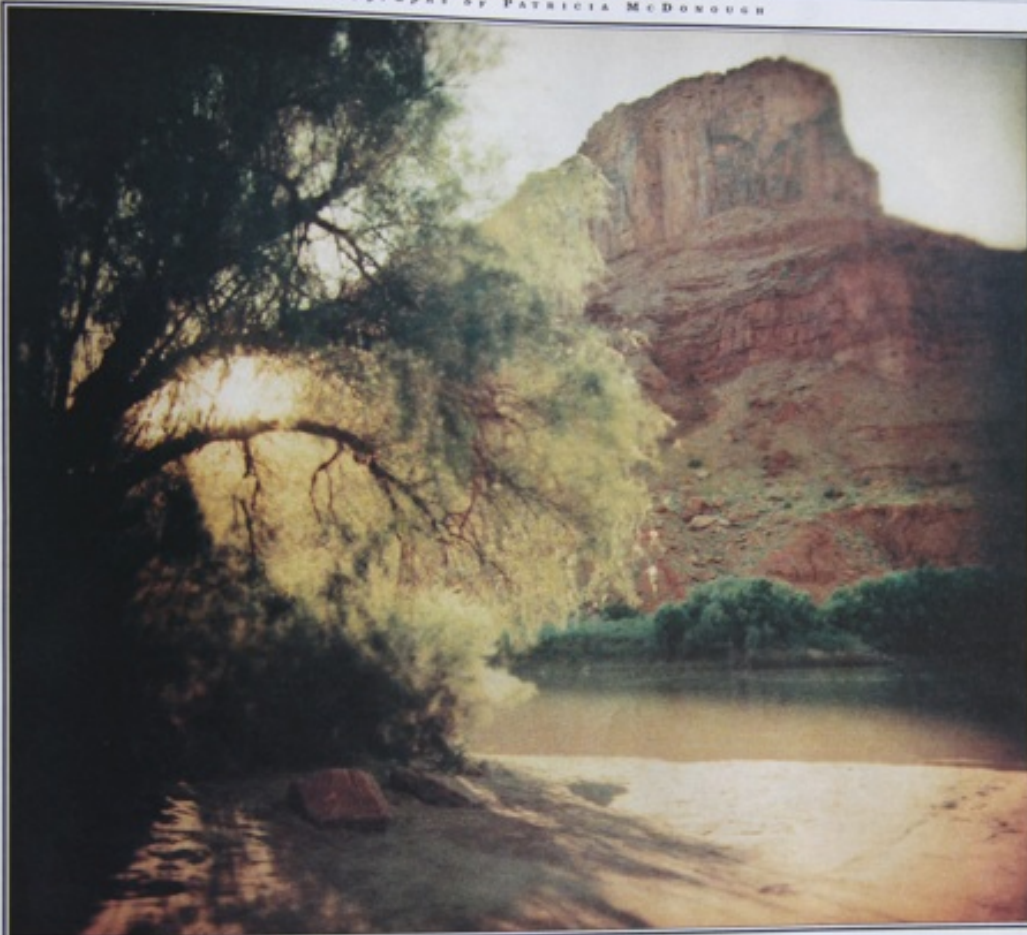


Photographs by PATRICIA McDONOUGH



A slice of Southern Utah's red-rock wilderness that environmentalists are fighting to preserve

TWILIGHT OF THE GREENS

[BY DANIEL GLICK]

IN A DESPAIRING MOMENT during Scott Groene's recent pilgrimage from Southern Utah to Washington, D.C., he suddenly felt like a patient with a broken leg in an emergency room full of gunshot wounds. A staff attorney for the

The environmental movement is on the attack. Trouble is, the enemy is itself

Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, Groene had flown to Washington to engage in the fiercest battle of the tiny organization's life — a congressional fight to decide the fate of 5.7 million acres of proposed red-rock wilderness. After arriving in

There's a conflict between an older generation of environmentalists and a younger one that operates at the grass roots and mirrors the growing distrust of Washington.



Adolphson (left) and Scholten collecting petition signatures at Utah's Arches National Park

Washington, he realized that SUWA's wilderness war was just one of dozens of environmental skirmishes breaking out around Capitol Hill. In the name of reduced government interference, the Republican majority was unleashing a powerful attack on environmental protections that had accumulated — law by law, regulation by regulation — during 25 years of remarkably effective work by the modern environmental movement.

