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## The New American Conservation Movement: New Strategies, Focus and Organizations for the 21st Century

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THE NEW AMERICAN CONSERVATION MOVEMENT:  
NEW STRATEGIES, FOCUS AND ORGANIZATIONS  
FOR THE 21st CENTURY

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May 2012

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## THE GRADUATE COLLEGE

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**Amy Deanna Northrup**

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**May 2012**

## ABSTRACT

### **The New American Conservation Movement New Strategies, Focus and Organizations for the 21st Century**

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This dissertation provides evidence of the emergence of a new conservation movement in the United States. The strategic, tactical and organizational approaches of traditional conservation efforts, which began in the early 1900s, have shifted during the last two decades. Specifically, the new conservation movement is characterized by three distinct changes. First, many of the well-established conservation organizations, such as the Sierra Club and National Audubon Society, have largely abandoned their traditional focus on increasing the number of acres preserved; instead more defensive and fragmented forms of conservation now reign. The second change to the conservation movement involves a dramatic expansion in the portfolio of issues that the social movement addresses; the once tight focus on land preservation has grown to include other issues never before relevant to conservation. The third change that characterizes the new conservation movement is the emergence of a new class of conservation organizations that, retain a focus on securing new acreage protections, but broaden their base for preservation beyond the U.S. to include threatened lands around the globe. As

they have developed a distinctly international focus, these new organizations have also embraced alternative tactics. This dissertation establishes that four theories of change, two primary and two supplementary, explain the factors that drove the emergence of the new conservation movement. Shifts in the domestic political opportunities afforded to the movement and its adherents; and the need to adapt to external pressures such as new threats and the emergence of globalization were found to be the primary driving forces behind the three movement changes. Also underlying these changes are efforts to ensure movement and organizational survival stemming from shifts the mobilization of resources and alterations in the lifecycle of social movement organizations. No single theory of change found throughout social movement literature alone adequately explains the emergence of the new conservation movement; all four are needed to explain the transition of this large, complex and institutionalized social movement.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The drive to protect nature has become institutionalized in the United States over the last century and a half (Kline, 2000; Vale, 2005). Beginning with the protection of the Yosemite Valley in 1864 and then the designation of Yellowstone National Park in 1872, the United States has sold the idea of nature preservation to the world over the last 125 years. The conservation movement was established by legendary figures in environmental history, such as John Muir and Henry David Thoreau; however, it has survived because of the millions of Americans that today make up the backbone of numerous conservation organizations.

Today nature and wildlands preservation is about protecting natural areas from the pressures of development, so as to save them for current and future enjoyment. There are those that believe in preservation so that hikers and bikers and campers can enjoy a world away from civilization, while there are others that believe in preserving the science, the ecosystems and the animals. With roots in both Romanticism and Utilitarianism, nature conservation has expanded beyond the first few spectacular national parks to include a national wilderness preservation system with well over 100 million acres, a national wildlife refuge system with over 150 million acres, over 190 million acres of national forests and grasslands and 84 million acres of national parks land. The World Commission on Protected Areas estimates that the United States has over 10,000 different federal and state level protected areas including the traditional forests and mountains as well as scientifically and ecologically significant deserts,

swamps and grasslands. Over time preserving this nation's natural locations has become a distinctly American ideal with widespread popular appeal.

Academic scholars have focused on the conservation movement and its contribution to the fabric of American society for decades, yet very few scholars have examined and analyzed the conservation movement in the last decade. Prolific amounts of scholarly work have focused on the movement up until the 1980s (Baldwin, 1972; McCloskey, 1972; Roth, 1984; Harvey, 1994; Frome, 1997; Sutter, 2002; Scott, 2004). The buildup and aftermath of the Wilderness Act of 1964 is particularly well documented (for example: McCloskey, 1965; McCloskey, 1995; Harvey, 2005). Some scholars followed the movement through the battle over the Alaska frontier (Allin, 1982) while others have addressed the problems with the wilderness system (Miles, 2009), the emergence of ecosystems management principles (Fitzsimmons, 1999) and biodiversity concerns (DiSilvestro, 1993; Lewis, 2007). However, in the last twenty years, the conservation movement has only been examined through focusing on history (Vale, 2005), through looking at radical grassroots organizations (Bevington, 2009) and through a primary focus on the wider environmental movement as a whole (Wellock, 2007; Shabecoff, 2003).

The dearth of literature examining the contemporary state of the conservation movement has left a gap of knowledge about how this fundamental American tradition is surviving and operating today—this dissertation has filled this gap. The earlier literature includes elaborate histories and narratives about the political and social efforts to conserve this country's natural resources. This detailed history is of limited value in understanding anything about the movement in the last twenty years. The strategy, focus

and organizational makeup of the conservation movement in 2012 are different than during the earlier proliferation of scholarly interest. Prior to this research, there was little to no academic research to describe and explain why. This dissertation now describes and explains changes to the conservation movement in the last twenty years and establishes evidence that a new conservation movement has emerged.

First-hand experience with the conservation movement, matched with a limited number of hints inside the scholarly literature sparked interest in the contemporary conservation movement. Over 40 in-person and telephone interviews with leading conservationists inside the largest national conservation organizations together with a systematic document analysis of more than 45 movement documents provided the evidence for this dissertation and the claim that the conservation movement today is different from the time when scholarly interest was prolific—justifying the recognition that there is a new conservation movement in America.

There are three distinct changes within the conservation movement that this dissertation describes and that now characterize the new movement. The first change involves shifts in focus and strategy within the oldest, most established traditional conservation organizations. Organizations like the Sierra Club, National Audubon Society and the Wilderness Society began as advocates for the protection of wilderness and other types of nature protection. The movement really began as one crusade after another to protect more and more natural land before it was spoiled by development. This focus on increasing the number of acres preserved has shifted toward a focus on ensuring existing preservation areas remain protected and instead focusing on private land owners and stakeholder agreements to hold off the destruction of nature. This change is more

distinct inside certain conservation organizations; but the shift is evident throughout the consciousness of the entire social movement.

Second, the new conservation movement is a social movement that addresses a much wider scope of issues than ever before. The conservation movement of John Muir was exclusively and passionately dedicated to protecting nature. Even until the 1990s the conservation movement addressed issues that maintained a fairly close radius to the heart of land and nature protection. Today, the conservation movement has taken on a much wider collection of issues including climate change, energy, and new extractive technologies. Issues once entirely outside the conservation movement, such as the use of fossil fuels, are now intimately connected to the preservation of nature. As the impact that climate change and fossil fuels have on wildlands is becoming clearer, the conservation movement has adjusted its focus to stay true to the mission of protecting nature. However, fulfilling that mission is pushing the movement to take on more issues, to be versed in more topics and to take on battles on an increasing number of fronts.

The third change that characterizes the new conservation movement is the birth of a newer class of conservation organizations<sup>1</sup> that are distinct from the band of older and established organizations. Newer organizations like Conservation International and Rainforest Action Network have a particularly different focus and utilize a wide range of new tactics. The new organizations have retained the original goal of securing more and more acres of natural land, though for many, their focus has shifted away from just the United States and is now global. With a global focus on wildland protection, these newer organizations have also adopted the use of innovative new tactics. So while the early

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<sup>1</sup> These organizations are not widely regarded a new anymore, as most of these newer organizations were established roughly twenty years ago. They are simply referred to as 'newer' to strike a dichotomy with the earlier conservation organizations that were established, in some cases, over 100 years ago.

traditional conservation organizations relied on political advocacy and lobbying for wilderness protection in the United States, the new wilderness organizations have left the halls of Washington D.C. to embrace market strategies, grassroots fundraising and international partnerships<sup>2</sup>.

In addition to describing the changes to the conservation movement that characterize the emergence of a new movement, this dissertation also examines the driving forces behind these movement changes. Using academic social movement literature, this dissertation identified and confirmed the usefulness of four theories of change that together explain the factors most responsible for the shape of the new conservation movement. These four driving forces include two primary driving forces and two supplementary forces that together (in an uneven arrangement) sparked the three movement changes. First, the new conservation movement was partly driven by fluctuations in the domestic political opportunities afforded to the conservation idea. As political access, shifting alignments and influential allies have wavered in the last twenty years, the movement has found new federally protected areas increasingly difficult to secure, and have begun to rely on new and often times fragmented ways to continue to protect wildlands. Second, a catalyst for the new movement was found with external pressures on the movement and the movement's need to adapt to them. The rise in new threats to wildlands and the rise of globalization altered the world that the conservation movement operates in—forcing the movement to adapt. The two supplementary forces

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<sup>2</sup> The differences between early and new conservation organizations have been briefly noted in the scholarly literature, especially by Mitchell et al., (1992) during their look at the mobilization trends among environmental organizations. The growth of environmental organizations, relationships between organizations and the political milieu impacting environmental organizations was the primary focus of Mitchell et al.'s work; as a result, no in-depth analysis of identified shifts in movement organizations was undertaken.

behind the new conservation movement stem from the movement's drive for survival in relation to organizational lifecycle and resource mobilization; and were found to be considerations across all three of the movement changes. The conservation movement succeeded in the 1960s and 1970s and today is wrestling with institutional survival—sparking defense of its original accomplishments while also adjusting to new social and political forces. And the mobilization of movement resources has shifted over the last twenty years forcing the movement to adapt in order to continue to procure the resources needed in order to survive.

The fundamental interest in wildlife and wildland preservation in the United States, matched with the recent decline in the appearance of the topic in scholarly literature, has made this research ripe. This research provides updated empirical evidence about a cornerstone American movement that can be useful to social movement scholars and social movement theorists. The descriptive results of this research can also be useful to other social movement scholars who seek to ask different questions of the same movement. This research is also relevant within the literature looking at nonprofit organizations. Andrews and Edwards (2004) argue that the literature looking at social movements, interest groups, and nonprofits is largely disconnected because they have been simultaneously tackled by separate disciplines. This disconnected scholarship contains common intellectual questions but lacks conceptual synthesis. This dissertation has focused on a social movement while maintaining the elemental unit of the nonprofit organization in focus in order to produce a body of work that although does not explicitly address this disconnect, does integrate the body of knowledge of both units to together gain a picture of how conservation nonprofit organizations make up a social movement

that is not static. This research, although not solely focused on bridging this academic divide, can be useful within this context, specifically to the advocacy portion of the nonprofit literature.

This research is about more than just the understanding of changes to a social movement or the filling of a gap in the academic literature. This research is about understanding how the social movement behind the profoundly powerful idea of preserving nature is being shaped by societal and political forces and how that is already beginning to affect the future of a significant American tradition.

The idea of protecting and valuing nature is a strong political and social force born in the United States and exported around the world. Today, over 13% of the Earth's land surface is protected in some form (Chape et al., 2005). These protected areas stand as evidence of the appeal of wilderness and the power of the conservation movement. Yet, as the conservation movement changes so too does the future of land protection. As the conservation begins to abandon a focus on federal lands in the United States and instead give credence to private land protection and collective community management, the future of land protection is impacted. As the conservation movement devotes more effort to international protected areas and market initiatives, the future of land protection is impacted. Understanding the contemporary state of the conservation movement is important because the laws and regulations that flow from the movement have the potential to transform vast amounts of land. Similarly, the conservation movement mediates many of the recreational and scientific outcomes that have shaped the American tradition of wilderness and how people around the world experience and think about nature; the changes to the American conservation movement and the establishment of a



new conservation movement in the twenty-first century has already begun to shape how the concept and experience of nature around the world is evolving.

## CHAPTER 2

### CONSERVATION ?

When first crafting the idea for this dissertation, it was unclear what term best described the social movement in mind—the one that fights to protect nature, fights to protect land, water and biodiversity. Even after scholarly research, there was little conceptual clarity separating the wilderness movement, the conservation movement and the environmental movement. After narrowing the criteria and selecting the organizations to be researched, the term ‘wilderness preservation movement’ was initially selected to describe the social movement aimed at protecting natural places, plants and animals. However once field research began, the nonprofit organizations at the center of this research quickly provided clues that wilderness preservation was not how they saw themselves. Instead, through dozens of interviews people most involved in the social movement made it clear that they consider themselves to be a part of the ‘conservation movement’.

The term wilderness is tightly wrapped up in its statutory definition (Interview 22.6, 10.1 and 10.3). Any protection of national parks or wildlife refuges or other forms of natural land is considered outside the purview of the wilderness movement, yet these activities are very much included under the conservation movement (Interview 10.3, 13.2, 13.3, 15.2, and 16.1). The conservation movement in this sense is commonly (although not universally) believed to be underneath the umbrella of the larger environmental movement<sup>3</sup>. The inability to easily distinguish between movement terms and define the conservation movement in particular, is a product of the varied history and

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<sup>3</sup> The environmental movement as a whole has come to include a much broader set of priorities.

use of the term conservation. This dissertation will adhere to a contemporary real world definition of ‘conservation’ and ‘conservation movement’ as intended by those inside the movement—the active protection of wildlife and wildlands for their inherent value and for the value they bring to humans. In an effort to provide clarity to the term and bring academic research closer to the meaning ascribed to the term by the movement, this chapter will provide a discussion of the term ‘conservation’ and lay the groundwork for this definition.

The aim of this chapter is to provide clarity for one definition of ‘conservation’ that can help shed the academic baggage the term carries and bring the meaning of ‘conservation movement’ much closer to reflecting the reality of those on the ground whom use it to describe themselves today. This chapter will briefly outline the complex history and use of the word conservation; a full discussion of the origins and linguistic history of the term is well beyond the scope of this dissertation. The brief discussion of the varied meanings of the word will give way to a posturing of how conservation can be understood today, which will preserve the term’s analytical usefulness while also gaining contemporary accuracy.

### **Complex History**

The term ‘conservation’ has an extremely varied history going back to the nineteenth century, which has resulted in a word with many definitions and a lack of conceptual clarity. The term has been associated with Gifford Pinchot and utilitarianism (See: Hays 1959; Nash 1967; Fox 1981; Runte 1979 among many others); it has been used interchangeably with the term ‘environmental’ while it has also been associated with forced indigenous removal in protected areas in developing countries (Palmer 2004;

Whitman 1994; Harvey 2000; Dorsey 98; Foreman 2006). Ultimately, the varied history and varied use of the term has fostered an increasing lack of specificity and meaning assigned to conservation. The problem is not that conservation cannot be defined; rather it is that there are too many definitions and not one which is widely agreed-upon (O’Riordan 1971; Hendricks 1982). The term means different things to different people, even within the academic community (McConnell, 1954). Over the last forty years, other scholars have published works arguing a new conservation movement has arrived or will soon arrive, however these scholars held separate and even widely different interpretations of the term ‘conservation’ and thus also ‘conservation movement’ (Kuzmiak, 1991; Czech, 2007). This lack of clarity has fundamentally rendered the term confusing and useless in many regards, nonetheless the conceptual power of the word ‘conservation’ has made its retirement impossible, if not also undesirable.

According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, the word conservation has its roots in Latin and old English, with its first usage occurring in the fourteenth century. Other words with a similar root include: conserve, conservative, conservatory, conservator. Since their beginning, these words have attracted cultural significance which has shaped their contemporary meaning, sometimes moving widely from their linguistic roots. For example, it is believed that J. Wilson Crocker first used conservative in the modern political sense in 1830 while conservation was attached to utilitarianism in the late nineteenth century (Online Etymology Dictionary, 2011). Today, significant cultural ties accompany these words and are responsible for the divergent meaning of the term conservation. Academics would provide a different definition than a politician, and a

person working in an environmental nonprofit organization would assign ‘conservation’ a different meaning than the average person.

### **Academic Definition**

In academia, the term conservation is most frequently assigned the meaning it held in the late nineteenth century when it was associated with Gifford Pinchot and the utilitarian perspective (See Wellock 2007; O’Toole 2002 and Hays 1959 among many others). Pinchot argued that America’s natural resources should be used to provide the greatest good to the greatest number of people. Pinchot favored the use of forests for timber and the damming of rivers for power generation and drinking water supply. Pinchot believed these uses to be providing the greatest good. However Pinchot was considered a land steward because he did not agree with the clear cutting of the nation’s forests-- such was unacceptable not because it damaged nature, but because it was not sustainable for future use.

This conservation perspective was, at the time, in direct conflict with the preservation perspective, most famously advanced by John Muir. Preservationists believed that America’s natural resources should be protected in perpetuity at all costs because the forests, deserts and mountains were a sublime creation which brought humans closer to the divine. The preservation perspective believed that nature had an intrinsic value beyond its usefulness to humans.

Pinchot and Muir often battled over proposed uses of nature—with President Roosevelt often in the middle (See: Hays 1959; Nash 1967; Fox 1981; Runte 1979 among many others). The most famous conflict between conservationists and preservationists came in the early twentieth century when a dam was proposed which would provide

drinking water to San Francisco. The dam would also have destroyed the Hetch Hetchy Valley inside Yosemite National Park (See Oravec, 1984; Miller 2001 and Fox 1981 among many others). In addition to this conservation—preservation dichotomy, Hendricks (1982) provided an outline of the various definitions of the term ‘conservation’ that academics have used; these include the definition associated with the New Deal, with the history of the western United States and with the history of modern forestry.

O’Riordan (1971) also outlined an evolution of the term ‘conservation’ by describing three waves of the conservation movement. The first in line with the Pinchot-Muir schism, the second associated with the New Deal and the third in line with the environmental movement and the definition used for this dissertation. The historic conservation—preservation split remains the most referenced in academia. Under such conditions, this definition can still be analytically useful because issues of use ethics, sustainability and values are regularly discussed and shaped. Outside of academia though, the use of natural resources are rarely seen within this narrow construction in the present context (Interview 22.6; 22.5 and 22.6).

### **General Public’s Understanding**

The definition of conservation most understood by the general public in fact has absolutely nothing to do with the Gifford Pinchot and utilitarian usage still alive in academia. Wikipedia, although not considered a reputable scholarly source, can provide a glimpse into social organization and meaning in today’s culture. The Wikipedia page for “conservation” currently includes more than 20 links to more specific definitions of conservation. ‘Conservation movement’ is the top link and carries a definition of “to protect animals, fungi, plants and their habitats.” This definition is the best depiction of

the general public's understanding of the term conservation. This definition is broad but it clearly describes conservation akin to the earlier preservation perspective when it comes to nature and the plants and animals inside. The twenty other links on the Wikipedia page also provide evidence that the general public has a difficulty selecting one definition of the term.

### **The Movement's Own Definition: The Basis for this Dissertation**

The advocates inside the self-termed conservation movement have another unique definition of the term—they understand the 'conservation movement' to mean the fighting for the active protection of wildlife and wildlands for their inherent value and for the value they may provide to humans. This definition is the most aligned with the current and real world understanding of the term and thus is the definition that this dissertation utilizes. As opposed to the academic dichotomy and the general public's broad definition, those inside the conservation movement intend for the term 'conservation' to provide a distinction between their advocacy for the protection of nature including wildlife and wildlands versus the much broader all-encompassing environmental movement which can include such disparate issues as nuclear energy and public health concerns (Interviews 10.3, 18.2, 13.3, 15.2 and 16.1).

In fact the term conservation, as used by those inside the movement, gained its meaning after the 1960s expansion of environmental concern. As new issues began to arise, those advocating for the protection of nature began to use the term conservation to distinguish themselves from the larger environmental movement. Hays (1982), the author most known for advancing the academic dichotomy of the term 'conservation', even acknowledges decades later that those inside the conservation movement intend for the

term to be understood quite differently. He even notes that the term is particularly useful to distinguish conservationists from those more interested in modern environmental issues. O’Riordan (1971) and Hendricks (1982) also acknowledge this definition of the term conservation and conservation movement and both distinguish it from other definitions by regarding it as the foundation for a “third wave of the conservation movement<sup>4</sup>” (Hendricks 1982, page 92). Movement adherents, and even the policymakers they regularly interact with, understand conservation by this definition. The reality on the ground inside conservation efforts and the conservation movement today is shaped by this definition.

### **A Useful Term**

The definition of the term conservation has undergone multiple changes and continues to hold multiple definitions for different constituents; this has contributed to a lack of clarity. It is not uncommon for words to be reinvented and reused throughout history, in fact it is quite commonplace. One other example includes the wise use movement which was akin to the Gifford Pinchot’s utilitarian conservation perspective-- today the very same ideas are widely termed ‘sustainability.’ Useful ideas and discussions can come and go throughout the consciousness of society as the attention to issues ebbs and flows; the reinvention of terms is often associated with reemergence. In the case of the term conservation, the word has been continually reinvented to fit with the needs of the time.

Despite the often times convoluted and emotional connotations of the term conservation, it is a useful term today if understood the way those inside the current

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<sup>4</sup> The earlier definitions of the term, including the conservation-preservation schism, are regarded as the earlier waves of the movement.



conservation movement have intended it to be—as a term that separates the protection of wildlife and wildlands as a distinct social movement within the larger environmental movement. In addition to this dissertation, Foreman (2006) and Harvey (1994) offer two instances where an academic used the same definition of the word as exists on the ground inside the current movement, but such usage by academics is thus far limited. One goal of academic research is commonly believed to be the provision of new perspective and understanding of the real world; within this guise, this research contributes to bringing academic research on conservation closer to the reality on the ground.

Although at least two other scholars have argued that a ‘new conservation movement’ is eminent, it is important to note that the new conservation movements they were speaking of are not at all related to the new conservation movement that this dissertation describes (Kuzmiak, 1991; Czech, 2007). This dissertation’s use of the word conservation is not intended to make history messier, it is intended to reflect the way the term is used in practice. The use of the contemporary and real world definition of conservation distinguishes this dissertation from other discussions of new conservation movements.

Ultimately there is little denial the term conservation, like democracy or freedom, is a symbol-word with emotive connotations which can fuel conflicting goals and inconsistent aims. However, despite its ambiguous and vague meaning, the term conservation continues to be analytically useful in all of its many forms; perhaps most useful is its contemporary and movement related form. In an effort to provide clarity to the term and bring academic research closer to the modern-day usage, this dissertation adheres to the contemporary definition of conservation and conservation movement—the

active protection of wildlife and wildlands for their inherent value and for the value they bring to humans. For clarity throughout this dissertation, the environmental movement will be defined as: the social movement working to ensure human health, livability and sustainability of the earth's natural resources through its work on pollution, land use, energy generation, and a myriad of other issues. Additionally, the wilderness preservation movement will be defined as: the social movement aimed at protecting nature through establishing wilderness areas as defined by the 1964 Wilderness Act.

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to describe how the conservation movement has changed and explain and analyze why the changes have occurred, this dissertation is rooted in both an understanding of the history of the movement and an understanding of scholarly literature on the dynamics of social movements.

#### **The Conservation Movement**

Many scholars begin the history of nature preservation by telling the story of the Madison Junction campfire. It is said that on the evening on September 19, 1870 the members of the Washburn-Langford-Doane expedition gathered around a campfire at the junction where the Gibbon and Firehole Rivers met in what is today Madison Junction in Yellowstone National Park. They had just completed surveying the land but rather than stake personal claim to the region of remarkable wonders, they had the idea to set aside the spectacular mountains, geyser basins and natural landscape as a national park (Runte, 1979; Schullery & Whittlesey 2003; Miles, 2009). Surely the nature preservation concept, in all its altruism deserved a “virgin birth” under the night sky around a flaming campfire, [imagining that] an evergreen cone had fallen near the fire, then heated and expanded and dropped its seeds to spread around the planet” (Sellars 1997, pg. 8).

Although a great story, historians have noted that the actual true beginning of the national park idea came instead as a response to several trends including: the need for a national identity, a fear that the frontier was gone and the drive for economic benefits by the railroad companies and future concession holders (Nash, 1982; Sellars 1997;

Barringer 2002). The altruistic aura surrounding nature preservation was (and still is) held up by concrete interests. In addition to the well-established sublime ideal reasoning behind nature preservation also lays practical benefits driving real action.

By 1900, the United States had designated Yellowstone, Yosemite, Sequoia, General Grant and Mount Rainer National Parks. The Sierra Club and the Audubon Society, founded in 1892 and 1906 respectively, were early nonprofit organizations interested in protecting nature for outdoor recreation and bird watching (Vale, 2005; Jones 1965; Graham, 1990).

The first major conservation event that historians focus on is John Muir and his Sierra Club's fight over the destruction of the Hetch Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park by a dam designed to provide drinking water for San Francisco. John Muir lost the fight in 1913. However this now widely cited battle between strict preservationists and utilitarian conservationists was not fought in vain-- it arguably marked the beginning of the conservation movement (Sutter, 2007; Weinstock, 1982; Miles, 2009).

Numerous nonprofit organizations interested in various aspects of nature were born over the next three decades. The National Parks Conservation Association was established in 1919 by one of the first leaders of the National Park Service, Robert Sterling Yard (Miles, 1995; Vale, 2005). Defenders of Wildlife was officially established in 1947, however its roots lie with an organization dedicated to fighting the trapping of wild animals, which was established in 1925 (Vale, 2005; Herscovici, 1985; Cecil 1997). The Wilderness Society was established in 1935, by eight men including Aldo Leopold, Robert Sterling Yard and Harvey Broome, in response to the threats of recreational development and commodity uses on wild landscapes (Vale, 2005; Wellock, 2007). And

lastly, the National Wildlife Federation was established in 1936; this Depression-era organization focused on biological concerns—mainly the maintenance of game populations for hunting purposes (Allen, 1987; Vale, 2005).

Scholars of the inter-war years argue that the 1920s and 1930s ushered in the modern conservation ideal—“the notion that Americans ought to preserve wilderness areas as a distinct federal land designation” (Sutter, 2007 p. 167). This idea and the growth in conservation minded nonprofit organizations was evidence of the growing conservation movement (Harvey, 2007). The interwar years saw the production of the automobile and the rise in visitation to natural areas. Now that Americans were able to visit wilderness in the comfort of their own cars, popularity grew as did the impacts of growing visitation (Sutter, 2002). The end of World War II brought rising affluence which contributed to even more growth in the popularity of national parks, national forests, national monuments and other natural areas. Several scholars connect this raise in popularity with the need for many of the early nonprofit organizations to devote time toward preserving nature from deteriorating conditions brought on by rising visitation (Sutter, 2002; Wellock, 2007; Harvey, 2007; Weinstock, 1982; Runte, 1979).

Many historians argue that the event that did the most for the modern conservation movement was the battle over Echo Park and the building of a dam that would flood the valley inside Dinosaur National Monument (Harvey, 2007; Harvey 1994; Frome, 1997; Allin, 1982; Weinstock, 1982). A coalition of organizations mounted an advocacy campaign over six years to stop the building of the dam. In a long and highly visible political battle, the conservation organizations won their first major victory in 1956. The battle over little-known Dinosaur National Monument not only showed the

organizations that they could win but it also heightened public awareness of conservation issues. The Echo Park victory was a catalyst for growth and legitimacy of the conservation movement.

