

Great Spruce Head Island
Sunset, Maine
04683

10 June 1969

Mr. Phillip Berry, President
Sierra Club
1050 Mills Tower
San Francisco, California

Dear Phil:

This is my reply to your request for comments on the subjects to be taken up by the Board at its special June meeting.

After listing the subjects you say the Board would like written recommendations prior to the meeting so that it can focus on the pivotal questions. This sounds to me like a contradiction of the cited purpose in requesting recommendations, for it implies that the Board will decide before it meets with the chapters, committees, and members which the important issues are that it is willing to discuss.

I offer, however, the following comment on the ostensible purpose of the meeting:

The last election was the result obtained when a dissident minority of the Board goaded the membership into dissatisfaction with staff, chapter, and individual relationships. The theme of this minority was the breakdown of communication at these levels. Now this minority has become a majority and it is faced with the necessity to improve communication. I do not concede that communication ever had broken down, for it seemed to me that the chapters were extremely vocal and that their wishes were always clearly audible. However, in response to what you and Mr. Wendling regard as a mandate from the members, you have apparently decided to embark on a course which could easily lead to placing procedures ahead of the cardinal conservation purposes of the Club.

You propose to conduct the June Board Meeting like an enormous town meeting in which all opinions will be considered on a basis of equality. Twentythree chapters, many committees, and any individual who may wish to speak will be heard. Inevitably a great disparity of opinion will be presented with which the Board will have to deal. Under the heavy pressure, a consequence of the assumed mandate, to reach decisions agreeable to all participants, it is a foregone conclusion that the resulting compromise between so many suggestions will be the course most agreeable to all and therefore the least effective. This is the danger then: that the Board will adopt a weakest solution to the Club's internal problems and the least militant policy on conservation. The common denominator principle will prevail. Thus a policy of compromise will originate from within the Club where it will erode the Club's effectiveness as a national conservation organization, and confrontation with the agencies and industries with which the Sierra Club is in fundamental conflict will be effectively, although possibly unknowingly, circumvented.

My concept of the duties of a director are to support the conservation issues according to his convictions and not out of considerations for a consensus. Presumably he was elected on the basis of what he

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believed and not for his ability to compromise with those with whom he disagrees. By electing him the membership has delegated to him the authority and responsibility to act as his conscience dictates, and if he votes for something less he is by that much betraying the trust bestowed upon him.

Conservation priorities are not difficult to assign; they are in most cases self-evident. National issues should be the responsibility of the Board. They are population growth and environmental degradation, which seem to me should obviously come first since they underlie all the others. After them are the establishment of National Parks and Wilderness areas, and the saving of San Francisco Bay, which has become a national issue. Torrey Pines, Red River Gorge, and the lower Colorado River are examples of chapter issues. Common sense will place most conservation issues in the proper category, but even when common sense fails allocation by policy criteria would not succeed either. I fail to see how these questions could be more easily answered by town meeting methods.

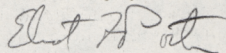
As for the problem of the Bulletin, I suggest that the Publications Committee and the Executive Committee take a hard long look at the Audubon Magazine, which has become under the editorship of Les Line the foremost popular conservation magazine. Since book publication is being whittled down more funds ought to be available eventually for the Bulletin.

Conservation battles should be fought more vigorously than ever before on the legislative level. I believe it is in this direction that the Sierra Club can be most effective. After all it is in the Congress and in the state legislatures where the conservation victories are won.

Your memorandum contains many ancillary questions most of which will be answered when the primary ones are resolved.

Will you please have copies of this letter sent to Aubrey Wendling and to all members of the Board of Directors.

Sincerely yours,



Eliot F. Porter