

BRIAN ALLEN DRAKE

the skeptical environmentalist: senator barry
GOLDWATER

AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT STATE

ABSTRACT

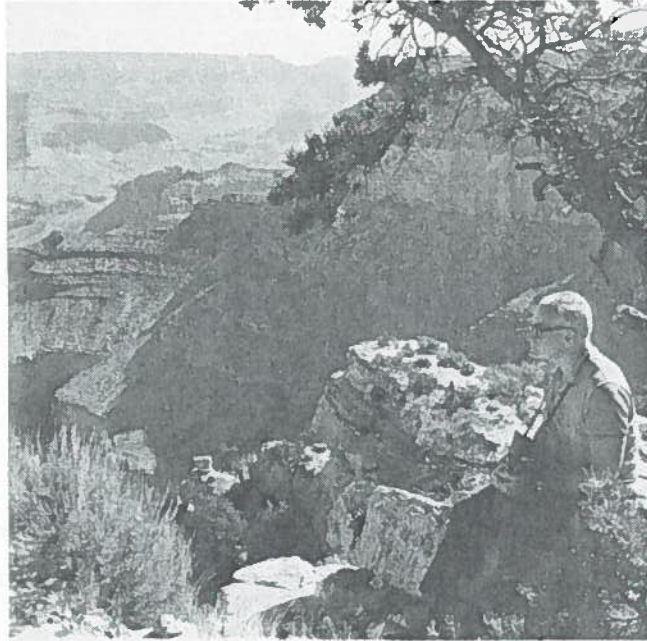
For much of American history, environmental protection and federal power have been two peas in a pod. This was especially true after World War II, as economic prosperity created a vast middle class that demanded environmental "beauty, health and permanence" (in Samuel Hays's words) as an indispensable part of its consumer lifestyle and expected government to secure them. The result was the birth, in Adam Rome's phrase, of the "environmental management state" in the 1960s and early 1970s as environmental protection took its place alongside national defense and social welfare as a major federal responsibility. Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater began his political career in the midst of postwar environmentalism's birth and growth. As a Westerner, a businessman, and a political conservative deeply mistrustful of the federal government, Goldwater seems an unlikely candidate for any environmental sympathies, especially of the federal-regulatory variety, but a close look at his life reveals a man with a complex relationship with the natural world, environmentalism, and the environmental management state. In the end, Goldwater went to his grave without ever fully coming to terms with the tensions between his environmentalist sympathies and his conservatism, but nevertheless his environmental odyssey tells us a lot about the depth and breadth of postwar environmentalism in the United States, as well as the changing conservative movement and the Republican Party.

AMERICA WAS A different place in 1970 than it had been only six years before, when the famously conservative Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater ran as the

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Brian Allen Drake, "The Skeptical Environmentalist: Senator Barry Goldwater and the Environmental Management State," *Environmental History* 15 (October 2010): 587–611. doi:10.1093/envhis/emq086

Advance Access publication on October 15, 2010

Figure 1. The Senator and the Canyon.

Credit: Arizona Historical Foundation, Personal and Political Papers of Barry M. Goldwater, Series IV: Photographs.

Republican Party's presidential candidate and took an electoral pounding at the hands of Lyndon Johnson. In 1964 most of the era's social and cultural conflagrations were just beginning to blaze—the civil rights movement was in full swing across the South, but second-wave feminism, the antiwar movement, the New Left, and the counterculture had yet to have their historical moment. Now, at decade's end, steam was rising everywhere as the sixties came to a head. Among its mushrooming movements was popular environmentalism. If things like air pollution or the loss of green space failed to inspire the levels of passion seen in the Weathermen or the Black Panthers, they made up for it with breadth of concern, as exemplified by the massive popularity of Earth Day 1970. For the first time, the nation's ecological problems had become the focus of national grassroots concern, no longer the domain of resource managers, small conservation groups, and local activists alone. Going green had gone mainstream.¹

A sign of the times could be found in the penultimate chapter of Goldwater's third book, *The Conscience of a Majority*, published just after his return to the Senate in January 1969. Much of the book was classic Goldwateresque criticism of liberals, labor, and the press, but the chapter "Saving the Earth" was

different. Its gist was simple: environmental problems were real, they were serious, and now was the time to solve them. It is “our job,” warned the senator, to “prevent that lush orb known as Earth... from turning into a bleak and barren, dirty brown planet.” But the job was not being done. “We are in trouble on the Earth in our continuing efforts to survive,” he continued, and “it is difficult to visualize what will be left of the Earth if our present rates of population and pollution expansion are maintained.” Indeed, Goldwater said, it was “scarcely possible to claim that man’s ability to destroy his environment has any serious limitations.” No longer was there “any reason to question whether the threat is real.”²

Such sentiments were hardly unusual in those days, as books like *The Population Bomb*, *The Closing Circle*, and *The Limits to Growth* testified. They rarely came from conservatives, however, and that fact alone made “Saving the Earth” notable. But the real shocker came when Goldwater mused on possible solutions to the nation’s ecological conundrums. Of course, he said, he favored local action and market remedies whenever possible. But then he admitted that more might be required.

I happen to be one, [he wrote] who has spent much of his public life defending the business community, the free enterprise system, and local governments from harassment and encroachment from an outsized Federal bureaucracy.... [Yet] I feel very definitely that the [Nixon] administration is absolutely correct in cracking down on companies and corporations and municipalities that continue to pollute the nation’s air and water. While I am a great believer in the free competitive enterprise system and all that it entails, I am an even stronger believer in the right of our people to live in a clean and pollution-free environment. To this end, it is my belief that when pollution is found, it should be halted at the source, even if this requires stringent government action against important segments of our national economy.

Even in the context of the time, it was a rather startling admission. “Mr. Conservative,” the perennial enemy of outsized federal bureaucracy, was embracing federal environmental regulation.³

Conventional wisdom tends not to associate conservatives with environmentalism, and for good reason, because environmental protection and big government have been closely linked since colonial times. As far back as the early 1800s, as John Cumbler, Richard Judd, Brian Donahue, and others have shown, state power was a key weapon for those who would save New England’s riparian meadows and fish runs from the threat of textile-factory milldams. Later that century, Progressive conservationists brandished the power of state-centered scientific and technical expertise in their crusade for better management of the nation’s forests, rangelands, and rivers and for the protection of its more scenic parts as well. Indeed, government’s role in environmental affairs, both

at the state and federal level, grew steadily after the Progressive Era, and by the years after World War II the “environmental management state” (in Adam Rome’s words) had joined the welfare state and the military-industrial complex as a prominent expression of federal power. With their allergy to government and their tight embrace of industrial capitalism, many postwar conservatives were unsurprisingly hesitant to identify with environmentalism or environmentalists; in 1980 the Reagan administration practically declared war on them, aiming to roll back federal environmental management à la the Soviets as a part of its larger deregulation campaign.⁴

But not all conservatives were so opposed. Even if he acted mainly out of political expedience, Richard Nixon helped to fashion some of the most important regulatory tools of the postwar era in the National Environmental Protection Act, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Clean Air Act of 1970, and his fellow Republican, John Saylor, was a furious opponent of dam building in the Grand Canyon in the 1960s and arguably the greatest champion of federal wilderness preservation in the House of Representatives from the 1950s through the 1970s. Meanwhile, a close look at the Republican Party, conservatism’s partisan home after World War II, shows that it has a very long history of support for federal environmental protection, best embodied by men like Teddy Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot, and Herbert Hoover. Its modern members can thus “claim with considerable justification that [the GOP’s] environmental record” before 1980 “was no less distinguished than that of the Democrats,” says William Cronon.⁵

Such exceptions to the “no green conservatives” rule suggest the accuracy of Samuel Hays’s observation that postwar environmentalism’s “values and ideals tended not to fit into traditional political ideologies, but to cut across them.” For Hays, environmentalism was a creature of consumerism, born out of 1950s economic prosperity and the desire it fostered among large swaths of the public for natural “amenities” like wilderness, green space, and clean air and water, along with the legislation necessary to preserve them (“beauty, health, and permanence,” as he termed it). As such, the environmental movement circa 1970 was not a narrow reform effort but a sea change in social values so widespread that it could sometimes find support even among the most unlikely of champions.⁶

In 1970, and indeed for much of his adult life, Barry Goldwater was one of those unlikely champions. Given his intense antistatistism, as well as his roots in the famously libertarian West, we might expect him to have been in uncompromising opposition to federal environmental regulation. But he was also the owner of a legendary independent streak (a “maverick,” in current parlance) when it came to issues like abortion and gay rights, and so it was with federal environmentalism as well. Nature was important to Barry Goldwater, and like so many Americans in the postwar period he was concerned about its fate, to the point that he was willing—at times—to invoke federal power for its protection. That willingness was never permanent, though, because whatever Goldwater’s hopes about government’s ability to save the planet, he remained

an antistatist conservative to the end, and those two sentiments could and did clash. "Green Goldwater" was thus a sporadic phenomenon, closely related to historical and personal circumstance. Indeed, the senator was never quite able to square the tensions between his environmental concerns, his faith in capitalism, and his mistrust of government. Nevertheless, Goldwater's complex personal relationship to the natural world tells us a lot about the power of postwar environmentalism and its influence on both him and the larger culture.

DESERT GENESIS

Goldwater came to know nature long before he got into politics, and his childhood experiences in particular proved vital to his later environmental sympathies. Although he was a city kid, raised in the middle-class home of a well-to-do Phoenix department store owner, Goldwater grew up surrounded by the Sonoran Desert, and that raw and dramatic landscape could hardly fail to influence a curious, adventurous, and impressionable boy. Young Barry liked to camp and hike on his own around Camelback Mountain (not yet engulfed by Phoenix's urban sprawl), but it was his mother, Josephine Williams Goldwater, who introduced him more fully to the beauty of Arizona. An independent and irrepressible Midwesterner who first came to Phoenix to find relief from tuberculosis, "Jo" Goldwater loved to take car-camping trips (an increasingly common activity in the consumer-oriented 1920s) into the desert, at a time when that was no easy feat due to the primitive state of both automotive technology and Arizona's rural roads. Leaving husband Baron behind, Jo and her three children regularly rolled and rattled across the Sonoran and camped in the open, where she would read and lecture to them about Arizona's natural history. Nor did she neglect natural theology. A sincere if not intensely Christian woman, Josephine believed that God's power and glory were manifest in Creation, and that He could be found, in Barry's later words, by "walking through the desert, or walking through the forest, or climbing the mountains just as easily as you can [find Him] in a church." Introducing her children to God's nature was, for Jo, vital to both their moral and intellectual development, and Barry learned his lessons well.⁷

On some of these trips Barry took a camera along, and thus began an avocation he would pursue passionately for the rest of his life: photography, particularly landscape shots and portraits of local Native peoples. He was never a world-class artist ("Ansel Adam's crown is still safe," legendary *Washington Post* Editor Ben Bradlee teased him in 1984), but nevertheless, Goldwater had considerable talent, enough to earn him a membership in the Royal Photographic Society and the praise and friendship of Adams himself. Indeed, one of Goldwater's first brushes with fame was his publication in 1940 of a book of his photography entitled *Arizona Portraits*, which won acclaim from around the state and garnered the society's membership offer.

Figure 2. Growing Up Wild.

Young Barry Goldwater poses, rifle in hand, with his mother Josephine, brother Robert, and sister Carolyn (along with two others) during one of their many car-camping trips in the Arizona backcountry in the 1920s. Goldwater later traced his political conservatism in part to the influence of the state's harsh desert landscape, which, he said, instilled in him a lifelong lesson about the importance of self-reliance, entrepreneurship, and individualism. Credit: Arizona Historical Foundation, Personal and Political Papers of Barry M. Goldwater, Series IV: Photographs.

Among impressive shots of Navajos and more prosaic images of cowboys and wagon wheels were a number of landscape scenes, some rather mundane but others quite striking, suggesting Goldwater's sincere and passionate appreciation for both the physical and spiritual beauty of nature. A second edition with similar content followed in 1946.⁸

But it was a trip down the Colorado River in 1940 that made Barry Goldwater a household name in Arizona. That summer Goldwater accompanied the Nevills expedition through the Grand Canyon, which would be only the thirteenth expedition to successfully complete the trip since the Powell expedition in 1869. While it lacked the dangers and heroics of Powell's legendary run, the Nevills expedition nevertheless had its share of adventure in the midst of the canyon's sublime beauty. Goldwater, who had long dreamed of taking such a trip, found himself moved deeply by the whole experience, as was evident in the lyricism of some of the passages in the journal he kept: "At this sunset hour the canyon walls are indescribably beautiful.... The tall spires near the rim ... look as though God had reached out and swiped a brush of golden paint across them, gilding those rocks in the bright glow of a setting sun. ... Above this grandeur float soft cumulus clouds, tinted with pastel shades of evening." Meanwhile, he took hundreds of photographs and some three thousand feet of motion-picture film. Thirty years later, he would publish the best of the photos, along with the journal, as *Delightful Journey Down the Green & Colorado Rivers*.⁹

The film actually played a role in setting Goldwater on the road to political office. There was much public interest in his trip, and by autumn 1940 he was

showing the film to audiences all over Arizona. He estimated that within a year some ten thousand people had seen it. He also gave lectures to accompany it, sometimes arriving for showings in more remote locales via his airplane (he was an avid pilot, as well as a photographer), which lent him an air of tech-savvy individualism to accompany his new reputation as a rugged outdoorsman. In the process Goldwater gained valuable public-speaking experience and, more significantly, made important contacts while polishing his image as a man of action. The film "gave me access to so damn many Arizonans," he noted later, "that it was just a natural step for me to go into politics." His conservatism might have been what attracted many voters to him, but when Goldwater took that "natural step" in 1948 and ran for a seat on the Phoenix city council, he also had the canyon as a very attractive and persuasive campaign backdrop.¹⁰

Figure 3. Arizona Portraits.



In the 1930s Goldwater began to roam the Arizona backcountry, taking thousands of photographs of its natural features as well as the people who lived among them. Here, in a photo taken by his wife Peggy circa 1940, he poses with his movie camera at the edge of Coal Mine Canyon, in the north-central part of the state. Credit: Arizona Historical Foundation, Personal and Political Papers of Barry M. Goldwater, Series IV: Photographs.

DAMMING ARIZONA

Goldwater's political ascent really began with his election to the Senate in 1952, and, as a Republican from traditionally democratic Arizona, his victory was a straw in the shifting political winds that were turning the Sun Belt into a conservative bastion. He spent much of his first two terms chairing the Senate Republican re-election committee when he wasn't clashing with labor leaders or railing against communism and the legacy of the New Deal. Environmental protection was not much of an issue for him, although he did introduce legislation in 1957 to increase the size of Grand Canyon National Park, a project that would later become dear to him. But overall Goldwater was not yet what many Americans would recognize as an environmentalist. Quite the opposite, in fact, for he voted against what was perhaps the era's most significant piece of federal environmental legislation, the Wilderness Act of 1964, and devoted considerable energy to enlisting the federal government's help in damming the West's rivers, a questionable crusade to many of the nation's wilderness lovers, not to mention a significant qualification to his small-government philosophy.¹¹

One of the things that most twentieth-century Western politicians shared was an unshakable belief in the virtues of federal reclamation: dams, canals, aqueducts, pumping stations, and so forth, built at public expense for the benefit of the economy of the western United States. Liberals liked reclamation for the jobs and cheap energy it provided to the common man and its mission (at least in theory) to support the idealized small farmer; dam building was a major component of the New Deal, for example, and had strong Democratic backing after World War II. Many western Republicans also supported reclamation. Their antistatism made this a rather tricky posture to maintain, but their desire for the economic growth to be underwritten by federally subsidized water usually trumped their ideology (eastern Republicans such as John Saylor tended to be far more resistant to reclamation's charms). Reclamation was not pork or a government handout, western boosters replied to critics (often with a touch of defensiveness). It was simply a helping hand for honest, hard-working folks in a severely arid environment, folks who would build the West up to glorious heights of free enterprise if only they could surmount its environmental obstacles.¹²

For all his complaints about big government, when it came to reclamation Goldwater cheerfully checked his antistatism at the door. Along with his Democratic senatorial partner Carl Hayden, Goldwater stumped regularly for the Central Arizona Project (CAP), a reclamation scheme to move water some three hundred miles from Lake Havasu to the area around Phoenix and Tucson, which became one of the most expensive reclamation projects in the West. "We desperately need [CAP] water for continuing development," Goldwater declared on the floor of Congress in 1963, with a finality that suggested the argument was watertight, as it were. Given his criticisms of

the New Deal-era Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) as a rogue bureaucracy (“conceived in the minds of socialistic planners, born in a period of economic distress, and nurtured and expanded in deceit”) Goldwater’s pro-reclamation sentiments hardly endeared him to southern Congressmen and their constituents, who saw the TVA as sacred. They had a point; Goldwater’s defense of reclamation certainly sidestepped the issue of its similarity to TVA projects. Nor were his answers to his critics—that the Constitution implied a federal role in reclamation while the TVA was unfairly producing and selling electricity, and that reclamation projects always repaid themselves—wholly convincing.¹³

Goldwater was also an ardent supporter of the biggest federal reclamation plan of the 1950s, the Colorado River Storage Project (CRSP), which aimed to bring the famous river and its tributaries under strict hydrological control with a slew of dams and related accoutrements. CRSP boosters argued that it would deliver to the region the kind of prosperity that heavily irrigated California enjoyed; indeed, they said, fairness demanded that Arizona, Utah, New Mexico, and Colorado get a shot at profiting from a watershed whose use California essentially monopolized. The heart of the CRSP proposal was Echo Park Dam, named after its proposed site on the Green River in Wyoming. But there was one problem: Echo Park was also inside Dinosaur National Monument. Many in the Sierra Club saw in the plan a replay of the Hetch Hetchy controversy some four and a half decades earlier, when the city of San Francisco built a dam in the eponymous valley inside Yosemite National Park. Club founder John Muir and his allies fought the dam hard, arguing that not only a place of natural beauty but also the entire “national park principle” was at stake; if a dam could be built inside Yosemite, the very idea of national parks as places where nature enjoyed protection from such development was destroyed. Muir et al. lost in 1914, but the 1950s were years of rapidly growing environmental sentiment, and in 1956 the Sierra Club—of which Goldwater was a member—and its allies would triumph (Saylor would give them considerable assistance in Congress). In return for the removal of Echo Park Dam from the CRSP, they agreed to a replacement in Glen Canyon on the Colorado River itself, upstream from the Grand Canyon.¹⁴

If dam opponents expected the river-running, desert-loving Goldwater to side with them against the dam, they underestimated his commitment to reclamation. One of his first acts as senator was to cosponsor legislation authorizing the CRSP, and on the Senate floor he rejected arguments that the Echo Park Dam would harm either the region’s beauty or the park principle. On the contrary, he said: by allowing boat traffic on its reservoir, the dam would allow “millions of Americans ... to visit this beautiful section of the country each year.” Enough of Echo Park would still remain after the dam’s construction to satisfy the critics, who ought to be happy, Goldwater concluded, that the common man would now be able to experience the beauty that they were so hell-bent on protecting.¹⁵

Even the Grand Canyon itself was not off Goldwater's list of potential reclamation sites. In moving water some three hundred miles southeast from Lake Havasu, the CAP would require massive amounts of electrical power for pumping stations, and the proposed Bridge Canyon Dam, to be located just downstream of Grand Canyon National Park, was to supply it. The resulting reservoir, dozens of miles long and hundreds of feet deep in places, would back up several miles into the park itself. As with the Echo Park Dam, wilderness activists in the Sierra Club and elsewhere went ashen at the thought and launched a desperate opposition campaign. Once again they were victorious, helping—along with considerable assistance from interstate political rivalries and compromises—to eliminate the dam from the CAP proposal in the mid-1960s in exchange for the coal-fired Navajo Generation Plant. But Goldwater, despite his love for the canyon, felt that reclamation trumped all arguments against the dam. Most of the canyon's beauty would remain, he argued, and what was lost was a fair exchange for the economic growth the project would stimulate. He was even willing to trade on his reputation as a canyoneer to buttress his arguments. "I have traveled every foot of the river through the Canyon," he told a correspondent, "and I believe that no one exceeds my own zeal for the Grand Canyon, and I honestly feel that in this case, the dam at Bridge would prove advantageous." So intense was Goldwater's support that years afterward he was still grumbling about the Sierra Club's opposition, as if it had been a personal affront.¹⁶

Finally, even one of the greatest pieces of federal environmental legislation in American history could not win Goldwater's support. For wilderness lovers, the Wilderness Act of 1964 was the fruit of decades' worth of effort to secure federal protection for "untouched" public lands of outstanding aesthetic, spiritual, and ecological character—lands where, in the act's famous words, "the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." While some human activities would be allowed, public lands designated as "wilderness" under the act would be protected from most forms of economic exploitation, like mining, drilling, timbering, and associated road construction. The Wilderness Society and the Sierra Club led the charge that secured the legislation (assisted by supporters like Saylor), which eventually had widespread support in Congress when Lyndon Johnson signed it into law in September 1964. Goldwater, however, was one of only twelve senators to vote against it.¹⁷

His reasons were varied. Like many in the West, Goldwater fretted about federal wilderness protection "locking up" resources and denying tax revenue to the states, and he also had procedural questions about the act's enforcement. But his main argument was an interesting one. The real problem with the act, Goldwater claimed, was that the protection it offered to "wilderness" would touch off an avalanche of visitors whose combined impact would destroy the very wilderness qualities that they flocked to see. With increased tourism would come pressure for more roads, hotels, and restaurants from "dudes" (as

Goldwater termed them) who did not really appreciate wilderness and were unwilling to hike or pack into it, sleep in a tent, or clean up after themselves. Soon the government would capitulate to their demands and “start putting sewer lines, gaslines [sic], waterlines, and paved roads” into places like his beloved wild Arizona desert. Federal wilderness areas, in other words, would die from the law of unintended consequences. Coming from a man who had recently argued in favor of dams precisely *because* they would increase tourism, this argument could seem disingenuous, to say the least. But seen from another angle it was a prescient concern, for the spectacular popularity of wilderness areas after World War II would indeed make crowd management an increasingly thorny issue for wilderness preservationists, a situation Roderick Nash has termed “the irony of victory.”¹⁸

More significantly, this particular criticism of the Wilderness Act revealed a growing inner ambivalence about the necessity of federal intervention to protect the nation’s environment. Goldwater remained “Mr. Conservative,” but as the sixties went on he showed signs of a rising willingness to invoke state power in the name of protecting nature. After his loss to Johnson in 1964, Goldwater would spend much of his free time raising money and lobbying for the preservation of Phoenix’s Camelback Mountain from the city’s relentless suburban sprawl (a story ably covered by historian Peter Iverson), a task which eventually required an infusion of federal money. It was a bellwether of things to come.¹⁹

GOLDWATER’S FIERCE GREEN FIRE

Flying into Luke Air Force Base in late 1969, not quite a year after returning to the Senate, Goldwater found himself in the disconcerting position of losing visibility as he attempted to land. The culprit was smoke from nearby Phoenix mixed with desert dust, and the episode clearly hit a nerve, and not just because of the potential for a crash. “You won’t believe this,” he wrote his friend Charles Orme afterward, “but [even] at forty thousand feet I could see the white smoke coming out of the smelter in town and then I could see every smelter north plus the one in Mexico.” Such a vivid encounter with the environmental costs of Arizona’s rapid growth—growth which he championed—filled him with unease. “I could go on and on about this, Charlie, as you can well imagine,” he told Orme. “The destruction of our clean air has me really concerned.”²⁰

If postwar American environmentalism was a product of the era’s middle-class affluence, as Samuel Hays argues, Adam Rome has suggested that it was also a product of middle-class personal experience. He argues that the loss of green space, erosion, and contaminated air and water that accompanied the postwar explosion of suburbia—malodorous foam in the tap water, septic-tank backups in the bathrooms, and bulldozed woodlots in the backyard—accentuated the middle-class desire for environmental amenities and were key

inspirations for the grassroots environmental movement of the 1960s and 1970s. There was a parallel to be found in Goldwater's descent into the smoggy sprawl of postwar Arizona; that experience and his anxious account of it suggest that Goldwater was coming more and more to fit the profile of a postwar middle-class environmentalist. Despite his conservatism and his previous opposition to wilderness preservation, as a middle-class American who appreciated the sundry amenities of the middle-class lifestyle, he was a prime candidate for the era's increasing interest in protecting nature, particularly the nature of his personal experience. As if to reinforce his airborne encounter with smog, he confessed to Orme in 1971 that, along with air pollution, he was "terribly worried about our State. ... because as I fly around it and over it after prolonged absences, I see more and more gouging and cutting" from Phoenix's inexorable suburban spread. Progress had now become a problem, and "there should be some way to control it."²¹

How? Like many Americans, Goldwater was coming to believe that controlling sprawl and other environmental threats might require a bracing shot of federal intervention. His return to the Senate coincided with what was the high-water mark for the postwar environmental management state, as the years between 1969 and 1973 saw the passage of some of the most important pieces of environmental legislation in the nation's history. Environmentally concerned Americans demanded, and received, government help in their quest for beauty, health, and permanence, and Goldwater was now joining them, albeit reluctantly. His remarks in *Conscience of a Majority* were certainly revealing, but his newfound grudging acceptance of environmental regulation could also be seen in his other activities as well, particularly his political ones.

Goldwater's fellow Republican Richard Nixon was no environmentalist, but ironically he would become the main architect of the environmental management state. He considered most green activists to be tree-hugging crazies, not much better than the hippies and war protestors who shouted down his silent majority. But he was also famously sensitive to prevailing political winds, and under the influence of certain green-minded advisers and a desire to steal the issue from the Democrats, Nixon decided to raise the federal government's environmental regulatory activities to a new level. The result was major legislation like the Clean Air Act (CAA), the National Environmental Protection Act, and the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), followed up by the Clean Water Act (which Nixon actually vetoed, only to be overridden), the Endangered Species Act, and others.²²

Goldwater supported Nixon's antipollution initiatives wholeheartedly in the early 1970s, cosponsoring the CAA in the Senate, for example, and trumpeting that support in letters to constituents. His preference was for local and state action, he wrote to one, but if those failed, "the Federal government [might] have to fill the gap to protect the atmosphere." Goldwater also stood behind Nixon's creation of the EPA, uncharacteristically throwing his weight to the creation of a regulatory bureaucracy. Such support was not merely pandering

for green votes; in numerous private letters Goldwater reiterated his belief that the time was ripe for government action on the pollution problem: "The whole question of what's happening to our environment," he told a constituent in 1969, "gives me the most concern of any issue before the Congress." He laid into the mining and utility industries for failing to clean up their emissions voluntarily and warned them that they could "expect the federal government to move in." He excoriated the auto industry for a lack of interest in cleaner, more efficient engines ("I can tell you I am getting tired of Detroit shirking its responsibilities. . . and this doesn't come from a left-wing liberal, this comes from a right-wing conservative") and left the possibility of federal regulation hanging. He expressed concern about the health risks of herbicides to agriculture secretary Clifford Hardin. He even told one correspondent that he would be willing to stop underground nuclear testing if "there is any danger to the ecology or the people of the United States," quite a concession from a serious Cold Warrior. But such was the threat of pollution, and "while I do not like to see government interference," he told a friend, "it is obvious that something has to be done."²³

This was only the start, as Goldwater also began to change his tune about federal wilderness preservation. A 1972 letter to a constituent supporting the proposed Saguaro Wilderness—only eight years after his vote against the Wilderness Act—suggested the depth of that change. "I truly feel," he wrote, "[that] with the rapid reduction of wilderness areas it is becoming more and more a fact that we must set aside enough acres of the remaining unspoiled country so that the following generations of Americans will have the opportunity of enjoying the sights that we have taken for granted all these years." In that vein, Goldwater threw his support behind Senator Henry Jackson's proposal for three wilderness areas—Mount Baldy, Sycamore Canyon, and Pine Mountain—in the Arizona Strip, and likewise behind Senator Robert Packwood's proposal to designate the Snake River as a federally protected "wild and scenic" river. It was a significant reversal for Goldwater, who fifteen years earlier had been a vigorous supporter of three proposed privately owned dams in Hells Canyon on the Snake. Meanwhile, to the surprise of some of his constituents, in 1974 he vehemently opposed condominium developments on Hart Prairie in Arizona's San Francisco Peaks and offered his assistance to antidevelopment activists.²⁴

