



# TAKE IT or LEAVE IT...

By Jim Stiles

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*(Editor's Note: As the Gulf oil spill story changes day to day, the frustration of posting an issue of this publication every two MONTHS should be obvious to all of you and especially to me. However, we are able to make daily posts at our facebook page:*

<http://www.facebook.com/FansoftheCanyonCountryZephyr>  
*We hope you will follow the updates with us)*

## THE 'SPILL'...AND OUR COMPLICITY

As I write this, it's July 19, about ten days before we post the August/September issue. Two days ago BP appeared to have finally installed a cap to stop all the oil leakage from the Deepwater Horizon well. It came almost three months after BP's drill platform exploded, killed 11 of its workers and created the biggest man-caused environmental disaster in this nation's history.

This morning, the BBC reports that leakage some distance from the cap and lower than expected pressures suggest the well has ruptured below the sea floor. The consequences could be catastrophic.

Yesterday, before the discovery of the new leaks, a perusal of news stories by the major media would suggest the crisis was over and that once again, life was good on the Gulf coast.

One AP story noted the return of tourists to beaches and tourist resorts, praised the marked reduction in visible damage from the oil and even described the surface oil still out there as a "colorful sheen" on the water.

*Hey! Maybe this oil spill isn't so bad after all. Heck it even creates a 'colorful sheen!'"*

Isn't it extraordinary how malleable we humans are. If only the media had bombarded us with the notion that tar balls have a charm all their own...and taste good too!...why I bet no one would have even raised a finger in protest.

BP and the government simply didn't know how to handle the crisis. They should have told us that leaking oil was good for us and most of the public would have been appeased.

Still Americans are angry and they aim the lion's share of their wrath at BP. The Obama administration has finally been held accountable by many Americans as well, though only reluctantly by some. His supporters have been loathe to admit that perhaps Obama isn't the Messiah they thought he would be 20 months ago.

But it's BP that catches most of the blame and rightly so. Their history of putting profit before safety and environmental responsibility is well-documented and irrefutable. Now their greed and shortsightedness will make them pay

dearly; it could very well destroy the company.

But who is the company? When we talk about oil corporate greed, what and *who* are we really talking about?

Two years ago, when the price of gasoline approached five dollars a gallon and oil companies were experiencing record profits, we Americans were livid. Oil greed was shocking and shameful. And indeed nothing infuriates me more than the extraordinary salaries the CEOs and other officers of these mega-corporations rake in. It is immoral.



Oil hits the Alabama coast

Ultimately, however, most corporate profits don't go into the pockets of their senior officers. Corporations are owned by their *shareholders*. The men and women who run these companies believe their first responsibility is to them. It is a sign of the times that corporate leaders feel very little loyalty to their own workers—to the thousands of employees who, by their hard work and sweat, help make the company profitable to begin with.

But who are the shareholders? Are they predominantly the 'rich weasels' we'd like to believe they are?

Last year economist Robert J. Shapiro tried to find out. Shapiro served in the Clinton administration as undersecretary of commerce for economic affairs and was a key economic adviser to Al Gore and John Kerry in their presidential campaigns. He is also a co-founder of the Progressive Policy Institute, a "think tank" affiliated with the Democratic Leadership Council.

His findings are interesting. Shapiro discovered the following:

\* *Almost 43 percent of oil and natural gas company shares are owned by mutual funds and asset management companies that have mutual funds. Mutual funds manage accounts for 55 million U.S. households with a median income of \$68,700.*

\* *Twenty seven percent of shares are owned by other institutional investors like pension funds. In 2004, more than 2,600 pension funds run by federal, state and local governments held almost \$64 billion in shares of U.S. oil and natural gas companies. These funds represent the major retirement security for the nation's current and retired soldiers, teachers, and police and fire personnel at every level of government.*

\* *Fourteen percent of shares are held in IRA and other personal retirement accounts.*

\* *Forty five million U.S. households have IRA and other personal retirement accounts, with an average account value of just over \$22,000.*

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In other words, whether we knew it or not, many of us had a vested interest in and greatly benefitted from oil company profits, while we simultaneously cursed them for their excesses. If you're a school teacher, a city employee, a cop, or if you maintain a small IRA mutual fund, most likely, at least some of your retirement income comes from oil company profits.

Last month, as BP stocks plummeted, UK citizens were in panic mode as they watched their retirement income collapse. Same story, different country.

