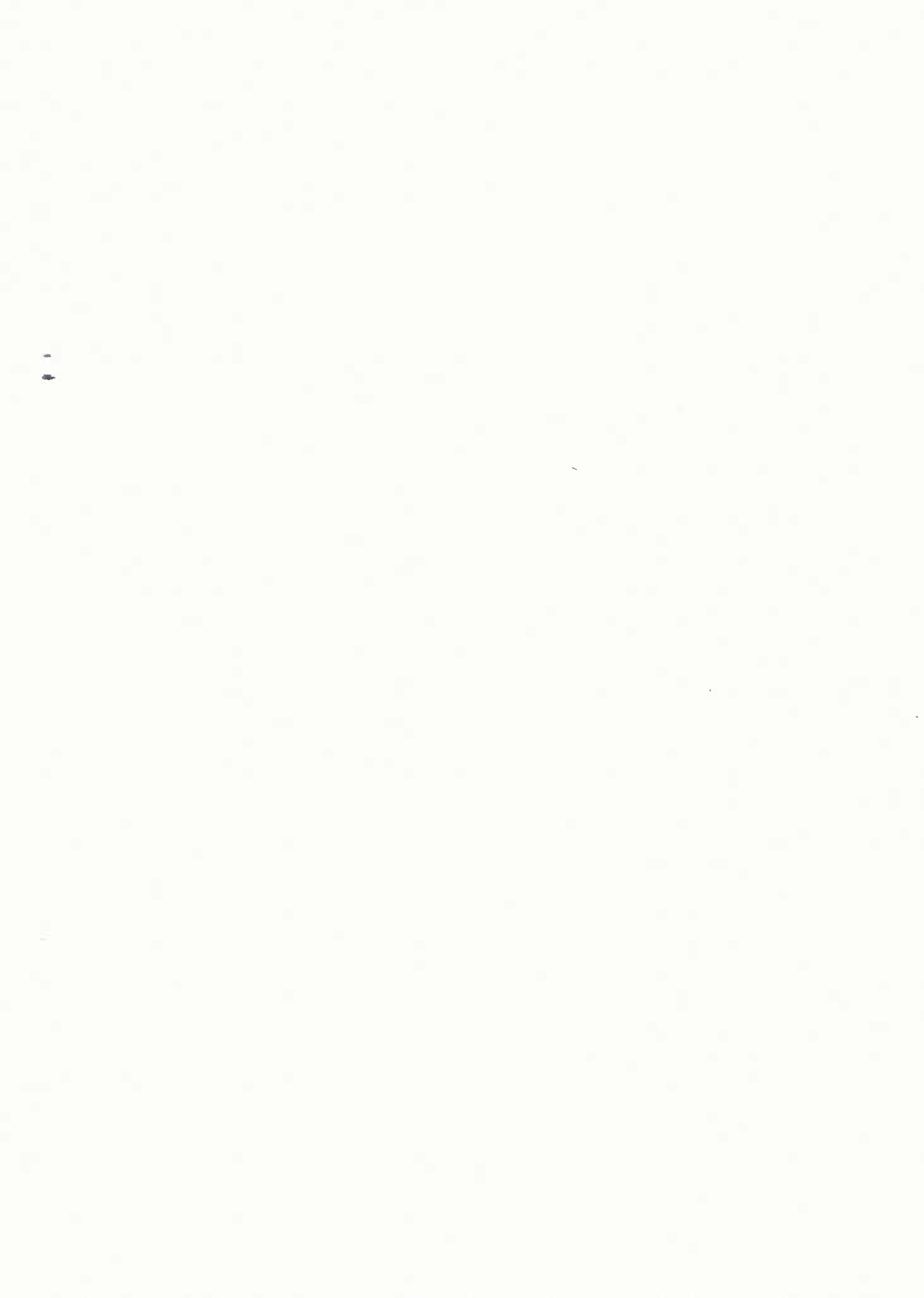
Tape 7, Side A	91
Tape 7, Side B	101
Tape 8, Side A	111
Tape 8, Side B	122
Tape 9, Side A	132
Tape 9, Side B not recorded	

Interview 4: April 8, 1998

Tape 10, Side A	137
Tape 10, Side B	147
Tape 11, Side A	158
Insert from Tape 12, Side A [5/5/98]	163
Resume Tape 11, Side A	163
Insert from Tape 12, Side A	164
Resume Tape 11, Side A	165
Insert from Tape 12, Side A	166
Resume Tape 11, Side A	167
Insert from Tape 12, Side A	168
Resume Tape 11, Side A	169
Insert from Tape 12, Side A	171
Resume Tape 11, Side A	173
Tape 11, Side B	174

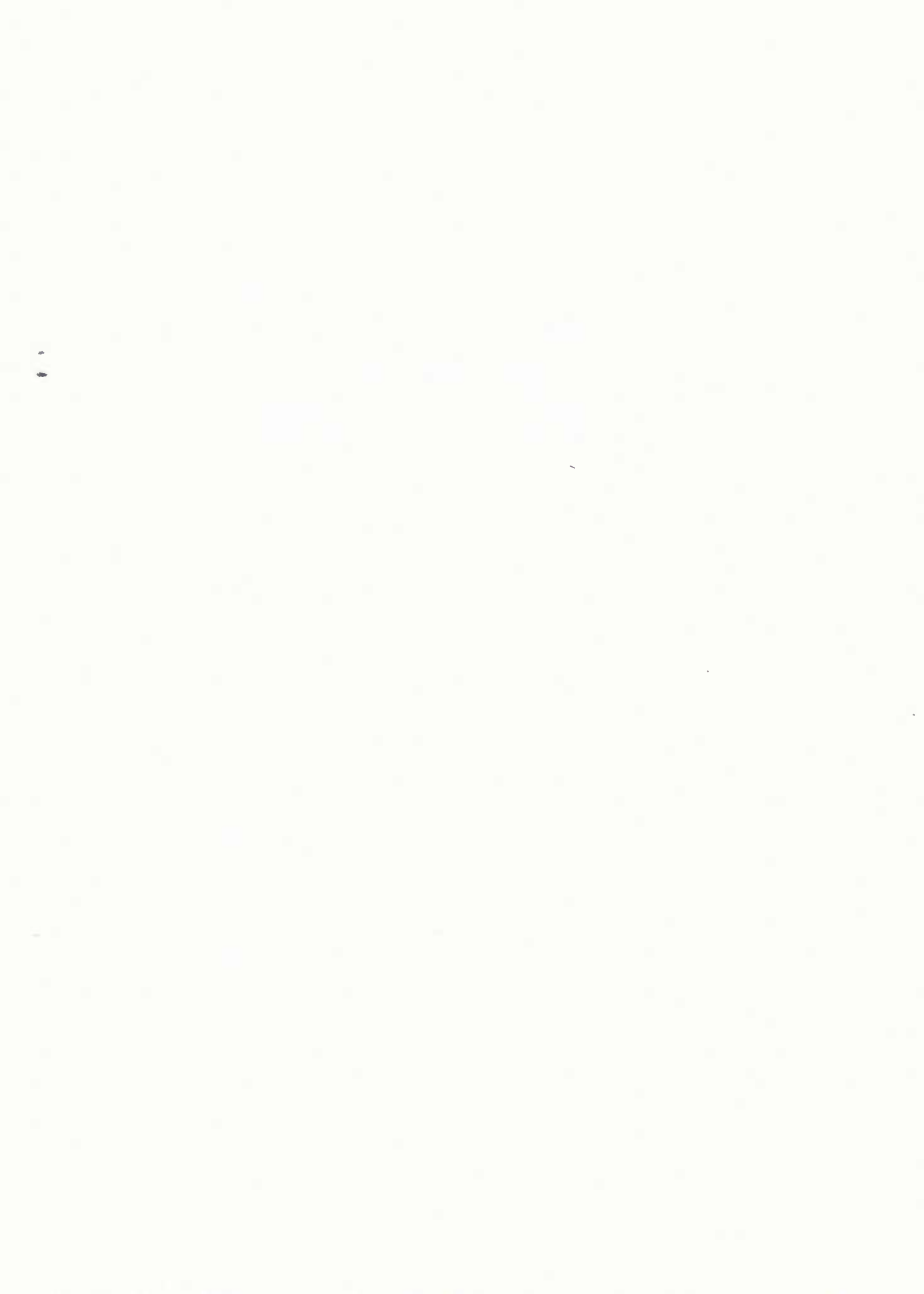
Interview 5: May 5, 1998

Tape 12, Side A	183
Tape 12, Side B	185
Tape 13, Side A	195
Tape 13, Side B	204
Tape 14, Side A	214
Tape 14, Side B not recorded	



