

MEMBERSHIP IN CONSERVATION GROUPS AND OUTDOOR CLUBS

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ABSTRACT. Conservation groups and outdoor clubs are a major influence on natural resource policy through their articulate members. Different kinds of groups are described — their membership, representativeness, potential growth, multiple memberships, and comparability with other voluntary organizations.

CONSERVATION GROUPS and outdoor clubs are a major influence on forest and recreation policy in the United States. Their influence is reflected in legislation such as the Wilderness Act, new National Parks such as the Redwood and North Cascade, many administrative decisions by government agencies, and growing public awareness of environment.

Managers of public or private natural resources deal with conservation organizations at several levels. Thus knowledge about such groups can contribute to understanding them and can provide a healthy perspective to guide future contacts.

Several questions are pertinent. For example, how does membership in conservation groups and outdoor clubs compare with voluntary affiliations among other segments of society? How many and what kind of conservation organizations are there? What kind of people belong? How many people belong? How do conservationists compare to other political groups? Why do people join conservation organizations and what satisfactions sustain their membership? Do multiple memberships of a few dedicated individuals account for many groups?

These questions cannot be answered precisely, because little research has been done on conservation groups and outdoor clubs. But there has been some study, the results of which frequently contradict some common beliefs about these organizations.

VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS

Conservation groups and outdoor clubs are what social scientists call voluntary organizations. Observers of American society have long marveled at our proliferation of clubs and organizations. Voluntary organizations have been noted for several beneficial effects. They allow for expression of a wide variety of interests and values while uniting their proponents; they perform services to society in religion, science, health and welfare, art, recreation, education, and politics; and they influence the legislative process in almost every field. Through multiple memberships they cut across related interests, thus reducing divisiveness in society. They help reduce explosive social tension by providing outlets for expression, providing interaction between social classes, adding to the richness of our culture by preserving traditional

values, and teaching and implementing democratic processes. They provide a potential means of social control that can be used (for good or bad) to communicate ideas and values to a large part of society in relatively short time. They have been noted as a major barrier to totalitarian mass movements and as a pathway to political participation for disadvantaged groups.

National surveys suggest that between one-third and one-half of the population belong to voluntary organizations. Most members of these groups tend to be higher than average in social class as measured by education, income, and occupational classification.

In general, members of organized interest groups tend to differ in some of their characteristics from persons who do not join such groups.

CONSERVATION GROUPS AND OUTDOOR CLUBS

How Many Groups?

The diversity and scope of voluntary organizations falling under the category of conservation groups and outdoor clubs have been illustrated by recent studies in the Pacific Northwest. A survey of wilderness visitors revealed that about 400 respondents belonged to one or more conservation groups or outdoor clubs, representing 218 different organizations (*Hendee et al. 1968*). A subsequent survey of car campers and wilderness visitors in Washington revealed membership by about 500 respondents in 258 different conservation groups or outdoor clubs. The organizations to which these recreationists belonged ranged from small activity-oriented groups (boating, fishing, rock collecting, etc.) to large national organizations (Sierra Club and Wilderness Society) that are strongly issue-oriented.

As these data imply, the network of groups and clubs is extensive, far more so than most people imagine. Many observers of the conservation movement tend to focus exclusively on large national organizations and forget the many small groups who locally express preferences for particular outdoor activities. When profes-

sional resource managers and conservation leaders were asked to estimate the number of groups encountered in our studies of recreationists in the Pacific Northwest, both grossly underestimated the number of existing organizations, although many overestimated the proportion of recreationists they thought might belong to such organizations.

What Kind of Organizations?

Sociologists frequently classify voluntary organizations as either "instrumental" or "expressive" groups depending on their goals. This fits conservation groups and outdoor clubs rather well. Instrumental organizations pursue activities primarily as a means of achieving some goal such as preservation of natural resources. For example, Friends of the Earth and the Audubon Society. Expressive organizations pursue activities for their own sake, such as specific types of recreation; for example, Washington Duck Hunters and Washington Fold Boat Club.