Already, Congress has passed a bill — which President Bill Clinton signed — that will double the allowable logging in national forests while suspending the environmental laws that govern how it should be done. Lawmakers also have refused to appropriate money to enforce the Endangered Species Act, proposed massive cuts in the Environmental Protection Agency's budget, begun declaring the enormously successful Clean Water Act and given the National Park Service just \$1 for one of the country's newest national parks and preserves, in the California desert.

Still other bills are wending their way through the U.S. House of Representatives that would turn hundreds of millions of acres of federal land over to states intent on making them available to industry or selling them, open up a pristine Alaskan wildlife refuge to oil drilling and defund environmental-compliance programs across the board. Meanwhile, the Senate, though less impetuous, has proposed a bill that would give ranchers free rein over much of the West's public lands and is considering several risk-assessment and takings bills that would make it tougher to regulate private industry and eviscerate those environmental laws that are still standing. The list goes on.

"Republicans are throwing as many bombs as they can, and there aren't enough people to catch them," says Greene, whose ruddy, newly shaven face reveals how uncomfortable he is wearing his going-to-the-capital suit. "It's overwhelming to see."

Yet how is it that these Republican bombs could so often hit their targets if Americans consistently say they want more environmental protection? "The American

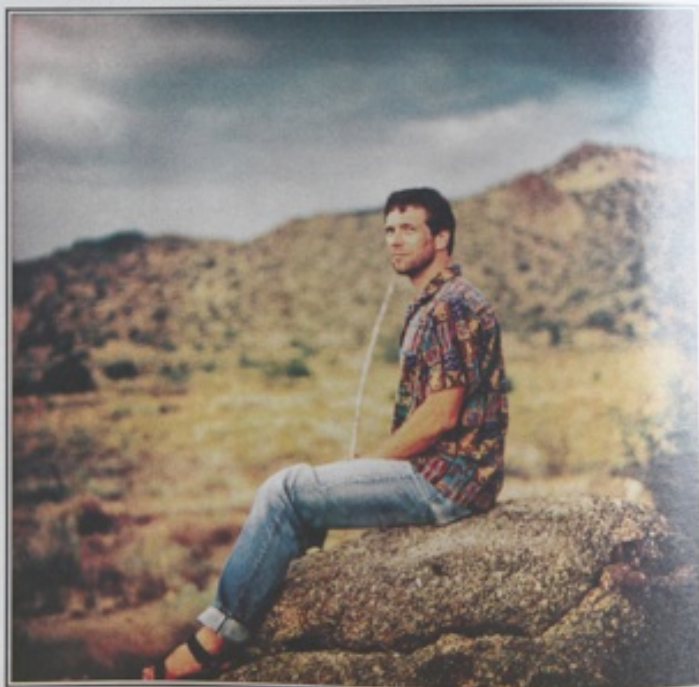
people didn't vote for this kind of rampage," says Greene, repeating a mantra of environmentalists. Indeed, surveys have consistently shown that about three-quarters of Americans polled are comfortable being called environmentalists. A solid majority favors strong environmental laws. There are thousands of tax-exempt environmental groups in the country and possibly an equal number of small NIMBY (not in my back yard) groups. The National Wildlife Federation (NWF), one of the biggest greens, takes in revenues of more than \$100 million, and green alumni are scattered around the Clinton administration (Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, for example, headed the League of Conservation Voters).

The answer, it seems, lies at least in part with the environmental lobby itself. Somehow the movement that emerged from obscurity a quarter-century ago when fires raged in Ohio's Cuyahoga River and raw sewage fouled the Potomac has lost some of its moral superiority — and most of its clout. For the greens, the past decade has been marked by infighting, personality conflicts, questionable strategies, and competition for funding and media attention. It is the type of internal strife that has infected practically every progressive movement from civil rights to women's rights, from pro-choice to gay rights. In the environmental community the result is a movement that has become less than the sum of its parts.

But there is something else that has now brought the environmental movement to the most serious crisis of its life: a conflict between an older, more conservative generation of environmentalists that has spent the last couple of decades roaming the halls of Capitol Hill and a younger generation that operates on the grass-roots level and mirrors the country's growing distrust of Washington. Younger environmentalists believe that the larger environmental groups, in their zeal to cultivate power inside the Beltway, have not only lost their fire but ignored their constituents throughout the nation. The big greens, for their part, respond that their critics are hopelessly naive and too provincial for the dominant take-no-prisoners politics currently in style.

This dispute had clearly landed the environmental movement in trouble way before the 104th Congress began. But the November 1994 election exposed the weakness in the conservation community like a lightning strike splits a tree and reveals how termites have invisibly destroyed it. Green groups that had spent years developing sources and friendships on key Democratic committees now find that they have great contacts among minority staffers — and none in positions of authority. Before, "the biggest splash with the smallest rock was in Washington," says Tom Dougherty, Western division staff director for the NWF and arguably one of the most

Far from the madding crowd: Greene during a recent visit to Albuquerque, N.M.



DANIEL GUICK, a former "Newsweek" correspondent, moved to Colorado to live in the environment about which he writes.



The stark and still unspoiled beauty of Southern Utah's sprawling red-rock wilderness

effective big-green representatives operating outside of Washington. "That just isn't the case anymore."

To the younger grass-roots environmentalists, this new powerlessness pointedly underscores the flaws of the inside-the-Beltway strategy they had been assailing. Instead of turning on the enemy, however, environmentalists first turned on one another. As David Brower, the archdruid and *éminence grise* of the greens puts it, "At the first sign of the enemy, we circled the wagons and fired within." Jay Hair, who resigned in July as the CEO of the NWF, calls it "conservation cannibalism."

The debate isn't just about tactics. The consequences of a befuddled and outgunned environmental lobby couldn't be more devastating. At the very moment the Republican Congress is dismantling 25 years of environ-

mental protections, the opposition is particularly ill-prepared to fight it. Anybody who believes that the federal government should ensure that citizens have clean air to breathe and clean water to drink, who expects that industries should clean up after themselves or who likes to visit public lands and parks should be concerned.

Yet the GOP's attack on the environment has also sparked the most fervent strategic-planning, reorganizing and budget-cutting period in the modern environmental community's history. It may also prove to be the environmentalists' salvation. "We are witnessing the death and rebirth of the conservation movement," says Andy Kerr, executive director of the Oregon Natural Resources Council. "And I want to publicly thank Newt Gingrich for killing us off."

DAVID SCHOLTEN AND MATT ADOLPHSON, A PAIR OF SUWA's grass-roots organizers, roam a vast territory of small, antipathetic Mormon towns around Southern Utah's red-rock country in search of new members and \$20 contributions. The dark-haired Scholten, 22, stumbled into environmentalism a few years back when he ran out of money in Denver and saw an ad for a U.S. Public Interest Research Group canvasser. Adolphson, a year older, with dirty-blond hair, came into the environmental fold after attending a tough-love back-country boot camp that his parents sent him to in the Utah wilderness. The pair's door-to-door technique is fitting for the times. For a younger generation, a Washington-centric approach to anything is suspect, and groups like SUWA that try to get their hands around a localized problem

The man at the door said, "If I had my way, I'd line you up and shoot you." Without waiting to see if he was serious, they muttered "thanks" and split, watching their backs.

seem to be infinitely more appealing for newcomers to the movement. "Let the big groups do what they do," says Adolphson, "but I don't think that's where the true change is going to happen." In that sense the duo represents the heart and soul of the environmental movement—a heart and soul that have become disconnected from their body, located somewhere in Washington.

With their ponytails, earrings and teen denim outfits, Scholten and Adolphson aren't exactly attired in Mormon missionary camouflage. "Normally people are pretty polite to us," says Scholten, who hails from Middletown, N.Y. Adolphson, who was raised in Orem, Utah, and exudes the soft-spoken ways of the rural Mormon kid that he is, says he's been menaced at times by people who see wilderness designation as a way for effete backpackers to "lock up the land." Like when the man behind a screen door told him and Scholten, "If I had my way, I'd line you up and shoot you." Without waiting to see if the man was serious, Adolphson muttered a quick "thanks, anyway," and they split, watching their backs.