In the end, pointing fingers at the oil companies and holding them entirely responsible for all these disasters is disingenuous and dishonest if we don't acknowledge our own complicity. First, as long as we create the demand and as long as we exhibit an insatiable desire to live the excessive consumptive lifestyle we believe is an entitlement, oil companies will keep looking for the product. Second, as long as we invest in these companies and expect a great return on our investment, we can hardly complain about the cost of gas or condemn their actions.

As Shapiro points out, these guys are working for us. When you complain, whether you want to admit it or not, you're biting the hand that feeds you.

This is the complicity that no "progressive" wants to acknowledge. Until we do, our credibility is laughable.

## FLASH!!! NEWS FROM THE FUTURE!

No one can accurately predict the future, even locally, whether it's trying to guess the effects of climate change on the Blue Mountains, the flow of the Colorado River, or the economic future of southeast Utah (how WILL the "amenities economy" manage to keep Moab fat and happy in the 21st Century?) But it's interesting to speculate.

Reviewing the recent news of the day, some ideas come to mind. For example, here in San Juan County, Utah, it appeared there might finally be some progress in the decades old wilderness debate. But Senator Bob Bennett's efforts to find consensus may have hit the skids when his own party rejected him at their convention in May (They thought he was too liberal!).

Many Utah environmentalists were probably delighted; some loathed the idea of any compromise and with even local "grass roots" green organizations boasting million dollar payrolls, what incentive is there to actually put themselves out of business?

Besides, a quarter century after the wilderness debate began, the various green groups still seem to show more inclination to bicker amongst themselves than to actually accomplish something.



Yuppie liberalism:

*"They support civil rights but seem unaware of or indifferent to the concentration of wealth and power in America (i.e., 1% of the population controls 34% of the country's wealth, while 10% controls 68%) as a threat to democracy.*

*They promote economic Growth while ignoring the effects of Growth upon our air, water, wildlife, etc. Neo-racism, yupster liberalism, New Age liberalism.*

Edward Abbey, January 22, 1988

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I still hear about the squabbles. As hard as it is for my old enviro pals to accept, there are still some insiders—moles if you will--- that keep me abreast. In San Juan County, the wilderness “coalition” is spending a good deal of time taking chunks out of each others’ asses. As it was explained to me by Deep Throat...let me see if I have this right---the Grand Canyon Trust wants a big chunk of acreage for wilderness in San Juan County that will never be acceptable to either the locals or to the Obama administration and also wants to expand the boundaries of Canyonlands National Park.

SUWA will go along with park expansion as long as everyone stays on board with their “Red Rock Wilderness” bill, despite the fact that the Obama administration has clearly stated it does not support it. (See the June/July 2010 Zephyr:)

[www.publicbroadcasting.net/kuer/news.newsmain/article/0/0/1641833/KUER.Local.News/Salazar.Looks.For.Compromise/](http://www.publicbroadcasting.net/kuer/news.newsmain/article/0/0/1641833/KUER.Local.News/Salazar.Looks.For.Compromise/)

The Nature Conservancy opposes park expansion because it could jeopardize their operations at Dugout Ranch (The ranch was donated to TNC by Heidi Redd, provided it was maintained as a working ranch.) Consequently the GCT and SUWA are mad at TNC and are holding private meetings without them.

Meanwhile, The Wilderness Society (TWS) is ignoring the other groups and is working directly with state and local officials to create a bill that will actually pass in Congress. The other groups say TWS is selling out.

### **Would the late Cal Black (Ed Abbey’s “Bishop Love” in The Monkey Wrench Gang) have ever dreamed that his county might be promoting its natural wonders and begging for tourist dollars on National Public Radio?**

And yet, the far Right-wing anti-wilderness advocates are just as delighted as their adversaries on the Left to see the legislation bog down. Perpetually locked in “sagebrush rebel mode,” few are willing to acknowledge that even conservatives in San Juan County have embraced the recreation/amenities economy touted by environmentalists.

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And could he have foreseen his home town, Blanding, proclaim itself, “Your Base Camp to Adventure?” Every time I drive into Blanding and see the big welcome sign sporting that logo, I remember the good old days, a few decades ago, when my “Drain Lake Powell” bumper sticker got me pulled over by the local cops on a regular basis. The mind boggles.

Watching the two ends of the wilderness debate spectrum, it’s interesting to note that intractability is their most notable shared trait. In fact, these people have more in common than they’d ever dare to admit.

So now what? I can almost see the headlines---20 years from now...

