

John Muir, founder of the modern environmental movement, spent much of his life working to preserve Yosemite as a national park. He later wrote: “As long as I live, I’ll hear waterfalls and birds and winds sing. I’ll interpret the rocks, learn the language of flood, storm, and the avalanche. I’ll acquaint myself with the glaciers and wild gardens, and get as near the heart of the world as I can.”

He eventually decided a formal organization would be needed to protect the area into the future. He worked with academic leaders like Henry Senger from the University of California and lawyer Warren Olney to create an alpine club to explore and educate people about the beauty of the Sierra. In a meeting in Olney’s office in 1892, the Sierra Club was born. Its three-fold purpose was recreational, educational, and conservationist: “To explore, enjoy, and render accessible the mountain regions of the Pacific Coast; to publish authentic information concerning them...and to enlist the support and cooperation of the people and government in preserving the forests and other natural features of the Sierra Nevada.”

Donations, funding, and budgets were not even mentioned.

They didn’t realize it, but they had started what would become a worldwide industry of environmental organizations. Of course, they would not have approved my use of the word “industry,” but neither would they have recognized, or identified with, what their movement has become.

Today almost 15,000 environmental groups are registered with the IRS, according to the Urban Institute’s National Center for Charitable Statistics (100 in Colorado alone). They are financed by foundations and corporations at the rate of \$38 million a day, making environmental activism a \$14 billion industry in the U.S. alone.

We know this because the Giving USA Institute tracks total giving by economic sector, including the environment, and its annual reports provide comprehensive numbers. They show dramatic growth in environmental grants in recent years, over 11 percent last year. Between 2000 and 2012, environmental grants topped \$80 billion, and in the decade since, \$98 billion.

Big Bucks for Big Green

What followed John Muir.

By Greg Walcher



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE VIA INTERNET

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If you wonder where it all comes from, rest assured almost none of it comes from membership dues or individual contributions. Nor do those numbers even include government grants, legal settlements, or foreign governments, all of which are also major revenue sources. Most comes from private foundations like the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and the Hewlett and Packard Foundations. Ironically, much of it comes from foundations created by successful industrialists and corporations—foundations now supporting organizations dedicated to destroying the very industries that created them.

For example, the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, funded by the Intel computer chip fortune, gave \$100 million to stop Alaska’s Pebble Mine project, a potentially

massive source of copper. Yet Intel buys much of its copper from China, which Intel’s own researchers say is of much lower quality. In the last five years, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation (HP money) gave \$6.3 million to the World Wildlife Fund, \$5.2 million to the Environmental Defense Fund, \$9.2 million to The Nature Conservancy, and more than \$930 million to 193 climate-change groups in 14 countries—all anti-mining. The Marisla Foundation gives nearly \$50 million a year and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, another \$32 million (both with oil money). The Walton Family Foundations (Walmart) give over \$95 million, and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation (General Motors), more than \$11 million.

Numerous environmental industry groups have become rich through such grants. Annual reports show the Sierra Club now takes in \$152 million a year and the Sierra Club Foundation, \$117 million. Greenpeace USA gets \$36 million; National Parks Conservation Association \$44 million; Wilderness Society \$50 million; National Wildlife Federation \$118 million; Natural Resources Defense Council \$218 million; Conservation International Foundation \$218 million; Environmental Defense Fund \$261 million; World Wildlife Fund \$451 million; and the Wildlife Conservation Society and The Nature Conservancy receive \$1.3 billion each. The latter pays its CEO \$875,000 a year and has 822 employees who make over \$100,000 a year.

Most of these groups don’t want you to know how big they are or where their funding comes from. Most have few if any dues-paying members, but include all donors, visitors to their websites, and attendees at their meetings when reporting their impressive “members and supporters” lists. They thereby claim to represent millions—and have the financial clout to show for it.

If John Muir had known how his fledgling movement would evolve, he would surely have said, “This is going to be big—really big.” ■

Greg Walcher is president of the Natural Resources Group and a former head of the Colorado Department of Natural Resources. For more info, go to www.GregWalcher.com.