

The Group of 10 respond

by Marty Durlin

Sierra Club

Founded 1892

President Allison Chin; Michael Brune,
executive director

Staff More than 350

2008 Revenue \$87,418,200

(does not include Sierra Club Foundation funds)

"The Sierra Club environmental justice program was kick-started by the (SWOP) letter," says former Executive Director Carl Pope, who served in that position from 1992 to January 2010. The Sierra Club hired its first environmental justice organizer in 1992, and the program has grown substantially since then. Now called Sierra Club Environmental Justice & Community Partnerships, the program has 12 organizers in communities including El Paso, Flagstaff, Minneapolis, Puerto Rico, Washington, D.C., Central Appalachia, Memphis and New Orleans. The program hires organizers from the local community and adheres to organizing principles posted at www.sierraclub.org/EJCP.

Natural Resources Defense Council

Founded 1970

President Frances Beinecke

Staff More than 300

2008 Revenue \$105,120,002

"Shortly after receiving the letter, NRDC's founder and president, John Adams, met with environmental justice leaders and attended the First National People of Color Summit in 1991," President Frances Beinecke says. NRDC felt the issues raised were legitimate, and the organization made a long-term commitment to both diversity and environmental justice. Ultimately, environmental justice was included in NRDC's mission statement, and staffers were hired to work with environmental justice communities.

In August 2006, the group's unprecedented work after Hurricane Katrina led Robert Bullard, considered by many as the father of the environmental justice movement, to describe it as a model of how mainstream groups can partner with EJ communities. Other examples of partnerships NRDC has made with EJ communities can be found at: <http://www.nrdc.org/ej/partnerships/>.

Environmental Defense Fund

Founded 1967

President Fred Krupp

Staff More than 380

2008 Revenue \$134,929,041

The 1990 letter was "galvanizing, important and timely," President Fred Krupp says. Even though the environmental community has made progress since then, he says, "We still have a long way to go to diversify our ranks and practices. Like all other enterprises, the environmental community must be held to a single standard: its actions."

Krupp, however, believes that SWOP's 1990 call to "stop operating" in communities of color "ignored the good working relationships EDF had and continues to have" in the regions in which it has offices.

"Nowhere do we 'speak for' communities," Krupp says. "We partner with them and bring our expertise to goals established -- and pursued -- by those communities." Nationally, EDF's staff advisory committee has sponsored 29 EJ mini-grant projects since 2004.

National Audubon Society

Founded 1909

President John Flicker

Staff 700

2008 Revenue \$104,260,000

"Audubon has a major and lasting commitment to expanding the diversity of our movement," says Phil Kavits, Audubon's vice president. "The health of people, wildlife and the environment we share are all interconnected and cannot be protected in isolation."

Eight Audubon Centers have been opened in urban communities since the SWOP letter was written, with more on the drawing board. "Many directly address the serious environmental justice concern that diverse communities have long been the dumping grounds for all the bad things that richer, less diverse communities don't want nearby." Audubon has partnered with local government agencies and residents to help clean up and transform once-undesirable locations into community assets.

The Wilderness Society

Founded 1935

President William H. Meadows

Staff 138

2008 Revenue \$23,551,536

Says President Bill Meadows, "Over the past 12-13 years, we've been much more attentive to issues of diversity than we were before. When I came, I made a commitment to build partnerships and coalitions. ... We've been working with African American organizations in the Southeast, Native organizations in Alaska and Hispanic groups in the Southwest -- that kind of positive work."

Meadows says the group has had the greatest impact in Alaska, where it has an Alaska native on staff, Lydia Olympic, who works to protect Bristol Bay from oil exploration and to keep the North Slope in Barrow free from off-shore oil exploration. "We have a great concern about the impact of oil exploration on the sea. Alaska natives are dependent on fishing and hunting -- we help them, they help us."

National Parks Conservation Association

Founded 1919; renamed the National Parks and Conservation Association in 1970 and National Parks Conservation Association in 2000.