The Echo Park victory specifically inspired the conservation movement to reach for more; some scholars note that the seeds of the Wilderness Act of 1964<sup>5</sup> were laid in the aftermath of Echo Park (Bevington, 2009; Harvey 1994; Scott, 2001). The passage of the Wilderness Act established a national wilderness system on federal land that included the highest level of protection for nature allowed under federal law. Immediately following this historic victory, the conservation movement became overwhelmingly focused on the politics of wilderness allocation (Allin, 1982). Each of the land management agencies was instructed to review and recommend land to be designated as wilderness. The United States Forest Service (USFS), caught between opposing special interests and the protective ones had the most difficulty completing their Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE) because the process was highly political<sup>6</sup> (Allin, 1982). By 1981, 258 areas were officially protected as wilderness, amounting to over 80 million acres designated (Wilderness Data, 2012).

Several scholars point out that the Wilderness Act in 1964, the first Earth Day in 1970 and the 23 major environmental laws passed throughout the 1970s forever changed the conservation movement (Bevington, 2009; Mitchell, 1989; Turner, 2007). The movement had legitimized and given value to the idea of protecting nature. And although none of the organizations in the movement planned the initial Earth Day in

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<sup>5</sup> David Brower of the Sierra Club and Howard Zahniser of the Wilderness Society emerged as leaders during the campaign for the Wilderness Act of 1964.

<sup>6</sup> After a failed first try, the RARE II process was not completed until 1977 when the USFS recommended 15 million acres become statutory wilderness.

1970, the largest of the conservation organizations saw a surge in membership between 1969 and 1972 (Mitchell, 1989). The 23 environmental laws passed throughout the 1970s provided new tools for the conservation movement to achieve its preservation goals. However, the new environmental laws also established a new “federal environmental policy apparatus” which drew many of the conservation organizations into a new world rooted in Washington politics (Bevington, 2009 p. 22).

Conservation organizations grew more professional, became strong lobbying forces and grew in members throughout the 1980s and 1990s as they continued to work for the federal protection of nature (Bevington, 2009; Mitchell, 1989; Turner, 2007). After the initial rounds of wilderness designations stipulated within the review process of the Wilderness Act, and after the 56 million new acres were designated as wilderness in 1980 with the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, additional land protections of any kind became smaller, less frequent and more difficult to come by. Land was still being protected and additional protected areas were being established, yet the large, historically and nationally significant new protected areas became increasingly rare. Wilderness areas, national parks, national monuments, national recreations areas, state parks and wildlife refuges continued to be created quietly as the zenith of the conservation movement began to fade. The few notable sparks of conservation thrust after 1980 includes 18 separate bills which designated roughly eight million new acres in 1984 and the California Desert Protection Act of 1994 which brought protection to 3.5 million acres of desert in the west. In the last ten years the creation of protected areas has slowed but continued as smaller areas with local support have achieved new protections.

In 1995, a different conception of wilderness was introduced by William Cronon through his now famous article “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature.” The introduction of culture and human construction into the idea of wilderness was seen by many as a philosophical attack on the ideal of wilderness. Cronon argued that the traditional ideal of wilderness defines it as separate from civilization, promoting a vision of a battling dualism. According to Cronon, this definition of wilderness actually worked against the environmental movement as it told Americans that they can protect untouched nature over there while continuing to live their environmentally degrading lifestyles here. The pronouncement that wilderness was simply just a human construct and its preservation was causing more environmental problems sparked intense debate in academic circles, inside the conservation movement and throughout society. The true impact of Cronon’s work is yet to be determined, still this introduction of culture into the concept of wilderness remains a critical component of conservation history.

Bevington (2009) notes that as the conservation movement was academically critiqued and the largest conservation organizations became more professional and comfortable inside Washington; new groups were formed out of growing discontent with the compromises and weaker advocacy embraced by the movement in national politics. For example, Earth First!, a radical wilderness organization was created in 1980 to pursue advocacy avenues outside of the establishment. The radical, confrontational and direct advocacy of Earth First! however was also undesirable to some—sparking new grassroots biodiversity groups<sup>7</sup>. One flagship tactic of these small grassroots groups included

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<sup>7</sup> Examples of new grassroots biodiversity groups include: Center for Biological Diversity, Forest Guardians, John Muir Project and Wild Alabama, among many others.



litigating to protect nature, such as during the now famous battle over the protection of the spotted owl and its habitat in the old growth forests of the Pacific Northwest (Bonnet & Zimmerman, 1991).

Separate from the development of radical and extra-institutional organizations, the conservation movement also saw activists organizing a wave of new formal national conservation groups. Today, Conservation International, Rainforest Action Network, Rainforest Alliance, the Nature Conservancy<sup>8</sup>, and the World Wildlife Fund are large formal organizations focusing on nature preservation. These new large formal organizations are different from the early conservation organizations for many reasons but namely because of their international focus.

### **Political and Social Forces Shaping the Conservation Movement**

The interplay of varying political and social forces has impacted the strategy, focus and organizational makeup of the conservation movement over the last two decades. The conservation movement is like any other social movement in that it operates alongside political institutions in a non-static environment. Different forces and factors are constantly developing and influencing political institutions and the advocacy organizations that interact with them. These forces do not exist in a vacuum and are consistently shaped and influenced by each other while they shape and exert influence on the entities that interact with them. In the twenty-first century these forces have included, among many others, shifts in domestic policy, waves of public support for nature preservation and the rapid advancement of globalization as both a theory of economics and as a sociological reality. This dissertation has found evidence that four distinct yet

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<sup>8</sup> The Nature Conservancy was established in 1951, twenty to thirty years earlier than the other organizations listed, however it is more descriptive of this new wave of organizations than the earlier wilderness organizations.

interconnected political and social forces shaped conditions that are together responsible for the emergence of the new conservation movement. These four political and social forces have been termed ‘theories of change’ and include in political opportunity, adaptation to external pressures, resource mobilization and organizational lifecycle.

### **Theories of Change**

This dissertation on the new conservation movement has found distinct changes in the social movement, as well as lays out the driving forces behind why these changes occurred. In an effort to understand the causes of these shifts, this research used analytical tools offered by social movement scholars to describe how social structural forces shape collective action over time. Four theories of change were identified and evidence of their influence was gathered. Political opportunity, external pressures, concerns surrounding the mobilization of resources and organizational lifecycle formed the basis of inquiry for this dissertation.

**Changes in Political Opportunity.** The political process perspective is a central tool for explaining social movement mobilization (key scholars include: McAdam, 1982; Kriesi, 1996; Tilly, 1978; Tarrow, 1994; McAdam, McCarthy & Zald, 1996) and specifically explaining how “groups with mild grievances and few internal resources may appear in movement, while those with deep grievances and dense resources but lacking opportunity—may not” (Tarrow, 1994; p. 18). The political process perspective argues that it is not the level of grievances or the amount of money or other resources available to a group of people that determines if a social movement can develop and stay mobilized. Instead the political process perspective argues that it is the level of political

opportunity afforded to the issue that shapes the mobilization of a social movement<sup>9</sup>. The political process perspective can also be useful in explaining changes or shifts in mobilization inside existing social movements.

The concept of political opportunity, has been defined by several scholars as “consistent—but not necessarily formal or permanent—dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for collective action by affecting people’s expectations for success or failure” (Tarrow, 1998 p. 76-77; Gamson and Meyer, 1996). The political process perspective believes that political opportunity can come in several different forms, both structural and flexible in nature, including: increasing access, shifting alignments, divided power elites, influential allies, and declining repression (Goodwin and Jasper, 1999; Tarrow, 1998). Political opportunity shifts can arise out of any “event or broad social process that serves to undermine the calculations and assumptions on which the political establishment is structured (McAdam, 1982 p. 41).

The political process perspective recognizes both internal and external factors as important for the mobilization and survival of a social movement; as important as political opportunity is, it is also necessary to look at the mobilizing structures of the internal actors, and the cultural framing<sup>10</sup> within the movement’s mass base. For example, without socially conscious and cognitively liberated movement adherents, no opening in political opportunity could spark a social movement. While political

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<sup>9</sup> Several scholars have analyzed policy change over time. The cyclical thesis (Schlesinger, 1986) the policy learning thesis (Sabatier, 1987; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1988) and the zigzag thesis (Amenta and Skocpol, 1989) are three distinct theories of how policy changes over time. This analysis can also be useful in explaining social movement change.

<sup>10</sup> Not to be confused with social movement framing discussed in Chapter 4. Cultural framing here references concepts such as cognitive liberation and the view of the problem and solution by social movement adherents.

opportunity is an external component, both external and internal elements are vital to social movement mobilization.

The political process perspective spends some time trying to explain the development and ultimate outcome of social movements. Political process scholars believe that over time, the survival of a social movement is dependent on the same three factors that enabled its emergence, however a fourth factor, the response of other groups to the insurgency, must be added to the list in order to understand the evolution of a social movement (McAdam, 1982; Kriesi, 2004). Ultimately the success and survival of a social movement is dependent on its ability to maintain its obtained political leverage and bargaining position. The level of political opportunity, the mobilizing structures and the cultural framing of the insurgency is judged along with a fourth element--how other groups, including the elite, are responding to the social movement. Together these factors help determine the potential for success and survival of the social movement along with explaining lifecycle decisions and shaping the ultimate health of any social movement (McAdam, 1982; Kriesi, 2004).

For the American conservation movement specifically, an evaluation of shifts in political opportunity is particularly relevant. Shifts in political opportunity can come from different political forces as well as different societal pressures. Public support for any issue is one example of a societal force that can deeply influence the political opportunity available for a any social movement issue. Changing public support can cause shifts in access, powerful allies and the opinions of power elites. Anthony Downs (1972) outlines the existence of an issue attention cycle whereby the public will become highly interested and even alarmed by an issue to only let it fade after hurdles to overcoming the problem

are made known. The environmental movement as a whole experiences this issue attention cycle; the research of Dowie (1995) and Bosso (2005) highlight such ebbs and flows of the movement. Nickas (1999) also noted the changing sentiment toward conservation in different sessions of Congress. The 104<sup>th</sup> and 105<sup>th</sup> Congresses were particularly anti-conservation, while the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress was markedly warmer to the issue<sup>11</sup>. This changing level of public support is both similar to and a contributing factor for shifting levels of political opportunity.

Christopher Bosso (2005) argues that the Sierra Club, the National Audubon Society, the National Wildlife Federation and other conservation organizations have become “permanent fixtures in national politics” because they have adapted to changing political and economic conditions. In an era of unpredictable issue attention cycles, organizations’ abilities to alter their organizational structure in order to meet new demands is key for survival (Staggenborg, 2011). The conservation movement is undoubtedly impacted by the ebb and flow of attention and support within the larger American public.

In addition to changing domestic political opportunity, another theory of change that this dissertation found to be helpful in explaining the new conservation movement is the adaptation to external pressures. These external pressures interact with and are shaped by the same larger political forces that contribute to changing political opportunity. External pressures shaped by changing politics threaten nature while rising globalization is also profoundly altering the environment surrounding the conservation movement.

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<sup>11</sup> The 111<sup>th</sup> Congress passed an omnibus wilderness bill in 2009 that added over 2 million acres to the national wilderness preservation system.

**Adaptation to External Pressures.** The conservation movement has achieved great success in furthering its goals since its origin. Nature preservation has become a distinctly American tradition with millions of acres protected today. The movement however is operating in a different America than the one John Muir and Henry David Thoreau knew. External pressures have started forcing the conservation movement to adapt to a new reality. New threats to protected areas and globalization are two external pressures that contributed the three changes to the conservation movement.

In 2012, the national wilderness preservation system was protecting more than one hundred and nine million acres (Wilderness Data, 2012). Despite this resounding success, there is great consensus throughout the movement literature that the work of the conservation movement is not over. Doug Scott, the policy director of the Campaign for America's Wilderness,<sup>12</sup> argues in his book "The Enduring Wilderness" that the wilderness protections secured over the last century are only as strong as the social consensus that back them up. He argues that the Wilderness Act is simply a piece of paper and cannot represent success for the movement because counter forces are challenging wilderness protections everyday. Staggenborg (2011) points out that regardless of earlier successes or new threats, the conservation movement, and larger environmental movement, has and will continue to face the difficulty of maintaining the movement's action over many decades. Maintaining activist volunteers, influencing public opinion and creating lasting organizations are all necessary for the conservation movement to remain alive.

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<sup>12</sup> A Pew Charitable Trust program

The counter forces challenging nature protections that Scott references have altered the original foundation of the conservation movement. The goal of the movement was to actively ensure protection for the most scientifically, ecologically and spiritually significant landscapes in the United States. The United States has numerous legal frameworks for establishing protected areas, whether as national parks, national monuments, wilderness areas, critical habitat or as a wildlife refuge, among others. However, leaders in the movement are now aware that simple designations for nature are not enough. “Attention must be given to the quality of the nature within these boundaries, or...empty shells” may be all that remain (Nickas, 1999 p. 449).

Many of the threats that face nature today were not foreseen by the advocates that fought for many of the legal frameworks that establish various protected areas. Similarly, in another forty years, there will undoubtedly be even more threats to nature that we cannot imagine today. This constant evolution of threats against nature has the potential to form a treadmill for which the conservation movement never stops chasing. The concept of managing nature, and particularly wilderness with its noted exclusion of human impact, emerged as a mainstream idea in the late 1970s (Hendee et al., 1978). Wilderness scholars however did not truly begin writing about the cadre of today’s growing threats facing wilderness and other natural public lands until the 1990s. Several scholars have noted numerous threats that include everything from air pollution, aircraft noise, invasive species and motorized recreation. Most scholars have focused on four distinct threats: fire suppression, mining, cattle grazing and adjacent land management (Hendee & Dawson, 2001; Cole & Landres, 1996; Nickas, 1999; Hubbard et al., 1999; Kelson & Lilieholm, 1999). Most recently, a fifth and sixth threat have been added to

this list—climate change and renewable energy projects now make up much of the informal literature about threats to nature.

Many of the threats facing nature are tied to strong opposing interests. Mining interests, for example, were viewed as the chief obstacle to passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964, so a compromise allowing mining to continue in some wilderness areas was reached (Hubbard et al., 1999). Today mining interests still ferociously defend their exploitative practices inside wilderness and other protected areas including national parks. Similarly, cattle ranchers have fought to maintain the sweetheart rates that the government charges them for grazing of their animals on public land, most notably inside national forests. Not only is the soil impacted and water contaminated but native animals are influenced, not the least from predator control which authorizes the killings of animals such as coyotes and brown bears to protect the cattle (Murray, 1997). The timber industry has also managed to influence wilderness and other natural public lands through the guise of fire suppression. Not only have natural fires that are helpful to ecosystems been suppressed, but logging for fuel reduction have been authorized.<sup>13</sup> Also facing nature are pressures from urban developers, private land owners and other interests that own adjacent land to protected areas. Actions on these adjacent lands can have profound impact on the health of the ecosystem inside these protected areas (Kelson & Lilieholm, 1999). Today the conservation movement is faced with addressing the threats to the integrity of the protected area system established throughout history.

The conservation movement is vulnerable to more than just opposing interests, it is also shaped by the pressure that large scale political changes exert on the movement.

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<sup>13</sup> Many of these fuel reduction logging contracts allow trees with diameters of 13 inches and even larger to be cut. Conservation advocates argue that such is beyond fuel reduction, as the clearing of underbrush can be accomplished with selective clearing of trees much smaller.



One of the most recent fundamental shifts in the organization of the world is that of globalization; the impact of globalization has been firmly noted within the social movement literature (Smith et al., 1997; Khagram et al., 2002; Della Porta and Tarrow, 2005; Cohen and Rai, 2000). In a post-Cold War world, several trends have converged to result in the globalization of society, and social movements have been particularly impacted. Social movement scholars have noted the origins and facilitating conditions of transnational social movements and social movement organizations, the rise in transnational social movements, including the environmental movement, and the strengths and weaknesses of transnational social movement organizations. Ultimately this dissertation investigates how the conservation movement has become globalized, and how new conservation organizations are impacting the movement here in the United States.

Smith et al. (1994) attributes the need for social movements to broaden their strategies onto an international level to the changing political structures of the world and the resulting change in the nature of the political process. Transnational social movement organizations (TSMOs) are a specific subset of both social movement organizations and international nongovernmental organizations. TSMOs are international nongovernmental organizations that are engaged in a larger social movement. Several scholars have outlined the origins of TSMOs; Chatfield (1997) argues that TSMOs begin as informal networks of people with shared concerns, similar to how more geographically limited social movement organizations begin. Despite similar beginnings, Smith et al. (1994) notes that empirical studies highlight that transnational social movement organizations are often deliberately formed as transnational organizations with a global focus and are

not simply evolutions of existing nationally-based efforts. Westby (2002) argues that although TSMOs may deliberately be created with an international focus, the social movement as a whole usually originates specifically in a national context and gradually develops into a transnational entity.<sup>14</sup>

Several facilitating conditions of transnational social movement organizations have been outlined and include growing democratization, increasing global integration, converging and diffusing values and proliferating transnational institutions (Kriesberg, 1997). These trends provide context for why TSMOs mobilized and have proliferated in the last several decades. The spread of democracy has not only physically opened up places around the world, it has also increased local participation and generally increased the standard of living. The world is becoming more and more integrated as economies are becoming interdependent, as information is reaching all corners of the globe and as many problems are now understood on a global scale. Values are diffusing and converging in a world where there is growing tolerance and diversity. It is even argued that some norms and values are now widely shared. But perhaps the most important facilitating condition has been the proliferation of transnational institutions; the scope and strength of transnational institutions (such as the United Nations) have influenced the dynamics and focus of social movements (McCarthy, 1997). Ultimately political environments and opportunities have changed with the proliferation of transnational institutions which has influenced the missions of new social movement organizations (Smith et al., 1994).

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<sup>14</sup> While trying to validate earlier claims about whether national or transnational organizations emerge first, Johnson and McCarthy (2005) discovered that in the United States, national organizations came first throughout history while transnational organizations came later. The situation is suggested to be the reverse in developing countries when affiliated transnational social movement organizations, already in existence, establish local branches.

Several scholars have focused on the details of the rise in transnational social movements and their organizations. Sikkink and Smith (2002) researched the TSMOs focusing on the several largest issue areas and tracked their growth between 1953 and 1993. The vast majority of transnational social movement organizations emerged after 1950, with 60% emerging after 1970. When looking at environmental transnational organizations specifically, the largest growth occurred in the last decade of the twentieth century. Khagram (2002) attributes the growth of environmental transnational organizations to the largest United Nations conferences on the environment, including the 1972 Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm and the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio. The transnational environmental movement contains 17% of all transnational social movement organizations in 2000; only the movement for human rights contained more (Sikkink and Smith, 2002).

Transnational social movement organizations (TSMOs) engage in three levels of political activity with three distinct targets: people to people, people to state and people to transnational levels (Leatherman et al., 1993). TSMOs also experience both strengths and weaknesses compared to their more localized counterparts (Kriesberg, 1997). The weaknesses of TSMOs include the increased transaction costs of operating internationally, the difficulties of implementing international efforts, the competition between TSMOs and their relative powerlessness compared to other global actors such as governments. The strengths of TSMOs include their work at many levels, the complementing nature of multiple TSMOs, their ability to mobilize support for and participation in global solutions, their ability to sustain attention on global problems, their

help framing issues and setting the policy agenda and their role carrying out transnational policies.

In addition to new threats and globalization, is a third theory of change also important to explaining the modifications to the conservation movement—the resource mobilization perspective and the importance of resources for the survival of any social movement including one like the conservation movement.

**Resource Mobilization.** The resource mobilization perspective argues that it is the availability of resources that determines whether people will organize and a social movement will be formed or not. Tilly (1978), Jenkins and Perrow (1977) and Oberschall (1978) established the argument that the level of grievances about the way a society operates is relatively constant-- conflict with formal institutions is essentially inherent in any society. This argument eliminates the existence of grievances as the sole reason why social movements are formed.<sup>15</sup> Instead the resource mobilization perspective argues that with grievances being ubiquitous, the only thing that determines whether people will organize and a social movement will be formed is the actual ability to do so--and that ability is determined by the resources that can be devoted to collective action (Oberschall, 1973; Tilly, 1978; McCarty & Zald, 1973; Gamson, 1975 and Jenkins, 1981).

Resource mobilization scholars never set out a clear definition of ‘resources.’ Instead it is widely recognized that what constitutes a resource for social movements can vary widely across campaigns. Consequently, scholars have explained how a range of moral, cultural, social-organizational, human and material resources all influence the

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<sup>15</sup> Early collective behavior theorists believed that collective grievances were a necessary and often times a sufficient condition to allow for the formation of a social movement (Blumer, 1951; Davies 1962; Parsons, 1951; Buechler, 2000).

extent of mobilization and the lifecycle of social movements (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004). Moral resources include legitimacy, solidarity, sympathy and celebrity. Cultural resources include specialized and tactical knowledge both in proprietary and generally accessible forms. Social-organizational resources include infrastructures, social networks and organizations both intentional and unintentional to the existence of a social movement. Human resources include labor, experience, skills and experience/ leadership. And material resources include financial and physical capital such as money, property, equipment and supplies. This typology provides context to the understanding of the vital importance that all types of resources play in the existence of social movements.

The continual flow of resources is arguably the most important element needed for any social movement and for all social movement organizations throughout their mobilization and throughout their entire lifecycle. This need for the continuous mobilization of resources can impact the course of a social movement and its social movement organizations, especially if the conditions needed to obtain resources are altered. Social movement scholars and particularly the resource mobilization perspective argue that the presence of resources is the single greatest indicator of social movement strength (McCarty & Zald, 1973). The conservation movement only became a social movement and only remains a social movement today because it has been successful in obtaining and mobilizing different resources. If the availability of resources changes or if the gatekeepers of resources desire different conditions or if resources are drawn to different issues, then the conservation movement will be faced with the need to meet the new demands for the resources. In such a case, without movement flexibility, the mobilization of resources would likely decline and the conservation movement would

face a future with substantially fewer resources, and as the resource mobilization perspectives lays out, would likely decline or fail to inspire further collective action.

Early social movement scholars framed the life cycle of social movements in a standard evolutionary process that always resulted in either success or failure. The resource mobilization perspective, in contrast, believes in an open life cycle of social movements that can vary largely however that is widely shaped by the political environment in which a social movement exists. The perspective places emphasis on the stance of power elites and the level of opposition from other established social organizations, which is shaped by the conditions of “governing coalitions, the structure of regimes and societal changes that give rise to regime crises” (Jenkins, 1983; p. 543). The conservation movement is a perfect example of a movement shaped by the political environment and the mobilization of resources.

In addition to the above three theories of change, also useful in explaining the changes to the American conservation movement is the role that internal factors such as organizational lifecycle can play in shaping a social movement.

**Social Movement Organizations: Life Cycle Changes.** Social movement scholars have noted typical movement lifecycles, while also noting that there is no single model that can account for all movement changes. Both external and internal factors have been outlined as contributing to lifecycle differences. Ultimately social movement scholars recognize that deviations will occur and have aimed to identify triggering factors. This literature has assisted this dissertation in explaining internal elements contributing to the three changes to the conservation movement.

Herbert Blumer (1951) distinguished four stages in a typical social movement lifecycle. He argued that a “social ferment” stage or a time of unorganized fervor comes first. Second, comes “popular excitement” when the exact outline of the movement and its causes is formed and spread. The third phase is one of “formalization” as participation and coordination of strategies is important. The last stage in Blumer’s lifecycle is one of “institutionalization” when a movement becomes a stable part of society. Many social movement scholars however, have argued that Blumer’s lifecycle is simply one pattern of evolution and not a formula that must be followed (della Porta and Diani, 2006; Meyer and Rowan, 1983). In fact, Minkoff (1995), points out that few social movement organizations even survive past their initial purpose and for those that do, della Porta and Diani (2006) argue that the direction taken by a social movement and its organizations can be that of both moderation and radicalization along with both formalization and disorganization.

Weber (1946) and Michels (1949) established the earliest baseline for change in movement organizations arguing that as a social base is established within society and as an organization ages and leadership changes, the organization is most likely to develop a bureaucratic structure and goal transformation is likely to occur. Zald and Ash (1966) developed a list of factors that can influence how exactly a movement organization will evolve. These factors include interaction with other organizations, internal leadership changes and factions, technological advancement and organizational culture. As social movements succeed or fail and age, adjustments in social movement organizations are inevitable.

On a theoretical level, Foucault in his book “Madness and Civilization” establishes how institutions have power and how they inherently will fight for their own survival. Foucault’s line of thinking melds well with the social movement literature arguing that institutionalization and oligarchization are symptoms of organizations undergoing change that will ultimately assist organizations in survival regardless of any necessary goal transformations. The conservation movement is a formal institutionalized social movement that has experienced resounding success in achieving its goals but more recently has undergone several changes; this research investigated internal movement elements including an element of fighting for survival and its role in the emergence of a new conservation movement.



## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND CASE SELECTION

This dissertation researched the emergence of a new American conservation movement with attention paid to the social movement itself and how political, societal and internal forces shape collective action and the nonprofit organizations involved. This research elicits a deeper understanding of the changes to the previous conservation movement which had been documented *ad infinitum* by a multitude of others (for example: Baldwin, 1972; Harvey, 1994; McCloskey, 1965 and 1995; Allin, 1982; and Sutter, 2002). This research provides evidence of three changes to the movement which mark the emergence of a new conservation movement which has largely been undocumented up until now. First, the new conservation movement includes a more defensive and fragmented approach to conservation as the movement has backed away from the creation of new federally protected areas; Second, the new movement also addresses a wider portfolio of issues including issues that had previously been outside the realm of the movement. And lastly the new conservation movement now includes a new class of nonprofit organizations which has added a global focus and a host of new tactics to the movement.

This research also gathered evidence of the driving forces behind the three big changes to the conservation movement and the precipitous for the emergence of a new conservation movement. The four different theories of change grounded in social movement literature (described in the prior chapter) were found to together explain the complex, multidimensional factors that have shaped the contemporary conservation

movement. A detailed explanation for how and why the conservation movement has been shaped by societal and political forces is the heart of this dissertation.

Key informant, semi-structured interviews were conducted both in person and over the telephone with 41 people inside selected nonprofit organizations inside the conservation movement. These interviews occurred between February and July of 2011. The identities of these individuals is strictly protected in line with standard institutional review board policies. Several of these individuals did agree to be named in certain places throughout the dissertation; however the names revealed are not representative of any characteristic of all interviewed personnel. Also, forty-six movement documents were collected from across the selected nonprofit organizations and document analysis was conducted in order to locate social movement frames and changes to those frames over time. Using two techniques to evaluate the same research questions not only increases the amount of detail captured about a topic but it also counteracts threats to validity associated with relying on only one method (Denzin, 1989; Blee and Taylor, 2002; Aldridge and Levine, 2001).

