The "Archdruid" Still Stands with CAPS In Memoriam – David Brower

By Leon Kolankiewicz, Senior Writing Fellow for CAPS

On the inside pages of *CAPS News* (our newsletter), the masthead lists the board of directors and advisory board of Californians for Population Stabilization. Over the years, some quite distinguished figures have been featured there. One member of the advisory board some years ago was Linus Pauling, a Nobel Laureate in Chemistry as well as winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for his opposition to weapons of mass destruction and his advocacy of a nuclear test ban treaty. Dr. Pauling is only one of four individuals to win two Nobel Prizes, and the only person to receive two unshared Nobels.

Among current and past eminent members of the advisory board are former Colorado Governor Richard D. Lamm; Earth First! and Rewilding Institute co-founder Dave Foreman; best-selling author, historian, and pundit Victor Davis Hanson; prolific author and documentary filmmaker Michael Tobias; legendary Grand Canyon river runner and long-time conservationist Martin Litton; pioneering deep ecologist George Sessions; and distinguished demographer and Princeton University emeritus professor Charles Westoff.

Careful readers may have observed that at the base of the list of 18 names currently on the advisory board, there is a small item that reads: "***In Memoriam*** David Brower." Before David Brower passed away in 2000 at the age of 88, he was listed alongside other members of the CAPS advisory board. Brower joined CAPS' advisory board because he believed in CAPS's mission: to promote population stabilization in California, the United States, and the world at levels that preserve the environment and a high quality of life for all.

In both California and the United States as a whole, promoting population stabilization implies supporting lower immigration rates, because it is immigration that is driving most current population growth and almost all future growth. It's that straightforward. David Brower understood this. He supported a halt to population growth in both California and the U.S., and he fully recognized that reducing overall immigration rates would be necessary to accomplish this.

As President Kennedy's and President Johnson's Secretary of the Interior and former Arizona Congressman Stewart Udall wrote in his classic book on conservation, *The Quiet Crisis:* "Dave Brower expressed the consensus of the environmental movement on the subject in 1966 when he said: 'We feel you don't have a conservation policy unless you have a population policy.' "

Indeed, so central was overpopulation to Brower's understanding of the environmental predicament that it was he who encouraged Stanford University biologist and Zero Population Growth cofounder Dr. Paul Ehrlich to write *The Population Bomb* in 1968. Ehrlich's polemic went on to outsell Rachel Carson's landmark work, *Silent Spring* (about the threat of environmental contamination from pesticides) to become the best-selling ecology book of the 1960s.

> *"David Brower understood the concept of limits. He understood the overwhelming destructiveness of overpopulation on the environment."*
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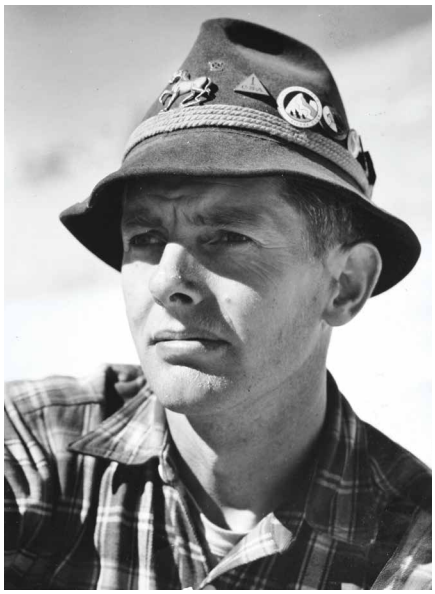
> – Kent Reno, CAPS Board of Directors, CAPS Newsletter, Fall 2000



Iconic conservationist and CAPS advisory board member David Brower in his mountaineering years.

