



# TARGET: MONTANA

HOW A CABAL OF WEALTHY ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS  
IS POURING MONEY TO HIJACK MONTANA'S POLITICS

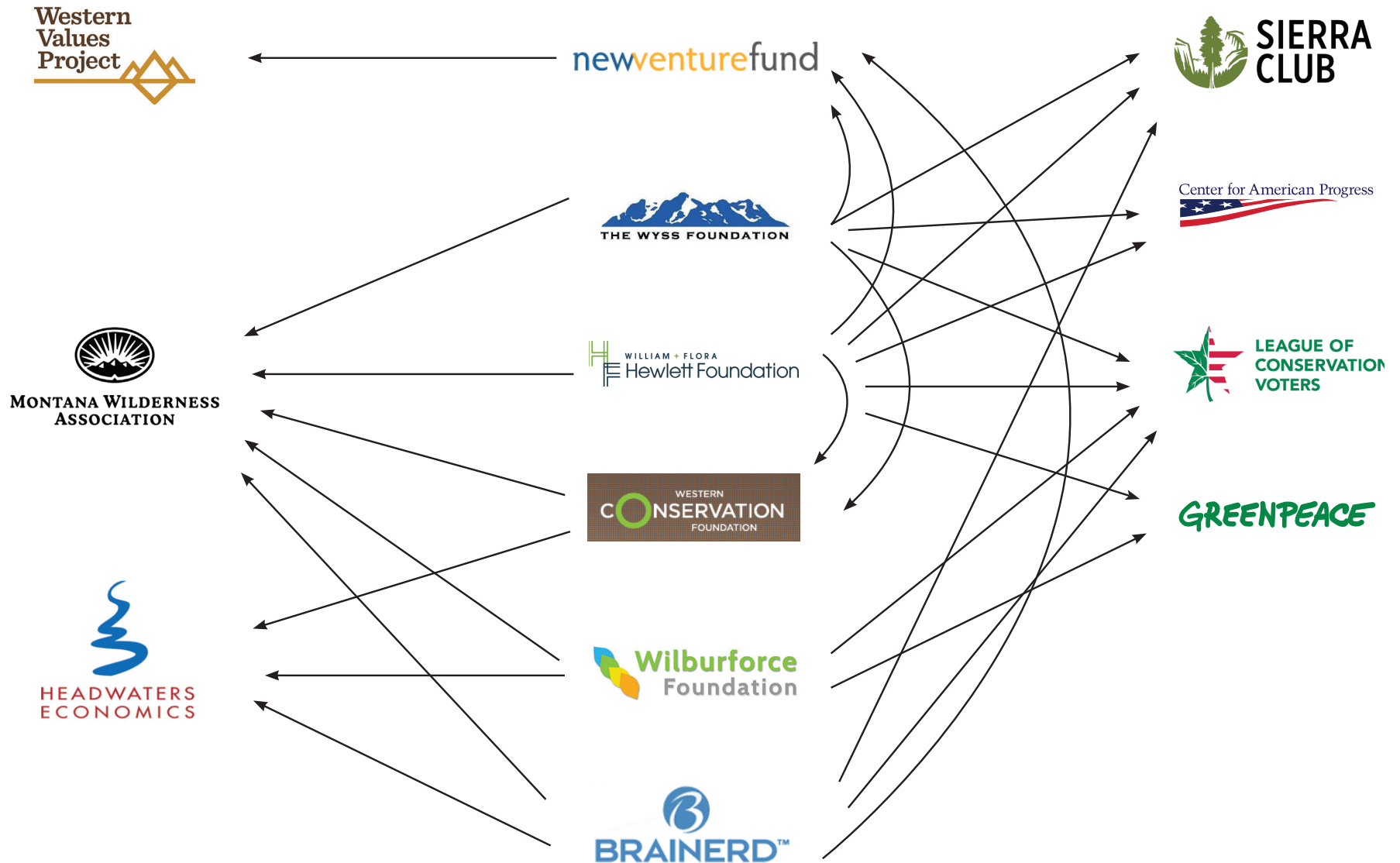




# MT ACTIVISTS

# FUNDERS

# LEFTWING/ ENVIRONMENTAL ALLIES





## INTRODUCTION

In 2012, a wave of dark money flooded Montana. By Election Day, more than \$1.2 million had been funneled to a group, Montana Hunters and Anglers Leadership Fund, to attack U.S. Senate candidate Denny Rehberg, a Republican running against Democratic incumbent Jon Tester.

