

WHAT PRICE PRINCIPLE?

The Grand Canyon Trust Loses Its Vision

By Doug Meyer

Progressives just can't win. On the same weekend that the Grand Canyon Trust hosted its first annual "Moab Sustainability Festival", thousands of fun hogs from around the nation converged on the valley for the 15th annual "24 hours of Moab" bike race. The Chamber of Commerce, busily counting the take, didn't quite catch the irony.

Yep, you got it right, the Grand Canyon Trust, those purveyors of hypocrisy, had the nerve to sponsor a public event, apparently hoping that Obama's Nobel Peace Prize gave them enough cover for the weekend. We're still crunching the numbers on how many bumper stickers in the parking lot announced "This vehicle's emissions offset by TerraPass".

I know, it's too easy picking on GCT, but despite the appearance of beating up on well-meaning, clueless innocents, I think a little journey down memory lane will show otherwise. The exposure of mega-capital behind the group has already been done (see Stiles' "The Greening of Wilderne\$\$ Part 2"), but what's happened to their supposed environmental advocacy as a result? Well, for starters, ignoring an economy built on bicycle tourism while clamoring about sustainability isn't just ridiculous; it's a surrender of position by GCT's executive director. Here's Bill Hedden writing 10 years ago, in an article titled "Recreation Impacts":

*"I guess I went over the top one day when I returned from a lonely, wonderful hike along the Sevier River to find Moab in the full throeb of a spring weekend. Hordes of Winnebagos in caravan crowded the main highway while jeeps lined up at trailheads on all the dirt tracks. When I turned upstream toward home on the road along the Colorado River, I was caught behind bicyclists three abreast practicing for a race the next day. Out on the river, canoes and rafts filled with people were serving as an obstacle course for jet skis roaring in the other direction. Every beach, every imaginable camping space was filled to capacity and people were doing I-daren't-think-what behind each bush. Burned down campfires smoldered beside the fluorescent tents. The ridgeline up on the Slickrock trail held an undulating conga line of mountain bikers against the sky, where sightseeing helicopters hovered and darted. It was nuts and I was in shock. ... **Everywhere we looked, natural resource professionals agreed that industrial-strength recreation holds more potential to disrupt natural processes on a broad scale than just about anything else.** It's a very tough problem affecting all of us. We will be actively searching for ways to deal with it. Stay tuned."* (Colorado Plateau Advocate, Winter 1999)

Reading those last few sentences you can feel Hedden's virtue begin to crumble, sensing that even as he typed them, he knew GCT wouldn't do anything about it. Why? Well, because river runners, backpackers, and "non-motorized" outdoor nuts in general make up their broad public support. Just so, the education of Bill Hedden began.

But where an environmentalist really cuts his teeth in the arid southwest is on the issue of water and population growth. If you're honest, it's simple: more humans means less water for non-human life. The Grand Canyon Trust seemed to agree, envisioning the Colorado Plateau one hundred years from now as "A region still characterized by vast open spaces", and Hedden's words in '02 were consistent:

*"Major pipelines are on the drawing boards that will suck Colorado River water to fast growing cities like Denver and St. George, allowing them to ignore the constraints of climate and geography for a while longer, but raising the costs of the eventual day of reckoning. Everybody knows that paper water rights on the River far exceed actual, wet water; yet everybody is grabbing for their share. The story of the proposed Lake Powell to St. George pipeline illustrates the way proponents of these projects typically fail to visualize a future any of us might want to live in. ... **A pipeline has potential to spread***

sprawl from the city all the way to Big Water near Lake Powell. We will be working to make sure no pipeline is built that threatens the integrity of that wild landscape." (Advocate, Summer 2002)

To make a long story short, in the very same year, at the direction of their board (which even then included David Bonderman), GCT closed its St. George office and withdrew from public advocacy over the pipeline. An internal smack down like that isn't easily forgotten, and it marks the point when Hedden could feel both boxed in by GCT's core constituency, and muzzled by its mega-capital board.

