Chapter 4

Professionalization and Institutionalization: The Mainstream Groups

A CEO CULTURE: THE GROUP OF TEN

The meeting on January 21, 1981, at the Iron Grill Inn, a few blocks from the White House, promised an afternoon of good food, interesting discussion, and getting acquainted or renewing ties. Set for the day after the inauguration of Ronald Reagan as the fortieth president of the United States, the proposed three-hour luncheon meeting was also designed to be a strategic moment for the mainstream environmental movement. It involved a gathering of the leaders of nine (soon to be ten) of the largest national environmental groups, brought together by sympathetic funders whose participation would likely ensure a high turnout. The conveners of the meeting had already begun to warn that the new administration in Washington demanded a strong response, a “precise, enlightened coordination among envorgs (environmental organizations) when pursuing shared goals,” as one internal memo put it.1

For the environmental organizations, the mood that winter of 1981 was somber. Uncertainty about the change in administrations was in the air. Through the winter, a series of meetings had taken place to assess the impact of the Reagan election, but no clear consensus had emerged among
These nine environmental heads were joined at the Iron Grill by several funders, who had come to the luncheon meeting more to listen and observe the potential interaction than to offer donor-related advice or opportunities. The key funder present was Robert Allen, vice-president of the Henry P. Kendall Foundation, a midsize foundation whose decisions were fully controlled by only three individuals: Allen and the two Kendall brothers, John and Henry. The Kendalls, one a businessman (John) and the other (Henry) a physicist (and founder of the Union of Concerned Scientists, a key environmental advocacy group of scientists), had decided to expand their family foundation after selling their family company to Colgate-Palmolive. The Kendalls had selected company employee Allen to run the foundation, partly for his environmental views. It was the environmental area that the brothers had decided would become the primary focus of the foundation.

It was a “heady moment” for Allen. “There I was,” he recalled, “at age fifty, after fifteen years at the company, overseeing the distribution of two-and-a-quarter million dollars in grants a year, concerning issues I cared passionately about.” Allen remembered ripping out articles in the Sunday New York Times about the latest environmental scandal and then bursting into his office Monday morning, prepared to call around to see which groups or environmental experts might be ready to litigate or otherwise challenge the status quo on that particular issue.

The foundation world itself was in flux regarding environmental matters during the early and mid-1970s, when the revamped Kendall Foundation made its appearance. Old-line, moneyed interests, such as Laurance Rockefeller, and hunting, fishing, and bird-watching groups, such as the National Wildlife Federation, Izaak Walton League, and National Audubon Society, were being complemented and, in some cases, replaced by other foundations: Ford, the younger generation of Rockefellers, the Stern and Mott family funds, and wealthy individuals such as Marion Edey of the League of Conservation Voters. These funders were new players in the world of environmental politics. They were helping to create a new breed of environmental organization, with expert staff, especially lawyers and scientists, and a more sophisticated lobbying or political presence in Washington. As much as anyone else, the foundations had become part of the process of creating the environmental policy system of the 1970s.

Though other funders were involved in the planning or participated in the Iron Grill meeting, including David Hunter from the Stern Foundation, Sidney Shapiro from the Levinson Foundation, and Rob Scribner from the Rockefeller Family Fund, it was Allen who initially conceived and would ultimately become the driving force behind the group. Through his role at
Kendall. Allen had become wary of some of the dynamics and interactions among the largest of the environmental groups. This included the incessant and fierce competition for funds, recognition, and overall political legitimacy, as well as the lack of collegiality among the heads of the national groups. Even though groups had met together before, they had not developed any ongoing relationship or strategic division of labor concerning issues and organizational resources. Instead, competition often created pettiness and, sometimes, personal tension. Without a forum to create linkages, disputes between groups and leaders periodically developed and sometimes "festered," as one of the leaders put it. Though increasingly professionalized in their composition and outlook, the groups had still failed to construct a coherent, movement-wide, institutional framework commensurate with their role in establishing a policy nexus in Washington. As leaders of disparate groups still searching for self-definition, some heads of mainstream organizations had become more willing to entertain the notion that their relationships needed restructuring, perhaps in ways similar to their industry antagonists.

One model available was the gathering of corporate chief executive officers that was established during the 1970s, in part because of environmental issues. At the national level, this gathering took place under the aegis of the Business Roundtable; at the regional level, it was structured through such groups as the California Business Roundtable and the Western Regional Council. Audubon's Russell Peterson, a former official at DuPont, was especially attracted to the idea. Other environmental leaders, though less familiar with the Roundtable example, were nevertheless amenable to the idea, particularly since the foundations were promoting it. For Robert Allen, the "CEO gathering" concept was the best means to make the institutionalization process as efficient as possible. It provided a way to "rationalize the field" by avoiding reduplication of organizational resources and collectively targeting funds for issue development. The need to create a coherent environmental identity was no longer just an abstract question: it had to be forged in the midst of a Reaganite counterrevolution against environmental regulation. The groups needed to see themselves and their roles in new ways: as defenders of a system and the heads of multimillion-dollar operations who by coordinating their common interests and goals could forge a mainstream identity.

As the environmental groups' "CEOs" and funders gathered at the Iron Grill, expectations about the luncheon meeting were rather vague. Allen had put together the initial list of invited participants, with advice from the leaders of some of the groups that Kendall had funded, such as the Environmental Policy Center's Louise Dunlap. There were a few who declined, most notably the Conservation Foundation's William Reilly, who remained wary of the staff-based, often adversarial groups such as the EDF, NRDC, and EPC. There were obvious omissions as well: by limiting the gathering to nine CEOs (soon to be ten, after Paul Pritchard of the National Parks and Conservation Association was invited to join), a number of groups, including several that matched the original nine in terms of membership and resources, would necessarily be excluded. But Allen and most of the CEOs thought the number of participants had to be limited to assure ease of conversation at the gathering and to maintain the capacity to follow through once consensus was reached. As with the Business Roundtable groups, the very existence of a mainstream environmental CEO gathering would signify an institutionalization process deemed necessary for environmentalism in the Reagan era.

Allen opened the gathering by laying out his premise and then posing a series of questions to the CEOs. With the new White House, Allen argued, there would be "powerful, increased efforts to subordinate environmental integrity to other national goals and private purposes." This, in turn, warranted improvement in the performance of the environmental movement through better coordination among the groups. How do you see the future? Allen asked the CEOs. Will you have difficulties working in the Reagan years? Would you as CEOs be willing to meet on a regular basis to establish this new form of coordination? Do you want your staff involved?

The CEOs responded briefly to the questions. They were happy to have met some of their counterparts, though disappointed in the low turnout of funders (and the implied promise of more funds for the groups). Although the Iron Grill gathering didn't prove conclusive in establishing new forms of coordination nor formal linkages among groups, the CEOs nevertheless decided to meet again on a quarterly basis, without their staffs, and with participants still limited to those initially invited. Agendas were to be set by the host CEO. Russell Peterson from Audubon would convene the next meeting, scheduled three weeks later for February 12. And although future meetings would be limited to the CEOs, Robert Allen was also invited to come back. He would serve as the glue for the group and a possible source of funds or fundraising for projects the group might collectively decide to undertake.

During the next months, the quarterly CEO gatherings continued, with
agendas and chairs rotated among the ten participants. An air of informality prevailed, though discussions sometimes focused on particular topics, such as the Clean Air Act. While several of the CEOs had wanted the group to remain nameless (and without a specified agenda or set of projects), the name "Group of Ten" began to be used by both participants and staff members of the groups involved. By the end of the group's first year of meetings, the name had begun to stick, providing an important identity to this experiment in forming a coordinated institution. The exclusive nature of the meetings remained in effect, though the Ten also established a staff-based implementation group, which staff members derisively called the "B Team." 

Within the Ten's first year, two key projects emerged as possible bases for action. One centered around a series of proposed regional meetings, each to be hosted by one or more of the groups and designed to strengthen the lobbying capabilities of the Ten at the local level. The second project involved the more ambitious task of identifying a common agenda. The details would be worked out by the B Team, with the completed product published in the name of the Ten. This book project, *An Environmental Agenda for the Future,* was published in 1985, when the Group of Ten was becoming a much more visible entity.

The first years of the Ten also saw a shift from the defensive posture assumed at the Iron Grill meeting to an increasingly assertive, more demonstrative approach taken during the early Reagan years. This more aggressive stance was based on rapidly increasing membership, high rates of return on direct-mail fundraising efforts, and continuing foundation support. It appeared to place the mainstream environmental groups back on an adversarial track, even as the agenda of the Ten sought to extend rather than revise the environmental policies created during the 1970s. With the one significant exception of nuclear issues, the areas reviewed by *An Environmental Agenda for the Future* duplicated or reinforced earlier ad hoc agendas by "building upon the strategies of the past two decades," as the document put it. What made the Ten's efforts most distinctive was the mainstream movement's dramatic clash with the Reagan administration that characterized much of Reagan's first term.

This conflict with the Reaganites, it turned out, also reinforced the movement's institutionalization process. On the one hand, it created a common focus for the Ten, with easily identifiable targets such as Secretary of the Interior James Watt and the EPA's director Anne Gorsuch Burford, dramatizing the conflict with the Reaganites and enhancing the organizational effectiveness of the Ten. Audubon, for example, with only limited success in direct-mail campaigns up to the Reagan period, shifted its appeal to a direct attack on the Reagan administration and raised more than ten times its largest previous total. At the same time, while most groups benefited enormously from these symbols of confrontation, a few of the Ten, most notably the Izaak Walton League and the National Wildlife Federation (NWF), had substantial internal conflicts concerning the battles with the Reaganites. Watt especially targeted the NWF, hoping to separate hunting/sportsmen interests from both the traditional conservationists and the new environmental policy experts. Though Watt himself largely failed to create such divisions, perhaps because of his temperament and divisive rhetoric, the NWF leadership under its new CEO, Jay Hair, maintained an ambivalent posture toward the Reaganite confrontation and the value of the Group of Ten process. This caused considerable consternation among other CEOs and B Team staff. In 1982, in anticipation of a "spring offensive" against Reagan's environmental policies, and again in 1983 and 1984 following the dismissal of Burford at the EPA and Watt at Interior, internal memos of the Ten and the B Team revealed strong fears about NWF positions. Ultimately, the NWF's Hair reluctantly continued to participate, both in the quarterly CEO gatherings and as a signatory to the environmental agenda document, modifying by his presence the adversarial stance taken by the Ten.