APPENDIX

Notes used in planning the oral history	217
"Social Issues and the Environment," by Michael McCloskey	231
Resume, J. Michael McCloskey	243
Publications of Michael McCloskey Since 1960	248
Chronological List of Achievements of Michael McCloskey in the Field of Conserving and Protecting the Environment (January 1999)	268



Date: Tue, 23 Dec 97 16:25:55 PST 217
From: mike.mccloskey@sfsierra.sierraclub.org
To: alage@library.berkeley.edu
Subject: Themes for my oral history interviews

Outlines used in
planning the oral
history

Ann: you asked me to suggest some themes for the interviews with me in 1998. Here are some that occur to me. You may think of others. I look forward to embarking upon this. I hope to suggest some dates early in the year. Best regards for the holidays. Mike

M. McCloskey

December 23, 1997

SUGGESTED THEMES TO EXPLORE IN THE SECOND VOLUME
OF AN ORAL HISTORY OF MICHAEL MCCLOSKEY
1981-1998

Final Years as Executive Director: 1981-85 and
1986-87

- impact of the Reagan Administration
- Watt years; impact of his departure
- club growth in 1980's/changes
- temporary return: 86-87

Change in Job in 1988 to Become Chairman

- reasons
- nature of new job
- choice of title
- helping to choose Executive Directors
- relationship with Executive Directors
- how it worked out:
 - ... "two ends of the spectrum" approach
- counseling/coach idea
- changes in lobbying role (Bush and Clinton and under Fischer and Pope)
- achievements/disappointments
 - ... work on wilderness & forests (sequoias)
- role on club history with wife
- making awards

Evaluation of Successors

- Douglas Wheeler
- Michael Fischer
- Carl Pope

Changes in the Sierra Club in the 1980's-90's

- income constraints in 1990's
- reliance on deductible funds: implications

- de-emphasis on lobbying
- changes in the Board (less experienced people)
- decline in pragmatism

Changes in the Environmental Movement Generally

- pressure on mainstream groups
- new strategies/focalpoints
- implications of maturity in movement
- decline of interest in perfecting 70's programs
- splits in movement
- club's place in the movement

Participation in Entities: inside & outside the club

Club Entities

- Board of Directors (ex officio)
- Conservation Governance Committee (ex officio)
- International Committee (staff advisor)
- Planning Committee
- Environmental Quality Strategy Team (do)
- Finance Committee (consultant)
- Outing program
- Center for Environmental Innovation

Other

- Group of Ten Greenparks
- League of Conservation Voters
- Natural Resources Council of America
- Independent Sector/Advocacy Forum
- Blueprint for the Environment
- Mineral Policy Center
- CERES
- NAC
- Aspen Institute
- Other: CEP, Greenseal, etc.

International Work

- IUCN: General Assemblies, Law Commission and Parks Commissions, World Park Congresses
- changes in International program (especially after 1985)
- Earthcare Appeals; lists
- Russian exchanges
- specific places: Zushi, Yasuni NP
- UNCED (1992): tropical forest policy
- trade work
- Arctic work

Work in the Broader Nonprofit World

- focus on regulations of nonprofit groups
- justification for work
- issues/results

Policy Oriented Work

- Pollution policy

Presidents Council on Sustainable Development

- duration (8yrs) & roles
- issues
- value
- outcomes

Business/Environment Interface

- strategic idea
- projects pursued
- upshot

Natural Value Mapping Project

- Origin
- World Wilderness Inventory
- Tropical Forest project
- Wild Rivers survey

University of Michigan Relationship

- adjunct professorship
- reasons
- results

Personal Hopes/Outlook

- possible appointments to public office
- reflections on a career with the club

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220

Date: Tue, 20 Jan 1998 13:35:49 -0800 (PST)
From: Ann Lage <alage@library.berkeley.edu>
To: mike.mccloskey@sierraclub.org
Cc: ann lage <alage@library.berkeley.edu>
Subject: your oral history

Mike--I wonder if you have dates set for a trip to California when we might get started on your oral history. I don't want my schedule to fill up (as it is beginning to) so that I won't be free when you are.

In looking over your proposed outline, I am again struck with how thorough it is. Any suggestions I might have probably fit somewhere within your structure. For instance, some reflections on the relationship of the club with the three presidential administrations and the agencies during these administrations. The transition to Clinton and the club's efforts to influence appointments and policy under Clinton.

Thoughts on the Sierra Club Foundation and the Legal Defense Fund, and the club's relations with these two organizations.

Environmental justice issues, diversity or lack of in the club and the environmental movement.

What would you choose as the Club's 5-10 most important accomplishments, 1981-1998? Your own most important (or most satisfying) accomplishments as Chairman?

Perhaps under changes in the club, your observations of key volunteer leaders; changes in staff-volunteer balance of power; changes in local-national balance of power. How do things get done in the club and how does the club determine what is to be done? Has this changed over the past 17 years?

The wise use movement and other bastions of anti-environmentalism.

The work of university scholars to reconceptualize wilderness as a social or intellectual construct.

I have a copy of your 1991 article in *Society and Natural Resources*, which gives lots of food for thought. We don't want to repeat in the oral history what you have written elsewhere, but perhaps you can expand on (and update) some of the ideas in that article, with more specific examples, and we can include the article as an appendix.

I'm looking forward to our interview. Let me know about possible dates. And hello to Maxine. Ann

Date: Thu, 22 Jan 98 15:33:00 PST
 From: mike.mccloskey@sfsierra.sierraclub.org
 To: alage@library.berkeley.edu
 Subject: Revised List of Themes for My Oral History

REVISED
 M. McCloskey
 January 22, 1998

SUGGESTED THEMES TO EXPLORE IN THE SECOND VOLUME
 OF AN ORAL HISTORY OF MICHAEL MCCLOSKEY
 1981-1998

Final Years as Executive Director: 1981-85 and
 1986-87

- impact of the Reagan Administration
- Watt years; impact of his departure
- club growth in 1980's/changes
- temporary return: 86-87

Change in Job in 1985 to become Chairman

- reasons
- nature of new job
- choice of title
- helping to choose Executive Directors
- relationship with Executive Directors
- how it worked out:
 - ... "two ends of the spectrum" approach
- counseling/coach idea
- changes in lobbying role (Bush and Clinton
 and under Fischer and Pope)
- achievements/disappointments
 - ...work on wilderness & forests (sequoias)
- role on club history with wife
- making awards

Evaluation of Successors

- Douglas Wheeler
- Michael Fischer
- Carl Pope

Relations with sister organizations: Sierra Club
 Foundation and SC Legal Defense Fund

- frictions and solutions
- personalities

Changes in the Sierra Club in the 1980's-90's

- income constraints in 1990's
- reliance on deductible funds: implications
- de-emphasis on lobbying
- changes in the Board (less experienced people)
- changes in the balance of power in the club
- staff/volunteer relationships
- decline in pragmatism; getting things done
- problems in picking priorities
- decline in emphasis on wilderness; changes in way it is viewed.

