

## The roadless rule ground game

Earthjustice editor Tom Turner's book provides more details

[Ray Ring](#) Nov. 2, 2009

*Excerpts from the book, [Roadless Rules: The Struggle for the Last Wild Forests](#), by Tom Turner, who's a longtime editor for Earthjustice; copyright 2009 by Island Press. Reproduced by permission of Island Press, Washington, D.C.*

(In late 1997, when Pew Charitable Trusts ramped up an effort to protect roadless forest areas and hired Ken Rait to run it) Rait convened a series of meetings that resulted in the creating of the Heritage Forests Campaign, a coalition of forest-defense groups. The campaign was a project of the National Audubon Society, with funding from Pew. ... The key early players in the campaign were the National Audubon Society, valued for its grassroots network and a highly respected vice president named Dan Beard, who had been the head of the federal Bureau of Reclamation and had worked for years on Capitol Hill (Ken Rait reported to him); The Wilderness Society for its policy expertise; the Natural Resources Defense Council for its policy expertise and attorney Niel Lawrence; the American Lands Alliance for its forest experience, its connections with grassroots groups, and its leader, the former Congressman Jim Jontz; the U.S. Public Interest Research Group for its canvass operation and grassroots outreach; Earthjustice for its legal expertise; the National Environmental Trust for political and media expertise; The Technology Project, an early leader in electronic communications; Green Corps for its grassroots organizing expertise; and Defenders of Wildlife for its strong activist base and grassroots networks.

(As the Forest Service began accepting comments and holding hearings in 1999, the campaign's Mat Jacobson) began by gathering contact information for every forest activist and group he could find across the country. With geographic information system (GIS) software, he plotted the location of all his contacts on a map and determined where the densest clusters were. He then mapped out a route that would take him to the center of each cluster. Next, he sent messages to people in his target areas saying that he was coming to pay a call, hoping to help them prepare for the scoping hearings, and that it appeared as if there was a

chance to do something really dramatic to save roadless forests. ...

... There was some resistance: Pew's funding of the Heritage Forests Campaign was a bit of a hindrance. Pew was mistrusted by some people (in the local forest groups), seen as the rich organization trying to dictate policy for these groups toward its own ends. 'I didn't dictate anything,' Jacobson says. 'I figured we could help groups get what they wanted with excellent results ...' A key, he said, and this extended to all the organizing and recruiting of allies over the next weeks and months, was to make this a positive, hopeful campaign. Many environmental efforts are, by necessity, trying to stop bad things from happening. In this case, they could sell hope, a positive vision -- nearly sixty million acres that could be spared the bulldozer and the chainsaw. People could, and would, get fired up. There was the opportunity to save a large swath of vital, vulnerable land, and build a powerful, national, political force in the process. ...

... From his perch in Oregon, Ken Rait held weekly conference calls with activists all across the country as Heritage Forests signed up scores more campaign partners. They commissioned polls and held focus groups to hone their message, that is, to ensure that the way they talked about protecting roadless areas would be as persuasive as possible to as broad a public as possible. They placed ads in newspapers and on radio and television and sent envoys to meet with newspaper editorial boards. They also kept up a steady barrage of news releases reporting the results of polls and surveys; the results of scientific studies; and the contents of letters signed by religious leaders, business interests, scientists, and others. ...

... The Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) with headquarters in Boulder, Colorado, has more than 1,200 members -- L.L. Bean, Sierra Designs, North Face, Recreational Equipment Inc., river runners, and other recreation interests. The association printed postcards for their members to distribute in their stores. ... And the OIA helped put together the Forest Roads Working Group, a remarkably diverse collection of conservation and business interests that set to work with meetings and seminars that would eventually produce a document with strong support for keeping roadless areas roadless. The Working Group included the OIA, plus Wildlife Forever, the Wildlife Management Institute, The Wildlife Society, Trout Unlimited, the Izaak Walton League of America, the Pinchot Institute for Conservation, and even International Paper.

