

## Introduction to NGOs

Non-government organizations (NGOs) have been a powerful force in the advancement of public policy. The Sierra Club, founded by John Muir around the turn of the century, worked almost alone in America, until the 1930s when the Wilderness Society was founded by prominent socialists Robert Marshall, and Benton Mackaye. The often quoted Aldo Leopold was also a member of this group. In Europe, the Fauna and Flora Preservation Society was formed in 1903 to expand the British national park system throughout the British empire. Even during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these NGOs were involved in political activity their to advance their social agendas. Robert Marshall's 1933 book, *The People's Forests*, advocated the confiscation of privately owned forests.

On October 5, 1948, a new organization was created in Europe: the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. Julian Huxley, founder of UNESCO (United Nations Education, Science, and Cultural Organization) and former head of the Eugenics Society, was a primary force in the creation of the IUCN. The new IUCN was a restructuring of the old Fauna and Flora Preservation Society. The Society's chairman, Sir Peter Scott, became the chairman of two of the IUCN's most important Commissions: the Commission on National Parks and Protected Areas, and the Survival Service Commission.

As a means to generate public contributions to support the work of the IUCN, Huxley and Scott convinced Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, to head a new organization called the [World Wildlife Fund \(WWF\)](#). The campaign was launched in the *Daily Mirror* on October 6, 1961, with a picture of a black rhino, and a plea for public support to help save the species. The campaign produced 60,000 pounds sterling and launched the NGO now called the World Wide Fund for Nature which uses the panda bear for its logo. Both the IUCN and the WWF are headquartered in the same building in Gland, Switzerland.

The WWF quickly developed corresponding organizations in 29 countries, one of which was the United States. Russell E. Train, a former Administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency, was chairman of the board of WWF-USA. Train was also on the board of directors of two different Rockefeller foundations, and was instrumental in accumulating massive grants to launch another NGO in 1982: the World Resources Institute (WRI). Train also became a member of the WRI board of directors. James Gustave Speth, co-founder of the Natural Resources Defense Council, was selected to be WRI's president.

These three NGOs have become the driving force in the development of environmental/social policy, as well as the coordinating mechanism through which thousands of affiliated NGOs promote and implement those policies. *Agenda 21*, the primary policy document adopted by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, is based on three publications produced jointly by these three NGOs and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP): *Caring for the Earth: A Strategy for Sustainable Living* (IUCN, WWF, UNEP, 1991); *Conserving the World's Biological Diversity* (IUCN, WRI, UNEP, 1990); and *Global Biodiversity Strategy* (WRI, IUCN, UNEP, 1992).

The IUCN boasts a [membership](#) that includes more than 700 national and international NGOs, 74 sovereign governments, and 105 government agencies, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, the Forest Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, and U.S. AID. Each agency pays membership fees, and the U.S. State Department contributes more than \$1 million per year to the IUCN coffers. The IUCN holds "consultative status" with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and at least five other UN organizations.

Making public policy is the first task of these three NGOs; getting the policies implemented around the world is the second task. They have mastered both tasks. Once policies are developed and adopted by official United Nations bodies, NGOs affiliated with these three, work at the national, state, and local levels to "educate" the public and to lobby governments to enact laws to implement the policies. The work of the affiliated NGOs is facilitated by grants made by the Environmental Grantmakers Association (EGA). This informal organization was initiated, and is operated by Donald K Ross, director of the Rockefeller Family Fund. The EGA consists of nearly 40 major foundations and corporations who meet annually to decide which NGOs and which projects to fund. NGO activity is effectively coordinated through this coordinated funding mechanism.

Communications, too, is an essential ingredient for effective coordination of the NGOs in the field advancing public policy. The Tides Foundation, a participant in the EGA, funded a project in the mid-1980s that resulted in [IGC \(Institute for Global Communications\)](#), which merged with the [APC \(Association for Progressive Communications\)](#). This massive, global, electronic communications network has facilitated the coordination and communications among more than 40,000 NGOs which lobby local, state, and national government bodies in 133 countries. IGC held an exclusive contract with the UN to provide electronic communications from the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, and from other UN conferences around the world.

There has long been a "swinging-door" between the executive offices of the major environmental NGOs and the agencies of government. Russell Train worked for the EPA and the WWF; William K. Reilly worked for the Rockefeller-funded Conservation Foundation before becoming Administrator of the EPA. Jay Hair, who was an original member of the President's Council, was head of the National Wildlife Federation before becoming president of the IUCN. Shridath Ramphal, whom Hair replaced at the IUCN, became co-chair of the UN's Commission on Global Governance. The infiltration of government agencies by NGO executives flourished after the 1992 Clinton/Gore election. Both national and international government bodies are managed by the individuals whose former organizations helped to develop and promote the environmental/social policies they are now in a position to implement.

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