Club's Relationship with Various Administrations (Reagan, Bush, and Clinton); appointments of interest in Clinton Administration

Changes in the Environmental Movement Generally [updating my 1991 article in Society and Nat.Res.]

- pressure on mainstream groups
- pressures from the right and left
- new strategies/focalpoints
- implications of maturity in movement
- decline of interest in perfecting 70's programs
- splits in movement
- diversity within the club; EJ issues
- club's place in the movement
- its most important accomplishments since 1980

Personal Hopes/Outlook

- possible appointments to public office
- reflections on a career with the club
- my most important accomplishments

ADDENDUM

[background information; limited inquiry into these themes if time for it.]

Participation in Entities: inside & outside the club

Club Entities

- Board of Directors (ex officio)
- Conservation Governance Committee (ex officio)
- International Committee (staff advisor)
- Planning Committee
- Environmental Quality Strategy Team (do)
- Finance Committee (consultant)
- Outing program
- Center for Environmental Innovation

Other

- Group of Ten/Greengroup
- League of Conservation Voters
- Natural Resources Council of America
- Independent Sector/Advocacy Forum
- Blueprint for the Environment
- Mineral Policy Center
- CERES
- NAC
- Aspen Institute
- Other: CEP, Greenseal, etc.

International Work

- IUCN: General Assemblies, Law Commission and Parks Commissions, World Park Congresses
- changes in International program (especially after 1985)
- Earthcare Appeals; lists
- Russian exchanges
- specific places: Zushi, Yasuni NP
- UNCED (1992): tropical forest policy
- trade work
- Arctic work

Work in the Broader Nonprofit World

- focus on regulations of nonprofit groups
- justification for work
- issues/results
- my role

Policy Oriented Work

- Pollution policy

Presidents Council on Sustainable Development

- duration (8yrs) & roles
- issues
- value
- outcomes

Business/Environment Interface

- strategic idea
- projects pursued
- upshot

Natural Value Mapping Project

- Origin
- World Wilderness Inventory
- Tropical Forest project
- Wild Rivers survey

University of Michigan Relationship

- adjunct professorship
- reasons
- results

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Date: Wed, 25 Feb 1998 16:56:45 -0800 (PST)
 From: Ann Lage <alage@library.berkeley.edu>
 To: mike.mccloskey@sierraclub.org
 Cc: ann lage <alage@library.berkeley.edu>
 Subject: more topics

Mike--I offer the following topics, many of which are already on your outline or implied by it. But perhaps this listing will generate some new thoughts for us to discuss before or at our session next Wednesday.

See you then, Ann

ISSUES FOR 2ND MCCLOSKEY ORAL HISTORY

INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF THE CLUB--the broad picture, on those issues you have had a chance to participate in or observe:

How has the club as an organization evolved and changed, 1980s-1990s?
 (possible additions to your list)

- Staff/volunteer relations--level of membership involvement; change in balance of power? at local level and national level
- Role of club president
- Bureaucracy in the club
- National/chapter/region relations
- East/West/South (or other geographic tensions)?
- Relations with Foundation
 - Previous oral history discussed this thru reorg in 1981. How did 1981 agreement work out, Why the new conflicts?
 - The Lang study, the New Mexico litigation, Stevicks departure
- Relations with Legal Defense Fund

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

- What has changed?
- You indicated that club is moving to broader public/media relations to educate/persuade the broader public, away from nitty-gritty lobbying. Is there more to say about that trend?
- Major supporters--in the public, in Congress--any changes?
- Policy by club initiative
- Restoring rivers--Glen Canyon

ISSUES TO EXAMINE--which are best case studies in how club functions and what it stands for?

Ancient Forests as an issue to discuss that will illuminate many aspects of the club and environmental movement--brings in local club entities, rel to Senator Hatfield and other legislators, SCLDF, other conservation orgs. , to USFS and private foresters

Other divisive conflicts on policy within the club for possible discussion: Montana or Wyoming wilderness?
 No commercial logging in national forests--how has that played out?
 Immigration policy
 Others?

THE VIEW FROM WASHINGTON, DC

Club policy on GATT agreements and NAFTA--your perspective and role

INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM

- Shift in program when office moved to D.C.?
- Human rights campaign re Shell and Nigeria
- Population/immigration issues

Political and cultural differences in dealing with Third World countries

ELECTORAL POLITICS

In 1981, clubs role in elections was in infancy. 1980 election results propelled greater activity. How has that greater involvement worked out?

Endorsement of Clinton/Gore, 1992

THE PRESIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATIONS--Decreasing reliance on federal protection of the environment--a trend? How did Clintons adm affect this trend?

THE CORPORATE WORLD?

LABOR?

THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

The major groups, the environmental justice movement, trends

THE FEDERAL AGENCIES

Any role in selecting personnel?

Religion? Environment as religion? Worster has termed the Sierra Club, the church that Muir built .

Wilderness as a social construct??

Living and working in the D. C. area

Women in the club and the environmental movement

Minorities in the club and environmental movement

Date: Fri, 27 Feb 98 16:03:36 -0800
From: mike.mccloskey@sfsierra.sierraclub.org
To: alage@library.berkeley.edu
Subject: Re: more topics

Ann: thanks for suggesting these additional areas of inquiry in our oral history interviews. All are acceptable areas to explore, though I probably have more focused thoughts on the items on my list. But it may be that some of these will spark a reaction and a line of thought.

In general, since I moved to Washington, D.C. in 1986 I have been less involved in the day-to-day view of club management. My view has been more general and topographical in scope. As one might suspect, I have more detailed views of things going on here.

I will look forward to seeing you on Wednesday, March 4 at the club offices in San Francisco at 2:00 p.m. in the Yosemite Room. Regards,
Mike

Date: Fri, 3 Apr 1998 15:34:57 -0800 (PST)
 From: Ann Lage <alage@library.berkeley.edu>
 To: mike.mccloskey@sierraclub.org
 Cc: ann lage <alage@library.berkeley.edu>
 Subject: outline

Mike--I have reviewed our previous two sessions, and looked over both of our outlines, incorporating here what is left of the main issues, and some of the addendum from your revised outline. We can add more if time permits. And please feel free to add, subtract, rearrange as suits your sense of things. See you Tuesday, Ann

We agreed to begin with begin with club relations with Sierra Club Foundation and SCLDF, from your perspective. You mentioned frictions and solutions and the role of personalities.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH SISTER ORGANIZATIONS

Working out a new relationship with Sierra Club Foundation, 1980-1985
 (Earlier oral history discussed through the reorganization in 1981.)

Later trials and tribulations with the Foundation--the New Mexico litigation, etc.

Troubles with SCLDF, from your perspective

RELATIONS WITH REAGAN, BUSH, CLINTON ADMINISTRATIONS

You have given an overview about your role in Washington, and discussed at greater length about relations with Watt and Hodel, so perhaps

we have dealt with Reagan, unless you have some other instances to relate.

Bush administration?

Administrative lobbying with Clinton administration

Considered for NPS under Clinton

The clubs SCOPE and successor electoral politics programs--growth and consequences

NAFTA as an issue that illuminates several of the areas we have agreed should be covered:

the Sierra Club on international trade issues
 relations with other environmental organizations
 relations with trade unions, corporate America
 relations with the Clinton administration

Your recent addition to Bancroft (from Wash. office) is great on NAFTA. Lots of memos outlining week-by-week what was happening with the Clinton team, pre-election, post-election, and as president. I think it would be very useful to get your perspective on this process. We can refer to the papers where researches can find the week-to-week detail.