The Enchanted Mountains Lure California's Native Son and Its Most Famous Immigrant

A native of Berkeley, David Brower (1912-2000) was often compared with the legendary conservationist and Sierra Club founder John Muir, and that's a serious compliment since a poll of California historians ranked Muir (1838-1914) as the single most influential Californian in history. Along with President Theodore Roosevelt, Muir accomplished

David Brower spearheaded the campaign to prevent two proposed dams from impacting Grand Canyon National Park.

more than any other American to save wilderness from being crushed and plundered by our country's rapidly growing population and ever-more voracious economy in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Brower's contributions to the modern-day environmental movement were also the stuff of legend. Among other achievements, and inspired by Muir's ultimately unsuccessful campaign to keep Hetch Hetchy Reservoir from being built in Yosemite National Park, Brower almost single-handedly kept large dams and reservoirs from being constructed in Dinosaur National Monument in Colorado and Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona.

Both John Muir and David Brower were husbands and fathers, college dropouts (Muir from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Brower from UC Berkeley), both fell in love with California's Sierra Nevada mountain range, both lived for a time in spectacular Yosemite Valley before it was overrun by crowds and cars, and both were accomplished mountaineers and "peak baggers" in the High Sierra, John Muir's beloved "Range of Light." One difference between them was that while Muir was a devout Christian pacifist who avoided serving in the Civil War, Brower was a World War II veteran, a climbing instructor and officer in the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division who saw action in northern Italy.

Another difference is that while Brower was truly a native son of California, John Muir was not only a migrant to the Golden State (from Wisconsin) but also an immigrant to America as well – from Scotland as a young boy with his family.

Born in Berkeley on July 1, 1912, David Brower lost most of his teeth in a fall at the age of one. Because of this, as a young boy he was rather shy and embarrassed to smile. Early on, he took an interest in nature, and he would guide his blind mother on walks in the Berkeley Hills, which were still quite wild a century ago. "That looking for someone else," he later recalled, "sharpened my appreciation of the beauty of natural things." (Interestingly, John Muir had also been temporarily blinded as a young man after an industrial accident, which gave him a renewed appreciation for the gift of sight and for the natural beauty it beheld.) Brower was first exposed to the High Sierra and Yosemite at the age of just six.

Later on, he was introduced to the conservation movement and to the Sierra Club through his passion for rambling among, exploring, and climbing wild mountains in the High Sierra. As a young man in the 1930s, he was regarded as a world-class mountaineer and credited with more than 70 first ascents. In 1934, he and his climbing partners began an extraordinary ten-week odyssey through the High Sierra, summiting 63 peaks, among them 32 first ascents. On the very first day, they climbed Mounts Tyndall, Williamson, and Barnard. Later, they made eight first ascents in the Devils Crags, which one expert called "one of the most remarkable mountaineering feats ever accomplished in the United States." They climbed Mt. Agassiz, and then in the Palisades Range, they summited Thunderbolt Peak and Starlight Peak.

Then it was on to the Sawtooth Range, where they climbed the Doodad, West Tooth, and Matterhorn Peak (12,285 ft.), on the northern border of Yosemite National Park. Matterhorn Peak, named for the renowned Matterhorn in the Swiss Alps, is the tallest peak in the cragged Sawtooth Range as well as the northernmost 12,000-ft. peak in the Sierra Nevada.

In 1935, Brower was part of a Sierra Club team that attempted the first-ever ascent of the remote Mt. Waddington (13,186 ft.) up in the Coast Range of the province of British Columbia, Canada. Once known as Mystery Mountain, the elusive, inaccessible Mt. Waddington is hidden away among a jumble of soaring ranges and sprawling glaciers north of two long, jagged fjords – Knight Inlet and Butte Inlet. These two crooked fingers of the Pacific Ocean pierce inland deeply through the rugged, heavily glaciated wilderness rain coast. I am a former resident of British Columbia myself, and in the summer of 1979 I kayaked with two Canadian friends for one month and 500 miles north through

Matterhorn Peak (12,285 ft.) in the High Sierra, climbed by David Brower in 1934.

Mt. Waddington's summit in the Coast Range of British Columbia, which was still unclimbed when a Sierra Club team including David Brower unsuccessfully attempted a first ascent in 1935.

B.C.'s fabled Inside Passage through the heart of this wild country. One of those same friends, John Baldwin, a gifted mountaineer and backcountry skier as well as an ocean kayaker, summited Mt. Waddington later that same summer.