By the mid-1980s, as confrontations with the Reaganites began to lessen in intensity, the Group of Ten became more secure in its defense of—and efforts to extend—existing environmental policies. Overtures were made to establish a dialogue with corporate leaders. This included a series of meetings with the heads of six chemical companies: DuPont, Exxon Chemical, Union Carbide, Dow, American Cyanamid, and Monsanto. The Group of Ten process was also becoming more routinized, increasingly seen by its participants as a successful effort at establishing a common frame of reference for the mainstream environmental organizations. Despite Jay Hair's ambiguities and the reluctance of some staff, particularly in groups such as the Sierra Club and the Environmental Defense Fund, to give much credence or prominence to the Group of Ten idea, the "CEO gathering" concept continued to suggest ways in which the groups were tending to converge. By seeking consensus through its published agenda and related activities, such as press conferences and other media efforts, the Group of Ten pursued its search for a common denominator. The process of attempting to achieve such unity itself became one more basis for the
institutionalization of the movement. Even when the formal organization of
the 'Ten collapsed at the end of the decade, due to misgivings about
possible negative associations for such groups as Friends of the Earth
and the Sierra Club, the name "Group of 'Ten" continued to be used by its
critics as the symbol of mainstream environmentalism. Strengthened ini-
tially by the Reaganite confrontation, forced to locate a common envi-
ronmental identity amid potentially differing positions and constituencies, the
'Ten, in existence for less than a decade, had effectively redefined main-
stream environmentalism less as a movement and more directly as an
adjunct to the policy process.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY SYSTEM

The cornerstone for contemporary environmental policies, the National
Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), was enacted, rather ironically, with
little legislative debate and with little input from any of the mainstream
groups who eventually constituted the Group of 'Ten. The brainchild of
Washington senator Henry Jackson and his chief advisor on this legislation,
Indiana University professor Lynton K. Caldwell, NEPA was, as Caldwell
put it, "a political anomaly. A policy statement not rooted in any specific
legislative context, NEPA, which was signed into law on January 1, 1970,
referred only in a general way to environmental and quality-of-life con-
cers. Both Jackson and Caldwell were interested in removing environ-
mental policy from the kind of political deal making exemplified by the
Iron Triangle system in water projects. They hoped instead that environ-
mental issues, through NEPA, would be debated and defined as technical
issues, involving the application of science in environmental decision mak-
ing in order to solve problems.17

For Jackson and other proconservationist office holders, the political basis
for NEPA was the increase in leisure-time consumptive uses of Nature.
These referred not simply to hunting and fishing interests of groups such as
the National Wildlife Federation and the Izaak Walton League but also the
growing middle-class interest in recreational opportunities. Beyond the
interest in these environmental amenities were the quality-of-life concerns
about pollution, whether in the form of smog, landfills, or drinking water
contamination. Though important legislative and administrative action had
occurred during the 1960s on issues such as air quality, water quality, and
solid waste disposal, it was not until Earth Day and after the passage of

NEPA that a more fully developed environmental legislative agenda began
to be introduced. These initiatives were influenced less by conservationist
groups than by new consumer and public interest movements spearheaded
by Ralph Nader and by budding staff-based groups of lawyers, scientists,
and other environmental experts. Perhaps most significantly, the new legis-
arative debate emerged also as a response to the relatively inchoate, yet large
and disturbing, constituency of young activists and counterculturalists who
remained an undertow during the Earth Day events and who symbolized a
general dissatisfaction with the established urban and industrial order that
had worried policy makers during the eventful days of the late 1960s.18

For policy makers, those worries had enveloped the political debate in
Washington by 1970. Paralleling the sense of system breakdown associated
with the Vietnam War, inner-city riots, and turbulence on college cam-
puses, the mood of environmental crisis seemed more and more over-
whelming. This sense of crisis was already reflected in such disparate
events of the late 1960s as the burning of the Cuyahoga River in the center
of Cleveland, the eutrophication of Lake Erie, and the dying birds washed
up on the oil-slicked shores of Santa Barbara. These were also events that
referred both to the degradation of the natural environment and urban and
industrial hazards. And while there was at first no organized lobby pressing
for coordinated government action or intervention by the courts, the force of
events combined with the unsettling times began to lay the groundwork for
new forms of environmental policy.

In just four years, between 1970 and 1974, an extraordinary range of
legislative initiatives, regulatory activities, and court action came to the
fore. These established a broad and expansive environmental policy sys-
tem centered around efforts to control the environmental by-products of the
urban and industrial order. Through this system, a vast pollution control, or
environmental protection, industry was created, including engineering
companies, law firms, waste management operations, and consulting firms
specializing in environmental review, standard setting, or other new envi-
ronmental procedures. According to one industry estimate, the waste man-
agement business alone was transformed from a group of small businesses
with revenues under $1 billion in 1970 into a huge, increasingly concen-
trated industry with more than $25 billion in revenues two decades later.
Similar to the rise of the huge environment-related government bureau-
cracies, the fast-growing environmental industry of the 1970s and 1980s
became an offshoot of and influential player in the development of envi-
ronmental policies.19
As legislative and administrative environmental policies were put in place in the early 1970s, a revised and restructured mainstream environmental movement also began to take shape. While less instrumental in drafting early legislation, the mainstream groups became heavily involved in implementation, monitoring agencies and preparing to develop new initiatives in such areas as solid waste disposal, toxic substances, and cleanup of hazardous waste sites. Increasingly defined by the elaboration of these policies, the mainstream groups came to focus on four arenas: legislation, administrative and regulatory action, the courts, and the electoral sphere. Adopting an adversarial stance regarding much of the policy process in these first four crucial years, the groups also developed a more complex position, assuming simultaneously both insider and outsider status. As a result, by the end of the 1970s, mainstream environmental groups would become both a part of the environmental policy process and its watchdog.

Aside from NEPA, the first key legislative act helping to establish the contemporary environmental system was the 1970 Clean Air Act. By the late 1960s, air pollution had emerged as a potent political issue in a number of urban communities and industrial plants. Between 1966 and 1970, according to one poll, the number of people indicating “very serious” or “somewhat serious” concern over air pollution jumped from 28 percent to 69 percent. In response to these escalating concerns, Congress found itself increasingly embroiled in the issue. Air pollution legislation enacted in 1963 and again in 1967 only increased rather than decreased the pressure to eliminate or otherwise deal with the problem.20

This momentum for action was also spurred by the emergence of several grassroots or citizen-action organizations, such as the Chicago-based Campaign Against Pollution (CAP) and the Pittsburgh-based Group Against Smog and Pollution (GASP). Founded in September 1969 and led by an asthmatic housewife who became a creative and effective organizer, GASP immediately became a presence in the debate concerning air quality in the Pittsburgh area. There, air-related policies had long been dominated by a coalition of industry interests led by the steel industry. Allied with local steelworker activists, GASP lobbied for changes in state and regional regulations, awarded “Dirtie Gertie” certificates to polluting industries, sold cans of clean air to dramatize the state of local air quality, operated its own complaint department that forwarded citizens’ complaints to regulating agencies, and engaged in a wide variety of other mobilizing tactics to pressure for change at legislative and administrative levels. To both industry opponents and public officials, groups such as GASP reflected what one industry representative called “an activist period, what with the racial dimension, colleges, and now the environment.” But to policy makers in Washington, it was precisely the concerns about activism that pushed along the Clean Air debate.21

This debate was also influenced by the emergence of a new activist/lobbying presence in Washington tied to citizen-action advocate Ralph Nader. Nader’s teams of graduate students with law, science, engineering, and public health backgrounds became immediate players in the legislative arena regarding pollution issues. These “Nader’s Raiders,” who identified a public interest rather than a conservationist perspective, combined intensive research efforts with direct advocacy work. In the air quality area, the Nader team published a key report, Vanishing Air, and helped form the Coalition for Clean Air, the major environmental lobbying effort. The coalition eventually included a few of the conservationist groups (who largely played a passive role during the Clean Air Act debates), some of the new expertise-oriented environmental groups (most notably the Natural Resources Defense Council), and Earth Day activists from Environmental Action (the group that inherited the structure originally established by Wisconsin senator Gaylord Nelson).22

These debates were framed in the context of national politics, especially the jockeying for the 1972 presidential election. In his 1970 State of the Union message and related speeches during the next several months, President Nixon declared that air pollution legislation, along with clean water initiatives, would be the cornerstone of his new environmentalist stance. During this intense 1969–1970 period, it appeared that the president’s most likely challenger would be Senator Edmund Muskie, the chair of the Senate Committee on Air and Water Pollution and key to the passage of the 1967 Air Quality Act. Muskie, however, was a target of some of the new activists, particularly the Nader groups, for his unwillingness to challenge industry’s position in the air quality debates and for his tendency to characterize the environmental issue as a problem of consumption rather than urban and industrial pollution.23

Despite their small numbers and the powerful array of industry interests mobilized around air pollution legislation, the new environmental coalition succeeded in getting the new Clean Air Act to extend the federal presence in the air quality area and establish more direct procedures for regulating air emissions at the national level. These procedures included standards for six specific criteria pollutants and a federal government role in the development
of pollution control technologies as part of the act’s cleanup emphasis. And, like other legislation that followed it, the new clean air legislation included target dates for such cleanup, raising expectations that pollution problems could be solved through back-end engineering controls.  

The Clean Air Act was signed into law in December 1970, a little more than seven months after Earth Day. It was seen as a pivotal event, defining a new environmental presence in Washington and providing the first block in the construction of a new policy framework. Subsequent legislation incorporated several key elements of the Clean Air Act approach: standard-setting mechanisms; an increased federal role in the development of control technologies; and ambitious target dates for eliminating or greatly reducing emissions or discharges, particularly more visible or treatable forms of pollution such as sulfur dioxide emissions or biological oxygen demand in water sources. These laws, including the 1972 Water Pollution Control Act Amendments (better known as the Clean Water Act), the 1970 Resource Recovery Act, and the 1972 Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act Amendments (FIFRA), also helped to further develop the new forms of environmental coalition and organization with their focus on regulation, litigation, and implementation.

During the 1960s, most federal environmental policies had been handled through conservationist or resource management agencies, such as the Bureau of Reclamation, the U.S. Forest Service, or the Army Corps of Engineers. Efforts to consolidate those bureaucracies into a single environmental agency or even a single resource-based agency (e.g., by combining the Bureau of Reclamation and the Army Corps) were strongly resisted by both industry and conservationist or protectionist interest groups associated with those bureaucracies. The federal government’s presence in the environmental area, whether in terms of pollution issues or resource policies, tended to be uncoordinated and weak due to uncertain mandates and ineffective regulatory powers for agencies that were also needing to respond to the mounting public concerns over the environment.

With the passage of NEPA and growing pressure to pass more expansive environmental legislation, the question of implementation, particularly the role of the Council for Environmental Quality (CEQ), mandated by NEPA, began to preoccupy the Nixon administration. Concerned about the CEQ’s potential to “advocate an environmental position, and probably an extreme one,” Nixon sought to counter its potential role. He hoped the answer lay in the proposal by his White House Commission on Executive Reorganization, which urged, shortly after Earth Day, that a single independent agency, separate from the CEQ, be established. Nixon endorsed the proposal and sent a reorganization plan to Congress to create a new and instantly massive bureaucracy that would essentially consolidate the functions of all existing entities dealing with pollution-oriented environmental issues. Borrowing from the language of systems analysis in his charge to this new U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Nixon argued that it would need to treat “air pollution, water pollution, and solid wastes as different forms of a single problem.” The creation of the EPA also meant that pollution-based environmental policies would now have their first, fully developed administrative form.