Other trade issues--GATT, fast track?

OTHER INTERNATIONAL ISSUES--We talked in general about your role as coach/counselor to Larry Williams, and you outlined the issues you have been involved in as chairman, without too much detail. Do you want to select a couple of issues to discuss in greater detail (in addition to trade)?

Do you want to outline changes in the program, especially since 1985
 How priorities are set

CHANGES IN ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT GENERALLY--updating 1991 article
 pressure on mainstream groups

pressures from right and left
new strategies/focal points
decline of interest in perfecting 70s programs (we discussed re
wilderness)
splits in movement
the environmental justice movement and the clubs commitment to
issues that impact low-income, minority communities.

RACE, GENDER, RELIGION

Ethnic and income diversity in the club, staff and leadership
Women in the club
Religion? Environment as religion? Worster has termed the Sierra
Club, the church that Muir built .

PERSONAL: FAMILY/HOPES/OUTLOOK

Family, Maxines role in environmental movement and Sierra Club
possible appointments to public office
reflections on a career with the club
most important accomplishments, legacy

Date: Thu, 30 Apr 1998 16:35:07 -0700 (PDT)
 From: Ann Lage <alage@library.berkeley.edu>
 To: mike.mccloskey@sierraclub.org
 Cc: ann lage <alage@library.berkeley.edu>
 Subject: May 5

Mike--

Here are the main topics remaining from our list. I think we can cover all of this on Tuesday, May 5 (9-12 in the Colby Mountaineering Room, reserved). Looking forward to seeing you then, Ann

BUSINESS-ENVIRONMENT INTERFACE--Do your notes show that we covered this? If so, it was in the last session (the only one still untranscribed).

CHANGES IN ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT GENERALLY--updating 1991 article
 pressure on mainstream groups
 pressures from right and left
 new strategies/focal points
 implications of maturity in the movement
 decline of interest in perfecting 70s programs (we discussed re wilderness)
 splits in movement
 the clubs place in the movement
 the environmental justice movement and the clubs commitment to issues that impact low-income, minority communities.

RACE, GENDER, RELIGION

Ethnic and income diversity in the club, staff and leadership
 Women in the club
 Religion? Environment as religion? Worster has termed the Sierra Club, the church that Muir built .

PERSONAL: FAMILY/HOPES/OUTLOOK

Family, Maxines role in environmental movement and Sierra Club
 possible appointments to public office
 reflections on a career with the club
 most important accomplishments, legacy

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July 9, 1993

SOCIAL ISSUES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

A Discussion Paper for the Retreat
of the Sierra Club's Board of Directorsby Michael McCloskey
Chairman

The Sierra Club is being asked increasingly to involve itself in issues that go beyond the traditional bounds of environmental conservation. These issues may generally be described as social issues. Sometimes we have said "yes" to these entreaties, and sometimes we have said "no." On what basis should we be making these decisions?

This paper will attempt to help answer this question, though only in an introductory way. It really hopes to stimulate further thought about the question and dialogue within the Sierra Club.

History

Ever since the modern formulation of environmentalism emerged in 1970, the club has been pressed to see our issues in a broader

*In this paper, two distinctions may be helpful. There is no problem in tackling issues involving victims of pollution and other environmental burdens, such as minorities. Nor is there any problem in finding environmental issues buried in other issues, such as trade. This paper focuses on social issues that, at first blush, seem not to be related to environmental premises.

and broader context. We have steadily expanded the boundaries and definitions of environmental thought. And we have been mindful of Muir's admonition about thinking holistically--everything is connected to everything else. But should that lead us to make our realm everything in the world? Should we abandon all boundaries?

We have not thought a lot about this question. But we have been acting. For instance:

- in the late 1960's, we endorsed the cause of controlling population growth and birth control;
- in the early 1970's, we acknowledged the need for choice on the question of abortion;
- in 1974, we endorsed the case made by a union that struck a Shell Oil Company plant because of concerns about exposure of workers to toxics;
- we subsequently became a collaborator with the AFL-CIO in the OSHA/Environmental Network;
- at various times, we have supported the ideals of the family farm, including enforcement of the one-time 160 acre limit on access to federal irrigation water;
- in energy debates, we supported special provisions to buffer the effect of higher energy prices on poor people;
- the Board recently endorsed the boycott against tourism in Colorado because of discrimination against homosexuals; earlier the club sanctioned organization of gay groups in

- the club;
- we supported programs to reduce stockpiles of nuclear bombs and other de-stablizing weapons and became involved with various defense issues;
 - in the international field, we have recognized the intertwining of environmental goals with the need to alleviate poverty by endorsing the concept of sustainable development;
 - we have decried excessive consumption and waste in the developed world because of burdens it imposes on the environment; we have acknowledged that this reflects maldistribution of wealth;
 - we have called for land reform in the developing world to relieve pressure on undeveloped areas;
 - we have championed the cause of homelands for indigenous peoples who want to live traditionally;
 - we have not only supported birth control programs through foreign aid, but also provision of more health services and literacy improvement for women;
 - we have championed the cause of human rights and democracy where environmental activists are being persecuted;
 - and we have begun to help organize communities of color who find themselves special targets of toxic dumping.
- We are trying to attract more minorities into the work of the club.

As we have involved ourselves in these issues, we have sometimes tried to find an environmental rationale for what we

have done. But not always. Sometimes we have simply tried to move the goalposts, or have done it to please a constituency.

Bases for Involvement

If we look into our reasons for involvement, a number of explanations suggest themselves. These may have been in the minds, or in the back of the minds, of our policy makers in taking these stands.

One. Because everything is hitched to everything else, some would argue there really are no boundaries for our subject. Everything is our domain.

Two. Some may feel that we should not be rigid about the boundaries of our domain. We should expand the boundaries as we see reason to do so--as real world cases come to our attention.

Three. More may feel that we should be open to getting involved whenever there is a logical connection between a given social issue and environmental thinking. For instance, abortion has been regarded as a legitimate, if not preferable, means of controlling population growth. Outlawing abortion may stimulate undesirable growth in population size.

However, logical connections may be either weak or strong, and there are distinctions between causal connections, correlations, and coincidences. Some connections may be merely hypothetical or speculative. Our enthusiasm might turn on how tight the logical connections are.

Four. Sometimes we have gotten involved with social issues

merely to oblige another party with whom we have worked closely or hope to work closely. We may be returning a favor and endorsing their favorite issue out of hope that they will help us on our issues. This is a kind of back-scratching. There may be no pretense of relatedness between the issues.

Five. Closely related to backscratching is the notion that we are really part of a movement that supports a progressive political agenda. As a movement member, some think we ought to show solidarity with our would-be partners and endorse their issues when asked.

However, it should be noted that while most of these social issues do fall on the progressive end of the spectrum, some issues fall on the conservative end. The idea of internalizing environmental costs results in higher prices, which progressives sometimes resist. Controlling immigration is an issue more congenial to conservatives than to many progressives.

Six. Some may also think we should involve ourselves in issues where we have common adversaries. For instance, we might endorse a strike by a union if we are also fighting the same company on environmental grounds.

Seven. Endorsing non-environmental goals might also be rationalized as part of a process of negotiating policy settlements. This kind of question arose in the UNCED process at the international level. Developing nations would only agree to higher environmental standards if the developed nations would underwrite the costs of ambitious economic development programs

in their countries. Environmentalists were asked to endorse this kind of quid pro quo. The price of environmental progress was support for other agendas.

At one time or another, I suspect that our policy makers have thought in terms of all of these rationales, though seldom are they articulated. The question, however, is which of these rationales makes sense to us when held up to the light of day?

Problems with Being Undisciplined

It may be most comfortable to avoid having to grapple with making choices on these questions. However, there are costs to avoiding them.