SUWA's newly opened Cedar City office is a caricature of a grass-roots environmental group's digs: third-hand furniture with fake wood veneer clinging to tables by packing tape, maps and advocacy posters the only décor. The phone, fax and computer are arguably from the post-Digital Age but are double- and triple-plugged into wall outlets. Lying on the cheap, stained commercial carpet on a spring afternoon, Scholten and Adolphson Scotch-tape 8 1/2-by-11-inch petition sheets into a wall-size grass-roots mural of 1,000 citizens' signatures, gathered at the painful pace of 30 signatures a night. They meet with staff attorney Groene to plan a strategy for hearings the next day in front of the governor and a Utah congressional delegation.

Groene, his kid grin hidden behind his usual too-lazy-to-shave beard, is busy answering phones and helping local activists prepare for tomorrow's testimony. "Just make sure you tell 'em you support 5.7 million acres," he prods a caller. "They gotta hear that from everybody."

Groene, 37, actually started out as one of those inside-the-Belway operators whom he now questions. Raised in a series of small towns in Kansas, Groene hiked through cornfields as a kid, biding time until he could get out. He kicked around a couple of colleges in Kansas and Missouri, thinking he'd become a forest ranger, until he wound up working as a roofer in Durango, a couple of credits short of a degree at the University of Colorado (CU). There, he says, "a pretty dicked thing happened" that turned him toward environmentalism as a career. He saw a documentary about the environmental destruction of the Four Corners area, where Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico and Utah meet, and said to himself, "If I were a lawyer, I could take these guys on." In any case, he figured, "law school would be a hell of a lot better than being a hot-tar roofer."

On his law-school application to CU, Groene listed 55 jobs he'd already tried on for size. After graduation, he moved to an adobe hogan in Monument Valley, Utah, and worked as a legal-services attorney in Mexican Hat, Utah, before joining SUWA. Then, after a fashion, the capital beckoned. He was offered a chance to work for then Utah congressman Wayne Owens. "I knew I was in trouble when I saw the White House and thought, 'It looks just like Doonsbury,'" Groene says.

After six months on the Hill, Groene discovered he was not cut out to be a congressional staffer; he hated the capital culture, with its nasty partisan politics and

wilderness [in Utah]," says Groene. "Now there's 5.7 [million]. A lot of that was lost one dirt road at a time."

We arrive at a federal Bureau of Land Management compound, where Groene shows his face to the new area manager. Then he pays a courtesy call to the editor of *The Spectrum*, a newspaper in St. George, Utah, that has been hostile to SUWA. The next day, Groene speaks at two regional wilderness hearings in Cedar City and Richfield, Utah, 111 miles away. In Richfield, Groene gets a taste of what he's up against as local after local steps to the mike to denounce the many environmentalists who have come down from Salt Lake City to testify. "I support no wilderness," said Met Johnson, a leader of the conservative "cowboy caucus" in the state legislature. Outside the hearing room, Johnson lets me know what he thinks of SUWA: "They sue and sue and block and protest and interrupt." Johnson contends grazing and logging are like "keeping your body in hygiene. You wash yourself and cut your hair, don't you?"

SUWA's approach is basic, says Groene: "Protect the land and don't worry about who gets mad about it." This straightforward, single-minded approach stands in marked contrast to the multiple issues that larger groups take on. Over the years, SUWA has tried with an almost religious zeal to protect the 5.7 million acres it considers to be wilderness quality. When a federal register notice reveals that somebody intends to mine, graze or cut timber on those pristine lands, "we try to stop them," says Groene. "Over time, everybody learned it was easier to stay the hell out of those places." For the moment, parts of Cedar Mesa, the Bears Ears, Little Grand Canyon, the Henry Mountains and the San Rafael Swell are free from oil and gas development, chaining, hard-rock mining and paved roads largely because of SUWA's bulldog approach.