But Goldwater's about-face on Glen Canyon dam was the real shocker. Ever since his 1940 trip, Goldwater had taken a keen interest in the Grand Canyon's ecological health. Since the completion of Glen Canyon Dam (the Echo Park Dam's replacement in the CRSP) in 1963, it had sickened steadily, deprived of beach-building silt and spring floods, the Colorado River itself now ice-cold as a consequence of its release from the bottom of the seven-hundred-foot-deep Lake Powell. In the 1950s Goldwater had had no compunctions about Glen Canyon Dam or the CRSP, but now hindsight revealed the environmental costs of his support. Meanwhile, heavy boat traffic, with its noise and

garbage, only made things worse. Thanks to Glen Canyon Dam and too many tourists, Goldwater lamented in 1970 to the park's superintendent, Robert Lovgren, "we are destroying one of the most delightful places in the world."²⁵

When the Senate debated amendments to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and their effects on a proposed dam on Virginia's New River in 1976, Goldwater revealed just how far his thinking about Glen Canyon had gone. "I rise to announce my opposition to this [New River] dam," he began, acknowledging that it "may sound funny coming from a man who was born and raised in the arid west. Of all the votes I have cast in the 20-odd years I have been in this body, if there is one that stands out above all the others that I would change if I had the chance it was a vote I cast to construct Glen Canyon Dam on the Colorado. Today we can build nuclear power plants. We do not need to destroy running water.... I think of that river as it was when I was a boy," he concluded, "and that is the way I would like to see it again." He followed up with a yea vote on a proposal to designate a twenty-six-mile stretch of the New River as "wild and scenic" and to revoke any hydroelectric licenses on it. Goldwater would later describe his vote for Glen Canyon Dam as the single worst he ever cast—quite an admission, given his regrets over rejecting the Civil Rights Act in 1964—and it is difficult to overestimate how significant this turnabout was. At the time, opposing Glen Canyon Dam was the domain of firebrand writers like Edward Abbey and the indefatigable former Sierra Club Executive Director David Brower. Goldwater would never repudiate reclamation *per se*—far from it—but on this one topic, at least, he had become not just an environmentalist but a "radical" one.²⁶

Finally, Goldwater's new environmentalism manifested itself in increased support for renewable energy, as he cosponsored a number of bills for federally funded solar and geothermal projects. Such support was especially easy for him. Energy independence from the Middle East was of vital interest to him as a Cold Warrior, brought home in 1973 by the oil crisis and the visions of permanent scarcity it inspired. Of further attraction was the pork; as a perennially sunny state, Goldwater's native Arizona was sure to be a major recipient of any federal funding for solar research. "We are the home of everything solar," Goldwater told the Senate in September 1974, only half-jokingly.²⁷

GREEN FIRE FADING

By the early 1970s, then, "Mr. Conservative" had clearly taken on a tint of federal green, a shade that closely matched, as it were, the political palette of the times. But it was not to last. As the decade wore on, and conservatism came into its own as a political force, Goldwater would begin to retreat from many of his Earth Day-era sentiments. Indeed, even as he praised the environmental management state out of one side of his mouth, from the other side came a growing stream of criticism, and by decade's end he would be in high

dudgeon against some of the very federal institutions he helped bring into being.

A nasty spat with the Sierra Club over the fate of Grand Canyon National Park helped to spark Goldwater's environmental retreat. Expanding and solidifying park boundaries had long been a mission of his; as early as 1957 had (unsuccessfully) introduced legislation to that effect, despite his opposition to other preservationist measures like the Wilderness Act. In late 1969 he tried again, teaming up with Democratic Congressman Morris Udall, who simultaneously introduced the bill in the House (for "the best show of strength," as Udall told him). The bill died, and they tried again in 1973; this time they were successful. Like many such boundary bills, Goldwater's was a complex mix of acreage additions and deletions designed to accommodate a variety of competing interests. It added thousands of acres to the park (and absorbed two previously protected national monuments), while also severing thousand of acres elsewhere. Most of the deleted acreage was to pass into the hands of the Hualapai, a Native American group then living on a tiny reservation inside the canyon and, in Goldwater's opinion, in desperate need of more land. While formulating the bill, with its myriad concessions and compromises, Goldwater had consulted many parties. Despite his reputation as a no-retreat conservative, in practice he recognized politics as the art of compromise and was willing to solicit advice from all sides of an issue in order to find a middle-ground solution. Thus he was very proud of the consensus behind the final product and equally confident in its prospects.²⁸

When the Sierra Club and its allies objected to the bill and threw their support to a rival bill sponsored by fellow Republican Senator Clifford Case, Goldwater was stung deeply. The club had two main objections to Goldwater's bill. The first was that its acreage additions were too few. The second involved the deletions for the Hualapai. However pressed the tribe might be for land, the club argued, carving out chunks of a national park for private interests set a very dangerous precedent. Like dams, such deletions seemed to violate the park principle, and the club, having already won a major battle in defeating Bridge Canyon Dam, felt little need to back down in this case. Goldwater was furious. He took to the floor of the Senate to denounce the club ("a closed society, a self-centered, selfish group, who care for nothing but ideas which they themselves originate and which fit only their personal conceptions of the way of life everyone else should be compelled to live") and resigned his membership. "While I know the Sierra Club would like about one-third of Arizona and a little bit of Utah and Nevada in the Grand Canyon National Park," he sniffed to Sierra Club President Raymond Sherwin in his resignation letter, "it is not going to be that way."²⁹