The EPA began operations on December 2, 1970. Its first administrator, William Ruckelshaus, initially sought to convey the impression that his agency would aggressively enforce the new policies, while partially adopting the systems approach by forming two primary program offices to handle the variety of issue areas and legislative mandates under its jurisdiction and several function-oriented divisions designed to be more responsive to White House concerns as well as fulfill certain agencywide objectives, such as enforcement and research. The new agency, however, was quickly overwhelmed by its rapidly expanding regulatory responsibilities, the conflicting signals from the Nixon and later Ford administrations on how aggressively it should pursue such regulations, and effective industry maneuvering, which used scientific uncertainty in the regulatory process to delay or counter the establishment and enforcement of standards.

Faced with potential regulatory gridlock, a number of mainstream environmental groups, increasingly focused on both the implementation of the new environmental legislation and the environmental impact review process established under NEPA, turned to the courts to force the system to function as it was presumably designed to do. The focus on litigation highlighted the significant role that lawyers began to play in the movement. It also reinforced the adversarial posture several mainstream groups had assumed during the early 1970s.

During this period of intense lobbying and litigation, mainstream environmentalism came to be defined in terms of two sets of groups, each with a focus on federal government and congressionally based activities. One set included the new organizations, such as the NRDC and EDF, which were fully engaged in the policy process; the other involved traditional conservationist or protectionist organizations, such as the Sierra Club and the National Audubon Society, which were transforming themselves as well as being transformed by this same environmental policy process. Despite a
convergence in focus, the groups remained distinct and often competitive and territorial in the issues they selected. But by the mid-1970s, the two kinds of groups had begun to resemble each other in how they structured their operations, set their agendas, and defined their constituencies and objectives. This mainstream environmentalism evolved rapidly, still primarily interested in issues concerning the natural environment and resource policy, but also, perhaps inevitably, addressing questions of pollution. With the EPA in charge of implementation of many of these policies, the mainstream groups found themselves focusing more and more on the new agency—and its pollution control-driven mandates—as central to their concerns and agendas.

By the mid- to late 1970s, the election of several new governors broadly sympathetic to environmentalist goals in places such as California, Colorado, Arizona, and Montana, as well as the 1976 victory of Jimmy Carter, who adopted a number of environmental themes during his campaign for the presidency, made the momentum to extend environmental policies throughout federal, state, and regional bureaucracies seem unstoppable.

With Carter in the White House and environmental policies apparently on the ascendant, the mainstream groups found themselves intrinsically involved in the policy process as it continued to evolve and expand. These groups inherited the label “environmentalist,” a term employed by the press to designate both the largest of the Washington-based mainstream groups (often excluding other locally based or direct-action movements and groups) as well as the environmental bureaucracies with which the groups were associated. Growing in terms of staff and financial resources, the mainstream organizations were increasingly absorbed by the operation and maintenance of the policy system itself. A revolving door between staff positions in the mainstream groups and government and industry positions cemented those connections, while the groups’ advocacy role, focused especially in terms of crucial lobbying and litigation functions, became more and more centered on keeping the system intact.

During the late 1970s, this system maintenance function of environmentalism, tied especially to the prominent role of revolving-door “enviros,” fully absorbed the mainstream groups. Key environmental leaders, such as Joseph Browder of the Environmental Policy Center; Katherine Fletcher, Harris Sherman, and Gerald Meral of the Environmental Defense Fund; and Gus Speth and John Bryson, co-founders of the Natural Resources Defense Council, secured positions in the Carter administration and at state resource agencies. They not only helped formulate policies, but at times found themselves in conflict with their former colleagues over specific issues. Browder, who headed a task force that selected sites for some controversial power plants in the Southwest, was a particular target of criticism, especially by local groups confronting those plans. Browder dismissed this more “provincial” perspective, arguing that while he would “rather be out watching birds than helping the utilities site power plants,” the nature of his position required him to help the utilities find sites for their coal-fired plants. The revolving-door phenomenon also paralleled efforts by mainstream environmentalists to find common ground with industry antagonists concerning such key issues as strip-mining reclamation. Attempts at dialogue such as the National Coal Policy Project were pursued by these mainstream leaders, such as the Sierra Club’s Michael McCloskey, who saw environmentalism as a cooperative effort of industry, government, and mainstream groups in identifying and making acceptable specific environmental policies to each of the parties involved.27

Still, several mainstream groups continued their more adversarial advocacy work, particularly in the courts, in response to the slow pace and effective industry countermoves regarding legislative and regulatory activities. Implementation of the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts and, subsequently, the 1976 Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) and Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) particularly preoccupied the newer, staff-based, and expertise-oriented groups such as the NRDC and EDF, which had carved out significant roles concerning these elaborate laws and regulations. Their court-related interventions, furthermore, underlined fears by both industry groups and the understaffed and overwhelmed agencies such as the EPA and OSHA that environmentalism was perhaps a more implacable, system-challenging movement.

But the advocacy work, despite the spirited and creative efforts of certain staff members within those groups, never became linked to the possibility of creating a new kind of social movement. The staff of the mainstream groups continued to limit their activities to their expertise function, whether drafting legislation or arguing in court about implementation. There was little effort to mobilize at the local level, despite a proliferation of local environmental groups throughout the 1970s. Several of these local groups at times cooperated and eagerly sought the expert advice of Washington-based mainstream groups concerning local hazards and environmentally destructive projects. But the process of interaction was largely one-way and failed to counter the growing impression that the
mainstream groups were becoming indistinguishable from the environmental policies they had helped create and sustain.28 This perception was borne out by the political problems experienced by the Carter administration. Shortly after his inauguration, Carter announced new approaches for both water and energy policy. Through these initiatives, Carter hoped to demonstrate a kind of environmental populism, an outsider approach in keeping with some of his campaign themes. His attempt to scale down or eliminate certain federally subsidized water projects, dubbed the “hit list” by the press, was originally put together by several mainstream environmental group staff members, some of whom were on the Carter transition team and would subsequently be appointed to mid-level policy positions in the new administration. Similarly, in the energy area, Carter worked closely with environmental advisors to fashion environmentally oriented conservation and efficiency themes. But both Carter and the environmental groups failed to mobilize constituencies at the local level in advance of these new policies and allowed industry groups to assume a local, grassroots stance as part of their prodevelopment countermobilization. These debates further strengthened the new coalition of business groups that had already begun to systematically attack environmental regulations established by the EPA, OSHA, and a number of other agencies. Led by the Business Roundtable, these business coalitions effectively emphasized the costs of regulation and asserted that a kind of moral as well as economic decline had set in with the enactment and implementation of current environmental policies. Fearful of potential structural challenges to industry implicit in such legislation as TSCA, the industry lobbies, through their antiregulatory counterrevolution, put the mainstream groups and environmental bureaucracies increasingly on the defensive.

Politically unprepared to fight back, the Carter administration and its small group of enviros began a full-scale retreat regarding questions of efficiency, regulation, and resource development. Carter quickly backed down on the water-project hit list and proposed an Energy Mobilization Board to fast-track certain energy resource projects and an $88 billion Energy Security Corporation to underwrite the rapid development of a synfuels industry. With its extraordinarily hazardous processes and by-products, synfuels development especially had the potential to transform parts of the West into an environmental sacrifice area.

Although the mainstream groups were concerned about Carter’s shifts in energy and water policy, they remained loyal to his administration and endorsed him for reelection in the face of Ronald Reagan’s nomination. Reagan, with his embrace of the western ranch and mining “sagebrush rebellion” designed to replace the vast federal ownership of land in the West, his rhetorical belligerence toward environmentalism and government regulation of industry, and his stated intention to deregulate in order to dismantle that system, represented the worst fears of the mainstream groups. But, like Carter, the mainstream groups were vulnerable to charges that their environmentalism represented a “special interest,” an elite constituency whose call for individual sacrifice translated into lifestyle disruptions that forced people “to be hotter in the summer and colder in the winter,” as Reagan put it. With Reagan’s election in November 1980, the era of the first Environmental Decade came to a close, with environmentalism having been successfully linked to an overall decline in America’s international standing and the daily life of its citizens. During that decade, an environmental policy system had been put in place and a mainstream movement had taken root. But the question now emerged: Would they both survive?

THE ROLE OF EXPERTISE: NEW ORGANIZATIONAL FORMS

In the course of the debates about the 1970 Clean Air Act, participants in the environmental coalition that had formed to press for the bill’s passage were immediately struck by the effective use of expertise by industry groups to amend and otherwise limit the legislation. Even more than earlier legislation, such as the Wilderness Act, which had required knowledge of the science involved in justifying certain provisions of the legislation, the pollution-centered bills debated during the late 1960s and early 1970s were defined at the outset in scientific and technical terms. Gaylord Nelson recalled that many of the traditional conservationist or protectionist groups felt removed from pollution issues and the maze of technical arguments that emerged during debates about those issues. “It wasn’t just a matter of dealing with parks or wilderness or the aesthetics of the matter,” Nelson remarked, “but dealing with complex subjects that required a different orientation, a level of sophistication and expertise that the groups had just not acquired.”29

While pressure was developing at the legislative level to establish a new environmental expertise, advocates of quality-of-life issues associated with the New Left or counterculture remained deeply suspicious of the role of
such expertise and the presumption that technical solutions were the best way to address such problems. Even the Nader groups, who prized themselves on careful, interdisciplinary research, shared much of the New Left critique of technical information, warning that "by unnecessarily technicizing and complicating the process, the law often creates insurmountable obstacles to public participation." At the same time, the Naderites warned, the understaffed, undertrained, and underfunded pollution control agencies "suffer as much from the complexity of the legislative scheme as do citizens." All too often "the putative expertise of industry prevails."  

Much of the lobbying and congressional debate about the Clean Air Act, such as the question of statutory auto emission standards, centered as much on technical details as on the larger political issues raised by the legislation. Confronting Rachel Carson's crucial axiom about industry's ability to purchase expertise, environmental lobbyists found themselves overwhelmed and outgunned by the technical experts mobilized by industry. While the final bill was shaped by the new focus on the environment, many of its details were modified during these technical debates. That use of technical expertise would become significantly magnified in the implementation process, where industry, through its "putative expertise," was able to heavily influence the agencies involved.  

The issue of where and how to direct organizational resources, particularly concerning this question of expertise, quickly preoccupied the new environmental groups emerging in this period. While there clearly remained, in the aftermath of Earth Day, the potential for further mobilization, most groups felt an even more pressing need to professionalize to better respond to and shape the new legislative and administrative structures rapidly being put in place. For a group such as Environmental Action, what direction to take remained a difficult question, never satisfactorily answered.  

Following Earth Day, Environmental Action found itself a major player in a quickly evolving movement. It had benefited from the enormous publicity surrounding the Earth Day events, successfully marketed a couple of books that increased its prominence, and immediately attracted thousands of supporters and small contributors, more than for many of the traditional conservationist groups. By trying to maintain the political balancing act it had pursued for Earth Day, Environmental Action staff sought to combine advocacy and lobbying. As distinct from the traditional groups, the organization focused on urban issues, or what one staff member called the "ecology of the cities," including clean air, transportation and the role of the highway lobby, and social justice themes. Some of the staff were influenced by the 1960s movements and theorists such as Murray Bookchin and attempted to establish a collective form of organization, while seeking to encourage various kinds of direct action, including acts of what came to be called "eco-tage." Most of the Environmental Action staff, however, including Denis Hayes, also wanted to influence the policy process in Washington and the explosion of new environmental legislation under consideration on Capitol Hill. Like other groups wishing to cultivate a new environmental expertise, Environmental Action had, in fact, sought funding from the Ford Foundation to help develop its professional and lobbying capabilities. But after months of negotiation and the establishment of a separate Environmental Action Foundation to secure such funding, the group's proposal was ultimately turned down by the foundation. The loss of the Ford grant also meant the organization would not be able to translate its interest in policy development into a more high-powered, expertise-driven framework.  

