



Edmond Van Hoerick

PRESERVING THE ENVIRONMENT

The natural environment is the ecological bedrock on which all life depends. Yet from the extinction of the passenger pigeon to the vanishing American wilderness, the pursuit of short-term gain has come at a terrible cost to our natural heritage. The state PIRGs speak out for the preservation of our environment – for its own sake, for its ecological value, and for the inspiration and wonder it provides for our nation’s people. We work to preserve natural ecosystems, large and small, across the country, as well as the endangered and threatened species that need them to survive.



1970s - MASSPIRG

Fish Ladders: MASSPIRG helps convince Connecticut River dam builders to include fish ladders, helping migratory fish like Atlantic Salmon return to upstream spawning grounds.

1973 - MPIRG

Environmental Impact: MPIRG drafts and wins the Minnesota Environmental Policy Act, requiring environmental impact studies for all development projects likely to have significant effects on the environment.

1975 - NJPIRG

Tocks Island Dam: NJPIRG plays a lead role in winning Gov. Byrne’s decision to stop construction of Tocks Island Dam, preserving the Delaware River and thousands of acres of farmland.

Oregon takes action to preserve farmland and contain sprawl

Only in recent years has most of the country awakened to the threat posed by sprawling development to farmland and open space. But in Oregon in 1973, sprawl was already a hot issue. “Sagebrush subdivisions, coastal ‘condomania,’ and the ravenous rampage of suburbia in the Willamette Valley all threaten to mock Oregon’s status as the environmental model of the nation,” Gov. Tom McCall told the Oregon Legislature in 1973.

With Gov. McCall taking the lead, the Legislature adopted a statewide land-use planning program in May 1973, to be implemented by the Land Conservation and Development Commission (LCDC). LCDC was charged with setting statewide land-use planning goals. If the goals were weak, little would be accomplished. OSPIRG set out to persuade LCDC to adopt strong goals that would protect Oregon’s farmlands and coastal areas.

The key to OSPIRG’s effort was research. OSPIRG set out to document the impact of unrestrained development, with Staff Attorney Henry Richmond exposing illegal subdivisions in eastern Oregon and interns Bob Stacey and Dick Benner demonstrating the failure of state agencies to preserve Oregon’s coast. Intern David Aamodt conducted a study showing that the state’s finest agricultural lands were being lost to development and making the case for preservation.

“Why should not the state, by reasonable regulation, see to it that necessary development go where the least valuable agricultural lands are located instead of the best?” Aamodt asked the LCDC.

OSPIRG recommended that the LCDC reserve lands in the three soil classifications rated most suitable for agriculture exclusively for farming. Instead, LCDC went one step further, opting to preserve lands in four soil classifications for agricultural use – a total of 26.5 million acres. The final goals adopted by LCDC also called for the establishment of urban growth boundaries around Portland and other cities – an approach that has largely succeeded in reining in sprawling development.

Thirty years later, Oregon remains a national model in the effort to contain sprawl – in large part due to the leadership of many of those involved in OSPIRG’s campaign. Henry Richmond left OSPIRG in 1975 to join with Tom McCall in founding 1000 Friends of Oregon – a pioneering land-use watchdog organization that has served as a model for similar groups across the country. Bob Stacey now serves as 1000 Friends’ executive director. And Dick Benner served as the long-time head of Oregon’s Department of Land Conservation and Development, where he implemented many of the same cutting-edge policies OSPIRG and others had helped create.



▲ OSPIRG research documented the threat posed by sprawling development to Oregon’s prime agricultural lands, leading to the enactment of precedent-setting policies to protect farmland and curtail sprawl.

▼ OSPIRG’s Doug Babb and Henry Richmond speak to the media at a 1973 press conference.



1976 - MoPIRG

Meramec River: The Legislature stops plans to dam the scenic Meramec River after MoPIRG and a coalition win a statewide advisory referendum vote 2-to-1 against the dam.

1978 - ConnPIRG

Farmland Development: ConnPIRG helps win legislation establishing a fund for state acquisition of farmland development rights to protect the state’s dwindling agricultural lands.

1982 - MPIRG

Acid Rain: MPIRG spearheads passage of the Minnesota Acid Deposition Act, the nation’s first acid rain legislation and a model for 1990 federal Clean Air Act provisions.

Minnesota's Boundary Waters preserved as wilderness

In the early 1970s, the U.S. Forest Service planned to allow private logging in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area of northern Minnesota. One million acres of conifer forests and hundreds of pristine lakes were at risk.