President Tom Kiernan

Staff 160

2008 Revenue \$61,107,237

"I don't think it's possible to overestimate the impact" of the SWOP letter, says Alan Spears, legislative representative. "Very few people at NPCA had any real sense of the environmental justice movement and how it was evolving, and they were very surprised that anyone felt NPCA was a problem."

By 1994, the group had hired a diversity consultant, and by 1996 established an "enhancing cultural diversity" program -- seeking to make the national parks more accessible to people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, "making them aware that parks also commemorate aspects of culture and history relevant to their lives." The program ended in 2003.

In 1998, NPCA began the national Underground Railroad Network to Freedom program, connecting the Park Service to places that were part of the Underground Railroad. That program is still active in 31 states and the District of Columbia and has slightly under 400 members, including sites, facilities and programs.

"The capstone was the Environmental Diversity Working Group -- EDWG -- established as a green group think tank on cultural diversity," Spears says. The group's diversity consultant, Iantha Gantt-Wright, was hired to run the program.

"Between 2004-05, we had an 8-9 percent increase in diversity of our staff in D.C. But we didn't see equal advancement in terms of regional staff. Personally, I think we have work to do. ... If we don't have the broadest constituency for park protection, we'll be in trouble. The old constituency is shrinking."

Friends of the Earth

Founded 1969

President Erich Pica (since September)

Staff 28

2008 Revenue \$4,067,907

The SouthWest Organizing Project "didn't realize we are a global organization with a fundamental emphasis on social justice," says Brent Blackwelder, retired president. "Every single program we do is viewed with that lens."

"We need more national groups that combine social justice and environmental linkage. ... If you do not have a healthy government structure with a healthy society, you will not have a healthy planet."

FOE takes positions unlike other organizations, Blackwelder says. "For example, we do not support the current climate bill because it perpetuates toxic hot spots and allows people to buy indulgences. These offset credits may or may not be credible. We think the bill sets the bar too low, and we don't necessarily need one gigantic piece of legislation. Obama could use the Clean Air Act to take robust action to deal with energy and climate issues. Obama's people could be as aggressive in protecting the environment as Bush was in destroying it."

National Wildlife Federation

Founded 1936

President Larry J. Schweiger

Staff 400

2008 Revenue \$88,102,000

When the letter arrived, NWF was working with Native communities on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming. "I think we saw diversity as fundamental to our institution," says President Larry Schweiger. "More recently, our membership is more of a Wal-Mart membership -- with the Ranger Rick magazine ... reaching out to everyone to the extent that we can.

"In the West, we're focusing on various tribal communities. We recently sponsored a conference in Arizona attended by 150 tribal leaders representing 100 tribes, examining what we can do together to advance solutions on climate change," says Felice Stadler, director of operations for NWF's Global Warming Program. "We continue to work with the Wind River to properly stock and re-establish river systems. That's turned out to be a success story, and we've continued to work with a number of other tribes on a range of wildlife and natural resource issues."

The group is working on a new campaign against extraction in the Powder River Basin. Schweiger and Stadler note that the tribes are involved in framing what's at stake. "One of our priorities is to create the linkage between tribal lands and global warming.

"We do what we can to build a large tent -- it's the only way we'll win," says Schweiger.

Earthjustice

Founded 1971 as the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, name changed to Earthjustice in 1997

President Trip Van Noppen

Staff About 150

2008 Revenue \$34,598,044

"Whatever's happened over the last 20 years is due to a lot of forces," President Trip Van Noppen says. "The SWOP letter was a flashpoint but there are related drivers." Van Noppen says Earthjustice has always been interested in "the people impacts."

In California's Central Valley, "one of the most polluted places in the country," the group has worked for years with the local population, which suffers huge health effects from air pollution. "We know that to do that work effectively means not just representing the Sierra Club, but having a real coalition. That way of working has become much more the way we do things."

Local involvement is "much more effective in terms of the advocacy, political and media aspects of the work. Whether it's air pollution, or pesticides and farm workers, cleaning up a dirty river or working with a Native community in the Arctic, working with those affected will make the work more powerful and effective."

Not included *The Isaak Walton League did not respond to our query.*