One. In the first place, our articles of incorporation and bylaws--our legal charters--limit us to certain subjects which are the purposes we can pursue. Going beyond these subjects us to the legal doctrine of ultra vires--i.e., operating illegally beyond our chartered purposes. A member could bring suit against us under this doctrine. How much exposure do we wish to incur in this regard?

Two. Our members joined us because they assumed we were devoted to pursuing certain well understood ends. We may alienate members if we seem to be drifting from our moorings; they may not understand nor approve.

Three. In addition, we may violate fiduciary obligations to dues payers and donors who have given us money with the implicit understanding that we would use it for environmental purposes. We may be taking money under false pretenses if we use it for

non-environmental purposes.

Four. If we drift into involving ourselves with issues which are less and less palpably connected to environmental thinking, where will it all stop? How do we say we will go this far but no further? On what basis do we turn down further requests to go farther and farther?

Five. If we scatter our shots over too many issues, will we not dilute our effectiveness? If we do this and start endorsing all sorts of social issues merely as a matter of appearances, are we not in danger of changing the nature of the organization from being results oriented into being an organization primarily concerned with ideology?

Six. If we start endorsing too many social causes will we not raise unrealistic expectations about following through on them? Can we tell our members that we are not serious about some things we say, in contrast to others? Can we tenably maintain a system of two classes of issues: those on which we make a real effort and those that are merely for show? On the issue of arms control, we found that we could not merely endorse the issue and then do nothing about it.

Seven. This raises the question of whether we want to erode our reputation for having clout and making things happen. The more that we are seen as making empty gestures and do not back up our pronouncements, the less our word will be heeded. There is a stiff price to be paid for making hollow gestures.

Eight. If we do seriously take on more and more issues, we

also multiply the number of our opponents and widen the breadth of alliances against us. The "Wise Use" movement may be stand as an example of catalyzing such alliances.

Nine. The more that our actions are driven by the general agenda of progressive politics, the less we will be able to drive politics by environmental thinking per se. We will begin to operate simply as an appendage of liberal politics. A number of thinkers believe that environmental philosophy cuts across old left-right distinctions with its own unique set of guiding principles. Do we want to give up on that notion?

Ten. Finally, we may become too predictable and uninteresting if we are seen as simply a general-purpose progressive organization with a green specialty. Such organizations are not doing too well today.

Recommended Approach

A. It is alright to broaden our horizons and boundaries over time as our understandings broaden. New times require new thinking, and we should continue to learn about the practical implications of our principles. This should happen in an evolutionary manner and as part of a reasoned process.

B. But there is still a need for boundaries. We still need to know what is within the ambit of our competence and what is not. All boundaries are by nature arbitrary to a degree, and it may seem unreasonable to some to insist too strongly on their meaning. But without them, there is no ready way of making

decisions, and there is no simple way to explain what is within our realm and what is outside. Without them, decision making becomes difficult, and we become less intelligible as an organization. The Hart survey already has suggested we have too diffuse an image and that this hurts us.

C. We also should be committed to being faithful to our legal charters and to our member/donors. We need to avoid acting in an ultra vires manner. If we need to, we should amend our articles and bylaws.

D. We should insist on a logical nexus between a social issue we involve ourselves with and the advancement of environmental ends. We should not get involved where the logical connections are remote and tenuous.

1. Moreover, the issue may be viewed as within our boundaries if its resolution provides environmental benefits in a direct and predictable way.
2. We should even be able to involve ourselves in issues beyond our boundaries in those cases where the connection is less direct and predictable if the environmental benefits would be very substantial and if leading thinkers in our field would agree. Our members should also find the connection to be persuasive.
3. We should test the strength of the logical connection

by satisfying ourselves that we would be comfortable with applying the underlying logic in other cases. Where we would be reluctant to view the involvement as setting a precedent, we should be reluctant to get involved.

4. Once an issue passes these tests, we might key the degree of our involvement to the tightness of the logical connection. Involvements that promise greater environmental benefits should draw greater involvement and others less.
- G. If we should decide to limit our involvement to cases where the requisite logical connections can be made, we would then avoid the following
1. backscratching
 2. involving ourselves as part of quid pro quo bargaining
 3. acting in pursuit of larger political agendas
 4. acting simply because we have common opponents
 5. acting expediently to re-define our boundaries to accomodate petitioners.

Examples of Logical Connections

1. Social Equity.

We could make the case for fairer distribution of wealth on the ground that maldistribution of wealth requires more

drain on the natural resource base to provide necessities to all. In other words, there would be less drain on the resource base with a fairer distribution of wealth. In effect, some hoard the shares that others should get, and that requires needless extra pressure on the resource base to replace the hoarded shares.

2. Social Equity

In the same vein, the point can be made that the case for equity among those living (intra-generational equity) has the same rationale as the case for equity for future generations (inter-generational equity). In both cases, someone is using up shares that others have a claim to. The net result is not only poorer people, but a poorer environment as a result of needless depletion.

3. Social Equity-International

A case can be made for addressing problems of poverty in given situations in developing countries because desperately poor people are more likely to abuse their immediate environment because they cannot afford to spare vegetation and prevent pollution. They may also invade virgin areas to convert them to farms. On the other hand, their overall rate of consumption and drain upon resources is low.

4. Family Farms

It has been argued that protection of family farms

advances environmental goals because such producers are less likely than agro-businesses to use chemicals and energy in excessive amounts. They will tend to have greater long-term commitments to protection of their land and good husbandry.

5. Jobs

We may have some reason to question the trend toward large-scale automation because it substitutes energy intensity for labor intensity. Thus, we might have a basis for working with unions. We clearly do on workplace health issues involving toxics and pollution.

Conclusion

This paper is only intended to stimulate discussion of this question. Further discussion may well bring additional ideas to the fore which may provide a better basis for grappling with the question of how we decide which social issues to involve ourselves with. We may want to set up a process for developing a guiding policy, or develop an initial guideline or two.

===

1/99

RESUME

J. Michael McCloskey

Address: Sierra Club
 408 C Street N.E.
 Washington, D.C. 20002
 202/675-6279

Present Professional Positions

Chairman, Sierra Club (since 1985)

Director, Natural Value Mapping Project
 (Sierra Club)

Adjunct Professor of Public Policy
 School of Natural Resources and the Environment
 University of Michigan

Voluntary Positions

Boards of Directors:

- Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES)
- Mineral Policy Center, Chairman
- OMB Watch
- Sierra Club, ex officio

Boards of Advisors:

- Alaska Conservation Foundation
- Arbor Day Foundation
- Aspen Institute's Program on Energy, Environment, and the Economy
- California Wilderness Coalition
- Committee for a National Institute for the Environment
- Defense Environmental Security Awards Panel (DOD)
- Journal of Law and Litigation

- Sol Feinstone Awards Committee
- Green Corps
- Discover Magazine's Awards Panel
(Environmental Technology)

Committees:

- Independent Sector, Government Relations
- Sierra Club, Conservation Governance, ex officio

Past Service

Board of Directors/Advisors:

- American Committee on International Conservation, Vice Chairman (1989-92)
- Advocacy Forum, Chairman
- Blueprint for the Environment (1988)
- Center for California Public Affairs
- Council on Economic Priorities
- Environmental Agenda for the Future (1984)
- Environmental History Society
- Environmental Task Force
- Eco-Justice Working Group
- Green Seal
- Independent Sector
- Institute for Ecology
- Joint Center for Urban Environmental Affairs
- League of Conservation Voters
- National Advisory Committee on Trade (EPA)
- Natural Resources Council of America, Chairman (1992-3)
- North Cascades Conservation Council
- OSHA/Environmental Conference, Co-Chairman
- Pollution Liability Project
- President's Environmental and Conservation Challenge Awards Panel (1991-92)
- Project on Nonprofit Advocacy (UECU)
- Public Interest Economics Foundation
- RESOLVE
- Sun Day celebration
- Urban Environmental Conference
- U.S. Committee for the World Heritage Program
- Western Forest Environmental Discussion Group, Co-Chairman