Brower's Sierra Club team, however, failed in their pioneering attempt to make that first ascent of Waddington back in 1935. Yet inspired by this effort, and acquiring a new expertise in winter mountaineering (contending with ice, snow, glaciers, cold, and storms), Brower made a number of first winter ascents of peaks in the High Sierra.

In October 1939, Brower and another Sierra Club team attempted "the last great American climbing problem": a first ascent of Shiprock, a volcanic plug and prominent landmark soaring to 7,177 ft. on the Navajo Nation of northwestern New Mexico. Known as *Tsé Bit'a'í* in Navajo, or "Winged Rock," Shiprock is the erosional remnant of an ancient volcano with nearly vertical walls. Twelve previous attempts to scale it had failed. Brower's team, described as "probably the only group on the continent capable of making the climb," succeeded where earlier teams had not, and in the process became the first ascent in U.S. climbing history to use expansion bolts for protection.

Not long after this feat, Brower's stellar mountaineering career was interrupted by the greatest war in world history: World War II.

Mountain Warfare, Mountaineering Warrior

In 1942, David Brower contributed to and edited the *Manual of Ski Mountaineering*. Published by the University of California Press and Cambridge University Press, it was used to train Allied mountain combat troops during World War II. U.S. Armed Forces used the techniques and methods outlined in this book in the battles of the North Apennines and the Lake Garda Alps.

During the Second World War, Brower served as a lieutenant in the elite 10th Mountain Division, a light infantry division of the U.S. Army based at Fort Drum, New York. He trained its soldiers in mountaineering and cross-country skiing in Vermont and the state of Washington. Later, Lieutenant Brower was shipped to the European Theater with the 10th Mountain Division.

There he earned a Bronze Star for action in Italy, where he fought against the Nazi Wehrmacht's forces in the Italian Alps during the final days of World War II. Brower's role in the 10th Mountain Division was featured in the 1996 documentary film *Fire on the Mountain*. After the war ended, he continued to serve as a major in the U.S. Army Reserve for a number of years.

Transforming the Sierra Club into a Formidable Force for Conservation

When it was founded by John Muir and other concerned California conservationists in 1892, the Sierra Club was very much a conservation organization, one of the very first in the United States. It was actively engaged on several fronts in conservation battles within its namesake mountain range. But after the battle for Hetch Hetchy was lost in 1913, and following John Muir's death in 1914, the Club lost much of its conservation and activist zeal and gradually morphed into more of a hiking and outings club for some decades. That began to change when David Brower was named the Sierra Club's first-ever executive director in 1952. His aim was to bring the Club back to its roots as a leader in grassroots conservation activism.

Brower and the Sierra Club soon found themselves embroiled in the national controversy over whether to build two huge dams and reservoirs in isolated Dinosaur National Monument in the remote reaches of western Colorado. In January 1954, Brower stood at the apex of a moment of high political drama in Washington, D.C., at a pivotal incident in the birth of the modern conservation and environmental movements in the United States.

The House Subcommittee on Irrigation and Reclamation had been holding two weeks of hearings on the proposed construction of dams at Echo Park and Split Mountain near the confluence of the wild, untamed Green and Yampa rivers in the National Monument. The Green and the Yampa are both tributaries of the Colorado River, the main hydrological artery of the arid American Southwest, as well as the sculptor of the iconic Grand Canyon in northern Arizona. But these were Baby Boom years, and the population of the Southwest was booming in tandem with America's. This once isolated, desolate, sun-scorched region was now starting to fill up with everyone and everything from uranium prospectors and their Geiger counters to the residents of sprawling new subdivisions and their shiny new sedans and station wagons. These people and their machines thirsted for water, by golly, and unless they got it the boom could go bust.

Brower had given testimony to the House subcommittee the previous afternoon. He was neither a civil engineer nor a hydrologist – nor even a college graduate for that matter. Yet he had had the audacity to question the estimates of evaporation rates in the proposed reservoirs calculated by civil engineers at the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. Now the

Shiprock, the erosional remnant of a volcano's throat, soars to 7,177 ft. elevation on the Navajo Reservation in northwestern New Mexico. David Brower and a Sierra Club team recorded its first ascent in 1939.

Confluence of the Green and Yampa Rivers in Dinosaur National Monument.

subcommittee had provided Brower with a blackboard and chalk so that he could clarify for them his own alternative calculations.

"Are you an engineer?" asked Representative Arthur Miller of Nebraska.

"No, sir, I am an editor," replied Brower, adding that he was using ninth-grade math.

"You are a layman, and you are making that charge against the Bureau of Reclamation?" asked Representative Wayne Aspinall [D-CO].

Added Representative William Dawson from Utah: "There are some 10,000 employees in the Bureau of Reclamation and 400 engineers in Denver, who have been investigating these sites and....we must say that those engineers are all wrong."

"My point is to demonstrate to this committee that they would be making a great mistake to rely upon the figures presented by the Bureau of Reclamation when they cannot add, subtract, multiply, or divide," said Brower. "My point is not to sound smart, but it is an important thing."

This exchange appears in *The Man Who Built the Sierra Club: A Life of David Brower* (Columbia University Press, 2016), one of several fine biographies of Brower. David was first introduced to a national audience by a popular mainstream author back in 1971 when New Yorker writer John McPhee published *Encounters with the Archdruid.* Sub-titled *"Narratives about a conservationist and three of his natural enemies,"* and split into three parts (originally published as three installments in *The New Yorker*), it pitted David Brower against miners, developers, and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. McPhee's book was a well-received, balanced portrait of "tree-hugging" Brower as well as his "tree-harming" ideological adversaries. It contributed to his growing reputation as an uncompromising, unrelenting campaigner for wild Nature.

Yet in this case, Brower did compromise. His success at saving the Green and Yampa Rivers of Dinosaur National Monument came with a high price tag, one for which he repented the rest of his life. That price – a political compromise – was an even bigger dam and reservoir at another beautiful site downstream on the Colorado River: Glen Canyon. Glen Canyon was beautiful, wild, and inaccessible, as well as filled with ancient Native American archeological artifacts, but it was not already protected as a national park, and therefore to build a facility there would not impair the integrity and sanctity of existing units of the National Park System.

When Brower finally did explore Glen Canyon before it was submerged under the rising waters of Lake Powell behind the Glen Canyon Dam, he was stunned and grief-struck. He observed that while "the river it was a spectacular sight....the side canyons are beyond belief." These 125 side canyons bore magical names like Music Temple, Hidden Passage, Mystery Canyon, Twilight Canyon, and Labyrinth Canyon. The bulging, sculpted sides of Labyrinth Canyon were so high, steep, and narrow that visitors could not see the sky from its depths.

For the rest of his life, Brower lamented the Glen Canyon compromise, regretting that he had abandoned and condemned this incomparable natural jewel just to avoid appearing to be an extremist. This bitter loss led him to become still more militant thereafter. This tenacity and readiness to struggle against great odds and powerful political adversaries were brought to bear in mid-1960s when still more Colorado River dams were proposed that would back water upstream into Grand Canyon National Park, although the dams themselves would be located downstream of the park boundary.

Brower became adept at designing and placing full-page ads in high-profile publications. One of the most famous appeared in 1966, in response to the claim of dam promoters that a reservoir in the Grand Canyon would allow tourists to appreciate better the geology and beauty of its vertical sandstone walls from up close by boat. The headline of Brower's ad read: *"SHOULD WE ALSO FLOOD THE SISTINE CHAPEL SO TOURISTS CAN GET NEARER THE CEILING?"*

Yet Brower's indomitable spirit – and some would say insufferable arrogance – made it hard for him to submit to authority, like that of the Sierra Club's board of directors, his bosses. Growing tensions between Brower and the board worsened as the sixties continued, ultimately culminating in his forced resignation as executive director in 1969 over allegations of financial mismanagement and insubordination. Even some friends, or former friends, had turned against him, such as landscape photographer Ansel Adams, board president Dr. Edgar Wayburn, and climbing partner Dick Leonard.

Everyone, even his foes, admired Brower's singular talents – his passion, creativity, leadership, ability to inspire. By the time he was shown the door, Sierra Club membership had increased ten-fold under his leadership and the Club had expanded from a California-oriented organization to a national one, the leading grassroots conservation and environmental group in the United States, if neither the largest (National Wildlife Federation) nor the wealthiest (Nature Conservancy).

After being forced out of the Sierra Club, David Brower founded three other important environmental organizations, Friends of the Earth (FOE), the League of Conservation Voters, and the Earth Island Institute. Each of these remains an important part of the environmental community today. In 1979, he stepped down as fulltime president of FOE but retained control of the board; in 1984 however, he was dismissed from the FOE board of directors due to clashes with other board members and staff over shaky finances and management issues.

Brower, however, eventually made up with many of the environmentalists with whom he had fallen out. He never dropped his Sierra Club membership, even after being fired, and

he later joined the board of directors in the 1980s and then rejoined it again in the 1990s.

Brower, Population, and CAPS

Dating back to at least the 1950s, David Brower was very concerned about overpopulation as a primary driver of environmental degradation. He himself at least partially attributed his education, awareness, and knowledge of the topic to his friend, mentor, Berkeley neighbor, and CAPS supporter, Daniel B. Luten (1908-2003), whom Brower dubbed his "coach on population." Luten was a chemist and geographer, as well as a professor at UC Berkeley.

Among other contributions to the environmental movement, Luten also served as a Sierra Club board member and FOE president. At the 1958 biennial Sierra Club Wilderness Conference, he delivered a speech on population entitled "How Dense Can People Be?" An edited collection of his writings, called *Progress Against Growth: Essays on the American Landscape*, appeared in 1986. In it, Luten warned of the potentially catastrophic consequences of continued population growth: "We all of us, must know one thing. The growth in numbers, so familiar to us, cannot continue; someday it must cease – it will cease either by a decrease in birth rates or an increase in death rates."

David Brower, for his part, felt so strongly about population, that, as noted above, Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall quoted him in his conservation classic *The Quiet Crisis:* "We feel you don't have a conservation policy unless you have a population policy." After seeing Paul Ehrlich lecture on population, Brower suggested that he write a book expounding his views. Ehrlich did so, and it was published in 1968 by Ballantine as *The Population Bomb*. This best-selling book helped ignite the modern population movement.

By the 1980s and 1990s, a potent, multi-pronged backlash against the "population control" movement had gathered force and the environmental movement distanced itself from population, which was increasingly perceived as coercive, toxic, and divisive. In the United States, a good part of this backlash was due to the increasing immigration rates unleashed by the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act and the growing clout and stridency of advocates for mass immigration, both legal and illegal. Since the late sixties, the Sierra Club had advocated for U.S. population stabilization by 1990, and had acknowledged that immigration needed to be limited to halt U.S. population growth.

One of the many spectacular side-canyons at Glen Canyon along the Colorado River, which was submerged under the rising waters of Lake Powell, after construction of the Glen Canyon Dam.

By the mid-1990s, however, under increasing pressure from "environmental justice" campaigners within the Sierra Club's own ranks, as well as from certain funders, the Club's board of directors voted that the Club, and those speaking in its name, would maintain a position of "neutrality" on immigration levels. This reversal on immigration all but denied its growing demographic significance. The board's action in turn instigated a group of Club dissidents led by Alan Kuper of Ohio and Dick Schneider, Ben Zuckerman, and Ric Oberlink of California (all active in CAPS) loyal to the Club's earlier population advocacy – who called themselves Sierrans for U.S. Population Stabilization (SUSPS) – to mount a campaign to place a referendum before the general Club membership in 1998 to decide just what the Club's official position on U.S. population stabilization and immigration should be.

SUSPS began enlisting prominent environmentalists to endorse their call for a holistic approach to population stabilization at both the global and national scales that would promote both fewer births and fewer immigrants to pursue this goal at the national level. Among the first endorsers were David Brower, author Anne Ehrlich (Paul Ehrlich's wife, then serving with Brower on the Sierra Club board), and Gaylord Nelson (former U.S. Senator and the founder of Earth Day). However, because the Sierra Club board of directors itself opposed the measure, David Brower and Anne Ehrlich were forced to drop their overt support.