Where did the money come from? Much of it was sourced to a Washington, DC super PAC called America Votes Action Fund, which received hundreds of thousands from labor unions and environmentalists—namely the League of Conservation Voters. An affiliate of this group also gave \$650,000 to Bull Moose Sportsmen, a Colorado-based “Green Decoy” group—referring to sportsmen groups that quietly receive much of their funding from environmentalists.

Another group, called the Citizens for Strength & Security Fund, gave \$140,000 to Montana Hunters and Anglers. The Fund’s given address was a post office box in Washington, D.C.

Now, six years later, money continues to pour into the West, specifically Montana.

## MONTANA'S SPIDER WEB

In August 2017, Backcountry Hunters & Anglers launched a \$1.4 million ad campaign in Montana against Ryan Zinke over the issue of resizing national monuments. This, despite no national monuments in Montana being flagged for changes.<sup>1</sup>

Two weeks later, the Western Values Project launched a \$500,000 ad campaign against Zinke’s monument review. It also released a push poll on the monuments issue. WVP also launched “Department of Influence,” attacking appointees to the U.S. Department of the Interior.<sup>2</sup>

The following week, Patagonia launched a \$700,000 ad campaign against Zinke in Montana, Utah, and Nevada.<sup>3</sup> And the League of Conservation Voters launched a \$100,000 ad campaign on the monuments issue.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, editorial pages have been flooded with letters and op-eds from groups with names such as “Montana Mountain Mamas” and Business for Montana Outdoors.

Where is the money for all of this activity coming from?

**Our original “Green Decoys” report** focused on five groups that were cloaking radical environmental money in sportsmen’s garb: **Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, Bull Moose Sportsmen, Trout Unlimited,** and the **Izaak Walton League of America.**<sup>5</sup>

Our report highlighted how radical environmental foundations were quietly sending millions to these organizations. For instance, tax documents showed that about 75% of the revenue of TRCP was coming from just a handful of large environmental and labor donors, despite TRCP’s claim to represent grassroots sportsmen in Montana and elsewhere.

New front groups have been popping up like mushrooms. Montana is ground zero. And just like before, the purse is controlled by a few wealthy out-of-state/foreign environmental interests.

## GROUPS IN MONTANA

Along with the dark money funding ad campaigns by Backcountry Hunters and Anglers and Montana Hunters and Anglers, a number of groups have appeared in Montana that raise an eyebrow.

**Headwaters Economics.** The Bozeman-based Headwaters Economics, which bills itself as providing “independent nonpartisan research,” has received at least \$6 million from foundations<sup>6</sup>, including a \$600,000 grant in January 2018 from the environmentalist Hewlett Foundation. Hewlett previously gave \$850,000 to Headwaters Economics in 2013 and 2015.<sup>7</sup> The Seattle-based environmental-focused Brainerd Foundation gave \$50,000 to Headwater Economics in 2015.<sup>8</sup> The LOR Foundation gave \$680,000 to Headwaters Economics in 2015.<sup>9</sup>

**Montana Wilderness Association and “Our Land Our Legacy.”** MWA launched the “Our Land Our Legacy” campaign in 2017 to create noise about public lands. MWA has gotten \$9 million from foundations—leftwing, out-of-state environmental groups such as the Wyss Foundation (\$1.3 million), Pew Charitable Trusts (\$787,000), and the Seattle-based Wilburforce Foundation (\$605,000). Over 95 percent of this foundation money going to MWA comes from outside the state, and MWA states in its most recent annual report that 66% of its contributions comes from foundations.<sup>10,11</sup>

**Western Values Project.** The Western Values Project has a P.O. Box in Whitefish—but it is really an internal project of the Washington, DC liberal behemoth New Venture Fund. (A job posting for a research assistant at the Western Values Project listed the job location as Washington, DC.<sup>12</sup>) Executive director Chris Saeger and deputy director Jayson O’Neill both worked for Democratic politicians.

