

# ECO-PROFITS

*Whose money harms the environment?*

*Words & photos by Dan Dagget.*

Contemporary environmentalism often achieves the exact opposite of what it intends—a healthy, sustainable environment. *RANGE* readers have seen plenty of examples of this. Instead of restoring the land to health, greenness and balance, environmentalism and its eco-remedy—protection—have caused the land to deteriorate, denude and erode. Instead of restoring and sustaining biodiversity, protection has caused the land to support less life, even eliminating populations of species that have been designated “threatened and endangered” under laws that the advocates of protection caused to be enacted.

I’ve written several of those *RANGE* articles and documented them with before-and-after photographs showing the healthy condition of the land while it was being grazed and its deteriorated condition after significant periods of protection and rest.

While I was visiting those places taking

those photographs, I have to admit I was amazed at the amount of deterioration that had followed and presumably been caused by what most of us consider to be the solution to most, if not all, environmental problems—“protection.” What amazed me even more, however, was that the people who call themselves “environmentalists” weren’t going ballistic about what I was seeing.

They had certainly ignited plenty of outrage, opposition, finger-pointing, demonstrations, calls for prosecution and actual prosecutions in response to the conditions illustrated in the “before” photos of land as it

was being grazed, never mind that the condition of the land in those photos was relatively healthy, especially when compared to the “after” photos showing the results after protection. But why weren’t environmentalists just as outraged, or even more so, by the results of protection, which were obviously much, much worse?

Then I realized that I was having an unexpected reunion with an outrage that had played a huge role in my eco-radical days—the role of the profit motive in causing ecological disaster. In this case, however, the shoe was on the other foot.



1963—Before, grazed for nearly a century. Grass is short and apparently recently grazed, but notice the grass density (mostly perennial natives) and the lack of erosion.



2013—Same Forest Service monitoring site as above after roughly 30-plus years of protection. Cattle numbers were reduced to zero during the 1980s. The result is less grass, much more erosion and less diversity.



Nearby, a small grassland remnant has managed to survive 30-plus years of protection. When I took Forest Service staffers to see the deteriorated condition of protected study sites pictured here, the fact that they were unfamiliar with those sites and had no recent data indicated that the agency is not monitoring (and therefore not regulating or mitigating) the damage environmentalism’s multibillion-dollar “protection” industry is causing on America’s public lands.

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When I came west in 1980, environmentalism was surging to establish itself as one of the dominant forces in the region's politics, and it was basing that surge on the contention that capitalism, private enterprise, and money were causing the devastation of the West's ecosystems. Protecting nature from capitalism, profit, and the damage it caused, the story went, would restore the region's environment to natural harmony, or at least as close as is possible with so many of us consuming humans present.

## **"American environmental activist groups are a \$13-billion-a-year industry."**

PAUL DRIESSEN, CFACT

"We've got to protect what's left of the West—our natural/national heritage," we trumpeted. And since the apparatus for protecting anything in our society is, of course, government, our campaign was right in tune with the New Left socialist agenda of those of us who made up the

'60s' generation. With that as our agenda we began construction of a barricade of laws and regulations to change the management of as much of the West as possible so that human activity on the land was guided by values at least ostensibly

based on ecology rather than economy.

Over time, efforts like this have become one of the main driving forces of our society's tenure in the West. Millions of acres have been set aside as wilderness, parks, preserves and monuments, and human activity has been restricted on much if not all the rest. The justification for these sweeping measures is the claim that this is the only way to return the land to conditions as "natural" and "balanced" as possible, and thus to remedy the abuse and overuse the region has experienced.

This push continues. At present an effort is underway to designate 160,000 acres around my home and hometown of Sedona, Ariz., as the Sedona Verde Valley Red Rock National Monument. Just south of the Grand Canyon, 1.7 million acres are also targeted, while north of the canyon in Utah, 1.9 million acres more are on the production chopping block.

Why is this movement so successful, so saleable, and so profitable, in spite of its not-for-profit designation? Because it enables its consumers to identify themselves as part of the solution as "Earth savers," and makes them immune to blame and guilt for all environmental problems except the vague

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1958—Before protection, and grazed for nearly a century.



2013—Exact same place as above. The results of roughly 30-plus years of protection are more bare dirt, more erosion and less diversity. Where's a real environmentalist when we need one?



2013—Stepping through the trees the full extent of the impacts of protection becomes apparent. Why, I wondered as I shot these photos, aren't the people who call themselves "environmentalists" going positively ballistic about results like these?



unavoidable guilt of being part of the human “affliction.”

Environmentalism offers its consumers immunity by placing the guilt for all environmental problems, along with the responsibility to fix them, squarely on “deniers”—those who oppose government regulation and thus stand in the way of the “solution”—environmental regulation and protection.

An important thing to note here is that the immunity to blame that comes with being a consumer and advocate of protection is not dependent on the results you create by doing so. In the case of grazing to produce beef, ranchers have to keep the grasslands they use healthy enough to enable their cattle to eat to survive, reproduce, and gain weight—the healthier the better. For that reason, being aware of the results of their management and fixing what doesn’t

work is in their best interest.

In the case of protection, the more devastated the land, the more effective it is at selling more protection. And no worry about being held accountable for those deepening gullies, thinning grasses, and disappearing species; they can always be cast as lingering effects of problems your opponents created.

How profitable is this not-for-profit, no-fault business?

“Behemoth Big Green even outstrips Big Oil in expendable revenue by orders of magnitude,” writes Ron Arnold in “Big Green’s Untold Billions,” a 2014 article published on the website of CFACT (Committee For A Constructive Tomorrow) and in the *Washington Examiner*: “[T]he American Petroleum Institute’s IRS Form 990 for the most recent year showed \$237.9 million in assets while the Natural Resources Defense Council

reported \$241.8 million.”