Public Policy Projects

Current:

President's Council on Sustainable Development
(liaison); co-Chairman: Environmental Management
Task Force (1987-8)

Commission on National Parks and
Protected Areas (IUCN)

Commission on Law and Policy (IUCN)
Vice Chairman (1978-1988)

Collegium Ramazzini (occupational health)

Past:

Academy of Natural Sciences:

Environmental Assessment Council

Commission for a National Agenda

for the Eighties (President Carter: 1979-80)

Ford Foundation Energy Policy Project (1974-5)

National Coal Policy Project (1977-8);

Co-Chairman Mining Task Force

National Petroleum Council (1970s):

--panel on strategic oil reserves

--panel on enhanced oil recovery

National Research Council:

--Committee on Surface Mining and Reclamation;

Co-Chairman of Environmental Group (1979)

--Panel on Geothermal Energy (1972)

Russian-American Environmental Exchange (1979,
1988, 1990)

Recognition/Awards

Listed in Backpacker magazine as "one of
the ten top environmentalists in the
United States" (January 1988)

John Muir Award of the Sierra Club (1979)

Special Commendation Award/Sierra Club
(1987)

Lifetime Achievement Award from The Wild
Foundation (1998)

Award named after him (Sierra Club): for distinguished professional staff work in conservation (Michael McCloskey Award)

Global 500 Award (UNEP) (1992)

California Conservation Council Award
[professional service] (1969)

Distinguished Bay Area Citizen (1990)

Listed in Who's Who in America, Leaders in American Conservation, Dictionary of International Biography, Who's Who in California

Publications

Frequent contributor to professional publications in the environmental field (see publication list)

Education

B.A., Harvard College, 1956 (magna cum laude; Detur Award)
J.D., University of Oregon, 1961

Military Service

U.S. Army, Artillery (1956-58); final rank of Captain

Past Professional Positions

Acting Executive Director, 1986-1987
Executive Director, Sierra Club, 1969-85
Conservation Director, 1966-1969
Assistant to the President (Sierra Club), 1965-66
Field Representative in the Pacific Northwest (for Sierra Club, Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs, et al.), 1961-64

Accomplishments: Highlights (see list of specifics)

During his years as Executive Director, most of America's environmental programs were put into place, with the Club recognized as a leading force in causing that to happen.

Under his leadership as Executive Director, the Sierra Club's membership and net worth grew five-fold (1969-85).

Initiated ideas that led to the first Forest Service inventory of roadless areas (RARE I).

Originator of the first world wilderness inventory and inventory of wild rivers of the world (1987-98).

Key draftsman of the U.N. Charter for Nature (1983).

Principal legislative advocate for the establishment of the Redwood National Park [world's most expensive national park] (1965-8).

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June 17, 1998

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###

M. McCloskey
January 1999

Chronological List of Achievements of Michael McCloskey
in the Field of Conserving and Protecting the Environment

[asterisks indicate most significant contributions]

1960's

- Landscape Management Policy for the High Mountain Areas of the National Forests of the Pacific Northwest (1962)
- Westside additions to the Mt. Jefferson Wilderness Area in the central Oregon Cascades (e.g., lower Pamela Creek) (1963)
- Protection of the immediate area around Waldo Lake in the central Oregon Cascades
- * Development of the first fully developed proposal for a North Cascades National Park (1963) in Washington State (eventually everything in that proposal received statutory protection from Congress)
- Developed momentum behind a vision for expanding the Alpine Lakes Wilderness in the central Washington Cascades (1963)
- Developed first fully developed proposal for Sky Lakes Wilderness in Oregon Cascades south of Crater Lake NP (final decision closely resembled my proposal)
- Played key role in arresting movement toward dismembering Idaho Primitive Area in central Idaho (1964)
- * Broke the political resistance to reporting The Wilderness Act out of the key committee in the House of Representatives where it had been bottled up (through organizing in the district of the chairman of the Interior Committee) (1963-4)
- Wrote classic law review article on the history of The Wilderness Act (1966) (Oregon Law Review)
- * Chief legislative advocate for the establishment of the Redwood National Park in northern California (1968) (history's most costly park)
- Secured westside enlargements of the Desolation Valley Wilderness in California west of Lake Tahoe (e.g., Lyons Creek)
- Drafted legislation that eventually provided the basis for the Marine Sanctuary system (Engel bill that was incorporated as Title III of the Ocean Dumping Act of 1972)
- Developed idea that broke the deadlock over establishing a California-Nevada Commission to protect the basin of Lake Tahoe from excessive development (California commission within a larger commission) (1969)

- * Initiated the first litigation that liberalized rules of standing for future environmental litigation (Mineral King case; 1969)
- * Delivered the key statement of support for enactment of the National Environmental Policy Act (1969)

1970's

- * Provided the impetus that led to the Forest Service's RARE I inventory of potential wilderness areas (1971) (through proposing to CEQ that all de facto areas be put under a moratorium on logging and roads)
- * Provided the leadership that eventually led to the addition of the Mineral King enclave to Sequoia National Park (1978)
- * Initiated litigation that established the need to prepare Environmental Impact Statements wherever the Forest Service proposed to develop de facto wilderness areas (1973)
- Prepared the first draft for the legislation that eventually became the Alaska National Interest Lands Act (1980), including the provision on subsistence.
- Proposed the idea that led to the final compromise over an LNG plant at Calvert Cliffs, Maryland (buried and submerged pipeline from offshore mooring point)
- * Led Sierra Club staff into developing into the premier environmental lobbying group.
- * Over years as Executive Director led the organization into five-fold expansion of its membership and net worth (in constant dollars) (1969-1985)

1980's

- * Persuaded IUCN (with Ed Wayburn) to expand its categories of Protected Areas to include wilderness
- * Made the first worldwide inventory of de facto wilderness areas (1987)
- Rallied environmental movement to resist oil development in the Arctic Wildlife Refuge (1986)

1990's

- * Leader in rallying the nonprofit sector to defend itself in tax and regulatory matters
- * Made first global estimate of remaining wild rivers (free flowing and pure); Arctic region: 1992; global: 1998.
- * Built defenses against undermining of U.S. pollution control laws (1994-97)
- Secured rights for outdoor clubs to use the National Park System without being entangled in concessionaire laws (1998)

- * Initiated the first litigation that liberalized rules of standing for future environmental litigation (Mineral King case; 1969)
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- Proposed the idea that led to the final compromise over an LNG plant at Calvert Cliffs, Maryland (buried and submerged pipeline from offshore mooring point)
- * Led Sierra Club staff into developing into the premier environmental lobbying group.
- * Over years as Executive Director led the organization into five-fold expansion of its membership and net worth (in constant dollars) (1969-1985)

1980's

- * Persuaded IUCN (with Ed Wayburn) to expand its categories of Protected Areas to include wilderness
- * Made the first worldwide inventory of de facto wilderness areas (1987)
- Rallied environmental movement to resist oil development in the Arctic Wildlife Refuge (1986)

1990's

- * Leader in rallying the nonprofit sector to defend itself in tax and regulatory matters
- * Made first global estimate of remaining wild rivers (free flowing and pure); Arctic region: 1992; global: 1998.
- * Built defenses against undermining of U.S. pollution control laws (1994-97)
- Secured rights for outdoor clubs to use the National Park System without being entangled in concessionaire laws (1998)