**Montana Wildlife Federation.** MWF backs the wolf reintroduction in Montana and has The Montana Wildlife Federation has taken over \$1.2 million from the Wyss Foundation, which also funds the Sierra Club, Greenpeace, Defenders of Wildlife, and the Natural Resources Defense Council. MWF Executive Director David Chadwick also sits on the board of the Montana Conservation Voters.

**Montana Mountain Mamas.** Montana Mountain Mamas is a group of just 15 women that bills itself as moms who simply like the outdoors. Along with newspaper commentaries, the group took out a newspaper ad—not an inexpensive endeavor—demanding U.S. Senator Steve Daines to support the Land and Water Conservation Fund, a federal land-purchasing slush fund that lawmakers were trying to reform but that environmentalists (and Green Decoys) love. It is unclear who is funding Montana Mountain Mamas, but it is listed as a project of Resources Media—a

PR firm that supports liberal causes—and the founder of MMM, Becky Edwards, counts the Western Conservation Foundation (see below) as a client.

## THE FUNDERS

This report will focus on three of the major funders of environmental causes in the West. The first is the New Venture Fund, which is essentially a (legal) \$300-million money laundry for new front groups; the second is the Wyss Foundation, funded by a foreign billionaire; the third is the shadowy Western Conservation Foundation, which itself acts as a middleman to collect and distribute money.

## NEW VENTURE FUND

The New Venture Fund has emerged as a leading funder of “Green Decoy” activist groups and other causes. Its specialty is setting up front groups and obscuring who’s funding them. It operates as a legal money laundry for leftwing front groups.

NVF is registered as a 501(c)(3) charity based in Washington, D.C. It operates by “lending” its charitable status to new “projects.” This allows new advocacy campaigns to bypass getting IRS approval for nonprofit status. It also means the funding for the campaign is internal to New Venture Fund. In other words, there’s no direct public linkage between a donor and an NVF “project.”

In practice, this translates to NVF running hundreds of Astroturf projects and funneling hundreds of millions of dollars to these fronts. A 2012 audit of the group listed over 100 “projects” of NVF, including the Green Jobs Institute, Fair Election Legal Network, and the Fossil Fuel Reduction Project (a.k.a. Tar Sands Campaign).

NVF’s revenue has grown from \$36 million in revenue in 2011 to \$282 million and \$365 million in assets in 2016.<sup>13</sup> Major funders of the New Venture Fund include the Wyss Foundation, Packard Foundation, Hewlett Foundation, and Gates Foundation. NVF’s president used to be national field director for the League of Conservation Voters, and other board and staff are tied to ecoAmerica. NVF began in 2006 as the Arabella Legacy Fund with a grant of \$725,000 from the Wyss Foundation for a project called Responsible Trails America,

which worked to shift gas-tax revenue from motorized to non-motorized trails.

NVF claims that it supports new projects during an “incubation period” and that these new entities are seeking IRS approval so that they can become “fully operational as independent charities.”<sup>14</sup> But this seems to be false in some cases. The Western Values Project launched in 2012—and as of 2018 it is still an internal project of the New Venture Fund. Allied Progress, which pushes progressive causes on financial issues, has been a project of New Venture Fund since 2015.

It is unclear how many front groups are managed by NVF presently. NVF does not publish a list on its website, and new websites for groups in NVF’s orbit are often purchased using a privacy shield.

It’s not just NVF grantees in Montana who are engaged on public lands issues. The Campaign for Accountability, founded in 2015 under the wing of NVF, filed a complaint against Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke in October 2017 and appear to be part of a broader campaign to keep pressure on the Department of the Interior—which is friendly to oil and gas development on public lands.<sup>15</sup>

## WYSS FOUNDATION

The Wyss Foundation is a group financed by Swiss billionaire socialist Hansjörg Wyss. While not as notorious as Hungarian billionaire and socialist moneyman George Soros, Wyss, who has a net worth of over \$5 billion, has quietly sent tens of millions to campaigns to lock away land in the West from development.