### **Case Selection**

For both research methods, the conservation movement was represented by six early conservation organizations and five newer conservation organizations. This non-random sample of eleven organizations was identified given four distinct criteria:

- Only the most prominent large social movement organizations inside the United States were considered; although social movements are made up of a variety of actors, large national social movement organizations can serve as bellwether

indicators for entire movements. Grassroots or local affiliated organizations, although meaningful, were excluded from this research.<sup>16</sup>

- Only organizations that are nonprofit were considered; foundations, think-tanks, businesses or other organizations were not included.
- The primary focus of the nonprofit social movement organization, as described in their mission statement, must be the preservation of nature. Organizations that only address conservation concerns within a larger mix of environmental concerns were not included.
- International organizations were not specifically excluded; however the nonprofit conservation organization had to conduct enough work inside the United States to meet the prominence criteria above.

The eleven organizations involved in this research include: the Sierra Club, National Audubon Society, National Parks Conservation Association, the Wilderness Society, National Wildlife Federation and Defenders of Wildlife as the early conservation organizations, and The Nature Conservancy, World Wildlife Fund, Conservation International, Rainforest Action Network and Rainforest Alliance as the newer conservation organizations. It is acknowledged that these eleven organizations are not the entirety of the conservation movement. Although outside of the scope of this research, a natural extension to this research could be to look at other social movement actors within the conservation movement and further grow the case study.

The separation between early and new conservation organizations relates to the date of organizational founding. Organizations founded after the end of World War II and

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<sup>16</sup> Although no specific size requirement exists, only prominent large organizations were included. Organization selection was corroborated by Mitchell et al.'s (1992) list of prominent conservation organizations.

the ushering in of the new age of affluence in American society are considered new conservation organizations; organizations founded before this time are classified as early conservation organizations. This separation occurs between the Defenders of Wildlife founded in 1947<sup>17</sup> and the Nature Conservancy created in 1951. This demarcation line was established solely for this research and was based on the observed departure from traditional conservation characteristics and the introduction of organizations with new strategies and tactics.

## **Research Methods**

### **Key Informant Semi-Structured Interviews**

The history of the conservation organizations, along with details of the changes to movement strategies, focus, organizations and tactics were ascertained from interviews with key informants inside the eleven different conservation organizations. Interviews are not only central to research about organizations (Blee and Taylor, 2002); but they have become a common methodological tool in the study of social movements because of their strengths exploring, discovering and interpreting complex events and social movement processes (Morris, 1984; Fantasia, 1988; McAdam, 1988; Staggenborg, 1991; Whittier, 1995; Robnett, 1996; Ray, 1999). Quantitative methods, such as large surveys, although also common in social movement research, are not adequately suited, in this particular research, to capture the nuances and causes behind the strategy shifts in the conservation movement. Qualitative methods provide this research with “a longitudinal window...to capture the rhythms of social movement growth...” (Blee and Taylor, 2002 p. 95). In the

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<sup>17</sup> Although World War II was over in 1947, the growing affluence of American society had not yet taken hold. The Defenders of Wildlife, although officially created in 1947, was formed out of an earlier organization that was created in 1925 (Vale, 2005; Herscovici, 1985; Cecil 1997).

end, gathering information from personal interviews allowed this research to adequately “put together the big picture about experiences and events...” (Schutt, 2009 p.376).

The semi-structured interviews included a schedule of questions which allowed comparability of data while also providing enough flexibility to digress and to probe based on the conditions and specifics of each individual interview. The open nature of the semi-structured interviews also allowed the researcher to benefit from the structure while providing the respondent with the opportunity to “generate, challenge, clarify, elaborate, or recontextualize understandings of social movements” (Blee and Taylor, 2002 p. 94). The respondents in this research were well positioned people inside the movement that have firsthand knowledge of the movement today and in the past. These well-placed individuals were not pursued for their individual experiences or emotions; rather they served as experts and provided information about several aspects of the conservation movement (Seidler, 1974). Key informants are not statistically representative of a larger population but they are knowledgeable about the social movement and the particular inside workings of the movement.

Validity concerns for key informant semi-structured interviews refer to whether the interview questions actually measure the intended concept and whether the results are generalizable (Selltiz et al., 1959; Black and Champion, 1976). Several scholars have reported concerns with whether respondents of social inquiries actually provide truthful, unbiased information (Bernard et al., 1984; Robson, 2002). The nature of this research minimized the risks of respondent and observer bias and errors; the subject nature of this research is not of a sensitive nature and no conflict of interest in the results of this research exist. Precautions were also taken to minimize any environmental conditions

that could have influenced the respondents or the observer. Content validity or face validity can be verified through the open nature of semi-structured interviews, by allowing respondents the freedom to tell the stories they want to tell. Also, this research relied on numerous key informant interviews allowing for a range of information to be obtained from a range of people; repetition provides insight into which pieces of information were least likely to be the result of error or design flaw. Any one method or way of measuring or gathering data will have its shortcomings; multiple methods evaluating the same research questions however strengthen the construct validity of this research (Robson, 2002; Blee and Taylor, 2002).

On the other hand, reliability concerns for key informant semi-structured interviews refer to whether the interview can consistently produce the same results. For quantitative methods, standard measuring and coding and the utilization of multiple coders can minimize reliability concerns. But the quantitative view of reliability is not applicable in many respects to qualitative methods. Miles (1983) argues that many elements of reliability must be intentionally violated in order to effectively gather qualitative data—for example, the observer's behavior will inevitably change from subject to subject and unique questions must be asked of different subjects. Similarly there is little consensus on how to systematically analyze large quantities of qualitative data; only guidelines, rules of thumb and advice have been offered (Glaser, 1978; Miles, 1983; Robson, 2002). In recognition of the importance of reliability in data analysis, this research audio recorded all interviews that were permitted<sup>18</sup> while also utilizing a

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<sup>18</sup> Allowing playback and confirmation by additional people.

consistent method of note taking as well as consistent method of a qualitative data organizing, coding, and analysis<sup>19</sup>.

The semi-structured key information interviews began with current vice presidents and presidents of each of the conservation organization. Additional personnel inside the conservation organizations were identified with a snowball sample—where one key informant identified and suggested other experts within the social movement. Founders of the organizations and other outside historians of specific organizations and the movement as a whole were also interviewed. This research followed Rubin and Rubin's (1995) two principles: completeness and similarity/dissimilarity in order to judge when the interview sample was large enough. Interviews were conducted until no new information was obtained and until each involved organization was adequately represented by personnel in leadership positions.

An interview guide was created where both the order of questions and topics to be covered were outlined. This provided structure and flexibility which promoted the development of rapport between the interviewer and the respondent (Blee and Taylor, 2002). At the onset of each interview the purpose of the interview and overall interest of the research was disclosed. Necessary consent was obtained. Throughout the research process, the interview guide was flexible and was specifically altered as the number of interviews increased and experience was gained.

Analysis of the qualitative data involved transcribing portions of interview recordings where possible and interview notes for the remainder. The process of analysis continued with a classic set of coding and identification procedures as outlined by Miles

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<sup>19</sup> Because qualitative data gathering and analysis is a largely ongoing process, codes were developed along the way and were altered as necessary.

and Huberman (1994) including giving codes to initial observations; going through materials to identify similar phrases, patterns, themes, relationships, etc. and gradually elaborating on obtained generalizations. Drisko's (2000) template approach was also used; as observed patterns and connections became clear, the construction of large outlines, flow charts and diagrams became possible.

### **Qualitative Document Analysis—Social Movement Framing**

The second method utilized in this research was a qualitative analysis of social movement documents and the framing of issues within them. Annual reports were collected from the years 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005 and 2010 from each of the eleven conservation organizations<sup>20</sup>. These annual reports contained information about the goals, programs, focus and budgets of the conservation organizations over time. These documents were analyzed for content and context in order to locate current and changing issue frames utilized by the movement. The social movement frames proved useful in corroborating information from key informant interviews and piecing together evidence of the three changes found in the movement.

Numerous scholars across multiple disciplines discuss frames or interpretive structures attached to messages and how such can influence how individuals organize and make sense of issues, events or causes (Snow et al., 1986; Snow & Benford, 1988, 1992; Fine, 1995; Gamson, 1995; Goffman, 1974). Frames interact with individuals' construction of reality and allow individuals to "locate, perceive, identify and label" occurrences within their lives (Goffman, 1974, p. 21). Several scholars have expanded the understanding of the role of frames by noting that framing is a verb because social

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<sup>20</sup> Not all eleven conservation organizations were able to provide all five of these annual reports, so alternative years or other movement documents such as newsletters were substituted.



movement actors can be active agents engaged in the production, maintenance and transformation of meaning (Gameson et al., 1982; Snow et al., 1986; Benford and Snow, 2000). In fact, once achieved, Snow et al. (1986) points out that frames cannot be taken for granted because any frame at any moment is simply temporary and always subject to renegotiation. A pivotal contribution to the literature on framing came from Snow, Rochford, Worden and Benford (1986) as they outlined four distinct processes of altering frames—frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension and frame transformation. Collective action frames are constructed for several reasons but the ultimate goal is to impact how movement adherents, movement opponents and society as a whole conceptualize the situation in need of change, who is to blame, what the solution is and the need for action. Snow and Benford (1988) label these core framing tasks as diagnostic, prognostic and motivational framing. These components of how the movement is seen by society are shaped by social movement frames in order to support the larger movement's strategies, tactics and focus.

Social movement organizations manipulate movement frames in order to inspire and legitimize support for the movement and its specific strategies, tactics and focus. As strategies evolve, it is likely that so will the framing. Brick and Cawley (2008) insist that the environmental movement as a whole has used various social movement frames. Studies have been conducted where alterations to social movement frames over time have been connected to larger social movement changes (Marullo et al., 1996)<sup>21</sup>. The shifts in collective action frames utilized by organizations in the conservation movement thus can be seen as modifications actively constructed for a specific movement purpose.

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<sup>21</sup> Marullo et al. (1996) showed how the peace movement organizations altered their portrayal of the issues at the core of the movement; they argued that the frame changes could be explained in terms of the broader movements changes (in this case, contraction and slowdown).

Identifying and characterizing transformations in movement frames can be useful in locating and understanding larger shifts in the focus and the strategy of a social movement. Unlike the vast amount of scholarly work on framing, this research identified different frames over time (Benford, 1997; Marullo et al., 1996). This look at framing in a temporal dimension allowed the frames to serve as additional evidence of parallel changes in the entire conservation movement.

Framing studies have typically relied on convenience samples of movement documents (Johnston, 2002). Out of necessity, this dissertation also employed a convenience sample of movement documents because each of the eleven conservation organizations had access to a different array of movement documents and annual reports; not all of the organizations could even provide copies of annual reports from previous years. Despite this unforeseen difficulty in obtaining organizational documents, every effort was made to avoid the downfalls of convenience samples. This research did not demand a true representative sample, so wherever possible, parallel documents from each of the organizations were secured. In the end, forty-six different annual reports were obtained and analyzed.

The powerful notion of frames and their use in social movements has been studied and noted throughout the literature (Marullo et al., 1996; Johnston and Aarelaid-Tart, 2000; Mooney and Hunt, 1996; Capek, 1993; Reese, 1996). Understanding how the conservation movement specifically utilized frames provided great insight into movement decisions about tactics and strategies and the overall perception of threats and opportunities. Analyzing different organizational documents over the last twenty years and across different organizations provided evidence of how frames have evolved

throughout the movement and provided evidence of the three changes identified in the conservation movement. These documents and the frames identified were also helpful in describing what the conservation movement looks like today.

Investigating social movement frames via document analysis only allowed for a description of the frames utilized. Benford (1997) points out that this is the most common form of research into social movement frames. Document analysis by nature cannot facilitate the gathering of strong evidence into why the frames utilized by the conservation movement changed or what impact the changing frames had on the larger movement. These cultural dimensions were beyond the scope of this research method.

Validity concerns for document analysis refer to whether the qualitative frame identification choices of the researcher truly measure the intended concept. The analysis of text is often subjected to concerns of true meaning, tone and situational circumstances that may alter the intended meaning of the text. Noting the situational aspect of the texts, including role perspective, author, audience and purpose goes a long way in ensuring the correct frame is identified. Linking identified frames with empirical observations also helped convince skeptic scholars of the utility of this research method (Johnston, 2002). Little consensus has been reached on systematic identification of social movement frames, however this research outlined exact criteria and kept the coding process simple in order to decrease concerns of validity. Because this was one of two different methods being utilized for this research, any concerns over the validity of a single method is minimized.

Reliability concerns for document analysis refer to whether the qualitative frame identifications will be the same during different trials and by different researchers. In

standard quantitative content analysis, it is recommended that at least ten percent of medium analysis be coded by a second person (Krippendorff, 2004; Lombard et al., 2002). For this research, reliability was assured by similarly using multiple coders for the analysis of the social movement documents; frame identification decisions were confirmed by one outside individual. Also, documents are permanent items so reference to specific lines in specific documents when discussing frame identification can allow the reader to go back to the document and verify the interpretation.

The process of conducting frame analysis on social movement documents began with the identification of and access to the documents. Key informants inside the eleven conservation organizations that were interviewed for this research helped facilitate access to organizational annual reports and strategic planning documents. The organizations at the center of this research are large institutional organizations which helped in gaining access to both current and past documents, however not all organizations were able to provide all of the requested documents, namely the annual reports from 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005 and 2010, so alternative years or other movement documents such as newsletters were substituted. The sample of documents analyzed for social movement frames was not representative of all the documents ever produced by the conservation movement, however such a convenience sample is typical of other similar research (Johnston, 2002).

In an effort to achieve a level of systematic analysis of the frames employed in the documents, this research coded key frame elements as determined to be present in four categories as outlined by Ryan (1991). The four themes include: the key issue in the frame, the responsibility and solution proposed in the frame, the symbols used, and the

supporting arguments including the links to history or cultural values. Specific codes within Ryan's four themes were used for the review of documents. Once the frames were identified, analysis was conducted by depicting the frames and frame shifts in large outlines and in charts.

## CHAPTER 5

### EMBRACING DEFENSIVE AND FRAGMENTED CONSERVATION

The American conservation movement has undergone a significant change in goals in the last twenty years. The prominent national nonprofit organizations at the center of the conservation movement, including the Sierra Club and Wilderness Society were responsible for the early achievements of securing protections for millions of acres of nature. These organizations, however, have moved on from this initial goal while embracing a more defensive, or reactive, mode of protection and stewardship that does not involve large pushes for new lands to be federally protected. The largest conservation organizations<sup>22</sup> have *all* shifted their goals away from creating new federal wilderness areas, national parks, wildlife refuges or any number of other conservation designations. Instead these prominent conservation organizations have begun to focus on more defensive campaigns to ensure that the already existing protected areas remain protected in an era of growing threats and an uncertain climate. This departure from a central focus on the federal protection of nature has left the conservation movement with a now highly fragmented land conservation strategy. Without a focus on federal lands, the movement is left to rely on private lands and community collaborations. These tactics have resulted in real land conservation gains yet they are also fragmented and involve an increasingly complex array of land protection designations.

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<sup>22</sup> This research found the goal transformation inside the six early organizations specified in this research. These prominent national conservation organizations include: the Sierra Club, National Parks Conservation Association, National Wildlife Federation, Defenders of Wildlife, National Audubon Society and the Wilderness Society.

This transition toward a more defensive and fragmented style of conservation has included the transfer of much of the original land protection goal to small local wilderness groups, such as the Alpine Lakes Protection Society, the Alaska Wilderness League and the Nevada Wilderness Project, among countless others. The national conservation organizations have handed off what many would consider the ‘bread and butter’ of the movement in order to embrace what some inside the movement consider to be a more mature and nuanced form of nature protection needed in an era of shifting values, political polarization and new global environmental threats.

This shift in goals is significant, not because the movement has never changed before and not because it speaks to the number of acres that will be protected in the future, but because it is indicative of how nature conservation will move forward and how conservation gains will be achieved in the future. The conservation movement is a distinctly American idea woven into the social fabric of this country. The movement has experienced many goal shifts throughout its history including periods of extreme threats which fostered defensive action. In fact, many of the present alterations in the conservation movement today parallel similar battles throughout history, however today these shifts are in conjunction with a retreat from establishing new protected areas. This unique shift has the conservation movement not only dedicating an increasing amount of resources to defending nature, but it has also reformed how the movement protects land. These changes are noteworthy because they have repercussions on the future of land management, conservation policies and any number of energy and recreation issues.

## **A Goal Transformation**

Although there will always be vestiges of the traditional conservation programs (discussed later in this chapter), over the last 15 to 20 years the American conservation movement, as a whole, has shifted its focus to become more defensive and protective of existing natural areas. Conservation groups are now battling back against an increasing number of threats to protected areas as well as political attacks on existing environmental laws. And they are focused heavily on oversight of land management of existing protected areas, including a focus on stewardship, in addition to a new wave of restoration and re-wilding campaigns. The evidence of a shift in movement goals can be found in the interview data, the programs listed in organizational annual reports, in organizational budgets, and the sheer number of people working for new designations on Capitol Hill. The rhetoric used during interviews and also found inside movement publications, including the annual reports, illustrate the kinds of defensive programs now prevalent in the conservation movement. A telling example involves the Sierra Club's 2006 Year in Review and Action Plan for 2007. In this short document, the two sections are entitled "2006: Keeping Our Opponents At Bay" and "2007: The Fight Will Continue." The document is littered with strong rhetoric including the statement: "It's clear we cannot relax our defensive stance."

The shift toward this more defensive stance was acknowledged by top leadership inside all six of the early conservation organizations involved in this research. The top executives all noted this shift, including one who stated "there is a lot of defense that has got to be played today...[because] if we ignored the defense of the lands we would realize we would be losing more than we could ever protect" (Interview 16.1). Another



top executive admitted that “it is no longer a priority to designate new lands” (Interview 13.3). Several movement professionals believe this defensive stance is a part of a larger cycle connected to the ebb and flow throughout the history of the movement. “There are times you have to play defense...and this is an extraordinarily tough time” (Interview 12.1). However more central to this goal change, is the defensive stance in conjunction with a significant decline in efforts to secure new protections. The highest priority programs and highlighted efforts inside each organization’s annual reports over the last twenty years tell of this break in protecting new areas. Across the board there is a visible decline in referenced efforts relating to securing additional acres of protected nature. For example, in 1990 the Wilderness Society, perhaps the organization most dedicated to federal land protection, highlighted seven programs in their annual report, of which six directly related to creating new protections. By 2010, that same organization, highlighted 22 ‘notable achievements’ in their annual report, but only one related to new protected areas, while 19 were explicitly defensive programs aimed at battling back threats or protecting the quality inside existing protected areas. Similarly, the National Parks Conservation Association explicitly mentions new protections and park expansions in their 1991 report; however, by 2010 not one mention of such existed anywhere in their annual report. Ron Tipton at the National Parks Conservation Association stated that “a real indicator” of the goal change inside the conservation movement “is the slowdown in the growth of the park system.” He explained that “the park system has expanded ever since it was created, but the rate of expansion has greatly decreased... especially in the last ten years.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The most recent additions to the National Park System have been small historic sites including: Fort Monroe National Monument, African American Burial Ground National Monument, the Clinton boyhood

James Nations, also of the National Parks Conservation Association, further explained that ten years ago the main focus of his organization was to secure more money to fund the National Park Service, including the establishment of new national parks. Today, the top priority for NPCA is about “protecting and enhancing national park resources” that already exist. The focus continues to be on funding the National Park Service, as a whole, however with specific attention paid to operations and maintenance backlogs. This defensive posture has been repeated across the most prominent national conservation organizations as new strategies have brought in new movement priorities. Specific changes to the time, energy, money and personnel dedicated to federal wilderness and land protection designations throughout the movement were noted explicitly in four interviews, including one willing to discuss a sharp decline in funding allocated for such work (Interviews 16.1, 15.1, 13.3 and 15.2). The sharp decline in funding came in an organization historically considered to be a leader in protected areas; yet this organization spent less than 5% of its annual budget in 2010 on federal land protection advocacy (Interview 16.1). This severe budget cut does not highlight a mission change, but rather this organization’s movement toward a new approach and new tactics. Personnel shifts were also explicitly referenced in relation to the number of employed wilderness lobbyists that exist throughout organizations in the conservation movement. Several interviewees pointed out a sharp decline in the number of lobbyists dedicated to new federal land designations in the last ten years. This decline even left previously dominant movement organizations without anyone on Capitol Hill advocating for new wilderness areas or new national parks or new wildlife refuges (Interview 10.1 and

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home, and Port Chicago National Memorial, among others. The last significant additions came in 2004 when Great Sand Dunes and Petrified Forest National Parks were expanded by roughly 100,000 acres.

22.6). The main lobbyist for one of the conservation organizations contended that “today there are fewer than half a dozen people on Capitol Hill working on [traditional land protection]” (Interview 10.1). This modification to personnel placement again highlights the overall social movement’s departure from federal advocacy for land protection in favor of more defensive and fragmented approaches not tied to the halls of Congress.

In short, the conservation organizations making up the conservation movement have shifted their goals. This shift has taken place in relation to three factors—growing external threats, an increasingly hostile political environment, and a new focus on land stewardship and restoration.

### **Defensive Against Threats**

Throughout history the conservation movement, and virtually every other social movement, there has been a need to defend achievements. Threats often evolve through time. This is not the first time the conservation movement has had to play defense, in fact there has always been an element of defense played at every moment; but virtually every person interviewed for this research agreed that a new generation of threats to nature has taken over. “The threats [to nature] are different and more numerous now than twenty years ago” (Interview 10.2). Also, “the threats are more complex” (Interview 12.2). “Twenty years ago` wildlands were threatened too, that is nothing new” (Interview 16.2). However “today the cumulative effect of old threats and new threats is dramatic” (Interview 13.3). Logging is no longer believed to be the most dominant threat to nature, as it was in the 1980s. Instead, some traditional multiuse threats, including mining and oil and gas leasing have reemerged as a threat with new technology which means the “problem has gotten bigger” (Interview 12.1). A whole cadre of entirely new threats such

as renewable energy and new forms of motorized recreation also exist today. Ultimately, the reinvention of old threats and the existence of entirely new threats have formed a reality where conservation movement officials believe that the quality of nature inside established protected areas is no longer guaranteed and that such prolific threats now require a ‘all hands on deck’ type of concerted defense by the conservation movement.

Data from more than thirty interviews was used to craft a list of the threats both old and new that are most concerning to the conservation movement. The list is considerable and begins with the expanding number of traditional threats such as new oil and gas leasing across the U.S., especially the growing number of proposals for deep water drilling, and proposals increasingly targeting the near vicinity of protected areas. Mining and cattle ranching also continue to pose large threats inside protected areas. The effort by the mining industry to get permission to mine in previously unreachable areas of the Grand Canyon National Park is just the most recent and visible example of the expansion of this old threat.

In addition to reinvented traditional threats, the conservation movement is now operating in a world where new threats are shaping the terrain. For many, renewable energy projects top the list. Environmentalists favor renewable energy for obvious reasons, however, such projects often require large amounts of open land and huge quantities of water, which creates high demand for unsettled, undeveloped protected federal lands. Although ending a reliance on fossil fuel energy is widely agreed to be desirable, these renewable energy projects “often threaten prized wildlife habitat with a leasing process that is haphazard and ill connected to sound ecosystem science” (Interview 10.3). A steep increase in the use of motorized recreation, such as snowmobile

and all-terrain vehicle use is also wreaking havoc on the ground inside some of this country's most protected natural areas. Although unlike the others, another threat often listed by top conservation movement officials is the increasing disconnect between people and the natural land. People of all ages are living a more urbanized lifestyle with "more distance, both physical and mental, between them and wilderness" (Interview 10.3). It is feared that this distance will create an American public that is increasingly willing to sacrifice nature for other gains—which means that even more threats to nature will arise and there will be fewer people willing to fight to save it.

The one threat most often mentioned in this research was climate change. "Climate change is the single greatest issue facing wildlands today" (Interview 16.2). It "presents a greater challenge for stewardship (Interview 11.3), while "questioning the fundamental reason for protected areas" (Interview 16.2) because as the climate warms, traditional habitats and ecosystems shift in location and change in nature, making the boundaries around areas increasingly futile and arbitrary. Climate change is one threat that the conservation movement has never been faced with before and is arguably a bigger threat than any other throughout history.

All of these threats are ultimately about land management and the uncertainty involved in protecting nature. Although national parks and other protected areas have federally designated boundaries around them, their current and future quality is still in doubt when faced with this list of threats. Although the American conservation movement has protected millions and millions of acres, those areas are now requiring constant protection and monitoring. This form of defensive protection has always been

necessary, but now the conservation movement has significantly modified its goals to embrace this long term concern for the quality of this country's protected areas.

### **Hostile Politics**

According to conservation movement officials and activists, it is not just established protected areas that are under attack. There is also a serious threat coming from political attacks on existing environmental laws. Although not the most severe or first time that environmental laws have been threatened, there has been a renewed focus over the last twenty years to reverse or weaken the Endangered Species Act, the National Environmental Protection Act, countless EPA regulations and the Clean Air Act (Interviews 15.1, 15.2 and 13.3). One of the most recent examples of these political attacks include Representative Richard Pombo's attempt to revise the Endangered Species Act in 2005 with a House bill that "does so much to eliminate opportunities for recovery of threatened and endangered wildlife" according to the current President of Defenders of Wildlife, Jaime Rappaport Clark (Defenders of Wildlife Press Release September 19, 2005).

The most recent of these political attacks has been centered on the Clean Air Act. In April of 2011, four separate amendments to a small business bill were aimed at undercutting the Clean Air Act and specifically its ability to regulate greenhouse gases. In 2007, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Environmental Protection Agency could regulate greenhouse gas emissions, which are responsible for climate change, under the existing Clean Air Act. This controversial ruling<sup>24</sup>, sparked attacks by both Republicans

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<sup>24</sup> This rule was controversial because of its basis in the belief that anthropogenic sources are responsible for climate change, and because it had the potential to significantly impact the operations of businesses around the country.

and Democrats to remove the authority to regulate countless businesses and these previously unregulated yet highly ubiquitous emissions.

The Sierra Club views the proliferation of political attacks as the primary reason why “it’s clear we cannot relax our defensive stance” (Sierra club 2006 Year in Review and Action Plan 2007). Others view these attacks as leaving the conservation movement little choice but to “defend pivotal environmental laws that many Americans believe to be a cornerstone of our environmental jurisprudence” (Interview 13.3). The attacks on environmental laws, in addition to the continued pressure and countless political attempts to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling and reverse its protected status, were cited by almost every organization in the conservation movement as a critical reason why the movement must be constantly vigilant over all the achievements the movement has ever secured.