In 1972, attorneys with the newly formed MPIRG took legal action to forestall logging. In a federal lawsuit, MPIRG charged that the Forest Service had approved logging without filing the required Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Almost immediately, MPIRG won a temporary injunction against logging and, later, MPIRG won the case. When the Forest Service eventually filed an EIS that justified logging, MPIRG sued again, arguing that the EIS was inadequate.

By the time MPIRG lost its final appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1978, Minnesotans had heard enough about the Boundary Waters to become convinced that it was worth protecting. Even as the legal battle transpired, MPIRG students were busy developing alternative strategies. Students and others copied lists of users of the Boundary Waters from the Forest Service, then sent out a mailing. With the money they raised and the support of other preservation groups, a new organization – Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness – was formed.

MPIRG's efforts also got a boost from a passionate defender of the wilderness: retired forester and professor Bud Heinselman.

"He'd come to MPIRG, wait until the staff had left for the day, and stand at the copy machine for hours to send mailings to the Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness," said former MPIRG director Jon Motl. "Everything happens because a human being appears and does something extraordinary. It was Heinselman. Students and staff loved him, and he loved MPIRG."

By 1978, the work of Bud Heinselman, MPIRG students and others had built the Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness into a strong organization. The Friends led the drafting of federal legislation to permanently protect the area and lobbied Congress to support it. Meanwhile, MPIRG students built support on their campuses, collecting more than 14,000 signatures on a petition in support of preserving the Boundary Waters.

The bill to protect the Boundary Waters passed Congress in October 1978, assuring the future preservation of the area. Today, the Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness remains a watchdog and steward of the area, while the wilderness itself remains what it always has been – an unspoiled natural treasure.



▲ *The U.S. Forest Service planned to allow logging in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area until MPIRG litigation and advocacy resulted in new protections in 1978.*

▼ *The Boundary Waters Canoe Area is comprised of a million acres of conifer forests and pristine lakes in northern Minnesota.*



1989 - VPIRG

Ozone Layer: VPIRG wins legislation protecting the ozone layer by banning many uses of ozone-depleting CFCs in Vermont, one year before federal Clean Air Act amendments address the problem nationally.

1995 - State PIRGs

Environmental Defense: State PIRGs and allies deliver 1.2 million petition signatures in defense of landmark environmental protections, helping halt proposed congressional rollbacks.

1996 - CoPIRG

Public Lands: CoPIRG plays lead role in amending Colorado's constitution to facilitate long-term protection of three million acres of public trust lands and permanently protect 300,000 acres.

“Save Our Shores” campaign derails plans to drill for oil and gas off Florida’s coasts

The energy crises of the 1970s led to a new push to drill for oil anywhere in America it could be found – including off the economically and ecologically vital coasts of Florida. In 1981, Department of the Interior Secretary James Watt offered a plan to lease 93 million acres off Florida’s Atlantic and Gulf coasts for drilling. The recently founded Florida PIRG resolved to fight it.

At times, it was a lonely battle. In 1984, Florida PIRG’s Ann Whitfield was the only citizen to testify at an Interior Department hearing on offshore drilling. But over the next three years, Florida PIRG’s Save Our Shores Campaign would enlist thousands of Floridians in the fight against drilling. By 1987, hundreds were turning out to Interior Department hearings, and Congress responded with a series of moratoriums on Florida drilling.

The Valdez oil spill in 1989 marked a turning point for the campaign. When President George H.W. Bush convened a task force on the environmental impacts of drilling, hundreds of Floridians packed the group’s hearings in the state. In Key West, where coastal tourism is the bedrock of the local economy, businesses draped their windows in black crepe paper and shut down for two hours as 2,000 residents attended a raucous task force hearing.

In 1990, President Bush responded to the task force’s recommendations by announcing a 10-year ban on new leasing and drilling off the Florida Everglades and Keys. But the prospect of drilling still loomed on the Gulf Coast. In 1993, despite



◀ *Florida PIRG activists rally outside a public hearing held by a special commission convened by President George H.W. Bush. The commission recommended that the president protect the Florida Keys from drilling.*

a spirited Florida PIRG campaign, Chevron was given permission to drill an exploratory well just 25 miles off the Panhandle coast.

Continued organizing and lobbying by Florida PIRG and others during the 1990s made even tacit support for offshore drilling anathema to any politician in the state – so much so that in 2002, Florida Gov. Jeb Bush interceded with his brother, the president, to negotiate the cancellation of Chevron’s existing leases off the Panhandle. “Florida PIRG has played a critical role in both the successes we have had and the ongoing efforts to protect Florida’s coastline,” said Gov. Bush.