The Wyss Foundation has given over \$260 million to group such as the Sierra Club, Greenpeace, and NRDC.

Wyss sits on the board of the Center for American Progress, a liberal advocacy group with close ties to Hillary Clinton’s orbit; he has given more to CAP than even Soros.<sup>16</sup>



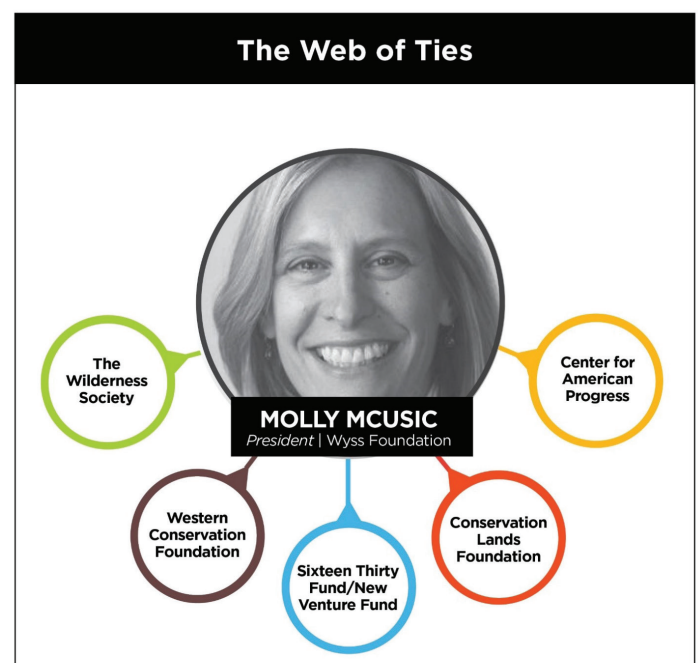
While a financial backer of leftwing political causes, including feminism, Wyss has been accused of sexual harassment by a former colleague.<sup>17</sup> A January 2018 report in The Daily Caller asserted that Wyss was under investigation by authorities in New Jersey in relation to these allegations.<sup>18</sup>

Additionally, executives of Wyss’ company, Syntheses, were found guilty in connection with illegal experiments on humans that the company conducted.<sup>19</sup> A federal judge overseeing the case noted the company’s “pattern of deception is unparalleled.” A former U.S. attorney commented, “Mr. Wyss was a highly involved owner of Synthes. The record shows that at the very beginning, it was he who made some of the very critical decisions that put the company on its ultimate pathway.”

According to a news report:

*Wyss was identified as “Person No. 7” in the original Department of Justice indictment because he participated in the pivotal meetings where the company decided to ignore FDA rules. But he was never formally charged by the Obama administration.<sup>20</sup>*

Wyss personally has given to the League of Conservation Voters Action Fund and Wild PAC. Wyss gave \$4.25 million in 2013 to help buy back 58,000 acres of oil and gas leases in Wyoming’s Hoback Basin and \$35 million in 2010 to help purchase 310,000 acres of private timberlands in northern Montana that are grizzly and wolverine habitat.





According to the Washington Free Beacon, Wyss financed a \$100 million “Democracy Program” in 2016, which sought to create a “surge of registration” and “substantially advancing the [Wyss] Foundation’s policy agenda.”<sup>21</sup>

Molly Mcusic, president of the Wyss Foundation, previously worked for the Clinton Administration overseeing the designation of National Monuments under the Antiquities Act, and she is tied to a number of environmental players.<sup>22</sup>

## WESTERN CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

The Western Conservation Foundation is a low-key front group operating in Denver that is funded by a handful of environmental interests and doles out grant money to Green Decoys and other environmental advocacy groups.