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INDEX--J. Michael McCloskey

- Adams, Ansel, 9, 26
AFL-CIO, 32, 113, 133
Agency for International
Development (USAID), 138
Alliance for Justice, 180
Allen, Bob, 7
Andrus, Cecil, 207
Anthony, Carl, 193
Antarctica and Southern Oceans
Coalition, 144
Arctic Council, the, 146
Arctic Environmental Protection
Strategy, 146
Asher, Tom, 45
Aspen Institute, the, 39, 41
Aspinall, Wayne, 211
Audubon Society, 79
- Babbitt, Bruce, 107, 114-116,
119-120
Barnum, Millard, 60
Bass, Gary, 180
Ben and Jerry's, 166
Berkovitz, Audrey, (Audrey Rust),
12, 24, 196
Berry, Phil, 72, 101, 105, 209-
210
Bethlehem Steel, 164
Block, Greg, 132
Brower, David, 19, 26, 44, 52,
189, 209-210
Glen Canyon dam, remorse over,
88
nuclear disarmament, 10
radical environmentalism, 5-6
relations with Sierra Club, 9,
28, 60
Sierra Club finances, 12
Brown, George, 61
Browner, Carol, 108-109, 111, 114
Brundtland, Gro Harlem, 110
Burford, Anne (Anne Gorsuch), 3,
17
- Bush, George, 36, 42, 106-108,
129-130, 184
- California state government, 27
Carr, Carolyn, 89-90
Carter, James (Jimmy), 4, 118
Center for Marine Conservation,
134, 186
Chavis, Ben, 113, 198
Christian Coalition, 200
Citicorp, 162
Citizens Clearinghouse for
Hazardous Waste, 187
Clamshell Alliance, 5
Clark, Charlie Arden, 129
Clark, William, 4
Claxton, Trista, 48
Clean Water Act, 15
Clinton, William (Bill), 36, 53,
129-130
administration's environmental
policies, 65-66, 113-117
administration's relations with
environmental groups, 106-
109, 118-121
Cloer, Carla, 61
Cluson, Chuck, 208
Coalition for Environmentally
Responsible Economies (CERES),
163-166, 199
Cohen, Jim, 104
Colburn, Thea, 151
collaborative resource management,
110-111, 115
Congress, U.S., 3, 15-16, 42, 46,
61-64, 77-79, 82, 92-96, 114,
122, 130-131, 139-140, 160,
181, 199, 211
conservation biology, 55, 150
Council of Economic Priorities
(CEP), 166-170
Council on Environmental Quality,
the President's, 4, 107-109, 213

- Council on Sustainable Development, the President's, 36, 108, 110-113
- Coyle, Kevin, 48
- Cronon, William, 56-57
- Crowfoot, Jim, 176
- Culver, John, 121
- Darmon, Richard, 106
- deep ecology, 5-6, 187
- Defenders of Wildlife, 8, 133-134, 136
- Defense, U.S. Department of, 160, 174-175
- Deland, Mike, 106-108
- Donahue, Tom, 113
- Dorsey, Michael, 192
- Ducks Unlimited, 8, 186
- Dupont Corporation, 158-159
- Earth First!, 5, 187-188
- Earth Island Institute, 193
- Earth Justice Legal Defense Fund (Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund), 97, 101-105
- Ehrlich, Anne, 11
- Ela, Jonathan, 208
- Environmental Defense Fund, 8, 39, 134-135, 184-186
- Environmental Education Act, 48
- environmental justice, 187, 192-195, 198
- environmental movement
 - conservative attacks on, 41-43, 134-135, 179
 - corporate accountability, and, 163-173
 - divisions within, 8, 134-136, 183-191, 194-195
 - goals and trends, 56-57, 125
 - government appointments, and, 118-121
 - government regulation of, 41-46, 178-181
 - international conservation, and, 141-143, 157-161
 - labor issues, 32
 - environmental movement (cont.)
 - science, and, 149-150
 - social justice issues, 89, 113, 161, 163-164, 167
 - trade issues, 32, 127-128, 133-136
 - environmental problems
 - arctic, of the, 37-38, 145-148
 - global warming, 31-32
 - life-cycle of products, and, 126-127
 - market solutions to, 8, 39-41
 - persistent organic pollutants, 148-152
 - pollution, 189-190
- Environmental Protection Agency, United States, 3, 8, 31-32, 36, 39, 48, 108-110, 115, 128, 166
- Erikson, Mary Ann, 196
- Evans, Brock, 14, 67, 207-208
- Falkenberry, Rebecca, 49
- Federal Election Commission, 42, 178
- Fischer, Michael, 25-30, 36, 43, 50, 198
- Fisher, Fred, 105
- Fontaine, Joe, 60-61
- Foreman, Dave, 188
- Forest Service, U.S., 52, 60-63, 67, 212-213
- Forest Stewardship Council, 169
- Frank, Barney, 141
- Friends of the Earth, 144
- Futrell, Bill, 197, 200, 210
- Ganados del Valle, 99
- General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), 127-128
- Gendlin, Fran, 196, 208
- General Motors, 111, 164, 166
- Gibbs, Lois, 5, 187-188
- Global Forests Project, 144
- Goldstein, Neil, 197
- Gore, Al, 65, 108-111, 113-116

- Gorsuch, Anne (Anne Burford), 3, 17
- Graham, Ray, 99
- Green Group, the, 7, 135. See also Group of Ten
- Greenpeace, 5, 136, 184, 187-188
- Greens, the U.S., 5
- Greenseal, 169
- Group of Ten, 6-8, 135. See also Green Group, the
- Hair, Jay, 136
- Hanson, Chad, 64, 66-68, 72-73, 83, 189, 191
- Hanson, Jaydee, 200
- Harmon, Gayle, 45
- Harris, Don, 105
- Hart, Gary, 39
- Harvard University, 41, 159, 161
- Hatfield, Mark, 60
- Hattoy, Bob, 119-120
- Hayes, Denis, 169
- Hickel, Walter, 207-208
- Hicks, Laney, 196
- Hill, Al, 4
- Hills, Carla, 136
- Hocker, Phil, 17-18, 20
- Hodel, Donald, 2, 4
- Hoffman, John, 103
- Holmes, Susan, 141, 143
- Howard, Bob, 49
- Humane Society, the, 133
- Hunter, Duncan, 140
- Hyman, Willie, 197
- Hynd, Peggy, 196
- immigration, 89-91, 191-193, 198
- Independent Sector, the, 42, 45, 125, 178-181
- Inerfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility, 199
- Interior, U.S. Department of, 2, 21
- Internal Revenue Service, 42-44, 179
- International Standards Organization (ISO), 166
- International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), 38, 56, 141, 154-158, 176, 203, 213
- International Whaling Commission, 203
- Istook, Ernest J., 42, 179
- Kamchatka world heritage site, Russia, 141-142
- Kantor, Mickey, 115
- Kendall Foundation, 7
- Kennedy, John F., 116
- Kennedy, Robert, Jr., 158
- Kennedy, Roger, 119-120
- Krupp, Fred, 135, 185, 188
- League of Conservation Voters, 122-123
- Leonard, Richard, 209
- Levitt, Len, 44-45
- Li, Vivian, 197
- Lichtinger, Victor, 132
- Litton, Martin, 61-62
- logging, 60, 67. See also Sierra Club, logging
- Lujan, Manuel, Jr., 106
- Maathai, Wangari, 153
- Mahoney, Tim, 53
- Mankin, Bill, 144, 169
- Marks, Beth, 144
- Marlin, Alice Tepper, 167-168
- Martin, Vance, 56-57
- Massie, Bob, 173
- Maune, Rosemary, 196
- McCloskey, Maxine, 156-157, 202-205
- McComb, John, 14, 18, 22-23
- McCown, John, 197
- McGinty, Katie, 108-109
- McGrady, Chuck, 46
- McIntyre, Joan, 202
- Miller, George, 62
- Mills, Steve, 152-154
- Mineral King lawsuit, 212

