

SOUTHWEST ORGANIZING PROJECT

HARWOOD TRAINING AND SERVICE CENTER

1114 7TH STREET N.W. • ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO 87102 • (505) 247-8832

March 16, 1990

SAMPLE COPY - See pp. 4-11 for signatures and pg. 12 for list of recipients.

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Marjorie Williams
Frances George
Roberto Contreras
Ruben Solis

Mr. Jay D. Hair, President
National Wildlife Federation
1400 Sixteenth Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20036-2266

Dear Mr. Hair:

Staff:

Richard Moore
Jeanne Gauna
Louis Head
Michael Guerrero

We are writing this letter in the belief that through dialogue and mutual strategizing we can create a global environmental movement that protects us all.

We are artists, writers, academics, students, activists, representatives of churches, unions, and community organizations writing you to express our concerns about the role of your organization and other national environmental groups in communities of people of color in the Southwest.

For centuries, people of color in our region have been subjected to racist and genocidal practices including the theft of lands and water, the murder of innocent people, and the degradation of our environment. Mining companies extract minerals leaving economically depressed communities and poisoned soil and water. The U.S. military takes lands for weapons production, testing and storage, contaminating surrounding communities and placing minority workers in the most highly radioactive and toxic worksites. Industrial and municipal dumps are intentionally placed in communities of color, disrupting our cultural lifestyle and threatening our communities' futures. Workers in the fields are dying and babies are born disfigured as a result of pesticide spraying.

Although environmental organizations calling themselves the "Group of Ten" often claim to represent our interests, in observing your activities it has become clear to us that your organizations play an equal role in the disruption of our communities. There is a clear lack of accountability by the Group of Ten environmental organizations towards Third World communities in the Southwest, in the United States as a whole, and internationally.

Your organizations continue to support and promote policies which emphasize the clean-up and preservation of the environment on the backs of working people in general and people of color in particular. In the name of eliminating

environmental hazards at any cost, across the country industrial and other economic activities which employ us are being shut down, curtailed or prevented while our survival needs and cultures are ignored. We suffer from the end results of these actions, but are never full participants in the decision-making which leads to them.

These are a few examples which we have witnessed of the lack of accountability by the Group of Ten:

- * Legislation was passed in December, 1987 to annex lands to form El Malpais National Monument in New Mexico. 13,000 acres were considered to be the ancestral holdings of the Pueblo of Acoma. "Conservation" groups such as the Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society supported the bill in complete disregard for the cultural heritage of the Acoma people.
- * Legislation is also being proposed to form the Albuquerque Petroglyph National Monument; 6,500 acres of escarpment that would include rock drawings carved centuries ago by Indian and Chicano peoples. Part of the land is within the boundaries of the Atrisco Land Grant, owned by Chicano heirs. The Atrisco Land Rights Council, an advocacy group for the heirs is opposing complete sale of the lands and is trying to assure that the heirs rights are recognized and preserved. Opposing the interests of the heirs is the Friends of the Albuquerque Petroglyphs. Members of this group also work in conjunction with the Sierra Club. Recently, the Trust for Public Lands, another conservation group, has proposed to buy the lands for the monument.
- * The Nature Conservancy, National Audubon Society, and others are opposing the grazing of sheep on the Humphries and Sargent Wildlife areas by a local, highly successful economic development project run by Chicanos in Northern New Mexico, one of the most economically depressed areas in the United States. Due to the encroachment of major tourism development companies in the area and consequent loss of private pastoral land historically controlled by local Chicanos, this grazing is considered essential to the continued viability of the project. Despite the fact that this grazing is considered by many to be an ecologically sound practice, these environmental organizations have chosen to "shoot from the hip" in their response to this proposed activity and are opposing the reasoned alternative of those who have lived in the region for hundreds of years.
- * Organizations such as the National Wildlife Federation have been involved in exchanges where Third World countries will sign over lands (debt-for-nature swaps) to conservation groups in exchange for creditors agreeing to erase a portion of that country's debt. In other cases the debt is purchased at

reduced rates; the creditors can then write it off. This not only raises the specter of conservation groups now being "creditors" to Third World countries, but legitimizes the debt itself through the further expropriation of Third World Resources. The question arises whether such deals are in the long term economic interests of both the countries involved and of the people living on the land.