### **THE BATTLE OVER UTAH WILDERNESS CONTINUES: 2030**

(Salt Lake City—July 20, 2030) *It’s difficult to imagine but both opponents and proponents of a Utah BLM Wilderness bill have been fighting over legislation for 50 years, and some wonder if this impasse will ever be broken. After half a century of bickering is there light at the end of the tunnel?*

*Scott Groene, longtime director of the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance (SUWA) believes the time has come.*

*At a sparsely attended press conference, Groene announced that SUWA and the Utah Wilderness Coalition were on the verge of a major breakthrough. “We believe that after our latest citizens’ inventory, we have a real handle on the wilderness that’s still out there.”*

*Groene told a stunned audience that the new Coalition inventory reveals more than 66 million acres of available wilderness in Utah. “Yes,” Groene replied to questions, “I am well aware that the number is more than the total amount of acreage in the entire state, but we really don’t believe that should be an impediment to this bill. We simply included properties in other states that are owned by Utah residents.”*

*Rod Decker, the senior correspondent for KUTV in Salt Lake City asked if it were true that SUWA includes Temple Square in its wilderness inventory.*

*“That is mostly true,” Groene said guardedly, “but we are going to allow some cherry stemming of Temple Square sidewalks and we are fairly certain the Temple itself does not have all the components for wilderness.... we just don’t think there’s enough solitude in the Celestial Room.”*

*Several Utah airport tarmacs where SUWA board members park their Gulfstream jets were also exempted from wilderness. “We believe in compromise,” the SUWA director explained. “This is simply proof that we can be flexible.”*



**“...we are fairly certain the Temple itself does not have all the components for wilderness.... we just don’t think there’s enough solitude in the Celestial Room.”**

*Meanwhile, anti-wilderness advocate Brian Hawthorne, former director of AccessUSA and the leader of the Blue Ribbon Panel for Open Access offered his organization’s own proposal at a similarly near-empty press conference in Cedar City.*

*“Our people have been out there on their ATVs; we’ve gone up one side of the state and down the other, and we’ve been able to locate 317 acres of real wilderness. That’s what our inventory says.”*

*Hawthorne identified the inaccessible pinnacles of numerous rock spires and monuments throughout the state, including several well-known climbing rocks near Moab, Utah as “possibly having wilderness characteristics ...we couldn’t get our ATVs up them, so they must be wilderness. Otherwise we stand by our count.”*

*Hawthorne refused to discuss a recent Blue Ribbon internal memo that called for the removal and transfer of Utah’s famed Delicate Arch to a more accessible location. “Let’s just say we believe in equal access and leave it at that.”*

*In the early 1990s, pro- and anti-wilderness forces lined up along respective acreages of 5.4 million acres versus 1.3 million acres. Today that gap has grown significantly. Has this difference of opinion inflamed the public?*

*A Dan Jones poll in the Deseret News says not. Of the 1345 Utah citizens polled over the wilderness issue, 76% replied, “Don’t care,” “Don’t know enough to answer,” or “Never heard of wilderness.”*

Clearly, the debate will continue, even if nobody else notices.

### **DICK CARTER says ‘FARE THEE WELL’**

I received word a couple weeks ago that Dick Carter and Margaret Pettis are shutting down their environmental group, High Uintas Preservation Council, after almost 20 years. Dick’s poignant “Fare thee well” note struck some sensitive chords with me.

When I moved to Utah, more than 30 years ago, Dick’s name was one of the first I became familiar with. Before environmentalists had to be lawyers and litigators to get a job in “the movement,” Dick was a conservationist who wore his humanity on his sleeve. He reached out to people who disagreed with him. He enjoyed dialogue and discussion. Dick was passionate and compassionate. He hoped for consensus and resolution.

But it’s been a quarter century since the greens began to bicker and fight one another. Dick’s conciliatory approach to wilderness made him a pariah to many. The Utah hardliners all but drove him out the door. The animosity toward him was stunning.

I recall at the time being bewildered by the rancor; honestly, I didn’t agree with all of Dick’s ideas but didn’t feel I needed to hate him as well. This is a man who stopped and sent me a personal letter of sympathy when Dick heard my old dog Muckluk had died. How can anyone loathe a man with a heart like that?

In his “fare thee well” comments, Dick expressed some of his frustrations...