... The religious community was approached by Suellen Lowry, formerly a wildlife lobbyist for Earthjustice and a sister of Mike Lowry, a former governor of Washington. ... This, as with many other efforts, was underwritten by the

Heritage Forests Campaign with money from the Pew Charitable Trusts. ... Lowry went on the faith circuit. She turned up at religious gatherings across the country, asking pastors, rabbis, ministers, evangelicals, deacons, priests -- anyone identified as a leader of a religious community -- to sign a letter urging the Clinton administration to take bold steps to protect roadless areas on the national forests. Lowry roamed through cafeterias at lunchtime, buttonholing people as they waited in line, as they ate lunch, as they left the room. She contracted with Peter Illyn at Restoring Eden to spend signature gatherers to Christian rock concerts, which attract many thousands of people. The signatures were not hard to gather. After all, a call to protect God's creation resonates easily and deeply with people of faith. ...

... In the end, Lowry and the others gathered signatures of more than two thousand people on a letter that said, in part, the following: 'As people of faith concerned with our responsibility toward God's marvelous creation, we would like to commend you for launching a process to protect roadless areas ... We urge you to continue this process by drafting a strong and effective policy that protects these pristine regions fully ... The Scriptures make clear that protecting God's forests, and the many aspects of creation they embody and protect, is not merely sound policy but holy obligation ...' ... Mark Jacobs, then the director of the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, hand-delivered the letter to the religious group liaison at the Clinton White House on June 29, 1999. Within twenty-four hours, John Podesta, the White House chief of staff, was on the telephone to Jacobs, inviting him to bring a delegation of religious leaders over for a chat. ... (Also) a raft of scientists was organized by Suellen Lowry (to sign a letter) ... again under contract with Heritage Forests ...

... John Podesta, the new White House chief of staff, asked Ken Rait if Heritage Forests could stimulate as many comments and as much support for a national rule (during the Draft Environmental Impact Statement process in 2000) as it had during the scoping process. Rait said yes. ...

... The grassroots network, well trained and organized through its scoping experience, went back to work (in the DEIS process). Vans were hired (again to haul activists to hearings), pizza ordered (to sustain them), volunteers recruited. Mat Jacobson and company were afraid they might be overwhelmed in hearings in remote sites near western national forests, but the organizing and recruiting -- not to mention the public's enthusiasm for roadless areas -- worked. ... The U.S. Public Interest Research Group (PIRG), led by Gene Karpinski, armed its canvassers with presidential postcards urging the Forest Service to ban roads,

logging, and mining on all national forests immediately. The Pew Charitable Trusts had underwritten this effort as well, via contributions to the National Audubon Society, so the canvassers were not asking for money as they knocked on doors nationwide; they were simply providing a convenient way for citizens to make their views known to their government. It was the most successful canvass in PIRG history -- its field people kept running out of postcards. People who answered the doors they knocked on were mostly enthusiastic about supporting roadless-area protections. ...

... Rait's colleague, Mat Jacobson, has a theory about winning public campaigns like this one. Jacobson draws a pyramid on a scrap of paper, with three or four horizontal lines across it. The pyramid represents the public. The bottom slice stands for the fraction of the public that is least engaged in a particular issue; the point on top denotes those who care most passionately. A general public opinion poll, he explains, will tell you that more than 90 percent of the public supports protection for roadless areas, for example. But way at the top, where you find the passionate environmentalists and the organized loggers and the antienvironmentalist ideologues, the split will be closer to fifty-fifty. And this is where most decisions get made, because those people make the most noise and are best organized. ... The Heritage Forests Campaign's goal -- the goal of all the organizations working to save roadless areas -- was, and is, to increase the influence of the second tier of the public, where support for protection has a far greater majority. And the strategy to do this is to persuade newspapers to write editorials in favor of, in this case, protection for roadless areas ... which will impress policy makers and the public alike. Also, probably more important, get the story in television, where a growing fraction of the public gets its news. The more vocal and engaged the middle ranks become, the better chance that the decision makers will listen to them. ...

... One difficulty that had plagued the environmental community more or less constantly over many decades was that there were groups saying many different things on the same subject, that is, there was a lack of what has come to be called *message discipline*. ... The constant roadless conference calls and meetings, however, had brought the wildly disparate groups together to the point where the Sacramento Bee would editorialize, speaking of the proroadless groups' comments on the DEIS, that 'However different the voices, the song sounded as if it were sung out of a single hymnal.' ... Ken Rait ruefully commented in a June 16 (2000) memo to his allies, 'I can't remember a time the environmental community was criticized by the media for such message discipline ...' Mat

Jacobson of the Heritage Forests Campaign includes the line on his resume, as a matter of pride. ...