While the imminent threat of drilling off the state’s coasts has been averted, dozens of active drilling leases remain off the Gulf Coast. Florida PIRG continues to monitor those leases and advocate permanent protection for Florida’s shores.



▼ *U.S. Rep. Bill Young, shown here with Florida PIRG’s Mark Ferrulo (left), was a congressional leader in the fight to protect Florida’s shores.*



1998 - NJPIRG

Highway Construction: NJPIRG and a broad coalition stall construction of Route 92, a \$350 million highway that would have paved over farmland and open space in central New Jersey.

1999 - NCPIRG

Factory Farms: NCPIRG staff gather thousands of public comments supporting cleaning up factory-style farms, helping to win a two-year extension of a ban on new factory hog farms.

1999 - WashPIRG

Cross-Cascades Pipeline: WashPIRG helps block a proposed pipeline that would have endangered residential areas, drinking water supplies and unspoiled wilderness in Washington.

A groundswell of public support leads to protection of 58.5 million acres of wild forests

Citizens generally assume that the job of the U.S. Forest Service is to protect our national forests. But for most of its history, the Forest Service has not only allowed but also encouraged logging and mining in America's most pristine forests. By the late 1990s, more than 100 million acres of national forests – more than half the total acreage – had been logged, mined or otherwise developed.

In the late 1990s, the state PIRGs and a coalition of environmentalists, scientists, religious leaders and outdoors enthusiasts vowed to make preservation of the nation's remaining wild forests a priority. In March 1999, after years of advocacy, the Forest Service announced an 18-month moratorium on road-building in some national forests.



The moratorium gave the Clinton administration time to reconsider its long-term forest policy – and it gave proponents of forest protection time to build public support.

That October, in the wake of thousands of public comments and numerous newspa-

per editorials in support of preservation, President Bill Clinton directed the Forest Service to revise its wild forest management policy. Within the coalition, the state PIRGs took on a leading role in reaching out to the public – encouraging citizens across the country to urge the Forest Service to adopt the strongest possible policy.

When the Forest Service issued a weak draft of the wild forests rule in 2000, the coalition set the audacious goal of soliciting one million public comments on the plan. In the end, more than 1.6 million citizens commented, with 95 percent in favor of full protection and nearly half the comments – 700,000 in all – coming as the result of PIRG grassroots advocacy.

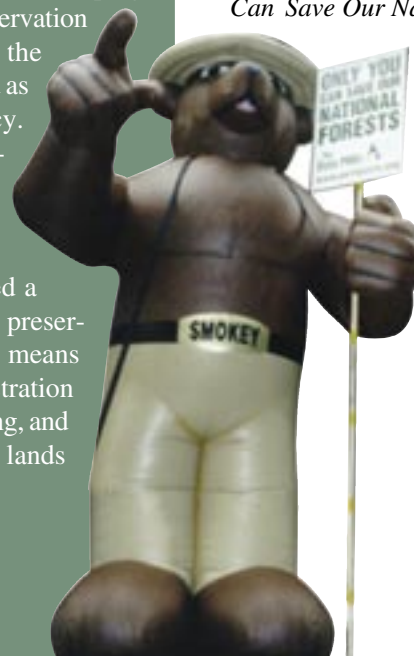
The groundswell of public opinion made an impression on President Clinton, who, two weeks before leaving office, moved to protect 58.5 million acres of undeveloped land in national forests. "I'm told that more Americans were involved in shaping this policy than any land preservation initiative in the history of the Republic," the president said as he announced the new policy. "Thanks to their extraordinary support, the process is now complete."

While the policy represented a landmark in environmental preservation, the victory is by no means complete. The Bush administration has yet to implement the ruling, and the future of these pristine lands



The U.S. Forest Service received 1.6 million comments on new protections for wild forests. Left, U.S. PIRG's Gene Karpinski announces the submission of the first 500,000 comments.

▼ *The state PIRGs' inflatable Smokey the Bear toured the nation reminding citizens that "Only You Can Save Our National Forests."*



2002 - PennPIRG

Open Space: PennPIRG helps pass three municipal anti-sprawl initiatives, including the largest municipal open space bond in the history of the state.

2002 - PIRGIM

Great Lakes Drilling: PIRGIM works with members of the state Legislature to permanently ban the practice of oil and gas drilling from Michigan's Great Lakes shores.

2002 - State PIRGs

Arctic Drilling: The state PIRGs join forces with a broad-based coalition to win a dramatic Senate vote preventing plans to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling.