

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Sierra Club Oral History Series

Carl Pope

Environmentalism and Progressive Politics:
Sierra Club Executive Director, 1992-2010

Interviews conducted by
Ann Lage
in 2013

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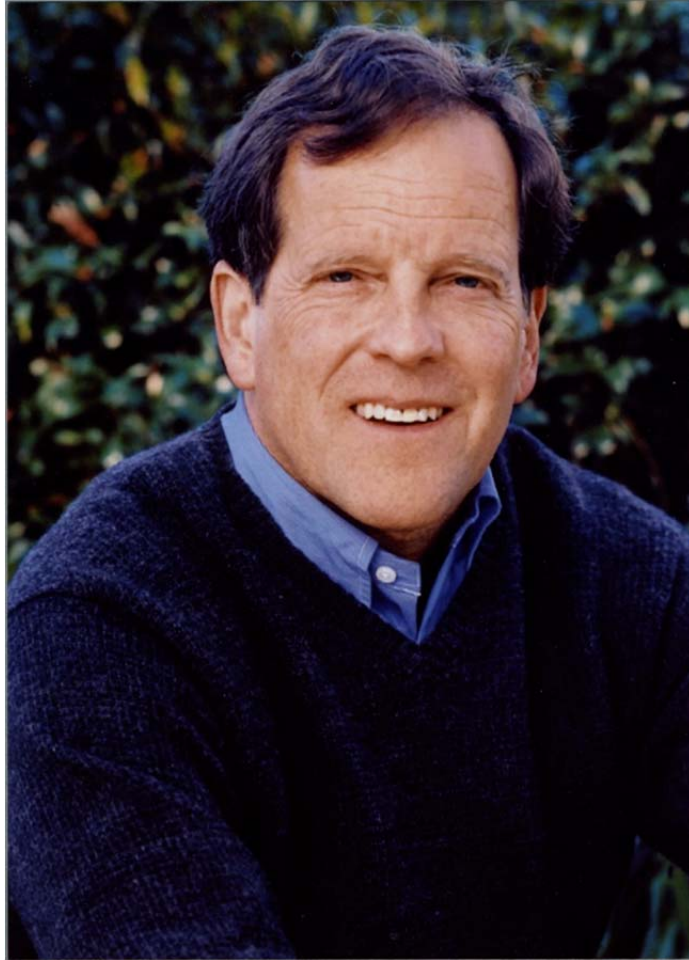
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Carl Pope, circa 2000
Photo courtesy of the Sierra Club

Carl Pope has had a forty-year career with the Sierra Club and served as its executive from 1992 to 2010. He began his environmentalist work in 1970 in Washington DC and moved to California in 1973 to become executive director of California League of Conservation Voters. Bringing his environmental interests and political acumen to the Sierra Club, he was instrumental in the club's decision to engage in electoral politics and managed that effort as its full-time political director. Two decades later as executive director, he oversaw an ambitious effort to increase the club's political effectiveness on the local level, resulting in a grassroots organizing model which influenced the 2008 Obama for America campaign. During Pope's tenure as executive director, the Sierra Club adopted global warming as its first priority. The Beyond Coal campaign was launched to stop new coal-powered power plants and retire old ones. The club lobbied for state legislation as well as federal rules for stricter fuel efficiency requirements. Under his leadership the club mounted numerous campaigns for permanent protection of public lands and defended against encroachments on existing protected areas. Pope now lives in San Francisco and works as an independent consultant, continuing to pursue a "big tent" approach to promoting a democratic civil society and a sustainable economy.

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Summary of Carl Pope’s accomplishments as executive director of the Sierra Club

Interview History—Carl Pope

The oral history with Carl Pope, executive director of the Sierra Club from 1992 to 2010, documents his forty-year career with the club, one the nation's oldest and most influential environmental organizations. Entering the environmental movement in 1970 as lobbyist for Zero Population Growth in Washington DC and working on a range of issues from clean air to the Supersonic Transit, Pope quickly demonstrated the acute political sense that has been a hallmark of his career since. One of the themes running through these interviews is Pope's early understanding of the potential power of the environmental movement to bring about progressive political change. The Sierra Club, as a democratic organization with a committed band of volunteers in chapters and groups across the country, seemed to him particularly well positioned to bring about a "powerful political movement."

Pope moved to California in 1973 as executive director of the California League of Conservation Voters while simultaneously working for the club as air quality consultant and then associate conservation director. In 1984, he was instrumental in the club's decision to engage in electoral politics and managed that effort as its full-time political director. Two decades later as executive director, he oversaw an ambitious effort to increase the club's political effectiveness on the local level, resulting in a grassroots organizing model which influenced the 2008 Obama for America campaign.

Pope exercised his political sense as well in directing the club's internal affairs. In an effort to simplify a complex volunteer component and to encourage a "more outward looking" volunteer leadership, he engineered two reorganizations of the club's volunteer structure. To respond to a shifting fundraising landscape, he cultivated several important but sometimes controversial major donors; in his oral history he reflects on this shift and the difficulties of a major-donor gift program in the volunteer-based Sierra Club. He navigated the club's way through several years of a controversial immigration debate, the result of outside interests trying to "capture the Sierra Club brand" and promote what he and many other club leaders considered to be a dangerous policy shift on immigration. And he brokered a deal between staunch proponents of two opposing approaches to saving public lands, bringing big-wilderness purists and incrementalists together to work for an effort that resulted in President Clinton's 2001 directive protecting 65 million acres of public forests.

During Pope's tenure as executive director, the Sierra Club adopted global warming as its first priority. Believing that the political situation in Washington made progress nationally unlikely, it pursued a Cool Cities program at the local level. The Beyond Coal campaign was launched, again working on local and regional levels to stop new coal-powered power plants and retire old ones. The club lobbied for state legislation as well as federal rules for stricter fuel efficiency requirements. All of this while mounting numerous campaigns for permanent protection of public lands and defending against encroachments on existing protected areas.

After resigning as executive director, Pope served an additional two years as chairman. He now works as an independent consultant, continuing to pursue a "big tent" approach to promoting a democratic civil society and a sustainable economy.

When the Sierra Club asked us to undertake the oral history with Carl Pope in 2012, we found that his busy schedule left little time for an expansive retrospective on his four decades with the club. We agreed to plan on fewer sessions, focusing on the crucial events and issues and illustrating the trajectory of the club and the environmental movement during his career. We recorded the oral history in four sessions at Pope's home in San Francisco in March and April of 2013. Once the interviews were transcribed and reviewed in our office, Pope undertook his review, making only a few changes in the transcript.

With the addition of the oral history of Carl Pope, the Sierra Club Oral History Series at the Bancroft Library now includes accounts from 112 volunteer leaders and staff members active in the club for more than a century. Varying from 1 to 35 hours in length, they document the many aspects of Sierra Club activities and concerns over the years, including protection of public lands and wilderness areas; safeguarding water and air quality; promoting environmentally sound energy and climate policies; and attending to the "explore and enjoy" aspects of its mission through a robust outings program.

The full-text transcripts and videoclips from the Carl Pope oral history and others in the Oral History Center's collection of Sierra Club interviews can be found online at <http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/collections/subjectarea/natres/sierraclub.html>. The Bancroft Library holds the records of the Sierra Club and an extensive collection of Sierra Club members' papers. It is also the repository for the records and papers of many other environmental activists and organizations.

The Oral History Center of the Bancroft Library, formerly the Regional Oral History Office, was established in 1954. The center conducts, teaches, analyzes, and archives oral and video history documents in a broad variety of subject areas critical to the history of California and the United States. The center is under the direction of Neil Henry and the administrative direction of Elaine Tennant, director of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Ann Lage
Interviewer
Director, Sierra Club Oral History Project

Berkeley, California
November 2014

Interview 1: March 25, 2013

[Audiofile 1]

Lage: Today is March 25, 2013, and this is the first interview, long awaited, with Carl Pope, about his career as an environmental advocate, focusing on the Sierra Club. Carl, let's start with the personal background, kind of what made you who you are and how you evolved over time. First, I don't have a birth date or place or anything about your family.

01-00:00:32

Pope: Okay. Well, I was born, actually, in San Francisco, at the end of World War II [May 1945], because my father's ship was being outfitted in the Stockton navy yard. But I grew up in the suburbs outside Washington DC after World War II, and did not, at that point, think of myself as an environmentalist. I don't think the concept had been widely spread, outside of California.

Lage: And your parents, what were their occupations?

01-00:01:01

Pope: My father was a lawyer for the Rural Electrification Administration; my mother worked for various nonprofit educational organizations in Washington. I think the one thing in my upbringing that I would say probably had something to do with what happened later was that almost all of the places where I went to play in the outdoors when I was in elementary school were gone by the time I graduated from high school. They had all been developed. So I was part of that first wave of suburban development.

Lage: Were these areas nature areas, as we think of them, or just sort of undeveloped suburban outskirts?

01-00:01:42

Pope: No, these were just wooded areas. These were probably all old Maryland farms that had ceased to be useful for corn sometime earlier, and had grown up in second-growth eastern woodland. But they were great places to play. And they were all gone.

Lage: And did that strike you at the time?

01-00:02:00

Pope: Yes, that did strike me at the time. I don't think I drew any conclusions, but it struck me. I was aware of a sense of loss. I was going to go into international development work. I decided that when I was in high school, and when I went to college, I majored in international development, at Harvard.

Lage: What drew you into that area, as really a quite young person?

01-00:02:22

Pope: I don't know. I was just interested.

Lage: Did you go to public schools or private schools?

01-00:02:25

Pope: I went to public schools. In that era in the United States, nobody went to private schools for academic reasons. You went to private schools for religious reasons, if you were Catholic; if you lived in the South, you might go to private schools for racial reasons; and you went to private schools for social reasons, so that you would meet the right person to marry. But in that era, the idea that you would send somebody to a private school for a better education, in K through 12, was actually quite strange. So I got a very good education.

Lage: In Maryland.

01-00:02:59

Pope: In Montgomery County, Maryland. The public schools in Maryland, in general, had a better reputation than the ones in Virginia, which is why my parents moved to Maryland instead of to Virginia. But that phenomenon of the fact that you just moved into a decent county if you wanted a good education was quite widespread across the United States. It wasn't so true in New England and it wasn't so true in the Deep South, for different reasons. In New England, there were too many Catholic schools; and in the Deep South, you had the racial issues.

Lage: Right.

01-00:03:34

Pope: So now, in today's world—at least in the Bay Area—people are worried about what kindergarten they get their kids into.

Lage: Sometimes preschool.

01-00:03:42

Pope: It's weird, freaky, and very unpleasant.

Lage: Yeah, yeah.

01-00:03:47

Pope: So I was interested, for whatever reason, in international development. It was probably the era. We were in the Cold War and the Third World was very important to the future of the United States, and these countries had just come out of colonialism, and there were world leaders like [Gamal Abdel] Nasser and Sukarno and [Jawaharlal] Nehru and [Habib] Bourguiba, of Tunisia, who were big figures in my living room, growing up. So that was probably part of it. I went to Harvard, and in Harvard, got engaged with the civil rights movement, spent the second Freedom Summer in Arkansas. Helped organize hospital workers, the first hospital workers' union in Boston, at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital.

Lage: What drew you in those directions?

01-00:04:37

Pope:

I was always a kind of lefty, into social change. I had a ninth-grade civics teacher and an eleventh-grade US history teacher, who were a big influence on me. My parents were violently anti-McCarthyism. They weren't particularly ideological, other than that, but they hated McCarthy. And they were both somewhat liberal Democrats, although actually, in 1952, had Stevenson not been the Democratic nominee, they would've voted for Eisenhower. And they hated Nixon. But the first vote I ever cast was for Spiro Agnew, as governor of Maryland, because when Spiro Agnew ran as governor of Maryland, the Democratic opponent was a guy named George P. Mahoney, who ran on a platform of opposing fair housing. And in my household, that was not okay, so we all ended up voting for Spiro Agnew for governor.

Lage:

Isn't that interesting? A forgotten bit of history there, probably.

01-00:05:43

Pope:

Right, but he was considered a liberal Republican. And we had lots of liberal Republicans in Maryland—[Charles] "Mac" Mathias and Gilbert Gude.

Lage:

And maybe some southern Democrats.

01-00:05:54

Pope:

In my part of the state, no. But yes, George P. Mahoney was a southern Democrat, and so Maryland did have southern Democrats. My parents would much rather vote for a moderate Republican—they were the liberal Republicans, they weren't moderate.

So I went to Harvard and got involved in SDS [Students for a Democratic Society], got involved in the civil rights movement. The only time, I think, that I actually did a physically really daring thing was when there was a demonstration against Robert McNamara at Harvard. We had announced that if he didn't agree to debate the Vietnam War in public, we wouldn't let him leave Harvard. He was having a meeting in private, with a bunch of hand-picked students, which we thought was not acceptable. So we came out and there was this big crowd of kids surrounding— And we'd announced he wouldn't be able to leave, but we hadn't actually planned how we were going to prevent him [from leaving]. I happened to be standing next to his limousine, and it started to drive away, and I lay down in front of the wheels. Now, I actually didn't think I was at much risk. This was Harvard and you felt pretty protected.

Lage:

Pretty protected. Did anyone join you?

01-00:07:08

Pope:

Yes. At that point, everybody joined me. He eventually was taken out, as the university should've done in the first place, out the steam tunnels.

Lage:

Oh, the steam tunnels?

01-00:07:17

Pope: Oh, yeah, there were underground passageways between the dorms. So we actually couldn't prevent him from leaving.

Lage: And you graduated in '67.

01-00:07:27

Pope: '67. Then I went into the Peace Corps for two years.

Lage: And what prompted that?

01-00:07:31

Pope: That was part of my interest in the Third World. At that point, I thought I would go to the Peace Corps for two years; I would come back, I would go to graduate school; and then I would go work for the State Department or the United Nations or AID [Agency for International Development]. That was my career plan.

Lage: Were you also having the specter of the Vietnam War kind of hovering?

01-00:07:49

Pope: Yes.

Lage: Everyone did then.

01-00:07:50

Pope: You had to do something. You had to do something. So I went into the Peace Corps and was assigned work on family planning. I had not picked family planning. I did pick India, and they sent me and my ex-wife to this rural village in Eastern India, to work on family planning.

Lage: Why did you pick India?

01-00:08:12

Pope: I had worked the previous summer for the Peace Corps, reading, as an internship, the reports from the first couple hundred Peace Corps groups around the world, and the ones who went to India seemed to have a particularly good time. That turned out to be an artifact. I had a good time; my group did not have a good time.

Lage: When you say a good time, you mean a happy time?

01-00:08:38

Pope: Rewarding.

Lage: Rewarding, rewarding.

01-00:08:38

Pope: Rewarding. Rewarding and happy, glad they did it. Not [happy] like in New Orleans. But I spent two years in India and came away with the conclusion

that I could not actually spend my life in a foreign policy career, because in places like India— I was in a place where people were actually starving to death. And they were starving to death because the people who ran that part of India didn't care; and I couldn't do anything about it legitimately, because I wasn't an Indian. I found myself in a place where, when I stirred up trouble—which was something I liked to do—in India, I wasn't the one who got in trouble. Somebody I was working with got in trouble. And I realized that was not ethically okay.

Lage: You had kind of protective cover.

01-00:09:37

Pope: Yeah, and that wasn't okay. You can't be a troublemaker if you're operating inside an expatriate bubble.

Lage: Just tell me a little bit more about liking to be a troublemaker, since it came up. Is this a trait that is part of your self-definition, or you just threw that out?

01-00:09:57

Pope: Well, it wasn't part of my conscious definition; but if I look back, that is certainly what I've done, so I have to say— I was not a troublesome child. I was actually a very straight-arrow kid. But I was always a straight-arrow kid because my parents didn't ever ask me to do anything that bothered me ethically, so it was fairly easy. I liked to be let alone and I discovered quickly, with my parents, that as long as I stayed in the middle of the road, I could drive as fast as I wanted. It was only when I started wandering off onto the edge of the road that they would pull me up short. Nobody would've said I was a troublesome child; but on the other hand, a great many people would say I've been a troublesome adult.

Lage: Right. Maybe you were showing some political strategy, even then.

01-00:10:51

Pope: Even then. That's possible.

Lage: So in India, you found you couldn't be a troublemaker in the Peace Corps, it seems.

01-00:10:58

Pope: Well, I could be, but then there was this ethical problem because the trouble didn't come down on your head. So I came back not sure what I was going to do. I'd decided I couldn't work for AID. To be honest, I looked at the roles that people in AID played, and they were kind of out of touch with what was really happening on the ground. That wasn't because they wanted to be, but it was just the nature of— It was hard enough for me, as an American, at the village level, to understand everything that was going on, because I wasn't Indian. But at least I could see what was happening. I, for example, knew that there were eight AID Jeeps sitting on cement blocks behind the hospital. AID

thought there were eight Jeeps going out and doing rural medical delivery, because that's what the bureaucracy of the Bihar state health department was telling them. I realized I didn't want to be in that kind of a position. So I wasn't sure what I was going to do. At that point, I'd spent four years studying it in college and then I spent two years in the Peace Corps. I had six years invested in this field, and that seems like a lot.

Lage: When you're that age, especially.

01-00:12:11

Pope: Exactly.

Lage: Did the family planning part grab you?

01-00:12:14

Pope: Well, it didn't grab me initially, but it then was very important in what happened later on, because I came back and decided I would be a foreign correspondent. That was plan B. And I talked with various newspaper reporters about how you became a foreign correspondent and they said, well, there were several ways. One was, you went to Rochester and worked on the police beat, as a reporter—which would probably have been the honest way to do it, but that didn't appeal to me. The other way was you went to graduate school and got a degree and tried to get a job directly in the foreign part of the newspaper business. I decided that was better. I applied to graduate schools; I got into graduate schools.

But it was October, so I had eleven months that I had to do something with. My parents were living in the DC suburbs, so I needed to find a job in Washington for eleven months. I started going around, looking for jobs in Washington, and I discovered that because I had spent two years doing family planning in India, I was suddenly now a population person. But it was not what I had planned to be, and I had no particular passion about that issue at that moment; but that was what people would look at me—I would go in and [they would say], “Oh, population; we don't have any jobs for population people.” Or, we do, and then they would consider you. It was right before the first Earth Day. We were cranking up. It was October of 1969, and we're cranking up to Earth Day 1970.

There was an organization called Zero Population Growth, which had just opened a Washington office, and I got offered a job working in their lobbying office, for \$50 a week—which wasn't much money, even then. But I was the only person in the office who actually had any population knowledge at all. I was actually an expert, by the standards of that time. I was one of the fifteen or twenty people in Washington who knew the most about this subject. Several weeks after I got the job, the guy who hired me—a guy named Garrett De Bell, who had written, for David Brower, the Earth Day handbook [*The Environmental Handbook* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1970)]. The Earth

Day handbook suddenly became this massive bestseller; and Garrett, as its author, became a hot college campus speaker. He decided he would much rather give speeches at college campuses than run the lobbying office of ZPG, so he left and I ended up, two weeks after I was hired, running this office.

Lage: Running the lobbying office? Because you didn't have lobbying experience.

01-00:14:54

Pope: No, but I'd grown up outside of Washington. I actually knew a lot about what it was really about, because I'd read the *Washington Post* and I didn't have some illusion that Congress was this great debating society. I was having a good time running this lobbying office, so when the time came to go to graduate school, I wrote Princeton and said, "I'll be back in a year." Then a year later, I was having *way* too much fun and so I never went to graduate school. So I came into the environmental movement because I was defined as a population person.

Lage: Interesting.

01-00:15:24

Pope: But in 1970, in the environmental movement, there were a whole bunch of new organizations. There was Friends of the Earth; there was Environmental Action, which became the Environmental Policy Institute, which then eventually merged back with Friends of the Earth; and the Sierra Club was beginning to gear up its Washington presence, which had been very small for most of the previous years. But nobody knew anything about anything, except parks. There was a real body of knowledge about parks, but there was really no body of knowledge about environmental policy. So everybody worked on everything, because none of us really had expertise. I read one book on the Clean Air Act and became an expert.

Lage: Oh, so you're broadening out from population to pollution.

01-00:16:09

Pope: Yeah, because it was just kind of everybody was doing everything. I did know how to lobby, because I understood how Washington worked because I'd grown up there. Most of the other young environmentalists in Washington had no idea how Washington worked.

Lage: They came from elsewhere.

01-00:16:21

Pope: They came from elsewhere, and they'd studied Washington in civics classes, which was almost a disadvantage.

Lage: How about *The Population Bomb*? That was published just about that time, I think, '69.

01-00:16:32

Pope: That had been published a year earlier. That was actually the launching pad for ZPG.

Lage: I see.

01-00:16:37

Pope: Brower went to [Paul R.] Ehrlich, said, “Write this book and I’ll publish it.” Ehrlich wrote the book, it became a bestseller, and Ehrlich then decided that population needed an organization, and he created ZPG.

Lage: Oh, I see. I didn’t know that history.

01-00:16:51

Pope: So that was in Los Altos. ZPG was then headquartered in Los Altos. So I and two other people were their Washington outpost. I worked on population policy issues, as well.

Lage: Did you go knock on the doors of congressmen? Is that what you were doing?

01-00:17:11

Pope: You do a little bit of that, but mostly what you do is you find congressmen who are interested, and you help them write draft bills, and you help them hold hearings. You basically are kind of providing additional staff support—in that era; it’s changed a little now. But in that era, being an environmental lobbyist was mainly providing staff support for friendly members of Congress, so that they could be more effective in the tussle with the less-friendly members of Congress. So most of my time as a lobbyist was spent like working with Bob Packwood on population or working with Ed Muskie’s people on the Clean Air Act. But I got a certain amount of expertise in the clean air area. Then, because ZPG shared offices with Friends of the Earth and Brower had also been crucial in asking Marion Edey to create the League of Conservation Voters, so the League of Conservation Voters also shared offices, and I became one of the board members of the League of Conservation Voters. So at that point, I got into environmental politics.

Three years after I went to work for ZPG— My ex-wife and I had agreed that we would take turns deciding where we lived; she wanted to come to California because she wanted to go to University of California to get a degree in teaching. So we decided San Francisco was a reasonable place for me to get an environmental job, so we moved out here so I could get an environmental [job]. What I wanted to do, in fact, was work full time for the League of Conservation Voters in California, which had a California outpost, but no real staff. I came out and I talked to them and they agreed that they would hire me half-time; but they said they could only afford a half-time person, so I had to find another half-time job. I had worked with the Sierra Club on various issues, including the Clean Air Act, and I knew Mike McCloskey. Mike and I had a good relationship, so I went to Mike to see if he could hire me half-time.

Mike actually had a political problem. Larry I. Moss—these are all names you know—

Lage: Yes.

01-00:19:15

Pope: Larry I. Moss was in his one-year presidency, and he had decided that he was going to leave his mark as the first of the Broweristas to be president of the Sierra Club, while he was going to leave staff people in his image behind him. So he had decided, and he told Mike that Mike had to hire a certain number of new staff people in Washington to work on policy; he had to beef up the field system in the Midwest to work on policy; and he had to beef up the San Francisco office to work on policy. So Mike basically had been told by the president that he had to hire a certain number of new people. I don't know that this was quite how Mike would have done things on his own. But I came in and said, "I want to come work for you." I was close to Larry, so that was good; I was going to count.

Lage: Oh, you knew Larry from—

01-00:20:09

Pope: I knew Larry from Washington. I don't remember how I met Larry, but I'd worked with him on some pollution stuff, some pollution-taxation stuff. So I would count. Mike would get points with Larry. I would count as one of Mike's Larry-type quota. I only wanted to work half-time, so that made me—

Lage: Cheap.

01-00:20:30

Pope: —more affordable, cheap. And I only wanted to work for a year. That was great. He could hire me, he could satisfy Larry, he could meet my needs—and he liked me; he and I had a very good relationship—and then I would be gone. So that was perfect. So he hired me half-time for one year, to work on the Clean Air Act.

Lage: This was about '73?

01-00:20:53

Pope: This was summer of '73. My first day of work was the day after Labor Day. The theory was, the Clean Air Act was supposed to be reauthorized in the next twelve months and I was going to work on the Clean Air Act. Well, the Clean Air Act didn't get reauthorized until 1977. Mike had no interest in getting rid of me, because he and I got along very well. So I actually became sort of one of the small number of policy people who were in the San Francisco office. There weren't many of us. Gene Coan was doing energy at that point, and a woman named Shelley McIntyre was doing public lands, so there were the three of us.

Lage: So you weren't back there lobbying? How did that work?

01-00:21:41

Pope: Well, I was organizing. I was helping to organize the non-DC part of lobbying. I was not the actual Capitol Hill lobbyist, but I would go to other states and try to organize public support. It was all, by today's standards, very funky and low-level. The communication world was so different. So what really changed— The list of Sierra Club activists on clean air consisted of a set of Avery labels with twenty-five people on it. Fifteen of them lived in Palo Alto. So that was what the Sierra Club had, in terms of a national clean air constituency. We didn't even have faxes, at that point; we had a teletype. You had the telephone, but you didn't have conference calls. If you wanted to send somebody multiple letters, you put in carbon paper.

So you communicated with very few people. Now, whether the world is any better off now, because we can communicate with so many people, is far from clear to me. It simply means that to get anything done, you have to have a hundred times as much volume; and it's fifty times easier, so you work twice as hard to get anything done. So I actually think we haven't gained productivity, we've just— In terms of what does it take to pass a bill, it's actually harder now than it was then.

Lage: And probably congressmen listen less to every communication they get.

01-00:23:05

Pope: Well, A. And B, they now only listen to the communications they get from their donors. In that day, they didn't have to raise very much money. You had to raise a lot of money if you were going to be a senator from California or a senator from Texas; but an ordinary congressional race didn't cost that much. In most of the country, it cost very little. So people could actually run for public office based on contributions from their family and friends, which is no longer true. It's very sad.

So I got into the club and the theory was I was going to be there for a year. Then the job didn't get done in a year, and then I was sort of there and had a good relationship with Mike. I always thought I'd be leaving in a year or two, and new things kept coming up. Because in that era, there was a lot of stuff that nobody at the club did. So there were lots of things where you could say, oh, here's something new we need and let's go start it.

Lage: You did this yourself? You saw a need and developed—

01-00:24:10

Pope: Yeah. I would go to Mike and persuade Mike that this was a need that he should let me try to fill, and I would then fill it. Then if it worked, somebody else would get hired in behind me, to keep it going. One of the things I did that worked for a while but then didn't work was, when Jimmy Carter came in, we went and we got government grants to do public education workshops

on clean air and other topics. Then in 1980, Jimmy Carter was no longer president, and let me tell you, Ronald Reagan wasn't going to give us grants to do public education workshops, so that function went away. So that's how I got into a lot.

Lage: That world changed a lot when Reagan came in.

01-00:24:46

Pope: Yeah. Yes, that's right. Okay, enough. That's the beginning.

Lage: Okay. So that's the beginning of the Sierra Club. At the same time, you're working at the California League of Conservation Voters.

01-00:24:55

Pope: Right. Right.

Lage: I notice you mentioned the coastal act, in the material you sent me. Were you involved with that?

01-00:25:04

Pope: Yeah. The coastal act [California Coastal Zone Conservation Act of 1972] had passed before I got out here, the first coastal act. But then the problem was, that was a temporary coastal act, which required being reauthorized. We did a lot of work on actually trying to get it made permanent, and it was finally made permanent [California Coastal Act of 1976], so that was something— In CLCV [California League of Conservation Voters], we did a lot of work on that, because the campaign on which CLCV initially worked was the first coastal initiative, in 1972. It was funny. I came back, and the first thing I really worked on with CLCV was the 1974 California gubernatorial race. The Sierra Club, at that point, was not into politics, except through its membership in the League of Conservation Voters. So the Sierra Club would have board members on the League of Conservation Voters, but the club itself did not endorse candidates, at that point. As the staff person for the California league, I wrote the questionnaire that was sent to gubernatorial candidates. Of course, the gubernatorial candidate who won that year was Jerry Brown.

Lage: How did he do on the questionnaire?

01-00:26:10

Pope: He did very well. I saw Jerry when he ran for governor again, six years ago. I was at the Sierra Club interview with him then, because I was the executive director. I remember we went in and he sat down and he looked at me, he said, "Pope, I just looked at this questionnaire you sent me. These are the same questions [as the last time I ran]. You guys haven't made much progress, have you?" [laughter]

Lage: Was this true?

01-00:26:41

Pope: This was substantially true, yes. It was substantially true, and I had to acknowledge it was substantially true. But I thought it was fairly impressive that he remembered the questionnaire he'd filled out for us in 1972.

Lage: I think it's very impressive. It's also interesting that it hadn't changed much.

01-00:26:56

Pope: Yes. The issues haven't changed that much. There's some new ones, but the old ones are still around.

Lage: That's true.

01-00:27:02

Pope: We're still fighting about the California Environmental Quality Act.

Lage: We sure are.

01-00:27:05

Pope: Yeah.

Lage: Okay. So let's go from how you got involved into what direction you took and what you were learning along the way.

01-00:27:21

Pope: Well, I think the reason that I, at that point, became an environmentalist— Because I was an accidental environmentalist.

Lage: That sounds like a good title for this whole oral history.

01-00:27:36

Pope: Okay. You could do that. It's your oral history, you can give it the title you would like to. There was a guy named George [Wiley]. He founded National Welfare Rights Organization, and I can't remember his last name now. He was a very, very influential social justice figure of that era. He made a comment that had a big impression on me. He said, "If it doesn't resonate with the American middle class, there's no point in talking about it." I concluded that one of the things that was powerful about environmentalism in the 1970s was that it was a progressive issue which resonated across a very broad spectrum of the American public; that you could really imagine building an environmental majority in this country. So environmentalism looked, to me, like a very powerful lens through which to try to make the United States, broadly speaking, a more decent place. So I came to environmentalism through progressive politics, not the other way around. Most environmentalists became progressives because it turned out that conservatives wouldn't give them the time of day, so they've become progressive. I actually became an environmentalist because I was a progressive.

Lage: That's a really important point.

01-00:29:02

Pope: What I did with what I thought environmentalism's importance was, that you could build a political majority— Therefore, I was always pushing the political side of what you could do with environmentalism. I was never really particularly expert in any aspect of ecological science or toxicology or energy economics. All of the technical side of environmentalism, which is extremely important, was not my strong suit. My strong suit always was, okay, here's what you tell me the biologists say we need to do; now how do we put together the votes to get it done? So that really was my knitting. My knitting was how to take the science-based policy goals of the environmental movement and turn them into politically viable strategies. And the club was an extraordinarily good place to do that, because it had a vast diversity of tools. We had publishing programs; we had outdoor activities; we had people in cities; we had people in rural areas; we had grassroots structures; eventually, we had a political program, we had the media.

Lage: The litigation [tools].

01-00:30:24

Pope: The litigation. So we had the full tool kit, and so you could try different theories about what was needed to get Congress to act, to get the president to act, to get a state legislature to act.

Lage: It sounds like the political process was partly what grabbed you.

01-00:30:46

Pope: Well, the political process had always been what grabbed me; but the environmental movement's leverage on the political process and the Sierra Club's tool kit within the environmental movement were sort of very—

The other thing that turned out to be, I think, very important in my longevity with the club is when I came to work for the club, the quote that was at the bottom of the letterhead was the Muir quote, "When you try to pick out one thing in the universe, you find it hitched to everything else." The club—and I think this was probably Brower's influence, but I can't tell you for sure; you might even know better—the club was unusually nimble in being one to follow that advice. The club was the one to say, okay, we're trying to solve this problem over here— It turns out, for example, in the mid-eighties, we were trying to deal with tropical deforestation. One of the tools that we came up with was saying, okay, we will not allow tropical woods that have been forested in countries that have really bad forestry policies to be imported into Massachusetts. We actually got the State of Massachusetts to pass a law saying that Massachusetts could not buy wood from— It may have been Burma. Then that got preempted by these trade agreements. So all of a sudden the Sierra Club found itself involved in trade agreements, because trade agreements were getting in the way of our ability to protect forests.

Most environmental organizations were much slower and more reluctant to follow those threads. So I think one of the things that I appreciated about the club was that it had that exploratory spirit, going all the way back to Muir. But I suspect it was Brower who just got away from the notion that there was a fixed box that defined the environmental world, and that you couldn't go outside that box. Most other organizations were much more cautious about exploring new things.

Lage: Outside their—

01-00:33:14

Pope: Their box, yeah.

Lage: —box or their goals. The [Secretary of Interior James G.] Watt petition came along in there, and I hear it was your idea. Does that kind of give us a lens to look at how things happen?

01-00:33:32

Pope: Well, that was interesting. Yeah, it gives us a lens into how things happen and how they change. I had a friend named Doug Ross, who had worked for Senator [Joseph] Tydings of Maryland, on family planning issues, when I was working with ZPG. Doug was from Michigan, and he wanted to go into politics. He moved back to Michigan and he established a Michigan consumer organization. He tried to create a real grassroots consumer movement in Michigan, and then eventually, he ran for senator, but did not win the Democratic primary. So he didn't ultimately have a successful political career. But Doug and I kept in touch after he moved to Michigan and I moved to California. One of the things he was doing with the Michigan Citizens Lobby, in 1980, was some petition drives. I remember talking to him, and he would tell me that they were pretty effective and they were a good way to get people engaged, and a good way to build an organization.

After Watt came in— It's really hard to imagine how his evil captured the public imagination, but it was very, very intense. I was sitting in the office one afternoon— no, after hours. After hours, in that era, you just heard this bell, which meant somebody was calling the switchboard. You had no idea if they were calling *you* or not. Of course, after hours, they mostly weren't, because they were just mostly calling somebody else. But if you wanted to get your phone calls and you were working after five o'clock, you had to answer the phone for everybody. So I picked up the phone and it was a Sierra Club member who had just read about the latest Watt atrocity—I don't remember what it was—and they said, "God damn it, you people should do something about this man! You should get rid of this man. Reagan should fire him." Then he hung up. Or I said something nice and he hung up. He wasn't rude, he was just very amped up. But there was a lot of passion, a lot of passion. And I thought about what Doug had said, and I said, "What the hell. Why don't we have a petition drive? Let's get a million signatures."

So I wrote a memo for Mike and said, “Why don’t we get a million signatures to replace Watt?” Mike came back to me and said, “Do you think we could?” Then I’m trying to remember, because Gene Coan was involved and there was somebody else who was a very key player, but I can’t remember who.

Lage: Was Doug Scott involved?

01-00:36:38

Pope: No, Doug was not. Doug was still in the Pacific Northwest, at that point, so he hadn’t come to— I knew him, but he was not a key part of these conversations. I can’t remember now, who the other key player was. We sat down and we sort of played with the numbers—somewhat naively. We had not even thought about how much it is to open them— Because these were all paper petitions. They were actually circulated by people.

Lage: That’s right. These are not email.

01-00:37:04

Pope: No, no. This is actually this piece of paper with somebody’s signature on it. So we decided to do it. There’s always a lot of conversation in the club about how much is the board involved in this. Let me tell you, basically, we told the board we were doing this a week before we did it. We didn’t have a big long discussion, because in that era, communication was so difficult that you didn’t communicate much with the board.

Lage: You got on the phone.

01-00:37:34

Pope: Well, but that was with one director. You didn’t have fifteen-person conference calls. Really, the board met four times a year, so anything that came up in between— You could tell them about it. Mike could call the president, and often did; but you didn’t really go and get board approval for this kind of thing because it just wasn’t possible. So we launched it, and it was obviously phenomenally successful; but we did have to create a whole cottage industry, of people whose job it was to open the damned petitions.

Lage: And count.

01-00:38:09

Pope: And count them, that’s right.

Lage: That iconic photo—

01-00:38:14

Pope: Of the stack.

Lage: —with the stack of them, with Mike McCloskey—

01-00:38:15

Pope: Yes, that's right. Yes, right.

Lage: —is a good one. How did they get circulated? Was it done by members?

01-00:38:25

Pope: Oh, it was done by not all members, but we got a lot of members out of it. There was a felt need, by a lot of people, to fight Reagan somehow, and Watt had become the member of Reagan's cabinet who symbolized what people didn't like. So I think we attracted a lot of people who, again, may not have previously thought of themselves as environmental activists, but this was something they could do. People wanted something to do. Nowadays, your inbox is flooded with opportunities to do something; but at that point, if you were living in Kansas, what could you do? You could wait four years to vote against him, four years later. That wasn't very satisfying.

Lage: It kind of illustrates, also, how the club seems to do well when we have an unfriendly administration. Membership rises, and—

01-00:39:22

Pope: Well, yes. Well, that was very true in that era; it's a little less true now, but there were some other things going on. But definitely, having a clear target is very helpful to mobilize people. And having a clear target and an opportunity for people to take action, when there aren't a lot of opportunities being offered. Nowadays, people get offered a lot more opportunity to get engaged.

Lage: It's easier.

01-00:39:51

Pope: And it's easier. So you're not quite filling that same need. It'd be very difficult to get that level of engagement now.

Lage: Interesting. I'm glad you keep bringing [up] the contrast, because you have had several decades to look at it.

01-00:40:06

Pope: Oh, yes. More than several, actually.

Lage: I was going to ask you a broad question about clean air and how that, again, is a several-decade issue that you've been involved in. Could you kind of illustrate how things have changed, by talking about clean air back in the seventies and clean air in much more recent decades? Not just clean air, but the campaigns.

01-00:40:38

Pope: Well, in 1970, we had a very weak previous federal clean air bill. There really wasn't much in the way of a regulatory structure. California had been working on this problem quite seriously, for quite a while, so there was a fair amount of California stuff that was already in place. With the burgeoning of concern

about pollution, which is really what drove Earth Day— Earth Day was more about pollution than it was about parks or forests or wilderness—politicians saw a huge opening, and Nixon saw a huge opportunity, and the Democrats saw a big opportunity.

The Democrats saw the biggest opportunity was Ed Muskie, who was getting ready to run against Nixon and was the chairman of what's now the environment and public works committee, and then was just the Senate public works committee. But he happened to have jurisdiction over clean air and clean water. Muskie decided that he was going to run against Nixon, as the man who cleaned up the sky. Ralph Nader had just written a book called *The Vanishing Air*, which was the one book I read, written by a couple of Nader's Raiders, one of whom was a guy named John Esposito and I can't remember who the other one was. Nader had a particular approach, which was that technology was going to get better, technology was getting better, and that we should simply require that as technology got better, factories and power plants and auto companies would have to adopt whatever the latest technology was. We took that to Muskie. We said, "This is what you should do." We had a version of a clean air act that we wanted, that would've been based on technology. Industry wasn't terribly well organized at that point. They had never faced this threat, so they really weren't geared up in a big way.

Lage: We didn't have K Street.

01-00:43:01

Pope: And they didn't have K Street. But they had what became K Street. They made the argument to Muskie that, look, we agree we should have to clean stuff up; but we have a bunch of old factories, old power plants, that we're going to be retiring in the next couple years, and it doesn't make any sense to spend money cleaning them up. So you ought to have a clean air act that has two pieces. There's the set of rules for new stuff, which should be really tough, and then you should only clean up the old stuff if you really need to, and then we'll have the choice to shut it down. And Muskie bought this compromise back to us. "Us" was a dozen, probably, environmental lobbyists, roughly of my age. So let's be clear, there was not a senior person—anybody you would take seriously today—involved. And we didn't like it, but we didn't have a very solid basis for not liking it. We just—

Lage: You suspected something.

01-00:44:18

Pope: Well, and it wasn't our idea. You've got to remember that. That was a factor. But this was what Muskie said was the price of getting this bill through. And the bill was quite good on autos, because on autos, they couldn't make that argument. We were not going to make people retrofit their cars; we were only going to influence new cars, so we didn't have that issue with cars. Everybody, at that point, thought the clean air problem was cars. That was the

big focus. So because we were getting what we wanted on cars, we took something we didn't quite want on power plants and factories.

When the auto industry saw that the utilities had gotten what they wanted and that they had been actually thrown under a bus, they came unglued. The presidents of the Big Three all got on their private jets and flew to Washington to lobby Muskie. It was a big front-page story in the *Washington Post*, that the Big Three had flown to Washington to lobby Muskie, which they had never done before. At that point, Muskie couldn't back down, because if he'd backed down, Nixon would've been able to say, hey, he's a wimp. And Nixon couldn't support the Big Three because if he did that, he would help Muskie. So the Big Three actually threw Muskie and Nixon into each other's arms, even though they were going to run against each other, so that neither one of them could actually back down.

Lage: This is very funny, really. You didn't plan this, it just happened.

01-00:45:57

Pope: No, we did not plan this at all. We could not have planned this. So the bill passed. But the other half of the equation, the half that actually was, I think, actually vastly, vastly damaging— Not only because it slowed down the cleanup, because what happened, of course, was they didn't shut down those power plants and they didn't shut down those factories; they just kept them going. They became zombies. Some of them are still operating today.

Lage: They did that in order to avoid making the changes.

01-00:46:29

Pope: To avoid the very substantial costs of building new stuff that was clean. But what that did was it, in effect, put the environmental movement on the side of slow turnover. We kept pushing, trying to get cleanup by making the new stuff cleaner and cleaner and cleaner; and what that did was to mean that the new stuff happened slower and slower and slower. So we actually inadvertently put ourselves on the side of a slow turnover of capital stocks in the American economy, which, when the climate crisis came along, became hugely counterproductive. Because the biggest problem we have is not that we don't know how to build new stuff that's really low-carbon, but is we don't have a society which rapidly, in the routine course of business, replaces the old stuff.

So that was very, very consequential, destructive—you could look back and say poorly-informed. But you say, well, but the knowledge that it would've taken to make a different call— First of all, I'm not sure we had the power. We could've say no to Muskie; he might well have done it anyway. But we didn't say no to Muskie. And we didn't set out from that moment, to undo that compromise.

Lage: When did you realize that this was not— It doesn't sound good for industry, either.

01-00:48:05

Pope: Well, it wasn't good. There's a split in industry. In any sector—whether you're talking about cars or you're talking about utilities, you're talking about chemical companies, steel—you have industry technology leaders, you have innovators. Typically, they're companies run by their engineers, and they're companies that have very, very high levels of technological components. Then you have bottom feeders; you have companies that are low-cost producers. It was very good for low-cost producers. It was very bad for industry leaders, you're right. It was bad for the Dows and the DuPonts and the 3Ms and actually, the Chryslers of the world, who were the technological innovators. It was good for the GMs and the American Electric Powers and the Koch brothers—the bottom feeders. So we actually created a regulatory structure that advantaged the wrong part of American industry.

I knew that they were screwing us on power plants. We knew that by 1977. We could never undo it because they had a lot invested in keeping it. We fought it in '77 and we fought it in 1990, but we got beaten both times. How important it was, I don't think I realized until in 2005, when the Sierra Club began really focusing on climate as its big focus. We started looking at the power sector, and I realized that these are the same God damned power plants that we were promised were going to be retired in 1970. Almost all of them. I realized that we had created these zombies and that the whole process of turnover and of capital stock replacement and of innovation had been slowed down because over time, companies that were innovative made new stuff. But they didn't build new factories to make old stuff, because they'd have had to compete with dirty old factories making dirty old stuff. So I didn't really realize this probably until—I think the first time I wrote about it was in my blog, and it was probably 2007. So there are these moments that at the time— We were making one compromise about one bill for a few years. It was one of those things that we felt we could undo; but it turned out, some of those things you can't undo.

Lage: Now, would some people say this is the problem with too much regulation?

01-00:50:46

Pope: Well, some people would say that, of course, because some people will always say that. But the reality is, it's probably too little regulation. If we'd regulated old facilities in the same way we regulate new facilities, we would not have had that problem. So this is actually an argument for more consistent— And actually, at this point, we really do have, I think, a serious challenge—and an opportunity—which is, we have in the United States, an environmental compliance system which is not stringent enough, and is too slow and clunky. We slow things down; but the result of slowing them down is simply to slow them down, it's not necessarily to make them better. We

ought to trade that for a compliance system that would have higher standards and faster results. So people shouldn't have to wait as long to get a permit; but the permit ought to have higher standards.

Lage: But how would you effect that?

01-00:51:52

Pope:

Well, you'd have to sit down with the innovative businesses. Environmentalists would have to sit down with the innovative business and say, "Okay, here's the trade. You want to get your permits fast. The price of getting your permits fast is everybody's permits have to be tougher." The innovative businesses would take that [snaps fingers] like that. I'm not sure the environmental community would, because I think the environmental community has gotten very vested in the ability of communities where we are well-represented and well-organized to hold off industrial development. And this would mean that all industrial development would be cleaner, but change would happen faster. So we would actually be in a world in which Marin County would probably have more environmental impact from development, and Riverside County would be vastly cleaner. Whether the environmental movement, which is much stronger in Marin County than it is in Riverside County, would take that deal, history will tell us.

Lage: Okay, well, that's a very good overview of the clean air business. Let's talk about your time as political director and getting the club into electoral politics. How did that come about? Who opposed it? Who thought it was a great idea? And then what was the result?

01-00:53:27

Pope:

Well, it came about because I was, at that point, simultaneously working for the club and the California League of Conservation Voters. In 1978, I read that in '76— I hadn't been aware of it at the time. So we're in the middle of Carter; Carter is president. We're already beginning to see the development of the partisan split on environmental issues. What was happening—and it was happening in the House of Representatives—was that what became the Sagebrush Rebellion, which became the Wise-Use rebellion, which became the Tea Party—it's all the same people—had decided to prevent eastern Republicans from having leverage over public lands. They started blocking the appointment to the House Interior Committee, of eastern Republicans. At that point, you had a guy named John Saylor, who was the ranking Republican on the Interior Committee, who was a wonderful environmentalist and wrote wilderness bills with [Morris K.] "Mo" Udall. Saylor was the last eastern Republican to be appointed to the Interior Committee, because at that point, the Sagebrush Rebellion guys said, "No, we're going to control this committee. We're going to control the Republican side of this committee." And there were always enough western commodity Democrats on the committee that if you had all the Republicans and a few Democrats, you could have a majority.

So we could see that the politics was getting much more partisan, and that you needed to be able to defend your friends, particularly in the Republican Party. I read this article that said that 501(c)(4) organizations like the Sierra Club could establish political action committees and endorse candidates. I thought CLCV was a terrific organization, but it didn't begin to have the public credibility that the Sierra Club had. And I thought it would be very important for the Sierra Club to be able to engage and identify who were these good candidates for the environment. I went to Mike, as I always did, ran this idea by him, and he said, "Well, let's go for it."

Lage: Was this a hard conversation?

01-00:56:16

Pope: No, not a hard conversation. The key with Mike was, when you went to Mike, if you said, okay, Mike, here's something I'd like to do, and here are the twenty-five things that can go wrong, but here are the five things that can go right, and I think they're worth it—as long as he was comfortable that the list of twenty-five included *all* the things that could go wrong—Mike was then willing to say, fine, I agree with you; the five things are more important than the twenty-five things that could go wrong. So Mike just didn't like unpleasant surprises.

Lage: He didn't want to be blindsided.

01-00:56:49

Pope: He didn't want to be blindsided. So as long as Mike felt you'd really done your diligence, Mike was willing to be actually fairly bold. So we took it to the board, and there was resistance, really, from two quarters, as I recall. My memory on this is not as clear as it is on some other topics. One, there was a certain part of the club that was still, I would say, in the— They weren't fully Broweristas, and they still weren't comfortable with the club's emphasis on policy. They were like in the outings department, or the outings committee. So they were parts of the club that didn't want the club to be too much of an advocacy organization.

Lage: They're still "exploring."

01-00:57:44

Pope: They're still exploring, right. And enjoying. They weren't so sure about the protecting part. So they were concerned because they saw this, correctly, as reinforcing this trend that was already established. And Mike's leadership was all about protecting. That was really who Mike was. Even more so than Brower, because Brower was more into the books and Mike was more into the advocacy.

Lage: And the mountaineering. Brower was into the mountaineering.

01-00:58:12

Pope: Yeah, and Brower was into the mountaineering.

Lage: I'm going to stop you right here, because we're going to run out. So keep that thought, okay?

01-00:58:20

Pope: All right.

[Audiofile 2]

Lage: Okay. We're back on with tape two, still March 25. Now, you were telling me how Mike accepted it, but—

02-00:00:10

Pope: And one source of opposition was the parts of the club that really were uncomfortable with the club's advocacy emphasis. The other source of opposition was people in the club who were very engaged in the advocacy side of the organization, but who were also Republicans, and could sense that the tides in their party were moving against the environment and that if the environment became an important issue in American politics, the Republicans would, most of the time, be on the wrong side. In the final analysis, it was that group that became the important factor in shaping the program, because we went to great lengths to shape the club's engagement with politics in a way that would do everything it possibly could to help moderate and liberal Republicans, who were very good on the environment and who were like the people in the Sierra Club who were Republicans—people like Chuck McGrady and Marty Fluharty.

Lage: Well, was that a direction you thought was a good one, or just a necessary one?

02-00:01:19

Pope: No, I thought that was a good direction. Now, ultimately, it turned out that the decision by the conservative movement in the United States to make the Republican Party its vehicle and to create an ideologically pure Republican Party, once that decision was made—and Sierra Club had no influence over that—that rolled out in a way which drove environmental Republicans, first, out of office, first in the House of Representatives, then in the Senate, and then in state legislatures. There was a sequence of activity. This thing didn't happen all at once. So we ended up with an ideologically pure Republican Party, which then, strangely and weirdly, could be bought by the oil industry and by the Koch brothers. In 2006, Republicans were wildly enthused about wind turbines. Now wind turbines are a Leninist plot. That's a little strange. That's not because grassroots Republicans suddenly decided they thought wind turbines were ugly; it's because the Koch brothers basically bought the

Tea Party. So we've now ended up in a place where there really is no place inside the Republican Party for an environmental Republican.

Lage: Why were the conservatives originally so in favor of wind turbines? Is there a reason for that?

02-00:03:07

Pope: Well, because if you live in Iowa, they're a very good way to generate electricity. Iowa doesn't produce any coal. So if you're in Iowa, you're saying, wait a minute; I can put a wind turbine on my farm and get paid, or I can pay West Virginia for coal. I'd rather have a wind turbine on my farm. So same thing in California. I can put a solar panel on my roof. Republicans don't particularly like paying other people money. That's not a party ideology. But because of the influence of big money, and particularly big money coming from the oil and gas and coal industries, the people who lead the Republican Party now can no longer afford to say, by the way, we need an all-American transportation system that doesn't use oil. They just can't say that anymore. Richard Nixon said it. In fact, even George Bush. As recently as 2004, George Bush said, "We need to end our addiction to oil." He didn't just say we need to end our addiction to foreign oil; he said we need to end our addiction to oil. Nobody was saying that on the campaign trail for the Republican presidential nomination, in either 2008 or 2012.

Lage: Let's go back to 1984 and '5. It struck me that you had to very slowly move the club into the political action.

02-00:04:28

Pope: Yes, and it began in '78.

Lage: Oh, it began that early?

02-00:04:32

Pope: Began in '78. From '78 to '80, we just put out information about candidates; we didn't endorse anybody. In 1980, for the first time, we endorsed a few candidates.

Lage: What was that process? How did you work out the process of who you're going to endorse?

02-00:04:50

Pope: Well, first we worked out a bunch of rules, which said that things had to be approved by—I wrote most of the rules, and they were designed to reassure the club's Republican activists that it would not be too easy to endorse, that we would only endorse. So you have to have a two-thirds vote of two different levels of the club; that was the core principle. Prior to 1980, you couldn't endorse; and then in 1980, we agreed that we would experiment with endorsements in California, in the legislative races. This is an experiment.

Lage: Very slowly.

02-00:05:25

Pope: So the first federal endorsements came in 1982. The first presidential endorsement came in 1984. So Walter Mondale was the first time the Sierra Club endorsed a presidential candidate. And in 1988, we did not endorse Michael Dukakis.

Lage: Why was that?

02-00:05:42

Pope: Because it was viewed that the difference between he and George Bush, Sr. wasn't big enough to warrant making an endorsement; that we should only endorse, particularly for president, when there was an enormous gap. And Bush ran, "I'm going to be the environmental president." Many of us didn't believe he would be, and you can debate whether he was or not, but it was considered that the difference between he and Dukakis was not big enough to warrant a club endorsement. So even as late as 1988, and really in 1992— If Bill Clinton had not picked Al Gore, I'm not sure we would've endorsed Clinton in '92.

Lage: Were people also afraid that if the club came to be seen as just endorsing Democratic candidates, you'd lose your clout, kind of, in Congress?

02-00:06:32

Pope: Yes, there was a lot of concern about that, and there was a lot of concern that we would lose Republican members. Now, over time, what happened was most of our Republican members stopped being Republicans. And the ones who didn't stopped being Sierra Club members, because in fact, they were very, very conservative and they realized that the club had become an advocacy organization, and that it had become a progressive advocacy organization. And they weren't interested in an organization that would only endorse liberal Republicans, because they were conservatives. That was fair. I'm not being critical; I'm just saying that the decision by the conservative movement to create an ideologically polarized political system in this country turned out to be a decision that once they made it and implemented it—which they did, very effectively—had consequences not just for the political parties. American institutions in general had to choose sides, including environmental organizations. So we all got pulled along in this polarization process, which was consciously launched by the conservative movement.

Lage: Tell me a little bit more about this conscious launching. It's not a Sierra Club topic, but— Is this well-established, that—

02-00:07:45

Pope: Oh, yeah, this is well-established that—

Lage: —this happened because a group of people made a decision?

02-00:07:49

Pope:

Yes. It's well-established, if you listen and read conservative stuff. It's not talked about much outside, but they talk about— There was a big debate about whether they should create a Libertarian party, they should create a conservative political party, they should create a third party, in essence, or they should take over the Republican Party. This debate reached its climax after Barry Goldwater was trounced.

Lage:

Early on.

02-00:08:17

Pope:

So in the late sixties, there was a big debate about which pathway to take. And Bill Buckley at the *National Review* and a number of other leaders, a number of whom were very, actually, strong environmentalists, it turns out—Russell Kirk—made the argument that the United States was fundamentally, and always had been, a two-party system, and that the pathway to power lay in controlling one of the two parties, and that what conservatives should do was to fight their battles inside the Republican Party. Even though at that point, in the eyes of most conservatives, most Republican office holders were not very conservative.

Lage:

Look at Nixon; he looks like a raving liberal.

02-00:09:04

Pope:

Right. Looks like a radical. So they made the decision to go inside and to purify. They could never have pulled it off, except for the southern strategy. The southern strategy gave them a bloc of Democratic voters that they could move over en masse, on a single set of issues—racial—that would flip the balance of power within the Republican Party. If you look at the 2012 electoral map, who won which state? And you say, okay, now, I want to find a presidential election that looks a lot like that. The presidential election that looks a lot like that is the presidential election of 1896.

Lage:

Oh, we're going way back.

02-00:10:03

Pope:

Except every state that was Republican in 1896 is Democratic in 2012, almost; and almost every state that was Democratic in 1896 is Republican in 2012. So literally, over the course of 116 years, the two parties completely exchanged geographic identities. So the South and the Mountain states were the Democratic strongholds for William Jennings Bryan; the Northeast and the Pacific Coast and the Upper Midwest were the Republican strongholds for McKinley. By 2012, Barack Obama is carrying essentially every state that McKinley carried. Without that, I don't think the conservative movement could've taken over the Republican Party, because you still have a handful of moderate Republicans being elected to congressional seats in the Midwest. If you looked at the 2012 Republican primaries, [Timothy] Pawlenty, of Minnesota, had been a mainstream— He was a conservative governor, I

suppose, but not a reactionary. He wasn't a Tea Party guy at all. You still had, in Indiana, Richard Lugar.

And even the governor of Michigan, the current governor of Michigan, tried to make some reasonable things. So the fact is, the Midwest, which was the heartland of Republicanism, never really became Tea Party territory. And still isn't. It would've controlled the Republican Party, and it would've kept the ideological polarization from taking over; but the South was bigger, so the South was able to—

Lage: Okay, so it's not really a new thing that you're saying here. It's the southern strategy and the—

02-00:12:15

Pope: But what hasn't been understood is that the southern strategy was part of a conscious strategy of— I mean, Thomas Mann at Brookings, and who's his colleague at the American Enterprise Institute? They're kind of two guys who write together a lot and I'm blanking on the other guy's name. They've written about this a lot. But the fact that the United States, from 1830 until let's say 2000, had ideologically incoherent national parties, in which you had very, very conservative Republicans and very, very liberal Republicans and very, very conservative Democrats and very, very liberal Democrats, all coexisting within one party system, that fact was— The important consequence of the southern strategy was to reverse that fact and to create a liberal Democratic Party and a conservative Republican Party. And Madison would be appalled. The whole Constitution was designed to prevent this from happening. And it did prevent it from happening for two-hundred-and-some years. But the interesting question, broadly speaking, is does this new order survive? I don't know the answer to that question. Do we end up twenty years from now, with two ideologically coherent national parties? Do we end up with three parties? I'm not sure.

Lage: Maybe there'll be four or five.

02-00:13:48

Pope: Right, we don't know.

Lage: Something has to happen.

02-00:13:51

Pope: Well, that isn't necessarily true, but something is likely to happen. But we might be wrong. We might be stuck where we are. Let's hope not.

Lage: Okay. Well, back to the Sierra Club. So you talked about the process. It sounded like a very bureaucratic process. We're going to have several levels.

02-00:14:11

Pope: Well, we created a bureaucratic process; but the purpose of the bureaucratic process was to provide assurance to people who were concerned that this could get out of control. So we were designing it saying, we won't be jumping into this; we're going to go slowly. And it worked.

Lage: Did the club have a clout, in this respect? Do you think it made a difference in elections?

02-00:14:32

Pope: Yes, I think we made a huge difference. The difference initially was just we could say, this guy is a good environmentalist or this woman is a bad environmentalist or good environmentalist. So initially, our endorsement was very valuable, because you had good environmentalists and bad environmentalists running on the same party ticket in the same states. So people really needed a guide, and we provided that guide. That's less valuable now, because by and large, all the Republicans are going to be bad and all the Democrats are going to be good; that's unfortunately the reality. Or better. The Democrats aren't necessarily good, they're better.

Now, what the club has had to learn to do—and I think the club has done a very good job of it—is that in some elections and in some places, what people really need is to be able to connect the dots on the issues. In some elections, what you really need to do is to get your people to the polls. So if you look at the elections of 2004 and 2008, around George Bush, John McCain, those really were elections [where] everybody knew what side they were on. There really wasn't any mystery. So that was about making sure that everybody who didn't like George Bush's environmental policies was registered and voted. That was where we put our effort.

Lage: And the club did that kind of thing.

02-00:15:56

Pope: And the club did that kind of thing, in a major, and I think a very effective, way.

Lage: Tell me about how that developed. Because you said in this cheat sheet you sent me, my cheat sheet, that this kind of organization helped shape the Obama campaign.

02-00:16:15

Pope: Yes. That was interesting. That was not actually our intention. That's a very interesting story. In—let me think now—in about 2004, Lisa Renstrom was the club president. She wanted to open up a new conversation about how the club organized itself and how the club could be more effective at engaging people. She focused on the word “enlist,” in our mission statement. That was kind of going to be her mantra as president.

Lage: And she came up with this on her own?

02-00:17:10

Pope: She came up with this on her own. And she wanted to have some speakers come to board meetings and address the board on these topics. She invited Bob Putnam, who'd written *Bowling Alone* [*Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*]. Then she wanted to build on that, and I suggested that we invite Marshall Ganz, who I knew from California organizing days. He'd been with United Farm Workers and I knew him and he was a colleague of mine. Marshall came and he gave a presentation to the board, got everybody like [he gasps] totally excited. And in particular got Lisa's husband, Bob Perkowitz, very excited. So Bob got up and said, "I think we ought to hire Marshall Ganz to figure out how to really make the chapters and the groups in the Sierra Club more effective, and I'll put up," I think, "\$100,000, to fund it." So we brought Marshall in, and Marshall set up a process, with a team of people from Harvard. Lisa set up a volunteer committee to work with him; I assigned Julia Reitan to be the staff liaison. And they created a kind of self-evaluating process that Sierra Club chapters and groups could go through, and Marshall invested a lot in it.

Lage: Was this to make the Sierra Club more effective in the political process?

02-00:19:07

Pope: No, just to Sierra Club more effective.

Lage: More effective.

02-00:19:10

Pope: Okay, let's go back to Bob Putnam. In Putnam's book, he argues that we're going through a period in the United States, in which bonding social capital is being spent down. We are less and less connected to our neighbors. And that this happened before, in the period when America moved, from 1870 to 1910, from being a rural nation to being an urban nation; that all of the forms of affiliation and connection that held rural America together didn't survive the move to the big cities, and didn't survive the arrival of huge number of immigrants. So Chicago, by 1910, was not a city made up of mill girls from rural Illinois; it was a city made up of some mill girls from rural Illinois and a bunch of guys from Scandinavia, who had nothing in common and did not know how to communicate or be part of a community together. And Putnam argued that from 1910 until about 1935, the Progressive movement's fundamental purpose was to create new forms of social affiliation. And that organizations like the NAACP, the Rotary Club, the Sierra Club, the National Federation of Women's Gardens—all of these face-to-face organizations, where people became members and had chapters and paid dues and had bylaws—all of that style of affiliation was the Progressive Era's solution to the problem of creating social capital. But that starting in 1960, television, the two-income family and the suburbs had begun to unravel that social

affiliation, and that somebody had to find something to replace it. That was Putnam's argument.

Ganz built on Putnam's argument and said, what actually is the problem is that modern communication technology has been deployed to create faux affiliation, direct-mail affiliation, and nobody has invested in figuring out how face-to-face affiliation can be empowered by modern communication technology. The Sierra Club was, he thought, an extremely good laboratory to test that out, so he launched this project and got it to a certain point. The club could never afford to invest enough in it to really harvest all of it, so there's a lot of, I think, unharvested value in what Ganz did. But he did train. He created a model for how you could do the first level. What we did not do, because the club wasn't ready to do it at this point, which would've been 1986— No, no, 2004 to 2007 would've been the period this was going on. We did not figure out how to link the club's chapters and the groups with e-activism. We didn't really integrate the whole electronic activist piece. The club wasn't quite far enough along on that spectrum.

Lage: But what did he promote?

02-00:23:07

Pope: What he did was to create a self-evaluation process, where the—Sierra Club groups, if you go back to the way they were, each one was very different. They could sort of do whatever the hell they wanted to, and many of them became little factions. They became little groups of people who would just say, okay, fine; there're six of us and we are the Sierra Club in this community, and we can decide what the Sierra Club stands for. And they didn't care about the eight hundred members, they only cared about the six of them.

Lage: The activists.

02-00:23:37

Pope: It was different in very different places. But you had places where they couldn't conceive of anybody under fifty-five being on the excom. Why do we need new people? So what Marshall did do was to create a process in which what made groups effective would be measured, and groups would be told how they were doing. The premise was that when people are spending a lot of their own time doing something, they do want to be effective. So if you give them feedback about what makes them effective and how they're doing, versus other Sierra Club groups, at being effective, that will move them along. People will adopt best practices from each other. And it turned out it was true. But what Marshall and we didn't get to the point of doing was saying, okay, how do you tie this together with national campaigns? We never got the upper layer of the puzzle.

When the Obama campaign came along, they hired Marshall. Or Marshall went to work for them; I'm not sure if he was on the payroll or not. He probably was, but I don't know. The Obama campaign was all excited about what they were going to do with the electronic side of the equation. And Marshall said, "That's not going to get you where you really need to go. You really need to get people together face-to-face. You need to build a movement. And I know where there's the structure. I know where the people are who know how to do that, because I just finished training them." So people from the Sierra Club, who had been through Marshall's process and who were the people who were leading that process, we actually loaned them to the Obama campaign. They paid for them, but we said, "Okay, you can take—" People came to us and said, "We want to take a leave of absence for four months to go work on the Obama campaign."

Lage: Oh, so these are staff people.

02-00:25:23

Pope: These are staff people.

Lage: Not the people in the chapters who had gone through the training process.

02-00:25:26

Pope: No. Although they then went and recruited many of the people from the chapters to come and be part of Americans for Obama [Obama for America]. What the Obama campaign did, they married what MoveOn had developed, in terms of electronic activism, with what the Sierra Club had developed, in terms of grassroots organizing. So the Obama operation was the marriage of the Sierra Club's grassroots model with MoveOn's electronic model. That was really what they put together.

Lage: Who were the people who moved over to the Obama campaign, do you recall? Marshall Ganz, who I guess wasn't—

02-00:26:03

Pope: Well, Marshall Ganz was not a club person. Oh, what is her name? Liz Pallatto was the key person, and then Liz took two or three other people with her. I can't remember who else she took with her. But Liz Pallatto, who had worked for Julia Reitan, was the key staff person who went over. Then they hired people. They hired a woman named Natalie Foster, who had originally been a Sierra Club organizer in Georgia, but then had gone to work for MoveOn. They hired Natalie to bring the electronic piece in, but Natalie also had a Sierra Club background. So there was a big Sierra Club flavor there.

Lage: I thought you were maybe going to go back even to an earlier time, with all the training on environmental lobbying, basically. Bringing people from the grassroots to Washington, teaching them how to lobby. But is that a separate—

02-00:26:51

Pope:

No, that was actually a very different approach, because that was teaching them how to lobby. That was not saying, what's really important is not what you do when you go to Washington; what really is important is what you do in Kalamazoo. This stuff was about what's really important is what you do in Kalamazoo. How could you be effective in Kalamazoo? Not how can you be effective in Washington? It was, if you're strong in Kalamazoo, then it's easy to be strong in Washington. But if you're weak in Kalamazoo, being a good lobbyist is— Again, the world had changed. It used to be in the seventies that if somebody showed up from Kalamazoo, you could get a meeting with your congressman. If you were an effective lobbyist, you'd then be able to persuade your congressman. Well, now, unless you've got a real organization behind you—

Lage:

Who says—

02-00:27:35

Pope:

—you better meet with this person, because we're going to have people at every precinct opposing you, if you don't, you don't get the meeting.

Lage:

Another way that times have changed.

02-00:27:33

Pope:

Yes, times have changed in a lot of ways.

Lage:

Very interesting. Okay, talk a little bit about how you saw the Sierra Club in the mid-eighties, under Mike McCloskey and then—

02-00:28:04

Pope:

Well, in the mid-eighties, I was a middle manager.

Lage:

How did you see the club as an organization? Was it something you thought you'd stay with?

02-00:28:11

Pope:

No. Actually, I was always the guy that was about to leave.

Lage:

Saying you were about to leave?

02-00:28:20

Pope:

Well, sometimes I would say I was about to leave, but there was just the sense. Interestingly, I discovered later, after I became executive director, that there used to be staff pools about who was going to leave next, and I was always at the top of the list, that I was the guy who was going to [leave]. Because I was always changing what I did within the club, so people saw me as somebody who every two or three years needed to do something new. They sort of assumed at some point, one of those somethings new would be outside the club.

Lage: What did you think about it? What did you think about Mike McCloskey and the way he ran it? What did you think about how effective the organization was?

02-00:29:04

Pope: Oh, I had a tremendous respect, both for the organization and for Mike. Because Mike's instincts—he was about advocacy and that's what I was about. Although he came out of the wilderness and parks and public lands side of things, he understood the political importance of pollution and energy. So Mike and I were a very good fit. I was very happy with Mike's leadership. And I thought the club was highly effective. The thing that struck me is people would complain about the club's grassroots structure or how slow everything was; and the board of directors, oh, my God, they're the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker. There's a lot of that. I would always note, I'd say, "You know something? The Sierra Club probably takes a very long time to make a whole bunch of not very important decisions. And you'd say, why is it so hard? But when the time comes to make a really important decision, the Sierra Club does a better job of getting it right than anybody else." I think the reason is because all that other stuff, which is clunky and slow and inefficient, creates enough buy-in that when you have to make a tough call, the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker take it very seriously, and they're quite capable of making very good decisions, when they're really focused.

I remember at one point, I watched Mike. This was a board meeting that was at the old National Wildlife Federation building in Washington. I can't remember when it was, but the issue was whether or not we were going to permit and support the captive breeding of California condors. There was a volunteer from southern California named Les Reid, who was passionately opposed to the captive breeding of condors, because if we captive bred them, they wouldn't really be condors anymore. The board was discussing whether the Sierra Club was going to support the captive breeding program, and Les was just vitriolically opposed and was waxing grandiloquent, in fact, I would say. Not just eloquent, but grandiloquent.

It was one of the times when I saw Mike actually sort of just step— Mike said, "I think it's important that we focus on this decision. Most of the time, when this board casts a vote, it influences what happens to the Sierra Club. That's what you're elected to do, that's appropriate. But most of the time, when you cast a vote on a policy issue, that isn't the determining factor. There are a lot of other voices—a lot of other voices—that get heard. So if we get it wrong, there'll be a lot of other voices that will get it right. But on this decision, if we get it wrong, the world will get it wrong. If we don't listen to the biologists, who tell us that this is what this species needs, there will not be any California condors left, wild or not. And that is a very, very heavy responsibility for this board to take." And Les was outvoted.

Now, the funny part of the story is that many years later, after Les died and his widow, Sally— They lived right next to the Sespe-Frazier wilderness. Their house became a stomping ground for condors. The condors started breaking into their house and tearing apart their furniture, which I thought was like, okay, maybe the condors knew that Les actually didn't want to give them a chance. Maybe this is condor revenge.

Lage: I wonder what Sally said to that.

02-00:34:17

Pope: I didn't ever offer that theory, but I just noticed it, said, "That's interesting." Sally loved having them tear up their furniture, because having a lot of condors in your house, if you— So it turned out Sally wasn't quite as opposed as Les was, to the fact that condors had become somewhat more comfortable with human beings.

Lage: Well, was that a role Mike would take very often, where he would—

02-00:34:41

Pope: No. No.

Lage: —make a strong statement?

02-00:34:43

Pope: But he chose his battles. Again, because he chose his battles, when he chose his battles, the board tended to be extremely respectful.

Lage: Now, let's see. In the middle of all this, along comes Doug Wheeler [executive director, 1985-1987]. Tell me about how you saw that interlude. It's interesting, in terms of talking about Republicans and Democrats in the club.

02-00:35:10

Pope: Well, that was the first time that the Sierra Club board of directors had gone outside to hire an executive director. And unsurprisingly, when most organizations do something for the first time, they don't do it very well.

Lage: Did the staff think that maybe they should've stayed inside?

02-00:35:31

Pope: There wasn't any inside candidate.

Lage: There wasn't.

02-00:35:34

Pope: No, there really wasn't any inside candidate, so that actually, no, the staff did not—

Lage: That wasn't part of the resentment.

02-00:35:41

Pope:

That wasn't part of it, no. Initially, Doug Scott was very excited about Wheeler. He arrived and there was some— Okay, here you've got a guy, who voted for Ronald Reagan and had been the head of the Republican Central Committee for the District of Columbia. That created some anxiety. But initially, it seemed to be going about the way you'd expect, because we'd never had an outsider. It was a very complicated, internally, non-transparent organization, hard to learn, hard to figure out. The guy's still figuring it all out. So nobody was terribly concerned.

About four months into Wheeler's tenure, I was at a wedding for the guy— And I'm blanking on his name now. He was the leader of an environmental group who had worked with Wheeler. He knew Wheeler well. So I was talking to him at this wedding and he's saying, "How's it going?" And I'm saying, "I think it's going okay. It's going fine." I said, "It's a little puzzling." I said, "I can't quite figure out his management style." I said, "Some managers send out one-page memos telling everybody what to do. Some managers have staff meetings. Some managers have three or four different groupings where they bring people together. Some people will get everybody together on a conference call. I just can't quite figure out what Wheeler's management style is." This guy looked at me and said, "Did you guys think that you hired Wheeler as a manager?" I said, "Well, yes, that's what the job is." He looked at me, he says, "Doug Wheeler couldn't manage his way out of a paper bag. That's why he was fired from the American Farmland Trust. Doug Wheeler is a salesman, and he's a *very good* salesman. But if you hired Doug Wheeler to run the Sierra Club, you guys are in for a very, very large surprise."

Lage:

Wow. Someone didn't do their vetting very well.

02-00:38:40

Pope:

Well, that was, in fact, the conclusion. I was told that the recommendation he'd gotten from the American Farmland Trust was part of a negotiated deal. He agreed to leave, and AFT agreed to give him the following recommendation. Then he didn't manage. And his instincts were quite revealing. He did not like me, because I symbolized the kind of progressive part of the Sierra Club, and he symbolized the establishment part of the Sierra Club. He was always *extremely*, extremely gracious about me, inside the Sierra Club. Then he would go out into the world and completely trash me.

Lage:

And you got feedback from others?

02-00:39:56

Pope:

Of course, because he's trashing me to my friends. He had come into *my* backyard and was going out— Because he apparently couldn't imagine that people in banks and public utilities were actually my friends.

Lage:

Oh, oh, oh. So he'd trash you to figures that he thought would be sympathetic.

02-00:40:19

Pope: Yes. He thought would be sympathetic. But of course, it got back to me. This is not very smart.

Lage: What did he trash you about?

02-00:40:31

Pope: Oh, I don't know, I was a leftie, I was radical, I was irresponsible, I didn't understand—

Lage: But were these things that you'd conflicted with him about in the club?

02-00:40:41

Pope: No. No, I didn't. No, I didn't. I didn't have any conflict with him in the club. He had a take on who I was, and I was the Sierra Club that he thought he had been brought in to tame.

Lage: I see, I see.

02-00:40:55

Pope: Now, he didn't have any mandate to tame the Sierra Club; that wasn't why the board hired him. The board hired him because they thought he'd be a hell of a good fundraiser. And he wanted to go raise money from Chevron. That wasn't what the board wanted. It was a colossally bad hire and a colossal misfit. Then, because he wasn't able to manage the organization, things began to go wrong. And they began to go wrong financially, and the budget began to get worse and worse, and there were allegations that he lied to the board about it. I wasn't even particularly part of all this because I was middle management, not senior management, at that point. But I was told that the senior managers of the club went to Larry Downing, who was the president, and said, "Larry, you have to know the financial reports you're getting from the executive director are not correct. He's cooking the books, and we have to tell you this." So he was let go.

Lage: Lots more happened, but we don't need to go into it all.

02-00:41:59

Pope: Well, I'm sure lots more happened. Again, I wasn't actually that close to it all. You've done the oral histories from that era, so—

Lage: Well, just a bit.

02-00:42:09

Pope: Yes.

Lage: People have their different takes on it.

02-00:42:11

Pope: Yes.

Lage: But you don't see it as a Republican hired in the Reagan era, versus a staff that's much more progressive? It was mainly a management issue, as you describe it?

02-00:42:25

Pope: No. Had he managed effectively, there might well have been, then, some really big issues. But in order for them to be really big issues, he'd have been having to do something. He'd have to been having to try to direct the organization. He never told me not to do a single thing or to do a single thing differently; he just went out and bitched about me to people at PG&E.

Lage: And you kept on with whatever you were doing. Political director.

02-00:42:52

Pope: Well, I kept on with what'd I'd been instructed to do. We had programs and we had policies, and we were carrying out the policies. He didn't go to the board and say, we need to change our approach to X for Y reason. That would not have surprised me. Then there'd have been a tussle, and he might've won, he might not have won. I'm inclined to believe he would not have won. But mainly because I don't think he was very skilled at that. He was a salesman; he wasn't a manager. He wasn't a strategist; he was a salesman.

Lage: Okay. What's your timing? Should we stop here?

02-00:44:47

Pope: Well, why don't I actually fill you in on one more piece of that, because there's one more piece of that story.

Lage: Okay.

02-00:43:51

Pope: So after he [Wheeler] left and Mike came back [as interim executive director], and then we had to look, going forward, to the next hire, which was also going to be an external hire because it hadn't been long enough for anybody internally to be keyed up for this—Mike and I had a conversation about what do we think went wrong. I had then gone out and talked to a bunch of people about the world of search firms. This is the first time the Sierra Club had ever had a search firm. I said, "Look, Mike, from everything I've heard, the basic fact is you hire a search firm, you think you are their client; you are not their client. The search firm's client is their talent pool. This is actually their asset, is the people that they can place, not the organizations with whom they place them. So they are not going to tell you anything bad about the people they send you. You cannot let a search firm do your diligence. We will have to insist on doing our own due diligence." Mike agreed. I said, "And I will tell you, when you hire a search firm for the next executive director, they will want to do the due diligence." Indeed, we hired a new search firm and indeed, they wanted to do their own due diligence.

Lage: And is due diligence going out and talking to the world about the candidate?

02-00:45:16

Pope: Yes, that's right. Mike [McCloskey] and the board didn't give them their way. And I will say that the board had a very, very good portrait of Mike Fischer when they hired him. They knew his strengths and they knew his weaknesses. They really did. The only thing that was— Michael turned out to have a complex relationship with strong women, which didn't come out in the due diligence. But everything else about Michael, good and bad, the board knew. There were no surprises with Fischer, because the club went out and did its own due diligence. We talked to lots and lots of people, and we learned lots and lots of things, and then we had kind of a portrait of the guy.

Lage: Then did the senior staff get to put their ideas forth, in the process?

02-00:46:15

Pope: Yes, they were much more engaged the second time. When we hired Fischer, I actually did a lot of the due diligence because I was one of the people who knew people who knew Mike Fischer, because he was out of California environmental politics and that was the place where my strength was. So I did a lot of the due diligence. I heard a number of things that were both strengths and weaknesses, and it was interesting. Mike was very fair, because Mike knew that I had done that, and he could easily have felt threatened by that; but actually, he was very open to me. So he did a good job of not letting that throw him. It was a much better way to do it, as is witnessed by the tenure of the two people.