Although the instrumental-expressive dichotomy refers primarily to organizational goals, it may also describe the orientation of member participation. For example, the businessman who joins a country club to improve business contacts is instrumentally oriented in an essentially expressive organization. And the "little old lady in tennis shoes" may be expressively involved in an instrumentally-oriented conservation group activity.

Outdoor clubs typically promote conservation group activities, provide recreational facilities for members, and encourage the enjoyment of certain activities through educational programs. When these organizations do become instrumentally involved in conservation, they typically focus on protection of environments directly tied to those outdoor activities sponsored by the club. For example, kayak clubs support wild rivers; hiking clubs support wilderness. Likewise, some instrumental organizations sponsor expressive activities to attract participation in their preservation endeavors. For example, a Sierra Club official explained to me that one purpose of their outings was to get people acquainted with wild country

so they will learn to love it and be willing to fight for it.

Another typology of conservation groups and outdoor clubs might be: (1) national preservation groups, (2) regional and local preservation groups, and (3) outdoor activity clubs, which are usually local although they may have national affiliations. National preservation groups continuously promote environmental preservation on a large front, such as by the Sierra Club, the National Wildlife Federation, and the Wilderness Society. Regional or local preservation groups tend to evolve by seeking preservation of some specific area such as the North Cascades, the Three Sisters, and the Alpine Lakes.

Who and How Many?

Studies indicate that many members of conservation groups and outdoor clubs live in urban areas and are well above average in education, income, and occupational classification. In general, education seems to most sharply distinguish membership: those belonging to instrumental conservation groups tend to be of a slightly higher educational level than members of expressive outdoor clubs. Members of such organizations are more highly educated than outdoor recreationists in general, who are also well educated. One study of the Sierra Club found that 75 percent had college degrees and nearly 40 percent hold advanced degrees (*Devall 1970*). In our two studies in the Northwest, 60 percent of the conservation group and outdoor club members had college degrees and 40 percent had done at least some postgraduate work.

However, members of conservation groups and outdoor clubs are not representative of all outdoor recreationists. We determined that about 20 percent of the wilderness users and 10 percent of the car campers in the Northwest belong to either a conservation group or an outdoor club. Based on these data and the known proportion of the public who are recreationists, a very rough projection suggests that less than 1 percent of the total population belong to conservation groups or outdoor clubs (*Hendee et al. 1969*). These conclusions have important implications for

resource managers in that, while such groups are not representative of all recreationists, they may often be so considered by resource managers with whom they have contact (*Hendee and Harris 1970*).

CONSERVATIONISTS IN AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

The accomplishments of conservationists are remarkable in view of the relatively small portion of the total population involved. Opponents wail, "Never has so much been set aside for so few." Another perspective suggests that, like other social movements, a relatively few activists lead a passive but generally concerned public. The 2 or 3 million organized conservationists do constitute an important political entity. They may be merely "the tip of the iceberg" and thus justify their activity in terms of the long-range interests of the general public.

That organized conservationists and recreationists are not representative of the entire population is clear. However, they do get public attention, are articulate in their appeals for public support, and have demonstrated their political effectiveness. Certainly their social class position contributes to their effectiveness, but the more critical question is whether organized conservationists are any less representative of the general population than other organized political activist groups representing other interests. They probably are not, since the highly educated professional and managerial segment of the public is the most involved in the political decision-making process on almost all issues.

Despite the social-class bias of conservationists, they are, in one respect, more representative than many other politically successful lobby groups in that their strength is based on human rather than financial resources. Whereas most industries lobby on the strength of money provided as an essential cost of doing business, the conservation movement is sustained primarily by individual contributions of time and money by members of instrumental conservation groups.