*After a great deal of thought, we have decided the High Uintas Preservation Council can offer no more hope, guidance or wild voice. Fifteen years and there is simply no more left.*

*...Of late, the environmental/conservation movement has just left me behind. It is a vastly different movement with a deeply different psychology, different expectations and engaged in a very different manner than was my experience. Conversation is not expected nor sought. Little blobs of light filter through now and again but we have been unable to shed that light on a hopeful path*

*...We are simply not real players.*

*...In the end a person pushing and pulling this kind of an organization has got to believe our voices are more than simple bearing witness. I can no longer get over that barrier. Bearing witness may be all we can really do and may be the most important thing we can do, but it can’t be the impetus for an organization like HUPC.*

*...So, keep it simple, thank you over and over, again and again. Let’s hope wildness can find its footing.*

When I had finished reading his wistful goodbye, it felt like a death in the family, though I haven’t seen Dick Carter in decades and we’ve only corresponded occasionally. But I had always taken comfort in knowing that he and Margaret were out there, being true to themselves and to the land they love.

I could not also help but think that in the not too distant future, his sentiments may be mine as well. As if they are not already.

Like Dick, I have no idea what I’m doing with this thing called *The Zephyr* anymore. Other than being a gathering place of sorts for other frustrated souls, I fail to see our relevance either.

I don’t see anyone in the mainstream media really addressing the issues confronting the country and the planet and I am tired of hitting my head against a wall. These are not ordinary times---so much is at stake. *Everything*, in fact, is at stake. Yet, I don’t see any real urgency out there, or honesty or candor, from anybody. Left or Right. I see a lot of cosmetics and gimmicky ‘solutions.’ Nothing more.

Society itself has become little more than a high tech media circus. Warhol was right—with facebook and Twitter, everyone gets their 15 minutes. Everybody performs but nobody listens. Both ‘sides’ play to their own people, their own audience, oblivious to the notion that a long look in the mirror might be enlightening and constructive. We exhibit a relentless partisan intractability against our adversaries and an unwaivering blind allegiance to our allies, where dissent is somehow mistaken for treason.

In the last months of his life, Abbey came to be disillusioned with everyone, even his ‘allies.’ He called it “chickenshit liberalism.” That was 1989; he should see it now.

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### **In 2010, the corruption and banality of environmentalism and “progressives” is beyond my comprehension. There are no idealists left. I don’t know who the ‘good guys’ are anymore.**

At a time when the planet itself is at risk, who do we turn to for inspiration? When environmental leaders in Utah publicly state: “Perhaps in the 21st Century, idealism is no longer applicable,” (and one did say that in 2008), then we are in big trouble.

If there was ever a time for real, genuine heroes, it’s NOW. Yet most people are ignorant of and even seduced by the deception. They see a public image manufactured by marketing campaigns and slick ads and media consultants that have nothing to do with earned respect. Or ethics. Or heartfelt values. Where is the heart and soul of environmentalism nowadays?

Mainstream environmentalists, funded by billionaire capitalists/industrialists, argue with straight faces that capitalism and increased profits and an expanding GDP are compatible with a healthy planet!

In most cases, even the most radical among us remain silent to the hypocrisy.

So what to do? Who really cares? How many times has *The Zephyr* already expressed its outrage in the last decade to thundering indifference?

I think this is an honest publication, and we’ve certainly paid a price for it. We’ve been trying to offer a non-partisan view, but I admit, when the bigger newspapers and magazines manage to ignore these issues, and when readers take comfort in their own non-involvement, it gets to the point where I feel like a broken record.

Recently, on *The Zephyr* facebook page, I enjoyed reading and participating in a long and constructive discussion that began when I posted an old Abbey quote about “Yuppie liberalism.” And yet, throughout the long comment thread, some readers either urged me to “keep up the good fight,” or else they lamented the fact that Abbey was gone. “Where is Abbey when we need him?” one asked.

Well Abbey has been gone for 21 years. He can’t come back and speak on our behalf. All those who miss Abbey... THEY need to be the voice. And even Abbey’s words are pointless if they don’t inspire all of US to speak out. If everyone is fed up with the hypocrisy that comes from ‘OUR SIDE,’ posting a facebook comment is worthless.. Don’t tell me. Don’t think venting on facebook is going to make a difference. TELL THEM. Tell our leaders that you’re disappointed—that you demand a return to honest idealism and leadership that’s rooted in integrity and candor, not the cynical, phony, slick “leadership” we see today.

Ultimately, all this publication can do is give you information and heartfelt opinions. What you do with that information is completely up to you.