While the organization had only limited resources for its lobbying, policy, and expertise-related work, it also discovered by the early 1970s that the climate for continuing mobilization and direct action was also changing. Though environmentalism as an idea continued to receive favorable attention from policy makers and the press, demonstrations and other forms of mobilization or direct action were becoming more difficult to pull off. At the same time, Environmental Action, as well as several of the other new environmental groups spawned by Earth Day, witnessed a decline in support, with the number of Environmental Action supporters only gradually increasing later in the decade.  

With the loss of the Ford grant and declining media interest in the direct-action forms of environmental activity, the group experienced a protracted identity crisis throughout much of the 1970s. Denis Hayes, most focused on the group's policy emphasis, decided to leave the organization for a policy-oriented program set up by Douglas Costle (later President Carter's EPA head) through the Smithsonian. "I decided I needed to have more information to be more of an expert," Hayes later said of his departure. After Hayes left, Environmental Action continued to try to refocus its efforts and establish a viable identity, but without great success. The group was most successful in highlighting its media-based, electoral-targeting strategy known as the "Dirty Dozen," which first received significant attention in the 1972 elections. The campaigns against the "Dirty Dozen," twelve congressional incumbents selected for their poor environmental
voting records, also helped reinforce a more adversarial political role for the
organization. This independent role was also reflected in the pages of the
group’s main publication, Environmental Action, which served as a forum for
a wide range of issues, such as occupational hazard issues, that received
significantly less attention from other mainstream groups. But neither the
group’s publication nor its “Dirty Dozen” electoral campaigns were able to
translate that oppositional politics or broader agenda focus into large-scale
garrests or mobilization, partly reflecting the organization’s decision to con-
tinue to function as a staff-based rather than membership-driven or
community-based organization. With most of its small staff serving as
lobbyists focused on the development of environmental policies, with
sympathetic coverage in its bi-weekly (later monthly and then quarterly)
publication of the themes of a developing alternative environmentalism,
and with an electoral political strategy heavily dependent on its media
visibility, Environmental Action remained a group without a clearly defined
role, walking on the divide between the various movements.33

Unlike Environmental Action, which achieved instant national status
through Earth Day but failed to carve out a clear role for itself, the ad
hoc group of Long Island citizens and professionals who created the Envir-
nmental Defense Fund in 1967 found their group clearly situated in just a
few years time as a major center of environmental expertise and policy
action. The EDF began as a local environmental discussion group, the
Brookhaven Town Natural Resources Coalition (BTNRC). It consisted of
scientists from the Brookhaven National Laboratory and the State Univer-
sity of New York at nearby Stony Brook as well as concerned residents in
the area. Similar to a number of other locally based antipollution or anti-
development groups that sprang up in middle-class residential
communities during the 1960s, the Long Island group addressed a wide range of
environmental issues. These included pollution from duck farms, dred-
ging, sewage pollution, groundwater protection, dump sites, wildlife and
habitat preservation, and the use of DDT. The DDT issue was of particular
importance for the group, given the widespread use of the pesticide
throughout Long Island’s Suffolk County.34

The BTNRC leaders were avid bird watchers, Rachel Carson fans, and
frustrated DDT opponents unable to counter the county’s high-profile
spraying campaigns despite growing apprehensions about DDT use. The
BTNRC’s major break on the DDT issue came in May 1966, when the

The opportunity to seek new resources presented itself in September
1967, when Yannacone was invited to address the annual convention of
the National Audubon Society. The Yannacone/BTNRC group decided to try
to get Audubon to establish a new “environmental legal defense fund” to
initiate litigation concerning pesticides and other issues. Yannacone, it was
hoped, would then become chief counsel for such an entity. With the
Audubon Society torn between a conservative and cautious leadership that
had played a largely passive role during the Rachel Carson controversy and
a membership increasingly receptive to the argument that DDT needed to
be banned from use, the Yannacone/BTNRC strategy stood a good chance of
succeeding. Resolutions from the floor of the convention, orchestrated by
the Yannacone/BTNRC group, called for the establishment of such a legal
arm to be financed through Audubon’s Rachel Carson Memorial Fund.
This entity would initiate litigation to seek a national DDT ban. Though
the resolutions were passed, the Audubon leadership, which (like the
Sierra Club) included directors with ties to chemical companies, looked
unfavorably on the establishment of a new litigation arm. Audubon chair-
man Gene Setzer successfully blocked implementation by having the mat-
tter referred to Audubon’s general counsel, Wall Street lawyer Donald C.
Hays. When Yannacone and others met with Hays two days after the
convention, Hays indicated that any effort to establish a defense fund
would not occur through Audubon. Audubon would only provide some
financial backing through its Rachel Carson Memorial Fund, although Hays
also made it clear that an activist-oriented litigation effort had no place within this traditional protectivist organization.36

Outmaneuvered by the Audubon leadership, the Yannacone/BTNRC group felt they had no choice but to establish their own organization, which they called the Environmental Defense Fund. Incorporated a few days after the Hays meeting, the new organization immediately sought local cases for which its budding legal and scientific resources could be utilized. The organization’s first action involved support testimony for the Michigan Department of Conservation regarding the use of dieldrin, a chlorinated hydrocarbon far more toxic than DDT, in a Japanese beetle control program in Berrien County. This effort was followed by legal support work for several other local groups, most of whom were involved in pesticide issues.

In its first year, the organization was dominated by Yannacone through his forceful personality, effective use of cross-examination, willingness to go public and mobilize people as part of his legal strategy, and irreverent, adversarial stance that linked him in some ways to the protest culture of that period. Yannacone’s trademark phrase “Sue the bastards”—also the title of his talk at the Washington, D.C., Earth Day rally in April 1970—reflected the sense of implacable opposition associated with direct action forms of environmental protest while placing such protest in the context of litigation. Such a stance, EDF leaders later commented, worked well in the pre-NEPA, pre-environmental policy system days of passion and advocacy, when the “crucible of the adversarial process” (i.e., cross-examination tactics) could burn away the “evasions, temporarizations and data tampering of the polluters and of the cozy-with-industry regulatory agencies.”37

But by 1970 that approach was seen as increasingly problematic by key organization figures, such as the new executive director, Roderick Cameron, and EDF trustees and financial backers, including the Ford Foundation. Though a decision to sever relations with Yannacone derived in part from a personality dispute, the action helped refocus the EDF framework of linking litigation, science, and the policy process. The departure of Yannacone also served to moderate the rhetorical stance of the organization, shifting it away from a “sue the bastards” style of confrontation to a far more temperate tone and organizational image.38

By June 1970, several months after the break with Yannacone, the organization was ready to undergo another major transformation. The Ford Foundation, which had provided initial funds for the organization through the Audubon relationship, expressed an interest in providing a sizable grant of $285,000, matching the organization’s existing annual budget. Ford, however, imposed a condition: the EDF would become subject to oversight by the “Gurus,” a Ford-created committee of five past presidents of the American Bar Association who would review any proposed action by all environmental and public interest groups receiving funding from Ford. The EDF was also obliged to create a Litigation Review Committee comprised of “prominent members of both political parties who would have great political clout and would have final say on any EDF litigation.” Though the review committees were designed to partially shield Ford from EDF actions that might be deemed too radical, it was another step to further professionalize the organization, since any litigation now had to pass through a two-stage screening process, forcing the organization to justify each prospective action “legally, scientifically and practically.” At the same time, the role of the Gurus and the establishment of the Litigation Review Committee, as well as the expansion of the EDF board to include such figures as Amyas Ames, chairman of the executive committee of the investment banking firm of Kidder, Peabody, further modified the adversarial approach. Ames, whose firm was a major underwriter of public utilities, later commented that his decision to join the board was a reflection of “EDF’s very early policy of working in cooperation with business and industry that made this decision easy.”39

Through the early and mid-1970s, the EDF became a major litigator in such areas as lead toxicity, the fight against the SST, the protection of sperm whales, and pesticide hazards, its preeminent issue since its founding days. The organization rapidly expanded staff resources, opening new offices in Washington, D.C., northern California, and Denver. It enlarged its financial base with support from foundations as well as from individuals who subscribed to the EDF’s newsletter and were otherwise designated as members of the organization. Of the different staff-based professional groups, the EDF maintained through this period a strong reputation as an independent, adversarial organization, particularly in such areas as toxics policy, where regulatory activities provided a continuous arena for challenge and litigation. At the same time, the group kept its distance from grassroots activities and movements, continuing to emphasize its professional character and the leading role of its own staff in setting the organization’s focus and agenda.40

During the late 1970s, the organization began to more systematically pursue the idea that Kidder, Peabody’s Amyas Ames had first raised on joining the EDF board: cooperation with industry through the search for what the organization called “win-win” strategies. In the area of utilities
policy, this was represented by an economic model put together by the organization's California office. The model sought to demonstrate to the utility industry that a conservation-oriented or demand-based approach, linked to certain incentives, would be more profitable in the long run than the volume-oriented, expansionary policies that had characterized the utility industry approach for more than sixty years.41 This focus on a potential economic common ground between industry and environmentalists, encouraged by the growing numbers of staff economists within the organization, evolved during the Reagan and Bush years into an overarching EDF strategy to promote market incentives, replacing regulation as a primary tool for reshaping environmental policy. A key influence in the shift toward professionalization in the early 1970s, the EDF would ultimately become, by the end of the second Environmental Decade, the organization most wedded among the mainstream groups to the idea that environmental change was a matter of reinforcing rather than restructuring a market-driven urban and industrial order.

The Ford Foundation's support for the new environmental professionalism was underlined by its role in the emergence of another lawyer- and scientist-based staff organization, the Natural Resources Defense Council. The NRDC was formed as a result of two parallel developments: a career search for a public-interest law practice by several graduating Yale Law School students and the protracted Storm King power plant fight along the Hudson River. The merging of the two under the auspices of Ford created another trajectory for a professional environmental group: nationally focused at the outset, heavily weighted toward the practice of law, and an ad hoc and expertise-oriented approach toward issues.

The Yale student group, from the class of '69, first got together in the fall prior to their graduation. Several of the participants, including Gus Speth, who had been instrumental in bringing the group together, had been editors of the Yale Law Journal. All of them seemed destined to have successful careers in the worlds of law, business, or politics. Interested in policy matters, the group wanted to pursue alternatives, such as the budding field of environmental law, to more conventional career choices. They had no clear role models to guide them. The closest examples seemed to be the American Civil Liberties Union or the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, legal advocacy groups that act on behalf of particular causes, such as civil liberties or civil rights.

