

## PANEL: "THE ROLE AND IMAGE OF THE PROFESSIONAL ECOLOGIST IN THE 70'S"

Maynard Munger  
Sierra Club  
San Francisco, California

It is with appreciation that I have been invited to speak to you on the issues of concern between the Sierra Club and the professional Ecologist. The Sierra Club is a recognized conservationist organization founded and incorporated under the laws of California in 1892. For 79 years its purposes have been "to explore, enjoy, and protect the nation's scenic resources and its forests, waters, wildlife and wilderness . . ." To this purpose I trust we are consistent today. However, there are issues, policies and procedures which unfortunately divide our organization from those of you who are best equipped to assist us in our objectives. It is to this issue that this commentary is directed.

The members of our Board feel both obligation and urgency to the American public which has looked to us for many years for leadership in the broad spectrum of conservation. The equipment, however, for intelligent decisions on resource issues rests with those of you who are usually found as employees in industry and government. On you falls the dilemma of whom do you really serve . . . . the supervisor who may be under pressure from many angles, or the American public. Although one directs, the other pays . . . . both ways depending on what you often do. We understand how little professional latitude you sometimes have. We are aware of the policy and directions on local and national level that prevent your participation in organizations which may oppose official viewpoints. We are as a movement, then, devoid of many members with your disciplines who could contribute substantially to our leadership. We are aware on major resource issues that your viewpoint is only one consideration. The others are political realities, economics, Chamber of Commerce mentalities and special interests. Most unfortunately we are aware of reprisals and censure by your peers when a "maverick" in your midst does cut loose to the general public with unadulterated findings of his research which embarrass an administration.

The leadership of the Sierra Club has known for years that scientific evidence and facts gleaned from careful research are the keys to conservation success. We are, however, faced with the dilemma that those of you in the scientific community who possess the most skills and the most factual information about the impact of the resource issue in question rarely can be free to speak up.

Like yourselves the conservation movement had as recently as 25 years ago its own "dark ages." At this time we had suspicions about man's effects upon his environment and the well-being of mankind through future generations. But we did not always possess the technical and scientific data and research to back it up. As a result, the conservationists at times resorted to emotionalism, sugar semantics, and alarmism. Today these tactics are neither acceptable to the American public nor necessary for our success because there is substantial academic refinement of procedures to define and clarify our basic concerns. In essence, then, it becomes quite clear that the Ecologist, no matter where he is and who his employer is, and the conservationist, no matter how broad his interests may be, must form a partnership of information and cooperation. We now know in the environmental movement that within these two organizations, and within your disciplines represented here in this audience, that there is information about major resource issues, be it the Peripheral Canal or a dam in Hell's Canyon, that can materially affect our policy decisions as well as those of your employers.

In essence we need your freedom so that our policies can be based on fact. You need your freedoms in order to expand your professional base and attract the talent that is necessary to meet the environmental challenges of this century, and your employers need your freedoms so that they can be truly responsible to the public they basically have sworn to serve.

However, as a group, you rarely speak up. It may be commendable to follow the company line and to be a loyal employee, but when your boss is wrong and his mistakes may affect future generations, you have no other alternate.

A number of years ago the appraiser who normally worked for large banks and companies was caught in your very dilemma. As a result, even though he was deeply needed by the business community, he had both low credibility and stature. Although usually excellently trained, his opinions were often captive by his employer, and financial wheeling and dealing went on during the 1920's that was only stopped by the great depression. The upshot of this was the voluntary formation of an organization which gave highly qualified appraisers a MAI designation. With that the appraiser became free of meddling, pressure, and special interest. He became sought after as a true professional (independent as well as skilled) by his former employers. Hence, the profession has grown and California has been built, literally, on his reputation. He was free not only to appraise the value of things, but, using Madison Avenue verbiage, to also set forth the "reason why" copy. That is, he can tell it as it is and he can tell why it is. I urge you to form, say, an ASE, the American Society of Ecologists, and to be free of the yoke that can put you in the same class of the 1920 appraiser. This would be an effrontery to your intellect, training, and importance.

Another great concern that the environmentalists find is what we refer to as the company "man." Without being cruel to any individual, an excellent example is a certain marine biologist who works for a prominent local utility. Whenever a study is made public, this individual is not referred to as Dr. Smith, retained by the utility, but as the utility's biologist. It is done, unfortunately, in such a manner that even though his statements are credible, he appears to be a captive to the public. Many companies have learned that if you add to your Public Relations Department an Ecologist, or at least one who will loan his name, the firm gets consumer mileage. The best definition of the public relations man I have found is "a ball of fire by day and a bag of wind by night." In the same vein it is interesting that in a confrontation recently between a major oil polluter and environmentalists over the recent disaster in San Francisco Bay, an engineer was dubbed an "Ecologist" by that company. That is, he was an "Ecological Engineer." In conclusion to this reasonably candid position, we find the word "Ecologist" can also refer, unfortunately, to the gauntlet of beaurocratic jelly-bellies, corporate closet cases, company "captives," and biostitutes who stand only as a cosmetic for rape.

It is our hope, as a movement, that you professionalize yourself, and emerge to assume your proper status in the society of truly professional men. The importance to the conservation movement and to man's habitat on earth cannot be overemphasized. We need from you the undiluted and honest evaluations so that intelligent men can make prudent decisions in both public and private sectors. We can no longer accept the tremendous withholding or delay in release of information by governmental agencies because it might embarrass some politicians. The Williamstown discussions are all too necessary, and yet the suppression by our government of so much of the information produced by your community is simply no longer acceptable. Only with your professionalization in every sense and with a collective standing to speak as a united body will we ever force our own government to establish a firm research policy which will keep the state of knowledge on resource management and development significantly ahead of practical developments and their resultant impact on our habitat.

In conclusion, the environmentalist realizes better than any what a struggle it was to get basic scientific and ecological data out of governmental agencies on the SST, on pesticides, and even on the environmental impact of Disney's proposed development of the Sequoia National Game Refuge. These are small links on an overall pattern. You men of government and of industry must serve the public with academic freedoms required of professionals. No group of men in the history of mankind hold more keys than you do to the tomorrow, if there is to be one.