Lage: Yes. So Mike [Fischer] was there for what, eight years or five, six years?

02-00:47:05

Pope: Six years. Six years, I think.

Lage: And you were conservation director and associate executive director, under Mike.

02-00:47:13

Pope: Correct.

Lage: Shall we save that for next time?

02-00:47:16

Pope: Let's save that for next time.

Lage: Sounds good. Thank you.

Interview 2: March 28, 2013

[Audiofile 3]

Lage: Today is March 28, 2013, and it's our second interview with Carl Pope, for the Sierra Club History Project, tape three. Carl, did anything come to mind about those early days that you wished you had had a chance to say?

03-00:00:19

Pope: I don't think so. The big change, really, from the time I came until the time I became executive director was just the incredible change in communication technology and the scale of everything.

Lage: Let's just talk a little bit about the Michael Fischer years. We got you right up to his hiring and knowing his weaknesses and strengths. How did he turn out as an executive director, and how did things evolve during those years?

03-00:00:54

Pope: Well, the Fischer years were a transitional period, for reasons other than Michael. When Michael came in, the direct-mail business was still an incredibly powerful fund-raising tool. The club's business model was essentially to do lots and lots of direct mail, and every two or three years, because we were in an inflationary era, to raise the dues rate; that would generate the next spurt of growth. So when Michael came in, the club still wasn't doing very much major-gift fundraising. We had some, but not a lot. Then during Michael's tenure, we had the 100th anniversary of the Sierra Club and we had the Centennial Campaign, and we built up a major-gifts effort and began to become much more reliant on major gifts—although the big loss of margin on direct mail came about the time Michael left. It came after Bill Clinton was elected.

Lage: Now, what do you mean by loss of margin? It became ineffective?

03-00:02:03

Pope: Well, you weren't making nearly as much money. In other words, you always had a problem with direct mail, that you would bring people in [as members] and some of them would stick and many of them would not. Then you had to replace the ones who did not. Initially, the cost of replacing them didn't eat up very much of the profits from the renewals. The renewals were always very profitable. But as more and more organizations got into direct mail and as people's mail boxes got filled up with more and more pieces of direct mail, and as the next generation of donors were people who didn't pay bills with checks— They paid bills with a credit card, so they were not as inclined to write a check and put it in the mail. When you were sitting down and writing fifteen checks every month, writing one or two of those checks to an organization was a very easy thing for people to do. When you weren't sitting down and writing checks, you were much less likely to write a check to an

organization. So direct mail lost its profitability, as more and more people got in and as the way in which people viewed their mail changed.

Lage: This is even before email took over.

03-00:03:16

Pope: This is even before email took over, this started to happen, because paying bills with credit cards happened before email. So Fischer was in a transitional period. In many ways, I think he was a transitional executive director. He wasn't ever wildly enthusiastic about the distributed, decentralized part of the Sierra Club. He came out of a career with government, and he came out of a situation in which the California Coastal Commission, for example, which he worked for for many years, worked out its position. The staff had a staff position. People didn't show up at city council meetings in San Diego, representing the California Coastal Commission, without the commission knowing it. So Michael always found it a little disconcerting that there were thousands of people around the country showing up at hearings all over the place, and they were representing the Sierra Club, and there wasn't really a lot of oversight of what they said. They mostly did a wonderful job, but they didn't all do a wonderful job.

Lage: And they were speaking in the name of the organization.

03-00:04:33

Pope: Yeah, and they were *legitimately* speaking in the name of the organization; they had been given agency by the organization, without a lot of accountability. That made Michael uncomfortable. And Michael spent his years trying to figure out how to deal with that.

Lage: Sounds like an administrative focus in a way.

03-00:04:51

Pope: Well, it wasn't administrative, it was cultural. It was, to what extent can we create one Sierra Club? Michael also was there during a period in which— His years were George Bush's presidency. Or most of them were George Bush's presidency. The end of the Reagan years and then the beginning of the Bush years. Those were kind of confusing years, about the politics of the environment. Bush had run, "I'm going to be the environmental president." He wasn't really the environmental president, in many ways; but on the other hand, he did do some pretty good work on the Clean Air Act. He wasn't Reagan. Reagan gave us people like [Robert] Burford and [James] Watt and [Anne] Gorsuch as targets. Bush didn't give us those kinds of targets. His appointees, some of them were very good. He put Bill Reilly in at EPA. So exactly what our role was during those years— It wasn't clear which way the landscape was going to move. It was like, okay, maybe we're going to get the kind of Republican environmentalism that we had from Richard Nixon; maybe we were going to get it back. Now, of course, it didn't turn out that way.

Lage: Were these things that would be discussed in staff meetings?

03-00:06:23

Pope: Well, I wasn't part of Michael's management team for most of his time there, so I can't really tell you what happened in his staff meetings, because I wasn't there. But certainly, they were discussed, and they were discussed widely around the organization. They were discussed a lot with the board. There were a lot of discussions about these kinds of issues with the board. The organization was struggling with, how did you deal with people like Bush, Sr., who weren't really friends and who we didn't really trust. We looked at his past, his background. But on the other hand, he was aligning himself, on some issues, with people we were very close to, like [Senator] John Chafee. So you had to maintain a relationship and you had to work with him. It was a confusing period, politically, I think.

Lage: You couldn't be as confrontational, which can give you—

03-00:07:20

Pope: Or collaborative. It wasn't like with Clinton, where you sort of understood you were trying to collaborate; or it wasn't like Reagan, where you knew you were in a war.

Lage: Yeah.

03-00:07:28

Pope: It was like, well, what is this? We're not quite sure. So it was a transitional period, and I think that partly because he was an outsider and partly because of the period he was in, Fischer was kind of a transitional executive director. If you looked at the club when he left and I took over, there was very little about the way the club functioned that had changed in those six years. There were things that had changed in the outside world, but the club itself hadn't changed that much.

Lage: Was the Centennial Campaign the beginning of the change, though?

03-00:08:01

Pope: Yes, the Centennial Campaign was probably— And the focus on major gifts. There was a big change in the finances of the organization.

Lage: Now, what brought that about? Were there a couple of key people, or just the fact that it was the hundredth anniversary of the club?

03-00:08:16

Pope: No, I think there were some key volunteer leaders. I think people like Denny Shaffer and Larry Downing. There was a generation of Sierra Club volunteer leaders—of whom Denny and Larry were probably the most prominent and the key figures—who thought that other organizations were clearly getting a lot of money from major donors and there was no reason the Sierra Club couldn't do so, as well. The Sierra Club Foundation was looking for a bigger

role, and this was seen as an opportunity to use the Sierra Club Foundation more effectively and to bring it into closer alignment with the Sierra Club, by giving it the responsibility for raising a much larger part of the club's resources.

Then it coincided with the fact that we had our hundredth anniversary. There was the somewhat naïve belief that having a hundredth anniversary would turn out to be a good enough reason to have a major-gifts campaign. Once we set out to have the major-gifts campaign, it turned out that major donors wanted to have a much clearer strategic plan than the club had ever had before. They wanted programs they were going to give these major gifts to; they weren't just going to write a major gift to the Sierra Club. That was actually quite a struggle, because the organization never designed, say, a five-year program from the top down. Programs had always kind of emerged and campaigns had emerged out of the needs of the moment. Now, some of the national park campaigns, like the Redwood National Park campaign and the Alaska Lands Act, those were multi-year, planned campaigns; but those were also legislative campaigns, and you couldn't fund them with major gifts. So the whole question of what was the Sierra Club's case to make to foundations and big donors—

Lage: And it had to be tax-deductible.

03-00:10:17

Pope: It had to be tax-deductible.

Lage: That was a shift, also.

03-00:10:20

Pope: That was a shift. And that was the shift that was very challenging, especially for the grassroots leadership, because they weren't used to thinking about their work in terms of, well, which part of this work is tax-deductible and which part of this work is not tax-deductible? Our tax-deductible work had always kind of just been an add-on. It was stuff we did, it was nice; but it wasn't central, it wasn't mission-critical, as the Defense Department would say. So that whole transition was probably the biggest legacy of the Fischer years.

Lage: Did you get involved in that? I have a note that you helped design the centennial ecoregions program.

03-00:10:56

Pope: Yes.

Lage: Talk about that a little bit.

03-00:10:58

Pope: I can't remember exactly where in the Centennial Campaign process we were, but there was a board meeting at Yosemite, so you could figure out when it

was. It was a board meeting at Wawona Lodge, in Yosemite. At the board meeting— I can't remember now. But basically, the people on the volunteer side and the staff side— I think at that point, a woman named Marianne Briscoe was leading the Centennial Campaign. We also had trouble staffing the leadership for this thing. We went through, I think, two or three leaders, before we got Bill Meadows. We finally ended up with a very good leader in Bill Meadows, but we had two or three leaders who weren't good fits. I think Marianne Briscoe, at this point, who was the first, was still leading the campaign, and she just got up and said, "I can't raise any money because I don't have programs. I need large-scale, long-range, visionary programs." It was kind of like, and I need them now. Because we were already up and running, and we already had a lot of staff and the money was supposed to be coming in. Donors were saying, what's it for? I was conservation director at that point, and I was tasked with helping to come up— and I came up with the concept of the ecoregions, the Center for Environmental Innovation, and there was a third piece that never took off.

Lage: Did you try to bring in the club committees. So often, the priorities had risen up through the grassroots and a lot of talk about what will our priorities be, and competition between committees.

03-00:12:55

Pope: Right. Well, what we tried to do was to write it so that whatever— I wish I could remember what the third one was. It never got any traction, whatever it was. But we tried to design them so that whatever the grassroots came up with could be accommodated within it. So the ecoregions gave us a regional approach, so that if there were projects that came up in the Midwest or the Southeast, they could be fitted in. But there would be a different lens; they'd have to be designed around a different lens. The Center for Environmental Innovation was an attempt to say, okay— We'd always historically had C-3 projects [funded by tax-deductible donations] that would come up that would be policy ideas, and this was a place where those could be supported and staffed. Now, obviously, the real campaigns, the C-4 campaigns, couldn't be paid for this way, so we knew that wasn't going to work. I don't remember what the third of the three—

There were three initiatives, and two of them did happen. Mainly, the ecoregions happened. What the Centennial Campaign really ended up mainly being was, we raised money—either unrestricted money for the endowment, mostly from planned giving, or we raised money for the ecoregions. We did not raise much money for the Center for Environmental Innovation; it never really took. But ecoregions, especially in some parts of the country— Our first big success with a foundation, for example, was with the Joyce Foundation, around the Midwest ecoregion. That was a very substantial program for a number of years.

Lage: How did it operate using tax-deductible monies?

03-00:14:26

Pope: Well, they would conduct conferences, they would do studies, they would work on administrative rules, either state or federal, and in the Great Lakes region, you had a lot of governmental infrastructure that had been created. There was a thing called the joint-something. It was the US-Canada Great Lakes Planning Body. So the club's efforts to influence that body could be paid for with C-3 money.

Lage: This got very complicated, as you got into your tenure [as executive director], didn't it? Sorting out what was C-3?

03-00:15:04

Pope: Oh, yes.

Lage: The bureaucracy of it.

03-00:15:06

Pope: Yeah, figuring out how to do this and to do it well was quite a challenge. And it was different for the club, because we had a different structure than other organizations that did this. The other organizations were mostly C-3s, with C-4 affiliates; we were a C-4 with a C-3 affiliate [the Sierra Club Foundation]. So we had to craft our own compliance and regulatory approaches, so that did take up quite a bit of time. It was always amazing to me that you would conduct these training workshops for volunteers— It was necessary, it was important, but I always thought it was fairly boring. And when you would conduct a training workshop for volunteers, everybody would be really interested in tax law. They would want to know what the details— It was just always amazing to me how well attended those compliance workshops were. So what that said about the Sierra Club, I'm not sure.

Lage: I bet you have a thought about what it says.

03-00:16:06

Pope: No, actually, I didn't. I was always perplexed.

Lage: That they'd be so interested in the internal matter, rather than the current campaign?

03-00:16:14

Pope: Well, they weren't so much into the internal matter, they were interested in tax law. They really were interested in tax law. Why they were so interested in tax law, I never did manage to figure out. It was good to have people who were interested because, in fact, it meant that if you look back and you say, okay, the Sierra Club, during those years, did a phenomenal amount of *very* decentralized tax law, tax-compliant work, where there was a pretty high bar for tax compliance, and we never got in trouble. We never screwed up. I think that was because for whatever reason, our volunteer leaders found this stuff much more interesting than—

Lage: Than you did.

03-00:16:57

Pope: —I would've thought. Yes, than I did. Right, for sure.

Lage: Yeah. Well, I want to talk about a couple of environmental campaigns from those times. During these years, we had the Superfund campaign.

03-00:17:12

Pope: Right.

Lage: I think you were quite involved in that, right?

03-00:17:14

Pope: Yes.

Lage: And Prop 65, you were also very involved in.

03-00:17:16

Pope: Right. I was very involved in that.

Lage: Can you talk about those?

03-00:17:19

Pope: Sure. The Superfund campaign, there was an implicit— I'll call it a template, because it wasn't a policy. It had never been decided by anybody. But there was almost a template, which was that with the communication tools of that era, the club, A, could only really run one big national campaign at a time; and B, the club needed to have a big national campaign to bring everybody together, to focus everybody, so that was important to identify. The first half of the Reagan years, the first Reagan term, it was pretty clear what the agenda was. It was, fight Watt and protect the public lands. That was a pretty straightforward—

Lage: It was defensive.

03-00:18:19

Pope: It was defensive, and it was around the club's traditional public lands agenda. Once Reagan decided that that wasn't good politics, and he'd given the Sagebrush Rebellion as much as he would give them and he brought in more reasonable figures as secretary of the interior, there wasn't an obvious big public lands campaign, from '84 to '88. In fact, the next big public lands campaign was the defense of the Arctic Wildlife Refuge. That was triggered by the fact that in the Alaska Lands Act, the refuge was safe until 1988. Then in 1988, the Interior Department was supposed to recommend whether drilling should be allowed. Of course, [Secretary of Interior] Don Hodel did recommend that drilling should be allowed. But there was kind of a pause. There were a bunch of wilderness bills that made their way through Congress during Reagan's second term, which were bipartisan, because it was still

possible to put together bipartisan wilderness bills. But those were regional. So volunteers in the Pacific Northwest would be involved, but there wasn't a big national kind of rallying thing.

In 1984, the Superfund came up for renewal. Congressman John Dingell, who had been very much on the other side of the Sierra Club, over battles about the Clean Air Act because he represented the auto industry, decided to have a big battle and really make the Superfund much tougher. The Reagan administration was vulnerable, because Gorsuch and Burford had gotten in big trouble about the way they'd handled the Superfund. So there was a big scandal there. So the decision was made, really by Dingell, that this was going to be the big battle of the second Reagan term. Doug Scott, who was the Sierra Club's conservation director—I was then the deputy conservation director. I think that was my title.

Lage: Associate.

03-00:20:29

Pope: Associate, whatever. [Doug Scott] decided that this would become the signature campaign, and that we would use it to really build up the club's grassroots lobbying capacity. So that campaign featured really two things that were new. One was we tried to create a congressional district coordinator—this was Doug's idea—a congressional district coordinator in every swing congressional district. So we would have two- or three-hundred volunteer leaders, who had been trained in what the Superfund campaign was about and who were responsible for trying to deliver their member of Congress.

Now, the second thing we did that was unique was, we developed a very sophisticated set of lobbying materials that were designed to make the case and to give our volunteer leaders materials that they could walk into a congressional office and they would have the same stuff as if you'd hired McKinsey— It wasn't as fancy as McKinsey, but the idea was to really invest in the tools of lobbying. My job was really to work on the materials side, because I had written a book about hazardous waste for the club, so I knew a relatively large amount about toxic waste. So I was the guy who was in charge of the message and the materials and the content, and Doug really took charge of putting together the congressional district coordinating network.

Lage: Were they using some of the same things that came out of the Alaska campaign?

03-00:22:08

Pope: Yes. I think the Alaska campaign was probably where Doug had got the model for it.

Lage: Then applying it to the brown issues, rather than the green issues.

03-00:22:19

Pope: Yes, right, the green issues. Right, exactly.

Lage:

Did the grassroots folks get as excited about the brown issues?

03-00:22:32

Pope:

I think it depended on the part of the country. The green issues had always resonated much more strongly in the West, and the brown issues resonated very, very strongly, particularly in the Southeast. That was probably the time when the club had the most real grassroots energy coming out of the Southeast, because that was a place where there were a lot— Companies really operated just outrageously. I remember going to one toxic waste site in Louisiana. It was a place in a bayou, where somebody had just dumped thousands of drums of toxic waste, like a quarter of a mile from this neighborhood. It was called Cleve Reber, and it was surrounded by a barbed wire fence. That was the cleanup. The cleanup was to surround it with a barbed wire fence. It was really bad.

So I went down to look at Cleve Reber, and that actually became one of our poster children for the campaign—this is what was wrong with the Superfund. I talked to the woman who was the local leader of the community group. She was not a Sierra Club leader, but she was a local community leader who'd been organizing about it because she could see it from her front porch. She told me this just incredible story, that about two months earlier, a Chevron seismic crew had been exploring for oil and gas in the area, and they laid a seismic line, which is a straight line that they survey and then they go along the straight line and every hundred yards, they set off an explosive so they can do a seismic test. That's how they explored for oil and gas in that era; I don't know if they still do. This transect that they laid ran right through the middle of Cleve Reber, and the hundred-yard point was right in the middle of this toxic waste site. These guys came along and they started cutting the barbed wire fence and they were going to set off dynamite in the middle of this toxic waste dump and just blow all these barrels up. She had to call Willie Fontenot, who was an assistant attorney general in Louisiana, to come out and stop them.

Now, Chevron would never have done that in California. But in the Southeast, it's like they did whatever the hell they wanted to do. It's the same company, but they just did things differently. So the Superfund campaign was one where the Southeast got particularly engaged. And the Midwest got very heavily engaged, because there were a huge number of these sites in the Midwest. I think it probably generated less excitement in the West. But that was not so important, because it was mainly a House fight; it was not so much a Senate fight. The Mountain states didn't have that many members in the House, so they weren't that significant. California was significant. But Utah, Wyoming, those mattered in a Senate battle, or a lands battle in Utah or Wyoming; they didn't matter that much in the Superfund battle.

Lage: And you were successful with the campaign.

03-00:25:30

Pope: We were successful. The campaign was successful.

Lage: A lot of good stories to be told, like the one you just told.

03-00:25:36

Pope: Yes, it was a very successful campaign. I'm trying to remember. We tried then to do the same thing a couple of years later, on something else, and we could not pull off the congressional district coordinator part of the model. I cannot remember what the issue was; it may come back to me, as we go through these interviews. We tried that model again, and it had outlived its time.

Lage: You couldn't get the activists engaged?

03-00:26:09

Pope: We couldn't engage the activists around the idea of holding a member of Congress accountable. We had to engage them in some other way. It wasn't that we couldn't get activists engaged, but the idea of engaging— Doug's vision had been, we're going to build a very congressionally focused grassroots Sierra Club. The idea of a congressionally focused grassroots Sierra Club, which we thought was taking off with the Alaska Lands campaign and with the Superfund campaign, then lost its oomph.

Lage: I would think that would fit well with the political campaigns, the electoral initiative.

03-00:26:44

Pope: Yes. No, no, that's Doug's concept.

Lage: Fit it all together.

03-00:26:47

Pope: It worked once. Again, I wish I could remember what it was we tried to do it for, but it didn't work.

Lage: We should try to come up with that. Okay, well, talk a little bit about Prop 65, which was just a California issue.

03-00:27:00

Pope: Yes, Prop 65 was a California thing.

Lage: Was it a sideline for your job?

03-00:27:07

Pope: Well, it was kind of a leftover from my— In my early years with the club, I managed the club's California field operations. So I had a California hat for the club, as well as running the California League of Conservation Voters, which I was half-time with, until 1981. Then I came over to the club full-time.

But I was still running the club's California field. I was supervising the club's California [field operations]. So I had a pretty deep California network. At that point, the Sacramento office was the only lobbying office at the state level that was funded by the national organization and that reported to the national organization. So we had a unique relationship with the California field office. Mike Paparian, who was the field rep, came to me and said that he thought it was time for the environmental movement to try another [ballot] initiative. There had not been a successful environmental [initiative]—there'd been several failed environmental initiatives, not coming out of the Sierra Club, but coming out of individual politicians and they had all failed—since the coastal [initiative]. So the coastal initiative was the last successful ballot measure.

Lage: That was 1972.

03-00:28:37

Pope: '72. Yeah. So it had been a long time. And Mike said he thought times had changed and that the thing to do it around was toxics, because this was the late eighties and toxics was very hot. So I undertook to try to figure out what the lessons were. Why had we failed? I concluded that basically, the lesson was that ballot measures had to be very simple; they could not be complicated. They had to be designed very carefully, to avoid giving the business community obvious ways of grabbing on and demonizing what this thing was going to do. So you had to design them in a very defensive way.

I went out and talked to David Roe, who did toxics work for EDF [Environmental Defense Fund], and Al Meyerhoff, who did toxics work for NRDC [Natural Resources Defense Council], who were kind of the two people that I had worked with the most closely in California, on toxics stuff. We sat down and we came up with the idea of basically selling a ballot measure as your right to know; but also having a very simple prohibition on discharge into drinking water. Well, who can actually be in favor of discharge into drinking water? But the real purpose of it was to change the burden of proof, because we had now spent many, many years trying to implement pollution laws or toxics laws, which said the government is going to come up with a standard, and then business has to comply with the standard.

Lage: But the government has to prove that something—

03-00:30:22

Pope: Well, the government had to set a standard. The government just would never set the standard. And if it did set the standard, the business community would sue. So we decided, all right, we should basically say, for a whole class of chemicals, the standard is zero until the government sets a standard. The standard is zero. At that point, we felt the business community would let the government set standards, because the business community would not want a standard of zero. That part worked.

Lage: I'm surprised that didn't give the business community a reason to get very active.

03-00:31:00

Pope: Oh, well, it gave them a reason, but they couldn't ever explain to the public why the public shouldn't think that was a good [idea]. Oh, they spent a *fortune* fighting us. It was a big campaign. But they never really could convince the public that that was a bad idea.

Lage: So it's that you can't put in a chemical unless the government has said it's safe?

03-00:31:22

Pope: Unless the government said this amount of a chemical is safe. The chemical was guilty until proven innocent, instead of innocent till proven guilty, which would've flipped the— The business community hated it. But they never could find any argument that grabbed the public. And we were able to raise a lot of money in Hollywood. Jane Fonda and Tom Hayden— Hayden eventually ran the campaign.

Lage: He actually took physical charge of running the campaign?

03-00:32:51

Pope: He took physical charge of it. I was initially running the campaign, and then he was raising all the money and said, "Look, if I'm going to raise all the money, I want to run the campaign." So that was okay. He who pays the piper calls the tune. And he did a good job. It was a fun campaign. There was a lot of very interesting stuff that happened.

Lage: I want you to talk more about that, but I'm just thinking, did it prevent the use of those chemicals—

03-00:32:17

Pope: No.

Lage: —or you just had to say that they were present.

03-00:32:19

Pope: It did two things. It said, you can't expose anybody without warning them, and you can't discharge it into drinking water. As a practical matter, the first requirement, you can't expose without warning, has gotten huge numbers of chemicals out of consumer products, because people who make consumer products do not want to have to warn the people who buy them that they may give them cancer. Surprise. Once they took them out of consumer products in California, they took them out of consumer products everywhere. For most of the populace, this is not at terribly important thing. But you remember Wite-Out?

Lage: Oh, yes.

03-00:33:09

Pope: You remember how it used to smell?

Lage: Strong.

03-00:33:13

Pope: That smell was xylene, which causes cancer. Now, people who only used a little Liquid Paper were not really at meaningful risk from their Liquid Paper, but secretaries were; they were using a lot of it. Liquid Paper was reformulated. It didn't dry as fast. The new reformulation actually was not as good, but it was safe. It was just water-based, instead of being xylene-based.

There was lead in all of the water meters. So whenever water was coming into your house, it was being passed through brass, which would leach lead. That all got taken out. So it was very effective on the consumer products side.

Now, on the water quality side, when Pete Wilson became governor, he was able to craft some regulatory loopholes. We were really going after pesticides. We really wanted to stop the use of toxic pesticides, because they were getting into the rivers. It has not been effective for that purpose, because the Wilson administration was able, without changing the basic principles, to craft some exceptions. Then it turned out the problem was to prove that somebody was discharging. The discharger was a farmer. So the farmer was dumping or spraying or whatever, with chemical; then it would wash off his fields, into the river. Well, the problem was you couldn't go on his land. You couldn't get access to his land, to prove he was doing it. So the water cases were very, very expensive, and nobody ever really figured out how to finance enough of them.

Lage: Who would be the enforcer? It'd have the government, I would think.

03-00:35:11

Pope: No, no, no, no, no. Prop 65 also had citizen enforcement.

Lage: Oh, yes?

03-00:35:15

Pope: We had citizen enforcement. That was the other thing we put in that drove them crazy. That's how the consumer products were cleaned up, is lawyers would bring lawsuits against people who made water meters. So your water meter is exposing people to lead and lead is a reproductive toxin.

Lage: Wow. So tell me about the campaign. You said there were some good stories about the campaign.

03-00:35:37

Pope: Oh, well, Hayden and Fonda really recruited Hollywood. So we had this bus tour that started out in San Diego and ended up in San Francisco. We stopped in all kinds of places, and we had fifteen or twenty movie stars. They were mostly people who are now very famous movie stars, but then were kind of

not that well-known. Michael J. Fox and Laura Dern. Those were not such big names in that day. But Fonda had a role in Hollywood; she kind of mentored social engagement by young progressive people in the acting community in Hollywood. So she and Hayden were able to recruit a bunch of them. Then you'd go to Salinas and you'd have a big crowd, because you had all these movie actors. So actually, the rallies were very big. Not because anybody wanted to hear somebody talk about toxic chemicals, but because they wanted to see Michael J. Fox and Laura Dern.

Lage: Yeah. Not so much Jane Fonda, who wasn't always popular in Salinas.

03-00:36:44

Pope: Well, but people still wanted to come and see her, even if she wasn't popular. So there was a lot more Hollywood in that campaign than in any other campaign I was involved with as an environmentalist.

Lage: Good. Well, I think that initiative really has had far-reaching impact, wouldn't you say?

03-00:37:04

Pope: Yeah.

Lage: Maybe it needs an upgrade, though. Notice the GMO campaign was kind of a similar—the recent, labeled GMO products.

03-00:37:10

Pope: Yes. But the business community has figured out better how to go after that, because that one, unfortunately, obviously, lost, even though it was well designed. The interesting thing was, after Prop 65, two years later, the environmental community, based on that success, came together and Hayden came together and we were going to do something that was called Big Green, which was a big-umbrella [initiative]. I was not happy with the way it was designed. I said, "This is too big. It's too sprawling. It's got too many things they can attack." And they just wiped us out. Because the principles that we had established in Prop 65—which was keep it small, keep it simple, and worry about the other side's attack, and don't give them anything to attack you on that you think will stick—those principles were not—

Lage: I can't remember all the things Big Green had.

03-00:38:12

Pope: No, you can't. It was *Big Green*.

Lage: Yeah. And a big loss.

03-00:38:19

Pope: And a big loss. That's right.

Lage: Well, anything else in that period? You moved up in the organizational structure of the club and you were associate conservation director, conservation director, and associate executive director for conservation.

03-00:38:42

Pope: Right.

Lage: How did that come about?

03-00:38:43

Pope: Well, what happened, that was all driven by Doug Scott's trajectory. I was Doug's deputy when Fischer came in. Then Fischer reorganized and created three associate executive directors, one for conservation, who was Doug; one for communications, who was a woman named Joanne Hurley; and one for administration, and I don't remember who played that role, actually.

So he had three deputies. And when Doug became the deputy for program, in effect, I became conservation director. At least from Doug's perspective, that did not work out very well, because there wasn't enough there. Michael's deputies didn't really have their hands on program, the way the conservation director did, and the organization wasn't really big enough that the coordination function required them. So Fischer really created a layer of management that didn't really have enough to keep the people who had the jobs very happy. Doug did it for a couple years, maybe a year and a half, and then he moved on, because he actually didn't find it that rewarding. That's when he moved to the Pacific Northwest. Then Michael gave me that job, of being associate executive director, and I didn't hire a conservation director, because I had seen what had happened to Doug. I said, "No, I don't want to put myself in that position." So I didn't hire a conservation director. I remained both conservation director and associate executive director for conservation, because I said, "There's not another job here."

Lage: Sounds like too many layers of bureaucracy.

03-00:41:52

Pope: There were too many layers.

Lage: Also, though, it seems like these years were sort of the building of a professional staff, a profession for environmentalists—over this period of time, not just under Michael Fischer.

03-00:42:10

Pope: No, a lot of that happened under McCloskey. When I came in, at the beginning, you didn't have anybody who had much experience doing anything outside of the environmental movement.

Lage: Or as you mentioned, you were an expert in population, because you'd been to India.

03-00:42:28

Pope:

Yes, well. But the answer is, we had jobs where there *were* real experts in the world. There were people who were real fundraisers. But our fundraisers were mostly people who had just grown up with the Sierra Club. So when I came in, even where there was a profession in the outside world, the Sierra Club wouldn't hire from that profession. By the time Mike left, that had changed. But what really changed under Fischer was we did add major-gifts fundraising. That was the big new function. And communications got much bigger. Joanne Hurley was really the first serious communications professional that the club had. Before that, we had people who were specialists in book publishing. Brower hired book publishers to publish books, but we didn't have media people. Joanne was a media person. So Fischer kind of created that function, as well. So we had a serious media person and we had a serious major-gifts person, and those were new functions. By the time Fischer left, the idea that we would've hired for either of those positions, somebody who hadn't had outside experience, was actually really quite incomprehensible. Fischer finished the process. Mike really began it and Fischer finished it; I think that's right.

Lage:

Well, I was also thinking, that when Mike left, you said there was nobody there who could've stepped into the executive director position. They had to go outside.

03-00:43:53

Pope:

Right.

Lage:

But by the time Fischer left, there was somebody there. Maybe that's just time.

03-00:44:00

Pope:

No, that was actually intentional. Mike decided and I decided, that we really wanted to— But there was only one person. If I had not been the right person, if the board had decided I wasn't the right person, they would've had to go outside, because all of the programs were in conservation. So the only person in the organization who had credibility with the issues, and management experience, was the conservation director. So you needed both of those things to have a credible executive director. You had to be credible on the issues; you couldn't just hire a finance person. And you had to have managed. There was only one real manager with environmental content, and that was the conservation director. The others were not, at that point—the conservation department wasn't big enough that managing— You had a field director and you had a Washington director, but they really hadn't managed anything very large and they hadn't been responsible for raising money—in that era. Now, that changed; but at the point when Fischer left, there was still only that one slot. That was significantly changed by the evolution away from dependence on just membership money and the increasing dependence on raised money. That's actually what created sort of a cadre of— Probably now, Mike Brune has four or five.

Lage: Four or five?

03-00:45:28

Pope: Senior managers who have environmental-issue credibility and have managed a significant set of financial responsibilities. He's probably got four or five people with that portfolio.

Lage: Now, explain how that is connected to the change in fundraising. I don't get it.

03-00:45:46

Pope: Well, because one of the things that an executive director has to do is raise money. And manage money. When I came in, the club had, I'm going to say 150 staff people. Probably eighty of them were in the field offices and the Washington DC office, and they were issue people. They did not raise money, for the most part. And we did not have big program expenditures, except payroll. So really, what the operation was, was it was eighty staff people. That was the conservation part, eighty organizers and lobbyists. Then you had another, let's say seventy—and I'm not sure these numbers are right—people who were in headquarters. And they were chopped up into— The only big department were the people who processed memberships. You had the back office, at that point— There were still fifteen or twenty people in San Francisco in the membership department. There were five people in *Sierra Magazine* and there were four people in Sierra Club Books. So the people who ran those units were very talented professionals, but they didn't have much management experience. The only person who really managed anything very big was the conservation director. I was managing eighty people and a budget of, let's say, \$10 million, so that was big enough. But nobody else had anything very large they managed, so there was no managerial track in the club, except for the conservation director. Then what happened, what you have now is a staff of five hundred.

Lage: It's grown that much?

03-00:47:48

Pope: It's grown that much. You've got 80 percent of the money, probably, being raised from donors. So you have dozens of senior staff who, in the course of a year, raise more than a million dollars for the club. And much more of the money is spent on things like media buys or polling or outside services, which have to be managed. So you also have ten or fifteen senior managers on the conservation side, who are handling contracts. So you have a much deeper management; you've got a much more management-rich conservation staff, and a much more, in that sense— I'm going to use the word professional carefully here, because their predecessors were very professional lobbyists or organizers, but they were not professional managers and they weren't particularly very good at managing. And not all of them are good at management now. One of the problems is you get somebody who's a fantastic organizer or a fantastic lobbyist, they may not be a fantastic supervisor.

Lage: Right. And where did you learn to manage?

03-00:48:58

Pope: On the job. And I'm not God's gift to management.

Lage: But you must've taken to it.

03-00:49:04

Pope: Well, adequately. Adequately.

Lage: But you didn't go out and take courses?

03-00:49:09

Pope: No. I read a lot, but I didn't go out and take courses. It's probably not accidental that when I stepped down, I became a consultant. The one rule I made for myself was I would do a wide variety of projects for a wide variety of clients, on a wide variety of issues; but I would not do any HR. I would not hire, I would not fire, I would not supervise. I always used to say that I thought that being a manager was fundamentally being an unqualified, underpaid therapist.

Lage: [laughs] I've heard that description.

03-00:49:55

Pope: Because you're trying to get human beings to do things that they don't want to do and they're not very good at. If they want to do it and they're good at it, you don't have to do anything. So you're trying to get the people on your staff to do the things they are either not good at or they don't like. That's not very easy to do.

Lage: Yeah. Or much fun.

03-00:50:18

Pope: Or much fun. In the private sector, the way you deal with that is you keep firing people until you get the right team. The Sierra Club was never a culture where that was part of what you could do. Once you hired somebody, unless they were really, really unqualified or dishonest or lazy—but we had very little of that—you really had to kind of work with what you had; you couldn't just—

Lage: You could fire people for budgetary reasons.

03-00:50:45

Pope: Well, legally, you had the power to fire people. But culturally, if there wasn't a budgetary reason, it was very difficult to do.

Lage: But didn't that happen both under Michael Fischer and then later under you, where budget cutbacks required some real staff cutbacks?

03-00:50:58

Pope:

Oh, yeah. Oh, no, Fischer had a couple of major layoffs, and I had one major layoff and a couple of minor layoffs. As we became more dependent on restricted grants, what happened was that more and more, by the time I left, probably a third of the staff were on limited-duration contracts. So we would have a five-year project or a three-year project, and we would hire them for three years or five years, with no guarantee that when the project was over, that there would be a job for them at the Sierra Club, because we might have ten people working in—I remember at one point, we had a very large program in South Dakota. We had eight people working in South Dakota, on a grant. We knew that if that grant wasn't renewed, we were not going to have a need for eight people in South Dakota. So when that donor eventually lost interest, as donors do, in that project—which was, I think, wetlands restoration—we went back to having one person in South Dakota.

So we had a lot more turnover in staff, as we shifted from everybody's being paid by the members to most people being on a restricted grant. But it wasn't mostly done by firing people; it was mostly done by hiring them for specific periods of time. Then when the job was done, if we had something else for them to do, we would transfer them, and if we didn't, we wouldn't. But even in that context, if you hired eight people in South Dakota for five years and two of them weren't quite what you needed, you probably worked with them instead of letting them go. In the private sector, they would've probably let them go.

Lage:

Interesting. Okay, let's talk a little bit about becoming executive director. There was a search. They had other candidates, right? Outside candidates?

03-00:52:59

Pope:

Yes, they did. They had outside candidates. When Michael Fischer announced he was leaving, I had to decide, did I want it? My challenge was this. The best job I ever had was conservation director. So I could've been very happy, if Michael had lasted forever, being conservation director forever. But when Michael left, there were really three possibilities. One possibility was they were going to hire another outsider. I had spent a fair amount of my time with Michael, pointing out where the elevator shafts were in the Sierra Club, because an outsider never knew where the elevator shafts were. I knew that that hadn't gotten better. In fact, that had probably gotten worse.

Lage:

Now, tell me about the elevator shafts.

03-00:53:52

Pope:

The club is not a very transparent culture. The board of directors will give an executive director a lot of running room to make really important and potentially risky decisions; but only if the executive director has kept the board engaged, in a very respectful way, on a whole series of things which are really fundamentally not that controversial or risky, and which in fact, you say, this is not the best use of these people's time. But it's what the culture

expects. So you had to know when you had to talk to whom. It wasn't really the way it was written down. There's a bunch of rules written down, but actually, the club was mostly an informal culture. There were a lot of people you needed to talk to that there was no rule that said you needed to talk to them. Like the former presidents. They have no legal or fiduciary status within the organization at all; but there is a class of organizational changes which, if an executive director wants to pull them off, he needs to consult with the former presidents. That's not written anywhere. They're a listserv, and they decide, sort of among themselves, what they're going to make your life miserable about, if you don't talk to them. You have to have a feel for that.

Lage: I can see coming from the outside—

03-00:55:26

Pope: It's impossible. It's just impossible. You don't have a feel for it. It's like, what? Huh? Who are they?

Lage: Like Doug Wheeler didn't have a feel for it, but he didn't get the staff engaged in helping him.

03-00:55:36

Pope: No. No, that's right. Fischer was much, much shrewder and got the staff engaged in helping him. I was the person that he actually mostly relied on, to be his kind of Sherpa. But Wheeler had not. So I knew, based on statistically, the odds were 50/50 that the next executive director would have a positive relationship with me, as Fischer had, as opposed to a negative relationship, which Wheeler had. And Fischer could've felt threatened by me. A lot of executive directors coming into a place want to get rid of the holdovers.

Lage: But that's not in the club's culture either, I don't think.

03-00:56:15

Pope: No, that's not in the club's culture. That doesn't mean somebody wouldn't have— If Wheeler had been able to deal with the board, Wheeler would've been able to do that, eventually. He just blew his relationship with the board, so he didn't last long enough to do it. But he could've done it. So I knew there was significant risk, if I waited for the new executive director, that it wouldn't work out. And B, I knew if it did work out, it would involve my spending a lot of time training somebody else. It's like, okay, do I want to do that again? I did it once, with Fischer. It was interesting. Do I want to do it again? So that was one possibility. Second possibility was I'd go find another job. My kids were still at an age where I was still locked into the Bay Area. So I looked around the Bay Area and there wasn't anything nearly as interesting as the club. Or I could decide to be the executive director, even though it was not nearly as good a job, in my opinion, as conservation director. So I could go for a bigger but less good job, at the right institution, and in a way that I wouldn't be subject to somebody else's—an unknown person's—sort of stuff. I decided it made sense to go for it.