- * The lack of people of color in decision-making positions in your organizations such as executive staff and board positions is also reflective of your histories of racist and exclusionary practices. Racism is a root cause of your inaction around addressing environmental problems in our communities.
- * Group of Ten organizations are being supported by corporations such as ARCO, British Petroleum, Chemical Bank, GTE, General Electric, Dupont, Dow Chemical, Exxon, IBM, Coca Cola, and Waste Management, Incorporated. Several of these companies are known polluters whose disregard for the safety and well-being of workers has resulted in the deaths of many people of color. It is impossible for you to represent us in issues of our own survival when you are accountable to these interests. Such accountability leads you to pursue a corporate strategy towards the resolution of the environmental crisis, when what is needed is a people's strategy which fully involves those who have historically been without power in this society.

Comments have been made by representatives of major national environmental organizations to the effect that only in the recent past have people of color begun to realize the impacts of environmental contamination. We have been involved in environmental struggles for many years and we have not needed the Group of Ten environmental organizations to tell us that these problems have existed.

We again call upon you to cease operations in communities of color within 60 days, until you have hired leaders from those communities to the extent that they make up between 35-40 percent of your entire staff. We are asking that Third World leaders be hired at all levels of your operations.

Although some Group of Ten organizations have sent general information on the people of color within their staffs and Boards of Directors, the information has been insufficient. Again we request a comprehensive and specific listing of your staff of non-European descent, their tenure, salary ranges, and classification (clerical, administrative, professional, etc.). Also provide a list of communities of color with whom you provide services or Third World communities in which you have organizing drives or campaigns, and contacts in those communities.

Finally, we call upon your organization to cease fundraising operations in communities of color within 60 days until a meeting is held with you including representatives of our choice. Once your organization responds to these requests you will be invited to confer with other national leaders on the poisoning of United States Third World communities.

Please send all materials and information to:

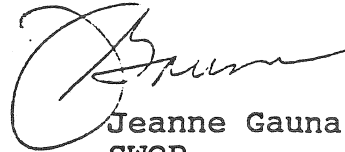
Richard Moore, Co-Director
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It is our sincere hope that we be able to have a frank and open dialogue with your organization and other national environmental organizations. It is our opinion that people of color in the United States and throughout the world are clearly endangered species. Issues of environmental destruction are issues of our immediate and long term survival. We hope that we can soon work with your organization in helping to assure the safety and well-being of all peoples.

Sincerely,



Richard Moore, Co-director
SWOP



Jeanne Gauna, Co-director
SWOP



Lila Bird, President
Graduate Student Association
University of New Mexico
Member, SW Indian Student Coalition
Albuquerque, New Mexico



The Rev. Minerva Garza Carcaño,
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Rio Grande Conference
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Albuquerque, New Mexico



The Rev. Wallace Ford
New Mexico Conference of Churches
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Verna J. Williamson, Governor
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* = Organization listed for identification purposes only

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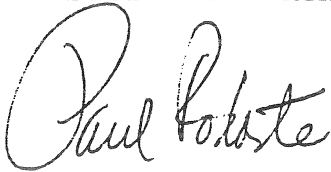
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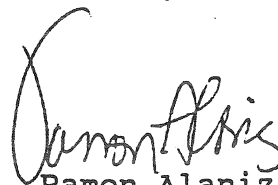
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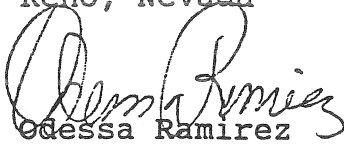
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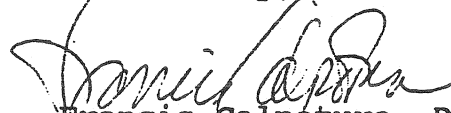
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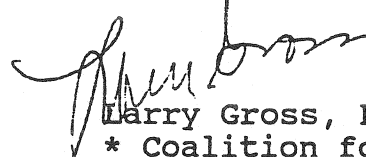
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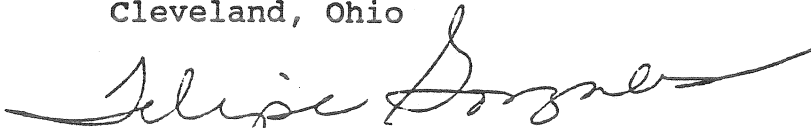
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Peter A. A. Berle, President, National Audubon Society
David Henderson, New Mexico Representative, NAS
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Dede Armentrout, Vice-President, Southwest Field Office, NAS
Ron Klataske, Vice-President, West Central Field Office, NAS
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Mike Clark, Chief Executive Officer, Environmental Policy
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