- Mineral Policy Center, 20, 215
Monsanto, 165
Moorman, James W., 103
Morella, Connie, 130
Morris, Don, 78
Morton, Rogers C.B., 207-208
Moss, Laurence I., 205-206
- Nader, Ralph, 133
National Association for the
 Advancement of Colored People
 (NAACP), 113, 197
National Council of Churches,
 164, 173, 198-199
National Environmental Policy Act,
 212
National Park Service, U.S., 52-
 54, 118-120
National Parks and Monuments
 Association, 8
National Resources Council of
 America, 7
National Rifle Association, 186
National Wildlife Federation, 8,
 45, 134, 136, 144, 180
Natural Resources Defense Council,
 79, 134, 138, 158-161, 183-185,
 187
Natural Values Mapping Project,
 37-38, 173-176
Nature Conservancy, The, 8, 79,
 186
Navy, United States, 159-160
Nelson, Mary Ann, 197-198
Neuberger, Richard, 202
North American Commission on
 Environmental Cooperation,
 131-132, 151
North American Free Trade
 Agreement (NAFTA), 110, 126-
 136, 140, 183-184, 188
North Cascades National Park, 211
- Oelschlager, Max, 200-201
Oryx Corporation, 159
Overseas Private Investment
 Corporation, 141
- Parker, Buck, 104
Pell, Claiborne, 140
Pelosi, Nancy, 130, 140-141
Perrault, Michele, 23, 36, 71-72,
 110, 171
Physicians for Social
 Responsibility, 10
Pickle, Jake, 123-124
Polaroid, 164
Pope, Carl, 18, 24, 88, 98, 193,
 208-209
 activist background, 90-91
 electoral endorsements, 122
 managerial style, 18
 relations with Clinton
 administration, 36, 108-109
 Sierra Club environmental
 strategies, 15-16, 34, 76-
 77, 92-96
 Sierra Club structure and
 organization, 50-51, 72,
 79-81
 population control, 89-91, 101,
 140, 191-193, 198
Project Jonah, 202-203
Public Citizen, 32
- radical environmentalism, 5. See
 also deep ecology
Reagan, Ronald, 36, 42, 107, 184
 environmental policies, 1-4
 impact on environmental
 movement, 1-7, 10, 187-188
 and radical environmentalism,
 5
Redwood National Park, 95, 211-
 212
Redding, Bill, 197
Reed, Nathaniel, 21-22
Reilly, William K. (Bill), 106
Roadless Area Review and
 Evaluation (RARE) I and II, 4,
 212-213
Robinson, Nick, 38, 138-139, 155-
 156
Rosenman, Mark, 180
Ruckel, Tony, 207
Ruckelshaus, William, 172

- Rust, Audrey (Audrey Berkovitz),
12, 24, 196
- Safari Club, 38, 157
- Scharlin, Pat, 137
- Schlickeisen, Rodger, 136
- Scott, Doug, 14-18, 22-25, 28,
53-54, 60, 63-65, 94-95, 208-
209
- Sequoia National Park, 60-63, 212
- Shaffer, Denny, 17-20, 23, 28,
49-51, 71-72, 210
- Shell Oil Corporation, 154
- Sher, Vic, 104
- Sherwin, Ray, 209
- Sierra Club
ancient forests, and, 52-55,
59-68
anti-Watt campaign, 7, 9, 207-
208
board of directors, 27-28, 30,
49-51, 69, 73-75, 86-88, 91
budget, 51
conservation campaigns. See
specific campaigns, e.g.,
Redwood National Park;
Yasuni National
Park, Ecuador
consultants, 12-13, 19, 29
corporate accountability, and,
158-163, 170
culture, 125, 200-202
elections, 68-69, 91
electoral endorsements, 121-
125
finances, 13, 16-17, 76-80,
83, 96, 213
fund raising, 11-13, 35-36,
43-45, 76, 79, 143
international program, 36-38,
137-141, 170-195
letterhead, 26
legal constraints on, 41-44,
178-179
lobbying, 14-15, 21, 35-36,
47-48, 76-81, 91-96, 121-
122, 189
logging, 64-68, 189, 191-193
- Sierra Club (cont.)
management, 16-19, 27-29, 49-
51
membership, 3, 13
surveys of, 85-86
views of, 6, 200
Natural Values Mapping Project,
37-38, 173-176
nuclear issues, and, 10-11,
205-206
people of color, and, 196-198
policy making, 33-34, 38, 46,
62, 74-76, 82-84, 87-88
population control issues, and,
89-91, 101, 140, 191-193,
198
social justice, and, 89-91,
152-156, 161, 193-195, 198.
See also environmental
justice
staff, 13-14, 17-19, 24, 27-
29, 50-51, 62, 71-73, 79-80,
82-83. See also Brower,
David; Fischer, Michael;
Pope, Carl; Wheeler, Doug
structure and organization,
15-21, 25, 51, 69-70, 73-76,
79-82, 84-85, 100
trade issues, and, 129, 140
trends, 15-16, 33-35, 53-58,
68-70, 75-81, 91-96, 187-191
volunteers, 17, 27-28, 51, 71-
75, 82-83, 144
- Sierra Club Foundation, 12, 97-
101
- Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund
(Earth Justice Legal Defense
Fund), 97, 101-105
- Siri, Will, 205-206
- Smith, Allen, 18, 208
- Snyder, Ted, 210
- Social Investment Forum, 163-164
- Speth, Gus, 118
- State, U.S. Department of, 36,
146-148, 160
- Stavens, Rob, 41
- Stevick, Steve, 100
- Sun Oil Company, 164
- Sununu, John, 106

- sustainable development, 112-113
 Sutherland, Rick, 103-104
 Swatek, Paul, 14
- Thacher, Peter, 37, 176
 Tom's of Maine, 166
 Torre, Gary, 99-100
 Trout Unlimited, 186
 Troyer, Tim, 45, 179-180
 Trumka, Richard, 133
 Trust for Public Land, 186
- Udall, Tom, 99
 Underwriters Laboratory, 169
 United Church of Christ, 198
 United Nations, the, 126, 138
 United Nations Environment Program
 (UNEP), 37-38, 126, 174-176
 United States government. See
 individual federal government
 entities, e.g., Forest Service,
 U.S.; Internal Revenue Service
 University of Michigan, 176-178
 Urban League, the, 197
- Van Putten, Mark, 136
- Wallach, Lori, 32, 128-129
Washington Post, the, 119
 Watt, James, 1-5, 9, 17, 187-188,
 207
 Wayburn, Ed, 19, 56, 63-64, 66,
 89, 155, 158, 213
 Werbach, Adam, 87-88
 Whale Center, 203
 Wheeler, Douglas, 21-26, 139
 White, Lynn, 199
 Wilcher, Denny, 11-12
 Wild Bird Society, Japan, 159-160
 wilderness, 3, 38, 52-59, 155,
 173-175, 189, 203, 212-213
 Wilderness Act, 52-53, 55, 211
 Wilderness Society, the, 9, 134
 Williams, Larry, 36-37, 137-139,
 141, 144
- Wirth, Timothy E., 39, 41, 148
 World Bank, the, 37, 141
 World Resources Institute, 174
 World Trade Organization (WTO),
 126-128, 140
 World Wilderness Congress, 38,
 56, 174
 World Wildlife Fund, 129, 134,
 174, 186
 Wyden, Ron, 123-124, 130
- Yasuni National Park, Ecuador,
 158-161
 Yeager, Brooks, 107, 118
 Yurchyshin, Anita, 144
- Zierold, John, 208-209
 Zushi, Japan, 159-160

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