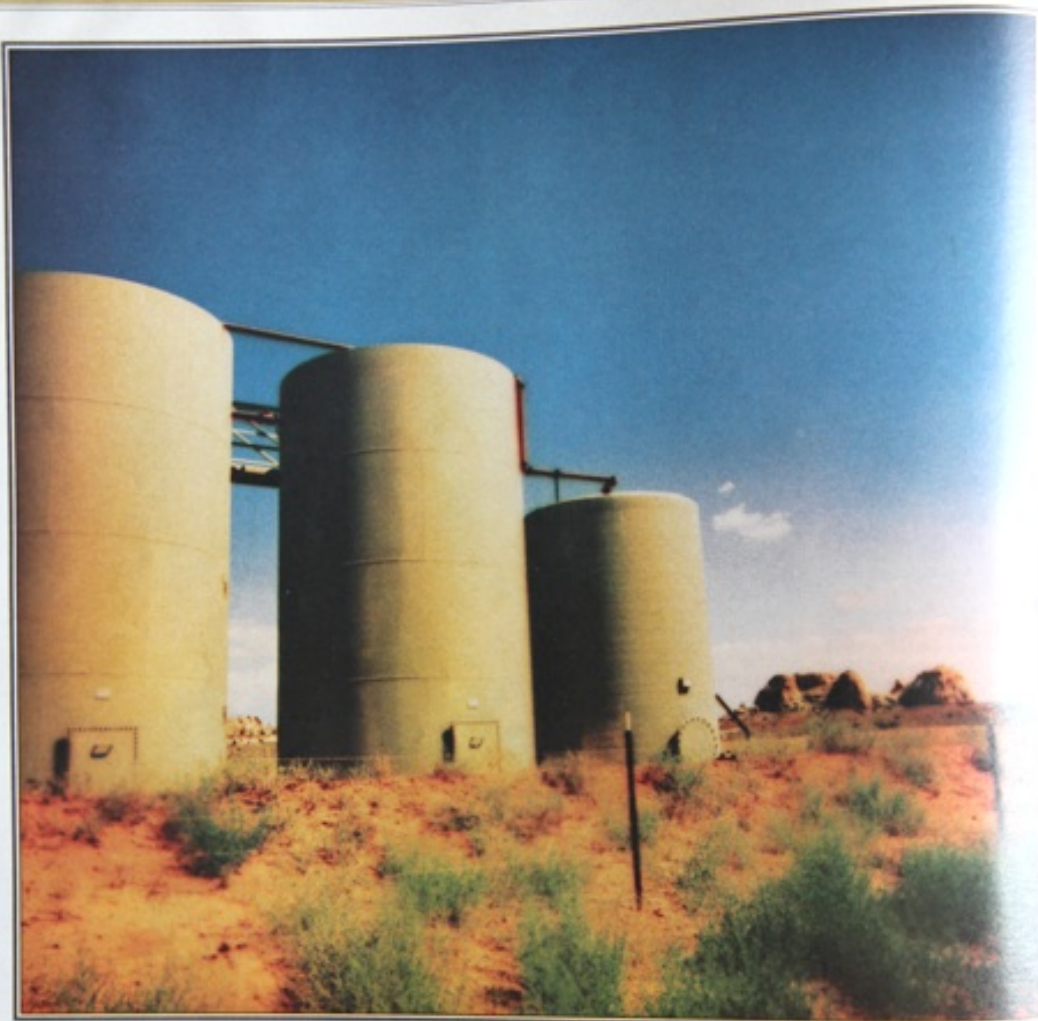
Oil well located on federal land for which SUWA seeks wilderness designation

bureaucratic red tape. So he left Washington and took up with SUWA again in Moab, Utah. During his five years in Moab, he watched local environmentalists become a significant political force and saw SUWA grow from 2,000 members to 3,000. With the Utah wilderness was heating up after the '94 elections, Groene decided to move deeper into hostile turf early this year. Taking up residence in Cedar City meant settling into another small town where it will toward environmentalists rivals feelings formerly reserved for Soviet Communist Party members.

Driving in his gray Toyota pickup truck, with a camper shell he sleeps in while on the road, Groene shows me why he thinks the area needs congressional wilderness protection to stop the roads, development and motorized access to the region's still-wild lands. He points to a pair of radio towers built last year in the proposed wilderness area, then to a favorite place where stands of piñon and juniper were "chained"—ripped down by two bulldozers dragging a chain until all the trees and shrubs between them were stripped. "Fifty years ago there were 16 million acres of

THE HIGH-CEILINGED, WOOD-PAN- eled Senate budget committee hearing room in Washington is a world away from the trailer-park doom that Scholten and Adolphson have been knocking on. This sunny spring day in the capital there's a press conference to announce a campaign to eliminate federal subsidies for sugar producers. The National Audubon Society's president and CEO, Peter Berle, patiently waits his turn to speak. Wearing a pinstriped light blue-gray suit, with short-cropped hair and slightly retro bonhomie-of-the-ear graying sideburns, he also wears the day's requisite prop: a plastic LUCKY BIG SUGAR lollipop pin. If you didn't know he headed the second-oldest environmental organization in the country, he would be indistinguishable from the row of legislators standing behind the microphones. Berle, 57, has flown down from the New York headquarters to speak for 30 seconds about an issue that Audubon has been fighting—unsuccessfully—for five years.

It is a good crowd as these events go. The severe room is packed with lobbyists, supporters, congressional staffers with earnest young faces, a solid complement of



Oil storage tanks tower above Southern Utah's wilderness on land that's been leased to an oil company.

reporters and – best of all – four television cameras, including a couple from “the nets.” First, three senators speak, then four congressmen, then Berle, in the natural pecking order of Washington. With his sound bite, Berle argues that sugar subsidies promote the destruction of the South Florida ecosystem by encouraging sugar growers to mock up the water with phosphorus-rich agricultural runoff. “We’re using public money to degrade the Everglades,” he says, and his time is up.

Berle then stops by the Washington office to check in with the troops in Audubon’s legislative branch. He asks advice from a staffer about a speech he has to give, then makes plans to choose a successor to chair the Green

Group, an informal coalition of large environmental organizations. (Berle stepped down as head of Audubon in July.) He then takes a shuttle up to New York, where he maintains an apartment, since he rarely gets up to his family and farm in the Massachusetts Berkshires.

Back at Audubon headquarters in Greenwich Village the next day, Berle, an ex-Air Force intelligence officer, is occupied with closing an issue of the organization’s magazine, which includes discussing ad sales and cost-per-page figures. He finishes up a report to funders on what the organization has accomplished. His airy office, with cherry-wood furniture and lots of glass, is tasteful and unpretentious, with bird prints by John James Audubon

hanging on the walls, of course. He takes a call from Philip Krupp, head of the Environmental Defense Fund, who phones from a train. Berle asks Krupp if he will speak to a group of business executives on a day when he runs out, Berle cannot. As Berle chats with me over turkey sandwiches, his secretary gently reminds him the day’s schedule beckons.

A lawyer and a former New York state environmental commissioner, Berle presided over rocky years at Audubon. He led a controversial effort to give the staid group a face lift by proposing it change its traditional egret logo. As Philip Shabecoff wrote in *A Field of Green Fire*, a book about the environmental movement,



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Under the egret: Berle, former CEO of the National Audubon Society

"The venerable group, in stiff competition with other national environmental organizations for both members and money, wanted to convey the message that it was a broad-based institution with a sweeping agenda of national and international issues, not a quaint old club of bird-watchers in stout shoes." After a shrill cry from members, the egret was re-adopted.

Critics say the Berle period exemplified one of the main failings of the large conservation groups: loss of focus. Buffered by concerns about softness in direct-mail fund raising, the challenge of finding new members and dealing with foundation grants that were increasingly given with strings attached, Audubon took on issues as far-flung as population growth and toxins. In branching out so abruptly, Berle alienated some of Audubon's core constituency without being able to replace it with new blood. "Berle was kind of a flop," says Mark Dowie, the author of *Loosing Ground*, a new book about the modern environmental movement. Dowie argues that Berle is a good patrician lawyer who should stay in New York and do pro bono work but is "the wrong guy for the movement now."

In Berle himself a certain resignation is apparent when you hear him talk about the hours of debates that went into the latest round of strategic planning that Audubon completed just before his departure. (Berle says he left because the 120,000 airline miles a year and the tedium of sitting in meeting after meeting had sapped some of his enthusiasm, and he realized it was time to move on. Others suggest that after years of

battling the board, the parting was, at best, mutually desired.) The brewing fights to redefine the organization are ultimately an acknowledgment that past strategies simply haven't worked. "When you stop getting the job done, you plan," Berle says with a wry smile.

PLANNING IS WHAT THE BIG GREENS are doing these days. Organizations like the NWF, the Sierra Club, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Environmental Defense Fund and the Wilderness Society all are engaging in profound, soul-searching missions, as often as not aided by corporate, soul-searching consultants. That's an encouraging sign, says the curmudgeonly Oregon activist Kerr, who has criticized the big groups for excessive inside-the-Beltwayism. "It's like [being] an alcoholic," says Kerr. "The first thing you have to do is admit you've got a problem."