Lage: I'm going to stop you right there.

[Audiofile 4]

Lage: This is tape four, still March 28, 2013, in the interview with Carl Pope. Okay. You threw your hat in the ring.

04-00:00:13

Pope: Right.

Lage: Tell me more about it.

04-00:00:18

Pope: Well, the process was, if you go back to the Wheeler process, where there'd been no staff involvement— The staff just got brought in at the end; well, here's your new executive director. Then when we did the Fischer process, there was some staff involvement. There was quite a bit of staff involvement. I don't remember exactly how it was structured, but I think there was actually a staff committee that advised the search process. There were three finalists— myself; a woman who then subsequently went on and ran the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Jamie Clark; and a woman from Rhode Island, who ran an environmental organization called Heal the Bay.

Lage: Not many women executives in the environmental movement.

04-00:01:15

Pope: No. One of the things that had happened at the end of Fischer's term was he had ended up having particularly troubled relations with the women on the board. And the board had a majority of women, at that point. So the women on the board, I think, were actually kind of actively interested in seeing if they could find a woman executive director. I think that was part of it. We went through the process. One of the two women—I can't remember which one— took her name out. May have been Jamie Clark, may have taken her name out. The board decided to offer the job to me. I believe it was eleven to four.

Lage: Is all this public knowledge, or you just hear about it? The eleven to four vote, for instance.

04-00:02:05

Pope: The eleven to four, I don't know whether it was public knowledge or not, but I was told. The four, actually, who preferred the other candidate were actually all women, so there was sort of a kind of a gender thing. But obviously, I got some women votes because the women were a majority. So they offered me the job and I took the job. I really don't know much about what happened in the process because they were doing it—

Lage: But did you have to present sort of a long-term vision on what changes you'd make?

04-00:02:42

Pope: Well, they didn't ask me for a long-term vision, but there was a process and I was interviewed by the search firm, about how I saw the club and how I thought the club worked and what kind of a leadership style I would bring to it.

Lage: Because you must've been able to answer this much more fully than many of the other candidates.

04-00:03:01

Pope: Well, I think that, A, I probably could give much more complete answers and the bar was probably higher; people expected me— The board was comparing the me they knew, not the me that came through this— I don't think really, what the search firm said about me had much to do with anything, because they knew me.

Lage: Because they knew you very well.

04-00:04:20

Pope: They knew me very well. So I think it was, okay, here we've got a known quantity. We know what we like about him and we know what we don't like about him. Here we've got two exciting new faces. We don't really know what we don't know about them. My guess is—but this is a guess; nobody told me this—my guess is, at the end of the day, if the internal candidate meets the we'd-be-comfortable-with-him test, it's hard for an outside candidate to knock you off. It was mine to lose, probably. The board would've had to say, we really don't think we want Carl as our executive director. Now, I think once they got to the point of, now we'd like Carl as our executive director, then it was like deciding that somebody you don't know very well would be an even better executive director is a hard thing for her to prove.

Lage: Yes. Gender aside.

04-00:04:24

Pope: Gender aside.

Lage: Well, did you come in with some long-term goals? Had things been festering that you thought—

04-00:04:31

Pope: Well, there was a big mess at the end of Fischer's tenure, around personnel management, because in the middle of— Oh, I can't remember what year it was; it was probably 1990.

Lage: This was '92, that you came in.

04-00:04:56

Pope: Yes. But I think it was 1990, when the recession hit, the club got into a bad financial situation. Fischer and the board kind of panicked. We had a board

meeting at Tenants Harbor, Maine, and at that board meeting, the decision was made that because of the finances, we needed to have a very major layoff. And it was not well-prepared. It was done in a rushed way, without enough thinking about how it could be— And it came as a huge shock to the staff and it led to a union drive.

Lage: Ah, yes.

04-00:05:53

Pope: It led to the unionization drive. So when I came in, one of the things that was pending was the union vote: are we going to win or lose the union vote. I didn't particularly want a union. Not because I was anti-union; because it would make my life harder. And it did make my life harder. It didn't really substantively change very much, but it was another piece of cumbersomeness that you had to work through.

Lage: The HR aspect.

04-00:06:16

Pope: Yes, and it ate up a lot of senior staff time and energy.

Lage: And how far up in the organization did the union go?

04-00:06:23

Pope: Well, unions go to the supervisory level. Anybody who's not a supervisor belongs to the union. Well, anybody that's not a supervisor or a lawyer, or there are a small number of people who are called confidential employees, because they have payroll information. So the payroll clerks are not in the union, because they know what everybody's salary is. But mostly it's everybody who's not a supervisor. We ended up with two unions, which was even more awkward. One in San Francisco and one everywhere else. Because the one in San Francisco was affiliated with United Auto Workers, who at that point, were fighting the club about fuel efficiency standards. So the conservation staff wanted a union, but they didn't want to belong to the UAW, so they organized their own independent union, which didn't often know what it was doing because it didn't have the kind of professional backup that the UAW-affiliated union had. So they were even harder to work with.

Lage: Was this the conservation staff nationally?

04-00:07:26

Pope: Well, in San Francisco, the conservation staff is part of the UAW affiliate, and the field staff and the Washington DC staff have their own union.

Lage: I see.

04-00:07:34

Pope: Which is called John Muir Local 100. So the big thing I had to deal with when I came in was the whole unionization thing. And the staff did vote to have a

union, and we had to then negotiate contracts with the union. So that was sort of the first thing. The second thing that I had to deal with when I came in was that two weeks after I was hired, Al Gore became vice president of the United States.

Lage: Yeah, you came in right as—

04-00:08:08

Pope: Correct, right as that transition took place. The Sierra Club, which had never actually been close to a president— We'd never really had a working relationship. We had always gotten our stuff done in Congress. That was the tradition. So when the Congress went sour, as it did in 1980, we didn't know— In 1980, of course, you had Reagan. But the House had still been Democratic. At that point, the House had been Democratic. We'd never had a Republican House. So the club had never had any experience, really, working with a really friendly [president]. Well, Jimmy Carter, I guess, I'm sorry.

Lage: Yeah, Carter was.

04-00:08:49

Pope: Jimmy Carter. I forgot Jimmy Carter, yes. That wasn't terribly successful, because shortly after Carter came in, we had the oil embargo and then the politics began to go sour. But there was an understanding and a belief that we were going to have to develop a new set of skills for how to work with the Clinton-Gore administration. That was one of the first things I had to face.

Lage: But was this a bad thing to face?

04-00:09:11

Pope: No, it was a challenge. But this was sort of the agenda; the agenda was figuring this out. Then there was the corresponding downside to that agenda, which was the economy wasn't very good and the moment they were elected, the direct-mail revenue fell off dramatically.

Lage: Is that a correlation there?

04-00:09:35

Pope: It was a correlation, but there were three things going on. We had a bad economy; there's a correlation with that. We had a friendly administration; that didn't affect renewals, but you didn't have a compelling reason for somebody who had never joined the Sierra Club to join the Sierra Club. By that time, almost everybody who was a direct-mail joiner had been asked to join the Sierra Club already.

Lage: Maybe several times.

04-00:10:02

Pope: Almost certainly, several times. So you didn't have a fresh, new audience to go to; you didn't have a fresh, new story to tell; and you had a bad economy.

So we actually didn't prospect for direct mail for a couple years. We got a lot smaller at the beginning of my tenure, because we couldn't justify doing recruitment mail for a year and a half, I think. So that also meant that making the major-gift part of the club much more central became part of my early challenges as executive director. So I had to deal with unionization; I had to deal with the financial thing; and then I had to deal with the fact that as you came out of the initial impact of Clinton-Gore and you went back into direct mail and you looked at the numbers, you could tell that you couldn't run a very large organization on membership. It simply was not possible, after 1990, to run a very large organization on membership dollars alone. You just didn't make enough money.

Lage: Because of this renewal thing, or because of the cost of running a big organization?

04-00:11:20

Pope: Well, no, because of the diminished profitability. It was the cost of recruitment. It wasn't the cost of renewals; renewals made a lot of money. But that would shrink. So if you wanted to say, well, we're only going to run for ten more years, you could probably run the organization as a fairly large organization for ten years, off the income from renewals. But every year, you would have less income, because you'd have fewer people renewing. So then you would run out. But if you wanted to keep the organization big, if you wanted to stay at a given size, it wasn't very lucrative. The natural size for the Sierra Club, the size at which you could've said, okay, it was all going to stabilize out, if you were trying to maximize your membership revenues, probably about 150,000, 200,000 people, not 4- or 500,000. So we had to do a lot more major-gift work.

So dealing with a friendly administration, which turned out to be much harder than we thought, because they were inept because they were new— By the time Clinton got to his second term, Monica [Lewinsky] aside, they had sort of figured out how to do things. But the first term, they just made lots and lots of really, just mistakes of inexperience. So I was dealing with a friendly administration, dealing with a financial crisis, and post the financial crisis, dealing with the reality that to grow the organization meant to grow major gifts. And to grow the organization's capacity, both to raise major gifts and to spend major gifts, were really major, major challenges that were kind of the challenges of my first, say eight years, the Clinton-Gore years.

Lage: I think we need to take these up one by one. And then the unionization you mentioned. Is that something to get more detail about?

04-00:13:21

Pope: Sure. Well, it happened. I don't think, in fact, that the Sierra Club, over those years, the years I was the executive director, I don't think we paid our employees meaningfully differently than we would have, had we not had a

union. The union was initially chosen by the staff because they wanted job security. Having watched the impact on the organization of poorly-planned layoffs, I was not inclined to use that as a management tool. I don't think the union made much substantive difference to the wages, benefits, or job security of Sierra Club employees.

Lage: But you did have to do layoffs. Did it make it more difficult?

04-00:14:27

Pope: It made it more difficult. It made it more cumbersome. We did the same layoffs, more or less. Again, I think at the margin, it probably made some difference; but everything was more cumbersome, because you had to negotiate it. At the end of the day, you can say, we're going to lay you off. The management has that power. But you had to spend a lot more time doing it.

Lage: Did you have to lay off people you might not have wanted to? Do it by seniority, rather than—

04-00:14:44

Pope: Well, you had a certain amount of seniority. We mostly managed to work around that. Again, I think at the margin, it probably made a little bit of difference. There probably were a few really bright young staff people that if we had had complete flexibility, we would've kept, and let some older folks go, but it wasn't very large. But it did eat up a lot of time. People like Lou Barnes and Debbie Sorondo and Sue De La Rosa spent a lot of their time dealing with the union. So it was a drain on the organization's overhead resources.

Lage: Now, all of this overhead—this is changing the topic a little bit—comes out of the membership dues, the nondeductible? Is that true or no?

04-00:15:41

Pope: No, because we charge overhead to grants. So in fact, no. You could not actually run the organization, if you paid for all of the administrative overhead out of dues. That would actually not be a viable business model. The costs of the board and the elections, the governance overhead, comes out of dues. But the administrative overhead, actually— I think given the way it works out, we probably mostly pay for that out of the restricted gifts, because that's the bulk of the money.

Lage: But it must be hard to raise funds from people for these administrative—

04-00:16:33

Pope: You're taking a little bit— People are used to the fact that organizations have administrative costs, so people expect to see administrative costs in a grant proposal. If it gets too big, it's a problem.

Lage: I'm thinking of what the university takes, sometimes 50 percent overhead.

04-00:16:48

Pope: Oh, no, no. We could not charge university overheads. We would not be able to get away with that. Fortunately, we didn't have university overhead costs. We also couldn't justify charging university overheads, because we didn't have that kind of overhead.

Lage: Okay, I think dealing with the major gifts might be next— The other thing, though, that I want to get to is, you did a lot of restructuring of the volunteer segment. Was that a result of trying to streamline things?

04-00:17:22

Pope: Yes, that was the result. But that was later. That came up later, so why don't we deal with these other things first, and then we can get to the volunteers. There were two big volunteer restructurings during my tenure, and we can talk about those and those are important, but they came up later.

Lage: Okay. Let's talk about shifting to major gifts and what that involved and what it meant.

04-00:17:44

Pope: We hired a staff that were skilled at doing this, and we eventually, in Bill Meadows, found the right leader for that staff. But it was very difficult to staff, because most of the people who had experience at doing major-gift fundraising, in the world, have come out of universities. That's where the bulk of them are. The interesting thing about a university major-gifts program is, if you an alumnus of Stanford and you're fantastically wealthy and I want you to give money, I have to persuade you that you want to give money to a university; I actually don't have to persuade you why it should be Stanford, because you went to Stanford. In the environmental arena, you not only had to persuade people who were very wealthy, you want to give to an environmental organization; we had to persuade them why it should be the Sierra Club and not NRDC or the Audubon Society. We had a big disadvantage, compared to everybody else, because we couldn't put them on our board. The standard way that you make somebody feel like they're really getting something, in terms of influence, for their gift is, you put them on the board. We couldn't do that.

Lage: But you had the foundation board.

04-00:19:20

Pope: But the foundation board didn't really control very much. So we would put people on the foundation board, and then they would discover they weren't really making conservation policy decisions on the foundation board, and that was what they wanted to make. I tried on several occasions, but never with enough grit, determination and stamina, I think, to create mechanisms by which donors could be engaged in our priority and policy conversations.

There was a lot of resistance from the grassroots volunteer structure, who didn't like the idea that somebody got a say because they had money.

Lage: Yeah. Talk about the culture of the club; that kind of goes against it.

04-00:20:05

Pope: So there was resistance. Finding a way that would be comfortable for the volunteers and comfortable for the donors was challenging, and I never pulled it off. That was probably a failure.

Lage: But what did you try?

04-00:20:19

Pope: I would propose various mechanisms, and sometimes we would create them and sometimes we would never even get there. None of them ever really worked. I think I never really took somebody aside and said, "It's your job to make this happen and I'll support you." I never really made it a mission-critical thing that the club had to get done.

Lage: Did the board discuss this? Was this a board issue?

04-00:20:44

Pope: This was discussed at the board and board members had different perspectives on it. Some board members understood it much more than others, particularly if they'd had board experience in other places, so they understood it. So a president like Lisa Renstrom, say, or Chuck McGrady, both of whom had been on other nonprofit boards and knew this, they kind of got it. Michele Perrault didn't have that experience, probably didn't get it. So it varied. So we had a problem staffing. Almost all the time I was there, we had vacancies for major-gifts position, because we couldn't find the right people. Then what you had was, I spent a lot of my time meeting with people. We did very poorly with foundations. I think Mike Brune is doing better. But during my tenure, the big environmental foundations—Pew, W. Alton Jones—especially the national ones—Rockefeller Brothers—didn't give the Sierra Club money.

Lage: Why?

04-00:22:16

Pope: There were two reasons, I think. Well, maybe there were three. One reason, clearly, was that the club works on a wide variety of issues and can be pretty confrontational, in a wide variety of venues. So any big foundation was likely to have as a trustee, somebody that had tussled with the club; in many cases, somebody who'd been sued by the club.

Lage: Oh, this is good.

04-00:22:47

Pope: It might only be one trustee, but that was enough to kind of make it hard. The staff would say, oh, shit, Joe doesn't want to give the Sierra Club money; why

don't we give this money to NRDC? That was a trustee problem. The second problem, which was a staff problem, was that the program officers of big environmental foundations—and I'm talking now about foundations that are really professional foundations, where the person who had the money died and left the money to a foundation, and then you hire a professional staff to administer it—those program officers like influence. They'd look at the Sierra Club and they'd say, this place is a little wild and crazy and a little independent and Democratic; it's too hard to control. So they didn't feel they had as much leverage, if they recommended making a new grant to the Sierra Club, as if they recommended making a grant to the Audubon Society.

Lage: So it's a power thing.

04-00:23:45

Pope: So it's a power thing.

Lage: What about HP, where Michael Fischer ended up, or was it the Hewlett Foundation?

04-00:24:01

Pope: Well, there is a Hewlett Foundation; there's a Packard Foundation. When those foundations became big, when David Packard and Bill Hewlett died—and those foundations would've been moderately-sized foundations, doing some environmental grant making—became *huge* foundations, which was during my tenure, everybody thought this was going to be different. Everybody thought the Sierra Club was going to get a lot of money from those foundations. In fact, Cole Wilbur, who had been the executive director of the Sierra Club Foundation, was the executive director of the Packard Foundation. He had spent time getting me to know Nancy Packard Burnett as a way of priming the pump for the moment, which he knew was going to come, when the big corpus was going to move over from David to the foundation; it was going to become enormous. Lo and behold, when it happened and we started going and talking to the new— It became clear that they were not going to give us any money. There were two reasons for that, I think. One was Julie Packard, who was on the board and ran the Monterey Bay Aquarium, had gotten into a tussle with the Ventana Chapter of the Sierra Club when she tried to expand the aquarium, over the traffic impacts. The Ventana Chapter had opposed some of her plans, and she was upset about that.

The second problem was that the Packard Foundation, you had a family. The board initially was these brothers and sisters, who did not get along with each other. They were so dysfunctional among themselves that a lot of what they did was to find some outside person who would re-grant for them. So they put a huge amount of money into something called the Resources Legacy Fund. The Resources Legacy Fund happened to be run by a bunch of people from places like the Nature Conservancy and Pete Wilson's administration in California, who didn't like the club's style at all. So the money wasn't

actually directly granted by the Packard Foundation; they would give it to some re-granting organization. The kind of people who would run those re-granting organizations were very much establishment figures. So we had—

Lage: Too many enemies.

04-00:27:13

Pope: Well, we were not their cup of tea. We were not their cup of tea. Nonetheless, we raised quite a bit of money, during my time as executive director. By the end, 80 percent of it was coming in from major gifts.

Lage: What percentage of those were foundations and what percentage were people?

04-00:27:34

Pope: Well, it was almost all people, although in some cases, it was foundations; but it was a kind of foundation where the guy who made the money was still alive. We found that our appeal was to people who had made the money. We had almost no appeal for second- and third-generation money. We had quite a bit of appeal [to the first generation]. So for example, if you look at the Goldman Foundation. Even though Dick Goldman was kind of an establishment figure and he was a Republican, he liked the Sierra Club. And he gave us quite a bit of money. His kids are much more interested in giving money to the symphony and giving money to the things that are so— Even though they're more liberal than he is.

Lage: That's very interesting.

04-00:28:21

Pope: They're more interested in being with the right crowd. Second generation money is more about status; first generation money's about impact. So basically, by the time I had finished my time as [executive director], I didn't spend much time on anybody who wasn't first generation. I would just say, yeah, fine, go talk to them, submit a proposal; but I wouldn't spend my own time on anybody who wasn't first generation, because I had concluded any big money the Sierra Club was going to get, it was going to get from the people who had made it themselves.

Lage: That's a very interesting observation.

04-00:27:53

Pope: In fact, if you look at the money I raised, I don't know what percentage, but it's an extraordinary percentage. Probably three-quarters of the total money that I personally raised came in from three people.

Lage: Can we talk about them?

04-00:29:05

Pope: Sure. Yeah, they're all now public. One was David Gelbaum, who was a southern California— Oh, I'll give you the three. One was David Gelbaum;

one was Aubrey McClendon, of Chesapeake Energy; and one was Michael Bloomberg, which came in after I was chairman, but it came in because of the relationships I built.

The biggest was Gelbaum, and he was the first. He was a guy in southern California, who had made his money somewhat accidentally. He was a securities guy in New Jersey. The securities firm he was in in New Jersey, some of the principals got in trouble for insider trading. David decided he didn't like Wall Street, so he came to California. He was doing private equity management. He helped to underwrite the initial public offering for Intuit. After Intuit went public, Microsoft tried to do a hostile takeover. As a result of Microsoft trying to do a hostile takeover, the stock went from— let's say it was sixty, to 600. As the underwriter, David had 10 percent of the stock. So he suddenly ended up with, from one transaction, something like \$3-, \$400 million. This was all unknown. This is the history we later pieced together, but this was all unknown. But there's this guy in Newport Beach, who's sending us a thousand dollars in the mail. Well, that doesn't happen that often, so Jim McDaniel, who's our gift officer, began cultivating him. Then he was giving us \$5,000.

Then in 1992, two years after Big Green was beaten, the Nature Conservancy in California put a park bond on the ballot. They came and talked to me about it and I was not enthusiastic, because I thought it was going to lose. I thought it was the middle of the California recession, the public was not— I just thought it was bad timing. But they were determined. They said, we have polled; it will pass. So they put it on the ballot. David called up Jim McDaniel and said, "Look—" He had been giving to the Conservancy; at that point, we did not know that, but he had been. He's very private. Very private. He said, "Okay. I want to give \$100,000 to this campaign. But the only way I can give \$100,000 anonymously is by giving it to a C-4 organization. If I give it to the Nature Conservancy, I'll have to give it to their campaign committee, and then I'll be disclosed, and I don't want to be disclosed. So I'd like to know, is the Sierra Club supporting this ballot measure? Are you willing to take a \$100,000 gift from me and spend it on the campaign?" I said, "Well, David, look. Yes, we've endorsed it."

Lage: You'd met him at this time?

04-00:32:48

Pope: No.

Lage: Oh, you hadn't met him.

04-00:32:49

Pope: This is phone. But he called me. Jim McDaniels set it up. Jim had met him, but I hadn't met him.

Lage: So you had endorsed the—

04-00:32:57

Pope:

So yeah. We just thought it was a bad idea. But it was like, okay, well, now we don't want it to lose. We thought it was a bad idea because we thought it was going to lose. We thought it was a good ballot measure, we loved the content; but we thought, this is bad strategy. But we'd endorsed it and we were going to try to help pass it, because what we were worried about was that it wasn't going to pass. So I said, "Well, David, look. The answer is yes, we've endorsed it. Yes, we think it's very good public policy. But I have to tell you, if I was a bettor, I wouldn't bet on this. I don't think the public is in the mood to approve a big park bond issue. The economy's terrible. We lost Big Green two years earlier. I think this is going down in flames. So I would have to say to you, this is a very big gamble. Now, I don't know whether you want to take that kind of gamble or not. If you want to take that kind of gamble, we will be delighted to spend your money as well as we can, to pass this initiative."

David said, "No, they've shown me the polling, and I'm convinced that it can pass." So he gave us the money, and we spent it all. And it lost. After it lost, he called us up. He called Jim up. He said, "I appreciated the fact that you told me the truth, and I would like to work with you more." Then he began coming up with ideas of things we could do with his money, and giving us money.

Lage:

How do you spell his last name?

04-00:34:28

Pope:

G-E-L-B-A-U-M.

Lage:

Just the way it sounds.

04-00:34:33

Pope:

At some point in 2000—and he was giving his money mainly, at that point, to work with— He was a big believer in coalition, so he gave us a lot of money to work with hunting and fishing groups, on wildlife issues.

Lage:

Was that something you had to create? A new direction?

04-00:34:52

Pope:

Well, yeah, the programs didn't exist. We obviously had relations [with wildlife groups] and we worked on wildlife issues. So the issues weren't new, but the programs were new. We had to create programs and hire staff. Then at some point— Let's see. Newt Gingrich gets elected in the fall of 2004. Bill Meadows says, "David Gelbaum is thinking up program for us. That's not the way this should happen. We should think up program for him. So we should come up with a big program idea and we should take it to him and pitch it." So we sat down and looked at the challenge that Gingrich posed, and we came up with what became a club program called the environmental public education campaign. The idea was, the way to beat Gingrich was to organize

intense local environmental sentiment around the country against him, but around local issues.

Lage: Around local issues in key districts?

04-00:36:00

Pope: Yes, in key districts. So we put this program together. It involved a lot of things that were new for the club. We were going to do quite a bit of paid media, which we had not done before. So we put this together, and then I'm getting ready to go down to southern California to pitch David Gelbaum. We're sitting down and I say, "Look, Bill, there's one thing I don't know. How much money am I asking for?" Bill said, "Well, the problem is, we don't really know. We don't know what his capacity is. We don't know what the right amount is."

Lage: Because he was so private.

04-00:36:48

Pope: Because he's so private, we didn't know what the right amount was. We knew he'd been willing to give \$100,000 of hard money, non-deductible money, for a California park bond, so we knew it was— And he'd been giving us, at that point, \$4- or \$500,000 a year, probably. So we knew he could do more than that; but it was like, how much? So I said, "Well, Bill, that's all well and good, but he's going to ask me at some point, 'What's the budget?' I'm pretty sure." And Bill said, "Well, come up with a number." As I think executive directors tend to, I had had this fantasy about I'd find myself bumped up to business class, and I found myself sitting next to somebody like Bill Gates, and he sort of turns to me and says, "I'd like to help the environment; how much would it cost?" So I had had this imaginary conversation. The figure I'd always used in this imaginary conversation was \$5 million. That was the outer limit of my imagination, at that point. So I said, "Well, I've had this Bill Gates fantasy in airplanes, so I could ask for \$5 million." Meadows said, "Yeah. He won't give you that, but that shows you're taking his \$500,000 seriously, and we'll find out what he can do." So we got there, we made the presentation, we're sitting there—

Lage: You and Bill together?

04-00:38:14

Pope: Actually, Jim McDaniel and I went; Bill didn't go, because Jim knew him. So we're sitting, we make the presentation, we finish. David says, "Well, what's the budget?" I said, "Well, frankly, this is modular, because we're doing this in key districts. So we can do more or fewer districts, but it costs \$100,000 for each district." I said, "Frankly, once I get to fifty districts, which is \$5 million, I think my personal energy would shift from raising more money to making sure that we spent the money we'd raised as well as possible. So my ideal budget for the first couple years is \$5 million." David said, "Well, I can do that." [they laugh]

Lage: How did you keep your facial expression?

04-00:39:12

Pope: I doubt I did. I managed not to fall off my chair, but it was not easy. Then over the next several years, David was doing very well. So this is 1995. He gave us, I think, roughly \$5 million a year, for the rest of that period of time.

Lage: For different programs each time?

04-00:39:42

Pope: No, no, to keep the environmental public education work going.

Lage: Was that effective, that program?

04-00:39:47

Pope: Yeah, it was very effective. It was very effective. And it built the club. The thing is that it was effective for his purposes, but also built the club. There were various changes, because the tax law, the regulations around this stuff were changing. So at some point, he started giving us some hard money; he gave us 527 money instead of C-3 money. So the program did change; but its core concept, which was to use environmental organizing around local environmental issues to impact the attitudes of members of Congress, didn't change. So that continued through about 1999. And I got closer to David. I actually went on the board of the land trust, which David also funds in southern California, called the Wildlands Conservancy. So we developed a very close relationship.

One funny story was when we moved into the office we're in now, from the office we had been in, which was Polk Street, and David came to visit us for the first time, David came with his brother, who lives in Marin County and who works with him on a lot of his giving. They're walking up the stairs. We've just moved in. And Bruce Hamilton, who they had not yet met, was walking up the stairs behind him; but they didn't know who Bruce was, and he didn't know who they were. Or he knew who they were. He knew who they were. They're talking, and Daniel Gelbaum is looking at the stairwell at headquarters, and he says, "Well, Davey, one piece of good news is they're not spending your money on the building." [they laugh]

Lage: Well, that's nice.

04-00:41:36

Pope: Which was very nice. When he got up there, we sat down and we're talking, and Bruce had told me this. So since Bruce had told me, I said, "Well, these are our new headquarters and I'm curious about your reaction, as a donor." He said, "Oh," he says, "I approve." He says, "I approve." He said, "Look, when I'm doing my philanthropy with environmental groups, it's like my auto mechanic. I hire my auto mechanic to fix my car. I hire you guys to fix the

planet. I really wouldn't want my auto mechanic to live in a house that was better than mine, because he'd be wasting my money."

Lage: Right. He sounds like quite a character.

04-00:42:20

Pope: He is quite a character. He is quite a character. But then in 2000, he comes to me and he says, "Okay, look. I've made so much money now that I need to give it away a lot faster, and I want your advice." So at that point, we put together a bunch of new programs, brought him a proposal, and he gave us \$100 million—

Lage: Good heavens!

04-00:42:48

Pope: —for three years. So he went from \$5 million to \$30 million a year. Then the next year, he got into financial trouble. So that \$100 million, we stretched out from— It was supposed to be 2001, 2002, 2003; the club actually stretched it out until 2006. [He made another big gift in 2004.]

Lage: Just by marshaling the resources?

04-00:43:16

Pope: We just slowed down. We didn't do a lot. We were going to spend a lot of money on media, and we ended up not spending it on media, because we thought that was the least— But that money really carried the club through. Then David was able to give us another \$15 million in 2004—he got back in the black again—and \$5 million in 2006. Then he put all of his money, all of his philanthropic money, into clean tech stocks, and lost most of it.

Lage: Oh, you're kidding.

04-00:43:48

Pope: So it's been a difficult time. But that one donor carried the club through.

Lage: A single donor.

04-00:43:56

Pope: Right.

Lage: How did all this work, in terms of developing programs? Were you doing what the club would've been doing anyway? Or were you targeting it to this individual?

04-00:44:10

Pope: Well, a couple things. One of the nice things about David was that he wanted to build the institution. So we were able to spend a lot more money on building up the club's grassroots capacities than we would've in the normal— Normally, when funder give you money, they want you to work on legislation

this year. So we were actually able to spend the money on these local issues, which we could never otherwise have funded. We didn't pick the issues; the chapter picked the issue. Now, they had to work on the issue in a certain way; they had to use it to build up—which not all the chapters wanted—they had to build up their grassroots. And they had to build partnerships and coalitions. So it pushed the club into being much more of an outwardly-facing organization.

Lage: Were they responsible for reporting back what had been done?

04-00:45:08

Pope: Yes. But not in a way that people found onerous.

Lage: To be able to measure results, I guess is what I'm getting at.

04-00:45:14

Pope: Yeah. There was probably not as much of that as there should've been, but we were very— We got results. At one point, I wrote up for David, what we'd actually accomplished with this money. Because when George Bush was reelected in 2004, he had given us a bunch of money to influence that—hard money, not soft money—and he was very angry at us because we'd failed.

Lage: Because you'd failed to defeat Bush?

04-00:45:47

Pope: Correct.

Lage: He should've gotten after the Supreme Court.

04-00:45:50

Pope: Well. And he thought we'd done it the wrong way. So I had to go back to him and say, "Okay, well, all right. So you're upset about that. But let's look at the whole history. Here's what has been accomplished with your [money]." It really was staggering. Hundreds of billions of dollars of either good public investments made or bad public investments stopped, and millions of acres protected.

Lage: Did it focus on lands, public lands?

04-00:46:20

Pope: No, it focused on all the club's issues. It focused on land, it focused on pollution, it focused on air, it focused on water, it focused on toxics.

Lage: So did it fund chapter activities?

04-00:46:31

Pope: The chapters and groups would pick the projects, and then the national organization would staff the organizing.

Lage: I see.

04-00:46:38

Pope:

Some chapters and groups were more enthused about that than others, and the chapters and groups that didn't get picked didn't feel— They would've liked to have just general membership money that everybody could've shared in, which would've been fantastic; but that wasn't where the money was coming from. Eventually, when the club's immigration battle came up, the people who wanted the club to get involved in the immigration campaign decided to make a big stink about the fact that we were getting all this money from this anonymous donor, because he was anonymous.

Lage:

Oh, totally anonymous all this time?

04-00:47:23

Pope:

Yeah, all this time. They actually, through a complicated series of events, they kept saying, we think there's this donor and we think this is the reason that the club does not take a position on immigration—which was not the case. Although David did not want us to take a position on immigration; but the board didn't even know that. I knew it, but it was like, well, that would be influencing the board; I don't want to influence the board. So I didn't ever tell the board what David felt about it. David even said to me, "If you decide to take a position on immigration, I will not be giving you money anymore."

Lage:

Oh, he did say that?

04-00:47:59

Pope:

Yeah, but I didn't tell the board that. So this had nothing to do with the board's position on immigration, but the people who wanted the club to get involved in the immigration battle made a big stink about the fact that we were getting this money and saying, you see, it's immoral to take anonymous donations. Well, one of them was Dick Lamm, who was on the board of the University of Denver, which took lots of anonymous money. So it was like, oh, come on, Dick; this is normal. A reporter in southern California decided to try to figure out who this guy was. And he noticed the fact that I was on the board of David's land trust.

Lage:

It was his actual land trust? His own?

04-00:48:49

Pope:

No, no.

Lage:

Or he was the donor.

04-00:48:51

Pope:

He was funding it. And he was a visible donor to that; he was on the board of that. So that was the one charitable thing he did where he was not anonymous, was this land trust. And he noticed that the land trust did a huge amount of work getting kids out into the outdoors, and he noticed that the Sierra Club had done a huge amount of work getting kids into the outdoors, because David had funded a lot of outings work for us, too.

Lage: Specifically for children?

04-00:49:16

Pope: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, children.

Lage: Underserved?

04-00:49:19

Pope: Inner city. Stuff like ICO [Inner City Outings]. So this reporter decided, okay, I think this is the guy.

Lage: Smart.

04-00:49:29

Pope: He called David up and said, “Now, I know you’re the guy.” David had not dealt with reporters and didn’t realize that reporters do that. Often, they’ll call you and say, I know you’re the guy. And David confirmed he was the guy, so then he was outted.

Lage: Outted.

04-00:49:41

Pope: Which was very unfortunate. I was very upset about that, because I had—

Lage: Did he realize that it hadn’t come from the Sierra Club?

04-00:49:50

Pope: Yes, after he and I talked. But he still had to hire security people to protect his kids, because nobody knew he was rich. He didn’t live in a hovel, but he lived in a nice middle-class neighborhood in Newport Beach. So it’s an upper-middle-class neighborhood, but he wasn’t doing anything fancy. And now all of a sudden was outted as this really fantastically wealthy guy, giving hundreds of millions of dollars to the environment, and he was very— His kids were never threatened, but I think— He let go of the security details after a while, but it was a very bitter experience for him, and I was very, very upset about it because basically, I had directors who had deliberately gone out to try to expose an anonymous donor to the club, because they didn’t agree with one policy decision the club had taken. I thought that was wrong.

Lage: These were the people who wanted the club to come out against immigration?

04-00:50:41

Pope: Immigration, yeah. I should be fair. Some of the people who were on that position didn’t do anything unethical. But there were some directors who I thought behaved in a very unethical fashion.

Lage: It’s surprising, though, that you could keep that whole thing a secret. There must’ve been a number of people who knew.

04-00:51:01
Pope: Well, there were not. Only the president and the treasurer knew who he was. The foundation knew, because he was actually making the gifts mostly to the foundation. But the president and the treasurer knew.

Lage: Over a period of years.

04-00:51:15
Pope: Over a period of years. And then everybody knew that the gifts existed.

Lage: Did other questions get raised about strings attached to those gifts?

04-00:51:25
Pope: Yes. Oh, yeah, there were a lot of questions. We were able to say, here's the grant proposal. Here's what we sent. The strings are in the grant proposal. And they were all reviewed and those were all public. The grant proposals were all public, because they were approved by the foundation. So what we were doing with the money and what the strings were was all public.

Lage: Yeah. Well, that's a great story.

04-00:51:46
Pope: Well, it's a sad story, actually, but it's an interesting story, yeah.

Lage: Sad in the end, but overall, it's not so sad.

04-00:51:50
Pope: Yeah, yeah. Right.

Lage: So did you lose him as a donor, at that point?

04-00:51:56
Pope: No.

Lage: Or you lost him because he lost his—

04-00:51:57
Pope: We eventually lost him because he lost his ability to give. He pulled back. He didn't pull back because of that; he pulled back for a while when Bush was reelected, because he wasn't sure we were spending the money strategically. So he pulled back for a while; but then he was starting to come back in, when he lost the money.

Lage: You're such a strategist on politics, let's talk about that election, since you brought it up. Did the club do a good job on that election?

04-00:52:29
Pope: Oh, yeah, we did a phenomenal job on that. That was by far, the best effort we ever made in a presidential race, because we got ready to help people at the grassroots. Because the 2004 election was interesting. In 2004, essentially

every voter in the country knew by August who they were going to vote for. Nobody was undecided about George Bush, in his second election. So the only question was, who was going to get to the polls? It was entirely about motivating people to vote, not about persuading them who to vote for. There was a lot of data which had emerged over the previous couple years, showing that what really motivated people to vote was being asked by another human being to vote. So it was all about organizing grassroots volunteers to go door to door. The Sierra Club figured that out early on, and thanks to David, had the money to put organizers in and set up structures. So we had tens of thousands of volunteers, many of whom had never worked with the club before, working with us for the two weeks before the election, in states like Ohio. We did a phenomenal job.

Lage: This sounds a lot like the Obama campaign.

04-00:53:37

Pope: Yes. The Obama campaign was a version of that, that was then more sophisticated and built on—

Lage: More electronic.

04-00:53:44

Pope: —more modern electronic tools, yeah. There was not much electronic stuff in 2004. So it was very much like the Obama campaign. The Obama campaign was the successor to the progressive effort of 2004, which was not run by the [John] Kerry campaign; it was run outside the Kerry campaign, because they didn't have the money. Now, the Obama campaign realized that they used the Internet to raise the money, so they could do it in-house, which was more effective.

Lage: Okay, interesting. Do you want to go to the other major funders? What's our timing?

04-00:54:23

Pope: I should probably stop now. It's one-fifteen.

Lage: Okay, that's fine.

Interview 3: April 1, 2013

[Audiofile 5]

Lage: Okay, we're starting. Today is April 1, 2013.

05-00:00:09

Pope: Today is indeed April 1.

Lage: No April Fools jokes. This is tape five, with Carl Pope. Maybe we'll finish our sessions today; that's what we're aiming for.

05-00:00:19

Pope: All right.

Lage: Let's see, Carl, we're focusing on your time as executive director. We started with fund-raising strategies, which really seemed very key to everything, and talked a lot about David Gelbaum. You mentioned two other major donors.

05-00:00:34

Pope: Right.

Lage: Should we talk about them? And also what kinds of things were funded with these major gifts. That gets us into environmental campaigns, as well.

05-00:00:41

Pope: Right, okay. David Gelbaum supported us very generously from 1995, when he made the commitment to the first \$5 million, and then through about 2006. His big gift was in 2004; he made some other gifts that were focused on outdoor education for children, in 2005 and 2006; and then after that, he didn't have the liquidity to make gifts, so he ceased being a major factor. We spent that money out through about 2008.

Lage: Let me just clarify. Was that a major hunk of the club's income, so to speak?

05-00:01:39

Pope: Well, certainly, in some years, it was, yes. It was a very major chunk. Our annual budget was running, in those years, between \$75- and \$90 million, and he probably gave us a total of \$200 million, over the course of ten years. So he was probably running, on the average, let's say \$20 million a year.

Lage: Significant.

05-00:02:04

Pope: So that was quite significant.

Lage: Okay, on to the other two.

