

The Epidemic of Extreme Environmentalism

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Recently, California Representatives Tom McClintock and Kevin McCarthy voiced concerns to the Forest Service about the need for our National Forests to remain open and accessible by all Americans. Both Representatives have written eloquently about the disturbing trend of the Forest Service to penalize those that enjoy motorized recreation access by cutting off access to treasured areas, putting strict limitations on the number of participants in long-running events, and even denying the opportunity for those that like to congregate together to enjoy their sport in a group.

Forests throughout California have traditionally welcomed events held by various recreational groups, but of late, they are trying to extract exorbitant amounts of money from these groups by a means called "cost recovery", demanding enough money that it could be called a form of extortion.

But as we rightly criticize this growing trend of discrimination against motorized outdoor recreation by the Forest Service, we have to look beyond the immediate, beyond those that are enacting these new rules to the forces behind them. While it is certain that some of the pressure is coming from Washington DC and those in charge, much of this is also the byproduct of the frequent lawsuits filed by anti-access groups against the Forest Service, which forces the Forest Service to act in this draconian manner.

In an effort with an end-goal to completely remove all forms of motorized recreation from our National Lands, (except, of course, the dirt roads that lead to non-motorized trailheads) anti-access groups such as Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, The Wilderness Society, the Center for Biological Diversity and other smaller, regionally-based groups, are dropping into Forest Service offices unannounced throughout the state to check permit applications that are being filed by motorized recreation groups and challenging the granting of those permits. Through the not-so-subtle threat of yet another lawsuit, these organizations are forcing the Forest Service to prepare cumbersome, expensive and unnecessarily complicated NEPA documents for recreation based events. The Forest Service is being coerced into extracting more and more money from small groups and organizations to pay for extensive environmental documents to protect themselves in the event of a lawsuit.

There are many anti-access groups who do little or no work on the ground, and exist merely to sue Federal and State agencies. And the worst part about this, is that they are paid for these efforts by the American Taxpayer. These groups, when they file a lawsuit, also file to

recoup all the costs, including attorney costs, from the defending agency. And the vast majority of the time they receive these costs which constitutes their entire livelihood.

Through the Equal Access to Justice Act anti-access groups are reaping millions of dollars a year from the American Taxpayer, and they have no incentive to stop. Read the following excerpt from an interview given to High Country News, in 2009: Kieran Suckling, Director of the Center for Biological Diversity was asked about the role lawsuits play in his overall strategy. His response is chilling; *"...we use lawsuits to help shift the balance of power.....the power shifts to our hands. The Forest Service needs our agreement to get back to work, and we are in the position of being able to powerfully negotiate the terms..... When we stop the same timber sale three or four times running, the timber planners want to tear their hair out. They feel like their careers are being mocked and destroyed -- and they are. So they become much more willing to play by our rules and at least get something done. Psychological warfare is a very under-appreciated aspect of environmental campaigning."*

All those that enjoy access to our National Forests are being manipulated in the manner described above, as are the Federal and State Agencies forced to defend their on-the-ground decisions. The financial implications on surrounding communities is unimportant in this scheme, as is the legitimate access of thousands of Americans to their public lands.

By recognizing this problem and the forces behind it, we can then take steps to strategize and conceive our own plans to defend our right to access our public lands. Remember the 3 P's - Participation, Political action, and Positive PR, but this time include your friends and family, your neighbors and acquaintances in this battle. Those of us who are Outdoor Recreation Enthusiasts number in the millions in California, yet our political muscle has not been flexed with any enthusiasm. This is truly a fight for our very existence, our enjoyment and our livelihoods, in some cases. We need to recognize that working together with all other groups that enjoy the forests is key to turning the tide against this Epidemic of Extreme Environmentalism.

Access Representative McClintock's statement at

<http://www.laketahoenews.net/2010/08/mcclintock-rips-apart-u-s-forest-service-practices/>

Access Representative McCarthy's statement at

<http://www.stewardsofthesequoia.org/PDF/TimeForAJobCreatingAgendalsNowOp-Ed.pdf>