To understand how the conservation community got this particular problem, it's instructive to look at what some conservation biologists call "initial conditions." This theory suggests that a particular species takes root in a region because of conditions that existed temporarily after an earth-changing event like a massive volcanic eruption. Those species might not, however, be as well adapted when the climate changes again.

Similarly, the counterculture '60s were the "initial conditions" that spawned the modern environmental movement. The 1970s and 1980s provided the fertile ground that sprouted millions of self-described environmentalists and laid the foundation for the most far-reaching environmental accomplishments the

[Environmentalists were pale from too much indoor light, weak from sitting too long behind desks.]

industrial world has known. For the burgeoning green groups in those heady times, direct mail went out, and money rained in. Fund-raising and membership drives were "like the nonprofit equivalent of a perpetual-motion machine," and volunteers flocked to start recycling centers and clean up local streams, says Jim Maddy, president of the League of Conservation Voters, which focuses on electing pro-environment officials.

But Darwin can never be ignored for long. As the climate changed into the more cynical late '80s and the incendiary '90s, the environmental community adapted sluggishly. The movement's main tools of the past — lobbying and legislation — had not only become less effective but also situated mainstream Washington environmentalists in a world alien to their constituents. When the recession hit in the early '90s, and membership plummeted, the big-green groups started downsizing like the rest of corporate America. Wage freezes, layoffs and restructuring joined global warming and deforestation as green-group obsessions.

Only slowly, however, did the big greens see the frightening parallels: They had become as staid and conservative as the corporations they had

vowed to take on. Like waking from a bad dream in which you're wearing the same funny golf shorts your dad did, these groups realized they had lost the mantle of grass-roots activism that had made them so successful in the first place. Meanwhile hundreds of smaller groups filled the vacuum. "Another whole species crawled into that niche," says Mike Matz, a former Washington-based Sierra Club lobbyist and now the executive director of SU/WA. "They've developed a new grass-roots base that the national groups used to draw on."

What remained for the nationals was an environmental landscape in Washington overrun with Phi Beta Kappa lawyers and knowledgeable but flaccid policy wonks — what Earth First! co-founder Dave Foreman once described as environmentalists who "resemble bureaucrats — pale from too much indoor light, weak from sitting too long behind desks, co-opted by too many politicians." Political expediency became the catchphrase. Environmental groups would time their press releases to correspond with subcommittee hearing schedules rather than setting priorities based on an issue's importance. Access, as much as progress, became a gauge of success.

"Symbolically and practically it would be a good idea for all the Washington-based environmental groups to move outside of Washington," says Maddy of the normally above-the-fray League of Conservation Voters. He believes that rather than let the corporations corner the market on political action committee donations, the environmental movement should focus on setting up environmental PACs to reward and punish legislators. (Most green groups are 501(c)(3) nonprofit, which means they are limited in the types of political lobbying they can do.) He also advocates grass-roots organizing with the aim of replacing politicians with dark brown voting records. "We will never win another important victory in Congress unless we change the political landscape," he says. "So let's get on with it."

THIS BELTWAY VS. GRASS-ROOTS debate broke out in a nasty public dispute late last year after Alexander Cockburn co-wrote a post-election article in the Nation with Jeffrey St. Clair, editor of the Wild Fire Review in Oregon. The article accused some national environmental groups of having become "baldly neoliberal litigation shops" that were "soft, corporate and politically ductile."

The broadside sparked a flurry of vitriolic faxes and e-mail. Audubon's vice president for national issues, Brock Evans, sent an e-mail message reproaching a grass-roots group for prematurely "bragging" about a temporary legal victory. In response, Michael Donnelly, another Oregon forest warrior, accused Evans of believing "that only those inside the Beltway should be calling the shots (and be immune to criticism), thereby relegating those of us peons out here in the hinterlands to second-class status."

For all the bitterness, the eruption did result in a more determined self-evaluation by the big greens, but recent attempts to get the disparate members of the Washington environmental community together have had mixed results. The Green Group divided into teams to plan collective strategy: CEOs and top brass met together (Jay Hair, formerly of NWF, dubbed the exercise the Green Goopie and refused to participate), the B team of top legislative guys and lobbyists met separately, and the M team, consisting of public relations types, met weekly.

The problem, says one M team participant, is that the reality has been laughable. For starters, the two-hour meetings often begin with [Cost on M?]

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