05-00:02:08

Pope:

The second really major donor that we landed was actually one that turned out to be quite controversial, which was Chesapeake Energy, which was a natural gas extraction company, which wanted to talk to us in 2005, at the first, and I believe, actually the only national convention the Sierra Club ever had. The club's leaders affirmed the early results of a consultative process we were having about what the club's priorities should be going forward. That was the moment when the Sierra Club's grassroots leadership decided that we were going to focus primarily on climate. We had obviously worked on climate before that, and we had worked on energy, but they had been kind of a second-tier issue. The biggest issue, of course, over the decades, had been lands protection, and pollution had been the second-tier issue, and then energy and climate had kind of been third-tier.

Lage:

Of course, this was happening everywhere, climate change rising to the top.

05-00:03:10

Pope:

Yes, but it was interesting. The club's leadership was early, because this was before [An] *Inconvenient Truth*. In fact, what happened was, for the club process—and this was a very important process—we made a huge effort in 2004, which we discussed a little bit about last time, to get voters to the polls, so that George Bush would be a one-term president. We didn't get there. So after Bush was reelected, there was a feeling on the part of the board and the club's leadership that we needed to really think deeply about where we were heading. Things looked pretty grim. The decision was made to do something much bigger than we've ever done before. This was also an initiative that was sort of spurred by Marshall Ganz, and I believe the person who actually first started the ball rolling internally was Bob Perkowitz, who was President Renstrom's husband, but I could be wrong about that. We decided to have a national convention. Marshall made the point that very, very large grassroots membership organizations, chapter-based organizations, historically used their national conventions to really bring their leadership together and have some face time and create more glue, and the club had never done that.

Lage:

Well, you'd had, I recall, gatherings at Snowmass. I don't know what they were called.

05-00:04:34

Pope:

Yes, we had a couple of international assemblies, they were called, one in Snowmass and one in Michigan somewhere. But they weren't really deliberative. Those were, come and learn about the environment, come and have a good time. Those were not places where the club deliberated where it was going; those were not, in that sense, conventions. This was a real convention. We had done a process with the grassroots, the chapters' and the groups' leaders in advance, to get them ready. The early returns from the grassroots process came out very, very strongly for climate as the top priority, which to be honest, it was a big surprise to me. And I think it was a big

surprise to the board. Probably a few of them anticipated it, but this was like, oh, this is different. And it was big.

Lage: Because you think of the club, the volunteers, as tending towards the green issues, the public lands.

05-00:05:28

Pope: Yeah. Well, that's what they'd worked on. But the basic message was, hey, we can save the Arctic Wildlife Refuge, which doesn't do any good if it's under water. So we had this convention, and at the convention, global warming emerged, even after people sat and talked about it for two days, that was what they said we should do. Then the board formally adopted that as the club's priorities that following September. One interesting thing about the convention was that we had invited former Vice President Gore to be a speaker at it, and he had been tied up. He was actually committed to giving another speech, which was going to be a speech he was giving to the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, state insurance regulators. The topic of the speech was "Global Warming and Extreme Weather," and it was going to be given in New Orleans, and it was going to be in New Orleans the weekend that [Hurricane] Katrina hit New Orleans.

Lage: Good heavens. What timing!

05-00:06:36

Pope: So when it became clear that there was going to be a hurricane in New Orleans, the insurance commissioners cancelled their convention, and Gore then called us up and said he would like to come and speak to our convention, that he was now free. And he came and he gave an absolutely incredible speech, which some people later argued, well, that's the reason that the Sierra Club decided to do climate, was because of Gore's speech and because of Katrina. Certainly, those were very important events. But if you look at the results of the chapter and group consultative process prior, they were just as strongly committed to climate. So I felt this was really not an impulsive or a reactive decision, by the club's leaders, but that this was really a well-reasoned and deeply felt commitment.

So confronted with the fact that we were going to now tackle the climate challenge, this was a very big challenge. It was not like anything the club had done before. The next stage in the process was that we brought about fifty club leaders together, in February of 2006, in Tucson. We brought in a very skilled facilitator. I can't remember now where we found him, a guy named Dave La Piana. He put those fifty club leaders, who were a mixture of staff and volunteers, local and national, young and old, through a series of planning exercises, to plan possible strategic focuses for our work on climate. Because there was an awful lot we could've done on climate, and it wasn't clear what this meant. We came up with about seven or eight different potential major campaigns that came out of that. Actually, if you look back, a surprising

number of them eventually happened, although some did not. But the one which began to take shape right after that was the Beyond Coal Campaign.

Lage: Oh, that early?

05-00:09:46

Pope: The Beyond Coal Campaign, at that point, existed in a very nascent form. It had started out as the Chicago Clean Air Campaign, because the Sierra Club had some leaders in Chicago, including a significant donor and a foundation trustee, who's now running for the board, actually. Chicago had a couple of old coal-fired power plants. And this guy's wife had asthma, so he was very concerned about pollution from coal power plants, because his wife was suffering from it. And he had run into Bruce Nilles, and they decided to launch the Chicago Clean Air Campaign and shut down these coal plants. These coal plants, incidentally, finally shut down about three months ago.

Lage: And what is his name?

05-00:09:43

Pope: Chuck Frank. Chuck Frank, who was actually an auto dealer. He was the largest General Motors dealer in Illinois, at that time.

Lage: Isn't that interesting?

05-00:09:51

Pope: So Chuck and Bruce had begun with the Chicago Clean Air Campaign, and Chuck had gone out and had found a bunch of people in Chicago who shared his concerns about pollution from coal. This was not about climate, at this point; it was about asthma. Soot and stuff like that. Then as they began to raise more money, they decided that the power plants didn't just stay in the community; the pollution blew hundreds of miles. So they began focusing on Illinois. So that what had been the Chicago Clean Air Campaign became the Illinois Clean Air Campaign. But the Illinois Clean Air Campaign had developed a pretty strong leadership cadre.

Lage: But this is Sierra Club, right?

05-00:10:27

Pope: This is Sierra Club. Oh, yes, this was Sierra Club. Two or three of the leaders from that campaign came to Tucson, and they saw the opportunity in Tucson, to take the Illinois Clean Air Campaign and make it much, much, much bigger. And they laid out this vision that the United States, which at this point, was on the verge of building 150 new coal-fired power plants, would not build any of them; that we would set out to stop 150 coal-fired power plants. Now, these 150 coal-fired power plants were the legacy of Dick Cheney's energy task force, back in the spring of 2001. This was the major energy policy legacy of the Bush administration. So to set out to stop it was really pretty ballsy. We did not know how we were going to do it. This was a case where

Bruce Nilles got up and just said, “If we build these 150 coal-fired power plants, we can’t stop climate change. That one act will put the United States so deeply in the hole, in terms of its carbon dioxide emissions, that we will never be able to meet climate change. We have to do it.”

Lage: How did the— Well, go ahead. I don’t mean to interrupt.

05-00:11:47

Pope: The club’s leadership said, okay, try.

Lage: It’s just interesting that such an important campaign seemed to have come from the grassroots, rather than from the San Francisco staff.

05-00:12:08

Pope: Well, that was not uncommon. That was not uncommon. Some of these things are teed up by events. For example, the Arctic Wildlife Refuge Protection Campaign. If you look at the history of that, the first thing that happened was that Ed and Peggy Wayburn went to Alaska, in the late seventies. Then they decided we had to save Alaska, and that triggered the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act. Then that set up a process by which the Department of the Interior had to recommend to Congress what would become parks and refuges and wilderness; and that then became the Alaska Lands Campaign, at the end of the Carter administration. One of the compromises Carter made, when he eventually signed the Alaska Lands bill, instead of just the national monuments that he created, was there was a compromise that the question of oil drilling in the Arctic Wildlife Refuge would be postponed for eight years, and the Department of the Interior would make a recommendation. Well, Don Hodel was Secretary of the Interior [after the eight years], and Don Hodel recommended that we drill in the Arctic. That launched that campaign. So that was a campaign that actually, in some sense, it was teed up by Hodel. But if you really go back, this was just the last piece of Peggy and Ed Wayburn’s trip to Alaska.

Lage: Right. I didn’t mean to get you off the track.

05-00:13:34

Pope: No, that’s all right. These are all part of the story. So the Beyond Coal Campaign was teed up and Chuck Frank helped raise the initial funding, which wasn’t very substantial. Then we began talking to other environmental groups about what they were thinking of doing about these coal-fired power plants, because nobody liked them. Nobody else really had a let’s-do-it-all strategy. Everybody else’s strategy was, let’s take four of five of them that we think that are particularly bad, and see if we can make them better, and just explore. Because nobody knew how to do this. So Bruce and the lawyers started working on these plants. I don’t know if they were shocked, but I was certainly surprised, because they discovered that a number of these plants, which were being built, did not have permits. They just didn’t have permits.

The first one we found like that was the municipal utility of Springfield, Illinois had spent like \$140 million of people's money, and they had a huge hole in the ground, for a power plant they didn't have a permit for. Then we found Kansas City Power and Light, just across the river. They had spent \$175 million on a power plant for which they had an expired permit. They had a permit, but it had expired. So we went to them, we said, "You don't have a permit." And they said, "Well, that's okay. The Bush administration's EPA told us we didn't need a permit." Our lawyers said to them, "Well, that's interesting. Perhaps we should go down the road to St. Louis and see what the Federal Circuit Court thinks of this theory that you can build a power plant without a permit or with an expired permit." In both cases, what happened was that, yeah, we went to the judges and—

Lage: Was this a formal court case?

05-00:15:43

Pope: Well, yeah, we filed. The judges looked at these cases, and they said to the developers, the City of Springfield, and Kansas City Power and Light, they said, "We would really strongly recommend you try to settle these cases, because you're not very likely to win them at all." These were just slam-dunk cases. So then these two developers sat with us, and said, "Well, we've already spent—" At this point, probably between them, they'd spent \$300 million. They said, "We don't want to throw it away. Is there any way we can work this out?" Because it would've been a devastating blow to the City of Springfield; it would've practically bankrupted the city. And Kansas City Power and Light, the CEO would've lost his job and there would've been a big scandal. We said, "Well, as a matter of fact, there is." Because both of these companies owned old coal-fired power plants that were really dirty. We said, "We'll let you finish these new plants, because they're so far along, if you shut down an equivalent amount of your old plants and you buy an equivalent amount of wind." So we basically got a two-for-one. We got twice as much cleanup from letting them finish the projects, and we jumpstarted the wind industry in the Midwest. And we avoided having some huge—I mean, these were both hard battles, but we didn't have scandals, as a result.

That did two things. First, it convinced a couple of big donors to give us significant money, like half a million dollars. It also convinced other people in the business that we were serious and we were real, and that actually, maybe these things weren't going to get built. Then we began to build up the campaign and Wall Street began looking at these power plants and saying, "I don't know about the economics of this." Which was a very smart thing, because the ones that were finished— We didn't stop them all. I think five or six, maybe as many as ten, actually, will end up having been completed. Every time one of them opened, people's utility bills went through the roof, because these things were just way too expensive to run. Once you built them, you just couldn't afford them.

Lage: Did they use cleaner technology? Is there such a thing as clean coal?

05-00:18:08

Pope: No, there's no such thing as clean coal, but they used modern pollution-control technology to clean up things like mercury and sulfur and soot. They cleaned up those things. They didn't clean up carbon dioxide, but they cleaned up mercury and sulfur and soot. That's one of the things that made it expensive. Even to the extent that you can make coal cleaner, you only do so by making it much more expensive. If you ever tried to clean up the carbon, you would make it unaffordably more expensive. In fact, the last of these plants to be built, which was finished last summer, it was a \$2 billion lignite plant, being built by a group of rural co-ops in North Dakota. I think it was called Great Plains Energy, or maybe Great Wind Energy. It wasn't wind energy, but—. They finished it and the contractor turned the keys over to the power company, and the power company locked it up; they never turned it on, because they couldn't afford to operate it. \$2 billion investment, just sitting there.

Lage: Bad business.

05-00:19:16

Pope: Very bad business. So we had one half-million-dollar gift for the Beyond Coal Campaign, which I think by this time was called the Beyond Coal Campaign. Then we heard that there was a natural gas company called Chesapeake, which we didn't know much about, that was interested in helping the Sierra Club fight coal, because they had already been fighting coal in Oklahoma. Their motivation for fighting coal was that they wanted markets for natural gas. They wanted to sell natural gas to power companies, and if the power companies were buying too much coal, they wouldn't buy enough natural gas. Their motivation was pretty straightforward.

We looked into them. We found that they had a good reputation. They didn't do stuff on public lands, which would've been a problem for us. They didn't do coal bed methane extraction, which the club opposed. At that point, people had not really focused on concerns about hydraulic fracturing, per se. So it looked to us like Chesapeake was somebody we could work with, and they began making some very significant contributions to the Beyond Coal Campaign. They also did a lot of work on their own to fight the coal industry. So we were not only getting money from them, we were actually working in parallel. They would go into the public service commission in a state and they would argue that they could deliver power that would be cleaner and cheaper than the power that would come from approving one of the new coal plants. And we would go in and argue that these new coal plants were really filthy, and we'd get citizens who were upset about them, so we would kind of double team in a number of states in the Midwest. Quite successfully.

Lage: Did that raise issues at that time? I know later, it did.

05-00:20:58

Pope: Well, later, it raised issues. At that time, it didn't raise particular issues. We were partnering with them. We didn't tell the coal industry how much money we were getting, because we didn't want them to know. And Chesapeake didn't want the gas industry to know how close we were, because many in the gas industry did not approve of Chesapeake being close to the Sierra Club at all.

Lage: So it was an anonymous—

05-00:21:19

Pope: So the gifts were anonymous. The partnership was not; we were up there in front of the public service commission. It didn't raise particular issues. Fracking had not become such a big issue. Chesapeake had not gotten into some of the fights it got into later. I think that when we finally decided not to take any more of their money, it was the right decision. I also think it was the right decision to take their money, when we did. I don't have any question, because without that funding, many of those coal plants would've been built and the United States would be in a much worse position. So I think it was a good temporary partnership, but it wasn't a long-term marriage.

Lage: Okay. Is it Aubrey McClendon who was associated with Chesapeake?

05-00:21:59

Pope: Mm-hm. He was the CEO. Some of the money was his and some of it was the company's.

Lage: I see.

05-00:22:02

Pope: It was a mixture. It was a mixture. Then the third big donor that we teed up in this process, who gave us the money because of the work we did with Aubrey's money, but gave us much more money, and money that people weren't nearly as upset about, was, of course, Michael Bloomberg. That finally came in after Michael Brune was the executive director; but the relationship with Mayor Bloomberg had been built up during my time as executive director.

Lage: Tell about building up a relationship with somebody like that.

05-00:22:26

Pope: Well, that was a very interesting story. One of the people that I knew in the environmental community and we had worked with over the years was Theodore Roosevelt IV, who was the great-grandson of President Theodore Roosevelt. He was a New York environmental attorney, and he was a Republican. He was one of the last people holding the fort for Republican environmentalism. I think in 2007, probably, but it might've been 2006, Teddy called me up and said, "Mayor Bloomberg wants your help." Bloomberg, when he started out in New York, had not had a terrific

environmental reputation. One of the first things he did was to shut down the recycling program, so we were not at all sure who he really was. He was relatively unknown to us. I said, “Well, what does he want our help with?” And Roosevelt said, “Well, he wants to use congestion pricing as a way of financing mass transit in New York City.” We were totally in favor of congestion pricing. I said, “Well, we’d be delighted to help him get congesting pricing.” He said, “Well, okay, so they’ll be reaching out to you.”

About two weeks later, I was going to Washington. My assistant, Rod MacKenzie came in and said to me, “Mayor Bloomberg would like to come see you while you’re in Washington.” I said, “Well, the mountain comes to Muhammad. [They laugh.] All right.” So we met in the Sierra Club office on C Street, which was not a terribly fancy place, and I think Bloomberg was probably a little surprised. Bloomberg and a guy named Kevin Sheekey, who was his political advisor and was leading the congestion pricing charge, came in. The reason they wanted to see me was because Kevin was a Californian. He had worked with Arnold Schwarzenegger. Although he’s not really Republican, he’s a Democrat; but he was a Democrat who had an affinity for going to work for environmental Republicans. Kevin really didn’t believe that East Coast environmental organizations knew politics very well. So he had tremendous faith in the Sierra Club, so he wanted to work with the Sierra Club.

Lage: Was he right?

05-00:25:00

Pope: I’ll let others judge that.

Lage: Okay.

05-00:25:06

Pope: So he came to see me and we sat down, and we hit it off with the mayor. I said, “Okay, so how do you want me to help you? We’d be delighted to help you. We support congestion pricing; this is a great initiative; mass transit needs funding.” He said, “Well, do you know Governor [Eliot] Spitzer?” And we did. I said, “Yeah, I know Governor Spitzer. I’m not a close personal friend, but we did support him.” He says, “Well, I need Governor Spitzer’s support with the legislature.”

Lage: That’s interesting, that he turned to you to do that.

05-00:25:41

Pope: It was like, this is a little weird, actually. The mayor of New York is asking this guy from California to go and talk to the governor of New York. But okay.

Lage: How close was your relationship with the governor?

05-00:25:57

Pope: Not terribly close. I'd met him, twice, I think. He'd come to an event or two and I'd talked to him a little bit before he was governor, and we had supported him.

Lage: The club had supported him.

05-00:26:05

Pope: The club had supported him. I said, "Okay." I thought I was going to have to go to Albany, but it turned out the governor of New York spends most of his time in New York City, which I didn't realize. So I went to New York and sat down with the governor's staff, before we went in. His staff all wanted him to support congestion pricing. So they gave me the pitch I had to make and how to convince him, because they wanted him to do it. So I went in and we had a good meeting, and I left not knowing whether I'd made the sale or not. Now, the governor did support congestion pricing. I don't actually think it was my intervention that did it, because the Bush administration also offered him a \$500 million bribe, in effect, by saying that the Bush administration, if you had approved congestion pricing, they would give New York State \$500 million for mass transit—which is a pretty hefty bribe.

Lage: Why was the Bush administration so in favor of it?

05-00:27:05

Pope: Because Bloomberg was a Republican. This is when they were trying to do some good stuff. They were trying to do some good stuff on transit. So I actually think it was the money that persuaded the governor. But I think the mayor liked the fact that I was willing to go to New York and do his lobbying for him. Then I would drop by to see him, every time I was in New York, and he was always very cozy, and he would sit me down— He doesn't have a private office.

Lage: Oh, no?

05-00:27:39

Pope: He sits in a trading floor, like a bullpen. It's like a trading floor. His desk is there, there are all these desks around, these big screens showing everything that's happening in New York. If you want to sit down with him to have a private conversation, there are a few little tables around the perimeter and he'll go sit down at one of these tables. He would sit down at a table and he'd say, "Oh, we've got some new snack-food companies in New York City. I want you to taste these and tell me which of these New York products you really think we should be featuring." It was just very funny. But we hit it off, so we built this relationship. Then at some point, as Mike Brune was coming in and I was leaving, we went to him. We said, "Okay. You have a big concern about health." The mayor's big thing has been tobacco, guns, pedestrian deaths. Those have been his big three concerns. The thing he liked

about all of them was you could count the number of lives you saved. He really loves to be able to count things.

So we said, “Well, we’ve got something here, you can count the numbers of lives you’ll save. You’ve got this coal campaign. Here is a climate change campaign that isn’t about cap-and-trade,” which he hated. He thought it was just a politician’s copout. “And it’s not abstract; it’s very concrete. There are this many new plants still—” We hadn’t stopped them all. We had about fifty more to stop. “And there are 500 old ones, and we think we can shut down a third of the 500, by 2015.” That was nice, measurable, quantifiable. So after a lot of hard work, mainly, he said to us at some point, fairly quickly, “All right, I want to give you the money, but now you have to figure out how you’re really going to do it and how you’re going to measure it.” So the real exercise he put the club through was figuring out how to measure our progress. The tools he gave us were really remarkable. They were much better than anything anybody else in the environmental community had enjoyed up to that date.

Lage: What kind of tools are we talking about?

05-00:29:41

Pope: Well, we built a model, where we ranked every coal plant in the country for how big it was, how dirty it was, how expensive it was, how liberal the state it was in—a whole bunch of things that we thought would tell us whether you could get a plant shut down or not. And we built a ranking system, and then we lumped all 500 coal plants in the country by tier one, these are going to be the easiest to shut down; tier two, these are going to be hard, but worth looking at; and tier three, these will be the last coal plants in the country to be shut down, so we will not start with them.

Lage: And you say he gave you the tools.

05-00:30:20

Pope: Well, he actually made us develop the tools; but he also gave us one of his staff who knew how to do this kind of stuff, to work with us and help us design them. So they provided us with technical support and mentoring. This model was what they call, in the business world, an interactive model; which means that as we went through, we were working on the plants that we thought would be easiest to shut down; but those were not necessarily the ones that shut down first. As other plants shut down first, the model would then tell us, oh, the plants that are actually shutting down first are ones that look like this, and here’s the next bunch. So we were continually adjusting our priorities, based on our experience. This is a tool which is widely used in the corporate world; but to our knowledge, it had never been used in the advocacy world at all. And we would never have done this on our own.

One of the things I liked about all three of our big donor partnerships was that the donors pushed the Sierra Club to learn how to do new things and took us

outside of our comfort zone, and didn't just let us do what we had thought of doing. When we went to see them, they'd say, well, yes, but we'd also like this or that. In the case of the mayor, what he wanted was a predictive modeling. That took probably three months. The whole conversation about whether we'd get the gift was maybe six months, and three months was building the model.

Lage: When did you actually get the gift? Was this after you were executive director?

05-00:31:50

Pope: It was while I was chairman. It was while I was chairman. This is in July of 2011, I guess. No, 2010. July of 2010.

Lage: But you continued to—

05-00:32:02

Pope: Yeah.

Lage: This was part of your portfolio [as chairman].

05-00:32:03

Pope: Right. Right.

Lage: Yeah. Very interesting. Now, that one didn't seem to be controversial, as the others became.

05-00:32:12

Pope: No. No. I'm sure that some people in the New York City group thought it was controversial, because there were things that the mayor had done they didn't agree with. But by that time, I think the club had gotten used to the idea that the kind of campaigns that the volunteers wanted to fight were big; and that if you're going to fight really big campaigns, you had to have significant resources; and that you just couldn't get enough money from membership dues to have those resources.

Lage: So this used hired staff, not volunteers?

05-00:32:48

Pope: Well, no, it used a combination, but you had to have— If you were going to bring a lawsuit, you had to have— We did have some lawsuits that were brought by volunteer lawyers, but not most of them. You don't have enough pro bono lawyers and all of the expert witnesses that you need to bring into a public service commission. On the other hand, there was also a lot of political work, and that was mostly done by volunteers. So it was a mixture.

Lage: When you say political, lobbying for legislation?

05-00:32:14

Pope:

Well, actually going out and seeing— Because we had cases where some of these power plants were owned by municipal utilities, so you would get involved— We got involved in Mayor [Antonio] Villaraigosa’s campaign for mayor of Los Angeles. One of the reasons we got involved was because he made a promise, which he kept last week, that he would make Los Angeles the first coal-free big city in the United States. They terminated their last remaining coal contracts last week. But we had to get Villaraigosa there, get him elected. There were a huge number of Sierra Club volunteers involved with that, as well as some staff.

These campaigns call on all of the club’s tools. If you look at *Sierra Magazine*, you’ll see quite a few articles in the last four or five years about coal and what coal does and how we can fight coal. One of the pieces of the campaign that was a lot of fun was, there were about sixty universities which at the time we began the campaign, had coal boilers on campus, providing power. Now, these were not very big power plants; but in some cases, they were very dirty. But they weren’t very big, and they weren’t really a meaningful part of the climate problem. But we thought it would be very important—in terms of training the next generation of students that coal was not something you wanted to be involved with—to get all of these campuses to go coal-free. So we had a significant piece of this campaign that was involved with just organizing students on these campuses to demand that the university administrations shut down the coal plants.

Lage:

It’s a great example of what a big national organization, multi-faceted, can do.

05-00:35:02

Pope:

Can do, yeah.

Lage:

Okay, let’s talk a little bit more about, while we’re doing the fundraising, other controversial things—the Clorox deal and the T. Boone Pickens connection. I don’t know if he was a [donor].

05-00:35:18

Pope:

No, he never gave us any money. He never gave us any money.

Lage:

No money. That was just—

05-00:35:21

Pope:

No money. Well, T. Boone Pickens is probably shorter. I got a call—this would’ve been the summer of 2007—from Bill Arthur, who was the Sierra Club’s field rep in Pacific Northwest. Bill said, “This guy who does work for Boone Pickens has called me up, and Boone wants to do a big wind campaign and he’d like to talk to you about it.” Well, I knew Boone Pickens as an oilman, but okay. So I went to Dallas and sat down with Boone. Boone was launching his Pickens Plan, which at that point, was mainly a wind plan. At that point, people still thought that the United States had a very limited supply

of natural gas. Boone's plan was, build a lot of wind to generate electricity. That frees up natural gas; then we can use the natural gas in cars and trucks, and that will reduce the amount of oil we import. Boone's big concern was imported oil.

Lage: Okay. He was an oilman, and he drilled in—

05-00:36:42

Pope:

Yes, but he also cared about imported oil. The independent oil and gas men don't really like the imports. Partly because it competes with them, but they partly— They're not actually in bed with ExxonMobil. They have a lot of their own conflicts. So Boone and I flew to a very, very famous town in Texas called Sweetwater, Texas. I had heard about Sweetwater, Texas, because Sweetwater, Texas, was in West Texas and it was a rural town, where the population peak was in 1924. It had been losing population since 1924. In 19, let's say '90, the last Dairy Queen in the county had shut down. Now, when a Texas county loses its last Dairy Queen, that's the last picture show. Then wind power arrived in Sweetwater, and by the time I heard the Sweetwater story, which was probably 2005—and I heard about it from a Texas environmentalist who had testified at the Texas legislature, about wind— Sweetwater, Texas had two Starbucks. Not just a Dairy Queen; they had two Starbucks.

So Boone and I went to look at Sweetwater, because Sweetwater was the great success story of the wind industry. And Boone had a couple of turbines in Sweetwater. Let me tell you, when Boone Pickens lands in Sweetwater, Texas, you get quite the welcoming. The band was there, the mayor. We just flew in in his private jet, and he lands and the band is there to greet him and the mayor is there and there's a big whatever. We go and we look at these wind turbines. I'd never seen a really big wind turbine before, and these were huge things.

Lage: So this must be a windy spot.

05-00:38:36

Pope:

This is a windy spot. We went back and I noticed there were about forty or fifty young people kind of being gofers and helping out and doing various things; but they mainly just seemed to be there. They were all wearing maroon sports coats. So I asked the mayor who they were. He said they were wind-power students, students who were taking a wind-power curriculum at the branch of Texas A&M which was in Lubbock, which was the nearest town. He said what used to happen was that kids from Sweetwater would go to Texas A&M Lubbock; they would become petroleum geologists, and they would go overseas and we'd never see our kids again. Now, he said what's happening, because of the wind revolution, the kids from town still go to Lubbock to get their college degrees, and then they become wind-power technicians, and they come back to Sweetwater and they start businesses. So it

was like a beautiful example of the positive things about the wind story. That was the summer that “drill, baby, drill” was beginning to get going, and Boone was out there saying, “We cannot drill our way out of this crisis.” So from our point of view, it was fantastic. Nobody believes us when we say you can’t drill your way out of this crisis; but when Boone Pickens says it, different kind of people will listen.

Lage: People from Texas.

05-00:40:20

Pope: So we began partnering with Boone, around countering “drill, baby, drill,” and we partnered with him through Obama’s election. Then with the crash in the financial markets, the financing for wind power dried up and Boone changed his plan, and it became just a pure natural gas plan. Because now he knew there was a lot more natural gas in the country.

Lage: Yeah, all of this is happening as fracking is coming on the scene.

05-00:40:54

Pope: Right, as fracking is developing. So Boone says, “I don’t need wind anymore, and I can’t finance it because I can’t borrow the money.” Because all the financing for wind dried up in the summer of 2008. So Boone switched his plan and we didn’t work with him after that. But I thought Boone was really quite helpful in undercutting the arguments for “drill, baby, drill.” I was very disappointed that he changed the plan, because I thought that he didn’t really have anything big anymore. He didn’t have a big idea; he had a little idea that wasn’t nearly as interesting.

Clorox. If you go back and you look at the Sierra Club’s financial history and you go back to the Brower years, one of the very interesting things about the Brower years is that during the Brower years, the club was actually heavily financed by its businesses. Books—

Lage: Oh, its own businesses.

05-00:41:50

Pope: —outings, calendars—those were lucrative businesses in those days. But the club, in 1960s, was not mainly funded by dues. Then those revenue streams began to dry up. So when I became executive director—and that was when it became clear that we were not going to be able to rely on the membership for nearly as much of our income as we had—we began to explore options for how we could recreate kind of businesses. We set up a Sierra Club mutual fund, which never took off and never really made any money.

Lage: You had a credit card.

05-00:42:36

Pope:

The credit card made a lot of money. And that was controversial. There were a lot of people that thought, why is the Sierra Club offering me a credit card? But the credit card was making \$150-, \$250,000 a year. And it was hard money. And it was the money we could use for whatever we wanted. The big challenge that I always faced as executive director, and the big challenge Mike Brune faces now, is raising that unrestricted money. That's the money that gives the volunteer leadership the ability to take the organization into new places where they want to go, or old places where they want to stay. So the unrestricted money was a big challenge. If you weren't going to get the unrestricted money from members, there were really two other places you'd get [it]. You can get big unrestricted money when people die. When people leave the Sierra Club a bequest, most of them just leave it to the Sierra Club or the Sierra Club Foundation, but they don't restrict it for a particular program. So the bequest revenue is a very major and important source of unrestricted money.

The other way you can get unrestricted money is by running a business. It needs to be an environmental business of some kind, or you won't be able to do it, if you're the Sierra Club. Or you have the option of licensing the Sierra Club's name, for products that think that will help sell the product. The club had been doing that for a very long time, but other than the credit card, we'd never had a really big product. We'd tried a lot of things that hadn't worked. Then at some point, the Clorox Company approached us and said, okay, we want to make the first really green, mass-market line of consumer products. We've done the research, and here's what we have found. The research shows that the public is very reluctant to buy green cleaning products from Ben & Jerry's, because they don't think they'll clean.

Lage:

Oh, I see.

05-00:44:45

Pope:

And they're very reluctant to buy green cleaning products from Procter & Gamble, because they don't think they're green. So they don't trust the small companies to clean properly and they don't trust the big companies to actually be environmental. So we think the only way that anybody can actually create a green cleaning product in the mass consumer marketplace is to combine a consumer product with a reputation for cleaning products, which is Clorox, with an organization with a reputation for being green, which is the Sierra Club. I thought that made sense, we discussed it with the board. There was controversy, it wasn't unanimous; but most of the board felt that made sense.

Lage:

Did it go through a vetting process?

05-00:45:28

Pope:

Oh, everybody was clear that products had to be absolutely what we would be comfortable with, and they were. There was never any question about the products. That really never came up as the issue. The issue was there were

leaders in the club who did not feel the club should be licensing its name to consumer products.

Lage: Just in general?

05-00:45:54

Pope: Just in general. The interesting thing about it was, as we went through the process of explaining it to people and talking about it, there was a clear generation divide. Sierra Club members over fifty-five were pretty uncomfortable; Sierra Club members under forty were almost invariably totally comfortable; and Sierra Club members in between were all over the map. But clearly, the generation of the 1970s—you can call them the hippie generation or the counterculture—they really didn't like the idea of partnering with corporations at all. To environmental activists under forty, that made no sense at all. No, of course, you partner with corporations. Then in between, you had people at all kinds of levels. So I thought it was actually a very successful partnership. Obviously, it was controversial and some of the club's leaders didn't like.

Lage: And the board voted for it.

05-00:46:55

Pope: The board voted for it and we did it, and the product worked and made it in the—I think these were each three-year contracts. They renewed once. And when it came time to renew for the second time, they didn't need the Sierra Club that much. And by that time, Mike [Brune] was executive director, and I think Mike was uncomfortable with that model.

Lage: Even though he's one of the younger folks.

05-00:47:20

Pope: Yes, that is true, but he came out of a consumer activism where he was targeting corporations, so I think he had a particular take. So I don't think he particularly wanted to extend it, and I don't think Clorox particularly wanted to extend it.

Lage: How much money did it make? Do you have those figures at your beck and call? Was it significant?

05-00:47:41

Pope: Yeah, it was significant. I'm going to guess we made a couple-hundred-thousand dollars a year. So it was as big as the credit card had been at its peak. The credit card, it's been cancelled now, because the business of affinity credit cards just ran out. People didn't want credit cards in that way anymore. I think there's a real ongoing challenge for the club, which is how do you raise this unrestricted money, given that you really can't get it from members as dues. And the idea of dues is sort of almost a passé idea. People under forty don't join things. They support things, they're generous—

Lage: But they don't give you that yearly—

05-00:48:24

Pope: No, they wait till you do something exciting; they give you something for that campaign. So what used to be called, in the philanthropic business, faith money is harder and harder to raise. I think if you're not willing to engage in some kind of business partnerships, it's going to be a big challenge for the club in the future.

Lage: Okay. We need to move right along here. Let's talk about internal organizational changes that you made.

05-00:48:52

Pope: Okay.

Lage: You came in, someone who really knew the club. What did you have in mind? What did you think needed to be done?

05-00:49:02

Pope: Well, I didn't come in with organizational changes, in the sense of reorganizations. I came in, and I initially had two goals I established. I was public about these and accomplished neither of them, it turned out. One goal was when I came in— Bill Clinton had just been elected. So we thought we were going to have some times like the early 1970s, when we'd had a big wave of environmental legislation pass. There was a bunch of what I called legacy environmental challenges—the Mining Law of 1872; rounding out some of the big holes in the national park system, parks we'd never been able to get, but that we'd always wanted; dealing with old-growth forests; fixing the Toxic Substances Control Act, which was a joke. So there were some legacy environmental issues that I wanted to deal with. I knew there was going to be a new wave of global environmental challenges that we were going to have to face; but I figured we ought to get the old stuff off the table. We got almost none of the old stuff off the table. It turned out to be very, very hard because the old stuff was all mostly in rural extraction communities, where the resistance in Congress was really tough. So we did not succeed at that.

Lage: There was a reason it was old stuff.

05-00:50:36

Pope: Yeah. I suppose you're right. Second thing was, I was hoping to tee up an internal succession. I thought it was much safer for the club to have the choice of hiring somebody from inside. The fact that I lasted eighteen years probably suggests that turned out to be correct, because all three of our internal hires lasted sixteen to eighteen years. The two outside hires we had before Mike Brune, one lasted a year and a half and one lasted five years. So I think the club is hard place. I knew that was because the club was a very complicated, not very friendly, in certain ways not very transparent place, and I wanted to

make the club more transparent; I wanted to make it simple; I wanted the culture to be one which was more welcoming of newcomers. I don't think, by and large, I got there. Now, we did hire an outside candidate and he's doing great. But if I look at the other people who were in the pool when he was hired, I don't think they would've found it so easy to figure the club out, because I don't think I had succeeded in making it transparent.

Lage: Were there internal candidates at that time? We're skipping all over the place here.

05-00:51:54

Pope: Yes, there was one internal candidate in the pool when Mike [Brune] was chosen. Not a terribly strong internal candidate, didn't really have the management expertise. Same problem that was when we hired Fischer. Now, there'd been an internal candidate that we had teed up. I hired a deputy conservation director, with the explicit purpose of letting Bruce Hamilton nurture and mentor him. Then I would nurture and mentor him or her—it ended up being a guy—and then we'd have an internal candidate, a guy named Greg Haegele who we brought in and was fantastic. I'm quite certain that the board would've been thrilled to hire him. Then—this is actually why I left when I did—he was forty, and he was diagnosed with fourth-stage prostate cancer and died [January 2010].

Lage: Oh, how sad.

05-00:52:58

Pope: He died when I was sixty-four, and I said okay—

Lage: And he was in his forties.

05-00:53:08

Pope: He was forty. There was nobody else. There were other people, but they were all my age. So it was like, well, Bruce Hamilton isn't going— He's my age. So it was like, okay, now we're going to have to go outside. The first time we went outside, with Wheeler, it did not work, so I actually wanted to give the board a chance to make a mistake. I said, "We may not get it right, so I should get this process going." So I stepped down a couple years earlier than I probably would've, so that—

Lage: So you could step back, if you had to.

05-00:53:39

Pope: If I needed to. Turned out I didn't need to. But it was an insurance policy for the club.

Lage: Okay, so we started that conversation by talking about making the club more transparent so an outsider could understand it.

05-00:53:49

Pope: Right, right. Now, then the two big internal process changes that did happen when I was at the club, one was— And I cannot remember what year this was. I became executive director in '93; it was probably, I want to say 2000. I'm not certain now. This is before we got David Gelbaum's big gift, which was 2001. The club was becoming increasingly unable to make any kind of priorities decisions, because the volunteer structure had become so complicated that nobody could understand it or work it. And it was becoming very inwardly focused, not outwardly focused at all. Every May, when the board got together, I would come and meet with the new board, and I would give sort of a state-of-the-club report. And in that state-of-the-club report, I basically said to the board, "If the club was a species, I would be putting it on the threatened list this year.

Lage: Oh, wow.

05-00:55:39

Pope: "Because I just don't believe that the moment we have to make any set of new important decisions relatively quickly, we can do it. So we have no resilience." I didn't use the word resilience; we weren't using that word then.

Lage: Well, what happened to make you think that?

05-00:55:59

Pope: Things had just ground— It was more and more difficult to set priorities.

Lage: On the board?

05-00:56:06

Pope: On the board, yeah. Well, the board had all these committees and the board had actually given away all its power.

Lage: To the committees?

05-00:56:15

Pope: To the committees. So the board really received committee reports, but didn't really make decisions. The result was that we couldn't decide what our priorities were. And when you were raising money, you couldn't have ten campaigns that were each equally important, because you couldn't raise money that way. You had to be able to say to donors, this is the big thing we want most of the money for. The board was unable to do those kinds of things. So Robbie Cox was the president and—

Lage: This is going to give us dates, because I have—

05-00:56:48

Pope: Okay, what year?

Lage: He was president twice, '94 to '96, and then again 2000-2001.

05-00:56:54

Pope:

It was 2000-2001. It was 2000. That's what I thought it was; that seemed about right. So Robbie was the president, and he launched something called Project Act, and he set up a task force to look at all the things we could redo about the club's structure—some of which, the ones that we recommended, were adopted by the board eventually; some of them were not. That was very controversial, because one of the things that you ended up doing was saying, well, we— At some point, we had sixty-three different committees reporting to the board. It was like, well, the board wasn't really managing them; nobody was managing them. These were little, kind of pieces of the club that did their own thing. They wouldn't even meet on the same weekend, so they didn't even get to know each other. When you wanted to make a decision about fundraising, we had three different development committees; and the three development committees would then appoint a task force of the three committees to discuss it. You just couldn't move. So with Project Act, we tried to really simplify the club's structure. That worked for a while; but over time—this is just the nature of these things—this all began to come back.

So much later, in 2008, we did another version, which was called Project Renewal, and we went through and restructured things. That was also very controversial, because it involved saying, wait a minute; you've got a situation here where you've got people who've been on this committee for ten years, and their definition of the Sierra Club is this piece of the club. They don't see the club as a whole. They see the club as the Inner City Outings program. That's the Sierra Club. If a club were to decide that the Inner City Outings program wasn't as important or central— That was one we never did decide that about, which is why I pick on it, because they were never actually the aggrieved party. But if we were to say, Inner City Outings doesn't make any sense anymore, we should be doing something else, you would've had a huge ruckus because you had a bunch of volunteers who had spent ten years being Sierra Club leaders, and for them, the club was Inner City Outings. So the whole challenge of how to keep volunteers connected to the whole club, this whole idea of one club—

Lage:

That's interesting, because in some ways, what kept people connected was their heartfelt attachment to some particular issue.

05-00:59:37

Pope:

Right. Now, it's not so much issues.

Lage:

Or program.

05-00:59:41

Pope:

We had people—we've always had people—who come to the club because they have a penchant for X, and they would get the club to take on X. That was kind of the issue. People would come to us with an issue; and maybe it was an issue that had been a priority for the club, and they wanted the club to make it an issue. That created one set of problems. We had those problems

around John Muir Sierrans. They were believers in a particular vision of wilderness, which was big wilderness.

Lage: Stop. [laughs] I've been waiting for a space to stop.

[Audiofile 6]

Lage: Okay, we're on tape six now. Still April 1. Let's see. You were saying the John Muir Sierrans sort of exemplified people who come with a particular issue, to the club.

06-00:00:14

Pope: Yeah. What had happened was that over the course of the 1980s, there were a group of public lands activists—mainly in the Rocky Mountain states, but to some extent, also in the Pacific Northwest—who began to develop a vision of what they called big wilderness. Their idea was that the historic way of creating wilderness areas—which had mostly worked from the top down, from rocks and snow down through the upper elevation forest—had left us with far too little connected wilderness, where species could really move across a wide range, and far too little low-elevation forest in the wildernesses. And that the only places in the country, other than Alaska, where there still was a substantial amount of wilderness-quality, wilderness-eligible forest was the Rocky Mountain states and the Pacific Northwest. Everywhere else, it was gone. They wanted to just create big wilderness areas and go out with a big vision and fight until you got it all.

There was another group of public lands activists in the same states—and it was fundamentally the same values, but a different approach to politics; and in many cases, older, so there was a generational gap—who said, no, you have to work incrementally and you added a little bit and then you eventually built it out. The kind of big wilderness people said, yeah, when you build it out, you never get it all; you lose the critical connectivity of the lower elevations, where the most valuable commercial timber is. This battle began to be fought inside— First, it was fought between small environmental wilderness groups that favored big wilderness, and groups like the Wilderness Society and organizations like the Montana Wilderness Association and the Sierra Club.

Lage: Who were the more—

06-00:02:20

Pope: Who were the incrementalists. These are not terms of art, but—The first big fight was actually in the Pacific Northwest, and it was over whether we were going to try to save all of the old growth in the Northwest. In the Pacific Northwest, the big wilderness advocates carried the day inside the Sierra Club. There was a big fight about it. Actually, Ed Wayburn got involved. It

was sort of the last big piece of the internal Sierra Club politics that Ed Wayburn weighed into.

Lage: Where did he weigh in?

06-00:02:56

Pope: He weighed in on the big wilderness side. Basically, you had what was then the Cascade Chapter, which became the Oregon and the Washington chapters, [which] had a lot of people who were saying, “Now, we have to work with the politics of this region; we can’t say, ‘Stop all old-growth logging.’” Ed intervened and the national board actually overrode the chapters, to some degree, and said that on the Northwest stuff— this is the beginning of the Clinton administration, so this is 1990 to ’94—in that case, the Sierra Club chapters ended up on the side of big wilderness.

In the Rocky Mountain states—and Idaho, Montana were the two big ones; Wyoming, a little bit—the chapters were incrementalists. At some point, the big wilderness advocates in the Rocky Mountain northern Rockies, put together something they called the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act. They then went around and they got, actually, Maurice Hinchey, who was the congressman from upstate New York, to introduce it. But they quickly discovered that it wasn’t going to go anywhere, without support from Democrats in the region. They would go to Pat Williams, who was the Democratic congressman from Montana, and say, “What would it take to get you to support this?” He’d say, “You have to have the Sierra Club.”

So they decided that their actual problem, their actual barrier, was the Sierra Club; that if the Sierra Club would only embrace big wilderness, then big wilderness would be on the agenda of Democrats in Congress and it would be able to pass. So they organized Sierra Club groups, and they ran for group chair, and they did the whole democratic thing, and they took over the Headwaters Group of the Sierra Club, which was based in Missoula, and there became a bitter battle between the Headwaters Group and the Montana Chapter. The Montana Chapter were incrementalists; the Headwaters Group were big wilderness people.

Lage: This gets very political.

06-00:04:56

Pope: It got *very* political. In effect, you had a whole insurgency within the Sierra Club. This is not the first time this had happened, but this was another one of those generational insurgencies within the Sierra Club.

Lage: Was this what Doug Scott got so upset about, this same issue? He was sort of attacked for being an incrementalist.

06-00:05:17

Pope: Yes, he was attacked for being an incrementalist, yes. He was attacked for being an incrementalist.

There ended up being two problems. One problem was—which was a healthy problem—that you had a new generation that had a different vision, and they wanted to duke it out with the older generation. Eventually, they won the argument; and then it turned out that actually, no, the reason big wilderness wasn't moving was not the Sierra Club, that the Sierra Club wasn't that powerful. Big wilderness wasn't moving because the politics of big wilderness in these states wasn't right.

Lage: Which the chapters must have sensed.

06-00:06:07

Pope: Well, but I also think it is fair to say that the chapters' approach wasn't going to work either. The reality was—which nobody wanted to recognize—the politics of those states had gotten to a point where there was no way to win. Well, there was a way to win, which is how we finally won; but we had to win by saying, okay, we're not going to get Congress to act, we're going to get Bill Clinton to act. But if it hadn't been for the big wilderness people, there would've been no national forest rule from Clinton. We should be very clear. The incrementalists would never have gotten us Clinton's wild forest rule.

Lage: We need to talk a little bit about this wild forest rule. [Roadless Area Conservation Policy directive, January 2001]

06-00:06:40

Pope: Right. The big wilderness people never embraced that because it wasn't enough for them; but if they hadn't been there, we wouldn't have gotten what we got.

Lage: That happens.

06-00:06:48

Pope: So this part of it was a very healthy dialectic, as Marx would have put it, where you had the thesis, which was big wilderness; the antithesis, which is incrementalism; and the synthesis was the Clinton wild forest rule—which didn't depend on the politics of Washington state or Montana; it depended on politics of Washington DC, and that was good politics for Bill Clinton.

Lage: How did this come about? Shall we just follow this issue through?

06-00:07:16

Pope: Sure. Sure. Well, the battle was continuing inside the Sierra Club, and I actually was brought in. This happened on my watch as executive director, although it began before my watch; but it really bubbled up to the surface, in my watch. My view was I had come, in an issues sense, as you remember, from the clean air side. In the pollution area, the style of the environmental

movement in dealing with Congress had always been a little different. There had never been any significant incrementalists, in the sense of you pass the little bills. There was always only going to be one Clean Air Act. What you would do is, you would start out with a very high bar and you would understand you weren't going to get that; you were going to [compromise]. But you would start with the high bar. You never started out little and tried to go big; you started big and then you made whatever compromises you had to make. So I looked at this fight and this fight actually didn't make much sense to me. I said, "We don't have to make this choice." So I brokered an agreement that the Sierra Club would endorse the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act, which was the big vision; but that if chapters in the region could get good incremental progress, they could take that.

Lage: Was this something you brokered on the board?

06-00:08:40

Pope: Well, the board was involved, and then the two factions were involved. We actually had shuttle diplomacy. We had a board meeting in San Francisco, and there was shuttle diplomacy.

Lage: When you say the two factions, are these people not represented on the board?

06-00:08:55

Pope: Well, they were—

Lage: Chapters?

06-00:08:57

Pope: They were chapter and staff. They were two factions and they were represented on the board, in the chapters, and on the staff.

Lage: I see, across the whole club.

06-00:09:07

Pope: So you had all three. So the two sides had six people sitting in a room and I went back and forth, and eventually—

Lage: Came up with it.

06-00:09:15

Pope: —we came up with language they could both agree [on], and the board then passed it.

Lage: Now, are these the John Muir Sierrans? You started by—

06-00:09:20

Pope: These are the people who became the John Muir Sierrans. Yes, these are the John Muir Sierrans. So from that perspective, now—the wild forest then emerged—what happened then was Sierra Club went out and we endorsed the

Northern Rockies Ecosystem Protection Act; Congressman [John Patrick] “Pat” Williams, who was the only congressman in the region willing to offer wilderness bills, retired, so we didn’t anybody anymore to offer incrementalist wilderness bills; and I went up to Montana, to a meeting of the Alliance for the Wild Rockies, which was the big wilderness advocate for the region. It was kind of the place from which the various John Muir Sierrans had come. They had all come out of the Alliance for the Wild Rockies, and basically, were sent to take over the Sierra Club, for their vision. So I went up to one of their meetings, and we were talking about strategically what to do, because it was pretty clear everything was stopped. They’d won their victory. I said, “Fine, now you’ve got us. Now what are you going to do with us? It’s not going to move.”

Lage: Did they receive you happily, or were you seen as illegitimate?

06-00:10:46

Pope: Oh, yes. No, I was viewed as an honest broker. I was viewed as an honest broker. They were probably happier with me than the incrementalists were, because I had seen enough Sierra Club insurgencies to know that the insurgents always win—if they’re young. If it’s a youth insurgency, it always wins because they always— The Broweristas eventually beat the old guard. I knew that the young faction was going to beat the old guard. So we sat there and I said, “Well, look. You’re at a stalemate. You can’t move legislation because you don’t have enough power in the region. They can’t move legislation because they don’t have enough power in the country. In a stalemate right now, they gradually whittle away, through the regular forest-planning process, at the forest. So what you need is basically to make the whole thing the functional equivalent of a wilderness study area, which is something the administration could do.”

Lage: All these lands scattered throughout?

06-00:12:02

Pope: Just take them out of the timber base. Don’t let them log on them. “That,” I said, “doesn’t require Congress. That could be done by the White House. You’d have to have a campaign. It’d have to be a big campaign. And you’d have to stop trashing people.” They knew that they’d done too much of that.

Lage: Trashing people within the club?

06-00:12:25

Pope: Within the movement.

Lage: Within the movement.

06-00:12:27

Pope: You couldn’t do this with a divided, ideologically splintered movement; you had to actually pull the whole public lands movement together. By that time, it

wasn't a terribly hard sell. Then people began going out and advocating this idea of having a rule-making process that would protect all the wilderness. Then Clinton went through Monica, and he got a new chief of staff, John Podesta. Then in 2005—2005? No, 1995—the Republicans shut down the government, over the Arctic Wildlife Refuge. Somewhat to everybody's surprise, Clinton let them. I actually did not think the administration would go to the mat over the Arctic.

Lage: That was the reason they actually shut down the government?

06-00:13:21

Pope: Yes, that was actually the reason it was shut down.

Lage: It wasn't over a fiscal cliff?

06-00:13:27

Pope: No, it was over the Arctic Wildlife Refuge.

Lage: I'd forgotten that.

06-00:13:30

Pope: They sent Clinton a bill to keep the government open, but it drilled the Arctic, and Clinton refused.

Lage: Did you folks lobby that?

06-00:13:41

Pope: Yes, we had lobbied the Arctic during the course of that whole Congress. But I was surprised. Then it turned out to be wildly popular. Podesta said to the president, "This is the stuff people want. There's this idea floating out there, that you can do a lot of public lands stuff." So the first thing Clinton did was the national monuments. He did Escalante-Grand Staircase and some others. Those were popular. Then Podesta said, "Why don't we go for the whole thing?"

Lage: Now, how did you get that idea? And what role did the club play in getting the idea of this rule into the administration?

06-00:14:26

Pope: Oh, we propagated it around the environmental community. I don't remember exactly how it happened, but we first took it around to the rest of the environmental community. And we had the Alliance for the Wild Rockies doing it, too. We actually got these two factions to each agree that this was the next logical step.

Lage: It's different from congressional lobbying.

06-00:14:51

Pope:

Yes, it was different. One of the advantages was you could use C-3 money, which you had more of. We raised a lot of money. We got some very major gifts for this campaign. It was a phenomenal success. But Clinton tested the waters. He had the success with the shutdown; then he did the Grand Staircase-Escalante and the North Kaibab whatever it was, and there were two other big national monuments. Those were very popular. They weren't popular in Utah or Arizona, but he didn't care about those states. Those were not his states. So that's how we got the wild forest done.

Now, the thing about the phenomenon with the John Muir Sierrans that was not so helpful was some of the John Muir Sierrans came into the Sierra Club, got elected to the board and became Sierra Club leaders. Now, they became Sierra Club leaders who still had their issue passions and priorities, but they decided that the Sierra Club was important. Some of them came in and the Sierra Club was never important; it was just the issue. That always produced a very difficult— Because they were always available to be— In effect, you could trade with them, for their vote. It would be like, okay, anybody who would give them their vote on the issue they cared about, they'd get their vote on something else that might not be in the best interests of the club.

So we learned that having people on the board who have too many loyalties to outside groups is problematic, and we passed some conflict-of-interest rules designed to deal with the worst of it. But it's still an ongoing challenge, which is that the club is always a target. Of course, the most spectacular example of that during my time was not John Muir Sierrans, but the whole immigration thing—which wasn't even really environmentalists. It was actually an outside, non-environmental movement that wanted to capture the Sierra Club's brand. They didn't give a shit about the Sierra Club. Or actually, they didn't care what we did on the issue; they just wanted to be able to say we were on their side.

Lage:

Who did they put on the board? Did they get folks on the—

06-00:17:06

Pope:

Yes, they got people on the board. They elected three people to the board, who nobody— The insiders knew this was a slate, but they didn't run as a slate. They talked about population, but they never talked about immigration in their ballot statements. It was Doug LaFollette, who was the secretary of state of the state of Wisconsin; there was a guy named Ben Zuckerman, who was an astrophysicist from southern California; and I'm trying to remember who the third part of that slate was. You have that board list from that year?

Lage:

I do. It's in the middle range that I find those two names.

06-00:18:04

Pope:

Paul Watson is the third one. Two of those three had some degree of celebrity power, to get elected. Zuckerman didn't; he was just another university

professor. We've had lots of those. But Watson was like a figure from the— And LaFollette was a public official. So they got elected, and those were by far, the most dysfunctional years.

Lage: Were they associated with a particular group?

06-00:18:35

Pope: Yes, there was a group called Sierrans for US Population Stabilization.

Lage: But from an outside group?

06-00:18:41

Pope: Yes, there was an outside— They were actually funded and supported—I can't tell you the details, but by— It was probably NumbersUSA. But it was one of the groups that had, for non-environmental reasons, a desire to really restrict the level of US immigration. Their problem politically was that was seen as a conservative issue; they needed a liberal brand. They picked the club because the club had an elected board, and they thought they could actually take it over. They elected those three directors, and then they put a policy statement on the ballot. At that point, the board put a contrary policy statement on the ballot, which won. But there was a big, *big*, huge battle about the election and the election rules and who could spend money. It was really ugly. It was really awful.

Lage: How did you negotiate all of this? Did you feel strongly about the issue?

06-00:19:47

Pope: Oh, yes, I felt very strongly. This would've been a very damaging thing for the club. I had originally worked on population, so I knew the field fairly well personally. I had spent a lot of time, before Zuckerman and Watson came on the board, trying to work with the two perspectives in the club and trying to figure out if there was someplace the Sierra Club could kind of mush it together and keep everybody okay, if not happy.

Lage: Because there were some old-timers who were in favor of that. I can't quite remember who they were now.

06-00:20:27

Pope: Well, there were a lot of old-timers—like Anne Ehrlich and Paul Ehrlich and Judy Kunofsky—there were some old-timers who wanted us to do something, if we could. I spent, as I said, four or five years trying to figure out if there was such a something. But at that point, the politics of immigration in the broader society were so toxic that there was no— And we're about to get an immigration deal, finally now, and it's 2013. In 2002, 2003, there was no way you were going to get an immigration deal. I tried for five years, to find some compromise that everybody could live with, and there was no compromise. It really was one group of people where, you will not do this at all; and the other group of people, you will only do it my way. There was no compromise. So I

had realized that this would blow the club apart. It was clear most club people did not want to take a position on this. This was not an issue that was of passionate concern to most of our leaders, most of our members, or most of our donors.

Lage: Wasn't that what the alternative ballot measure was, that the club would not take a position?

06-00:21:48

Pope: Mm-hm, and that's the one that won. Then after that happened, they decided that they would try to take over the board by running celebrities, and they then ran a real celebrity slate. They ran Dick Lamm, the former governor of Colorado; they ran David Pimentel, the very, very famous ecological scientist from Cornell; and they ran an African American candidate. I can't remember what his name was. At that point, the mainstream of the club said enough, and they organized—this has only happened this one time— Well, maybe it happened in the Brower years; I wasn't there then. But the mainstream of the club organized itself as a political faction and put its own slate up and raised money and made a huge effort, and three times as many people voted that year as normally voted. The Lamm-Pimentel-whomever-it-was slate—Morris; his name was Morris—got 10 percent of the vote. Just got wiped out.

Lage: That's an interesting tale.

06-00:23:07

Pope: And that was the end. But you had those three directors who were there for their terms of three years. Everything that we did, they put through the lens of how was this going to affect this power struggle about population, so you couldn't do anything.

Lage: Were these the years leading up to the initiative, which was 1998, or were they after?

06-00:23:40

Pope: No, these were the years— Well, if you hand me that, I can tell you what those years were, because I can tell you— The initiative was 1998, and these were the years 2003 to 2006.

Lage: Okay, so it was after the initiative failed, and then they made this effort to—

06-00:24:03

Pope: Yeah, right.

Lage: —take over the board.

06-00:24:05

Pope: Well, these were the ones who were on the board. Then they made an attempt to elect three more, after the initiative failed, and didn't succeed.

Lage: You said there were some conflict of interest things put in place. Did they change the number of people needed to put forth an initiative?

06-00:24:28

Pope: We made some changes in those rules, yes, and we said that you couldn't be on the board unless you'd been a member for a full year. There were a number of changes that were made to try to make it harder and less attractive to take the club over from the outside.

Lage: But probably this politicizing the elections is what defeated them.

06-00:24:48

Pope: Well, yes. The answer is, at the end of the day, what you have in the club, typically, is low-information democracy. People vote for directors, but they don't know much about the candidates and we don't give them much information. We can't afford to give them much information.

Lage: The candidates can say whatever they want in their ballot statements.

06-00:25:07

Pope: Well, of course. It's a democracy; you can say whatever you want. That's all right. But the lack of real information— One of the things that Robbie Cox and I tried twice to do—we tried it with Project Act and then we tried it with Project Renewal—was we tried to get some kind of blended process, in which part of the Sierra Club board would be picked by the chapter and group leaders, on the grounds that that would've been a high-information election, because chapter and group leaders actually know these people. We never made any headway.

Lage: That would require a big bylaws change.

06-00:25:55

Pope: Well, yes, it would've required a bylaws change, but there was really no appetite for it, on the part of the board. The directors get elected in the present system. This is always the problem with campaign reform, is the people who have to approve campaign reform have always been elected by the unreformed system.

Lage: Right.

06-00:26:13

Pope: So you're asking them to vote against their own electoral history. I think to many of the board of directors, that would give the chapter and group leaders too much power, which was part of Robbie's and my idea.

Lage: To give them more power.

06-00:26:26

Pope:

And to buy them into the board, because the chapter and group leaders didn't really think the board spoke to them. So again, you didn't have a strong legitimacy. The board did not have strong legitimacy. The original proposal— And I think the only one that really would've worked would've been to say that we would have a regular membership election every other year; and in the off year, we would have a chapter and group convention, and they would pick the five directors that year. What that would mean is that the directors have three-year terms, and they can serve two. A director who was elected for their first term by the membership would have to be elected in their second term, by the leadership; and a director who was elected in the first term by the leadership would have to be elected in the second term by the membership. So you would've actually created what you want, which is a board of directors which, in a political sense, feels accountable to both groups of people, the members and the leaders. But the board never— I don't think Robbie and I ever had more than three or four votes for it.

Lage:

That's interesting, very interesting. Now, in part of this reorganization, wasn't the council done away with?

06-00:27:34

Pope:

No. No.

Lage:

The council's still there?

06-00:27:36

Pope:

The council still exists. What was done away with were the regional conservation committees. Those were done away with because we were no longer funded in a way that made regional work make sense. So it was like you had this group of people who really didn't have a function.

Lage:

Another layer.

06-00:27:50

Pope:

Another layer. That was one of the things that we got rid of, and that was controversial.

Lage:

Were there downsides to these reorganizations, as you look back? (Maybe you haven't looked back.) Or were there maybe unforeseen consequences?

06-00:28:03

Pope:

No. No, no, no. First of all, none of them were perfect. I would've argued that none of them went far enough, and that part of the problem was that if you don't go far enough, old habits tend to come back pretty quickly. So that you almost have to go too far with the reorganization to make it stick. So the reason we needed the second one, in part, was because the effort by the first one to simplify— The goal was to have fewer people in the club giving approval, and more people in the club doing things. Neither of them was completely successful at that. They both, I think, made progress, but not

enough progress. And yes, there were unanticipated consequences. There are always some downsides, of any kind of— That was true when I reorganized the staff. It was a lot easier to do because I was the executive director; but you'd do a staff reorganization, you'd make some progress, and some things would fall between the cracks. There's no perfect organizational form for anything as complicated as the Sierra Club.

Lage: Yes, it is complicated. Now, how did you work with what Doug Scott referred to as the “mandarin class” in the Sierra Club? I'm not exactly sure what he meant, but did you have a feeling there was a mandarin class?

06-00:29:22

Pope: Well, there were two mandarin classes. There was the mandarin class of people who were primarily national committee members, didn't have strong chapter connections, frequently had a lot of issue expertise. They were the group of people that were most upset by the various reorganizations, because they tended to be people whose role in the club was they could approve things other people did. They were not people who did things; they were people who approved things. So I was continually trying to reduce the role of that aspect of the mandarin class, even though many of them had been very terrific environmental campaigners, and it would've been terrific if they had gone back and done what Ed Wayburn did.

Ed Wayburn was the classic example of the mandarin of the mandarins. He was like the great high panjandrum. But Ed never spent more than 10 percent of his time worrying about what anybody else was doing, and Ed spent 90 percent of his time doing what Ed was really, really good at doing. So my ideal mandarin was Ed Wayburn. I kept trying to encourage the Ed Wayburns of the world, and discourage some of the others, some of whom you've interviewed.

Now, then there were the chapter and group leaders. That was really challenging because when I could actually work with them, I tended to have very good relations with them. We had a couple of very dysfunctional chapters, where that would not have been the case. The Atlantic Chapter was always problematic, because they viewed themselves as being hostile to headquarters; I was, by definition, headquarters. But there were really not enough opportunities and enough avenues for really working with them as much as I would like. But that was the part of the Sierra Club that I always wanted to empower.

Lage: The local—

06-00:31:22

Pope: Chapters and group leaders.

Lage: Now, how did you deal with David Brower, when he came back in the club?

06-00:31:32

Pope:

Well, I met Dave when I was working for ZPG. Actually, I think the first thing I did for ZPG was to write a speech for Dave. Because Dave was coming back to give a speech about population and I think I wrote the speech, because ZPG was sharing offices with Friends of the Earth and League of Conservation Voters. Then when I came to California, the first office of CLCV was in the Friends of the Earth office, so I spent a lot of time with the Friends of the Earth people and with Dave. In 1984—I don't remember when Dave came back on the board, but I think it was after that—

Lage:

Let's see, let's see.

06-00:32:11

Pope:

You have it here.

Lage:

I do. He was there '83, then '88, and then '95 to 2000.

06-00:32:18

Pope:

Okay. So it was just after he came back. I was having a very difficult time with the then conservation director, John McComb. There was a brief six-month period where John was really, really upset with me.

Lage:

And you were what, at that time?

06-00:32:39

Pope:

I was political director. Doug was the associate conservation director, and was my immediate supervisor, and Doug and I were very good friends. John wanted me gone. There wasn't anything substantive, it was just stylistic. Eventually, I figured out what John wanted, and then we were fine. But there was a six-month period where we were not fine. During that six-month period, the job of executive director of Friends of the Earth opened up. Friends of the Earth, at this point, was polarized between a Brower faction, based in San Francisco, and an anti-Brower faction, based in Washington DC, which had come out of the environmental— Now, what was it called? Anyway. The DC people wanted to lobby, and the San Francisco people wanted to publish.

I thought FOE, at that point, had an interesting opportunity to fill in some niches that the Sierra Club had not yet filled. I was not happy at the club, at that point, and I didn't like not being happy at work. It was the only time in my life I wasn't happy at work. So I decided I would try to apply for the job of executive director of FOE. I went and said to Dave, "I'm not asking you to say I'm your candidate, but I will only do this with your support." Because it was very clear that to try to become the executive director of FOE without Dave's support was just clinically insane. [he snaps his fingers] Dave gave me his blessing; we went through the process; I was one of the two finalists. I was actually quite shocked that I didn't get the job, because there were a number of people on the board who were actually pretty close friends of mine. The guy who got the job never took the job.

Lage: Who was that?

06-00:34:44

Pope: A guy named Mark something. He was a friend of Dave's from Colorado, who never left Colorado, never came to San Francisco, never took the job. He got the job, but he never took the job. A guy named Wes Jackson, who's the head of the Land Institute in Kansas and who I was moderately close to, was the chairman of the board. He had to call me and tell me. He called me in and he said, "I want to explain to you why we made the decision we did. Which is, you came in and we asked you what you thought your vision for the organization was, and you told us and it was a very interesting, compelling vision. But we decided we wanted a candidate who would let us sort out what our vision was going to be." I said to myself, when he said that, oh, you want to keep fighting. I had offered, basically, a way to bring to two factions together. The two factions did not want to be brought together. They wanted to fight it out. And they did, and Dave lost.

Lage: You were probably glad you didn't get the job.

06-00:35:45

Pope: Oh, look, the moment when Wes told me why they hadn't hired me, it was like, thank God. Thank God. That was a bullet dodged. So at that point, I still had a very good relationship with David, and I think I had a good relation with Dave all during his first return. When he came back for his second return—

Lage: In '95.

06-00:36:11

Pope: '95. I was the executive director. One of the first things that happened was that Adam Werbach went to Dave and got Dave's support to become the youngest president in Sierra Club history. I got along fine with Adam. After that, the John Muir Sierran thing began kicking up, and Dave winds up with the John Muir Sierrans and became, for reasons that, to be honest, were never entirely clear to me, increasingly unhappy with me.

Lage: He didn't like fundraising from big donors; I heard that from him, I guess.

06-00:36:59

Pope: Yes. Yes.

Lage: Soft money.

06-00:37:02

Pope: Yes, he didn't like that. I don't know, there were undoubtedly other things that he didn't like. Then he decided to play along with the immigration people. He didn't really believe what they were saying, but he was going to— He was looking for the trouble spots. He didn't like peace. He wanted a ruckus. I was the chief peacemaker; that was my job, was to figure out what a majority of the board wanted to do, and then to make everybody else okay with it. That

was actually my job. That is not how Dave had seen his job, when he was executive director. His job when he was the CEO was to lead a faction. My job was to lead the majority. Not a faction, but the majority. That's how I saw it. He saw it differently.

Lage: Did you ever talk to him about his role as executive director versus yours and things like that?

06-00:38:03

Pope: No, because that was long in the past. I would talk to him about why I did things the way I did them, but I never talked to him about his role. He never really said much about why he— This was mostly indirect; he didn't really confront me. He would just complain about me. So there's probably a large part of the story I don't know, and I probably did some things wrong that I don't know about. At one point, Mike McCloskey said to me, he said, "It's just Freudian, with Dave."

Lage: It's just Freudian?

06-00:38:39

Pope: Freudian. He said, "He is so threatened. He is so unable to let go and become a grandfather, instead of being the authoritarian father, that he always— You were actually, for a long time, his darling. Now you're not doing everything he wants, and he can't take it." Now, I don't know if Mike was right or not; that was what Mike said.

Lage: How did you do with Mike as chairman? Was that a role that worked out?

06-00:39:13

Pope: Yes, very well. Very well.

Lage: Then when he left as chairman, there wasn't another chairman.

06-00:39:18

Pope: No, the chairman's job was originally created for him.

Lage: Okay, now let's see. Can we pause here one second. [audiofile stops, restarts] We're back on because we're just going to do a little more around the internal affairs, and the mandarin class, we'll call it, a couple of people who were strong personalities, Phil Berry being one.

06-00:39:38

Pope: Well, Phil was a very interesting story and ultimately, a very happy story; but it had some rough spots. When I came in, Phil and I had a very good relationship. Phil was, at that time, married to Michele [Perrault], and I had a good relationship with Michele. So for a long time, although Phil's relationship with Mike and Brower was always strained, I didn't have any— He was actually quite supportive of getting the club into politics; and I was

very supportive of the legal program, which was always very important to Phil.

Then in 1984, as the club was really getting into politics, I was still working for CLCV. I got invited, by friends I knew in California politics, to a number of Mondale events. Actually, I was no longer with CLCV. These people I knew because I had been with CLCV, so these were old relationships. So a number of my friends who were California Democratic donors would invite me to these events. Phil and Michele somehow got the impression that I was using club money, and instead of having them go to these events—having Michele go as the club president—that I was going to these club events, the political donor events, without them, and they got very, very angry with me.

Mike intervened. Mike became aware of it; Mike tried to work it out. Michele yielded a little bit; Phil wouldn't yield at all. At one point, when Doug Scott appointed me to be the associate conservation director, from political director—he gave me a promotion—Larry Downing was president. Doug made this announcement, at a board meeting in Washington, in a conference room that was very long and very thin. Doug had invited me in because he was going to make this announcement about me, and I was sitting down at one end of this long, thin conference table, right across from Michele. Phil came in late. He sat down at the other end and did not notice I was there. So Larry Downing called on Doug, at some point, and Doug made this announcement that he was appointing me associate conservation director. Phil went into a tirade, not realizing I was there, and said, "This is the most outrageous thing I've ever heard. This guy is really dangerous. He doesn't have the Sierra Club's best interests at heart." It was a very, very strong personal attack. And Michele is sitting across from me, dying. She was just like, oh, my God. Finally, Larry Downing said, "Phil, you don't have to speak so loud; he's right here in the room."

Lage: Oh, that was very clever.

06-00:43:22

Pope: Phil looked up at me and said, "Well, I'm not telling you anything I haven't told him." And I said, "That's right, Phil."

Lage: Was this all over just the Mondale—

06-00:43:35

Pope: That was the only thing that was ever actually— But it was about a sense of I hadn't given Michele enough of the limelight. There was clearly some other set of things that were involved with Phil and Michele. I think this would not have happened, had Michele not been president at that point, and she and I had a perfectly good relationship. Then several years later, I was involved in a controversy for the club, involving a golf course in Squaw Valley, where the club intervened to stop a golf course, because it was going to mess up a

wetland. We ultimately settled the lawsuit, because we couldn't win it, but we settled for some pretty strong mitigation, and we agreed we wouldn't do anything else to oppose the golf course. Some of the local people, who didn't like the hotel that the golf course was attached to, continued to fight. And the lawyer for the golf course, who had clearly told his client that he'd solved the whole problem and he hadn't, sued the Sierra Club and sued me personally. Phil was the best lawyer I knew about this stuff, by far, and Phil offered to represent the club and represent me pro bono.

Lage: Was this when you were executive director?

06-00:45:02

Pope: Yeah, this is all after I was executive director. So Phil took me on as a client, and did a fantastic job. We won the lawsuit. It took seven years. We won the lawsuit. I eventually actually got some money from the developer for malicious prosecution, because they— It was just one of these nightmarish things. But at some point, about two to three years later, something came up— No, actually, I wasn't executive director. I'm sorry, did you ask if I was the exec—

Lage: Yeah.

06-00:45:46

Pope: No, I was not executive [director]; this is before I was executive director. Something came up, and Phil said something very nice about me at a board meeting. I went up to him afterwards and I said, "Are you and I friends now?" And he said, "Weren't we?" I said, "Well, we were, and then for a while, I didn't think so." He said, "Oh, that was about something." He said, "I can't remember what it was. But then when you let me be your lawyer, I said, 'You must be okay.'" [they laugh]

Lage: That's a great tale.

06-00:46:28

Pope: And we had a very good relationship.

Lage: Yeah. Did he support you as executive director?

06-00:46:31

Pope: Oh, yes. Yeah, yeah. We had this one two- or three-year period when it was just odd. The person who was kind of the counterfoil for that, because he never really did have a good relationship with me, was Denny Shaffer. That, I think, was almost a kind of non-environmental ideology. It was the guy from Fayetteville, North Carolina, looking at the radical guy from the West Coast. Because very early on, when Denny was first on the board, I prepared a paper. Gerald Ford was president, I believe, and I did a briefing paper for the board, on Ford's campaign against inflation. It wasn't mainly about the environment, it was mainly about inflation and what Ford was doing about it. I don't really

even remember what it said. Mike thought it was good, and he handed it out to the board. The board gets together and Denny raises it up and says, “I want all copies of this despicable document gathered up. This is dangerous, subversive propaganda.” It was just like—he never really—I mean, on substance, we mostly agreed.

Lage: But what was it—? Was he coming from a conservative—?

06-00:48:12

Pope: Well, I think he was coming from a stylistically conservative— I don’t think it was really so much substantive. But he didn’t, I think, see the Sierra Club as part of the progressive movement.

Lage: As you had.

06-00:48:29

Pope: As I had. I think he saw me as trying to tie the Sierra Club to the left, and he didn’t see the Sierra Club that way. So I think that’s what it was. Then when he did come back on the board, there was this issue that, unlike Michael Fischer— It wasn’t so much of an issue in Mike’s era, but this came up. One of the things that these committees did is these committees sort of said, okay, we’re the committee now that oversees the development department, and we’re the committee that oversees the finance department, and we’re the committee that oversees the magazine.

Lage: And Denny was often treasurer and oversaw the budget.

06-00:49:11

Pope: That was actually one of the few functions where actually, that was what they— He was the treasurer of the board. He wasn’t just an appointed head of the membership committee. No, Denny and I never actually had any dispute about his role as treasurer. It was his role, he wanted to be able to manage— He wanted these committees to manage the club. And under the bylaws, I was supposed to be managing the staff, and I was responsible for the results. So there was a conflict with both Denny and Larry Downing, which was about no, we’re not a university, where each department is autonomous. We could’ve been a university. You could have bylaws that created that kind of staff, but that’s not what you created. You said the staff works for the executive director and the executive director is responsible.

Under California nonprofit law, actually, you had to do it that way. There had to be a CEO. There was, interestingly, a fight. I wasn’t part of this. I was around, but I wasn’t involved in it. The fight was when the [new] bylaws were adopted, which I think was 1981, probably. California nonprofit law was changed. Brower had left a decade earlier, and we had to adopt new bylaws. There were some pretty important changes. There was one issue the board could not agree on. That issue was over whether the CEO of the Sierra Club would be the president or the executive director. Ironically, Ed Wayburn

wanted the CEO to be the president, and Denny led the charge to have the CEO be the executive director.

Lage: Oh, so interesting.

06-00:50:57

Pope: Because Denny always, always was an advocate of a distributed Sierra Club. He didn't like the field system, for example, because the field system was making the organization more national and less chapter-based. He really wanted a confederation. Maybe that's the southern thing, the confederacy. But he wanted a confederated Sierra Club.

Lage: A federation of chapters?

06-00:51:27

Pope: Of chapters. He thought that having an appointed CEO would weaken the national organization, because you would always have the volunteer president, who would be able to control the power of the— Since when he did that in 1981, there weren't very many field staff, there wasn't much of a staff presence at the chapter level. So his concern was not with the staff, it was on the volunteer side. By the time he came back, we had a much more fully developed field system, which he had not been in favor of. He wanted all the money to go to chapters, for chapter lobbyists, so they would be independently hired and staffed. I was a centralist and Denny was a federalist, so that was one of the issues with Denny and I.

Lage: Interesting.

06-00:52:20

Pope: But that wasn't the issue back at the beginning, when he just took after me. But when he came the second time, it was the federal Sierra Club versus the unitary Sierra Club.

Lage: And the issue of being able to come in and take a look at the finances.

06-00:52:31

Pope: Oh, he could always look at the finances. He had complete access to the financial records. He wanted to be able to, not ask the staff all the questions he wanted, which he had the absolute right to do. Nobody ever was bothered by it. He wanted to tell them what to do. That's the difference, the difference between managing people and having access to all the information. He had access to all the information. But he wanted to manage the people, and that wasn't appropriate.

Lage: Yes. Okay, now let's see. We're running out of time, but I think we've also covered a lot.

06-00:53:09

Pope: We have covered a lot.

Lage: Let's think if there are any environmental campaign issues that we haven't—

06-00:53:17

Pope: Well, the thing we haven't talked about, the major thing we haven't talked about is, we haven't talked about the politics of the Bush years.

Lage: You're very right.

06-00:53:31

Pope: And we don't really have time for that. That was actually a fairly big part. I think probably so; I think we're going to have to do another [session] because that is pretty important. It'll probably take an hour. I don't think we need two hours, but we'll probably need an hour for it.

Lage: Oh, okay. Okay, that sounds good. Shall we stop now then?

06-00:53:56

Pope: Well, if you have other things you'd like to do, we can do— I've got about fifteen more minutes before I have to—

Lage: A lot of these things have been touched on in other discussions. We haven't talked about your affinity for the big tent and what you did in that regard.

06-00:54:16

Pope: Well, I think the biggest example of that, we actually did talk about, because that was actually— Well, you could mean two different things by the big tent. The way in which I resolved the big wilderness versus incrementalist thing was an example of the big tent. My view was the organization needed to say, here's a bunch of stuff we believe in. Now, there's a bunch of stuff out here we don't believe in, but here's a bunch of stuff we believe in and here's where we want to go. And that the organization should accept the fact that you have a bunch of different parties climbing the mountain, and they weren't all going to go on the same route. And that arguing about which was the best route was not the right way to do it. It was, well, go try. So that was one aspect of the big tent.

Then I suppose the other aspect of it might've been—because you brought it up so you probably know what you meant—is that John Muir great quote that I mentioned earlier— everything is hitched to everything else. I was always a believer that if we found that, in order to get our job done, our mission as we defined it, we had to worry about a new area of public policy, we should go there. Like I said, "Okay, we have to work on trade, because if we're going to save tropical forests, we've got to deal with trade." So when you said the big tent, what did you mean?

Lage: I was thinking about alliances with labor, alliances with—

06-00:55:56

Pope: Yes, that's the part that we didn't get to and that I want to save for next time.

Lage: Okay, that comes with the politics of the Bush years?

06-00:56:00

Pope: Yes, that was a phenomenon that became operational mostly in the Bush years.

Lage: Okay. Let's save it then. I think we'll stop then.

06-00:56:09

Pope: So that we should save, all right.

Interview 4: April 29, 2013
[Audiofile 7]

Lage: This is April 29, 2013, and we're on our final session, session four, tape seven. Okay, Carl, we have one big topic left, and that is the club's response to the Bush administration, how your political approach and your whole advocacy approach changed.

07-00:00:31

Pope: Got it. Okay. Well, when the Bush administration came in, we were very distressed and upset. But he had campaigned in a slightly ambiguous fashion, saying that he was going to do something to clean up old coal-fired power plants, that he believed climate change was a real problem. So we didn't quite know how things were going to be. We were not happy campers. In the spring of 2001, as the administration came in and began to shape itself, Dick Cheney emerged as a much more powerful figure than people had anticipated, and he took the reins on energy policy. That was actually the spring in which the main energy policy thing happening in the country actually was the California electricity crisis. The club was responding to the California electricity crisis and saying that we had cleaner, cheaper, safer, and faster energy solutions than trying to just do more with fossil fuels. And Cheney came out with this secret task force that had developed an energy plan, whose centerpiece was 150 new coal-fired power plants.

Lage: When you say secret—?

07-00:02:20

Pope: Well, nobody knew who they'd met with. They wouldn't release the records. The club brought a lawsuit later, saying that they were required to disclose what they had been up to, but we lost that lawsuit, ultimately. The public reaction to what the administration did was not positive. In fact, what people probably often forget is that in the spring and summer of 2001, George Bush very much looked like a one-term president. His popularity ratings were going down steadily. The polling showed that one of the major factors driving his popularity down was the perception that he was the candidate of big oil; that even though he had promised that he would govern as a centrist, as his father had, he in fact was not.

And shortly after he came into office, [Christine] Christie Todd Whitman, who we had supported when Bush nominated her for the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, went to Europe to deliver on Bush's promise that he would do something about carbon. While she was in Europe making promises to her fellow energy ministers and environment ministers in the EU, columnist Rowland Evans wrote a piece where he said that the conservative movement had told Bush, in no uncertain terms, that if he took action on cleaning up carbon pollution, they would not support him. And Bush changed his position, pulled the rug out from under Whitman, and made the

decision that nobody in his administration would ever use the words global warming again, and nobody in his administration ever uttered the words global warming again.

Lage: Truly?

07-00:04:06

Pope: Truly, truly.

Lage: Completely off the—

07-00:04:07

Pope: Completely, completely off the charts. So we were really engaged in a very, very intense—and we were doing quite well—effort to demonize the Bush administration’s very, very bad energy plan.

Lage: Through what kind of—?

07-00:04:26

Pope: Just the media. The media. Dick Cheney went on *Meet the Press* and announced on *Meet the Press* that as far as he knew, the Bush administration largely agreed with Sierra Club energy policy. This was staggering. But you had to respond to it, so we sent him a letter and said, “We’re very surprised, but we would love to meet and discuss it.” So actually, a meeting was set up with several environmental groups and people from the administration, and the vice president did come, in the White House. It was the only time during the Bush administration, I think, that any of us were in the White House.

Lage: Ah. And what other groups?

07-00:05:13

Pope: NRDC and EDF, I believe, but I could be wrong about that. But we were the ones that mainly set up the meeting. And we sat down and [I. Lewis] “Scooter” Libby, who subsequently went to jail for the vice president, was there representing the vice president, and the vice president came in for about half the meeting. The vice president came in and gave us the lay of the land and said that the administration was considering what to do about climate and they were trying to come up with a reasonable approach. But he did not say they were going to do nothing.

Lage: And he didn’t say global warming.

07-00:05:45

Pope: No, but he said climate change. The vice president’s presentation seemed— He didn’t make any commitments—we didn’t really expect him to make any commitments—but he didn’t slam any doors. Then he left and I think it was somebody from NRDC said to Libby, “Scooter, we hear what the vice president says and we’re heartened.” And Libby had sitting next to him this thick stack of documents that was the national energy plan, which had been

developed by this secret taskforce. The NRDC guy says, “But the vice president’s saying one set of things, but we’ve gone through your energy plan and we can’t find any of what he’s talking about. So we’re very confused.”

Libby put his hand on the stack of documents, said, “This is not our energy plan.” It was like, well, then what is it? Why did you release it? It was very—kabuki-like. This is not our energy plan. We’ll get together with you and we’ll figure all this out. Then as we left, they had set up the media to talk to us. And it became somewhat clear later, the whole thing had just been a media opportunity to say we talked to the environmentalists and we still have an open mind.

We never had a follow-up meeting and it became clear that, in fact, this document *was* their energy plan; that the centerpiece of their energy plan was 150 new coal-fired power plants; that they *were* going to deregulate natural gas drilling, and a variety of other things; and that we had not been wrong that they were not at all where we were. During the course of the summer, the president was in big political trouble. And then 9/11 happened.

Lage: I thought we’d get to that.

07-00:07:42

Pope: 9/11 shifted the focus, of course, to the war on terror, and then the war in Iraq. That was a period of time when the club didn’t have a clear strategy, because it was very hard to know how to deal with all of this stuff that was going on. In the fall of 2002, the Republicans did well in the midterm elections; Democrats did very badly. Democrats had mostly voted for the war in Iraq. Everything was a complete mess.

Lage: Did the club take any stance on the war in Iraq?

07-00:08:32

Pope: There was a big debate. There was pressure inside the club, to have us take a stance against it. We ended up taking a stance that anything the United States did in Iraq should have UN support. I believe that was the final decision. We didn’t say whether or not we should or should not, but we said we should do it in collaboration with the UN. That was the resolution that was going to be offered in the Senate, as an alternative to the resolution that finally passed, that authorized the president to do whatever the hell he wanted to. So we, in effect, ended up supporting that alternative resolution, although I don’t know, when we made the decision, if that resolution had yet been drafted. In the end, it wasn’t actually offered. So we did not find our feet during that period leading up to the 2002 election, so that year was very mucky. 2002 election goes badly. After that, we sat down and concluded that if there was going to be a chance of making Bush a one-term president—and it was clear that was our goal—that we had to do our political work very, very differently and that we had to do it in partnership with people like the labor movement, the

women's movement. We really had to bring the progressive movement together, because it was very clear they were very well organized. They were going to have their message, they were going to be united; and if we were divided, we didn't have a shot.

Lage: I just want you to elaborate a little bit on the "we," the kind of decision making within the club—who fed in and—

07-00:10:17

Pope: Okay. Well, I think by that time, the "we" was anybody who wanted Bush to be a one-term president. It became clear that was our goal. That was not controversial.

Lage: Right. But how to go about it.

07-00:10:35

Pope: But how to go about it. We began having conversations.

Lage: Is this something the board discusses, or the staff?

07-00:10:41

Pope: The board discussed it, the staff discussed it. Initially, the conversations we were having with labor and the women's groups were largely tactical: How do we actually create mechanisms to coordinate? So they weren't really policy things. Eventually, I became, along with five or six other people, one of the leaders of a group of progressives who sat down with some of the major independent donors—of whom George Soros was the initial and the most important—to say, look, there are a lot of people in this country who are going to vote for George Bush; there are a lot of people in this country who are going to vote against George Bush; there are a lot of people in this country who may not vote. Those are actually the important people. Everybody's made up their mind. By the time you'd had the war in Iraq, you'd seen the oil industry influence, you'd seen the tax breaks, we didn't think there were very many people who didn't know who they would vote for; but we thought there were a great many people who might or might not vote. So we shaped a strategy which was premised on the fact that 2004 was going to be about turning people out to vote.

There was an intersection of this conversation with the conversation that the board was having more broadly, about making the club more of an organizing culture and more of an outward-facing culture. I can't remember the timing of that conversation. That was when Robbie Cox led the first Project ACT. Was it Project ACT? I think it was Project ACT. But there was a conscious decision by the board, that we had to be more of an organizing culture, that we had to reach out to the community more. And this all fit in with that, but I cannot remember now exactly what the sequence was. So we became a part of an organization called America Votes. That organization then set up collaborative electoral planning tables in, I think, seven key swing states,

because everybody knew, by that time, what the seven key states were going to be in the fall of 2004.

That was really a time of tremendous engagement by the club. We actually were one of the organizations that got ourselves organized very early. So by the time you got to the summer of 2004 and you got worked up for the election, the Sierra Club was running major get-out-the-vote operations in, I think, five of those seven states. In many cases, we had thousands of new people coming in to work on the election, through the Sierra Club, who were not even Sierra Club members. They came to us because we had the best-organized program. So it was a very major leap forward for the club, in the electoral arena. It was all around the premise that what was 2004 was about was turning people out to vote; that George Bush and John Kerry would persuade people who to vote for; that what we had to do was to encourage and enable people to actually get there and vote.

I was also, personally and on behalf of the club, involved in several other organizations. There was an organization called Americans Coming Together, and there was an organization called American Families United. American Families United was a voter registration organization, and America Coming Together was an organization that was actually reaching out to— It actually had ground teams, paid staff, that were going out. What the club was doing was using the club's volunteer base, plus all these people who were not club members. What Americans Coming Together was doing was using paid canvassing teams to get people out to vote.

This was the first time any of us had done it. We had huge problems, for example, with the databases. We thought we could use commercial databases to manage the state voter files. The state voter files turned out to be just a mess, so it was very hard to keep track of— By today's standards, it was actually a very primitive effort; but by the standards of what had come before, it was an utterly astonishingly well-coordinated effort. It was ultimately not enough.

Lage: It is amazing how much has happened over the last decade, in terms of elections.

07-00:15:32

Pope: Now, I remember when we met at Soros's house in Southampton. There was a guy from Seattle—I'm blanking on his name now; he ran a progressive radio network; now I'm blanking on both his name and the name of the network—who actually asked the most important question. We were having this conversation about how we were going to get all these people out to vote. He actually said, "Where are we going to get the data?" Steve Rosenthal, of the AFL-CIO, who was the leading technical person in this effort said, "Oh, we'll use commercial databases." Then it turned out using commercial databases didn't work at all. But it was a complete sea change from the way that

environmentalists and the women's groups and the labor movement and the civil rights groups had ever worked together before. And it was highly effective; but—

Lage: Not enough.

07-00:16:27

Pope: —it was not enough.

Lage: Tell me a little bit about George Soros. I don't mean to get you off the track, but you had a view of him that a lot of us don't. What was he like to work with?

07-00:16:44

Pope: George was very smart and very kind of, actually, low key. Most of the really rich people I've met fall into two categories. They're people who made their money because they were CEOs; they tend to be charismatic and persuasive, extroverted, outgoing and frequently, somewhat domineering. That's your classic big business sort: Steve Jobs, William Clay Ford, Larry Ellison. Then there are the people who actually made their money because they were just analytic. Soros is one of those. These people are typically somewhat introverted, they're very analytic, they're often understated, and often not terribly particularly charismatic. We met at Soros' house in Southampton for this meeting. It was a very nice house, but it wasn't showy; it was just nice and in a very nice place. It was very low key.

Lage: Did he want to tell you how to do it? Did he want to investigate your—?

07-00:17:56

Pope: He had hired people to look at all the ideas on the table, and then he had brought the people together who were involved in the ideas that the people he'd hired to do the due diligence said were the most promising. And he did have a plan, and he did have a way he wanted to do it, which I actually think was ultimately somewhat problematic, because the original vision, which we, the groups, had had was that there would be, in effect, a holding company, a coordinating body that would get the money, and it would then manage three or four different efforts. George decided that was too weak a model. He wanted to have a single organization that had most of the money, so he set up Americans Coming Together, as the big body that would get most of the money. I actually think that was not the right decision. It was a decision that made sense from his point of view; it was the way you would run a single corporation. But this wasn't really a single corporation; this was really a collaboration. So I think we probably paid a price for that perspective, but donors always have a perspective, and that perspective is almost always more influential than it deserves to be. That's the nature of having the money. So you almost always pay a price for it.

Lage: I'm going to stop you for one second. [audiofile stops, restarts] Okay, now we're back on. I'm sorry for the interruption. We've got the failed effort of 2004.

07-00:19:36

Pope: Right. Out of that effort, came a very important initiative for the club, which ultimately was not— Well, it was successful, but not successful within the club. We made the decision that we liked having all of these thousands of local volunteers show up, but that we didn't want it to be a thing that only happened when we had a catastrophic presidential campaign. We wanted to try to build what we called the neighborhood Sierra Club. We actually made a decision that we wanted to try to build up, at the neighborhood level, something that would be much more local than the Sierra Club group structure.

Lage: Which is already very local, for a national organization.

07-00:20:28

Pope: Well, yes, but in most places outside of California, the group structure is a metropolitan area. So it's not the equivalent of a Neighborhood Watch or your local PTA. We really were looking for something so that many, many more people, without driving to a meeting, could be engaged in activities. We did manage to raise some money from David Gelbaum to do that, and during 2005, we made a serious effort to put that structure in place within the club.

Lage: Around what issues?

07-00:21:15

Pope: Well, around whatever the local issues were. The idea was you would organize local people around whatever was happening environmentally in their neighborhood. It didn't take. I think it didn't take for several reasons. One, it was difficult to incorporate it with the existing group structure, because the club's group structure was quite formal. You had bylaws, you had an election, you had an executive committee. These neighborhood organizations tend to be much more informal. It was very difficult to figure out what power did— The groups would get nervous about, well, the neighborhood associations were doing things, and they weren't coming to the group for permission. Sort of the difference between a local network and a formal structure. We couldn't figure that out.

We also had a problem, which was that in the club's group structure, what will happen because of limited resources is, of the array of local environmental issues that affect a metropolitan area—say Chicago, greater Chicago—if you look at greater Chicago, there are a lot of different environmental issues, and they're not all equally important in each part of Chicago. In downtown Chicago, it might be air pollution; out in the suburbs it might be sprawl; somewhere else it might be a wetland. What typically happens in the club structure is the group ex-coms [executive committees], since they have

resources, they decide which one is the priority and they work on that. Well, we were putting resources out to a lower level, and we were putting resources out in a way that the local people could work on their local issues. So the group ex-coms felt, wait a minute, we decided that clean air was the priority in Chicago this year, and most of the money's not going to clean air. Only the money that's going to downtown Chicago is going to clean air. So there was a lot of tension about the formal club structure versus the kind of informal neighborhood structure that we were trying to create.

Lage: How did you get money to this neighborhood structure? Did you have a staff person for them?

07-00:23:42

Pope: We provided them with staff people.

Lage: I see.

07-00:23:45

Pope: So the national organization was funding local efforts that, by their nature, wouldn't necessarily be on whatever the group had voted was the priority. We could never quite make that work. I also think the club's historical culture, on the staff side, was problematic because it had always been very focused on mainly the federal level, lobbying congressmen, or at the most, the state legislature. So when you got down to it, really a lot of these neighborhood activities are service activities. They're clean up the creek. A lot of them were service, which is why they attracted more volunteers. But they weren't what the club's staff was used to being rewarded for, and we never managed to get the culture right.

So we tried it for about a year and a half. It did not take off. During that year and a half, we were also going through the planning process that made global warming the club's top priority. Eventually, what happened was the global warming priority just— The money ran out for the neighborhood organizing. The global warming money began coming in, and the club began to focus much more heavily on this global issue, instead of all these really local issues.

Lage: Such a switch from the very local.

07-00:25:06

Pope: Huge switch; very local to very global. Very big switch. Now, the most successful part of the club's early global warming work was Cool Cities, which was all about getting cities to agree to do something about climate change. So it wasn't a complete switch, because we'd started out doing the global warming thing, through Cool Cities, through the very local intervention at the city level.

Lage: And why was that decision made?

07-00:25:29

Pope: That was just what took off. That wasn't a decision; that was just what took off.

Lage: You mean you had it on several levels and the Cool Cities is the one that took off?

07-00:25:37

Pope: Took off. That's right. We had it on several levels and Cool Cities is what took off. And that was a big surprise. The mayor of Seattle came to San Francisco and he announced that he was going to have a thing called the US Mayor's Climate Commitment, I think was what it was called, and he was going to ask other mayors to join him. He had about forty-five mayors at the cable car barn on Powell Street. A Sierra Club volunteer leader named Rafael Reyes—who was the Loma Prieta chapter leader, later became a board member, but wasn't then on the board—was there and got excited and said, "We're going to do this in all the cities." He set up a task force and started communicating, and lo and behold, we had hundreds of little groups of people working on making their city Cool Cities.

Lage: That's really kind of an amazing example.

07-00:26:33

Pope: That's the club at its best.

Lage: Yeah. Amazing. And generated by a volunteer who got excited.

07-00:25:41

Pope: Generated by a volunteer who got excited. But a volunteer who was living in Silicon Valley, because he lived in Palo Alto, so he knew the tools of online organizing and you didn't need the formal structure.

Lage: And then did you give him a staff person? Did that task force get staffed?

07-00:27:01

Pope: Yes, Cool Cities was staffed. Then at some point, we got like a thousand cities.

Lage: To sign up to make change?

07-00:27:13

Pope: To make change. Then we tried to figure out how to actually help them do it. That was where we probably actually needed the neighborhood Sierra Club we had failed to create. But we didn't have that neighborhood Sierra Club and we didn't have any tool. Like Arlington, Texas—George Bush's hometown, the home of the Texas Rangers—Arlington, Texas, became a Cool City.

Lage: Really? What did they do to become a Cool City?

07-00:27:39

Pope: Well, becoming a Cool City meant you passed a resolution saying you would reduce your greenhouse gas emissions by whatever the Kyoto requirement was—I think it was 7 percent—by 2005, I guess. No. I can't remember what the deadline was.

Lage: Must've been later.

07-00:27:54

Pope: It must've been later. Must've been later. But we didn't have, really, a group of people who were really self-organized in Arlington. We had one person in Arlington who went to the city council and got them to do it, with some support from the staff; but there wasn't really a neighborhood Sierra Club in Arlington, Texas. There was a Dallas-Fort Worth group, but that had several hundred cities in it, and they were never going to really think through how the thirty or forty of those cities that became Cool Cities were actually going to do it. There were Sierra Club members in Arlington, but there was nobody reaching out to them and saying, there's a city council meeting next Tuesday. So the failure to organize that neighborhood Sierra Club became quite consequential, when the time came to actually take Cool Cities to phase two. Phase one was *unbelievably* successful; phase two never really happened.

Lage: Which is getting it done.

07-00:28:54

Pope: Getting it done.

Lage: Although you kind of expect the cities would figure out how to get it done.

07-00:28:57

Pope: Well, in the cases of the big cities, they did. Like Seattle, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles—they hired sustainability directors and they looked at what was happening and they did energy evaluations. So big cities did it. But Arlington, Texas? I don't think they did much. I don't know that for sure; I don't want to be quoted here about what Arlington did or did not do. But most of the little towns didn't have— They ended up actually, many of them that wanted to do something, ended up working with an organization called ICLEI, which was an organization of cities. I can't remember what ICLEI stood for [now, Local Governments for Sustainability]. ICLEI was somewhat, actually, competitive with Cool Cities, because ICLEI idea was the cities would do it and the Sierra Club's idea was that the volunteer citizens should persuade the cities to do it. ICLEI actually got more of the job done than we did, because we ultimately were not able to figure out a mechanism.

Lage: Sounds like something you could work together on.

07-00:30:01

Pope: Well, yes in theory, and we should've; but there is always this human reality of when there are limited resources, it's always easier for organizations to

compete than to collaborate. This is a sad fact about human beings, but it's still a true fact.

Lage: Something you've learned over your years, here.

07-00:30:17

Pope: Yes. I might even have known it before those years, but I certainly knew it after my years.

Lage: Right. So this is all on a very local level. Had you given up on trying to influence policy in Washington? Or was that another thrust?

07-00:30:32

Pope: No. No, but there was Washington, you were not really going to— You had Bush sitting there. So we'd given up on influencing Bush.

Lage: And Cheney.

07-00:30:44

Pope: And Cheney. So we had no hope of influencing the administration. Most of that time, the Republicans had the ability to veto anything happening in Congress, so we were not able to move— We were mainly playing defense in Washington, in those years. The only significant progress we made was that in the fall of 2007, Congress did pass compromise legislation that began the process of improving auto fuel economy standards. That happened mainly because in the fall of 2007, oil prices started going through the roof and the US auto industry started going bankrupt, and the two things were clearly connected. What we had done, the other thing that played into that was, in 2003, California had passed its own fuel economy standards. Under the Clean Air Act, other states could adopt any standard California adopted. States had a choice. They could go by the EPA standards or, if the California standards were tougher, they could go with the California standards.

After California passed it, Dan Becker, who was running the Sierra Club's climate change program, decided that the strategy that we should use was to get a lot of other states to adopt the California standards. That would put the auto industry in this bind. They would be able to sell one kind of car in Texas and another kind of car in Texas and Oklahoma and North Dakota and Ohio, and they'd have to sell different cars in California, Washington, Oregon, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts. And they couldn't handle that. We actually set out to fragment the national market, and by 2007, I think eighteen states had adopted the California fuel economy standards. At that point, the auto industry said uncle. They said, fine, we have to have a deal. In 2007, Congress passed a compromise, which was then much strengthened when Obama came in.

So the one big success we had at the federal level, during the Bush years, was based on the success we had at the state level. It was a direct result of

successful state lobbying forcing action at the federal level. We really didn't, other than that, have any successes in Washington during the Bush years. A, this was a totally different kind of administration; and B, during this period, the Republican Party began to develop this tradition of complete partisan loyalty. Dennis Hastert, who was the speaker of the House, adopted what he called the Hastert rule, which was that the job of the majority leadership is to pass legislation which is supported by a majority of the majority. What that meant was that if the Republicans had—let's say they had 60 percent of the House; they never did, but let's say they had 60 percent of the House, and 31 percent of the house is a majority of the Republicans—if 31 percent of the house didn't want renewable energy standards, then Hastert would not allow the house to vote on renewable. Even though 69 percent of the House might want to vote for renewable energy standards, he would not allow them to vote on that.

Lage: And that stayed for quite a long time. Until just recently.

07-00:34:41

Pope: That stayed until just recently. Frankly, it only broke down recently because almost half the Republican caucus became utterly unable to legislate on *anything*. I don't think John Boehner liked having to change the Hastert rule. But that was a fundamental break with all of American political history. We'd never had party loyalty. Members of Congress were supposed to vote their districts; they weren't supposed to vote their parties. So this was a fundamental shift, and neither we nor anybody else figured out what to do about it. So we did not do much in Washington, during the eight years that Bush was there.

Lage: So that's kind of a major shift in the club's advocacy approach.

07-00:35:31

Pope: Right.

Lage: In response to—

07-00:35:44

Pope: In response. It's the advocacy landscape, and the club adapted to it. And the club had an advantage over many other environmental organizations; we actually had the decentralized structure to go in and lobby in Kansas. Did we talk about the coal stuff?

Lage: Beyond Coal?

07-00:35:49

Pope: Beyond Coal. Have we talked about Beyond [Coal]?

Lage: You did talk about it, in terms of Bloomberg's funding it.

07-00:35:53

Pope:

Right. But the other thing, if you look at the actual program, very little of that was done in Washington. That was done in state legislatures, in state public service commissions, in city councils. So when the club then shifted, you would've said, well, in 2005, we made this big shift to climate change. Oh, that means you're going to be worrying about Copenhagen and the UN. Well, yes, we had a delegation at Copenhagen. I was in Copenhagen, Fred Hewitt was in Copenhagen. But the club's emphasis never was at that level. The club's emphasis became renewable energy standards at the state level, shutting down coal plants at the state level, state public utility commissions. So the club's advocacy shifted from Washington to the state and local level. And it's stayed there. Obviously, we can do a lot more with the Obama administration than we could with the Bush administration, and we have; but you're not getting much through Congress.

Lage:

Does this change the dynamics between the club and other environmental organizations? Was there any other environmental organization that could make that shift?

07-00:37:10

Pope:

Environment America was set up to make that shift, because they were set up initially as a federation of state— They used to be the Public Interest Research Groups, and then they split the PIRGs into two. The organizations that kept the name PIRG became consumer organizations. Their environmental advocacy was housed in an organization, Environment California, Environment New York, Environment Massachusetts.

Lage:

Is this the Nader organization?

07-00:37:37

Pope:

This is Nader. This came out of the Nader tradition. They were set up that way, because they actually had always had a rather weak national organization. The power really was with their state affiliates. So they were very well suited to shift. The Audubon Society never had state affiliates; it had very local affiliates. And it had largely shed its local affiliates, didn't have much connection with them, so they really couldn't do that. They had ceased being a big advocacy organization, at that point. NRDC had offices in a few states; EDF had offices in a few states; UCS [Union of Concerned Scientists] had offices in a few states. But if you wanted someone in Kansas, there was nobody. Oklahoma, there was nobody. Michigan, there was nobody. People might have an office in Illinois, but nobody had an office in Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin. So it actually did change the dynamic, and it gave the club very substantial— We were much more the indispensable organization than we had been before. In Washington, while we could do a great many things very well, other people could also do a great many things very well. At the state level, there were far fewer competitors.

Lage: That's a very interesting point, I think, to make. Were you gearing up for 2008 during these years? Was that ongoing?

07-00:39:01

Pope: Well, we ran a very successful program in the fall of 2006; the Democrats captured the House, did very well, and yes, we were gearing up for 2008. But the ironic thing then was that— Let's go back to the neighborhood Sierra Club that never happened. The effort led by Marshall Ganz, to try to figure out how to make the Sierra Club's grassroots structure more nimble in the twenty-first century, and the investment we made in trying to create the neighborhood Sierra Club—

Lage: Are they the same thing?

07-00:39:42

Pope: No. They came together, though.

Lage: Okay.

07-00:39:44

Pope: One of them was driven by the evolution of the board's conversations, and the other was driven by the response to the politics. So the two things came together. We really did bring them together. When the neighborhood Sierra Club thing, it became clear that doing it separately from the groups was not going to work, we then tried to do it through the groups; and that became merged with the board's effort at grassroots effectiveness. And all of that knowledge and all of that learning then flowed into the Obama for America effort.

Lage: You mentioned how even your staff people—

07-00:40:24

Pope: Yes. We even moved our staff people. So this effort within the Sierra Club, to wrestle with these major issues of how you organize progressives, flowed into the Obama effort.

Lage: And how soon did the club connect with Obama? Was it not till he was nominated?

07-00:40:41

Pope: No, we had connected with Obama— The Sierra Club volunteer leaders in Chicago had me meet Obama when he was still a state senator. They said, "This is somebody you have to meet. This is somebody who's going to be president of the United States."

Lage: How interesting.

07-00:40:58

Pope: So I met him.

Lage: What did you think?

07-00:41:01

Pope: I was impressed. I didn't know if he was going to be president or not. Then I was in Boston in 2004, when he gave his speech. I was there in person. It was really quite remarkable. It was in this big hockey arena, the Staples Center. I was up on the third floor. I came out of the box I'd been sitting in to watch it, and Larry King, from CNN, was walking down the corridor and talking to himself. I sort of fell in behind him. He was saying, "My, my, my, my, my. My, my, my, my, my. *My, my, my, my, my!*" It was like, okay, this guy has made an impression on people.

So we had worked with Obama. When he got into the presidential race, actually, our effort, our goal early on in the primary season, was to make the Democrats highlight climate, and to make the Democrats highlight climate in an economic frame. Actually, the person to do it was not Obama and was not Hillary [Clinton]; it was John Edwards.

Lage: Oh, dear, John Edwards.

07-00:42:30

Pope: Our first breakthrough was John Edwards. John Edwards was the one who said, okay, we're going to really take an ambitious goal on climate. We're going to get 80 percent of our emissions down by 2050. He was actually the first. Then Hillary and Obama followed him, in relatively short order; I don't remember which order it was. At that point, our strategy was, have as many Sierra Club leaders as we could in each of the three campaigns. We said we want to have lots and lots of people close to John Edwards; we want to have lots and lots of people close to Hillary Clinton; and we want to have lots and lots of people close to Barack Obama. So that was our strategy.

Lage: And then what role in the actual election?

07-00:43:14

Pope: Well, in the national election, we basically put most of our volunteer leaders into the Obama campaign, if they were in states where Obama was organizing, or into Senate [campaigns]. So most of our volunteers ended up going into campaigns. So we did not have, in 2008, a large independent volunteer effort, because we said, you know something? People are going to want to work for Barack Obama. They're actually not going to want to be not able to be part of it. People are going to want to be part of that. That's where the learning is going to take place, that's where the new technology—

Lage: They had the databases.

07-00:43:50

Pope: They have the databases. Let's let our people have the best possible experience. So we actually encouraged people to join the Obama campaign.

Lage: Do you want to just talk a little bit about how things changed once Obama was president?

07-00:44:04

Pope: Okay. I can't remember what we've gone over, what we haven't.

Lage: We really haven't talked about that.

07-00:44:07

Pope: Okay. Well, Obama came in and John Podesta—and we were close to John—headed up the transition. We worked very closely with him. We were *very* excited.

Lage: When you say “worked closely,” you mean thinking about appointments?

07-00:44:32

Pope: Thinking about appointments, we made a lot of recommendations for policy stuff. When he came in, there were really two big things that people wanted to work on. We wanted to take the fuel economy standards to the next level, because that was an issue the club had been the leader on for twenty years. So that was a big victory for us, and he did that and it came out very well. The other big effort was cap and trade. I'll get back to that in a second.

Then the third arena where we were hoping for a lot of new momentum was on the whole public lands, parks, wilderness areas. There were mixed reactions to [Secretary of Interior] Ken Salazar. Some thought he'd be good; some people thought he would not be good. In the event, his focus turned out to be primarily on both good and bad energy things on the public lands. He didn't really move much of any lands-preservation agenda at all. And that had always, actually—almost always—been a congressional thing. The way we had moved parks and wilderness bills historically, as the club, was in Congress. The one exception was Bill Clinton. A huge amount of his second-term stuff was national monuments and the national forest rule. But mostly, the public lands protection agenda had been a congressional agenda. And you couldn't move things through. It became rather quickly clear that the Republicans in the Senate were going to use the filibuster to stop every public lands bill. So there wasn't much happening there.

I think that's been a very serious problem for the club, the fact that Congress is no longer available as a land-preservation arena, where if you get the local politics right, you get your legislation. I think that's a very serious challenge for the club that we haven't figured out what to do about yet.

Lage: It's like a fifty-year or forty-year dynamic that has changed.

07-00:46:50

Pope: Well, a hundred years. It's actually a hundred-year dynamic, going back to Teddy Roosevelt. So it's a hundred-year dynamic, and we haven't figured it out, the club nor has anybody else.

Now going back, the third big thing was the cap and trade bill. That was very complicated for the club because we wanted a major piece of climate legislation out of Barack Obama. We did not particularly want it to be a cap and trade bill. We were skeptical, both about the substance and the politics, and we thought it was likely, if it happened, to be very badly compromised.

Lage: And who was pushing it? I know EDF has been strong on cap and trade.

07-00:47:27

Pope: Well, EDF was the original advocate. Then at some point—with a different perspective, so I don't want to equate the two organizations—NRDC bought in very heavily. And Al Gore was always bought in. So you had EDF, Gore, and NRDC.

Lage: And what was the objection of the Sierra Club?

07-00:47:51

Pope: Well, two things. One, we thought it was likely to end up that you would give a lot of the permits away to the polluters. So in effect, you would reward the old economy for having polluted. You'd say, fine, we're going to make you stop polluting; but meanwhile, here's a bunch of stuff. That's what had happened in Europe. Second, we knew that if you looked at the polling, Americans were quite willing to pay more for clean energy. They did not want to be charged for using dirty energy, because they didn't think they had any choice. I'm sitting here, I get my power from my utility in Indiana; I don't control it. If I happen to have a utility that buys dirty-coal power, I don't want to pay more. I'm not getting anything better.

Lage: And you do pay more with cap and trade?

07-00:48:52

Pope: Yes. Your utility would've had to pay to buy a permit to emit the carbon, and would then have passed it on to you. The theory was, the economists argue, then your utility would switch to a cleaner energy source. But again, in terms of the public reaction— So we didn't think the politics of cap and trade was very good, and we thought that it would probably be an excuse for lots and lots of very bad deal making. Well, I would say that the history of what happened says we were right on both counts. The bill that passed the house was so badly compromised that we didn't— Because in order to get it, they gave away EPA's right to regulate carbon pollution. So it was like, no, no, that's not a good tradeoff.

Lage: So the club didn't support that.

07-00:49:40

Pope:

Well, we basically said, we'll support moving this bill to the Senate, but we do not want this bill to be signed by the president. If we can't improve this bill, we will kill it. It became clear not only couldn't you improve it, you couldn't even get it voted on. The politics was not there at all. Then there's been a lot of discussion about, well, suppose Obama had done it before he did healthcare; could it have been sneaked through the Senate? I don't think so. It barely passed the House. The Republicans were going to have a sixty-vote rule. There was a crucial vote the Democrats cast on whether or not they would do climate as part of the budget, which only requires fifty-one votes. And many of the Democrats, including people who are usually our friends, like Patty Murray, voted not to do climate as part of the budget, which meant that any climate bill had to have sixty votes. I don't think there were ever sixty votes in the Senate for any vaguely decent cap and trade bill. There might've been fifty-two votes, but I don't think there were ever sixty votes. So I don't think it could ever have happened. But there are people who believe that if Obama had done it sooner or— I don't agree.

Lage:

And you didn't think it was a good bill anyway.

07-00:51:10

Pope:

No, that's right. So it was not a good bill, and I don't think it could've passed.

Lage:

So what approach is better than cap and trade?

07-00:51:19

Pope:

Well, I think we could've gotten—I don't think we can now—we could've gotten a national renewable energy standard for electricity. That would've been hugely good. We could've gotten—I don't think we can now—a much more ambitious federal financing program for building efficiency. Instead of trying to do it with one economy-wide magic bullet, you could say, okay, what could we move in the transportation sector? You could have a federal low-carbon fuel standard. What can we move in the electricity standard? You can have a clean-energy portfolio requirement. What can we move in the building sector? We can finance efficiency. So I think if you'd broken it down— Because each one of those has a smaller set of opponents. Now, after the 2010 elections, Republicans could no longer vote for anything. Or they didn't think they could. So that window was 2009-2010. After that, the window closed.

Things are changing a little bit. There was an article this morning that Republicans are beginning to vote against Grover Norquist on online sales taxes. Now, that officially has nothing to do with the environment or climate. But it's a sign that Republicans are beginning to say, I have to vote my district; I can't vote my party. If you got Republicans voting their district, then I think you can say, okay, there are a bunch of districts where people want renewable power, because they're going to make it there. All up and down the Midwest, people can make renewable power. So they'll vote for that, if

they're voting their districts. There're a whole bunch of districts where people want mass transit, because they live in cities. If Republicans who live in those places can vote for mass transit, we'll fund mass transit.

I think if the partisan gridlock breaks down a little bit, then I think we have opportunities not to pass something like cap and trade. We might pass a carbon tax; but we'll pass a carbon tax small enough that it'll do a great deal to fund the government and only a little bit to help the climate. It'll do a little bit to help the climate, and it's a good thing and it's a better way to fund the government; but we're not really going to pass a carbon tax that's so big that it's going to make people stop using gasoline, because people don't think they have anything else to buy. We have to give people choices, before we can actually start charging them taxes, I think.

Lage: Okay, now, we have more to discuss with this approach in the Bush years, and that includes the alliances. You're the big-tent guy.

07-00:55:12

Pope: Right.

Lage: I want you to talk a little bit about the big tent and the actual forming of more formal alliances.

07-00:54:19

Pope: Well, two things happened and came together. The first was—and I think it's important to underscore—the decision that in order to make George Bush a one-term president you needed to have a unified progressive political effort almost forced you to build alliances on other things. You couldn't really cooperate with people on election day that you were squabbling with the whole rest of the year. So there were two forces that drove this. One force was the recognition that we needed to cooperate around elections. The second was that— In 2006, the year when clean energy first became a major electoral issue, I was going around the Midwest with Leo Gerard and the steelworkers, campaigning for clean-energy candidates—people like Sherrod Brown. I went to the Cleveland City Club; Leo and I were both speaking there. Leo and I had both spoken to the Cleveland City Club before.

Lage: As a duo?

07-00:55:29

Pope: No, separately.

Lage: Oh, separately.

07-00:55:30

Pope: So we each knew our crowd. So we got to the Cleveland City Club, and there were a bunch of environmentalists there who are always at the Cleveland City Club when I speak, and there were a bunch of steelworkers there who always

come when Leo speaks. Then there were a bunch of guys in suits. It was like, why are the guys in suits here? It became clear that the guys in suits were here because they thought this was the place to make money. Clean energy was the place to make money. I realized at that point, as Fred Hewitt likes to say, climate change requires us to take every car, every truck, every house, every hospital, every power plant, every jail, every road, every bridge, every streetlight, every factory, every chemical plant, every refinery and every port in the United States and completely redo it by 2050, in thirty years. That's what Fred likes to say.

Lage: Fred's an optimist.

07-00:56:35

Pope: Well, but that's what we need to do. Fred is not saying we are going to do it, but Fred is saying this is what we must do. There's a lot of money to be made. That's a whole new economy. We actually are the spearhead for the new economy. That, fundamentally, is a different dynamic. If you look at the way environmentalism was in the seventies and the eighties and the nineties, it was about trying to stop the spread of twentieth century industrialism, before it invaded every last wilderness area and every wetland.

Lage: More of a luddite— It was accused of.

07-00:57:18

Pope: Well, it was accused of being luddite, but it was about saying, wait a minute, we shouldn't turn the whole world over to twentieth century industrialism. We should save as much of it as we can. Now we're a world in which twentieth century industrialism got its hands on too much, and we have to make twenty-first century industrialism much more sustainable or it doesn't matter, because there's already enough bad stuff out there. Stopping new bad stuff won't do the job. So when you suddenly start staying, oh, okay, now we need to make a certain set of things happen much faster and you need to help a new set of industrial processes and technologies, realistically, it creates some issues.

There was just an article last week, an exposé by Bloomberg [News], that in 2007, there was a partnership between Chevron and Weyerhaeuser—not our two favorite players. This partnership was trying to determine how you could grow, in tree forests—of which we already have a lot—how you could grow fast-growing biomass that you could then turn into renewable fuels. They concluded that they could produce gasoline from these intra-crops they're intra-cropping within a tree farm. They could produce cellulosic ethanol for \$2.18 a gallon. Now, that's, A, pretty competitive with \$4.00 gasoline. B, it doesn't create the issues of food versus fuel. You're not converting land; you're taking that's already been converted and using it to grow a second crop. So it's got all kinds of attractive things. But on the one hand, it's Chevron and Weyerhaeuser. And on the other hand, they didn't take it to

market, because Chevron concluded, I think, that it would reduce the profits they made on oil.