Recent grants in Montana include, in 2016: Montana Wilderness Association (\$130,500); Montana Conservation Voters (\$40,000); Montana Wildlife Federation (\$24,000); Greater Yellowstone Coalition (\$21,852); and Forward Montana Foundation (\$18,000).<sup>23</sup>

The same year WCF also gave \$117,600 to the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership; \$111,010 to the national office of Trout Unlimited—both “Green Decoy” activist groups funded by environmentalist.

WCF’s funding comes from a handful of sources. According to its 2012 tax return, just six sources provided \$18 million to WCF over the previous five years—about 58 percent of all of its revenue over that time.

WCF’s funders include the wealthy Packard Foundation, the Wyss Foundation, the Hewlett Foundation, and The Sea Change Foundation. The Sea Change Foundation, in turn, received \$23 million from an entity in Bermuda.<sup>24</sup>

WCF’s website says next to nothing about the organization, and WCF’s most recent (2016) tax return only

lists a handful of staff members, despite its \$11 million budget. But WCF’s ties to environmentalists are apparent with some digging.

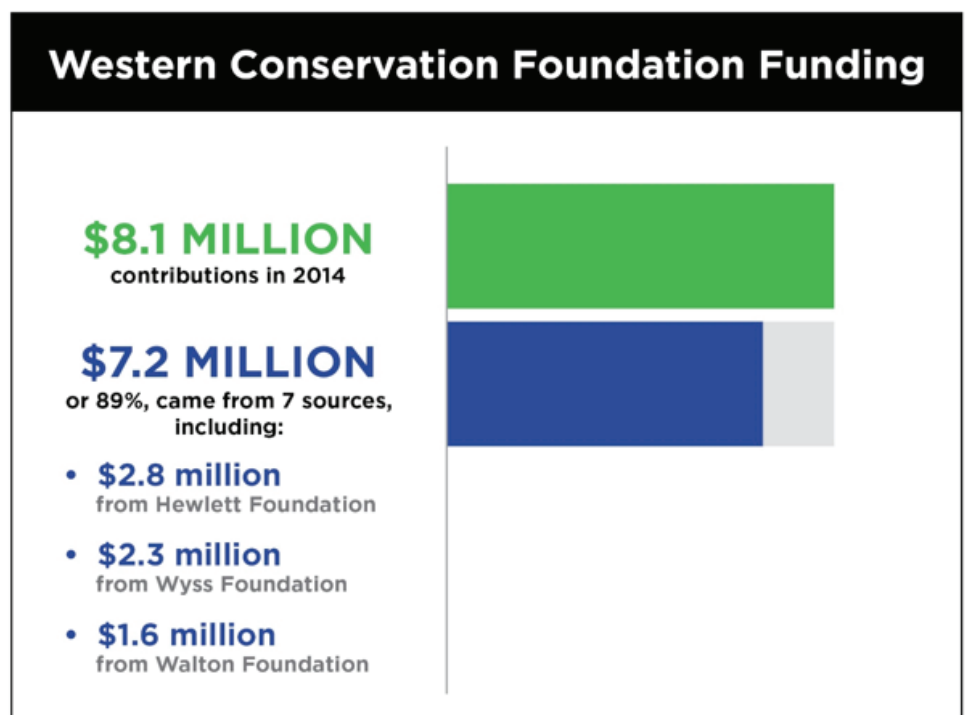
CEO Brendon Cechovic is the previous head of Washington Conservation Voters and sits on the board of the League of Conservation Voters. COO Leah Wieneke previously worked for Washington Conservation Voters and Democratic politicians John Kitzhaber and Jeff Merkley. Strategy director Andrea Keller Helsel –became program director at the Hewlett Foundation in 2017.

WCF’s office building at 1536 Wynkoop Street in Denver also houses a Who’s Who of environmental groups, including the radical Center for Biological Diversity, the infamous WildEarth Guardians, Sierra Club, Colorado Trout Unlimited, NRDC, Conservation Colorado, Alliance for Sustainable Colorado, Colorado Alliance for Environmental Education, and the Western Clean Energy Campaign.<sup>25</sup>

## WHAT IS THE BIGGER PICTURE?

What do environmentalists want, and how are they going about doing it in the Montana and the rest of the Mountain West?