Meanwhile, the club's opposition to the SST, a proposed supersonic passenger jetliner, did little to improve Goldwater's sinking opinion of the group. As an Army Air Corps veteran of World War II, a high officer in the Air Force Reserve, and an inveterate technophile, Goldwater loved gee-whiz aerospace projects, and

in the case of the SST he seemed to take opposition to it as an insult. So he had little patience when environmentalists cried out against the aircraft because of the potential effects a fleet of them might have on the Earth's atmosphere and climate (not to mention noise pollution from sonic booms). Goldwater sneered at such concerns—despite the recent incident over Luke Air Force Base—and in a 1970 *New York Times* editorial, he dismissed the “scare stories, myths, guesses, speculation, half-truths and downright lies” coming from “an unusual combination of left-wing scientists, politicians, economists, and conservationists” in “a desperate attempt to channel ever more funds into social welfare programs.” As he had with the Bridge Canyon Dam, Goldwater also invoked his own environmentalism in response to environmentalists. “Long before the words ‘ecology’ and ‘pollution’ became prominent,” he huffed in 1971, “I was known in my State of Arizona as a nature lover ... and I yield to no one ... in my concern as a conservationist.” Yet, he declared, “I [will] vote for [the SST] with not a single qualm as to its possible effect on the earth's atmosphere. If there were even a question of a doubt I would be opposed to this program.” Well into the 1970s, long after the SST went down to defeat as a victim of its inordinate costs, Goldwater would fire the occasional volley at the recalcitrant environmentalists who had, in his mind, selfishly deprived America of its own Concorde.³⁰

The Grand Canyon boundary issue and the SST were as much personal as political issues for Goldwater, but they paralleled a similar ideological turn from federal environmentalism. In 1970 Goldwater was singing the praises of the environmental management state, but within a decade or so his tune had changed. A major focus of his increasing ire was the EPA. He had supported its creation in 1969 as he had Richard Nixon's other environmental initiatives, but it wasn't long before his aversion to bureaucracy and big government kicked in to induce a kind of buyer's remorse, which could vary in intensity. “Some of the programs of the [EPA] have been instrumental in the movement toward a cleaner environment,” Goldwater mused to the general manager of Kennecott Copper in 1975, “but I wonder at what cost?” The cost was too much regulatory power and hamstrung private enterprise. On the Senate floor he was more direct, accusing the EPA of “impeding the progress of people and affecting the lives of people and the livelihood of people.” He had originally supported organizations like the EPA, he said: “I thought they were good. [Now] I think they are being badly misused by ... people who really do not understand what they are supposed to do, nor what we intended them to do.” In letters from the late 1970s he was even blunter, declaring the EPA “out of control,” insisting that it “must be brought into line,” and declaring that if he had his way, “we'd just get rid of the EPA entirely.”³¹

Had the EPA mutated into a rogue bureaucracy? The answer to that question depended to a large extent, of course, on the ideological stance of the questioner, and critics could easily argue that Goldwater had no room to criticize the regulatory agency for doing the job it was created

to do: regulate. But whatever the answer, Goldwater's retreat was of a piece with the broader antiregulatory sentiments of the Reagan-era GOP now emerging as a national force. As conservative antistatism pushed aside the postwar liberal consensus to take the American political high ground, Goldwater's own antistatism seemed to be reenergized, at least when it came to environmental issues (it had not necessarily gone away in other realms).

Perhaps nothing symbolized this as well as Goldwater's leadership in the emerging Sagebrush Rebellion of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The rebellion's locus was in the legislatures of a number of intermountain western states, and its proponents advocated the return of federal land within their borders to state control, which could then decide how to best manage it, including selling it to private interests. Rhetorically, the rebels draped themselves in rugged-pioneer trappings and preached the gospel of state's rights, free enterprise, and deregulation. Critics scoffed, seeing the "rebellion" as simple greed swaddled in an antifederalist mantle, dedicated to short-circuiting federal land management in the name of private gain. Goldwater, for his part, embraced enthusiastically both the rebellion and its best-known federal ally, Secretary of the Interior James Watt. President Ronald Reagan appointed Watt—a lawyer and former president of the intensely antienvironmental Mountain States Legal Foundation—to assist his campaign to restrain federal environmental regulation, and Watt was almost universally despised by American environmentalists in the early 1980s because of the commitment he brought to the task during his short tenure. Goldwater, however, loved him ("an exceedingly fine Secretary") and defended him vigorously, much to the consternation of a number of constituents. Watt reciprocated, telling Goldwater upon his resignation that "your personal friendship and loyalty stand out as some of the most valued things that [I] take with [me] from this office."³²

More evidence of Goldwater's opposition came with the debate over the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, known informally as the Alaska Wilderness Bill. It was a monumental proposal, calling for wilderness designation for over one hundred million acres of federal land in the state and "wild and scenic" status for over two dozen rivers. It was no surprise that Goldwater, deep in the middle of the Sagebrush Rebellion, refused to support the bill and, indeed, voted against it and also in favor of every amendment intended to weaken it. The bill would lock up land that Alaskans badly wanted and needed for economic growth, he argued, but its supporters had only their self-interest, and the votes of environmentalists, in mind. Goldwater told an Arizona state senator that the end result was "probably the worst legislative foul up that I've seen in all my years in the Senate," intended to make "one gigantic ... national park out of the State of Alaska." Undaunted, Congress passed the bill, and President Jimmy Carter signed it into law in December 1980.³³

NEW GREEN SHOOTS

Yet Green Goldwater wasn't entirely dead; there were a few signs of renewed life in the 1980s and 1990s, two of them in particular. One was Goldwater's Arizona wilderness proposals. In 1982 Goldwater introduced legislation designating Arizona's Aravaipa Canyon as a federal wilderness, waxing eloquently on the Senate floor about its "beautiful multicolored cliffs [that] rise as high as 1,000 feet," its lush vegetation, wildlife populations, and recreational opportunities. It had been a long time since he had spoken so enthusiastically about federal wilderness, but the Aravaipa bill was small potatoes compared to the Arizona National Forest Wilderness Act of 1984, which proposed wilderness designation for nearly thirty parcels of Arizona public lands. As he had with his Grand Canyon expansion plan, Goldwater teamed up with Morris Udall to introduce the bill into Congress, and he was particularly proud of the bill's bipartisan backing (which included Morris Udall's brother, the former Kennedy/Johnson administration Interior Secretary Stewart Udall, who praised Goldwater in a letter for preserving the "wild glory of Arizona's out of doors ... for all time"). The bill became law on August 28, 1984, and its significance becomes more apparent in historical context. Here was Goldwater in 1984, with the ashes of the Sagebrush Rebellion still smoking, "locking up" thousands of acres of Arizona wilderness under the authority of the very Wilderness Act that he had voted against two decades earlier. No other event so neatly summed up his continuing ambivalence about federal environmentalism.³⁴

