STATEMENT ON THE DIABLO CANYON ISSUE

When convictions are strong emotions run high.

The eight Directors, including myself, who signed a letter to Mr. Sibley, President of P.G.&.E., appraising him of a possible reversal of the Club's resolution giving its blessing to P.G.&.E.'s nuclear plant at Diablo Canyon, did so because they believed that reversal would be a return to the basic, fundamental conservation policy of the Sierra Club. We respectfully requested that he take cognizance of this possibility by stopping the construction at Diablo Canyon in the interim. We took this action because we believed that it was the right course - the consistent course if you wish - which would return the Club to a position of integrity. That the membership voted for what we believed to have been a wrong course was not a compelling reason for refraining from what we did. I at least signed the letter out of conscience and conviction. There is very little left of the wild coast of California. It is difficult for me to understand how so many California chapters could not wish to save what little there remains. They condemn what I consider a right action in favor of consistency with a wrong course. We are accused of irresponsibility, dereliction of duty, and betrayal of trust. These accusations must not go unanswered.

Among the purposes of the Sierra Club from the day of its founding was the preservation of wildness for enjoyment

and re-creation of the spirit. The founders did not anticipate the rapid growth in population which has occurred since their day; they did not visualize the demands for the preemption of land by private interest, by developers, by exploiters, and by agencies of the government for personal profit or for bureaucratic advantage. Under these pressures the Sierra Club was faced with the choice to expand its purposes and involvement to meet the growing forces arrayed against its aims and ideals, or the choice to build up its defenses for the protection of its limited goals and avoid the wider conflict, to shut itself in and try to maintain a static state within a limited realm of influence. Had it chosen the latter course, even had it survived, it would today be a vigorless, self-admiring, unknown group battling ineffectively against the piecemeal whittling away of the territory it set out to protect.

But the Sierra Club chose the former course, and with that choice it undertook to set no boundaries to its fields of engagement, no limits to its areas of responsibility in the continuing war against the despoilers of the natural environment. It renounced a static policy based on timid caution, on fear of antagonizing its opponents and creating enemies, on accepting less in order to avoid conflict. Instead it welcomed the challenge of a growing America with all the risk that this entailed. It chose a policy of expansion, gambling that with uncompromising, fearless engagement growth and influence

would concomitantly increase.

However, not without opposition has this course been adopted. Even within the ranks of the Club have there been those who viewed with trepidation a conservation policy which if vigorously pursued would lead the Club into conflict with the most powerful private organizations in California and in the nation beyond the borders of the state, and even into conflict with independent, intrenched government agencies responsive more to private than to public concern. These people looked with nostalgia back to the days when the Sierra Club's principal activities were in pack trips and mountain climbing in the Sierra Nevada. They felt more comfortable in the cozy atmosphere of a small club in which all the members were acquainted. They were uneasy at the burgeoning membership enlisted from among the people unhappy about the trend towards complete occupation of the land, people who were willing to count less their own convenience and pleasure than happiness and health of future generations.

Outings and mountain climbing are essential parts of the Sierra Club's activities; they are in a sense its reason for being. But they could not long survive in the absence of a forceful dedicated conservation program. A program, which of necessity, to meet the ever increasing pressure to subtract from conserved and protected areas, to reduce undeveloped wilderness, to force acceptance of the concept of the uselessness of unprofitably used lands and of the concept explicit

in the disparagement of wilderness values, must declare an accelerating counter-pressure in support of these values or it will fail. Towards this end all the ancillary activities and resources of the conservation effort must be directed.

California, because it has the largest and fastest growing population of all the states, is the focus of this conflict. Wild land is disappearing faster in California than anywhere else. One would expect that the Sierra Club would unanimously without qualification defend against despoilment the remaining de facto wilderness areas in the state. But sadly it had not done so. Many among us believe that only by compromise and accommodation can the Club retain its influential position with the government and the people. They believe that only through stubborn consistency can the Club maintain public respect for its actions and a fair image in the land. I say that compromise and accommodation with industry and private interest, and as well with bureaucratic agencies, will destroy the influence and standing of the Club. I say that consistency is meaningful only in terms of the actions taken; consistency with a wrong or stupid decision is worse, and works more harm to the fair image of the Club, than the wrong or stupid action worked in the first place. Consistency with right is the highest justice and the greatest wisdom, but one has to be sure of the right. The Supreme Court has a record of consistency with wrong decisions which continued for generations, and when it finally reversed itself,

it received nearly universal acclaim. Its fair image for dispensing justice and wisdom was exalted. All deliberative bodies have the prerogative, and indeed the duty to reverse their previous actions for reasons other than the presentation of new evidence, but for reasons simply of a changed point of view, a new or revised philosophy, or merely a change of heart.

We should be ready and willing to allow our hearts to advise our minds, when we are involved in debates on conservation issues with impersonal corporations whose deeds belie their words, and whose interests are diametrically opposed to ours. They do not care for conservation unless in ignoring it they sully their public image. Then they change their tunes and profess deep concern for the abstract human aspirations. They are the ones who must watch their public images, who need the sanction of the public if not its respect, for without these things they suffer in the place that hurts them most - in their profits.

There is no compromise between an organization like the Sierra Club concerned with the public welfare and a corporation concerned first last and always with material gain. Each concession we make is accepted as its due, and each concession it makes is given as a boon or charity, which it claims can justly be withdrawn when necessity, as determined by it alone, dictates. Each compromise on our part regarding any conservation matter is bound to be a loss, a retraction of our boundaries, a

narrowing of our defense perimeter, and a degrading of values. Each piece of the environment lost is lost forever. Each concession represents a shrinkage of our freedom.

To those who say the Sierra Club is damaging its fair image by reversing its actions or by reconsidering an issue, I reply what good is this fair image when all is lost and the Sierra Club itself ceases to exist because there is nothing left to defend? We must join no convention that lessens wildness; we must make our stand and not give in; we must, if possible, advance and not retreat.