The agenda is this: Making land “hands off” for use by humans. They ideally want roadless wilderness, untouched



by people. Environmental policies pushed by the activists including banning oil & gas development, mining, and logging on public lands. They also pushed the roadless rule under the Clinton Administration to restrict vehicle use.

The founders of the Center for Biological Diversity, an environmental law group that shares funding sources with Green Decoy groups, “We’d like to close thousands of miles of roads, and see a huge amount of retooling of local economies.”<sup>26</sup>

How do they implement this vision? By winning political races, passing legislation, conducting public propaganda campaigns to change public opinion, and building grassroots networks.

That’s where the environmentalist-funded Green Decoys and allied activist groups fit in.

The Hewlett Foundation, which funds Green Decoys and other environmental groups from its multibillion-dollar accounts, outlined its goals in a 2011 report titled, “A Strategy Planning Tool for Western Conservation.”<sup>27</sup> The report calls for stopping the extraction of oil and gas by forming eight large national parks—each the size of Switzerland—and keeping them off limits.

In practice, they have the national monuments. And that’s why the Green Decoys have been so obsessed with the Trump Administration’s decision to reduce two national monuments, one designated by President Clinton and one by President Obama. For their plan to succeed, they need friendly administrations to lock up land without a future administration being able to review the designation.

## CONCLUSION

Environmental groups are pouring money into the Mountain West in an attempt to gain political control of these areas. They know their agenda, which includes prohibitions on natural resource use and development, does not find much natural support in these states. So, these money men are cloaking their efforts behind different messengers, such as “hunter and angler” front groups or “mountain mamas.”

Why should sportsmen care? Because the policies advocated by environmentalists won’t just cause job losses in their communities. It’ll also hurt the recreation they love. Policies

pushed by environmental activists would ban lead ammunition and sinkers and would reduce access to land. Hunting on public land shouldn’t just be restricted to those who can do it “backcountry”-style. But the anti-development policies and hands-off ideology pushed by environmentalists would do just that.

Montanans and Montana sportsmen should be aware that they are the subject of a well-funded, multi-faceted campaign from the environmental lobby.

Why should sportsmen care? Because the policies advocated by environmentalists won’t just cause job losses in their communities. It’ll also hurt the recreation they love by reducing hunting & fishing opportunities. Policies pushed by environmental activists would ban lead ammunition and sinkers and would reduce access to land. Hunting on public land shouldn’t just be restricted to those who can do it “backcountry”-style. But the anti-development policies and hands-off ideology pushed by environmentalists would do just that.

## ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ALLIANCE

The Environmental Policy Alliance, which produced this report, is devoted to uncovering the funding and hidden agendas behind environmental activist groups and exploring the intersection between activists and government agencies. The Alliance is a project of the Center for Organizational Research and Education, a nonprofit based in Washington, D.C.

## TIMELINE

**Aug. 2017:** Backcountry Hunters and Anglers launches \$1.4 million ad campaign against Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke’s monuments review. The campaign is focused on Montana, despite no monuments in the state being shrunk.

**Aug. 2017:** Western Values Project launches a \$500,000 ad campaign against the monuments review.

**Aug. 2017:** Patagonia launches a \$700,000 ad campaign against Zinke in Montana, Utah, and Nevada.

**Aug. 2017:** The League of Conservation Voters launched a **\$244,000 ad campaign** on the monuments issue.

**Oct. 2017:** The Campaign for Accountability **files an ethics complaint** against Zinke for a speech he made to a professional hockey team. CfA was founded in 2015 under the wing of the New Venture Fund.

**Feb. 2018:** National Wildlife Federation runs a **full-page ad** against Zinke. NWF has given money to Green Decoys.

**Feb. 2018:** The Campaign Legal Center **files a complaint** against Zinke. Major donors include George Soros' Foundation to Promote Open Society and the Hewlett Foundation—which also funds Green Decoys. In 2015, four grantors contributed approximately 65% of total revenue. In 2016, two donors comprised 31% of revenue.