By the time of their graduation, the Yale group, calling itself the Legal Environmental Assistance Fund, or LEAF, had not yet secured funding to establish its own environmental law practice. As a result, group members became law clerks or took similar jobs in the interim, while continuing to talk with potential supporters, including the Ford Foundation. Ford, which had established a Natural Resources and Environment division a few years earlier, had already begun its own discussions with two prominent Republican attorneys from the Wall Street law firm of Simpson, Thatcher, and Bartlett. Along with a few associates, these lawyers, Stephen Duggan and Whitney North Seymour, Jr., had become interested in establishing a resource-oriented law practice based on their experiences with the Storm King case. This proposed water storage facility and power plant had generated strong local opposition in the Hudson River Valley, and litigation eventually caused the project to be abandoned. In the course of this fight, the Duggan/Seymour group had become familiar with similar local environmental and development-related campaigns across the country, but felt they tended to be "disorganized, one-shot deals," as Duggan later put it. "Instead of this finger-in-the-dike approach to protecting the environment," Duggan said of his group's thinking, "such fledgling environmental efforts" would benefit "from an organization staffed by lawyers and scientists who could provide ongoing professional help."42

In January 1970, the Duggan/Seymour group decided to hire John Adams, a lawyer formerly with the U.S. Attorney's office in New York, to become the first staff member for their new law practice. Incorporated a month later as the Natural Resources Defense Council, the new organization immediately approached Ford about start-up funding. The foundation, in turn, suggested that the organization join forces with the Yale group. Ford executives knew such a merger had to overcome generational differences in style, attitude, and organizational focus. The Yale group was suspicious of the orientation of the old-line Republican (and conservationist-oriented) NRDC group, while Duggan and Seymour remained wary about the new and possibly radical ideas of the former Yale students. The Ford executives were friends and associates of the NRDC board members, but were also impressed with the Yale graduates, and wanted to support both groups without duplicating efforts. To obtain foundation backing, Ford insisted that the Yale group work through the existing NRDC structure with its already established board of wealthy and powerful figures, such as Laurance Rockefeller as well as Duggan and Seymour. Duggan himself would be the group's first chairman.
Before the Ford funds could become available and the new group fully launched, a tax problem involving the IRS still had to be resolved. As a result, through the spring and summer of 1970, the organization experienced some tensions between the two groups exacerbated by the uncertain status of the funding. Yet both groups quickly agreed upon a common goal: to establish a new kind of law practice, a “law firm for the environment” capable of responding to the sudden explosion of environmental issues and legislation. In its effort to help mold a new kind of law and policy, the NRDC could help reconstitute a contemporary environmental movement by “brining professionalism to the environmental scene,” as one of the group’s top leaders put it.43

Once the IRS allowed Ford to fund environmental and public-interest law activities, the NRDC, subject to Ford’s review process (which included the five Gurus and an acceptable, corporate-oriented board), quickly became involved in several issues. “Our agenda was eclectic,” Adams recalled. “but we felt like we were being dropped right into the middle of a war, since there were no other lawyers doing what we had decided to do.” The group immediately involved itself in implementation of the Clean Air Act, became engaged in the coalition lobbying for the Clean Water Act, focused on strip-mining and stream channelization problems, helped bring suit regarding the Alaska lands bill, and tied into agriculture, forestry, and land use issues as well. It became best known for its monitoring and litigation on implementation issues: through Richard Ayres, the NRDCs air expert, the organization filed thirty-five of the first forty Clean Air Act-related lawsuits.44

By the mid-1970s, with the NRDC functioning on much of the same terrain as the EDF and the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, and with several of the traditional conservationist groups also hiring lawyers as well as scientists and economists, the question of division of labor and increased competition also emerged. The NRDC sought to distinguish itself from the other groups by presenting itself as a law service. “Instead of competing with the big groups like Audubon or The Wilderness Society,” Adams recalled, “we were saying that we would be their mouthpiece, and in that way we wouldn’t step on toes.” An informal division of labor with groups such as the EDF also developed, though competition between the groups, the more directly they resembled each other, generally increased rather than decreased during the 1970s. Each of the professional groups also worried that their need for greater expertise was outpacing their capabilities in influencing the environmental policy process.

The NRDC decided it needed scientists and lobbyists; the EDF, with more scientists, added lawyers and economists. A number of staff members also became crucial participants in the policy process through the environmental revolving door. John Bryson, for example, one of the original Yale Law School group, helped establish a northern California office for the NRDC and soon parlayed his NRDC involvement in California resource issues into high-level appointments with the State Water Resources Control Board and then the Public Utilities Commission during Governor Jerry Brown’s administration. Eventually Bryson secured a position at Southern California Edison, becoming its chief executive officer in 1990. In the process, Bryson’s career demonstrated how one industry had come to recognize that the professional wing of environmentalism also provided training for high-level industry jobs.45

By the 1980s, the NRDC had become a dominant force in the professionalization of the movement. Though its agenda remained eclectic (it included, for example, nuclear arms race issues), it felt firmly implanted within the environmental policy system. At the same time, the NRDC, along with several other mainstream groups, became increasingly focused on global issues and helped promote certain domestic environmental approaches (such as energy efficiency and pollution control) within an international context. Over time, the NRDC became the environmental organization most identified with the technical expertise needed to draft legislation, issue reports, and use litigation as a tool in the policy process. By the end of the second Environmental Decade, it had come to symbolize the ascendancy of professionalism among the mainstream groups. Applauded for its continuing emphasis on expertise while simultaneously expressing a lack of interest in the tactics and strategies of mobilization, the organization had secured for itself a central place in the organizational culture of contemporary mainstream environmentalism.

One of the most forceful figures helping to reshape the environmental movement has been David Brower. A charismatic yet polarizing personality, Brower embodied the uncertainties and turmoil experienced by traditional conservationist and protectionist groups during the late 1960s. As his fight with the Sierra Club reached a climax, Brower made plans in 1969 to establish a new organization more in keeping with the new trends within the movement. He was aided in these efforts by the cult of personality that had built up around him. With his shock of white hair and rugged good looks, his
evocative rhetoric, and his increasingly "no compromise" negotiating posture, Brower looked and acted the part of the "archdruid" so strikingly described by essayist John McPhee in his profile of Brower for The New Yorker. Aside from establishing greater latitude for his own interests, Brower wanted his new San Francisco-based organization, which he named Friends of the Earth (FOE), to pursue certain issues and strategies that the Sierra Club had not or would not pursue. These included a greater emphasis on international issues (including plans for non-U.S. chapters of the organization), a more direct ideological role through an expanded publishing effort, and a more expansive agenda, including but not limited to traditional wilderness and resource policy themes.

With his departure from the Sierra Club and incorporation of Friends of the Earth, Brower quickly established a board willing to back his ventures and selected a staff interested in more expertise-oriented approaches toward the new environmental issues. FOE's key staff figure was Joseph Browder, a former southern field staff representative of the Audubon Society who had been heavily involved in the fight to protect the Everglades. Browder and Brower, though, immediately clashed, with Browder emerging as a leader of the staff faction of FOE wishing to develop an interdisciplinary or integrative expertise concerning environmental policy. Brower, on the other hand, saw the staff, particularly those in Washington, as overly focused on the legislative, administrative, and political dimensions of the "beltway" process, the narrow locus of policy making centered in Washington. The bitterness of the dispute was magnified by the conflict over Brower's management style and personality, a key area of confrontation in the Sierra Club situation also.49

In 1972, most of the East Coast staff departed from FOE and created a new D.C.-based organization, the Environmental Policy Center. The EPC was structured as a quasi-lobbying, quasi-research and advocacy group of policy experts-in-the-making, complementing the parallel shift toward professionalization based on the use of law and science occurring within other parts of the movement. Though the EPC maintained a strong lobbying presence in Washington, it was one of the few groups to successfully establish ties with dozens of local organizations that had formed to tackle specific issues ranging from strip mining to water development.

Under first Browder and later Louise Dunlap's leadership, the EPC was able to define itself in professional terms with respect to both its lobbying and policy development functions. The organization became adept at working congressional committees, monitoring agencies such as the Army Corps

of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation and allying with a wide variety of interests to accomplish certain specific objectives. With respect to water policy, for example, the EPC (which changed its name to the Environmental Policy Institute) utilized cost-benefit techniques to enlist more conservative and less environmentally oriented opposition to water projects such as the Bureau of Reclamation's Central Utah Project and the Army Corps' Tennessee-Tombigbee project. During the 1970s, this approach helped delay authorizations of existing projects and limit new projects. Although successful at the policy level, the EPI and other environmental groups that had helped put together Carter's "hit list" were still unprepared to deal with the countermobilization organized by water industry interests.

The EPI achieved its most notable water policy successes during the Reagan administration years. Despite the harsh, anti-environmental rhetoric within the EPA and the Department of Interior, EPI staff discovered that administration officials in other agencies, especially the Office of Management and Budget, were willing to work with environmental groups to block or slow down specific water projects that they opposed for fiscal or ideological (reducing government's role) reasons. Ironically, the EPI's water policy successes eventually caused some of the organization's major foundation backers to eliminate funding in this area on the assumption that the issue was no longer critical, even though overall federal water policy remained uncertain and contentious. The dependence on foundations, which reinforced the tendency to address policy questions on an issue-by-issue basis rather than in more strategic ways or as part of a larger environmental vision, underlined the crisis management atmosphere of the beltway process and the ad hoc nature of the staff work within the EPI and other policy-oriented mainstream groups. Within those limits, the EPI had succeeded, by the end of the 1980s, in consolidating the group's role as lobbyists and policy analysts in the reconstitution of the contemporary mainstream movement.47

Shortly after its formation, but prior to the FOE/EPC split, Friends of the Earth played a role in encouraging the development of an environmental electoral arm for the mainstream movement. First conceived by Marion Edey, a young congressional staff aide, the idea was brought to the attention of Lloyd Tuppling, a long-time Sierra Club lobbyist who had stayed aloof from the internal fight that had recently paralyzed his organization. Tuppling suggested that Edey speak to David Brower, who was then
forming Friends of the Earth, Edey, Brower, and several Brower allies subsequently met and decided that Edey should establish a separate group to be initially housed at FOE’s Washington office.48

The new organization was named the League of Conservation Voters (LCV). It began in 1970 with few resources but only a small overhead. Supporting herself through her own inherited wealth, Edey became the LCV’s first, unpaid staff person. She quickly began to raise funds, establish a board largely drawn from FOE, and search for candidates to support or incriminate to oppose. The group decided it could most effectively challenge potentially vulnerable anti-environmental Democratic Party incumbents in the primaries. Toward that end, its first major effort was an attempt to unseat George Fallon, the powerful head of the House Public Works Committee, who was also known as Mr. Highway Trust Fund for his support of highway construction and opposition to mass transit. Fallon was challenged in the primary by Paul Sarbanes, a young Baltimore attorney whom the LCV aided through its fundraising and volunteer support. The timing of the election proved to be fortuitous. A major air pollution alert in the Baltimore area shortly before the election, along with Earth Day events and debates on the Clean Air Act, served to highlight this and other pollution-related issues that were central to the LCV strategy. Fallon indeed proved to be vulnerable and lost the election. Two years later, an even more dramatic primary upset occurred in Colorado with the defeat of Wayne Aspinall, the powerful, prodevelopment chairman of the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, by a former regional director of the EPA, Alan Merson. In this race, the LCV raised more than $20,000, or about half of Merson’s funds, and again provided volunteers and staff time. The 1972 Aspinall defeat, two years after George Fallon’s loss, astounded many of the existing environmental groups and put the LCV, along with Environmental Action and its “Dirty Dozen” campaigns, at the center of the new environmental focus on the electoral process.49