Like few other movements in a democratic society, conservationists have shown

that a dedicated and vocal minority with relatively meager financial resources can influence legislation. Although some earlier successes are notable, only recently has Congress become highly responsive to the growing preservationist philosophy. In the past, a few partisan alliances, extremely limited financial resources, and an unwillingness to negotiate handicapped the political power of conservationists. Alliances with powerful leaders in the Senate and acceptance of political compromise have been factors in recent legislative successes. Since the reputation of conservationists as "uncompromising Jeremiahs" is well founded, these recent successes may suggest a significant political awakening and increased appeal and acceptability of the movement among politicians.

WILL MEMBERSHIP INCREASE?

Some of the most interesting and important questions about conservation groups and outdoor clubs concern the growth and maintenance of membership. How does membership in such organizations come about? What sustains interest? Will future membership increase? If so, in what types of organizations? These questions have obvious implications for natural resource policy.

The well-established correlation between membership in conservation organizations and higher education implies that membership will increase as educational levels rise. A correlation between membership and urbanization may hold similar implications for growth. Conservation organization membership is increasing. The Sierra Club, with membership now over 110,000, has grown about 20 percent annually for several years.

In studying how people get involved with these organizations, we interviewed members of several groups and found a common steppingstone sequence — from membership in expressive activity clubs to membership in instrumental preservation organizations. The evidence suggests that membership in a politically active preservation group is often preceded by affiliation with an activity-oriented group where

certain values and environmental perspectives are learned. If this experience results in an urge to do more to protect the environment and spread the value system, an obvious sequel is to join a more powerful group dedicated, not just to enjoying activities, but to crusading for protection of environmental values. To the extent that it is valid, this steppingstone hypothesis suggests further growth among the preservation-oriented groups from the widespread outdoor clubs.

On the other hand, Devall (1970) suggests that preservation activist organizations, such as the Sierra Club, may recruit people not previously associated with outdoor activity clubs. These contradictory interpretations suggest that more study is needed.

The upsurge of interest on college campuses about environmental issues has no doubt had a substantial impact on organizational membership. Although a forest industry-sponsored essay (Benneth 1967) suggests a deliberate attempt by preservation groups to recruit college students, it seems unlikely that this is necessary. In a survey at the University of Oregon, 90 percent of the students indicated "moderate" or "great" interest in environmental issues and 75 percent indicated that they "strongly approve" of the environmental movement. (Richard P. Gale and Riley E. Dunlap. Attitudes of University of Oregon students toward environmental issues: a preliminary report. Dep. Sociology, Univ. Oregon, Eugene. 7 p.)

Comparison of the environmental movement with the civil rights movement indicates some similarities, particularly with signs of evolution from politics to protest among conservationists. (Gale, Richard P. From sit in to hike in: a comparison of the civil rights and environmental movements. Paper presented to Nat. Res. Sec. Rural Sociol. Soc. Wash. 16 p. 1970.) Increasing fervor in the environmental movement may be a significant attraction to college students and some other potential members.

Other significant attractions for membership are sociability benefits, which were interpreted as the primary rewards for membership in the Mazamas on the basis of an extensive study of this Oregon group

(Harry 1967). For example, the study found that the Mazamas served as a marriage market for about one-third of its unmarried adult members.

No doubt there are other explanations for increasing and maintaining of membership in conservation groups and outdoor clubs. Further research is needed to explain processes by which people develop commitment to preservation ideologies and affiliations with related organizations.

MULTIPLE MEMBERSHIP

There is multiple membership among conservation groups and outdoor clubs, just as a relatively few persons (15 percent)

account for a large proportion of memberships (50 percent) in voluntary organizations in general (Wright and Hyman 1958). Among recreationists, we found that 40 percent of the members belonged to two or more groups and accounted for 64 percent of all memberships reported. The 15 percent who belonged to three or more groups accounted for one-third of all memberships. Devall (1970) found that only 21 percent of the members but 37 percent of the leaders of the Sierra Club were active in other conservation groups or clubs. These findings suggest that a small cadre of active conservationists provides liaison and coordination to the movement and a conspicuous appearance of multiple membership.

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