## NOTES

Hewlett made a \$400,000 grant to the Society of Environmental Journalists “for enhancing coverage of public lands” in 2018. They fund the messengers, now they fund the media, too.

## REFERENCES

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- <sup>3</sup>“Patagonia Spends \$700,000 In First-Ever Ad to Blast Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke,” *The Inertia*, August 21, 2017. <https://www.theinertia.com/politics/patagonia-spends-700k-in-first-ever-ad-to-blast-interior-secretary-ryan-zinke/>. Accessed May 4, 2018.
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<sup>5</sup>“Green Decoys: How Radical Environmentalists Are Using ‘Sportsmen’s’ Groups as Camouflage,” May 2015. Available at: [https://www.greendecoys.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/GreenDecoys\\_Update\\_April2015.compressed.pdf](https://www.greendecoys.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/GreenDecoys_Update_April2015.compressed.pdf)

<sup>6</sup>Source: Foundation Search.

<sup>7</sup><https://www.hewlett.org/grants/headwaters-economics-for-general-operating-support-4/>

<sup>8</sup>Source: Brainerd Foundation Form 990 tax return for 2015.

<sup>9</sup>Source: LOR Foundation Form 990 tax return for 2015.

<sup>10</sup>Source: Foundation Search.

<sup>11</sup>Source: MWA 2016-17 Annual Report.

<sup>12</sup><https://careercenter.democraticgain.org/job/research-director/40384304/>. Accessed April 10, 2018.

<sup>13</sup>Source: Form 990 tax returns.

<sup>14</sup>Source: New Venture Fund independent auditor’s report (2014).

<sup>15</sup><https://campaignforaccountability.org/government-watch-dog-seeks-investigation-of-interior-secretary-for-violating-ethics-rules/>

<sup>16</sup>Richard Pollack. “EXCLUSIVE: NJ Township Re-Opens Sexual Assault Investigation On Democrat Mega-Donor Tied To Hillary And John Podesta.” *The Daily Caller*, Jan. 29, 2018. <http://dailycaller.com/2018/01/29/wyss-sexual-assault-investigation/>. Accessed May 4, 2018.

<sup>17</sup>Richard Pollack. “Clinton Foundation Donor Threatens Abused Former Lover With Jail, DCNF With Litigation,” *The Daily Caller*, July 29, 2015. <http://dailycaller.com/2015/07/29/4655420/>. Accessed May 7, 2018.

<sup>18</sup>Pollack, *The Daily Caller*, Jan. 29, 2018.

<sup>19</sup>Richard Pollack. “Three people died in illegal human experiments carried out by John Podesta backer’s firm.” *Washington Examiner*, July 23, 2014. <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/three-people-died-in-illegal-human-experiments-carried-out-by-john-podesta-backers-firm/article/2551139>. Accessed May 4, 2018.

<sup>20</sup>Pollack, *The Daily Caller*, July 29, 2015.

<sup>21</sup>Lachlan Markay. “Memo Reveals Clinton Foundation Donor’s \$100 Million Registration, Turnout Push.” *Washington Free Beacon*, June 22, 2016. <http://freebeacon.com/issues/memo-reveals-100-million-effort-by-clinton-foundation-donor/>. Accessed May 4, 2018.

<sup>22</sup><https://www.cof.org/content/molly-mcusic>

<sup>23</sup>Source: Foundation Search.

<sup>24</sup>Lachlan Markay. “Foreign Firm Funding U.S. Green Groups Tied to State-Owned Russian Oil Company,” *Washington Free Beacon*, Jan. 27, 2015. <http://freebeacon.com/issues/foreign-firm-funding-u-s-green-groups-tied-to-state-owned-russian-oil-company/>. Accessed May 7, 2018.

<sup>25</sup><https://www.thealliancecenter.org/community/our-tenants/>

<sup>26</sup>Nicholas Lemann. “No People Allowed: A radical environmental group attempts to return the Southwest to the wild.” *The New Yorker*, Nov. 22, 1999.

<sup>27</sup><https://www.hewlett.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Environment-Refreshed-Western-Conservation-Strategy-1.pdf>