In the *Christian Science Monitor* in a 2012 guest blog, Robert Rapier observes, after “looking through the financials of a prominent environmental ‘nonprofit’” and discovering “\$250 million in assets, annual donations of more than \$100 million, and a dozen employees listed as receiving more than \$200,000 a year in compensation,” he thinks “it is safe to say that environmentalism is indeed a lucrative business for some.”

Thus awakened, I did some looking on my own. In the 2014 annual report of The Nature Conservancy, I found assets listed at more than \$5.77 billion. Total support and revenue for that year added up to more than a billion dollars.

On a blog named “NOYO—News and Views from the North Coast,” a list of the salaries of “Big Green” CEOs includes:

- President, Natural Resources Defense Council: \$432,742;
- President, Environmental Defense: \$423,359;
- Executive Director, Environmental Defense: \$347,963;
- Managing Director, Pew Environment Group: \$400,487; and
- Two nonprofits included in NOYO’s list because of their prominence in environmental affairs—the David and Lucile Packard Foundation and the Pew Charitable Trusts—paid their CEOs more than a million dollars.

“U.S. environmental activist groups are a \$13-billion-a-year industry,” writes Paul Driessen, senior policy analyst for CFACT, adding that “[t]he liberal foundations that give targeted grants to Big Green operations have well over \$100 billion at their disposal.”

Getting beyond the tip of the not-for-profit iceberg, Driessen makes the case that the biggest funder of Big Green is government—federal, state and local. “Under President Obama...government agencies have poured tens of millions into nonprofit groups for anti-hydrocarbon campaigns,” including “spending \$2.6 billion [per year] on climate-change research and only those who support the politically correct climate-change narrative receive funding.”

Proposed climate-change budget authority for fiscal year 2014-2015 was listed at \$21.4 billion according to the federal climate-change expenditures report to Congress in 2013.

Worth noting here: Cattle and grazing are blamed as a major contributor to CO<sub>2</sub> and are therefore one of the main targets of

COURTESY, SEDONA HERITAGE MUSEUM



Big Park, Ariz., near Sedona with iconic Bell Rock in the background. In 1921, this area had been grazed for roughly 50 years. Here, too, perennial native grasses are cropped and short, but plant density is high and erosion is nowhere in sight.



After all cattle were removed around 1990, more than 20 years of protection have produced the familiar results of less grass, more erosion, and less diversity. In spite of results like these, the value of a contemporary environmental economy continues to be estimated in hundreds of billions of dollars.





*For contrast, here's a U.S. Forest Service study site on central Arizona land that is grazed. It is not seeded, irrigated, or fertilized, just grazed in a manner inspired by the insights of Allan Savory (check "Cows Can Save the World," RANGE, Summer 2015 at rangemagazine.com). Federal and state agency staffers are monitoring this site to make sure the rancher and his cattle aren't harming public lands. This leads to an obvious question: Why have those same agencies stopped monitoring the "protected" sites pictured in this article to see whether the multibillion-dollar environmentalism industry is harming public lands? And if protection is causing harm, as the photos seem to indicate, why isn't the government bringing action against these groups, as it would against a rancher or other commodity producer if he or she were causing harm?*

climate-change campaigns and research. In fact, the movie "Cowspiracy," which claims that cattle contribute more CO<sub>2</sub> and are therefore a greater cause of climate change than all forms of transportation combined, was funded by grants of \$117,000 from various sources. Federal energy and environmental spending in 2015 equaled \$44.85 billion, adds [www.NationalPriorities.org](http://www.NationalPriorities.org) in "Federal Spending, Where Does the Money Go?"

The 50 states added more than \$23.5 billion in environmental spending for fiscal year 2015 according to "Ballotpedia—The Encyclopedia of American Politics."

One of the methods by which government subsidizes environmental groups is a tactic called "sue and settle." Here's how it works: An environmental group (or groups) files a lawsuit against a federal agency to increase regulation to protect an endangered species, and then, rather than allowing the suit to proceed to argument and decision, the agency settles, usually out of court, by agreeing to environmentalists' demands. In the process, the government (i.e., taxpayers) pays the environmental group's legal fees, which can include \$750 an hour per lawyer,

and, by caving to their demands, gives the environmental group a success to market in order to increase its not-for-profit profits.

These cave-ins routinely happen with little or no input from opposition, as in the case of the "threatened" spikedace minnow in the Verde River in Arizona, which was described in my article "Critical Mass" in the Summer 2008 issue of *RANGE*.

How does the environment fare in all this? There hasn't been a spikedace seen in the Verde River since sue and settle caused cattle grazing to be removed from public lands along the Verde in 1997. In spite of that, sue-and-settle groups can claim that they "saved" the spikedace and the Verde River.

Add to all the above the political offices "environmental protector" claims enable their holders to win, the bureaucratic agencies and positions created, the professorships established, and science programs initiated, and you have a "not for profit" Big Green Behemoth that accounts for over a hundred billion dollars annually. In 10 years that's a trillion bucks.

So now as you review your copies of *RANGE* or travel the western outback and see all those instances of ecosystems dam-

aged, even devastated, by protection, you'll know the reason you hear no mea culpas from the protectors—because contemporary environmentalism has a vested interest amounting to hundreds of billions of dollars in those deteriorating environments.

Which means environmental corporatism is guilty of the same offense of which it has made a career of accusing capitalism, the free market, and private enterprise: getting rich at the expense of the health of the environment. And its consumers are just as blind to the damage they cause as they accuse the private sector of being. Actually, more so. ■

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