After a hard-fought, internecine campaign in which the measure's supporters were often denounced as racists, xenophobes, and nativists, the Sierra membership rejected the measure by a vote of approximately 60-40% in early 1998. As *Outside* magazine described it in a 1998 dispatch:

> When it was finally announced that the Sierra Club's rank and file had scuttled a proposal to support new restrictions on U.S. immigration, the organization's leaders positively jumped for joy. "I'm very relieved," said former club president Adam Werbach, 25, who had called the measure "horrendous" and pledged to resign from the board if it was approved. "The Sierra Club should not be blaming immigrants for environmental problems." Despite his relief, though, Werbach admitted to feeling unsettled by the fact that his views were criticized by his most trusted ally, David Brower, the club's erstwhile executive director. "The leadership are fooling themselves," barked Brower, 86. "Overpopulation is a very serious problem, and overimmigration is a big part of it. We must address both. We can't ignore either."

The following year, with just a year or two of life left in him, Brower joined the CAPS advisory board. And in the final months of his life, he made two dramatic gestures, the first repudiating his beloved Sierra Club and the second supporting CAPS.

The first gesture, resigning from the Sierra Club national board of directors in May 2000, reflected the depth of his disenchantment and disillusionment with the direction of a storied conservation/environmental organization to which he had dedicated so much of his zest, his zeal, and his life. The statement he issued announcing his resignation was stark:

> The world is burning and all I hear from them is the music of violins. Overpopulation is perhaps the biggest problem facing us and immigration is part of that problem. It has to be addressed.

In August 2000, CAPS sponsored a two-day conference at the University of Southern

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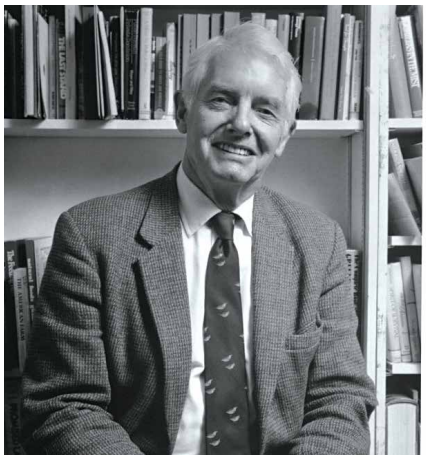
California's Davidson Conference Center. Entitled "Waking from the Dream: Population and the Environment at the Millennial Edge," it featured a veritable Who's Who of eminent population and environmental activists, among them Brower, Earth Day founder Gaylord Nelson, The Wildlands Project chairman Dave Foreman, and former congresswoman Claudine Schneider. One highlight was a screening of the 1973 overpopulation sci-fi cult classic film *Soylent Green*, followed by a panel discussion with its stars Charlton Heston and Leigh Taylor-Young, and its director Richard Fleischer.

People are good, but too many people are not.

Brower was scheduled to speak twice at the conference. The second address was entitled, "Fiddling While Rome Burns," a reference to his quote above on the Sierra Club's retreat on the population issue. His advancing illness forced him to cancel the trip, but he phoned into the conference, was put on audio-speaker, and delivered a powerful message of support to the attendees at the CAPS 2000 conference. It was his last public speech. Within three months, he had passed away, in November of 2000. With his death, the Earth had lost one of its most stalwart defenders. And the population stabilization movement – whose aim has always been to save the Earth and to rescue humanity from Too Much of a Good Thing – People! – had lost one of its staunchest allies.

CAPS Board of Directors member Kent Reno wrote a tribute to David Brower in the Fall 2000 *CAPS Newsletter*, which read in part that:

> Over the years I came to know and greatly admire this man. Not just for his many accomplishments, which are legendary, but for who he was. A leader with principles who would get out front and stand up and fight for what he believed was right – and he was not afraid to step on a few toes in the process. He was not given to compromise, nor was he concerned about polls or political correctness. On top of all this he had a great sense of humor.



David R. Brower in his later years.

> He was my kind of guy. It may be a while before we see another one like him.

This is why we at CAPS continue to list David Brower on our masthead. This great conservationist recognized along with us that conserving California's, the nation's, and the world's wild places, wild things, and livable human habitats means limiting the load we humans place on these assets. In other words, we must not only limit our collective and individual ecological footprints, but the number of feet as well.