The Grand Canyon Trust telling itself to keep quiet on 180 miles of water pipeline below the spectacular red mesas of southern Utah was such a contradiction of their vision that it's a wonder the group survived. The glaring inconsistency should have at least forced Hedden, as GCT's newly appointed executive

director, to bring an ultimatum before his membership: either change the vision statement, or reorganize without funding from the system devouring the landscape. But there was no ultimatum, no change in the stated vision, and no reorganization. What happened? Even more money flowed in. Hedden's education was complete, and the era of denial, subterfuge, and pretense began.

Fast forward seven years to 2009. The Grand Canyon Trust is still trying to conjure (in our minds) a veil of protection over the Colorado Plateau, while supporting and drawing sustenance from the economic system which consumes it. Meanwhile, the science of global warming tells us that ecosystems everywhere on Earth will be transformed by the

end of the century. In a mere one hundred years, a blink of an eye compared to eons of evolution, human-emitted GHG's *already in the atmosphere* will commit at least a quarter of all plant and animal species on Earth to extinction. As we've said before, there is a moral issue here.

Things have gotten so bad that the UN's 2009 Science Compendium effectively joined in deducing the death of environmentalism with this bombshell: "the conservation community needs to move beyond the preservation or restoration of species and ecosystems in place as the correct approach." So...will GCT finally accept the fact that global capitalism has killed off both their mission statement AND their vision for the Colorado Plateau?

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Of course not, those rich guys on their board envision the need for a lot more green washing as the planet collapses around us. Predictably, Hedden has had to reinvent himself (again), this time as a full-fledged progressive:

*"Public opinion in America today seems divided on the consequences of shifting to an economy featuring green technologies, renewable energy, and restoration of the places that have been damaged during **our collective orgy of fossil-fueled development.** Where some see creeping socialism and heavy added costs that will wreck our economy, others envision America leading the way on the sustainable technologies that will determine who wins and who loses in this new century. **I personally think our dignified survival as a society demands that we make the transition as rapidly as we can thoughtfully do it; but I understand that there will be costs along the way.**"* (Advocate, Summer/Fall 2009)

For anyone paying attention, those "costs" are the last remnant of Bill Hed-



den's environmentalism being flushed down the toilet. And why should we be surprised, knowing that David Bonderman, the multi-millionaire profiting from three new lignite coal-fired power plants in Texas, sits on GCT's board and provides substantial financing to the group?

Remember those "vast open spaces"? I'm told GCT emphasized rooftop solar at the sustainability festival, but did they mention the huge industrial wind farm proposed for plateau rangelands southeast of Flagstaff? They've taken no position, of course. GCT might ask if the landscape is "disturbed" at the site. Well, since cows have grazed there, I guess it means that hundreds of 500ft tall bird-killing turbines are OK by them. But what about GCT's own cattle ranches down slope of the Kaibab, where the wind fairly howls much of the time? Hypocrisy

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literally oozes out of this organization.

In the end, the capitalists who fund the Grand Canyon Trust don't care about the environment or our future either. No, what they care about is our *perception* of the future, so they put on a "sustainability festival" in the face of unmitigated environmental disaster. As long as there's the illusion of hope, the big boys figure we'll keep on shopping. That's all they need, and that's exactly what we can take away from them.

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BASIN & RANGE WATCH UPDATE

By Kevin Emmerich & Laura Cunningham

Baron of the Land Rush: Salazar Fast-tracks Solar in the West

Living and working at Great Basin National Park in eastern Nevada in 1991 could be a challenge. The nearest grocery store was just under 80 miles and the better quality shopping was about 180 miles away in Cedar City, Utah. Getting there was the fun part. One of the most beautiful parts of the trip passed through the wide open sagebrush of Wah Wah Valley in Utah. Not much was there back then except peace and quiet and meadowlarks. Most of the basins seemed so distant from the industrial worldview of the cities. At the time, the remoteness of this little known basin seemed untouchable.

But lately, our beloved Interior Secretary Ken Salazar has announced several ways to change all that. One is a Bureau of Land Management plan to take several of those remote desert valleys and map them as "Solar Energy Study Zones." The government will then help companies build thousands of acres of solar thermal mirrors or photovoltaic panels over the desert by pre-qualifying huge swaths of federal land for development.