In fact, the numerous attacks over the past 15 years led one long-time leader inside the conservation movement to conclude that “[we] are in the middle of the most difficult politics in my thirty years of experience” (Interview 16.2). This was qualified by another person saying “Washington is increasingly polarized, while the middle ground in Congress has disappeared” (Interview 11.3). This political gridlock has been the focus of several scholarly works and is widely established in the literature (Klyza and Sousa, 2008; Repetto, 2006; Binder, 1999). The hostile political climate for conservation interests in Washington has arguably impacted the conservation movement and has contributed to its shift toward different and more defensive tactics.

## **Stewardship and Restoration**

A common criticism the conservation movement faces when advocating for any new protected lands is that “we cannot afford to take care of the lands already protected, so why ask for more?” (Interview 22.6). Given this, the conservation movement is now strongly embracing the quality component of conservation through its stewardship and restoration efforts<sup>25</sup> that were once entirely managed by government agencies. A leader within the Wilderness Society notes that “eight years ago we started to focus on stewardship,” while another movement insider reasons that “stewardship and restoration work is growing. It is easy to build political support for it so it is a win-win” (Interview 13.1). One reason is that monitoring and protecting the health of an ecosystem is not highly controversial work; it can also attract quite a bit of positive local attention in communities around protected areas. Stewardship includes traditional responsibilities of managing trails, removing trash and improving other visitor infrastructure, but has also come to include the eradication of invasive species, the monitoring of habitat shifts due to climate change and the overall insurance of ecosystem health.

Stewardship responsibilities once resided entirely in the lands of the four federal land management agencies<sup>26</sup>, however as federal budgets have been cut, so too has the ability of the agencies to fulfill this work. This, along with the ever increasing threats to public land, has fueled the conservation movement’s entrance into this arena.

“Stewardship responsibilities have become underfunded by the government” and yet “the threats are becoming more obvious” (Interview 11.2). Ultimately, the conservation

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<sup>25</sup> Restoration efforts date back to the 1960s and 1970s, however the largest, most prominent conservation organizations involved in this research have only become intimately involved in these efforts over the last twenty years.

<sup>26</sup> These four agencies include the Forest Service, National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service and the Bureau of Land Management.



movement recognized the need for restoration work and has jumped in, embracing this new conservation goal.

Restoration and re-wilding projects have also grown in number and size (Interviews 11.1, 11.2, 13.1 and 16.1). The restoration of the Florida Everglades is the largest of such undertakings. According to the Everglades Coalition website and organizational annual reports, all six of the most prominent conservation organizations involved in this research have joined hundreds of other local and environmental organizations to fight for the restoration of this rare ecosystem. Other restoration projects have come to include the National Wildlife Federation working to restore the Great Lakes (2005 Annual Report), and numerous organizations including National Audubon Society and National Wildlife Federation focusing on restoration of the Mississippi River Delta and the Wisconsin Prairie Grasslands (National Audubon Society 2010 Annual Report and Interview 12.2).

Re-wilding projects are quite new but still include large scale projects such as the reintroduction of wolves into the Yellowstone ecosystem currently championed by dozens of conservation organizations (Defenders of Wildlife 2010 Annual Report). Other re-wilding projects taken on by the most prominent conservation organizations include small projects such as the planting of native willows in the disappearing Sierra Nevada meadows by the Sierra Club as well as large projects such as dam removals (Interview 16.1). Two dams on the Elwha River are already being removed in Olympic National Park while dozens of organizations fight for the removal of four dams on the lower Snake River (Interview 11.1).

## **The New Fragmented Conservation**

Without the old, traditional, central focus on acquiring and protecting public lands, the new conservation movement as a whole has drifted toward a fragmented approach to conservation. Instead of relying on the largest conservation organizations and the federal government to protect large swaths of land in wilderness areas, national parks and nature reserves, other actors within the conservation movement have begun to branch out and embrace private land protection—using land trusts and conservation easements, and community collaboration. These new tactics for protecting land have the potential to achieve and expand conservation movement gains; however, these gains tend to be of a smaller scale almost by definition, and generally are accompanied by inconsistent protections. However this type of fragmented protection is in line with the realities of modern life. A patchwork of urban-hinterland protections may be fragmented but they offer conservation beyond just secluded wilderness; conservation that is integrated with society as opposed to separate from it.

Over the last 20 years, partly following the lead of the Nature Conservancy, land trusts of all sizes have been established and have started to buy up private land in order to protect it from development (Interview 15.2). Between 1990 and 2005, the number of land trusts in the United States nearly doubled to almost 1700. As of 2005, 11.9 million acres were protected by land trusts—with nearly half of those acres protected in just the five years between 2000 and 2005 (Aldrich and Wyerman, 2006). Although most of the 1700 land trusts are small and only own one piece of land, collectively the presence of land trusts in the American conservation movement further highlights a departure from the traditional route of federally protecting land (Interview 13.2). Although none of the

most prominent conservation organizations at the center of this research function purely as land trusts, all have worked with land trusts directly or indirectly. “The biggest change in conservation has been the types of people around the table and that the table is now on the local level” (Interview 12.2). Without a strong focus on federal protections, land trusts and the larger focus on private land has assumed a higher profile within the strategy for achieving conservation gains.

Similar to the growth of land trusts, conservation organizations of all types and sizes have also embraced the concept of conservation easements (Interviews 15.2 and 22.1). Conservation easements are agreements made between private land owners and a qualified land protection organization<sup>27</sup> which legally limit the use of land strictly for the purpose of conservation. Land trusts and conservation organizations have reached out to private land owners and negotiated with them to voluntarily protect a portion of their land. Examples of conservation easement projects were obtained in interviews as well as identified throughout organizational documents during this research. The National Audubon Society was involved in creating conservation easements on roughly one million acres in the flint hills in Kansas and roughly two million acres in the Dakota grasslands (Interview 15.2). Five different conservation organizations have worked on obtaining conservation easements worth more than \$15.8 million in California to preserve Tejon Ranch (Audubon Annual Report 2010). The National Wildlife Federation lobbied to have tax credits included in the most recent Farm Bill for private landowners who create conservation easements (NWF Annual Report 2010). And, Defenders of Wildlife currently operates a “Living Lands” program that works with private land owners interested in conservation easements and has specific programs in Minnesota, Nebraska,

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<sup>27</sup> These can include government agencies at all levels

Washington and Oregon centered on obtaining conservation easements (Defenders Annual Report 2010).

Although it varied, the figure most often used throughout the interviews for this research was that of 37 million; 37 million acres of land are currently being protected in a countless number of conservation easements located in all fifty states. These strips of land located on otherwise developed or utilized land engages private land owners and traditional foes including farmers, ranchers and commercial developers to protect their land and its conservation values. A long-time leader in the conservation movement acknowledged that “a different type of conservation is going on...because the reality of conservation today is you have to work with local constituents.” Ken Salazar, Secretary of the Interior agrees that recognizing the role of private landowners is "a new way of conservation. These are conservation initiatives, which are different from conservation initiatives of the past" (Taylor, 2011). The movement’s engagement with conservation easements is evidence the American conservation movement is no longer solely relying on the federal government to protect nature. It is also evidence that the conservation strategy today is fragmented as it deals with smaller parcels of land and with a countless number of inconsistent protection schemes.

Outside of land trusts and conservation easements, there are also a growing number of informal community collaborations and agreements which are being utilized by the conservation movement to protect land (Interviews 10.2, 10.3, 12.2 and 15.1). Bringing all of the interests involved in a single plot of land or larger landscape together can often bridge divides and encourage conservation or at least better land management on both multiple use public land and private land. Instead of advocating for government

regulation, now many in both the largest national and smallest grassroots conservation organizations attest to the success of forging cooperative agreements on multiple use areas. Some inside the conservation movement believe that in today's world, the best route to land protection is not through forcing conservation onto land users but to cooperate, educate and ultimately forge a plan that can incorporate conservation into the realities of everyday land users (Interview 12.2).

This focus on cooperation can be seen with The Wilderness Society working with ranchers in Utah and Native American tribes in Washington (Interview 10.3). Similarly the Audubon Society works with private owners of land inside Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in order to secure stewardship and protection of flyways and bird migration routes (Audubon Annual Report 2010). The National Wildlife Federation has also put a lot of effort into engaging stakeholders to try and reach use agreements (Interview 12.2). These cooperative agreements, while potentially successful in protecting acres of natural land, are highly variable by nature and thus contribute to an increasingly fragmented network of protected land.

Ultimately land trusts, conservation easements and community collaborations are all significant indicators that are critical to understanding the current state of conservation in America. Various actors inside the conservation movement today are protecting a fragmented array of land while the center of the social movement—the largest national movement organizations have transformed into largely defensive organizations concerned with safeguarding the quality of existing protected areas.

## **Vestiges of the Original Goal**

Any discussion of goal transformations inside the American conservation movement would be incomplete without mentioning those movement actors which have not and likely will not ever depart from the original heart of the movement—the drive to federally protect as much natural land as possible. There are funders, programs inside national nonprofit organizations and a growing number of local grassroots organizations that have retained the original focus on wilderness protections despite the larger movement’s response to the changing world of conservation (Interviews 22.6, 10.1, 10.2 and 15.2). There remains a vibrant yet disjointed community of wilderness designation advocates that have been successful in establishing new federally protected areas even during the harshest of political climates. This has largely been possible through the decentralization of the movement and the political process. “The biggest change in the advocacy for protected areas is that it has been decentralized and is now locally based” (Interview 10.2).

As the American conservation movement, as a whole, has largely withdrawn from the political game of obtaining federal protections for land, a few movement actors have remained. Throughout the interviews for this research, it was discovered that new wilderness bills have advanced out of committee and have been passed by both houses of Congress yet this has only been possible because of individual Congressmen and Congresswomen that put their support behind bills which impact only their districts (Interviews 22.6, 10.1 and 10.2). It is believed by those inside the movement, that although many in Congress may have ideological biases against new protected areas, it

has been discovered that few will argue with a colleague who wants one in their district<sup>28</sup>. This local advocate approach, with an underlying feel of pork barrel type benefits, has been successful in facilitating the establishment of new federally designated areas<sup>29</sup> (Interviews 22.6, 10.1, and 10.2). Given this political reality, the movement actors who have retained the original goal have had to move their focus to the local level where local support is key to finding an ally in Congress willing to push through new legislation. Obtaining and showing the support of local constituents is often about understanding local political dynamics and achieving compromise with local interests (Interview 22.6). In fact the most common type of new protected areas, to be established in the last 20 years, are additions to already existing protected areas<sup>30</sup> (Wilderness Data, 2012). The expansion of boundaries and protection of land adjacent to an existing protected area often do not incite as much opposition because local interests are already familiar with the reality of the protected area and some local interests have even undoubtedly forged ways to benefit off of it (Interviews 10.1 and 22.6). The exact conditions on the ground in each location and the exact personality and interests of each Congressman can be vastly different which makes locally driven campaigns vital to the success of any campaign for a new federally protected area.

The required local nature of establishing new protected areas has ensured that the only conservation movement actors effectively involved are local grassroots organizations. Even the Wilderness Society, the original national conservation

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<sup>28</sup> It was mentioned that even this may be becoming increasingly untrue, as some anti-conservation policymakers have begun to disregard this professional courtesy (Interview 16.2).

<sup>29</sup> The 2009 omnibus federal lands bill, which established over two million acres of new wilderness areas, was able to make its way through Congress largely for this exact reason. There were so many individual Congressmen with land protections in their districts included in this omnibus bill that the bill passed despite the overall lack of political support for such a large increase in federal land protections.

<sup>30</sup> The Ventana Wilderness in Southern California for example has been expanded seven different times bringing the initial 42,000 acres to over 240,000 acres in 2011.

organization dedicated to the passage of the Wilderness Act and instrumental in the protection of millions of acres of nature, has shifted its organizational structure (Interview 10.1). Almost all campaigns for new protected areas are now run on the local level with only support from the Wilderness Society through their ‘Wilderness Support Center’ which works with local groups and “helps them create their [own] campaigns” (2009 Annual Report, p. 10). The Wilderness Society and the rest of the most prominent national conservation organizations have largely abandoned their goal to establish new protected areas. This goal has been taken over by other movement actors which have forged alternative routes to protection. This departure from the national conservation organizations has decreased the visibility of new land protections, meaning that new wilderness areas are still being created but the average American is much less aware of these efforts. The national conservation organizations have largely transitioned and brought the entire American conservation movement into a new era of defensive and fragmented conservation.

In the fall of 2008, the Sierra Club printed in its newsletters that “[we] recognize that the wilderness areas and wildlife we worked so effectively to protect for more than a century are being threatened and lost.” This focus on defense, fueled by increasing threats to natural areas, increasing political threats to environmental laws and an increasing need for stewardship and restoration on existing protected lands, inspired the transformation of a core goal of the conservation movement. The center of the social movement is no longer primarily focused on the establishment of new national parks, new wilderness areas or new wildlife refuges. This push for new federally protected areas has given way to a necessary return to defensive campaigns to safeguard existing



protected areas. Ultimately the American conservation movement is large and complex and there is a lot happening, however this research has focused on the most prominent national conservation organizations and the immediate surrounding meaning of their goal change. The history of the American conservation movement is also long and complex and largely outside of the scope of this dissertation; this research has focused on the changes to the movement over the last twenty years and where possible infused the relevant historical context.. The conservation impacts of the abandonment of traditional protected area formation is still unknown, but it is clear that the American conservation movement, originally rooted in iconic preservationist leaders such as John Muir and Henry David Thoreau, have begun to chart a new course in response to a changing world and environment.

## CHAPTER 6

### CLIMATE CHANGE, RENEWABLE ENERGY AND MORE: A NEW CONSERVATION PORTFOLIO

In the last twenty years, the American conservation movement has become engaged with more than just the traditional repertoire of issues surrounding the protection of nature. The changing natural, political and social worlds have created a reality where this social movement must respond to an array of new issues in order to continue effectively protecting nature. Conservation advocacy has evolved from selling the qualities of a proposed new national park or wilderness area to also include other issues such as crafting energy strategy and monitoring air pollution. The character of the conservation movement has become a bit blurred with that of the larger environmental movement, despite their arguably different foundations and focus. More and more issues are overlapping between these adjacent social movements which have required conservationists to embrace issues once entirely under the purview of the environmental movement. The movement of John Muir is now much bigger than his personal story or his original nature preservation vision. This growing portfolio of issues for the American conservation movement is a product of the same expansion of threats that contributed to the movement's defensive transformation already discussed. Natural, political and social changes have shaped a new conservation reality which has prompted the most prominent conservation organizations to respond by expanding their scope.

## **Traditional Issues in the American Conservation Movement**

The American conservation movement has historically been intertwined with early American preservation advocates. John Muir is perhaps the central figure that gave rise to and shaped the ideal of nature conservation in this country. Muir's philosophy placed nature above human civilization and materialism; he believed that all life was sacred and even described the natural world as a glimpse into divinity (White, 2009). Muir's philosophy shaped early conservation advocates including the founders of the Sierra Club. Early conservation organizations were born with a focus on protecting nature, including Muir's favorite place, Yosemite Valley. This connection to the natural land was the driving force behind the central focus of the early conservation movement—to protect nature in perpetuity (Vale, 2005).

As other more general environmental issues arose in the 1960s and 1970s, the environmental movement was born, forming a sister movement, which, although fundamentally similar, embraced a different set of issues. While the environmental movement was quickly drawn into discussions over the human health impacts of pesticides and the virtues of nuclear energy in the 1970s, the original long standing conservation movement remained focused on limiting development of natural lands and establishing protected areas including national parks and wildlife refuges. Prior to the 1990s, these sister social movements were allies yet remained dedicated to their niche interests (Interviews 22.6, 22.4 and 22.2).

## **The American Conservation Movement Today**

In the last twenty years however, the original, central focus of the American conservation movement has expanded. Natural, political and social changes have led the

conservation movement to adapt and expand in order to remain effective. As Paul Spitler from the Wilderness Society explains, “the world is more complicated now” and thus requires conservation advocates to be versed in more and more issues. Organizations have even begun to officially note this trend with warnings to members that “the scope and scale of our strategies to protect the parks [will] evolve in the coming years” (National Parks Conservation Association 2010 Annual Report). Moreover, everyone interviewed for this research agreed that the overall portfolio of issues that the conservation movement addresses has expanded greatly in the last twenty years. Many of these conservationists argued that the larger portfolio of issues is due to the growing threats to natural land. “None of the new issues are taken on abstractly, but rather because of their direct impact on the land” (Interview 16.2). Bruce Hamilton, Deputy Executive Director of the Sierra Club argues that conservation organizations must “constantly meet the needs of the time.” Another leader in the conservation movement admits that “this organization has changed as science has changed” (Interview 13.3). And, as new technology, new advancements, new trends, new waves of social understanding, and new opponents arise, how to conserve natural land also evolves. The expanding portfolio of conservation issues within the most prominent conservation organizations is most visible in the overall growth in the scope of organizational programs and priorities, and specifically in the rise of climate change and energy advocacy.

### **Endless New Threats**

One conservationist argued that “energy development, climate change and recreation are the three biggest drivers of issue changes” in the conservation movement

today (Interview 10.2). Political transformations in the access and reach of extractive industries are making these traditional threats to land, such as oil and gas development, more complex and potentially more harmful. Natural changes in the climate and various ecosystems are posing entirely new threats to land conservation. While social shifts in how Americans move around and recreate in nature are threatening the sustainability of this country's "natural heritage" (National Parks Conservation Association 2005 Annual Report). Ultimately political, natural and social changes have created a reality where the conservation movement feels pressured to act on a growing list of issues in order to maintain its effectiveness as a movement.

According to one conservation leader, many of the new threats to nature qualify as "larger issues" and as such "can dwarf any of our traditional considerations" (Interview 11.2). The American conservation movement must remain versed in the traditional repertoire of issues, in addition to developing new expertise in and spending organizational resources on emerging issues such as: new types of oil and natural gas drilling, renewable energy technology, renewable energy siting, critical habitat mapping, transportation technology, transportation impacts, native flora and fauna, the science and eradication of invasive species, climate modeling, organic chemistry, habitat distribution, fossil fuel generation and fuel distribution, among many others. For example, the National Parks Conservation Association became involved with noise and air pollution as they fought tourist sightseeing airplane and helicopter trips inside national parks in 2000. Similarly, the National Parks Conservation Association developed an expertise in watercraft motors in their campaign to ban two stroke engines while promoting the manufacturing of cleaner four stroke engines for their use inside most park service units.

Other examples include, conservation organizations focusing on cell phone reception in order to combat tower construction near protected areas, and focusing on geothermal energy technology in order to ensure endangered species are not adversely impacted (National Parks Conservation Association 2000 Annual Report). The Sierra Club and National Audubon Society have even taken on population growth issues including promoting contraceptive use (National Audubon Society 2000 Annual Report and Interview 16.3).

The nature of politics today is also requiring constant vigilance over seemingly completely unrelated issues because they are increasingly impacting conservation policy. The 2011 federal budget crisis and the associated politics of appropriations suddenly developed relevancy to the conservation movement as the Bureau of Land Management's wildlands policy was cut on page 304 of the 459 page spending bill, completely isolated from the always relevant discussion on the various land management agencies budgets (Taylor, 2011; Interview 12.1). The list of such issues and their corresponding examples is ever expanding and increasingly moving further away from the days of focusing on identifying protection schemes for remote natural areas and monitoring habitat quality.

Not all of the conservation organizations have had the same capacity to allow for this growing portfolio of concerns and thus have expanded at different rates (Interview 15.1). Some organizations have been more opportunistic while others have been somewhat inflexible, however ultimately the American conservation movement as a whole has expanded its scope. Put another way, although "different organizations have shifted to different degrees," if the Wilderness Society, the organization most tightly tied to traditional conservation work (Interview 22.6), is now involved with climate change

policy fights, then the shift has most definitely been dramatic and movement-wide (Interview 10.3).

### **Climate Change, Energy and the Conservation Movement**

Perhaps the most telling evidence of the expanded portfolio of the conservation movement is the presence of both climate change and energy programs<sup>31</sup> in all of the prominent national conservation organizations included in this research. Issues concerning climate change and energy were almost exclusively within the realm of the environmental movement until recently when their impacts on natural lands became apparent. This impact is so clear that one person inside the conservation movement argued that “the strategic priority of the conservation movement is no longer about public lands, it is all climate change” (Interview 15.1). Many inside the movement have come to the realization that climate change now puts all of the movement’s prior successes at risk (Interviews 13.1, 11.3 and 16.1). In this way, climate change not only threatened nature but also altered the way that movement organizations approached conservation.

Twenty years ago, few people inside the conservation movement were versed in the new science of climate change and the potential impacts on nature were not yet recognized. However, by 2010, all the early conservation organizations, including The Wilderness Society, the National Audubon Society, the Sierra Club, National Wildlife Federation, Defenders of Wildlife and the National Parks Conservation Association had formal climate change programs and were deeply involved in issue. In fact, in their 2010 annual report, the National Wildlife Federation listed seventeen accomplishments associated with climate change, as well as framed their traditional wildlife protection

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<sup>31</sup> Although most conservation organizations have separate climate change and energy programs, it is important to note that these issues are often intertwined because the burning of fossil fuel energy is the biggest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, the cause of climate change.

work under the guide of climate change with the title “Safeguarding Wildlife...in a Warming World” (National Wildlife Federation 2010 Annual Report). Likewise, the very first highlighted story in The Wilderness Society 2009 annual report was about energy while the second highlight was about climate change. Coverage of the Wilderness Society’s traditional issues did not begin until page 9 of the report. In just twenty years, new issues have emerged and have altered the path of the American conservation movement.

For the Sierra Club and Defenders of Wildlife, climate change has become a core focus and now provides direction to their main conservation efforts (Interviews 16.1 and 22.6). At the Sierra Club, for example, all land protection is now done under the “Resilient Habitats” umbrella, where traditional conservation efforts have been revalued and given the new purpose of creating climate refuges for nature and wildlife (Interview 16.1). Climate refuges were not the original goal of John Muir, but today’s conservation movement has come to value nature for more than just its spiritual connection—a shift in values has meant that climate refuges are now recognized as part of the work of the conservation movement. Virtually everyone interviewed for this research notes that nature’s ecological value and biodiversity protection are now dominant reasons for nature protection. With such goals, the movement cannot ignore climate change and its root causes in energy and other threats that may not take away from the spiritual splendor of a location but that deeply challenge its ecological health. One longtime member of the conservation movement acknowledged “before our decisions were because we just did not like logging however now, we know the science, we know the threats, and we know exactly how wilderness is in danger” (Interview 16.1).



The creation of energy programs inside the most prominent conservation organizations is linked to the role fossil fuels play in climate change. The energy programs have come to include a focus on renewable energy and specifically monitoring its effects on natural land. “Renewable energy projects have come to demand a lot of time and attention by organizations” (Interview 15.1). Conservationists have always supported clean energy; but it has always been an issue largely outside of the realm of the conservation movement. Renewable energy projects quickly became a conservation movement issue when wind and solar farms began being placed on vast amounts of ecologically significant land and began threatening the scientific and social values of natural land (Interviews 15.1, 10.3, 13.1, 12.2 and 15.2). Brian Turner from the National Trust for Historic Preservation argues that “we’re seeing landscape-level changes in a way that this country has not seen since the development of the interstate highway system” (Harrison, 2011 p. 37). Renewable energy projects can often take up thousands of acres, profoundly changing the landscape, habitat connectivity, and social values associated with the land. Today, the conservation movement has had to not only become versed in renewable energy leasing and assessing the ecological values of millions of acres of federal land, but it has also been pushed to become versed in the emerging technology, economic benefits and the business transaction side of renewable energy projects. Some of the conservation organizations have even begun to discuss what tradeoffs between land conservation and renewable energy are acceptable, including which protected lands might be disposable and which ones must absolutely remain protected (Interviews 10.3 and 15.2).

## **Organizational Priorities**

Climate change and energy programs are just two examples of organizational programs that did not exist inside the conservation movement twenty years ago. The programs exemplify key parts of the expanding portfolio for the social movement. The overall list of organizational priorities for the conservation organizations today, further tells this story.

The priorities for each conservation organization today, judged by the named programs and listed issues each organization highlights to their members and the public, reflects how much larger their portfolio has grown beyond their traditional nature protection work. For example, the Sierra Club, the organization formed most closely following the philosophy of John Muir, highlights six goals or programs on their website in the fall of 2011. These programs were entitled: Beyond Oil, Beyond Coal, Natural Gas Reform, Protect Americas Waters, Resilient Habitats, and Youth and Diversity. Of these six programs, only Resilient Habitats retained the organization's earlier central focus on nature conservation and even that is now under the guise of climate change. The leaders at the Sierra Club interviewed for this research argued that "all of [its] programs, one way or another are directly or indirectly tied to protecting ecosystems and wildlife" (Interview 16.1).

The Defenders of Wildlife is perhaps the organization with the widest portfolio (Interview 22.6)—their website in the fall of 2011 highlighted a wide range of programs on science and economics, international conservation, renewable energy, climate change, off shore drilling, and wildlife and habitat conservation. On the other end of the spectrum, the Wilderness Society is the organization which has remained most tightly

connected with the conservation movement's central focus on nature protection (Interview 22.6); however even the Wilderness Society's website provides evidence in the fall of 2011 that their portfolio of issues has expanded to include climate change, energy, recreation and stewardship issues.

There have been "at times subtle but overall significant shifts... in the priorities of the conservation community" (Interview 11.2). A few conservationists hinted that the inclusion of new issues can, at times, make the core nature protection work begin to appear like just one piece of a larger list of efforts (Interview 22.5 and 12.1). However, all of the conservation organizations involved in this research argued that the expansion of scope is not a departure from an overall mission or from any nature conservation goal, it is just a symbol of the complexity and difficulty of conservation today. "The world is more complicated" (Interview 10.1) and "there are a shifting set of challenges" (Interview 22.4) which have forced the conservation movement to adapt "in order to be relevant in a new era" (Interview 22.2).

The American conservation movement, with its original core goal of nature protection, was long ago integrated into the social fabric of this country. It is still unclear what adopting new issues will mean to movement adherents, to movement opponents and to the still unwritten history of nature protection. However, it is clear that nature protection and land management are becoming more and more complex which is making it more difficult for everyday people and even policymakers to understand; this places renewed emphasis on the role of the conservation movement to act as a knowledge broker who oversees the complex protection of nature around the world. This reality will only

further cement the fact that the American conservation movement is no longer just the movement of John Muir and his belief in natural divinity.