During the early 1970s, when the LCV was establishing its role within the mainstream movement, campaigns were far less expensive to run than later in the decade, when limits on individual donations paved the way for corporate PACs and enormously expensive elections. As its ability to influence the outcome of specific elections diminished, the LCV focused efforts on its congressional ranking system, charting the votes of members of Congress on environmental legislation. The group saw itself as representing the interests of the entire mainstream movement by institutionalizing the movement’s political and lobbying activities. One frequently employed tactic involved the purchase of a block of tickets to a fundraiser. Tickets were then distributed to various mainstream environmental lobbyists to allow them to be visible at the event, reinforcing their lobbyist profile.50

By the 1980s, the LCV’s political capabilities had largely become dependent on its voting charts, reinforcing the perception that the group—and the mainstream environmental movement—were involved in a kind of interest group politics tied to the maintenance of the environmental policy system. Though the LCV never became an organization of professional lobbyists—many of the mainstream groups developed their own PACs and hired their own lobbyists instead—it contributed to the mainstream movement’s conception of itself as a “career oriented and not cause oriented” group of staff professionals, as the LCV’s founder Marion Edey put it.51

Ironically, the most conflicted of the new policy-oriented groups spun off or departed from FOE was Friends of the Earth itself. From its beginnings, the group was torn between David Brower’s vision, evolving politics, and management style, and a reliance on a staff form of organization with its tendencies toward professionalization. During the 1970s, Friends of the Earth sought to explore new themes, new coalitions, and new environmental issues, such as the SST, nuclear energy, and urban development, even as it maintained a heavy emphasis on wilderness, population, and environmental protection concerns. Its internal organ Not Man Apart, its agenda documents, and its various other publications, such as Progress As If Survival Really Mattered, reflected this diversity of approach. FOE’s efforts at establishing an international framework for its activities through its semiautonomous FOE chapters in other countries also contrasted with nearly all the mainstream groups, which maintained an exclusive domestic frame of reference in this period.52

Despite its interest in an active membership and local activities, FOE never fully resolved the tension between its organizational emphasis and its activist inclinations. During the 1970s and early 1980s, a number of FOE organizers saw themselves as the radicals of the mainstream movement, pushing the limits of the environmental agenda and seeking to broaden the movement’s appeal. But FOE’s resources were primarily available for its lobbying and policy-related professional functions, which clashed at times with the group’s search for a more radical approach. This problem was significantly exacerbated by yet another conflict between some of the professional staff and the group’s founder, David Brower, who had already
been removed from the organization's daily operations during the late 1970s. By 1984, a bitter internal battle ultimately led to Brower's departure from the organization. While the FOE founder, anticipating his defeat, established Earth Island Institute, a more radical, think tank–like organization, the post-Brower FOE shifted its operations to Washington, D.C., further underlining its policy, rather than activist, orientation.

With a declining membership and an inability to compete in terms of professional resources and policy influence, Friends of the Earth finally decided to merge in 1989 with the Environmental Policy Institute. The merger integrated FOE's international presence, membership base, and “willingness to take risks” with “EPI's expertise in politics and key environmental issues,” as the organization's new CEO, former EPI head Michael Clark, put it. While Clark suggested that by reaching out to new constituencies, such as minorities, FOE/EPI could conceivably expand its agenda to deal with “poverty, housing, income, food and shelter” as “legitimate environmental concerns,” the merged organization nevertheless remained bound by its overwhelming Washington, D.C., beltway-process orientation, which precluded such a change. The Brower-inspired experiment in radical environmentalism, never fully escaping the professional impulse of the mainstream movement, had come full circle.\(^5\)

The Restructuring of the Traditional Groups

With the emergence and growing prominence of expertise-oriented, staff-based professional groups, traditional conservationist and protectionist groups also experienced their own organizational metamorphoses. Long-standing debates about protection versus management and recreation values versus development values came to be modified by, and eventually gave way to, a new focus on environmental regulation and pollution control. Constrained by their own history and constituency ties, traditional groups nevertheless adapted to the conditions imposed by the development of an environmental policy system, embracing it as their own once its construction was well under way.

The key group in this shift was the post–David Brower Sierra Club. In the aftermath of the Brower conflict, the organization, with a new executive director and a board of directors wary of the sharp rhetoric and heightened visibility of the Brower era, worried about the political polarization in the period. Some feared the influence of the New Left and counterculture would push the organization toward addressing issues such as the Vietnam War. In a February 1970 report to the organization's board of directors, the club's president, Philip Berry, warned that the “growing popularity of our cause has attracted some whose motives must be questioned,” including “anarchists voicing legitimate concerns about the environment for the ulterior purpose of attacking democratic institutions.”\(^5\) At the same time, with the election of Richard Nixon in 1968, the organization anticipated a retreat from conservationist themes and was unprepared for the rapid increase in interest and membership following Earth Day and the explosion of media coverage about pollution issues. The club, which maintained a modest-size staff at its San Francisco headquarters and a handful of staff at regional offices across the country, also failed to anticipate the rapid construction of new pollution-oriented environmental policies that would also force the traditional groups to reconceptualize their activities.

The first major indication of change was the creation in 1971, through a Ford Foundation grant, of the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund as a separate legal arm of the organization. Immediately plunging into both NEPA-related litigation and the implementation of new environmental legislation, the Legal Defense Fund, which both complemented and occasionally competed as an environmental legal advocacy group with the EDF and NRDC, had a major impact on the Sierra Club itself. It caused the club to rethink its staff functions, especially as Legal Defense Fund staff lawyers began to assert that the “real battle may not be in court, but long before, when EPA or whatever agency is involved arrives at its administrative position.” This, in turn, required an ability to argue cases in “conference rooms rather than courtrooms,” as the Legal Defense Fund’s executive director concluded.\(^5\)

While the Washington-based Legal Defense Fund, operating largely independent of the San Francisco–based club, helped stimulate a greater club emphasis on both litigation and lobbying, the organization still remained reactive and often wary of the developments reshaping the mainstream groups during the early 1970s. In the energy area, for example, the Sierra Club was influenced by the pronuclear position of its president, Laurence Moss, himself a nuclear engineer. At first, the organization took a cautious position on nuclear power, despite its rapid emergence as a pivotal local issue in areas where plants were being sited. The group's leadership also proceeded cautiously with respect to the question of coal-fired plants and related mining questions, seeking to separate landscape and natural environment questions from the pollution problems associated with the use of coal. During the same period that the Legal Defense Fund undertook
litigation to stop the pollution caused by the coal-fired plants in the Four Corners area in the Southwest, the club became heavily involved in the National Coal Policy Project (NCPP). The NCPP, a group of industry executives and environmental staff initiated by Moss and Dow Chemical's corporate energy manager, Jerry Decker, sought to develop consensus on acceptable forms of mining and coal energy development. When Sierra Club executive director Michael McCloskey became cochair of the project's mining subcommittee during 1975 and 1976, he was forcefully attacked by several club activists, including the former chair of its energy committee. But McCloskey saw coal as a "bridge fuel" and worried that the mainstream movement's overall tendency toward adversarial actions made it difficult for organizations such as the Sierra Club to pursue "acceptable accommodations" as represented by the NCPP.56

Unlike expertise-oriented organizations such as the EDF and NRDC, which operated without any direct connection to—or constraints from—specific constituencies, the Sierra Club, with its legacy of chapters and membership and a post-Brower era reluctance to vest too much authority in staff leadership, at first resisted the powerful professionalizing tendencies within mainstream environmentalism. During the 1970s, disputes among and between chapters and the staff and the board occurred periodically. With senior staff creating their own cliques in alliance with separate board or volunteer factions, the club increasingly resembled a fractious organization without a clear definition or sense of purpose. This infighting weakened the shift toward centralization and professionalization. More than the other mainstream leaders, executive director McCloskey's participation in the Group of Ten process was influenced by these organizational conflicts, exacerbated by a mistrustful board and staff unwilling to grant him functioning CEO status.57

Nevertheless, the Sierra Club continued to grow and expand its reach through the 1970s and 1980s. It benefited enormously from the explosion of interest in environmental issues and its continuing reputation as a central player in the movement. By the mid-1980s, its membership had jumped to more than 400,000, with an organizational budget of $23 million and a staff of 225.58 When Michael McCloskey decided to resign in 1985, a divided board sought to locate a new executive director capable of concentrating its professional, technical, and lobbying resources. After a bitter search process, the board selected former Nixon aide Douglas Wheeler. But Wheeler, who later became a top environmental aide to Republican California governor Pete Wilson, almost immediately became a magnet for organizational opposition at the chapter level and among various staff factions. After only six months as executive director, Wheeler was fired on an eight to seven vote by the board, to be replaced five months later by Michael Fischer, a former California environmental official with numerous club ties who was himself hired on an eight to seven vote. Fischer sought to sustain the club's evolving, though still discordant, professionalization while maneuvering through its byzantine structures and organizational culture. Into the 1990s, the club continued to function as a less focused, more diffuse organization, with a relatively weak top leadership, a powerful, politically oriented staff group operating out of the club's national offices in San Francisco and lobbying headquarters in Washington, and a volunteer leadership that directed club activities at the local level.59 While influenced by the reach of professionalization among the mainstream groups, the Sierra Club had also come to represent the movement's conflicting and diverging tendencies at the local level as well.

The Sierra Club's uncertain transition paralleled the uneasy shift toward contemporary mainstream environmentalism experienced by the oldest of the traditional groups, the National Audubon Society. Comfortably housed in its limestone-and-brick building on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, and later at its five-story, Georgian-style mansion just a few blocks south from its earlier site, Audubon had been able to grow modestly up through the 1960s, thanks to its bird-watching activities and sanctuaries, nature films and education programs, and conservation camps in places such as Maine, Connecticut, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. During the 1950s and 1960s, the organization also began its evolution from a more decentralized organization of state-based societies similar to the Izaak Walton League and National Wildlife Federation to a more centralized organization emphasizing individual membership and national programs and policies.

During the 1960s, under the leadership of Charles Buchheister and the organization's Washington, D.C., representative, Charles Callison, the Audubon Society followed the lead of the Sierra Club and Wilderness Society with involvement in issues such as the Wilderness Act and the fight against a jetport in the Everglades. The group was most absorbed by the pesticide issue, particularly in light of the controversies concerning Silent Spring and pressure within the organization to pursue a more forceful role against DDT. The anti-DDT efforts were led by the organization's vice-president, Roland Clement, who had worked closely with the EDF group to change the Audubon approach.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Audubon became one of the first
of the traditional groups to try to adjust to the restructuring of the mainstream movement. Its new executive director, Elvis Stahr, a former secretary of the army and University of Indiana president, reflected board interest in establishing Audubon as a major player in the environmental policy arena. During Stahr’s ten-year tenure from 1968 to 1978, Audubon hired a number of staff scientists, increased its lobbying presence in Washington, initiated direct-mail solicitation on specific environmental topics, and restructured its main publication, Audubon, to reflect a broader interest in environmental or ecology themes. It was in the pages of Audubon, especially, that membership unease with the transition was most forcefully expressed by those who felt the organization should remain “synonymous with birds and birding” and not environmental advocacy, as one member wrote. At the same time, the group’s 1971 move to a midtown high-rise office building from its more reclusive setting on Manhattan’s Upper East Side was another indication of the culture shift taking place within the organization. 

When Stahr retired in 1978, the Audubon board sought an executive director like Stahr who would have visibility and political influence. Though Audubon had grown more rapidly than other traditional organizations in the years shortly before and immediately following Earth Day, that growth had leveled off by the mid- to late 1970s, and the group’s embrace of broader environmental themes had yet to translate into a clear organizational direction. After a lengthy search, the board selected Russell Peterson. They saw in him a credible environmental moderate whose background and interests as director of DuPont’s research and development division, as Delaware governor, as chairman of the CEQ, and most recently as director of the Office of Technology Assessment would enable him to further broaden the Audubon agenda.

Peterson immediately became a forceful figure at Audubon. His interest in global and population issues as well as politics conflicted at times with board, staff, and individual members “who considered the Society’s mission to be historically that of wildlife protection.” During the confrontational years of the first Reagan administration when James Watt became a potent symbol of environmental polarization, Peterson helped initiate and hold together the Group of Ten while becoming the most visible spokesman for the mainstream movement’s response to Reagan’s approach. “As a Republican, a businessman involved with the chemical industry, a public official in both Republican and Democratic administrations, and an outsider to the movement prior to his appointment at Audubon,” the EPI’s Louise Dunlap recalled the thinking among the Group of Ten, “he was the ideal person to get up at our press conferences and blast away at Reagan and Watt. Russell Peterson was our answer to charges that the environmental movement was a liberal cabal.”

For Peterson, politics, as much as professionalism, was critical to reshaping environmentalism. He sought to reinvigorate the chapter structure of Audubon as a potential lobbying force to accomplish political goals for the organization and the larger movement. In regional gatherings of the organization, in the pages of Audubon’s publications and in its direct mail, and through Peterson’s own public appearances, the Audubon CEO became the leading proponent for politicizing the movement.

Those political efforts culminated in the 1984 presidential election, when Peterson and Audubon and a number of other Group of Ten CEOs directly supported or provided resources for Reagan’s challenger, Walter Mondale. But the Mondale campaign never effectively developed environmental themes, and the Reagan reelection effort was able to tag Mondale as the candidate of the “special interests,” including the environmental groups. By the mid-1980s, with Reagan’s sweeping reelection victory, his partial retreat with respect to deregulation, and a leveling off of support for the mainstream environmental organizations, a number of the mainstream groups began to reevaluate their public identities. This included rethinking the degree to which politics should be a primary frame of reference above and beyond the need to support and extend existing environmental policies.

By the time Russell Peterson reluctantly stepped down in 1985 (one year short of his seven-year contract), to be replaced by attorney Peter A. Berle, nearly all the organizations of the Ten had begun to focus on management style and how to better emphasize cooperation and solutions rather than the heightened adversarial stance of the early Reagan years. Each of the organizations, including Audubon, also strongly emphasized that CEOs had a fiduciary or corporate responsibility that measured group success by the bottom line, including staff resources. At Audubon, Peterson’s effort to elevate the chapters as a political force was deemphasized in favor of further strengthening the professional and corporate character of the organization.

For the conservative Audubon board, Berle seemed an appropriate choice for this new stage of development in the movement. The son of a well-known economist and a former state assemblyman and director of New York’s Department of Environmental Conservation, Berle quickly sought to lower the Audubon profile, reemphasizing the centralized nature of the
organization. He closed regional offices, eliminated staff positions, and reduced the share of membership dues available for local chapters. As a result of these moves, an organizational rebellion, led by a retired Charles Callison, challenged Berle’s leadership and Berle’s primary board supporter, Audubon chairman Donal C. O’Brien, Jr., a lawyer for the Rockefeller family. The clash between chapters and member activists and the professional staff became a critical part of the dispute. The Audubon leadership, as one of Berle’s critics put it, worried that chapter “agitators” might elect directors “who wouldn’t fit in socially with the rest of the Board, and whose manners could prove embarrassing in the presence of foundation executives and corporate officers.”

Though Berle and his backers were able to turn back the challenge from the Callison group, the question of organizational identity still remained prominent. Berle worried that Audubon, despite its large membership and big budget, had an image problem, a “bird watchers’ reputation that it had never fully shaken off, even during the politically charged Peterson interlude. To deal with this image issue, the organization hired Landon Associates, an outside consultant. Landon reported that the “bird watchers” reputation still had deep roots, both among the membership and in terms of the perceptions of Audubon within the mainstream movement. Unless Audubon, with its legacy as an organization of birders, was accepted as a contemporary professional environmental group, it could conceivably fall behind in membership growth and access to financial and other organizational resources.

To accomplish that image shift, Berle sought to redefine the organization as “diverse and far flung, [where] there are unlimited opportunities to plug your energies into the Audubon machine.” Recruitment, fundraising, and greater managerial skills continued to be given greatest priority. In a period extending from 1987 to Earth Day 1990, when all the mainstream groups were benefiting from a renewed popularity of the environmental issue, Audubon also aggressively sought to expand its budget and membership. By the new decade, the organization, like several other mainstream groups, had consolidated its own professional and corporate identity. For this one-time organization of birders, reconstituting itself also meant escaping its past.

The question of organizational identity became particularly compelling for The Wilderness Society, one of the protectionist groups most bound up with its own history. During the 1960s and 1970s, the organization’s publications frequently invoked the memories of its key founders and leaders, such as Benton MacKaye, Robert Marshall, Aldo Leopold, and Olas Murie. The death of Howard Zahniser, the group’s long-time executive director, just a few months before final passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964, only reinforced that desire for continuity, based on the group’s exclusive focus on wilderness issues. Unlike the Sierra Club and the Audubon Society, whose transitions to new executive directors paralleled their complex and often uneasy shift toward organizational restructuring, The Wilderness Society under Stewart Brandborg, Zahniser’s assistant, who took over the position of executive director, maintained its earlier leadership style and wilderness focus.

In the decade that Brandborg ran the organization, Wilderness Society resources became fully absorbed by implementation of the Wilderness Act and the group’s other major area of concern, preservation of the Alaskan wilderness. For Brandborg, Alaska and the fate of the Wilderness Act were great causes. His exhortative leadership style, his approach to “each battle as if it was the last battle,” and his tendency to get absorbed in the details of staff work eventually caused him to clash both with staff and board members, who worried about the organizational debts he had incurred. At the same time, Brandborg became personally sympathetic to the activism of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which caused additional clashes with his conservative and more narrowly focused board. Unlike the Sierra Club and the Audubon Society, which both grew faster and sought to expand agendas while professionalizing staff resources, The Wilderness Society was unable to make a clear transition to the new era of mainstream environmentalism, despite quadrupling its membership to 87,000 within a decade. When Brandborg was finally fired in January 1976, the organization seemed least prepared among the traditional groups to reconstitute itself along more professional lines.

During the next two-and-a-half years a crisis mood prevailed. The organization went through several leadership changes, rapid staff turnover, a 50 percent decline in membership, and an enormous budget deficit that came close to wiping out the principal from the endowment left by Robert Marshall that had long supported the organization. Many of the staff who remained were activist-oriented, poorly paid compared to their counterparts at other traditional groups, and locked in bitter conflict with the board. The board, in turn, sought a new executive director to “knock heads” in redirecting the organization. The eventual choice to head the organization, William Turnage, an aide of Ansel Adams who had worked at the State Department and studied at the Yale School of Forestry, promised to intervene forcefully in establishing a new framework for the organization.
When Turnage took over in November 1978, the organization was suffering from uncertainty about its wilderness advocacy as well as from its internal organizational disarray. Many of the staff ("young, radical, crusader types," according to Turnage) had become frustrated and angered by the slow and complex Wilderness Act implementation process, including the proceedings involving Bureau of Land Management lands. By 1980, thirty-six of the thirty-seven pre-Turnage staff had departed, essentially forced out by the new Wilderness Society leader, who began to pursue a more aggressive professionalization process for the organization. Turnage wanted to carve out a specific role for the group within the mainstream movement, not by competing over the range of environmental policies being addressed by the different groups, but by limiting the organization's agenda to its own historic interest in public lands issues, including wilderness. Turnage hoped to concentrate organizational expertise, to have The Wilderness Society become a professional environmental group with a specific focus instead of a traditional advocacy organization with limited expertise. He was also interested in lobbying and public relations activities and linked the group's increased ability to analyze policy with its lobbying function. At the same time, the increased focus on public relations, relatively unique then among the mainstream groups, established greater visibility for the organization despite its narrower agenda.

Similar to other mainstream groups, during the early 1980s The Wilderness Society was able to expand its financial base and substantially increased membership to 150,000 in 1985, when Turnage left the organization. His replacement, George Frampton, a Washington lawyer who had been an assistant special prosecutor on the Watergate Special Prosecution Task Force, reinforced the emphasis on public lands issues, although narrowing the focus even further by excluding any involvement in resource development questions on state or private lands. Frampton, seen by board members as more of an "analytic, rational manager" than the more intense Turnage, also decided to reduce the organization's high-profile public relations efforts and establish a greater emphasis on policy analysis and implementation and monitoring at the regional level. Like other mainstream environmental executives, Frampton buttressed the group's corporate style of management, expanding the organization's finance, administration, and development departments, while also providing a think tank environment for the Resource Planning and Economics Department staff. With another spurt in membership and finances during the late 1980s, The Wilderness Society was able to complete its transition to a narrow but focused role within a mainstream movement that had itself become defined by its corporate/professional bureaucracies and focus on environmental policy making. Even when the growth subsided and membership actually began to decline after Earth Day 1990, the organization simply scaled back rather than refocused efforts, its strategic and organizational directions having already been set.

The most striking transition among the traditional groups was the evolution of the hunter-based National Wildlife Federation. Established in 1935 under the leadership of political cartoonist Jay "Ding" Darling, the NWF sought to fill a vacuum left by the declining fortunes of the most prominent conservationist organization of sportsmen, the Izaak Walton League. The IWL, or the Ikes, had exploded on the scene during the 1920s, particularly in the Upper Mississippi Valley area, where contaminated streams and other pollution problems had begun to have serious impacts on fish and wildlife populations. The IWL was especially critical of the evolution of the National Park Service, the Forest Service, and the Biological Survey, characterizing them as agencies "of destruction and not of preservation of outdoor America." Despite its initial popularity, especially in the Midwest, the organization began to experience bitter internal conflicts by the mid-to late 1920s. These eventually led to divisions between the state chapters and the central organization, as well as the forced resignation of its founder and most charismatic leader, Will H. Dilg.

The origins of the NWF can be traced to a North American Wildlife Conference organized by IWL member Darling, who wanted to extend the approach of the Ikes by combining hunting and wildlife management through a single organization. Darling's plan was conceived in conjunction with and subsequently funded by the leading suppliers of ammunition to hunters, including DuPont, the Hercules Powder Company, and the Remington Arms Company. The new group was immediately forced to confront a key potential conflict: how to balance the needs and interests of hunters versus the growing pressure for a more absolute wildlife protection approach. This issue had been raging among organizations such as the IWL and Audubon and had preoccupied key wildlife advocates such as Aldo Leopold and William Hornaday. The NWF decided to side with the hunters' interests, defining the group in its constitution as a federation of hunter-oriented wildlife interests organized through state societies. Individuals and nonhunter groups who wanted to join—the most likely
constituency for a more stringent approach to wildlife protection—were given only nonvoting membership. Thus, the new group established at its outset a structure that "reflected the reality of the sportsman-first philosophy," as the NWF's official biographer put it.73

Through its first several decades, the NWF, with a financial base tied to the organization's sale of wildlife stamps, continued to be dominated by hunting and fishing interests active through state affiliates. Many of the state groups functioned as pressure groups for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The NWF, however, was less action-oriented and more involved in its service functions. As a consequence, it tended to be less identified with some of the key wilderness and protectionist issues that emerged in the post-World War II period. Even when the group did become engaged in an issue, such as support for the Wilderness Act, it did so only after hunting activities were protected. During the 1960s, when the organization under executive director Thomas Kimball sought to broaden its agenda by involvement in the fight against the proposed dam in the Grand Canyon, it still faced conflict within its own ranks, particularly among the state societies that remained motivated by their hunting or recreational interests rather than a protectionist concern for the natural environment.74

During the 1960s, the NWF gradually shifted direction after individual voting membership was authorized to establish a broader constituency for the group regarding wildlife issues in general. By the early 1970s, the organization had made a modest transition toward a more professional staff and had expanded its mission. Still, the NWF remained one of the most conservative of the mainstream groups, reflected in its efforts to stay out of the courts, avoid adversarial relationships, and cultivate ties and personal relationships with policy makers. More than other mainstream groups, the NWF actively solicited relations with industry interests while decrying the "extremists and kooks" and "screamers and yellers" within the environmental movement. Nevertheless, the group's transition was still noteworthy, symbolized by its decision to change the slogan on the front page of its publication National Wildlife from "Dedicated to the Wise Use of our Natural Resources" to "Dedicated to Improving the Quality of Our Environment."75

In 1981, shortly after Ronald Reagan became president, Tom Kimball retired, the last of the old-line conservationist leaders to step down. After a two-year search, the NWF's board selected a new executive director: Jay Hair, a younger, professional-oriented leader from within the group's ranks. An associate professor of zoology and forestry at North Carolina State University who had been president of the South Carolina state branch of the organization and a special assistant on fish and wildlife policy to Secretary of the Interior Cecil Andrus, Hair immediately sought to refashion the organization. He envisioned the NWF as an active, independent player in the mainstream movement, commensurate with its large membership, budget, and organizational staff. Once in office, Hair was immediately forced to contend with James Watt's efforts to actively court the NWF organization while attacking its Group of Ten counterparts. The interior secretary sought to appeal directly to hunters and recreational interests by distinguishing between the use and protection of wilderness and wildlife. At the same time, Watt's assistant secretary for fish and wildlife, G. Ray Arnett, tried to appeal to Hair's antagonists within the organization. Arnett, a former NWF president who cultivated a "great white hunter" image, had also been involved in NWF intrigues over the selection of Kimball's successor and the effort to have the organization "revert to its good-old-boy hunting club approach," as Hair put it.76

The response of Hair and his staff was ambiguous. On the one hand, Hair established his own direct link to the White House, the only Group of Ten CEO to develop a working relationship with top administration officials. Hair also expressed discontent with the Group of Ten process, suggesting that his organization was larger, wealthier, and more powerful than the other groups and that consequently he might not have the time or inclination to participate as fully as the other CEOs. Though Hair never fully withdrew from the Group of Ten, his periodic distancing from the mainstream movement, at times in alliance with other conservative environmentalist figures such as William Reilly of the Conservation Foundation, revealed some of the movement's conflicting tendencies as well.77

One area of disagreement among the Ten was the issue of cooperation with industry groups. Shortly after assuming his NWF post, Hair decided to establish a Corporate Conservation Council in order to make a "fairly aggressive outreach to industry" to overcome the antagonisms that had developed during the previous decade. The council consisted of top NWF executives and representatives of oil and chemical companies and utilities. Its objectives were defined as identifying common points of agreement and ways to resolve disputes between industry interests and environmentalists. The council's quarterly publication, the Conservation Exchange, was sent out to Fortune 500 CEOs, major foundation executives, business schools, and mainstream environmentalists. This approach was further extended when both Hair and William Reilly, again with
leading oil and chemical companies, created Clean Sites Inc. to promote privately sponsored cleanups of particular hazardous waste sites. The Clean Sites strategy, emphasizing voluntary action similar to William Reilly and George Bush's later concept of voluntarism as a substitute for regulation, broke new ground, according to Hair, by "enlisting the entrepreneurial zeal, the proven expertise, and the enlightened self-interest of America's private sector." 28

By the late 1980s, Hair and the NWF, through its cooperation with industry, emerged as one of the two (the other was the Environmental Defense Fund) mainstream organizations in sharpest dispute with the grassroots and direct-action wings of the movement. The dispute extended not only to the content of issues (how, for example, cleanup of waste sites should be accomplished), but in the embrace of power associated with these organizations and their CEOs. One aspect of the professionalization of the movement—assuming the trappings of power such as higher salaries, chauffeur-driven cars, and elegant offices—stood out most dramatically with the NWF. Even more than the other traditional groups, this organization of hunters had made its transition by imprinting on the contemporary professionalized movement its concept of the necessity of relating to the dominant sources of power in the Reagan-Bush era. 29

By the early 1990s, the professionalization and institutionalization of the mainstream groups seemed secure, though incomplete. The Group of Ten meetings, for one, had given way to larger gatherings that provided recognition for the continuing process of institutionalization, but these still fell short of fully defining the movement's institutional framework. The continuing debate about whether to assume an adversarial or negotiated approach toward industry and government also remained unresolved. George Bush's selection of William Reilly as EPA head in 1989 suggested one approach. As a leading advocate within mainstream environmentalism of a government/industry/environmental movement decision-making triad, Reilly sought to expand on his and Bush's voluntarism approach by creating policies independent of the regulatory system itself. This approach broadly corresponded to the growing interest in market arrangements, such as water transfers or marketable air pollution permits, that became prominent among key mainstream groups such as the EDF. These market and voluntarism approaches influenced the design of such new legislation as the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments and such agency actions as the EPA's "33/50" voluntary reduction plan in the toxics area. 30 Both approaches were controversial, frequently attacked by direct-action and grassroots groups that were themselves situated outside the mainstream movement's arena of activity. These activists argued that such market approaches established a "license to pollute" and that both market and voluntary approaches decreased rather than increased the pressure to restructure industrial decision making in order to incorporate pollution prevention and other environmental values. Mainstream groups such as the EDF dismissed the criticisms, focusing instead on their broader objective of further influencing and refining the environmental policy system through its "win-win" solutions worked out with government and industry.

The mainstream groups today stand at a crossroads. On the one hand, they seem ready to pursue an even more comprehensive process of professionalization and institutionalization, their activities defined increasingly as career training for the initiation and management of environmental policies. 31 At the same time, having enlarged their agendas in response to the development of an environmental policy system, these groups remain vulnerable to criticism by those who have come to define environmentalism in broader social terms as a response to urban and industrial change. The conflicts and contrasts between mainstream and alternative environmental groups, central to this question of definitions, will ultimately become a crucial determinant in the reshaping of environmentalism in the contemporary period.
leading oil and chemical companies, created Clean Sites Inc. to promote privately sponsored cleanups of particular hazardous waste sites. The Clean Sites strategy, emphasizing voluntary action similar to William Reilly and George Bush's later concept of voluntarism as a substitute for regulation, broke new ground, according to Hair, by "enlisting the entrepreneurial zeal, the proven expertise, and the enlightened self-interest of America's private sector." 78

By the late 1980s, Hair and the NWF, through its cooperation with industry, emerged as one of the two (the other was the Environmental Defense Fund) mainstream organizations in sharpest dispute with the grassroots and direct-action wings of the movement. The dispute extended not only to the content of issues (how, for example, cleanup of waste sites should be accomplished), but in the embrace of power associated with these organizations and their CEOs. One aspect of the professionalization of the movement—assuming the trappings of power such as higher salaries, chauffeur-driven cars, and elegant offices—stood out most dramatically with the NWF. Even more than the other traditional groups, this organization of hunters had made its transition by imprinting on the contemporary professionalized movement its concept of the necessity of relating to the dominant sources of power in the Reagan-Bush era. 79

By the early 1990s, the professionalization and institutionalization of the mainstream groups seemed secure, though incomplete. The Group of Ten meetings, for one, had given way to larger gatherings that provided recognition for the continuing process of institutionalization, but these still fell short of fully defining the movement's institutional framework. The continuing debate about whether to assume an adversarial or negotiated approach toward industry and government also remained unresolved. George Bush's selection of William Reilly as EPA head in 1989 suggested one approach. As a leading advocate within mainstream environmentalism of a government/industry/environmental movement decision-making triad, Reilly sought to expand on his and Bush's voluntarism approach by creating policies independent of the regulatory system itself. This approach broadly corresponded to the growing interest in market arrangements, such as water transfers or marketable air pollution permits, that became prominent among key mainstream groups such as the EDF. These market and voluntarism approaches influenced the design of such new legislation as the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments and such agency actions as the EPA's "33/50" voluntary reduction plan in the toxics area. 80 Both approaches were controversial, frequently attacked by direct-action and grassroots groups that were themselves situated outside the mainstream movement's arena of activity. These activists argued that such market approaches established a "license to pollute" and that both market and voluntary approaches decreased rather than increased the pressure to restructure industrial decision making in order to incorporate pollution prevention and other environmental values. Mainstream groups such as the EDF dismissed the criticisms, focusing instead on their broader objective of further influencing and refining the environmental policy system through its "win-win" solutions worked out with government and industry.

The mainstream groups today stand at a crossroads. On the one hand, they seem ready to pursue an even more comprehensive process of professionalization and institutionalization, their activities defined increasingly as career training for the initiation and management of environmental policies. 81 At the same time, having enlarged their agendas in response to the development of an environmental policy system, these groups remain vulnerable to criticism by those who have come to define environmentalism in broader social terms as a response to urban and industrial change. The conflicts and contrasts between mainstream and alternative environmental groups, central to this question of definitions, has ultimately become a crucial determinant in the reshaping of environmentalism in the contemporary period.