"The Secretary of the Interior proposes to withdraw approximately 676,048 acres of public lands from settlement, sale, location, or entry under the general land laws, including the mining laws, on behalf of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to protect and preserve solar energy study areas for future solar energy development. This notice segregates the lands for up to 2 years from surface entry and mining while various studies and analyses are made to support a final decision on the withdrawal application," says the notice on the Federal Register, June 30, 2009.

"Protect and preserve for solar energy..."? We've come a long way in defining what public land is.

These Solar Energy Study Areas, 24 tracts of BLM-administered land in California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Colorado, would provide landscape-scale planning and zoning for solar projects, cutting out many of the obstacles (such as public comment?) to permitting solar development. Pesky threatened and endangered species like Sage grouse will be dealt with, we presume, by committees of GIS-experts safely distant in their city offices.

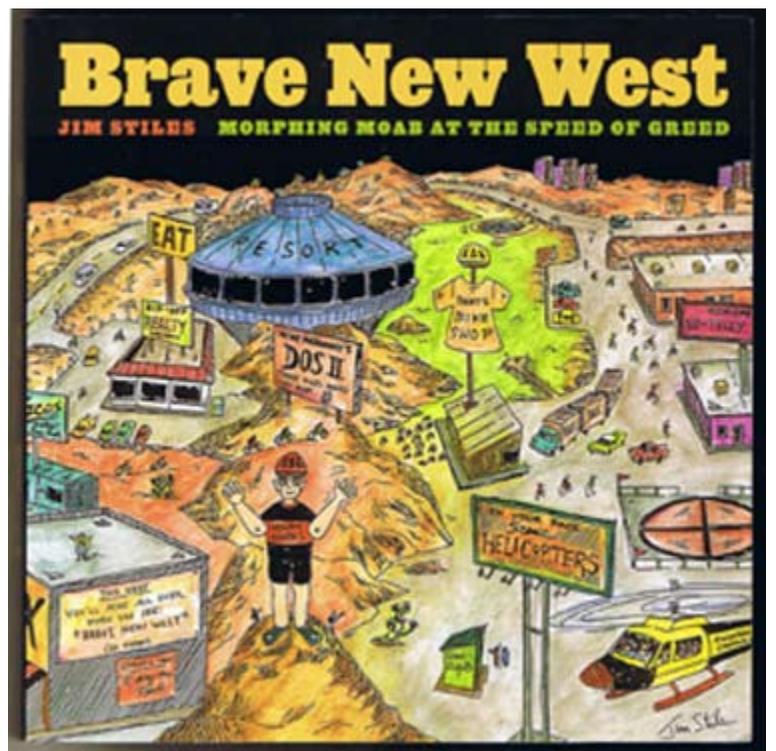
The Solar Energy Study Areas will be included in a huge Solar Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, or PEIS, a sort of "one-stop shop" for developers seeking permits. See <http://solareis.anl.gov/index.cfm>.

Joan Taylor, California-Nevada desert energy chairwoman for The Sierra Club, called the declaration "a knife through the heart of the desert."

Utah's share of these new renewable energy zones includes Escalante Valley, Milford Flats South, and, yes, Wah Wah Valley.

"This environmentally-sensitive plan will identify appropriate Interior-managed lands that have excellent solar energy potential and limited conflicts with wildlife, other natural resources or land users," Salazar said.

The reality on the ground, however, may make things more difficult for Salazar's plan, as top-heavy management and real-world conflicts pile up. When concepts like "preservation" simply become bureaucratic advertising ploys that open the flood gate for energy development on public lands, it becomes symbolic that we never really owned our public lands.



"Jim Stiles holds up a mirror to those of us living in the American West, exposing issues we may not want to face. We are all complicit in the shadow side of growth. His words are born not so much out of anger but a broken heart.

He says he writes elegies for the landscape he loves, that he is "hopelessly clinging to the past."

I would call Stiles a writer from the future.

Brave New West is a book of import because of what it chooses to expose."

-- Terry Tempest Williams
author of - RED -

Passion and Patience in the Desert

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