They can make bigger profits on oil than they can on inter-cropped cellulosic ethanol. Weyerhaeuser couldn't do it on its own; they needed an oil company partner. So these new things that we desperately need to have happen, and we need to have them happen quickly, are likely to be done by our old enemies.

Lage: That's very interesting. I have to stop you so we can put a new—

[Audiofile 8]

Lage: Here we go again, on tape eight. We're continuing with that thought about cooperating with the enemies.

08-00:00:10

Pope: Well, the challenge is, the actual deployment of a sustainable economy is likely to be by many of the same corporations that are responsible for the completely unsustainable economics. So that's just a reality; that doesn't actually tell you how you deal with that. My solution—and the majority of the board agree, but I won't claim it was unanimous because I don't think it ever was unanimous—was that fundamentally, you tried to make the overall social system as democratic and long-term and inclusive as you could; that your best bet for enabling the new sustainable technologies to actually be both deployed quickly and deployed well— Because those are both important. You could produce cellulosic ethanol in a horrible way; you could cut down palm forests in Borneo. That the best shot for getting the new economy right was to build the forces of, broadly-speaking, democratic civil society. That meant partnerships with ethnic minorities, that meant partnerships with labor unions, that meant partnerships with community organizations. That was where the big tent came from, was the sense that the rules of the game— If the politicians felt they were really accountable to ordinary people, then it would be much less likely for corporations to be able to get away with murder. And the corporations could get away with murder in deploying solar power, just as they had gotten away with murder in deploying oil wells.

Lage: This sounds a lot like what you came into the movement with, that you mentioned in our very first interview—

08-00:02:14

Pope: That is correct.

Lage: —that you saw the Sierra Club as a device for—

08-00:02:15

Pope: Yes, that is correct. That is correct. I came back at the end, to sort of the same kind of political analysis that originally brought me into the Sierra Club in the beginning. Although when I came in, in the beginning, it was not about creating a new economy. The understanding that we are now at a turning point, when we will replace the twentieth century economy because there's not enough stuff in the world to have a twenty-first economy for seven billion people that looks like the twentieth century. That's just mathematically not possible.

Lage: You mean not enough natural resources?

08-00:02:55

Pope: Right, stuff. That's what I mean by stuff. Not just energy. It's energy, it's copper, it's cement, it's steel, it's wood, it's—

Lage: Air.

08-00:03:05

Pope: Well, there's enough air, probably. So we will have a new economy. That's not an advocacy position, that's just right. Now, we could have many different new economies. If we want to have a new economy that we are happy with, we need to build it on a democratic infrastructure. That isn't just my view, that's actually the club, if you look at the club versus many other environmental organizations, because of its nature. The most important, I believe, decision that Dave Brower made was when he got rid of the requirement that you be sponsored [for membership]. That made the Sierra Club the first genuinely lowercase-D democratic environmental movement in history. Environmentalism had always been an elite, before 1950. They were clubs; you got admitted. You were a scientist; you were credentialed.

Lage: Right.

08-00:04:07

Pope: The people who did environmentalism before 1950 all thought of themselves as not part of the masses. And Brower broke that. That was part of the whole post-World War II democratization of American life. Brower's decision, whatever you may think about the techniques he used to get there, was really fundamentally different. And the club was always different during my years with it, because NRDC's board chooses itself, with a lot of help from the executive director; and NRDC staff, in many cases, are the children of NRDC's donors.

Lage: Really?

08-00:04:48

Pope: And they definitely have a preference for hiring people who went to certain colleges.

Lage: That's interesting.

08-00:04:55

Pope: NRDC is a very self-selected representative segment of America's leadership, or elite. Sierra Club really isn't.

Lage: Does that happen in the club, though, as you rely more on big donors? Does it change the board of the foundation, or even the board [of the club] itself?

08-00:05:15

Pope: There's always been a concern that it could. I actually don't think that ever happened, because in fact, the way the club is doesn't attract the American elite, so they don't want to be on our board. In most cases, only a few of them want to be our donors, because they don't want to be on our board. So the kind of people who want to be on EDF's board were Wall Street guys. And they like to be on EDF's board, in part, because there are other Wall Street guys on EDF's board.

We get the disrupters, we get the mavericks. You and I have talked about where I was successful at raising money. All the people I raised money from were mavericks. None of them were people who were the chairman of the board of a symphony, because none of them were really part of the establishment. It's kind of strange to say that Michael Bloomberg is not part of the establishment, but he really is not a comfortable part of the establishment. You go to his house in New York City and it's a very different crowd than you see if you go to the Metropolitan Museum dinner.

Lage: Okay. Now, do you want to talk about the BlueGreen Alliance, the formation of it? Were there problems in bringing these groups together?

08-00:06:41

Pope: Sure. Well, the BlueGreen Alliance was probably the biggest example of alliance building. Dan Becker and I started out trying to create the BlueGreen Alliance, probably in, I'm going to say, 1996. No. No, no, 1994.

Lage: So that went way back.

08-00:07:14

Pope: Way back. [Joseph] Lane Kirkland had just stepped down as the president of the AFL-CIO, and John Sweeney had become the new head of the AFL-CIO. John Sweeney had hired somebody to do environmental work within the AFL-CIO, a woman named Jane Perkins, and we decided to create a blue-green alliance. We had a lot of meetings. Through the AFL-CIO, Jane was very supportive. In the summer of 2006, people were working— This was two years after Gingrich came in, and we and labor were actually on the same side of the elections that fall; we wanted to get Congress back from Gingrich. We had a meeting at an AFL-CIO training center near Baltimore. Sweeney came

out and basically gave everybody the signal that they were supposed to cooperate with this because he really needed a united front for the election.

Then in the spring of 2007, it all began to fall apart and eventually, it blew up. And it blew up because you had within the AFL-CIO, a number of unions—some of the building trades, the mineworkers—who just weren't comfortable with the environmental movement. They saw us as the enemy. Within the context of the AFL-CIO, you really couldn't bring anybody outside in. It was just very hard. So it blew up and it failed. Dan and I kept working with specific unions that wanted to partner with us—SEIU, the steelworkers.

We tried to work with the autoworkers, but the autoworkers leader, at that point, was very close to the companies. I went to see him in Detroit, a guy name Steve [Steven] Yokich. I went to see him in the UAW headquarters, called Solidarity House. So I sat down and I said to him, "Look, Steve—" This is '98. "Anytime you and I talk about what we want to get done in the next year, we have different points of view. Anytime you and I talk about what we want to get done in the next ten years, we're actually on the same page. You guys work for companies that, right now, are making a lot of money taking really, really old truck technology and sticking fancy sheet metal on it and marking it up 20,000 bucks. That's great, for next year. But there's no reason on God's green earth why Toyota and Mercedes aren't going to take modern technology and put fancy sheet metal on it, and mark it up \$10,000 and completely steal the market. You shouldn't want that, and I don't want that, and we need to figure out how we get Detroit to make cars on modern technology, and those cars will be much more fuel efficient. So I'll be happy; and people will buy them in ten years, so you'll be happy. So we actually have a common interest."

Lage: And how did he react to that?

08-00:10:37

Pope: Yokich said, "Let's go to the window. Look, I want to show you something." So we went to the window and he showed me the parking lot at Solidarity House. He said, "What do you notice?" Well, I'm from California and at that point, you never saw a US car on the road in San Francisco. I said—but I wasn't very surprised—"Well, of course, they're all American made." He said, "No, look again." Well, I looked again. He said, "No SUVs." It was true. There were essentially no SUVs in the parking lot at Solidarity House. He said, "My guys know shit when they build it." [they laugh]

Lage: Well, that's good.

08-00:11:19

Pope: He said, "But if you go out to the suburbs here, their wives all have SUVs, because they like being up high, and they don't know what they're driving." So I said, "Okay, so I think that means you basically agree with me that ten

years from now, you're not going to be selling the stuff that's not in your parking lot." He said yes. I said, "So can we work together to try to make the companies—?" He said, "You should go talk to the companies." He just wasn't willing to break. But we found a couple partners, and mainly the steelworkers. Have we talked about the steelworkers and the Arctic?

Lage: No.

08-00:11:59

Pope: Okay. This is an interesting story.

Lage: I'm interested in why the steelworkers got involved in the Arctic.

08-00:12:03

Pope: The steelworkers had a very long relationship with the environmental movement, because back in 1970 they passed a very important clean-air resolution. The steelworkers actually led the fight to clean up the American steel industry, and they worked with the environmental movement. They had a vice president named Jack Sheehan, who for many, many years sat on the board of the National Clean Air Coalition, which was the umbrella group that coordinated environmental groups working on clean air, and I sat on that board for many years. In 1990, when Congress was passing the George Bush version of the Clean Air Act, the Clean Air Act of 1990, which cleaned up acid rain, there was a big fight about whether or not we were going to require old coal plants to install scrubbers, or whether we were going to let them burn low-sulfur coal. George Mitchell, who was a strong environmentalist and was the Senate majority leader, had cut a deal with the Midwestern utilities to get the votes he needed to pass the bill. The deal was, they could import low-sulfur coal. [Robert] Bobby Byrd, the senator from West Virginia—West Virginia coal was going to lose out, and he wanted to make companies install scrubbers.

Now, the environmentally correct thing to do was to install scrubbers; that was clear. The politically expedient thing to do was to let them import western [low-sulfur] coal. That's what Mitchell wanted to do. The environmental community was sort of torn, because we were, generally speaking, highly supportive of Mitchell. Mitchell was telling us, you've got to let me do this, and the right position was to require scrubbers. Jack Sheehan called me up, and he called up several other environmentalists, and he said, the steelworkers have been with you since 1970 on clean air. I said yes. He said, we're calling in our chits. We want you to support Bobby Byrd against George Mitchell, because what Byrd is doing is, environmentally, the stronger position and it's what we need to hold together the coalition that enables us to be for clean air. The Sierra Club went with Byrd; the rest of the environmental community went with Mitchell. The Sierra Club was never allowed back into Mitchell's office again, as long as he was in the Senate.

Lage: Really? That was a big deal to him.

08-00:14:51

Pope: And Byrd took that vote and put it on the back of his door in the Senate. And when anybody would come in to lobby Bobby Byrd, another senator or a staff would come in to lobby Byrd, they would make their pitch, and Byrd would get up and he would push the door closed, and he would run his finger down and he would see you, and say yes or no, based on where you'd been on that vote.

Sheehan must've retired in about 2003, and I worked with a succession of steelworker presidents. There was I.W. [Iorwith Wilbur] Abel, who was the president who did the stuff in the beginning; and then it was George Becker; and then Leo Gerard became the president. So I worked with all of them on clean air. As I said earlier, at one point, the Sierra Club and steelworkers had a series of one-night stands on clean-air issues. In 2006, the last really serious threat to the Arctic Wildlife Refuge came up. Bush decided that one of the things he was going to do— He knew he was going to lose control of the House in the fall elections, and so he had one more shot at doing something for the oil industry. He was going to get the Arctic for the oil industry, come hell or high water. So he basically offered various senators big packets of boodle for the states. He offered Bobby Byrd about \$2 billion of some kind of federal benefit for West Virginia, which was a poor state and a small state, so \$2 billion was substantial. We heard about this, and our staff went— Byrd's staff said, look, we can't say no. And Byrd was the key vote. If Byrd voted to drill the Arctic, then Bush would have sixty votes to end the filibuster. So this was it.

So I called Leo up. I said, "Leo, in 1990, Jack Sheehan called me up and here's the conversation we had. And I'm now calling you up and saying, I'm calling [in] my chits. I want you to call Bobby Byrd and remind him of where the Sierra Club stood in 1990." And Leo called Bobby Byrd. He called me back and he said, "Senator Byrd said that his staff would dearly love to have him vote to drill the Arctic, but that it's the wrong thing to do."

Lage: And that was the deciding vote?

08-00:17:50

Pope: That was the deciding vote. That was the deciding vote.

Lage: Wow, that's a very good story about the value of alliances.

08-00:17:57

Pope: Right. So at some point after the AFL-CIO blue-green alliance blew apart, Dave Foster, who worked for the steelworkers, came to me and said, "Leo would like to try to do this outside the AFL. He doesn't think you can do it inside the AFL; he thinks the politics are just too mucky. But he doesn't see any reason why the Sierra Club and the steelworkers shouldn't begin to create

something of their own.” So we then began to create something of our own, and for three or four years, the BlueGreen Alliance was literally the steelworkers and the Sierra Club. We were the only members. We were a closed club; we didn’t let anybody else in. And other people began to want in.

Lage: Exclusiveness.

08-00:18:39

Pope: Right. At that point, Dave said, “Okay, I think we’re strong enough now. We’ve built our relationship. But Leo’s nervous about losing control. Leo doesn’t want to lose control, so you have to help me persuade Leo to open this up.” So I was actually in New England and I remember I had this conversation with Dave and Leo walking along a trail, and it was not terribly good cell phone reception, so I’d have to stop periodically to carry on the conversation. But we had a conversation and we decided, okay, we would admit a certain— We’d become a coalition of the willing. Then we opened it up to two or three organizations, and then we’ve opened it up more broadly. The organizations in the BlueGreen Alliance now have more members than the organizations in the AFL-CIO.

Lage: Now, are these organizations from the labor movement?

08-00:19:35

Pope: And from the environmental movement. The Sierra Club, NRDC, UCS, and the National Wildlife Federation are the four environmental organizations, and there are eight labor unions: Steelworkers, SEIU, American Federation of Teachers, Utility Workers, Communication Workers of America, Pipefitters. I can’t remember what the final one is.

Lage: And what do they actually do?

08-00:20:07

Pope: They work on issues that labor unions and environmentalists can agree on, mainly around green jobs issues, but not exclusively. They work on green jobs and green chemistry. They’re a very, very important convening platform for trying to figure out, okay, how can we— Right now we’re working on an effort to say— We have a lot of natural gas pipelines in the United States, and they leak and they’re dangerous, and we need to replace them. Well, replacing them is going to add a lot of jobs. But it’s also going to eliminate a lot of methane leakage, which is very important to the environment. So we’re working together to find out, how can we get these pipelines modernized? How can we actually create a national program to modernize America’s pipelines? Those are the kinds of things we work on.

Lage: So you have people researching positions.

08-00:20:54

Pope: And then we lobby. The Autoworkers [UAW], that's the other union, the Autoworkers. The BlueGreen Alliance was the mechanism through which we worked with the Autoworkers, under their new president, who is quite willing to break with companies—

Lage: Interesting.

08-00:21:11

Pope: —and work for fuel efficiency and things like that.

Lage: Were you as successful on the big-tent issue, with ethnic groups, poor people, environmental justice?

08-00:21:22

Pope: It was slower. It was slower because during the middle of the effort, we had the big immigration battle, and that kind of made a lot of people very suspicious of the club. But actually, we've made really remarkable progress. A lot of that effort that was made by club leaders like Robbie Cox, fighting the immigration battle, has actually paid off now, in the last couple years. Mike Brune has been able to make some really amazing breakthroughs with people like Ben [Benjamin] Jealous, at the NAACP. So I think yes. We did a very big series of youth outdoor programs; we've built relations in ethnic communities; and a lot of the big-city mayors we've worked with, like Antonio Villaraigosa, are from either the Hispanic or African-American community. So, yes. It was slower, but we made a lot of progress.

Lage: And the alliances with industry seem more problematic for the club, and kind of touched you, it seems.

08-00:22:27

Pope: Well, they're more problematic, in that the challenge is that they tend to be more transactional. So at a particular moment, with a company, sustainability appears to be its best strategy. It's rarely the case with big companies that sustainability is at their core. So you can partner transactionally, but you can't really form long-term alliances, because they tend to then find something you disagree with them on. DuPont, for example, makes chemicals to replace greenhouses gasses in refrigeration. That's a very good thing. DuPont also makes the chemical that's in Teflon and in Gore-Tex. So a lot of Sierra Club members actually probably consume a lot of it, but we don't really like the conditions and standards under which it's used, so that's not a good thing. So with companies, we tend to have a much more transactional relationship.

Lage: You mean just one one—

08-00:23:39

Pope: It'll be on one aspect of their operations. That makes it both less durable; it also makes it less comfortable for the club. Nobody minded Clorox's green cleaning products; people didn't like the rest of everything Clorox made and

so they were uncomfortable helping Clorox's clean hand, because Clorox also had a less-clean hand. So that is challenging.

Lage: Yes. Well, what have we missed? We should talk about your leaving as executive director, which you touched on, and then why you left altogether, as chairman.

08-00:24:16

Pope: Okay. I don't remember what I've said.

Lage: Well, you said something about that you left a couple years before you would've, to be sure you could step back in, in case a new executive director didn't work out.

08-00:24:20

Pope: That was correct. That's absolutely correct. So that's why I left. Then after I'd been chairman for about a year, it became clear that I didn't have as much freedom as I wanted, wearing the club's banner, and that Mike Brune wasn't terribly comfortable having me still very visibly connected with the club. He felt that my being there was getting in the way of his being able to— We hadn't had any conflicts about anything, but he was looking ahead and saying we could, and that would be awkward, so we should accelerate this transition. That's why I left. It was a combination of my own freedom, but also Mike was not comfortable.

Lage: It was reported in the news as kind of, well, unhappiness with this stance, vis-à-vis alliances with industry, etc.

08-00:25:16

Pope: Oh, that was that story in the *Los Angeles Times*. That was a completely fabricated story; it was really quite remarkable.

Lage: Oh!

08-00:25:24

Pope: That was a reporter who hated the fact that the Sierra Club had been in favor of clean energy. Literally, he thought we should not be about climate; we should be about local land protection. He apparently had called the chapter office repeatedly and screamed at them about the fact that we were supporting various clean-energy projects. You shouldn't be supporting things. Your job is to protect things, not support things. He basically constructed that story. Mike and the board were very unhappy about it because it wasn't reflective of what was happening at all.

Lage: That's interesting. Well, just as a final thing, how do you like working as a solo? You're a consultant, right?

08-00:26:15

Pope: Yeah.

Lage: Is it harder to get things done? Or is the freedom—

08-00:26:19

Pope: Turns out to depend. Some things were much easier than they were, and some things are much harder, and they're not necessarily the things I would've guessed. Now, one of the things you have to know is that when I decided to become a consultant, I said I was not going to do any HR. No hiring, no firing, no supervising.

Lage: You'd had it with that.

08-00:26:39

Pope: I'd had it with that. So I'm a particular kind of consultant. Some consultants have staff who support them. I have an administrative person, but she just does administrative work. I'm much freer to be able to follow the trail of something, so I can go much deeper than I could when I was at the club. And I can try out new ideas more quickly. On the other hand, for example, when I travel, it's really hard because I've got three or four projects I'm working on at any time. When I was at the club, if I had three or four projects I was working on and I went away to work on one, somebody else would keep the other two or three going. Now I have to keep them going, which means that when I'm traveling working on X, I also have to think about W and Y and Z, and that's hard. So I'm still figuring all that out, to be honest. I probably won't ever wholly figure it out. I don't have a very good sense of how long something's going to take me now. Some things take me less and some things take me more.

Lage: Do you look back now, with more distance, on the club and its value than when you were right immersed in it?

08-00:28:01

Pope: Most of what I would say now, I would've said when I left. I think I had a fairly decent perspective, because the club is a place where there's always a lot of— There's not a lot of group-think in the club, so you get a lot of different perspectives when you're there. The one place that my perspective has changed is that a lot of what I've done since I left has been unlearning things I thought I knew. The things I thought I knew were not things that either I uniquely or the Sierra Club believed. These are things which are part of a common political conversation. They're mostly things that probably were true ten years ago that are not true today.

Lage: Give me one or two examples.

08-00:28:50

Pope: Well, for example, the whole belief that pricing carbon was the key to reducing emissions. Widely believed, not just by our side. Widely believed that that's the battle. The battle is about pricing carbon, so you assume that pricing carbon must be the big deal. As the executive director, you don't have

the opportunity, really, to notice one disconcerting fact, say, that if you really thought about it, would cause you think, wait a minute, is pricing carbon really going to do what we think? Not, can we get it? Because that's the thing you think about when you're executive director: how do we get it? Because you've always wanted it. You don't actually say, yeah? And we were right to want it ten years ago, and it would still be somewhat useful; but it's probably not as important as we thought.

So I think that I'm much more aware of the fact that the combative role that the club plays means that there's always a risk of holding onto yesterday's truth. What used to happen was that the club would be intellectually refreshed by work coming out of—since it was public lands work—mostly the government. It would come out of the Forest Service or it would come out of Fish and Wildlife Service, it would come out of the Park Service. A lot of very basic research, ecological research, used to be done in government. That research was more actionable than what happens in academia. It wasn't abstract; it was useful. It was useful to club leaders working on, okay, how are we going to manage the Columbia River? There's a lot less of that happening.

So I'm now aware of the fact that there is a whole chunk of the landscape where in fact, the club doesn't have access to new thinking because the new thinking won't happen inside the club, because we're in combat mode; and the new thinking is no longer happening in the way we need outside the club. Academia's too academic, the government is no longer doing it, so there's really a learning challenge—not just for the club, but for all advocacy groups. So that's probably the biggest new insight that I've developed since leaving.

Lage: Does that make you want to go in the direction of a research institute, or fostering a research institute?

08-00:31:22

Pope: Well, I'm doing research, so yes, it definitely makes me want— But the interesting thing is when I try to talk to the think tanks—there are institutions who claim this is their job—they're too establishment for the needs of a disruptive organization like the club. We don't really have a disruptive think tank. Yes, it would be good to have one, but I don't know much about setting up think tanks.

Lage: [laughs] Well, is that a good note on which to end this?

08-00:31:56

Pope: That's a good note. That's a good note on which to end, and thank you so much, Ann.

Lage: Great. Thank you very much.

APPENDIX

The following summary of Carl Pope's achievements with the Sierra Club was a draft prepared as part of an application for an energy prize. Pope sent it to ROHO as an aid in planning the oral history interviews.

EX Summary 200

Forty year career as environmental policy advocate and leader. Seventeen years as CEO of the Sierra Club, America's "most influential grass-roots environmental advocate."(Aspen Institute).

Major leadership role in key policy campaigns;

Clean air: Clean Air Act 1970 passage, 1974/1996 regulations, 1977/1990 renewal, 1981/2011 defense. Cumulative impact of these successes reduced public health risks from air pollution in the United States by more than two-thirds.

Toxics: 1984/1985 Superfund passage/renewal, 1994 unsuccessful renewal, 1988 California Proposition 65; 1995 Federal Pesticide Reform Act; 1976/1984 Resources Conservation Recovery Act/Amendments.

Parks/forests/wilderness: 1976 California Coastal Protection Act; 1994 California Desert Protection Act, 25 million acres; 1999 Headwaters Forest Reserve, 60,000 acres; 2000/2001/2011 Wild Forests Roadless Rule promulgation/defense, 65 million acres; 1989/1995/2001/2007 Arctic Wildlife Refuge Wilderness 1 million acres.

Energy policy: 1974/2007/2009/2001 auto/truck fuel-efficiency standards; 1979 blocked Energy Mobilization Board; 1978 California Nuclear Safeguards Act; 1981/1988/2005/2009 campaigns against coastal oil drilling; 2004-2007 11 states adopted Clean Car standards; 2005-2011 Beyond Coal campaign stopped 150+ new coal-fired power plants, retired dozens of old ones.

More than doubled the size and scale of the Sierra Club's grass-roots base, budget, staff, and impact; pioneered the environmental movement's engagement in politics; organized unified, 21st century political coalitions and infrastructure.

Impact 500

During my thirty seven years with the Sierra Club, I led, organized or directed dozens of important public policy campaigns. They included virtually every significant national legislative

battle in the clean energy or sustainability arena beginning with the 1970 Clean Air Act. But four of these campaigns stand out for their long term impact and the significance of my personal role.

In 1988 I co-authored the nation's first significant Green Chemistry state law, Proposition 65. Proposition 65 transformed the incentives of the chemical industry, by establishing a clear, scientific threshold of risk. Once testing demonstrated that a chemical crossed that threshold, and it was placed on the Prop 65 list, the burden of proof shifted. Now the manufacturers or users had to show that their use of a potentially dangerous substance was, in fact, safe. Toxic chemicals were no longer innocent until proven guilty.

As a result of these new incentives, manufacturers of hundreds of consumer products phased out their reliance on heavy metals, halogenated hydrocarbons, volatile organics, and other dangerous ingredients. Because the California market is such a large one, most of these product formulation changes were adopted nationally.

Second, beginning in 1990, the Sierra Club and I initiated a new approach to forest protection. Instead of waiting for Congress to pass location specific Wilderness bills, we advocated a uniform prohibition on logging or new roads on the remaining wild forests. President Clinton signed such a regulation at the end of his Administration, protecting 65 million acres of America's wildest forest lands from commercial development.

Scale 400

The new public policy approaches which I pioneered at the Club have had substantial and scalable impacts.

Under Prop 65, California has promulgated "safe harbor" standards for some 220 reproductive toxicants or carcinogens; three-fourths of these still lack comprehensive regulation by the federal government.

The Wild Forest Rule was the third largest lands protection measure in American history, outranked only by Theodore Roosevelt's expansion of the National Forests system and Carter's Alaska Lands Act. It protected 65 million acres of public forest land from logging and commercial development. While the Bush Administration tried to reverse Clinton and reopen the forests to logging and roading, the Club led a vigorous legislative and legal defense. At the end of the Bush Administration, only 8 miles of new roads had been constructed in these areas. As a secondary result of this success, the forests of the Pacific Northwest shifted from being sources of carbon dioxide emissions to being significant sinks. Instead of each square meter public forest emitting 48 gram of carbon, they began storing 141 grams of carbon.

The combined 2012-2025 carbon emission and fuel efficiency standards for passenger vehicles are probably the single most effective policy yet adopted in any nation to reduce transportation carbon emissions. By 2025 these rules will reduce US consumption of oil by 2.5 million gallons/day. Emissions of CO₂ will decline by 280 million tons by 2030.

The Club's Beyond Coal Campaign has made even larger reductions in US utility sector emissions. The 153 blocked coal plants would have emitted 600 million tons of CO₂/year; already announced retirements of old plants will eliminate another 113 million tons; the 2015 goal of retiring one-third of the existing coal fleet will mean savings of another 500 million tons.

The US Copenhagen commitment of 17% reduction in CO₂ emissions required cutting pollution by a billion tons a year. The Sierra Club's Clean Car and Beyond Coal campaigns are already responsible for reducing US 2020 emissions by 800 million tons.

Organizational leadership 500

During my 37 year tenure the Sierra Club grew from a California based grass-roots network to America's largest, strongest, environmental advocacy organization. From 1992-2010 I served as the Executive Director; four years after I took the helm, the Aspen Institute rated the Sierra Club the most effective regulatory and environmental advocacy group in Washington; at the end of my tenure the Bloomberg Foundation recognized our Beyond Coal work with a \$50 million grant.

These policy successes were built on strengthening the organization and its resources. During my tenure the organization's support base grew from 500,000 households to 1.4 million; staff increased from 200 to 450; raised budget from \$53 million to \$90 million; doubled the number of lawsuits from 70 to 145 a year. I personally solicited and raised about \$400 million for clean energy and sustainability work.

During this period, *in partnership with other environmental organizations*, the Sierra Club was the primary mover in numerous national and state policy accomplishments (in italics are efforts which I personally or as Executive Director led):

Protected California's coastline through the California Coastal Initiative.

Protected 100 million acres parks and forests in Alaska with the Alaska Lands Act of 1980.

Led the campaign to avoid a wasteful, dangerous American commitment to synthetic fuels during the Iran oil crisis.

Blocked Reagan Administration efforts to dismantle the Clean Air Act and the Superfund. Organized national outcry against the anti-parks policies of Interior Secretary James Watt with a million signature petition drive.

Enacted California's Proposition 65.

Brought innovative lawsuits which slowed clear-cutting of the rainforests of the Pacific Northwest, setting the stage for the Clinton Northwest Forest Plan.

Created the vision and impetus for the California Desert Protection Act, protecting 25 million acres of wilderness.

Initiated the strategic concept of an umbrella federal regulation protecting wild forests, which led to the 65 million acre Clinton Roadless Rule.

Held off repeated efforts under three Presidents to open up the Arctic Wildlife Refuge for oil drilling.

Initiated 18 state-wide clean energy mandates between 2001-2007, requiring 10-40% renewable electricity.

Persuaded more than 1000 American cities to commit to the Kyoto green-house gas goals when Congress refused.

Persuaded 11 additional states to adopt California's 2004 Clean Car carbon rules, setting the stage for the Obama Administration's recent rules doubling auto fuel efficiency. .

Launched a "Beyond Coal" campaign which blocked the construction of 154 proposed coal-fired power plants.

In addition to these Club led campaign, we were an integral part of environmental movement coalitions which protected or strengthened the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Toxic Substances Control Act, the Wilderness Act, and the Clean Air Act. A hundred million acres of protected areas were created outside of Alaska. The Club participated in state coalitions that ended the first American flirtation with nuclear power, and set aside tens of billions of dollars of tax and bond funding for parks, sewers, mass transit and other environmental infrastructure.

External engagement 300 (114)

Other than the achievements mentioned above, how has the candidate worked to raise awareness and spread knowledge across the industry and wider world? Discuss involvement in major industry associations; agenda setting for the industry; policy development and other areas of leadership. [max 300 words]

My signature has been the big tent. Since focusing on clean energy access, I have engaged leaders from 100 renewable energy companies/entrepreneurs, engaged government leaders from 25 countries and 10 multi-national institutions, attended a dozen major global forums including the Abu Dhabi Future of Energy Summit.

My earlier work with the Sierra Club was similarly expansive. The Club took the lead in bridging the gap between environmentalists and labor unions; between urban environmentalists and rural hunters; we brought churches, mosques, temples and synagogues into the environmental dialogue, and empowered low income and minority communities to address their own environmental problems. I was the key environmental leader in constructing, over ten years, the Blue-Green Alliance, now the largest sustainability coalition in the United States.

Thirty years of coalition building transformed antagonism between environmentalists and labor into a vibrant partnership, uneven, still with rough edges, but rooted in trust and collaboration.

At a crucial moment in 2006 when the US Senate was considering drilling the Arctic Wildlife Refuge, I was reached out through the United Steel Workers Union to West Virginia Senator Robert Byrd, the key vote, and persuaded him to vote for the environment, because sixteen years earlier the Sierra Club had stood with him on a principled, if ultimately unsuccessful, effort to make American power companies scrub all their sulfur emissions.

Formal roles: Non-profit Board, Chair, Member or Convener:

National Petroleum Council, National Clean Air Coalition, CERES, America /India Foundation, Yale Environmental and Energy Institute, California Common Cause. US-India Aspen Track II Climate Dialogue, America Votes, Americans Coming Together, American Families United, American Rights at Work, Apollo Alliance, Blue-Green Alliance

Clean Tech Board: Grid-Point, Entech Solar

Addressed annual conventions of the Steel Workers, SEIU, UNITE-HERE, Teamsters, AFL-CIO, Change to Win, National Press Club, Commonwealth Club, Cleveland City Club.

External recognition 150

Routinely consulted by other NGO's, particularly on questions of strategy and advocacy capacity building.

Regularly write for Bloomberg Views. Articles have been published in a wide variety of print and on-line journals: the Nation, the New Republic, the Atlantic, Grist, Demos, Foreign Policy, TIME, Newsweek, as well as newspapers: the New York Times, LA Times, Chicago Tribune, Atlanta Constitution, Times of India, Washington Post, San Francisco Chronicle, Sacramento Bee, Minneapolis Star Tribune, Seattle Times.

Appears regularly at forums like the Clinton Global Initiative, Energy Future Summit, Aspen Institute, Keystone Center, Wall Street Journal Eco:Nomics Conference, the World Affairs Council Global Philanthropy Forum, the Skoll World Forum, the Delhi Sustainable Development Summit.

Recipient: the Sidney Hillman Award and the Right Stuff Award.

Prize juror: Green Car of the Year, Environmental Media Association, Best Thing Since Sliced Bread

Continuity 300

When I stepped as a CEO in 2009, I went back to the front lines. I chose opportunities – such as the reality that for the world's 1.2 billion poorest people renewable energy is already cheaper

than the fossil fuels they use – candles, kerosene lamps, and diesel generators – that were outside the mainstream but that could be disruptive.

A successful policy continuity strategy has two elements. Policy reforms must be robust and resilient – difficult to reverse, adaptable. And a tenacious, vigorous outside watchdog and advocate must remain behind to protect the reforms. I have dedicated myself to creating that kind of resilience for renewable energy access for the poor.

Ensuring that policy reforms are robust and resilient is, alas an inexact art, not a science. In my case, this required working with the grain of America’s divided government. The Sierra Club incorporated Madison’s core insight – that getting the incentives and burdens of proof right trump formal requirements. We had to be pragmatic, resilient, and persistent. The auto industry could block clean car standards in DC – so we outflanked them in the states. The coal companies stopped cap and trade legislation – but we forced them to clean up with state initiatives, lawsuits, and federal health rules.

The watchdog was first and foremost an invigorated Sierra Club. A century old when I became its CEO, it was durable. It needed to be modernized. During my tenure the organization undertook three cycles of internal reform, and three cycles of advocacy innovation. (See below for details).

Each cycle of internal reform required pruning layers of staff and governance processes appropriate to an earlier period but no longer optimal. Because communications was so central, the three phases were described as “the Post-Office Sierra Club,” “Sierra Club 1.0” and Sierra Club 2.0”

After 2000, the continuity of the Club’s clean energy and sustainability legacy required embedding them in a broader progressive politics. For the last decade I devoted my energy to ensuring that labor, women’s groups and civil right organizations view environmental sustainability as a critical part of their missions.

Vision of Energy 400

The future of energy needs to mimic Bell’s telephone, not Edison’s light-bulb. We need an innovative, sustainable and competitive energy sector. Today’s energy sector is none of these. Fuels production innovates – take horizontal drilling for shale gas of oil. But energy is consumed using technologies and even physical facilities up to 100 years old.

The energy sector was designed when fuel was abundant, pollution a non-issue, and information scarce. Today fuel is scarce, pollution, particularly CO₂, an existential threat, and information abundant. We need to substitute information for waste – but both incumbent monopolies and government bureaucracies obstruct this, leading to massive market failure.

A sustainable-low carbon energy future requires three ingredients:

New technologies, which the engineers will provide

Flexible, open markets, so that new technologies can **earn** market share from incumbents. Today's markets permit established incumbents to exclude competitors

Fair finance, so that low carbon technologies can scale. Government policies make financing clean energy innovations much harder than supporting dirty, outmoded technologies.

Examples litter the landscape. Solar panels are 5-10 times cheaper than kerosene lamps – but low interest loans are not available for companies supplying them to the poor. Off-grid villages in India could be most rapidly and economically electrified with solar; the World Bank focuses lending on inefficient centralized power plants.

Natural gas and biofuels could both compete with gasoline. American car manufacturers do not make vehicles for these fuels because American refiner/distributors will not install infrastructure for them. Rooftop solar in the US southwest is cheaper than fossil power for peak loads. Solar companies pay twice as much for project finance as utilities, so they cannot scale. Returns from upgrading commercial buildings are roughly three times as high as for power plants. These investments cannot be financed because those who make the profits are not the same as those who carry out the upgrades. Flying larger planes on more direct routes could cut carbon emissions by at least half; aviation regulators encourage airlines to use smaller, less efficient planes through irrational landing fees and airspace allocations.

Internalizing the price of carbon, with taxes or permits, would eliminate one important source of unsustainability. But a low carbon energy sector will require massive reform to eliminating the multiple market failures that go far beyond unpriced carbon.

Market reform, not technology or carbon pricing, is the key to energy sector sustainability.

Innovations 400 words

When I stepped down as CEO of the Sierra Club, I embraced three disruptive technologies.

Focusing renewable power on those customers whose fossil fuels were kerosene lamps or diesel generators.

Helping distributed solar energy in California.

Revitalizing American manufacturing with a level-playing finance field for solar and wind company.

During my term as CEO with the Club, we recast our advocacy approach three times:

From legislative to executive leadership in 1994 when Republicans took over the Congress. Developed approaches like Wild Forests litigation, demonstrated to the Clinton Administration that initiatives like protecting the Arctic were good politics.

From executive leadership to electoral mobilization when Bush was elected. Transform the American electorate, create a conscious and coordinated progressive movement to resist the Bush counter-revolution. Organize new progressive partnerships.

Encourage sustainable technologies when global warming became our priority in 2005. Demanded that we partner with clean energy companies and innovators, as well as unconventional allies like natural gas, and work to help clean energy businesses eliminate market barriers.

These three transitions were empowered by organizational innovations.

Creating a political environmentalism. In 1976 Congress permitted NGO's like the Sierra Club to enter politics. I persuaded the Club to be first to seize this opportunity. The Club developed the strongest overall political presence of any environmental organization.

Linking environmental litigation and organizing. Prior to 1992 environmental litigators and community organizers were siloed. Litigators focused primarily on federal appeals courts, seeking to broaden the reach of previous legislative victories. Community organizers tried to convert local concerns about pollution or land preservation into political capital for new victories.

In 1993 the Sierra Club launched its Strategic Environmental Law Program, linking the two. Court victories would be underpinned by public understanding. The ELP pioneered the use of environmental litigation to transform capital market perceptions of investment risk, most spectacularly in the Beyond Coal campaign.

In 2002 in association with Harvard University's Hauser Center we developed an intense grass-roots training and organizing curriculum, the Grass-Roots Effectiveness Program, which in 2007 served as the basis for the Barack Obama volunteer effort, organized by our partner Marshall Ganz and staff on leave from the Club.

Organizational:

First major non-profit to use an affinity credit-card.

First major environmental group to develop social networking sites.

Innovated partnerships to increase market share of innovators: Sungevity/SunRun (solar leasing), Clorox (Green cleaning products), Toyota /Honda (hybrid vehicles)

Innovation impacts 200 words

A 119 year old organization is primed to ossify. By leading the Sierra Club through three major innovation cycles in 20 years, in response to shifts in the external environment, and by empowering these cycles with specific new advocacy and organizational tools, I kept the Club out of this trap. Each one of the three innovation cycles achieved its primary external goals.

The 1995-2000 effort by the Gingrich anti-environmental forces to shred the American environmental legacy failed; such emblematic victories as the protection of the Arctic Wildlife Refuge, the Wild Forest Protection Rule, and the integrity of the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts evidence our successful defense.

The environmental mobilization against the Bush Administration failed in 2004; Bush was reelected. But by 2006 environmental ally Nancy Pelosi was Speaker of the House, and in 2008 the organizing model originally developed by the Sierra Club served as a template for the Obama for America effort.

The decision in 2005 to shift the Club's focus to clean energy by blocking the coal rush culminated in the stunning withdrawal of 85% of proposed new coal plants, and the cascading retirement of existing coal plants, with shutdowns of 14% already announced.