Later, near the end of his life, Goldwater accepted an honorary membership in the group Republicans for Environmental Protection (REP). As the name implied, REP was (and is) an organization of Republicans that took pride in the GOP's legacy of federal environmental protection and was not at all comfortable with the antienvironmentalism that dominated the party in the wake of the Reagan years. It is certainly possible to read too much into Goldwater's acceptance, but given the widening distance between the GOP and its ideological godfather in the 1990s over issues like gays in the military, abortion, and the influence of the religious Right, Goldwater's relationship with REP suggested that, as with these other issues, he no longer felt that the Republicans' environmental views matched his own. On green issues as on others, Goldwater now seemed to be leaning distinctly to the liberal wing of his party, an environmental maverick repudiating part of the very political legacy he had helped to create.³⁵

SUNSET

In 1998, at eighty-nine years old and twelve years out of office, Goldwater passed away. Some of Goldwater's earthly remains were interred at Christ Church of the Ascension in Paradise Valley after a well-attended funeral, but the rest were scattered over his beloved Colorado River and Grand Canyon.

Given the role that Arizona's wild lands, and particularly that river and its canyon, played in his life, it was a fitting end. With these two natural wonders as a backdrop, we might end by considering the larger significance of Goldwater's "natural life."³⁶

In March 1971 Goldwater received a letter from a young constituent, a Prescott College sophomore named Maggie McQuaid. McQuaid wrote to praise the senator for his recent Grand Canyon park-expansion plan; having hiked in many of the areas included in his proposal, she now put pen to paper to encourage him to keep up the good work ("Your proposals are good ones, Senator Goldwater, keep trying to get them through!"). At the end of the letter, McQuaid hinted that she was not a conservative and was far more likely to be at home with the New Left than Young Americans for Freedom—"I consider myself pretty radical," she wrote, "and have disagreed with you before"—but when it came to things like the Grand Canyon, she considered Goldwater a fellow traveler. "I am supporting you now," she told him, and "to you," she concluded with a very sixties flourish, "I say: RIGHT ON!!"³⁷

It is an old political truism that Right and Left, at the fringes, begin to resemble one another, and this was certainly the case for the "movement" sixties. In her 1999 study *A Generation Divided*, sociologist Rebecca Klatch compared the backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences of former activists in the liberal-Left Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and its conservative counterpart, Young Americans for Freedom (YAF), and found that they shared a similar anxiety about the increasingly suburbanized, consumerist, white-collared, power-elite-dominated America of the postwar years. Few would ever accuse Goldwater of being a liberal (biographer Robert Goldberg has warned modern liberals that their recent warming to him comes at the price of "ignoring the Arizonan's enduring conservatism"), and at any rate he was at least a generation too old for either SDS or YAF. But, as we have seen, his environmental sentiments and his ambivalent embrace of federal environmental regulation cut across typical American postwar ideological boundaries much like those of Klatch's younger activists.³⁸

They also remind us that the senator from Arizona was much more than simply "Mr. Conservative." Goldwater often appears as a cardboard-cutout icon for postwar American conservatism's farther reaches, the embodiment of the various fringe elements of the Right that would coalesce into the Reagan Revolution of the eighties and not much more than that. But—at the risk of more truisms—human beings are complicated, and Goldwater was not merely an ideology connected to a warm body. He was also a photographer, hiker, camper, boater, wilderness lover, and a middle-class suburban consumer, with all the anxieties, hopes, and desires those roles entailed. Given that diversity, then, the idea that this staunch conservative should also flirt with a state-friendly environmental movement seemingly so antithetical to his ideology is, upon reflection, not a big surprise. Goldwater was always more

complicated, more nuanced in his thinking, than his critics and perhaps even he himself believed.

Further, Goldwater's example suggests just how broad the environmental impulses of the postwar period were. The environmental movement often gets little press in histories of the period, coming off as a minor player to the more famous civil rights, antiwar, counterculture, and feminist movements. Yet, as historians like Samuel Hays and others have shown, it garnered widespread support in a way that these other movements did not. Goldwater's environmentalism is a reminder, then, that even the most conservative of conservatives were not insulated from or indifferent to environmental concerns—indeed, they could embrace them—and much work remains for historians who would trace environmentalism's influence among other conservatives and similar “unlikely” greens. Goldwater's example also suggests the surprisingly protean ideological character of environmentalism itself. It was a movement broad enough in its concerns and constituencies that it literally had something for everyone and could be cast and recast to dovetail with beliefs from across the political spectrum. That it was attractive to liberals and the Left is well known. That people on the Right, too, could find something to like in environmentalism is a fact that warrants a deeper look.

Finally, Goldwater's stormy relationship with the environmental management state exemplifies broader shifts occurring in postwar American conservatism as a whole. On one hand, Goldwater was on the conservative movement's leading edge, pointing out its course and lighting its way to the future. But on the other, his environmental sympathies also linked him to the earlier Republican tradition of federal environmental protection, when the GOP wrestled with the Democrats for leadership on the issue. In the end, we might see “Green Goldwater” as a symbolic bridge between the Republican Party's more environmentally friendly past and its post-1980 antienvironmental future, a transitional figure suspended somewhere between Teddy Roosevelt, Ronald Reagan, and George W. Bush.

Brian Allen Drake is a lecturer in the University of Georgia's history department, where he teaches U.S. and global environmental history. He is currently completing his book manuscript, “The Unnatural State: Conservatives, Libertarians, and the Postwar American Environmental Movement,” for the University of Washington Press's Weyerhaeuser Environmental Series.

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