## CHAPTER 7

### NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK: WELCOMING NEW CONSERVATION ORGANIZATIONS AND TACTICS

The conservation organizations thus far described in this dissertation have only included the six early and most prominent national conservation organizations<sup>32</sup> that date back as far as 1892. However, starting in the early 1990s, a new class of organizations profoundly impacted the course of the American conservation movement. Five of these newer conservation organizations are now quite prominent and integral elements of the overall movement. In fact, two are now widely considered to be the largest conservation organizations—one based on membership<sup>33</sup>, the other based on assets and revenue<sup>34</sup>. These five organizations include the Nature Conservancy, World Wildlife Fund (WWF-US), Conservation International, Rainforest Alliance and Rainforest Action Network. Although these organizations were not all founded within the last twenty years, it is within this time frame that they have come to devote considerable resources and effort and that their presence has profoundly impacted the American conservation movement. Taken together, they represent an evolution in the types of conservation projects and tactics that the social movement employs to facilitate change. More specifically, they have expanded the base of the movement into global conservation efforts; they have preserved the original goal of the movement—to establish protected areas; and they have facilitated the adoption and legitimization of an entirely new toolkit of tactics.

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<sup>32</sup> These organizations were laid out in Chapter 4 and include Sierra Club, National Audubon Society, National Parks Conservation Association, Defenders of Wildlife, National Wildlife Federation, and the Wilderness Society.

<sup>33</sup> WWF-US

<sup>34</sup> The Nature Conservancy

## **The New Organizations of the American Conservation Movement**

Rainforest Action Network, Rainforest Alliance and Conservation International are all young conservation organizations, having been founded in 1985, 1986 and 1987 respectively. However, several decades earlier The Nature Conservancy and WWF-US had already begun to reinvent what it meant to be a conservation organization. Although at 60 and 50 years old in 2011 respectively, The Nature Conservancy and WWF-US are still considered newer organizations simply in relation to the earlier conservation organizations and for the usefulness of the distinction for this dissertation. Taken together, these five organizations represent an evolution in large strides away from the ways of the early conservation organizations. They have substantially shifted the attention of the movement overseas while remaining committed to protected areas and embracing new innovative methods for achieving conservation gains.

### **New Class of Conservation Projects**

#### **Global Focus**

The global perspective of the newer conservation organizations has broadened the scope of the still uniquely American social movement. It is not effective anymore to try and protect biodiversity and the most naturally unique places by only focusing inside the borders of the United States. With missions as broad as “protecting life on earth,” the global focus of the newer conservation organizations is required (Interview 19.1). These new organizations, and the conservation movement in general, still remain an American social movement. The five newer organizations are all headquartered in the United States, were founded by Americans and rely heavily on supporters and financial support from within the US. “It is strategic that we are a U.S. based organization...this is the richest

country with the highest philanthropy in the world” (Interview17.3). Numerous interviews established the financial importance of organizational members and donors from the United States and United States based foundation grants (Interviews 20.1, 18.2, 21.1, 17.3 and 17.1).

Although deeply embedded in the American society and the American conservation movement, organizational interests of the newest conservation organizations have moved beyond the United States and the politics of Washington, D.C. Now, the conservation movement interacts with the governments of well over 100 countries, and the heads of international organizations, including the most powerful international aid and development agencies (Interviews 17.1, 17.2, 21.2, and 18.2). The newer conservation organizations run their own offices in other countries and partner with local organizations. Both methods have allowed these American organizations to gain legitimacy and power in some of the most remote or politically entrenched locations in the world (Interviews 17.2, 19.1, 21.2 and 18.1).

Now, exotic locations, dramatic foreign landscapes and the charismatic megafauna (including the African elephant, Asian tiger and Giant Panda Bear), all trigger emotional responses by Americans despite the thousands of miles that separate them.<sup>35</sup> Global environmental problems and exotic species now shine as brightly in the American conservation movement as the original wilderness ideal did in the late nineteenth century (Interviews 21.2, 18.1 and 20.1).

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<sup>35</sup> “People care about mammals. In general the risk of extinction faced by gorilla or whales ...[has an] emotional impact.” (Entwistle and Dunstone, 2000, p. 2).

Most of these newer conservation organizations have a methodology for selecting the most ecologically important areas in the world; whether called hotspots<sup>36</sup> or ecoregions<sup>37</sup> or critical landscapes,<sup>38</sup> these identified locations represent the places that are most in need of conservation protection. These locations are truly global—and not just international, meaning locations inside the United States are included when appropriate. WWF-US in 2011, for example, identified 20 ecoregions to focus on; three of these were transboundary, four were inside the United States, and 13 were in other locations around the world (Interview 18.1). The newer conservation organizations “[work] globally, not just internationally” (Interview 18.1). The American conservation movement, with the newer conservation organizations, is a global movement.<sup>39</sup>

### **New Protected Areas**

In the last twenty years, as the six early conservation organizations underwent a shift away from the original goal of the movement—to protect as much natural land as possible, and toward a more defensive stance of safeguarding the existing protected areas, the five newer conservation organizations all retained a strong grip on the original goal. All five of the newer conservation organizations currently fight for the creation of new protected areas around the world. Russell Mittermeier, President of Conservation International argued that “protected areas are the greatest tool we have” because in heavily impacted areas, sometimes the only nature left is inside the boundaries of protected areas. The pressures that contributed to the early conservation organizations abandoning their focus on protected areas inside the United States are largely absent on

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<sup>36</sup> Conservation International term

<sup>37</sup> WWF-US and The Nature Conservancy term

<sup>38</sup> Rainforest Alliance term

<sup>39</sup> “U.S. leadership was needed” in the international conservation community (Interview 17.1).



the international scene. In fact, just Conservation International alone, since its founding in 1987, has been involved in the creation of over 353 protected areas, both land and marine, in 31 countries totally over 108 million hectares (Interview 17.4). Creating protected areas is politically feasible, financially feasible and most of the largest threats to nature internationally are still easily solved through protected areas.<sup>40</sup> This reality on the ground has enabled the five newer conservation organizations to utilize protected areas as a tool for protecting intact ecosystems and the habitats of endangered species while benefitting local indigenous people. The new conservation organizations all frame the work they do through the guise of human benefit. All of the organizations utilize language similar to WWF-US in saying that “the reality is that we need nature more than nature needs us” and “when we talk about saving forests, tigers and oceans, we’re really talking about saving ourselves” (WWF-US 2010 Annual Report).

“Protected areas are a part of how we work; all ecoregions plans first start with [protected areas]” (Interview 18.2) Russell Mittermeier continued his justification for new protected areas by noting that it can cost up to two hundred times more to restore a damaged ecosystem, than to protect nature inside a protected area. In 2005, Conservation International laid out five strategic commitments through 2010, three of these five commitments involved increasing the use and effectiveness of both land and marine protected areas (Conservation International 2005 Annual Report). Similarly, in 2010, WWF-US touted its success in preserving nearly 80 million acres through their

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<sup>40</sup> Even climate change, which is one reason why protected areas are no longer seen as the most efficient conservation tool in the United States, can still arguably be addressed with protected areas in developing countries. An international focus on the emissions from deforestation has elevated protected areas as a climate change mitigation tool. Reducing Emission from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) is an international scheme dedicated to the connection between deforestation and climate change (Interview 17.2 and 17.3).

involvement with the Amazon Region Protected Areas Program and the establishment of communal conservancies in Namibia (WWF-US 2010 Annual Report). Even the Rainforest Action Network has been running a “protect-an-acre program” since 1993, having “distributed more than one million dollars in grants to more than 150 frontline communities...to secure protection for millions of acres.” (Rainforest Action Network 2010 Annual Report).

The protected areas that the five newer conservation organizations support can be very different from the strict preservation policies in the United States; new forms of protected areas have become central to the American conservation movement’s global agenda. The protected areas supported by these newer conservation organizations are often less strict, involve local stewardship and address issues of buffer zones, human uses and concern over the viability of local communities. For example, the Rainforest Action Network “protect-an-acre program” has secured the protection of so many acres by providing grants to indigenous communities to help them “regain control of and sustainably manage their traditional territories” because they believe that “indigenous people do a better job conserving woodlands than national governments or international donors” (Rainforest Action Network 2010 Annual Report). Integrated conservation and development projects are another example of nontraditional protected areas which are managed by the local people and can even raise money for the local community by protecting the animals that draw tourists to the area. These mutually beneficial projects include setting up boundaries and protecting an area, but they do not include the strict usage restrictions that are involved in national parks, wildlife refuges or wilderness areas in the United States. However, there are still plenty of strict protected areas supported by

some of the newer conservation organizations. Rainforest Alliance’s description of their work has largely come to typify the focus of the American conservation movement’s work overseas, it is “not about protecting undisturbed ecosystems, but about helping people live... in viable communities and thus viable ecosystems” (Interview 21.1).

### **New Repertoire of Contention**

These new types of protected areas are one example of how the five newer conservation organizations of the American conservation movement have embraced innovative tactics aimed at securing conservation gains around the world. These newer conservation organizations have embraced a long list of new tactics—which include both where conservation is taking place and how leverage is being gained. The early conservation organizations, like the Sierra Club and Wilderness Society, have long relied on research, education and advocacy to further conservation goals inside the United States (Interviews 10.3 and 16.2). However, one member of the conservation movement admits in 2011 that when looking at the conservation movement as a whole, the “traditional toolkit is changing” (Interview 15.1). Many inside the conservation movement voiced acceptance for these new tactics, by arguing that the movement needs all different perspectives and all different approaches as long as they are all aimed at conservation. “I think what has happened...is a positive thing” (Interview 11.2). “We cannot get up and say we have the one answer...we need all of the complex solutions” (Interview 10.3). “It does take every organization doing what they do...we all have a role” (Interview 20.1).

Not only have these new tactics been welcomed by the whole movement, but in many cases, the newer conservation organizations would argue that their new tactics have

worked better than traditional routes. Carter Roberts, the President of WWF-US argues in their 2010 Annual Report that “we know we have little hope of saving these species unless we combine our ongoing work...with novel initiatives to change the trajectory of commodities like palm oil, sugar, soy and beef.” The new class of tactics employed by the newer conservation organizations, include: embracing global environmental negotiations, linking conservation and development goals, focusing conservation projects on both public and private land, partnering with corporate entities, and relying on the global marketplace to push conservation and sustainability.

### **Global Negotiations**

As previously discussed, all of the newer conservation organizations have a substantial orientation toward global conservation. However, in addition to undertaking conservation projects on the ground in other countries, many of the interviews conducted for this research revealed that these organizations are also getting involved with international environmental negotiations at the United Nations and with other international organizations and agencies.

For example, the climate change negotiations that took place in Copenhagen under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2009 drew representation from almost all of these newer conservation organizations. Involvement with other environmental conventions, includes the Convention on Biological Diversity, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora and the larger United Nations Conferences such as the Conference on Environment and Development. “We work with international organizations like the

IUCN<sup>41</sup> and at the UNFCCC and we do not lobby governments, we partner with them” (Interview 21.2). Similarly, these organizations have working relationships with worldwide finance organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. “We are respected [internationally] because we can reach out to the World Bank and the Global Environmental Facility” (Interview 17.1). Also on the global scale, the U.S. Agency for International Development, Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation and other national aid agencies now commonly coalesce with the American conservation movement (Interviews 17.2 and 21.1).

### **Link to Development**

The newer organizations inside the American conservation movement have forged relationships with development minded agencies and have become very active in a variety of development projects around the world. This connection between conservation organizations and development forces is aimed at helping implement sustainable development on the ground and ensuring that the environment is not hurt while still improving the lives of people in developing countries.

One conservation leader points out that “the amount of money the World Bank and other private banks spend on development, including building roads in sensitive areas, dwarfs any conservation work,” so if there is any hope of protecting ecosystems and biodiversity, we cannot ignore development pressures. The United Nations Development Programs continues to report that many people in developing countries around the world still lack safe drinking water and available sanitation services (Klugman, 2010). These basic human needs, along with other projects such as electrification and transportation infrastructure, are often funded by any number of

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<sup>41</sup> International Union for the Conservation of Nature

development agencies that exist on both the country and global levels. U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the World Bank and other national aid agencies and regional development banks such as the African Development Bank, all fund development projects.

Improving the standard of living in developing countries is widely agreed to be a good thing, however development can also often occur with a substantial cost to the natural environment. In fact, it has been noted that a large portion of tropical biodiversity loss comes when forests and other ecosystems are converted to other land uses (Interview 21.2). In response, conservation aims have been coupled with development aims, for example in Integrated Conservation and Development Projects and well as in Community Based Natural Resources Management projects (Interviews 17.2 and 21.1). Conservation organizations work with local people to use conservation gains to improve their lives, such as through sustainable agriculture, sustainable forestry and ecotourism. The newer conservation organizations have come to see that involving the local people on the ground throughout the world in high conservation locations is not only good for the people but can also be good for nature (Interview 17.3). This is part of the rationale behind the recent alignment of the movement with the human side of nature conservation. The WWF-US quote is worth repeating, “when we talk about saving forests, tigers and oceans, we’re really talking about saving ourselves” (WWF-US 2010 Annual Report).

### **Private Land**

The second innovative tactic utilized by some of the newer conservation organizations involves a shift from the traditional focus on federally owned lands, toward privately owned land; a similar trend to the one seen in the early conservation

organizations but for different reasons. The newer conservation organization realized that the vast majority of land in the United States, and also around the globe, is privately owned, so protecting enough public land to forge together a connective ecosystem is extremely difficult. “Most land is private, so the natural land there is key” (Interview 19.1).

By expanding their conservation focus to include private land, the newer conservation organizations increased the potential for meaningful conservation gains (Interview 19.1). Also, some inside the newer conservation organizations have argued that negotiating conservation gains on private land can often be cheaper than implementing and enforcing government regulation (Interviews 19.1, 19.2 and 21.1). The Nature Conservancy is perhaps the most well-known for this tactic as they pioneered the idea of buying privately owned land in order to stop proposed development. We are still “implementing [land acquisition] on an unprecedented scale” (The Nature Conservancy 2010 Annual Report). Stakeholder agreements, conservation easements and private conservation projects are also examples where conservation gains can be accumulated on private land (Interviews 10.1, 19.1, 19.2). Although for different reasons, both the early conservation organizations and the newer conservation organizations currently have a focus on private land. For various reasons and in various locations, the American conservation movement now views private land as a location where meaningful conservation can take place.

### **Corporate Partners**

The negative impact businesses and other financial interests can leave on the environment has grown at extraordinary rates in the last twenty years. And while the

American conservation movement has historically considered corporate interests to be the enemy of conservation, the newer conservation organizations have abandoned this demonizing tactic and instead have forged relationships with businesses in an effort to make them greener. These corporate relationships do come in different forms; Rainforest Action Network and Conservation International, for example, have greatly differing views on which businesses to work with.

Rainforest Action Network (RAN) is a direct action organization that mounts campaigns against the dirtiest of corporations. Hillary Lehr of RAN points out that “RAN finds the most success from calling out corporations with problematic supply chains.” Through negative publicity and pressure from the organization and its grassroots support, RAN aims to drive market pressure and impact a corporation’s reputation. If a corporation agrees to make changes, RAN then partners with the corporation and assists in their transition. This collaborative relationship however only ever comes after RAN directly confronts the corporation about its environmentally destructive behavior.

Conservation International on the other hand finds the greenest of corporations that already exist and partners with them to not only make them greener but to also raise the positive publicity around their brand. Ultimately both routes of this new tactic of working with businesses recognize the power of the private sector (Interviews 19.1 and 18.2). Although many inside the conservation movement expressed the sentiment, Hillary Lehr of Rainforest Action Network perhaps said it best, “the environmental reality on the ground in many places is driven by corporations.” Ignoring corporations then is like ignoring a powerful option for change (Interviews 17.1, 20.1 and 18.2).”The



private sector is critical, it is where the most change in the next ten years will be, [and] where the most positive impacts will come from” (Interview 18.2).

Currently Rainforest Action Network has campaigns against the actions of Chevron and Cargill while Conservation International has partnered with Starbucks and Disney, WWF-US has partnered with Nike, IBM, and Coca Cola, while The Nature Conservancy has partnered with Avon and Visa<sup>42</sup> (Interviews 20.2 and 17.1; WWF-US website; The Nature Conservancy website). All of the newer conservation organizations that partner with corporations, and ultimately the entire American conservation movement, risks the appearance that they ignore environmental harms caused by the corporation in return for financial contributions. In fact, several of the organizations have already been publically criticized for this reason (Interview 17.1). All of the organizations that take financial contributions from businesses involved in this research argued their criteria for partnership ensure they only work with those corporations most dedicated to conservation. “We do not just partner with any company” (Interview 17.1). “We apply strict guidelines and a rigorous due-diligence approach to identify which [corporate] relationships best align with our mission” (The Nature Conservancy website).

Partnering with corporations is an imperfect strategy aimed at gaining any possible leverage for conservation aims given the economic powers in the world. These partnerships do not always run smoothly however. As of May 2011, Rainforest Action Network began a campaign against Disney for their association with a pulp and paper company that reportedly has been involved in the displacement of people in Indonesia and logging in high conservation areas there. This Rainforest Action Network campaign

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<sup>42</sup> Although different from the other types of corporate partnerships, Rainforest Alliance has also worked with corporations including Kraft foods and McDonalds in their promotion of sustainably harvested coffee and other foods.

highlighting Disney's conservation harms, took place at the same time that Conservation International was partnered with Disney because of their touted environmental sustainability. This disparity highlights the different aims and views conservation organizations can have about corporate partnerships, while also showcasing the difficult terrain that partnering with corporations can entail.

### **Economic Tools**

Another route to gain leverage for conservation gains has come through new tactics that involve the power of the global marketplace and economy. "A green economy is a pivotal part of the answer now" (Interview 17.3). Although few of the natural resources found throughout a typical American's life are procured inside the United States, it is now possible to trace where the banana or coffee or timber comes from. The logic behind greening the commodity chain at the source is that it will not only be easier for consumers to make greener decisions, it will also improve the environment on the ground where the natural resources are grown. "You must transform the marketplace because it impacts the land...most tropical diversity is lost because of [profitable but unsustainable] land conversion" (Interview 21.2). The most common way to green the commodity chain is through sustainable certification schemes.

Rainforest Alliance has been involved in almost all of the certification schemes in existence today including for timber, bananas, coffee, tea, and coca (Interview 21.1). Rainforest Alliance even has their own line of product certifications including one for coffee. Certification involves allowing those farms or logging operations that follow strict sustainability guidelines to bear a symbol or label on their product. This label then

tells the consumer that they are purchasing a product that has been harvested in a sustainable way.

The Forest Stewardship Council's certification of timber, for example "ensures that the forest products... are from responsibly harvested and verified sources" such as where clear-cutting and other harmful practices do not occur (Forest Stewardship Council website). Often times such sustainability measures are more expensive than the environmentally harmful alternative, but certification allows for a price premium to be gained in the market because many consumers are willing to pay a bit more to help the environment.<sup>43</sup> By using commodity chains and consumer behavior and global pricing, these new tactics have provided incentives to make natural resources procurement greener (Interviews 21.1, 21.2, 17.2 and 17.3). Inside many of the newer conservation organizations, it is believed that such conservation gains could not be achieved through education or advocacy along—only the marketplace can provide effective financial incentive for environmental stewardship (Interviews 18.1 and 17.3).

Similar to the greening of the commodity chain, another market based initiative involves attaching a price to a ton of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD) is a scheme approved through the United Nations that would essentially pay developing countries to keep their forests standing. Deforestation releases greenhouse gases, so reducing deforestation reduces the gases linked to causing climate change. Without allowing the market to put a price on carbon dioxide, there would be little incentive and certainly no financial

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<sup>43</sup> Although a premium is never promised, other benefits to certification are often touted. These benefits include an increase in productivity, quality and a decrease in waste and cost (Interview 21.2).

incentive for the government and the local people in developing countries to keep their forests standing.

Now through carbon trading, that incentive is beginning to exist (Interview 17.2). “The projects...deliver results for climate, community and biodiversity” (Rainforest Alliance 2010 Annual Report). Jack Hurd from The Nature Conservancy even argues that “the concept—quantifying and trading on the value of carbon sequestered in healthy forests—could be the most transformative idea in conservation since the creation of the first national park” (The Nature Conservancy 2010 Annual Report). Almost all of the newer conservation organizations support REDD projects in a number of international locations including The Nature Conservancy’s projects in Indonesia and Bolivia, Conservation International’s projects in Mexico and Rainforest Alliance’s projects in 15 countries including Paraguay and Mozambique (Interviews 17.2 and 21.2; The Nature Conservancy website; Rainforest Alliance website).

### **Movement-wide Tactics**

The Nature Conservancy, WWF-US, Conservation International, Rainforest Alliance and Rainforest Action Network have brought change to the entire American conservation movement through the tactics that they employ to achieve conservation gains. It is important to note that these “new tactics do not replace the old” (The Nature Conservancy 2010 Annual Report). The market based tactics on international land, in association with development agencies and transnational corporations are a large departure from the days of public education, research and advocacy. Nevertheless none of the newer conservation organizations have wholesale abandoned the tried and true tactics of social movements; instead the new tactics are considered additions.

In fact, several of the newer organizations, including WWF-US and the Nature Conservancy are active in local advocacy and political lobbying in the United States alongside the early conservation organizations. The Nature Conservancy for example has expanded beyond its initial private land focus and works on public land and advocates for conservation gains with early conservation organizations in the United States. Almost all of the newer conservation organizations also take part in some form of public education and research. The newer conservation organizations have influenced the conservation movement and realize that they must be “continually lifting [thier] eyes to the next horizon of opportunity and effectiveness” (2010 Nature Conservancy Annual Report) while not forgetting the traditional tactics that are responsible for historic success of the movement (Interviews 19.1 and 19.2).

The entire conservation movement, including the early conservation organizations, is scanning the horizon for the next opportunity while holding on to traditional tactics. The new tactics brought to the conservation movement by the newer organizations even have had an impact on many of the early conservation organizations. Although several of the early conservation organizations were founded over 100 years ago, they “do innovative things now too” (Interview 16.1). In fact, almost all of the early conservation organizations involved in this research have embraced at least one of the new tactics. The National Audubon Society, Defenders of Wildlife and the National Wildlife Federation have all expanded their work outside of the borders of the United States in the last twenty years<sup>44</sup> (Interviews 15.2, 13.3 and 12.1). The Sierra Club is now involved in green certification schemes including a line of green cleaning supplies sold in

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<sup>44</sup> The Sierra Club has also had a limited international expansion with a Canada branch and with limited involvement with international negotiations such as with the UNFCCC and CBD.

stores in the United States (Interview 16.1). The Defenders of Wildlife has also begun to embrace market initiatives aimed at putting a price on ecosystem services (Interview 13.3). Although not the same framework as the newer conservation organizations, all six of the early organizations have entered into the world of corporate partnerships. For example, the Sierra Club partnered with Chlorox for its green cleaning products while the National Parks Conservation Association has accepted donations from Chevron and Nature Valley (Sierra Club website; National Parks Conservation Association website). The Defenders of Wildlife also has an entire “Defenders Marketplace” on their website where corporations have agreed to give a portion of sales to the conservation organization (Defenders of Wildlife website). Ultimately the new opportunities and new strategies brought to the movement by the newer conservation organizations have now permeated the entire movement.

The presence and influence of the five newer conservation organizations has altered the American conservation movement in the last twenty years. A couple of these newer organizations have been around for over fifty years while others are several decades younger, however taken together, they represent an evolution in the types of conservation projects and tactics that the social movement employs to facilitate change. The new conservation movement exists partly because of their new way of seeing conservation and conservation solutions.

## CHAPTER 8

### EXPLAINING CHANGE: BECOMING A NEW CONSERVATION MOVEMENT

The American conservation movement is a social movement that has undergone three significant changes over the last twenty years. Clarifying how and why the conservation movement has changed is complex; no one social movement theory was found to adequately explain the forces behind this transformation. Instead, explaining the emergence of the new conservation movement requires a multifactoral explanation.

This research gathered evidence that the conservation movement responded to new external pressures in the form of threats to land conservation and the global expansion of industrial development. Conservation organizations also responded to changing political opportunities as congressional support for conservation-based land acquisition waned and attacks on environmental laws intensified. In this context, resource mobilization and organizational survival became paramount concerns. Waning political support and the rise of climate change as a primary environmental problem, led funding sources to shift focus. The conservation movement now faces a constricted and more competitive landscape for the money and moral high ground required to sustain their efforts. Consequently, organizational survival for many groups is linked to the center of many activists' concerns as strategies to continually expand land for conservation have ceded to efforts focused on retaining areas already designated for conservation. This chapter will discuss each of these explanatory factors and their relative strength in driving the new conservation movement.

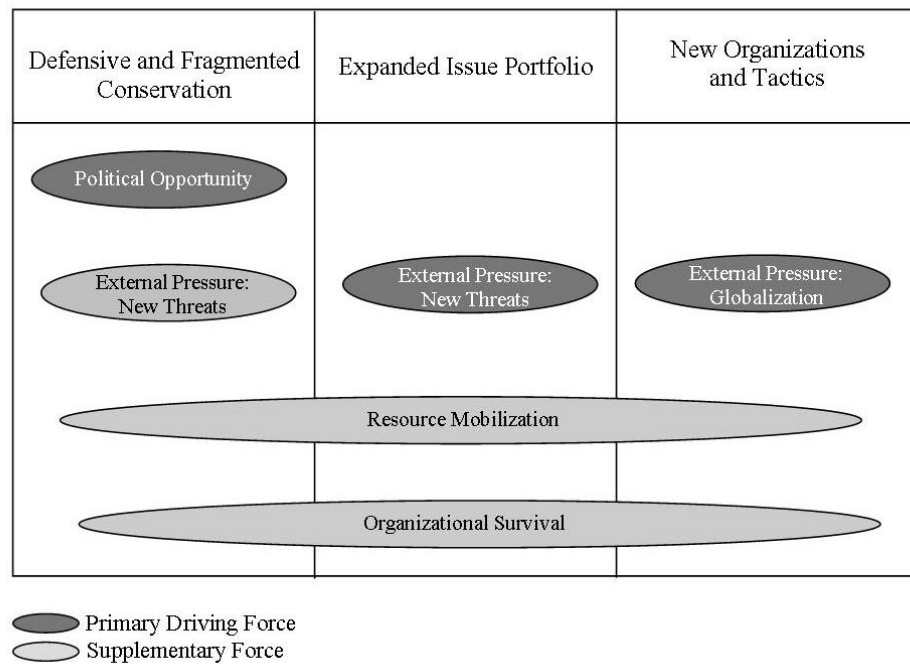
The power of external pressures and the importance of political opportunity proved to be the primary driving forces behind the conservation movement's changes. The mobilization of resources and concern for organizational survival were also found to be influential factors although only supplementary to the primary forces. Social movement scholars have long recognized the ability of all four of these factors to influence the shape of social movements. Scholars have highlighted the importance of external pressures<sup>45</sup>; arguing that factors external to the structure of a social movement can sometimes exert influence strong enough to alter the direction or shape of the movement. The political process perspective believes social movement mobilization and success is determined not by resources or by the level of grievances, but by the level of political opportunity afforded to the movement in society. The resource mobilization perspective believes the largest determining factor to the mobilization and direction of a social movement is the level of resources, both financial and otherwise. And lastly, organizational lifecycle scholars have pointed out the influence of internal factors to a social movement, including how the drive to ensure organizational survival can shape a social movement.

These theories of change are collectively responsible for the emergence of the new American conservation movement. However, each change in the movement was not driven by an equal arrangement of the forces. Figure 1.1 illustrates the unequal role each of the four theories of change played within the three movement changes.

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<sup>45</sup> External pressures in this instance are defined very broadly. Most social movement theories recognize the constraints that the real world puts onto collective action and social movements in particular. The resource mobilization theory, political process theory, new social movement theory and others all include elements where external issues impact a social movement. Whether political or financial or social, the realities of society will forever impact how and why a social movement exists.





**Figure 1.1** Explaining the Changes in the American Conservation Movement

Each change in the American conservation movement was driven by a unique arrangement of the explanatory factors. Though complex and unequal, ultimately this research established that although existing social movement theories can explain elements of these changes, no one theory is responsible for the emergence of the new conservation movement. Instead four different theories of changes were simultaneously present within the conservation movement over the last twenty years, which have together shaped the current form of the movement.

The conservation movement's goal transformation to a more fragmented and defensive form of conservation was primarily a response to alterations in the political opportunity afforded to the movement. Political opportunity, however pivotal to this one movement change, was not at all present in the other two movement changes. Instead it

was external pressures in the form of both new threats and globalization that was primarily responsible for driving the expanded issue portfolio and the new organizations and tactics respectively. New threats, although somewhat less influential, were also an issue in the movement's goal transformation. The two supplementary theories of change, resource mobilization and organizational survival, were present across all three of the movement changes.

### **Primary Driving Forces**

Although each conservationist interviewed for this research had a unique perspective on why the movement has changed; two reasons were most often and freely mentioned across all of the interviews. External pressures, although widely defined, were mentioned frequently; especially with regards to the role of new threats and globalization and in association to two of the movement changes. The role of political opportunity and the impact of political structures were also frequently cited with regard to one of the three movement changes. These two theories of change are pivotal in explaining the conditions that impelled organizations and activists in the American conservation movement to make modifications. Two supplementary theories of changes were also found to be useful, and will be discussed later in this chapter.

### **External Pressure**

**New Threats and Movement Opposition.** Protected natural land has always experienced threats, especially from extractive uses; however in the last twenty years, old threats have evolved and new threats have emerged to uniquely exert pressure on the American conservation movement. This pressure was found to be influential in the movement readjusting strategies, organizational priorities and expertise (Interviews 16.2,

12.1, 12.2, 13.1, and 15.1). Protecting nature is no longer only about touting its spiritual values, beating back logging and grazing, and lobbying for the protection of hidden gems of the natural world. Now, the conservation movement must also be versed in and ready to respond to a long list of threats from movement opponents and allies alike.

The consideration the conservation movement gives to new threats is immense. Evidence of the impact that new threats has had on strategic decisions in the social movement can be found in the rhetoric the largest conservation organizations regularly use. Examining annual reports and organizational newsletters from the largest most prominent conservation organizations easily revealed one frame consistently utilized across all of the organizations and throughout the last twenty years-- the attention these organizations have given to threats. The largest conservation organizations all frame the work they do as a response to the dangers to nature; the movement as a whole has framed its purpose in relation to saving “America’s natural treasures” against “a firestorm” of new threats (The Wilderness Society 2005 Annual Report). The organizations remind members that “time is running out” and that “there’s not a moment to lose” (Defenders of Wildlife 2000 Annual Report). The rhetoric the American conservation movement regularly used over the last twenty years, includes words like: “crisis”, “catastrophe”, and “fight” (National Wildlife Federation 2010 Annual Report) and describes nature as “under siege” and “in harm’s way” (National Wildlife Federation 2000 Annual Report). This extremely common rhetoric also described fights against these new threats as ‘ground zero’ (The Wilderness Society 2005 Annual Report) and even used military combat terms such as “on the front lines” and “effective weapons” (Defenders of Wildlife 2004 Annual Report and National Parks Conservation Association 1991 Annual Report)

to describe the movement's efforts. Overall the framing technique and rhetoric used throughout movement documents are evidence of the influence competing interests and other anti-conservation forces have had on the shape of the American conservation movement.

The fights the written reports describe are to a degree nothing new, however new entities, new technology and new science do represent the reinvention of factors threatening nature. With great destructive power, these forces are menacing existing protected areas and other conservation efforts to protect natural land. "The threats [to nature] are different and more numerous now than twenty years ago" (Interview 10.2). Oil and gas leasing for example is nothing new, however the fervor of current lease applications in naturally sensitive areas is new. As the traditional oil and gas grounds are running dry, the industry has been forced to stake out new deposits and develop new technology to extract oil and gas. Natural gas fracking and deep water oil drilling are two examples of new technology which has expanded not only the areas exposed to this extractive pressure but also its potential impact on nature (Interview 12.1). Mining interests are also not leaving protected natural areas alone; the most recent example of this is the push to gain approval for uranium mining inside the Grand Canyon National Park. Although this specific proposal was blocked by the Obama Administration in early 2012, this trend highlights how even the most iconic protected natural places are not spared from movement opponents challenging borders and the quality of nature within. Oil and gas leasing, mining, logging and ranching are all dangers to natural land that regularly come from opponents of the conservation movement (Hendee & Dawson, 2001).

In addition to addressing new and evolved threats by movement opponents, recently threats from movement allies have also become a factor. The conservation movement has always been sympathetic to outdoor recreationists, for example; the movement is ultimately made up of and supported by complementary industries such as outdoor recreation centered businesses and individuals. However, virtually everyone interviewed for this research noted the destruction new types of motorized recreation cause to the landscape and ecosystem. This has compelled the conservation movement to take a stand against their allies, with campaigns to eliminate or limit the use of snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles. “Although millions of Americans enjoy snowmobiling...more than 76,000 miles of trails are available for the sport, America’s parks could and should be spared” (National Parks Conservation Association Annual Report 2000).

A potentially larger threat coming from movement allies involves renewable energy. The conservation movement is sympathetic to the aims of the larger environmental movement including the need for more renewable energy. However as municipalities establish renewable energy mandates, such as California calling for 30% of energy coming from renewable sources by 2020, many in the conservation movement reported the rush to set up such projects has established a haphazard location process where naturally significant lands and vital wildlife corridors are being impeded with potential solar farms and wind turbines (Interview 10.3 and 15.2). “Renewable energy has the potential to be more of a threat than [anything else] because it is about real changes on the ground” (Interview 15.1). The American conservation movement has had to balance the values of obtaining renewable energy versus the need to protect sensitive

natural land and have ultimately dedicated organizational resources toward this delicate balance (Interviews 10.3, 13.1 and 15.2).

Both movement allies and opponents support interests that conflict with the traditional conservation of nature, however arguably the most destructive, the most difficult to deal with and the most influential external pressure on the conservation movement comes from global climate change. The American conservation movement knew about the greenhouse effect and carbon dioxide induced climate change in the late 1980s. However, it did not enter the everyday milieu of the movement until the early 2000s when impacts of climate change started to become visible inside protected areas. This coincided with scientific predictions of future changes and the awareness of the general public (Interview 16.1). Evidence of increasing global temperatures and shifting climatic regions have made the conservation movement realize that climate change fundamentally alters natural conditions and thus alters how nature needs to be protected (Interviews 11.1, 12.1, 13.1 and 10.1). “Climate change is also changing the science that impacts how decisions are made” (Interview 12.2). And “we realize that climate change has put all of our accomplishments at risk” (Interview 12.1). In this way, climate change has impacted how the entire social movement thinks about conservation.

***New Threats Drive Expanded Issue Portfolio.*** The new threats described above are the biggest driving force for one of the conservation movement’s changes—its expanded issue portfolio. Conservationists interviewed argued that the movement could no longer maintain a strict focus on nature protection schemes with so many issues, both near and far, that were impacting nature. Several new issues were so large that they “dwarf[ed] any of our traditional considerations” (Interview 11.2). As new issues began

threatening conservation efforts, the conservation movement took them on. Over time, with one more issue being added at a time, the portfolio of issues steadily grew to become strikingly larger than just twenty years ago.

Compiling data from all of the interviews conducted for this research produced a long list of threats which are dragging new issues into the American conservation movement; this list includes climate change, energy development, renewable energy, recreational usage, motorized recreation, and invasive species, among many others. The issue most indicative of the expansion of the conservation movement however is renewable energy. The issue was, until recently, entirely outside of the realm of the conservation movement. This was true until these projects began being placed on vast amounts of ecologically significant land threatening both scientific and social values of natural land (Interviews 15.1, 10.3, 13.1, 12.2 and 15.2). Renewable energy projects can often take up thousands of acres, profoundly changing the landscape, habitat connectivity, and social values associated with the land. Brian Turner from the National Trust for Historic Preservation argues that “we’re seeing landscape-level changes in a way that this country has not seen since the development of the interstate highway system” (Harrison, 2011 p. 37). Today, the conservation movement has had to not only become versed in renewable energy leasing and in assessing the ecological values of millions of acres of federal land, but it has also had to become versed in the emerging technology, economic benefit and business transaction side of renewable energy projects. This example of the expansion of issues addressed by the American conservation movement could be repeated for a number of new external threats. The conservation movement of the twenty-first century is much larger in issues, expertise, and capabilities.

The issue that has arguably influenced the American conservation movement's scope the most is climate change. Twenty years ago climate change was barely within the consciousness of the larger environmental movement and almost entirely removed from the concerns of the conservation movement. One conservationist admitted that fifteen years ago, the movement was deeply involved in traditional conservation issues including "habitat protection and land conservation...[with a policy focus on] the Land and Water Conservation Fund" (Interview 12.1). Another conservationist also admitted that today "the strategic priority of the conservation movement is no longer about public lands, it is all climate change" (Interview 15.2). This strategic focus can be seen in the pages of the annual reports released by the largest most prominent conservation organizations. In their 2010 annual report, the National Wildlife Federation framed their traditional wildlife protection work under the guise of climate change with the title "Safeguarding Wildlife...in a Warming World" (National Wildlife Federation 2010 Annual Report). Likewise, the first highlighted stories in The Wilderness Society 2009 annual report were about climate change and energy. Coverage of the Wilderness Society's traditional land protection issues did not begin until page 9. Climate change has altered the way the American conservation movement thinks about conservation and has expanded the scope of the conservation movement (Interviews 13.1, 11.3 and 16.1).

The conservation movement has had to not only learn about the science of climate change, its causes and its impacts, but the movement has also expanded its knowledge of wildlife habitats, land management options, invasive species impact and eradication, and mitigation and adaptation options inside and outside of protected areas. The conservation movement has become involved with climate change legislation and international



negotiations despite the political rhetoric which largely lacks an explicit and recognized connection to conservation. The complexity of climate change science, the link to fossil fuels and energy generation and the countless impacts on humanity are all, at first glance, well beyond the purview of the conservation movement. Nevertheless they are all now firmly within the scope of the conservation movement because “climate change is the single greatest issue facing wildlands today” (Interview 16.2). The impacts and response to climate change have the potential to profoundly impact the legacy and future of nature conservation

*New Threats Contribute to Goal Transformation.* In the last twenty years, the American conservation movement has had to deal with a constantly evolving portfolio of external pressures steaming from the latest technology, social trends and natural phenomena which have demanded innovative responses. The goal transformation away from advocating for new federally protected areas and toward more defensive strategies can be partially explained by these external pressures, however the primary driving force behind the movement’s goal transformation can be found in a second theory of change to discussed later in this chapter.

The same threats and opposition that drove the conservation movement to expand its issue portfolio, also simultaneously played a supporting role<sup>46</sup> in driving a second movement change--the conservation movement’s goal transformation. Although threats against nature are nothing new, the arrangement of current dangers has produced a conservation movement that is more focused on defending nature and safeguarding existing protected areas than ever before. Also, many of the current threats do not stop at

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<sup>46</sup> The largest reason the movement underwent a goal transformation rests with a modification in political opportunity afforded to the movement, which will be discussed later. In addition to political opportunity however, external pressure in the form of new threats also contributed to this movement change.

a protected area's border and thus have caused the conservation movement to fundamentally question their once cornerstone conservation tactic.

“Today the cumulative effect of old threats and new threats is dramatic” (Interview 13.3). Together these dangers from movement opponents and allies alike form a long list of issues and interests that continuously pose a risk to conservation efforts that requires a concerted and consistent response. Conservationists throughout the movement admitted that the largest conservation organizations regularly spend their time safeguarding existing protected areas against new incursions often at the detriment of advocating for new federally protected areas (Interviews 10.1, 12.1, 12.2 and 13.3). “When urgent threats to natural areas arise, the movement must often jump into triage mode” in order to ward off the threat and protect the area (Interview 10.1). This defense has become so urgent and continuous in the last twenty years that the earlier priorities of the movement, including establishing new federal protections for nature, have faded as the movement responded.

External threats are doing more to the conservation movement than sparking defensive campaigns, the new threats are also fundamentally altering how the movement looks at its original goal of federally protecting as much land as possible. External threats are nothing new to the conservation movement (Hendee & Dawson, 2001; Cole & Landres, 1996; Nickas, 1999; Hubbard et al., 1999; Kelson & Lilieholm, 1999). Extractive industries and recreational usage have always placed pressure on nature. However, the current cadre of threats is different from historic and earlier threats (Interviews 16.2, 12.1, 12.2, 13.1 and 15.1). The way any movement organization responds to the new threats is also entirely different. When logging was the most

dominant threat, advocating for a new federally protected area was a perfect solution because national parks and wilderness area include strict rules on logging. Conversely, the dangers facing nature today cannot be easily solved with new protected areas (Interviews 12.2, 16.2 and 13.2). Motorized recreation inside protected areas and renewable energy projects both inside protected areas and adjacent to them are examples of danger to existing protected areas which have made protecting their natural quality extremely difficult despite their protected status. Although not allowed inside some protected areas such as wilderness areas, recently renewable energy projects have been approved inside state parks, wildlife conservation areas and other designated critical habitat. Fifteen wind turbines were even approved for inside the Green Mountain National Forest in Vermont, visible from the nearby “peace and solitude” of George D. Aiken Wilderness Area; highlighting the vulnerability of even federally protected land to this incursion (Streater, 2012). Ultimately, the current cadre of threats is unpredictable and requires different solutions, which has contributed to the goal transformation inside the conservation movement.

Perhaps, the biggest shift away from protected areas comes from the emerging threat of climate change. “Climate change is the single greatest issue facing wildlands today” (Interview 16.2). It “presents a greater challenge for stewardship (Interview 11.3), while “questioning the fundamental reason for protected areas” (Interview 16.2). Federally protected areas, with even the strictest of regulations, are no less vulnerable to climate change than other non-protected lands. Climate change alters the habitat and living conditions of an area regardless of whether it is inside a park boundary or not. This dynamic of climate change has altered the way the conservation movement thinks about

area boundaries and the connectivity of habitat (Interviews 11.1, 12.1, 13.1 and 10.1). Joshua Tree National Park is a perfect example of the impact of climate change inside a protected area. Climactic changes have already started to move the habitat of these endemic trees to higher altitudes, however much of this new range is not included in the park boundaries. Climate change does not recognize political boundaries, so as the climate changes and species react, the politically drawn boundaries aimed at conservation have already shown that they are unlikely to remain effective conservation tools (Interview 11.3). One leader in the conservation movement contended that protecting land in this era of global climate change should really be about “creating climate refugia” (Interview 16.1). A vast majority of people inside the conservation movement interviewed for this research noted that fighting climate change has engulfed a lot of organizational resources while figuring out how to help already existing protected areas cope with climate change has fundamentally impacted the outlook of the conservation movement. “Doing what is right for nature is more complex than ever...protecting anything [like we used to] is not good enough anymore (Interview 16.1).

A shift in the values attached to nature conservation has further placed the movement’s original goal of securing federal protection for nature under question. Ecological values and biodiversity protection have come to be touted alongside, and often times above, any social, recreational or religious reason for nature conservation that has been historically valued. This shift in values has further complicated the conservation movement’s use of its cornerstone conservation tool—creating protected areas. Historically, social values were the original drivers of wilderness protection; in fact many inside the movement refer to early wilderness as ‘rock and ice’ because protecting land

was about beautiful natural landscapes and not about robust ecosystems or biodiversity (Nash, 2001; Interview 22.6). However, the values of wilderness protection have advanced. “With our focus on conservation biology, it is no longer justified to only care about what is inside protected areas...we must manage unpreserved areas too” (Interview 13.1).

“It used to just be about pretty landscapes, but now we understand ecology” (Interview 11.3). Protecting natural areas has become about ecological representation and biodiversity protection. This value shift has meant that areas with high ecological value, but perhaps low social value, were still worthy of protection. Grasslands, swamps and deserts were traditionally not seen as beautiful natural areas, however they hold scientific value and thus became targets for protection by the conservation movement. However, as climate change has become evident and as the science has grown stronger, the conservation movement has begun to realize that if protecting biodiversity and ecological values are the goal, then establishing protected areas is no longer the best route (Interviews 12.2, 16.2, and 13.2).

If spectacular landscape and recreation were still the priority values then protected areas may still be the best route. However climate change does not stop at the boundary of a national park, so the best way to protect biodiversity and the ecosystem is no longer by setting up static boundaries. The American conservation movement has, in response, dropped their original goal and instead is fashioning new ways of protecting nature. This realization has driven alternative forms of protection such as cooperative agreements on multiuse areas, conservation easements on private land and a general

understanding that nature cannot be protected by solely establishing protected areas on federal land.

**Globalization Drives New Organizations and Tactics.** External pressures, this time in relation to political, economic and social globalization, also were the primary driver of the third change in the conservation movement—the creation of new organizations and the adoption of new tactics. A new global reality has exerted pressure on the American conservation movement and ultimately sparked a dramatic change. Social movement scholars are aware of and have documented the impact that globalization—as both an economic and social phenomenon—can have on the course of various social movements. In the last fifteen years, social movement scholars have particularly focused on the rise of transnational social movement organizations and how and why they have emerged (Smith et al., 1997; Khagram et al., 2002; Della Porta and Tarrow, 2005; and Cohen and Rai, 2000). Empirical studies have shown that transnational social movement organizations (TSMOs) are often deliberately created with a global focus and are not just evolutions of existing nationally-based efforts (Smith et al., 1994). Four of the five of the newer conservation organizations involved in this research, including WWF-US, Conservation International, Rainforest Alliance and Rainforest Action Network, fit with this empirical research—all were founded with a specific international focus<sup>47</sup>. In fact, the founders of most of these organizations specifically stated that, the focus of the conservation movement solely on nature inside the United States, represented need for broader considerations—which sparked the

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<sup>47</sup> It is important to note that the less likely route has also occurred in the conservation movement as national organizations have added international arms at a later date. The Nature Conservancy is considered a newer conservation organization and developed an international program only after its national focus. Some of the early conservation groups have also recently added limited international efforts. This dynamic was discussed earlier in Chapter 7.

founding of their organizations (Interviews 17.3, 20.2, and 21.1). “There was no effective leader doing international work for endangered species and ecosystems at the time” (Interview 17.1).

It has been established that although TSMOs may be deliberately created with a global focus, the social movement as a whole usually originates within a national context and then gradually develops into a transnational entity (Westby, 2002). In the case of the American conservation movement, such a transition has been observed. The American conservation movement has existed in one form or another since the late nineteenth century, it was not until WWF-US was created in 1961 and the founding of Conservation International, Rainforest Alliance and Rainforest Action Network in 1987, 1986 and 1985 respectively, that the movement began to transition into a transnational entity. Numerous interviews conducted for this research established that the founding of these organizations and the transition of the social movement occurred because globalization both raised the awareness of global conservation problems and also enabled the movement to access previously extremely remote places (Interviews 21.1, 18.2 and 17.2). “There was an overwhelming perceptions that the world was getting smaller” (Interview 21.1). “Globalization brought the reality that borders did not matter anymore and that we are all interconnected” (Interview 12.1). The American public began to become aware of global environmental problems including the alarming rate of deforestation and the disappearance of the Amazon rainforest as well as the shrinking numbers of charismatic mega fauna including the Giant Panda Bear and the African Elephant. These problems had previously been hidden by distance and had been out of the reach of any American who wanted to help.

With globalization came the awareness and the opportunity to help. McCarthy (1997) argues that the proliferation of transnational institutions helped facilitate this awareness and these opportunities. In particular, it has been argued that the United Nations environmental conferences, beginning with the 1972 Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm and the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, not only raised awareness of global environmental problems but also facilitated the involvement of civil society in crafting solutions (Khagram, 20020). Although perhaps outside of the reflection of many of the younger people inside the conservation movement today, several people interviewed for this research linked their organization's founding to the United Nation Stockholm conference, arguing that the gathering not only made the world feel smaller but it also served as a call to action (Interviews 21.1, 17.1 and 20.2). "Wilderness was under assault, and now we realized it, and we knew that resource management could be [better]" (Interview 21.1). It was also transnational institutions that helped further the idea of sustainable development; one of the organizations involved in this research specifically mentioned that the founding of their organization coincided with the need to translate this idea into real action. "The idea of sustainable development pre-dated us but only in the policy and conceptual realm. We came in because of the need to translate sustainable development into real effective and actionable projects on the ground" (Interview 17.2).

The new globalized and interconnected world and economy not only fueled the creation of new organizations inside the conservation movement, but it also helps to explain why these organizations adopted new and innovative tactics. Globalization fueled global environmental destruction while also creating economic opportunities for



conservation gains. In a globalized world, free trade is arguably the largest characteristic. Free trade has allowed the consumption demands of wealthy nations to be met with natural resources procured from much poorer countries. For example, the deforestation of Indonesia's forests is now partially driven by American demand for timber, palm oil and other goods. Rooted in the same principles of free trade and globalization, market based tactics provided leverage to achieve conservation gains (Interview 21.1). The newer conservation organizations were founded at a time when the new globalized economy allowed for commodity chains to be traced, allowed pricing incentives for the sustainable harvesting of those commodities to be created, while transnational corporations and other market based projects also emerged as powerful social forces. This allowed the newer conservation organizations to embrace these new ideas and formulate new tactics. "We realized that we must transform the global marketplace because it is what impacts the land" (Interview 21.2). "The existence of an environmental marketplace...where good actors could get recognition...was beginning" (Interview 21.1). Globalization and market programs have grown and have continued to be powerful shapers of organization tactics. Jack Hurd from the Nature Conservancy argues that "the concept—quantifying and trading on the value of carbon sequestered in healthy forests—could be the most transformative idea in conservation since the creation of the first national park" (2010 Nature Conservancy Annual Report, p. 33). This idea based on the United Nations climate change scheme to reduce emissions from deforestation and degradation (REDD), has recently become a tactic that all of the newer conservation organizations have embraced.

Social movement scholars have firmly established the impact that external pressures including globalization can have on social movements. The American conservation movement is one example of a movement transitioning into a transnational social movement. Sikkink and Smith (2002) note that almost 20% of all transnational social movement organizations are now a part of the environmental movement. The ever expanding toolkit of tactics for the conservation movement, crafted in accordance with new global economic possibilities, is additional evidence that external pressures were extremely powerful driving forces behind the creation of the new organizations and new tactics in the conservation movement.

### **Political Opportunity**

A harsh political climate and a decline in political opportunity was noted by virtually everyone interviewed for this research as a highly influential driving force behind one of the conservation movement's changes, the goal transformation—which involved abandoning the push for more protected areas and embracing a more defensive and fragmented form of conservation. Although all four theories of change were found to be involved in this one movement change, the role of political opportunity was decidedly the largest. The political process perspective however was not found to be a useful theory of change in explaining the forces behind the other two movement changes discussed in this dissertation.

The political process perspective, as utilized by social movement scholars, helps to explain how alterations in the political environment and in political opportunity in particular can substantially impact the course of a social movement. For the conservation movement, modifications in political access, the existence of allies, and shifting political

alignments were found to have influenced the overall political opportunity afforded to the movement and thus ultimately encouraged the movement's goal transformation. Many inside the conservation movement recognize that today "there is definitely a push against land acquisition and protection on Capitol Hill" (Interview 15.1). Put another way "the movement does not have enough power to push thru [land conservation] bills anymore" (Interview 12.1). This difficult political climate and the subsequent movement limitations, is the largest reason the conservation movement transformed its original federal land protection goal. The movement no longer focuses on securing federal protections for land in the form of national parks or wildlife refuges, instead the movement has embraced a much more defensive and fragmented form of conservation.

Social movement scholars have come to widely accept the impact that the availability of political opportunity can have on a social movement (McAdam, 1982; Kriesi, 1996; Tilly, 1978; Tarrow, 1994; McAdam, McCarthy & Zald, 1996). The political process perspective, in social movement theory, aims to explain how "groups with mild grievances and few internal resources may appear in movement, while those with deep grievances and dense resources but lacking opportunity—may not" (Tarrow, 1994, p. 18). The political process perspective argues that it is not the level of grievances or the amount of resources available to a group of people, but rather the level of political opportunity afforded to the group that determines and shapes the social movement. The political process perspective also recognizes that a decline in political opportunity could prompt any movement to adjust strategies, goals, and focus in order to remain mobilized or otherwise risk difficulty and failure. Many inside the conservation movement note that the American conservation movement's decision to back away from the politically

entrenched process of federally protecting conservation areas, like national parks and wilderness areas, came as a direct result of a harsh political climate and a marked decline in political opportunity.

Political opportunities have been defined by several social movement theorists as “consistent—but not necessarily formal or permanent—dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for collective action by affecting people’s expectations for success or failure” (Tarrow, 1998 p. 76-77; Gamson and Meyer, 1996). Goodwin and Jasper (1999) and Tarrow (1998) have categorized political opportunities into several forms including: access, alignments, power elites, allies and repression. The American conservation movement’s decline in political opportunity is seen particularly with regards to political access, allies and alignments.

**Change in the Political Environment.** The American political system is highly responsive to public opinion; changes in personnel and the dominate ideology can occur as often as with every election cycle. Friends and foes can be both long lasting and quick to depart. Dowie (1995) and Bosso (2005) have both highlighted the ebbs and flows of the larger environmental movement which can be driven by the issue attention cycle as described by Downs (1972). Nikas (1999) specifically noted changing sentiments toward wilderness and conservation issues in Congress, while members inside the conservation movement have observed such changing sentiment first hand. “The political dynamic has changed” (Interview 11.2). “There is an ebb and flow to these things but [we] are in the middle of the most difficult politics in my thirty years of experience” (Interview 16.2). Overall, it has been noted by many people interviewed for this research that the political climate in Washington toward the conservation movement has been fairly cold since the

early 1990s, if not earlier. Although President Clinton was a friend to environmentalists, his administration was not largely invested until late in his second term when several executive orders established positive (although somewhat fleeting) results for the movement (Interview 11.2). The 103<sup>rd</sup> through the 106<sup>th</sup> Congresses however were not at all warm to conservation interests. The Bush administration and the 107<sup>th</sup> through the 110<sup>th</sup> Congresses were believed by people inside the conservation movement to be the most anti-conservation in recent history. Even with the ushering in of the Obama Administration in 2009, the political opportunity afforded to conservation interests, although somewhat better, has not improved dramatically (Interviews 12.1 and 16.2).

**Political Access.** Foes of conservation in Congress have frequently reduced the political access given to the conservation movement by chairing and thus controlling important committees in Congress and refusing to allow pro-conservation bills to get out of committee (Interview 22.6). The House Committee on Natural Resources and the Senate Energy and Natural Resource Committee are two examples where land protection bills have gone to die. “All it takes is one senator who threatens to filibuster and the bill is dead” (Interview 22.6). This denial of access has been extremely influential in shaping the level of political opportunity for the conservation movement (Interviews 22.6 and 16.2). The inability to get bills, that establish new federally protected areas, out of committee, let alone get them passed by both houses of Congress, has contributed to the conservation movement’s goal transformation. “Right now with the Congress we have today, we cannot easily use legislation to create new parks” (Interview 11.1). Over the last twenty years, when faced with political gridlock, the larger American environmental movement has backed away from positions and has shifted venues to take their issues

directly to the other branches of government including the administrative agencies and the courts. The conservation movement has similarly moved ‘beyond the gridlock’ and has embraced alternative venues and ultimately entirely new and defensive and fragmented goals (Klyza and Sousa, 2008).

**Political Allies and Alignments.** Similarly, the existence of allies has been unstable at best; even political allies of conservation that have been reliable over the last 20 years have reacted to waves of interest and slumps in public opinion (Interviews 11.3, 16.1 and 12.1). As budget issues and other social issues capture the attention of Americans, nature conservation interests are frequently cast aside. The moderate Republicans and moderate Democrats that used to make up the political middle have also largely disappeared (Interviews 11.3 and 16.1). Without moderates, most policymakers hold entrenched and polarized ideologies; this has made any progress on conservation issues extremely difficult to come by. “You are not going to convert any politician who does not already support wilderness” (Interview 10.1). These shifting alignments and the reductions in allies have ultimately fueled anti-environmental policymakers’ ability to not only block conservation legislation, but also forge all out assaults on environmental laws and land protections. Threats to reverse the Endangered Species Act and dismantle the National Environmental Protection Act and to open up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge are distinct examples of how a change in the political climate has directly driven the conservation movement to transform its goal away from new federally protected areas and instead take up a defensive post against incoming threats to existing environmental laws and existing protected areas.

**New Political Reality.** Decreased access, shifting alignments and a decline in allies are all responsible for reducing the overall political opportunity afforded to the American conservation movement. The political process perspective holds that a significant decrease in political opportunity can dramatically alter the environment that a social movement exists in and thus cause changes in the movement. For the American conservation movement, the reduced political opportunity has meant an entirely new reality with distinct changes. Not only is conservation legislation much harder to get passed and existing conservation laws and protections under assault, but funding for federal land management is also being impacted.

The political reality for the conservation movement is that they are not achieving new federal protections for land, and the resources for managing existing protected areas are now constantly in jeopardy. Budgets for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the Environmental Protection Agency and of the four land management agencies—the Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Park Service and Bureau of Land Management have declined over the last twenty years<sup>48</sup> (Interviews 10.3 and 15.2). Because political forces impact the budgets of these vital conservation services and agencies, many of the people interviewed for this research noted that the national conservation organizations have stepped in to ensure the protection of existing conservation areas. Government failures are widely recognized as precipitating events for nonprofit organizations to step in and fill the hole (Young, 1999). In this case, the government's failure to adequately fund land management agencies sparked the national conservation organizations to lobby for

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<sup>48</sup> Most recently, the debt-ceiling debate in the summer of 2011 threatened the funding for several key conservation programs. Although untouched by early budget cut agreements, it is widely believed inside the conservation movement that ongoing concerns over the government's deficit could incite drastic cuts to the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and cuts to budgets of environmental agencies

increased budgets and take up the job of overseeing the land management agencies to ensure existing protected areas are being adequately protected even in the face of diminishing management resources. This oversight and stewardship has become a vital role for the conservation organizations to fill because much of the budget cuts have been manifested in reductions to support personnel (Interviews 10.3 and 13.3). Currently there are hundreds of vacancies across this nation's protected areas, many of which will remain vacant; in fact, "about half of all wildlife refuges do not have a single biologist on staff" (Interview 13.3). This government failure has fueled the common argument used by political opponents of conservation -- that this nation cannot afford new protected areas when it cannot take care of the ones we already have. Although this argument is not new, recent budget cuts have again fueled this line of reasoning. The decreased political opportunity for the American conservation movement has created a new reality where transforming their goal away from securing new federally protected areas and toward a more defensive and fragmented form of conservation was necessary. Ultimately those inside the conservation movement have provided evidence that the political process perspective's belief about the influence of political opportunity on a social movement is particularly evident in the conservation movement (Interviews 22.6, 11.3, 15.1, 16.2, and 10.3).

Taken together, the difficulty in getting conservation bills passed, the attacks on existing environmental laws and the government failure to properly fund the management of its lands are all associated with alterations in the political opportunity afforded to the conservation movement. In an era of unpredictable political opportunity, social movement theorists believe that organizations' abilities to alter their organizational



structure in order to meet new demands are key to survival (Staggenborg, 2011).

“Political changes can change our priorities because some things just may not be realistic anymore” (Interview 12.1). All of the national conservation organizations involved in this research point their fingers at political difficulty as a primary reason why the conservation movement has had to alter its goal and why specifically more federal land protections are not sought. The cyclical nature, or the up and down, of political opportunity was acknowledged by the conservation movement. However, despite short-term oscillations, it appears that the last twenty years have been difficult politically and have taken a toll on the social movement.

The political process perspective is central to understanding the goal transformation in the conservation movement; however this theory of change is not useful in explaining the other two changes the movement has experienced. The isolated usefulness of this theory of change is connected to the political requirements associated with establishing new federally protected areas. The other social movement changes are not related to the political arena and instead are better explained by external pressures, as previously discussed. Resource mobilization efforts and organizational survival concerns, although not influential enough to drive any of the movement changes independently, were discovered to be involved in all three of the movement changes.

### **Supplementary Driving Forces**

External pressures and shifts in political opportunity proved to be the largest forces behind the changes in the American conservation movement, however such forces do not provide a comprehensive look at all of the reasons this social movement was driven to change. Somewhat in response to external pressures and the decline in political

opportunity, changes in resources mobilization and considerations of organizational lifecycle became influential considerations inside the movement. These two issues make up the supplementary driving forces which, while not mentioned as freely or as often as the primary driving forces, were identified throughout the interviews conducted for this research, to be somewhat important considerations, especially for the decision makers in the largest of the national conservation organizations. Resource mobilization and the particulars of fundraising and public support were found to be influential in shaping the conservation movement, having played a role in all three of the movement changes. Also found throughout all three of the movement changes was the impact of organizational lifecycle and specifically how age, leadership transitions and organizational maintenance prompted concerns of organizational relevance and survival in a rapidly changing political and natural world.

### **Resource Mobilization**

Although not always apparent to political operatives and programs managers on the ground in the conservation movement, decision makers in the movement easily confirmed that shifts to the sources of funding and evolution in public opinion toward conservation have been influential in shaping decisions in the conservation movement. Modifications in resources—both material and moral—paired with the resource mobilization theory of change provide a glimpse into the how and why the conservation movement has adapted to resource conditions. Interviews with people inside the conservation movement provided evidence that all three of the movement changes are connected to efforts made to secure movement resources.

The resource mobilization perspective believes that the only thing that separates a social movement in motion from just a group of likeminded individuals who share a legitimate social grievance is the actual ability to mobilize into a social movement—and that ability is largely governed by the availability of resources (Oberschall, 1973; Tilly, 1978; McCarthy & Zald, 1973; Gamson, 1975 and Jenkins, 1981). Although resource mobilization theorists never set out a clear definition of ‘resources’ it has been established that a range of resources can include material or financial but also moral, cultural, socio-organizational and human resources (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004). Resources are vital for the initial mobilization of a social movement mobilization, as well as imperative throughout the lifespan of any movement. Shifts in an established social movement’s traditional resource base and how resources are obtained has the potential to dramatically impact the course of any social movement.

The funding sources for the conservation movement have shifted over the last twenty years, while public support for the movement has also fluctuated. Given the importance of resources, the conservation movement has had to meet the new requirements for securing the resources to remain mobilized; this has translated into changed goals, adjusted issue portfolio and a new organizational make up and tactical toolbox. All three of these conservation movement changes can be connected to an effort to secure both material and moral resources.

**Material Resources: Funding Conservation.** Where and how money, the most obvious of material resources, is obtained for the conservation movement, has evolved over the last twenty years. The largest prominent national conservation organizations, which make up the center of the conservation movement, have historically reported in

their financial disclosure documents that they received most of their material or financial resources from a lot of small individual contributions, including membership dues (Interview 22.6). In the last twenty years however, this has been changing. By 2010, the annual reports for the largest national conservation organizations included financial disclosures which revealed that they rely more on the support of large contributions from foundations and other contributors than ever before. Perhaps the most dramatic change was shown by one organization which in 1991 received 48.8% of its operating fund from membership dues and 31% of its budget from contributions including foundation grants. By 2010 those same numbers were 2% and 79% respectively (National Parks Conservation Association 1991 and 2010 Annual Reports). This increased reliance on foundation grants and other large contributors means that these organizations must react to the types of programs that these funders support and obey the strings attached to these grants (Interviews 11.1, 11.2, 12.1, 13.3 and 22.6). The vast majority of foundations and large contributors are interested in funding the most talked about, the most interesting and timely issues of the day. Only a very few foundations have remained loyal to funding the traditional programs of the conservation movement (Interviews 11.2, 16.1, 16.2, and 13.3). “We are now accountable to funders and with restricted funds, our flexibility has decreased” (Interview 16.2).

Conservationists admitted that “the reality is, [the movement] depends on foundations... and funders’ interest has been wrapped so strongly around climate change lately” (Interview 11.2). Although naturally, few people inside the conservation movement interviewed for this research would admit that their organization was directly pulled by these funding dynamics, there were plenty of people willing to tell stories about

other organizations that transformed their goals or interests or tactics in order to secure funding. Ultimately, despite the general sentiment within the movement not to ‘chase money’ at the cost of your mission, the growing reliance on foundation and large contributor resources has translated into movement organizations positioning themselves to ensure the greatest number of current and future dollars (Interviews 11.1, 11.2, 12.1, 13.3, and 22.6).

The lack of large pools of money available to fund the original goal of the conservation movement, to federally protect as much nature as possible, was cited by many people inside the movement as a distinct driving force behind the movement’s goal change (Interviews 16.2, 16.1, 13.3 and 22.6). “With less and less money, our capacity to [protect more wilderness] is disappearing” (Interview 16.2). Although perhaps not an adequate driving force alone to cause the movement to abandon a core goal and pursue a more defensive and fragmented form of conservation, the lack of financial support together with the other primary driving forces, sparked the movement’s goal change. Logically, foundations and large contributors interested in funding the next big thing and the timeliest issues can often be convinced to also fund defensive fights against immanent threats because of the associated timely drama. “[Funders] take a look at opportunities and threats and jump on the new hot thing” (Interview 13.3). Some large contributors are also becoming interested in community based problem solving which has made funding available for many of the fragmented forms of conservation (Interview 12.2).

As large contributors and foundations search for the next big idea and next big accomplishment and aim to stay on the cutting edge of conservation, a lot of money is now available to address the hottest issues today—which includes climate change and

renewable energy. This availability of money is partially responsible for the expansion in the number of issues that the conservation movement now addresses which of course now includes climate change and renewable energy (Interviews 11.2, 16.1, 16.2 and 13.3). “We do change according to funders...just four years ago we did not work on renewable energy but now we do” (Interview 13.3). Large contributors and foundations are usually very flexible and responsive to political and social pressures, so as a new issue emerges, funders often quickly follow. This dynamic provides evidence that the issue portfolio of the conservation movement will not remain static but rather will constantly fluctuate. In the last twenty years, this has translated into a rapidly expanded portfolio of issues.<sup>49</sup> If John Muir were alive, he would have a hard time finding funding for his traditional repertoire of issues. In today’s world the conservation movement has been pushed to embrace a wider mandate in order to secure the resources needed to maintain the movement.

The preferences of large financial contributors and the availability of funding from entirely new sources also helped facilitated the creation of entirely new conservation organizations and the process of creating and leveraging new tactics. For example, as the plight of nature and mega fauna overseas became apparent to Americans, a lot of foundation money dedicated to conservation efforts was quickly directed to addressing global needs. While very few of the early conservation organizations were equipped to take on international conservation projects, entirely new organizations were born. At least two of the newer conservation organizations were created after small

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<sup>49</sup> An example of portfolio expansion fostered by foundation resources comes from the National Audubon Society, which began work on the threat coming from global population growth in the early 2000s. This issue is typically far removed from the conservation movement, however a partnership with a foundation sparked this prominent national conservation organization to expand their portfolio and embrace this issue

groups of Americans recognized the need and were able to capitalize on the availability of funding (Interviews 20.1 and 21.1). The few early conservation organizations that have since expanded their work overseas, directly link this expansion to the pull of material resources. “Foundations have been key for this organization for the last twenty years or so and their strings can definitely direct programs, look at our international work for example...” (Interview 12.1).

The creation of new conservation organizations and new conservation tactics was also linked to the emergence of entirely new funders. For example, international development agencies including the World Bank, the United Nations and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) started to fund conservation and development programs in developing countries. This funding source not only further encouraged the international focus of the newer conservation organizations, but it also facilitated the new tactical focus on sustainable development and the coupling of development interests with conservation interests (Interview 18.2).

Similarly, a new funding source emerged in the form of large donations from corporations; this money has also shaped the conservation movement, especially driving the new tactic of working with businesses. Corporations control very powerful purse strings and thus have become attractive to conservation organizations; several of the newer conservation organizations have formalized a range of partnerships with both the greenest and the dirtiest of corporations (Interviews 19.1 and 18.2). Lastly, many of the newer conservation organizations recognized that market certification and other new tactics linked to the global economy could also provide flows of revenue from earned income. Rainforest Alliance, for example, secures roughly a third of its operating budget

from revenue obtained through their work certifying forestry and agricultural operations around the world (Interview 21.1; Rainforest Alliance Annual Report 2010).

The conservation movement, like every other social movement, is dependent on sources of material resources. In order to secure the resources needed to remain mobilized, the American conservation movement has had to adapt to the preferences of funders and take advantage of new funding options; this need for resources, however, has contributed to distinct changes in the movement.

**Moral Resources: Public Support for Conservation.** The resource mobilization perspective contends that money is not the only resource that a social movement needs in order to stay mobilized. Moral resources, especially in the form of public support, are also vital to keeping a social movement alive. A social movement is only as strong as the support it gets from both movement beneficiaries and movement adherents. Without public and member support, any social movement will lack legitimacy. A shift in the availability of moral resources for the American conservation movement, including sympathy and public support, was cited during this research as a contributing factor to all three of the changes in the movement. Those inside the conservation movement report that Americans have become less supportive of traditional conservation efforts while peaks of interest have occurred around new conservation issues and venues. The goal transformation, expanded issue portfolio, and new organizations and tactics then can, at least partially, be seen as the result of conservation organizations reacting to these new dynamics of obtaining moral resources.

Although nature conservation has been firmly rooted in the American psyche for generations, many inside the movement believe a wave of indifference has arrived which



has made the establishment of new federally protected areas particularly difficult (Interviews 18.2, 13.3 and 11.3). It is believed that many Americans think all of the really important places were protected long ago, so there is no need for their support for the conservation movement (Interview 11.3). The level of support for various conservation efforts also often ebbs and flows in relation to other competing issues such as budget concerns, international events or the latest issue to reach the front page of the New York Times (Dowie, 1995; Bosso, 2005; Downs, 1972).

History has taught movement leaders that unless there is a distinct fear that one of the iconic places will be lost, it is hard to incite support for a new wilderness area beyond the locals that will be directly impacted (Interview 10.2). Fear has often been cited as the greatest motivator; for the conservation movement this translates into easily garnered public support when faced with the fear of losing a natural area or key environmental law (Allin, 2008). The American conservation movement then is able to mobilize moral resources when fighting defensive fights but mobilizing such resources when advocating for a new federally protected area is much harder to come by. This reality of resource mobilization has driven the conservation movement toward its goal transformation. This wavering of public support and legitimacy is believed by many in the conservation movement to come not because American people disagree with the movement, but rather because they take it for granted. Several of the national conservation organizations noted their biggest issue in this century will be to build constant support for the conservation agenda. These organizations believe that as people become more urbanized, and spend less and less time outside, there is a loss of connection to the outdoors (Interviews 13.3, 10.3 and 11.3). This public disconnect is beginning to show up as declining support for

the environment in the ballot box; which only exacerbates the political difficulty of federally protecting nature. Declining moral resources have, together with the other driving forces, pushed the conservation movement to abandon its traditional aim of establishing new protecting areas. Instead public support is inspired with defensive campaigns.

In addition to the typical defensive campaigns discussed earlier in this dissertation, one unique defensive goal inspired by the declining public support, that is worth mentioning, comes from the National Audubon Society. Given the changing moral resources in this country, over the last fifteen years the National Audubon Society shifted its focus onto establishing community centers and educational programs. The organization put so many organizational resources into inspiring young people to care about conservation issues that much of its other programs and goals, including its support for new protected areas, waned (Interview 15.2).

As the general public and even conservation movement adherents have become disconnected with traditional conservation issues, they have simultaneously become interested in and concerned about climate change<sup>50</sup> or at least have become aware that climate change is the biggest environmental issue today (Interviews 10.3, 13.3, and 16.1). The conservation movement cannot afford to lose moral resources by declining to address the issues most talked about and the issues believed to pose the biggest threat to nature. Because movement members and the general public have embraced new conservation issues, the movement has also been driven to embrace these issues. “The conservation movement is tied to what everyone is excited about...climate change is the big thing now” (Interview 17.3).

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<sup>50</sup> Interest and concern about renewable energy has also to a limited degree increased.

Similarly, in the last several decades, it is believed that the American public and conservation movement adherents have also become aware of, interested in and concerned about global environmental problems (Entwistle and Dunstone, 2000 and Interviews 19.1 and 17.1). As mentioned above, the conservation movement could not risk losing moral resources by ignoring the issues most supported by the public. This level of support helped facilitate the creation of nonprofit organizations to fulfill this need. Over the last twenty years, these organizations have continued to inspire moral resources for the conservation movement (Interviews 19.1, 21.1 and 22.6). This shift in resources has firmly established the newer conservation organizations and thus shaped the entire American conservation movement.

### **Organizational Lifecycle**

Although not as influential as the two primary driving forces or even referenced as frequently as the role of resources; this research did find that several internal factors played supplementary roles in the three changes of the movement. Social movement scholars point out that it can be important to look at the dynamics inside of a social movement because internal factors can dictate many elements of a movement. Social movement scholars have studied the typical lifecycle and progression of social movement organizations, including the dynamics of long standing, institutionalized movement organizations like those in the American conservation movement. Age, leadership, institutionalization, goal transformation and organizational maintenance are several of the internal factors that can influence the course of a social movement (Blumer 1951; Weber, 1946; Michels, 1949). All of these factors, associated with the typical lifecycle of movement organizations, were recognized as supplementary considerations for the

conservation movement. Specifically the organizational lifecycles of the most prominent national conservation organizations suggest that the movement has followed an expected route to change, that age and leadership transitions have been influential and that the movement is firmly within the organizational maintenance phase making organizational relevance and survival central concerns.

Many social movement scholars have followed movements throughout history and have formulated a typical lifecycle for a social movement. Such lifecycle is widely agreed to begin with social ferment and popular excitement then the lifecycle eventually leads to formalization and then institutionalization (Blumer 1951). The American conservation movement is firmly established in the terminal institutionalization phase which can be broadly characterized as involving bureaucratic structures, professional staff, and relationships with government officials and other social elites (Staggenborg, 2011). Institutionalized social movement organizations can behave quite differently than those in earlier social movement phases; the absolute top priority of an institutionalized organization often ceases to be related to furthering the movement goal and instead becomes the relevance and survival of the organizational. This organizational maintenance stage is often also coupled with a goal transformation (Weber, 1946; Michels, 1949). Each of the most prominent national conservation organizations has generally followed the most dominant path for social movement transformation as outlined more than sixty years ago by Weber (1946) and Michels (1949). Institutionalization, shift to organizational maintenance and goal transformation have all been experienced by the American conservation movement.

**Moderation.** Although a variety of social movement paths have been described by social movement scholars, institutionalized social movements are believed to most often become concerned with organizational maintenance or survival and consequently undergo a goal transformation that is in line with a de-radicalization or moderation of the movement in society (Zald and Ash, 1966; Blumer, 1951). In fact, goal transformations are recognized as not just possible, but are actually viewed as likely occurrences as social movements age and experience internal changes (Weber, 1946; Michels, 1949). The American conservation movement, although never associated with extremely radical social ideals or actions, has followed scholars' expectations and has largely become more moderate. The goal transformation described in this dissertation involves the movement leaving the highly contentious political fights aimed at securing new federally protected areas and instead focusing on safeguarding existing protected areas through stewardship, restoration and community collaboration among other things. Although the movement has not abandoned all fights, especially against threats to nature, the general trajectory of the movement can be seen as a shift toward more moderation. "There is a different type of conservation going on...a different approach" (Interview 15.2). Zald and Ash (1996) attribute movement goal transformations to any number of internal factors including age, transitions in leadership, interactions with other organizations, factions, and general organizational culture. The American conservation movement is a long time mobilized and institutionalized social movement subjected to these internal factors and has responded as social movement scholars would expect. The expanding portfolio of the conservation movement and even some of the new tactics and the international focus of newer conservation organizations also fit neatly within this expected social movement

trend. Although specific drivers of movement changes have been important, the organizational lifecycle theory of change notes that internal factors and the associated trends expected by social movement scholars are also considerations when explaining why the American conservation movement has shifted over the last twenty years.

**Organizational Maintenance.** Goal transformations and the moderation of a social movement are believed to occur because institutionalized social movement organizations become chiefly concerned about their own survival even at the cost of the movement's mission and goals. In addition to the moderation of the conservation movement, concern for organizational relevance and survival can cause other movement shifts as well. Anything that challenges or conversely ensures the long term survival of a movement organization will likely inspire a reaction. This dynamic was cited as influential in the movement changes.

Similar to the dynamic described by the resource mobilization perspective, social movement organizations will do what is required to obtain the resources and the relevance needed to survive. Relevance is similar to moral resources, as it is gauged by the meanings that the public and movement members attach to movement organizations and movement goals and actions. Staying in line with public and movement members' desires then is an important part of securing relevance and thus survival<sup>51</sup>. Although rarely explicitly cited, the interviews conducted for this research found that the American conservation movement's concern with relevance and survival did prompt organizations to react to the changing world and to the changing opinions of movement adherents in ways that contributed to the movement changes.

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<sup>51</sup> Securing relevance is also often connected with obtaining material resources as well. All different types of resources flow to movement organizations because people and funders see the movement as relevant, for example.

In the last twenty years the general public and adherents and members of the conservation movement have expressed concern for new threats and especially for what is perceived as the biggest environmental issue—climate change (Interviews 16.1, 13.3 and 10.3). Perhaps the best evidence of this rising concern comes from The Sierra Club; the organization has a unique organizational structure which allows organizational members to regularly vote on the strategic direction of the organization. At the Sierra Club’s national convention in the early 2000s, its members voted to radically shift the organization’s primary focus to climate change (Interview 16.1). This decision to broaden the issue portfolio of the organization also included the decision to defend nature against this new threat. This new strategic focus largely caused the Sierra Club to back away from its previous leadership in the creation of new protected areas (Interview 11.2). This Sierra Club vote is representative of how much movement members care about climate change. Although other conservation organizations are not subject to the actual votes of members, the conservation movement as a whole was influenced by the opinions and desires of movement members and the general public; which contributed to the expanded portfolio of issues the movement addresses, and as a result also contributed to the defensive form of conservation and the movement’s shift away from its original goal of establishing protected areas (Interviews 13.2, 11.3, and 11.2). One organization admitted to not wanting to be left behind with the new issue of climate change “[This organization] got involved in the climate change fight because we needed to have a voice there” (Interview 10.3). Another organization admitted to addressing new issues because “new issues are what people care about, so we do it” (Interview 11.2). A couple of people in the conservation movement also mentioned the psychology of change and the

organizational excitement that comes from taking on new issues “people do it too, people get bored so they care about what is popular” (Interview 13.2).

**Transitions in Leadership.** In addition to institutionalized organizations entering an organizational maintenance phase and often undergoing a goal transformation, social movement scholars have also long recognized other internal factors that can act as catalysts for movement shifts. Age, transitions in leadership, interaction with other organizations, internal factions and organizational culture have all been found to contribute to the shape of a movement (Zald and Ash, 1966). Many people inside the American conservation movement interviewed for this research believe that one of these factors, changes in leadership in particular, contributed to the movement changes discussed in this dissertation. Over the last twenty years the leaders of the conservation movement and the conservation organizations have shifted, from early naturalists and advocates that worked their way up in the movement they were deeply passionate about, to professional business men and women with Masters Degrees and experience in Silicon Valley and Wall Street (Interviews 12.1, 15.2, and 11.2). This professionalization of the leadership within the conservation movement has “removed some of the emotion...[and provided a] new viewpoint” and perspective on the issues and the structure of the social movement (Interview 11.2). Specific transitions in leadership personnel were noted in interviews with several organizations including the Sierra Club, National Parks Conservation Association and the National Wildlife Federation, the specific changes brought by specific people are also noteworthy because they highlight the implications that new types of leaders can have on the movement.



The new businessmen leading the American conservation movement have not maintained the traditionally narrow focus of the movement and instead have a broader viewpoint and new ideas; this, matched with an enthusiasm for embracing new ideas, a recognition of the need to go after the next big idea and a desire to be in the center of any idea revolution has translated both into the movement and the conservation organizations embracing a wider range of issues as well as the creation of new organizations and an entirely new repertoire of tactics (Interviews 12.1, 15.2 and 11.2). Several people inside the conservation movement interviewed for this research specifically cited the transitions in leadership as a driving force behind several organizations recognizing the importance of climate change and energy. “About seven years ago our new CEO made climate change a priority and now climate change is in almost everything we do” (Interview 12.1). A new leader at an early conservation organization was also listed as the cause that prompted the organization to take on a new international focus and cooperate in international conservation networks. “He saw the importance of [international work] and convinced the Board of Directors to see that importance” (Interview 15.2). Similarly, the new professional leaders with business experience were also cited as a reason why some of the newer conservation organizations had the courage to take on and the ability to successfully implement tactics embedded in the global economy. Commodity chain sourcing, sustainable certification of commodities and even the carbon market being created around reducing deforestation, all require advanced business and economic expertise (Interviews 21.1, 21.2 and 18.2). Ultimately, none of the movement changes examined in this dissertation would have been possible without external forces prompting the adjustments; however leadership transitions--an internal factor typical in

institutionalized social movement organizations, also helped facilitate these movement changes.

**Movement Maturity?** It is also worth mentioning that two of the more senior and well educated members of the conservation movement mentioned that they believe the changes experienced by the movement is an overall lifecycle trend connected to movement maturity (Interviews 11.1 and 10.2). As the social movement has moved out of its social ferment and popular excitement phases, the overarching job of protecting the most spectacular and most endangered natural areas has been completed. The conservation movement may not have had the time to look into other issues while it was extremely focused on getting the most basic protections in place. However, now that the dramatic need driving the initial mobilization of the social movement has been addressed, the movement is now able to step back and care about the quality of nature inside existing protected areas, address other conservation issues and begin to tackle international conservation needs (Interview 11.1). This maturity can be viewed as an obvious evolution after a movement experiences great success; it must then logically protect its accomplishments. This movement maturity can be seen as a reaction to the question that always comes after movement success—‘now what?’

## CHAPTER 9

### CONCLUSION

The World Commission on Protected Areas estimates that the United States has over 10,000 different federal and state level protected areas. This includes well over 100 million acres of wilderness, a national wildlife refuge system with over 150 million acres, over 190 million acres of national forests and grasslands and 84 million acres in a variety of national parks designations. The idea of protecting nature has grown since the first mention of protecting land by the Washburn-Langford-Doane expedition in what would become Yellowstone National Park. The American social movement that has been championing the protection of our natural heritage since the early twentieth century has since been sewn into the fabric of American culture.

This dissertation set out to examine this social movement, the self-proclaimed conservation movement, one that had been examined and written about prolifically throughout the sixties, seventies and eighties. This dissertation discovered that the American conservation movement has undergone three significant changes in the last twenty years which altered the makeup and tone of the movement enough to warrant a distinction from the earlier forms of the movement. This dissertation establishes that a new conservation movement has emerged in response to a complex interplay of various political, social and economic forces.

This conclusion will address what this new conservation movement means for the future of conservation and for the future of the movement. The way we protect land is evolving, not only in the types of designations, but also in compromising with opposing

interests. There are more voices in the climate change and energy debates. Conservation is being achieved through the adoption of innovative tactics in place of the traditional reliance on the political arena. The future of the new conservation movement will be determined by how well the movement stays connected with its core supporters while breeding future support in an increasingly urban world. The new conservation movement will likely continue to be altered over the course of the next decade, as climatic uncertainty and political volatility translates into an unstable political, social and natural environment for the movement. This conclusion will also touch on the usefulness of this research and the remaining questions which can drive future research.

This entire dissertation aimed to be cognizant of the historical context of the changes in the conservation movement. Throughout history, the conservation movement has undergone shifts; some are along the same pattern as in the last twenty years. Understanding how the conservation movement adapted and responded to changes in the past will assist the discussion of how conservation in general and the movement will be impacted by the most recent round of modifications. The explosion of environmental concern during the Progressive era was largely driven by a sense of appreciation for nature and worry that threats would destroy it. This attention to threats is happening again today, only the details are new; before it was a rise in logging, now it is natural gas fracking and renewable energy. Also, compromises with opposing interests are nothing new; building the Hetch Hetchy dam was a compromise of nature for human health much in the same way renewable energy on vast amounts of desert land is compromising nature from human safety from a changing climate. Innovations in tactics and concern for the level of support have also both occurred in the past. Understanding what a new

conservation movement means for conservation and what these shifts mean for the social movement, requires a understanding of how the conservation movement responded and adapted to earlier changes. It is safe to project that the conservation movement's future is likely secure and the ethic of nature preservation will continue. But, what exactly is different for conservation and what future hurdles confront the social movement is up for discussion.

### **What Does a New Conservation Movement Mean for Conservation?**

The roots of the American conservation movement can be traced back more than a century to the early American preservationists which could not stomach the loss of natural areas in America's quest for development. The conservation movement throughout history has been idealistic yet strong and successful; constantly adapting to new public opinion, new threats and new opportunities. The changes in the conservation movement in the last twenty years, although consistent with this constant adaptation, were dramatic as they began to alter the way conservation is achieved and where it is realized.

The new conservation movement will not translate into a complete absence of new federal protected areas; in fact quite the opposite will be true. Although the golden era of protection is over, small local groups will continue to be able to secure federal protections for new wilderness areas, new national monuments and other forms of protection. However, these new protected areas will be smaller and increasingly absent from the pages of national news outlets. The average American will be hard pressed to hear about new protections outside of his or her local community. The largest of the conservation organizations will assist in these small designations, but instead of spending

their time and resources lobbying for something that is increasingly unlikely to materialize, they will look for alternative ways to conserve the natural resources of this country. The conservation organizations' campaigns aimed at private land owners, cooperative multi-use agreements and the land trust movement are all here to stay. Conservation will remain somewhat removed from the traditional political arena and be brought to the local level where conservation gains are real but coordination and concerted conservation efforts are much harder to come by. This fragmentation, while effective in securing conservation gains, will impact the way the average American experiences and understands conservation and the need for conservation in the future. Without new areas for backpackers to explore or the new national park for families to visit, the conservation movement will have to work hard to secure public support for conservation while combating an increasing perception that the job of conservation is done.

Perhaps more dramatic is the impact of climate change on conservation— many inside the conservation movement argue that climate change is the absolute biggest threat to conservation. As climate change becomes more and more evident, any remaining focus on the traditional definition of a protected area will continue to fade. Protected area boundaries are absolutely unable to protect the nature inside them from the changing climate; with this reality, the focus away from new federal protected areas will endure. The new conservation movement will continue to lend its voices to the climate change and energy debates. This will somewhat blur the lines between the conservation movement and the larger environmental movement, and force the conservation movement to sell this new type of conservation to its traditional supporters. This shift

will also be pronounced around the world because the creation of new protected areas has largely remained a viable conservation tool internationally until now. Global climate change has already begun and will continue to alter the validity of protected area formation both in the United States and internationally. However protected areas will never completely fade away, this country's sentimental attachment to beautiful places and charismatic animals is unlikely to be altered.

The importance of supporters to the new conservation movement cannot be overstated as threats are beginning to require more grassroots action and support than ever before. During the financial crisis in California in 2011, the state announced a plan to close 70 of the state's 279 state parks. In President Obama's State of the Union address in early 2012, he announced he would open up millions of new acres of federal land and 75% of offshore oil reserves to new drilling. In February 2012 the League of Conservation Voters proclaimed the House of Representatives in the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress to be "the most anti-environmental in our nation's history" (Yachnin, 2012). And all of this is occurring as the budgets for the four federal land protection agencies are uncertain. Ultimately the new conservation movement will have its hands full and will do all that it can, but it is becoming more and more evident that some conservation protection will require more than just the conservation movement's advocacy, it will require on the ground action by conservation advocates. This can already be seen with local California conservationists taking matters into their own hands by raising money to keep their local state parks open. Conservation within the new conservation movement will be increasingly difficult and centered around defending nature and existing protected areas from threats.

The new conservation movement has already begun to alter exactly how conservation is achieved; soon it is likely to also face the reality that what gets protected is also up for debate. Climate change has already begun to fuel important tradeoffs inside the new conservation movement which are unlikely to cease. Certain climate change mitigation efforts can have sometimes huge impacts on the natural environment. The new conservation movement will be increasingly faced with mitigating climate change at the expense of nature. Johanna Wald from the National Resources Defense Council expresses these difficult tradeoffs well. “I am now helping facilitate an activity on public lands that will have very significant environmental impacts. We are doing it because of the threat of climate change. It's not an accommodation; it's a change I had to make to respond to climate” (Cart, 2012). Utility scale solar installations are one example of this tradeoff—protect the desert ecosystem or allow natural disruptions in an effort to produce renewable energy and reduce climate change? Compromises between nature and some other social good are not new; but the uncertain climate that the new conservation movement exists within will continue to demand these compromises, altering not only how conservation is achieved but also specifically where it is achieved.

Any return to the golden era of conservation when millions of acres of nature were protected at a time and protected in perpetuity, would require dramatic shifts in the political environment and social consciousness in the United States. What is much more likely for conservation is the continued adoption of innovative tactics introduced by the new conservation organizations. The new class of conservation organizations has championed new tactics, including ones that rely on the global marketplace and environmental branding. Conservation in the United States will also likely begin to rely



on these tactics as the largest conservation organizations continue to search for new ways to secure conservation while adapting to the difficulties of traditional conservation avenues.

Ultimately the existence of the new conservation movement means that conservation, although increasingly difficult, will continue to be achieved in one way or another and continue to be an aspect of American culture. The way conservation is achieved, where it is realized and what it takes for the protections to remain in place will continue to shift throughout history; nevertheless the new conservation movement is evidence that the movement is still able to adapt for the sake of its cause, even during dramatic alterations to the political, social and economic milieus. This survival of the social movement is a good indicator that despite any future changes, conservation and nature protection are likely to also survive in the future.

With a great appreciation for the history of change that has occurred throughout the lifespan of the conservation movement, the new conservation movement should be understood through the context of larger historical changes. The new conservation movement is just the latest installment in the constant evolution of the movement. It should be seen as a critical evolutionary movement in the timeline that represents the panorama of environmental and conservation movement change. Very few elements of the new conservation movement are entirely new, rather many changes to the conservation movement have occurred previously and could easily occur again. For example, the defensive stance and changing portfolio of movement issues are episodic and highly reliant on outside forces. The conservation movement has experienced periods of defense before and this dissertation found little to suggest that the movement could not

return to another form of offense in the future. However it is worth noting that without substantial changes in society, it is unlikely that the new conservation movement will be greatly altered in the foreseeable future. The changes highlighted in this dissertation are not the conditions under which this social movement will function in perpetuity, however they do reflect the shape of the movement given the currently entrenched social, political and economic conditions. So while change is largely episodic and ongoing, the new conservation movement is more than just a glimpse in time, it is a description of how both internal and external forces, largely outside of the control of the movement, have taken hold of and shaped the movement.

### **Implications for the Social Movement**

The ability of the conservation movement to alter its goals, its focus and its organizational makeup and tactics is pivotal to the movement's survival and will ultimately be central to the continued success of the idea and practice of nature conservation in the United States. This is not the first time that this social movement has evolved in order to adapt to the needs of the time and it will likely not be its last. Remaining nimble and responding to changing conditions is at the heart of the conservation movement's past and will also be at the heart of the conservation movement's future. It is unlikely that the idea of nature conservation will lose status in American culture; nonetheless the biggest job for the conservation movement will be to figure out how to achieve nature conservation given the constraints on the process at any one time.

One of the constant constraints on conservation and one particularly important to the new conservation movement is the mobilization of supporters. Staggenborg (2011)

argues that the environmental movement as a whole is so large and so diverse and has been active for so long that its biggest job will always be maintaining the mobilization of supporters. The new conservation movement will need to be cognizant of how shifts to political, economic and social factors will impact the mobilization of supporters both now and in the future. Current supporters of the conservation movement will need to be reassured that the new goal, focus and tactics of the movement will remain aligned with their reason for being active in the movement. The new conservation movement will also be faced with the need to find ways to convince new supporters to mobilize; this can include tapping into new communities that align with the movement's new focus or fostering entirely new constituents. One leader in the conservation movement argued that focus of the entire movement needs to be on support, even above a focus on money. "The problem has never been the money, it is the level of public support" (Interview 18.2) Similarly the president of another conservation organization echoed this sentiment with the observation that "we need to find a way to make conservation relevant again" (Interview 13.3). This concern is not likely to disappear, as it has been around since the beginning of the movement. The "nature-deficit disorder" addressed by the nature study movement during the Progressive Era is evidence that although we are in an increasingly urban world today, the struggle to get people to pay attention to nature and appreciate it has always and will always be a job for the conservation movement<sup>52</sup> (Armitage, 2009 p. 213).

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<sup>52</sup> The National Audubon Society recognized this struggle over the last two decades and devoted a substantial portion of their resources to opening new Audubon Centers aimed at connecting people with nature and birds. The Society struggled to keep their other programs including a focus on securing new federal protections for nature alive (Interview 15.2). This begs the question of how effective the new conservation movement will be in remaining active in conservation while devoting resources to cultivating future supporters.

In addition to being nimble and fostering continued mobilization, the existence of the new conservation movement has legitimized the adoption of new tactics. The newest conservation organizations fostered a period of great expansion in the tactics used to promote nature conservation. Finding new ways to achieve conservation is likely to be a constant consideration for the new conservation movement. New tools available today, including social media organizations and outlets, are much more powerful than the tools available to the early pioneers of this movement. This evolution in tactics is not only desirable, but also a predictable process over time. Entirely new modes of protection, including land zoning options and other forms of private agreements, might also prove useful. Similarly, new tactics especially aimed at new international developments and market tools will certainly also be helpful. As the population of the world increasingly moves to urban environments, promoting the services and value that nature can provide to humans will also be an increasingly appealing angle. This and other tactical innovations can help ensure the social movement has the best chance of standing on the strongest ground.

The factors that drove the creation of the new conservation movement with its new goals, focus, organizations and tactics have not disappeared. The future of the social movement is contingent on the new conservation movement learning from its past and capitalizing on opportunities to secure what is needed for the movement's future. Any social movement, after a big change, could risk losing the overall ability to be strategic in its operations and planning; maintaining this discipline will be required for the conservation movement to continue to succeed.

## **Usefulness of this Dissertation**

This dissertation began out of personal curiosity for the contemporary state of the long lived American conservation movement. There is an abundant amount of literature on the movement, with almost all of it written prior to the 1990s or with a focus on earlier decades. A general dearth of information was available about how the movement has fared in the last twenty years. This dissertation pieces together a picture of the movement today, using the most prominent national conservation nonprofit organizations to foster knowledge about the goals, focus, tactics and makeup of the movement and how certain conditions today are impacting how conservation is achieved. This dissertation not only updates the academic literature on the subject, but also provides a glimpse into how a social movement arguably at the peak of its success in the 1960s, with the passage of the Wilderness Act and the preservation of millions of acres of nature, has fared in the last few decades. This information about the American conservation movement is particularly useful for social movement scholars, scholars of nonprofit organizations, and for those interested in the conservation and larger environmental movements. Describing the emergence of a new conservation movement and the characteristics of this new movement will also be useful for actors both inside and adjacent to the movement. With little resources devoted to introspective evaluation, the cultivation of history or even hindsight, this dissertation can provide the leaders of the movement with a big picture look of where the movement has gone over the last twenty years<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> During the course of this dissertation, I was repeatedly surprised at how little attention even the most professional of nonprofit organizations gave to the history of the movement and even their own organizations. Being so dedicated to the task at hand often precludes those inside the movement from taking the time to look at the big picture, appreciate history and learn from the past. Although not the aim of this dissertation, this perspective is believed to be a benefit.

Everyday Americans can also find this research useful because the conservation movement has impacted vast amounts of land and has the potential to continue to impact the future of millions of acres of land in this country. How public land is utilized is of interest to a number of groups of people including those with extractive interests for public land as well as everyday Americans who enjoy biking, hiking and camping in their local protected area. The new American conservation movement has the potential to mediate how nature is experienced in this country, and thus this research is of interest to all whose lives are touched by public land.

Explaining the emergence of the new conservation movement required a detailed analysis of political, economic and societal factors that drove the social movement to change. Four different theories grounded in the social movement literature were used to explain how driving forces facilitated decisions inside the conservation movement. No one social movement theory was adequate to explain the range of factors that influenced the course of the American conservation movement. And, although the aim of this dissertation was not to challenge these theories but rather to see how well the existing theories were able to explain complex change in a long lived and highly institutionalized social movement, this case study can be useful to other social movement scholars applying or challenging these theories or in pursuit of entirely new explanations. This research can also be useful for other scholars asking parallel questions.

This dissertation chose to focus on social movement change and social movement theories, however many of the factors involved in the changes to the conservation movement hold information for other theories from other disciplines. In particular, this research exists parallel to the world of policy change and policy process theories. While

this dissertation relied on McAdam, McCarthy, Zald, Tilly and Tarrow and the political opportunity perspective to explain how the current political environment influenced the conservation movement, there are many scholars and policy theories that aim to explain why the political environmental and political opportunity have taken their current shape. This dissertation chose to focus on one group of actors inside a wider social movement and their perception of certain conditions that impacted the course of their strategies and focus. This research did not at all dive into why those conditions exist in the first place. However such a question is a logical extension and parallel theoretical inquest to this research.

Also worth noting, one unforeseeable yet decisive benefit of this dissertation came out of the difficulty of naming this particular social movement. Experience with the environmental movement pointed to the existence of a separate social movement devoted solely to the active protection of wildlife and wildlands for their inherent value as well as for the value they provide to humans, yet there was little societal guidance on the name of this specific social movement. Research inside the movement quickly revealed that those inside the movement refer to themselves as the conservation movement. Heavy academic baggage attached to the word ‘conservation’ and a general lack of precision surrounding the word in society complicated this distinction. This dissertation aimed to bring clarity to this naming dilemma and align future research with the definition in ‘conservation’ employed by of the American conservation movement.

### **Future Research**

As this dissertation strived to both document changes in the American conservation movement and explain why they have occurred, it also raised other

questions and laid the basis for additional theoretical inquest. This dissertation captured a picture of the American conservation movement but such is far from a comprehensive assessment of the entire social movement or of all the factors influencing it. Ultimately this dissertation laid the foundation for a research agenda that looks at the new conservation movement and asks different questions of the movement.

First, the new conservation movement was detected through research that only focused on eleven of the largest, most prominent nonprofit conservation organizations in the United States. All social movements are made up of a variety of actors including small grassroots organizations, scholars, policymakers, professionals and individual activists, among others. In order to get a complete view of the new conservation movement, research into these other movement actors is needed. The picture of the movement over the last twenty years will undoubtedly be different from their perspective; the future of protected areas in particular is also likely to appear different from their perspective.

Second, this research also only scratched the surface of several issues impacting the movement—which will each have their own story to tell. In particular, a closer look at how climate change is impacting nature conservation and how renewable energy projects threaten natural areas would be of particular interest. Climate change and efforts to mitigate climate change have the potential to alter how nature is experienced and protected, making a closer look important to understanding the future of the conservation movement and the future of protected areas in the United States and globally.

In addition to the wider empirical questions that this dissertation raises, there are larger theoretical questions that could also be helpful in explaining how this research fits



into the larger understanding of the world we know. This research specifically looked at how the policy environment and other factors influenced the conservation movement; however other parallel theories seek to explain why such a policy environment exists in the first place. In particular the punctuated equilibrium theory and advocacy coalitions theory, established by Baumgartner and Jones, and Sabatier respectively, are two policy change theories that appear to have something to say about why certain political conditions existed for the conservation movement (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Sabatier, 1988). Although this dissertation in its current form does not have any implications for the policy change literature, it does beg future questions of it.

Similarly this dissertation also touched on organizational decision-making issues and nonprofit organizational management issues which raises questions for organizational and philanthropy theories. The conservation movement is at the largest unit a social movement, however if broken down to its constituent parts, the conservation movement is also a collection of nonprofit organizations and individual activists and volunteers. Breaking the new conservation movement into these constituent parts and looking at their own changes is one more logical extension of this research.

Lastly, further research could also be useful in fostering a deeper understanding of the history and usage of the word ‘conservation.’ The complex history and linguistic basis of the word was beyond the scope of this research, yet such could be potentially fruitful in providing clarity to the word and the American conservation movement. The term conservation has undergone multiple definition modifications and continues to hold multiple definitions for different constituents leaving behind a labyrinth of meanings and connotations which threaten to erase the distinction the conservation movement seeks.

Future research could also tackle this and other distinctions that separate different factions of the larger environmental movement, providing a clearer understanding of how the environmental and conservation, wilderness, environmental justice and other connected movements relate.

## APPENDIX I

### WHY A SOCIAL MOVEMENT PERSPECTIVE?

Explaining and analyzing how and why the new conservation movement emerged with three distinct changes in strategy, focus and in organizational makeup was central to this research. Scholars looking at social movements over the last fifty years have crafted perspectives to help explain the phenomena of social movements and the unique conditions, theories and rationale that apply to collective action. Social movement theory is specifically equipped to explain the forces that influence social movements. Social movement theory was thus specifically equipped to assist this research given that the initial research questions were aimed at trying to explain the causes behind changes to a social movement.

Given the focus of this research, on changes in a social movement as a whole, social movement theory was best equipped to serve as the conceptual framework. Because this research was not about the individual decisions that led to changes within organizations or the pressures within an organization that sparked change, other theories about decision making and institutional management are less appropriate.

#### **Conservation Movement as a Social Movement**

Several social movement scholars have questioned whether highly institutionalized organizations, such as those of the conservation movement, can actually be social movement organizations, however this research contends that the conservation movement is a social movement and a focus on large key organizations was an adequate way to judge changes across an entire movement.

Throughout history, humans have been unhappy about particular social conditions and have expressed their complaints in hopes of change. There has been a wide array of examples of people coming together to pursue goals of social change. The definition of a social movement and the necessary conditions of a social movement are numerous and can vary widely. For this research, a definition of a social movement was established and justification for the design of this research was addressed with particular attention paid to the role of institutionalized actors.

A social movement for this research was defined as a: conscious, concerted and sustained effort by groups of people to change some aspect of their society (adapted from Goodwin and Jasper, 2003 p.3). Formal definitions of social movements are numerous and emphasis can vary widely, but the heart of any social movement lies in the overall effort of people to change society.

Several scholars have focused on social movements and their make-up of extra-institutional actors and means; arguing that a defining characteristic of a social movement lies in its operation outside of institutions (Doherty, 2002; Rootes, 2004; Bosso, 2000). Piven and Cloward (1977) even argue that formal organizations are antithetical to the mobilization of social movements. However, formalized social movement organizations are present in most social movements (McCarthy, 1997), including the conservation movement. McCarthy and Zald (1977) argue that in fact formal organizations facilitate rather than hurt mobilization because of the resources they can provide.

Several scholars have extended the discussion of formal social movement organizations to include the rising trend toward the institutionalization of these organizations (Katzenstein, 1998; McCarthy and McPhail, 1998; Meyer and Tarrow,

1998). Institutionalization can be seen as the formalization of an organization as it moves toward a standard hierarchy and professional staff, and often operates as an insider to the established state political structure (Wongkaren, 2008). Institutionalization is often measured by several indicators including size, income, formalization of structure, number and professionalization of employees and relations with government and other established actors (Rootes, 2004). It has been established that there are four distinct but interdependent components of organizational institutionalization; cultural institutionalization (Meyer and Tarrow, 1998), political institutionalization (Klandermans et al., 1998), administrative institutionalization (Weber, 1946; Michels, 1962; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) and economic institutionalization (Jenkins and Eckert, 1986). The environmental movement and the conservation movement have seen many organizations formalize and become institutionalized<sup>54</sup> (Dowie, 1995; Costain and Lester, 1995; Coglianese 2001).

Some scholars have questioned whether the environmental movement can constitute a social movement at all because of its organizational institutionalization (Shellenberger and Nordhaus, 2004; Rootes 2004). It has been observed that the environmental movement's "intellectuals have grown into new kinds of established intellectuals" (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991, p.66). These scholars may argue that the institutionalization of many of the environmental organizations make them entirely outside the true realm of the social movements. However, many other scholars believe

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<sup>54</sup> Coglianese (2001) points out that successful lobbying for new environmental laws drew movement players into the state. A few people from environmental organizations even took positions in the Carter Administration after the surge of legislation in the 1970s. Similarly, the Wilderness Act was largely written by members of the conservation movement, marking again the level of institutionalization of some organizations (Harvey, 2005).

that simply because the Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society are now effective lobbying entities in Washington does not destroy the larger movement of many actors or their specific role within the larger movement (Rootes, 2004; Staggenborg, 2011). In fact, institutionalization can be seen as the ultimate goal of many social movement organizations; for many of the conservation movement organizations, their days as extra-institutional actors may be over but their centrality to the movement remains (McCarty and Zald, 1977). Several scholars argue that formal institutionalized organizations can be vital players in social movements. Bosso (2005) describes how established environmental organizations have been able to change their organizational structure to meet new demands and keep the movement alive. Bosso also argues that older more formal organizations facilitate the emergence of new movement actors. Lichterman (1996) and Clemens and Minkoff (2004) argue that these formal organizations are often central locations for interaction for the entire network of movement actors. The institutionalized organizations can in fact “shape the flow of actors” in a social movement (Clemens and Minkoff, 2004, p. 157).

Mitchell et al. (1992) points out that most people think of formalized and institutionalized organizations when they think of the environmental movements because of their visibility and because they are often the most influential actors pursuing the movement’s goals. Although social movements are made up of a variety of actors, the main actors (and the main focus of research on social movements) are social movement organizations (McCarthy and Zald, 1977; Gamson and Schmeidler, 1984; Gamson, 1990). Social movement organizations are leading entities that shape the way movements

as a whole are manifested in society (Zald, 1990). This centrality of formal social movement organizations makes them bellwether indicators for the entire movement.

The conservation movement fits the definition of a social movement as defined for this research. The formal institutionalized organizations in the conservation movement are central actors that can be used as bellwether indicators for the entire movement. Thus this research focused on the conservation movement as depicted through several of the largest formal organization.

## APPENDIX II

Over 40 interviews were conducted within the eleven national conservation organizations identified in this research. Each interview was conducted under strict confidentiality, so the specific identity of those people interviewed cannot be released. Interviews cited throughout this dissertation have been coded to ensure confidentiality. Interview codes have been grouped by organization but otherwise have been randomly assigned. Interview codes beginning with 22 were conducted with people outside of the eleven organizations but still actively engaged in the movement.

Several individuals did wave their confidentiality and agreed to be named in certain places throughout the dissertation. The names revealed however are not representative of any characteristic of all interviewed personnel and are not meant to be used as a gauge for others who may have participated in this research. The referenced quotes are also not intended to characterize the entirety of that person's contribution to this research.



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