

## WISE USE PUBLIC EXPOSURE PROJECT: ANTI-VIOLENCE INITIATIVE

Western States Center

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### BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

In the seven years since it was launched at the 1988 Multiple Use Strategy Conference in Reno, the "Wise Use" Movement has developed into a powerful social and political force. Today, the impact of the Movement in the electoral and policy arenas is indisputable. To achieve its current level of influence, the Movement has utilized grassroots organizing, public relations, and electoral strategies, among others. It has also fostered (and profited from) harassment and violence targeted at its adversaries, including: environmental activists and their families, government natural resource agency workers, public officials, resource workers and union activists, as well as other citizens and groups with differing views on environmental issues.

Although such harassment and violence is not a new phenomenon, anecdotal evidence strongly indicates that the problem is growing. Emboldened and radicalized by the successes of the Wise Use Movement, certain of its leaders and factions have become increasingly aggressive and confrontational with their adversaries, even aligning themselves with armed militia groups and other right-wing extremist organizations. One result has been a proliferation of the sources of harassment and violence, as some of these extremist organizations have added environmentalists to their list of scapegoats allegedly responsible for grave and deliberate political and economic abuses against American citizens.

Documented examples of the broader problem include: hangings in effigy of environmental activists; breaking open closed government roads with heavy machinery; denying environmental groups and public officials access to public facilities and accommodations such as libraries, schools and restaurants; job blackmail and other threats against job security of opponents; intimidation of environmental activists and resource industry workers with both veiled and open threats of bodily injury or death; books and lectures characterizing environmental activists as terrorists that implicitly encourage and demonstrably result in vigilantism; physical assault on the persons and property of opponents; newsletters promoting the formation of armed militia groups; and possibly the bombing of Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management buildings and installations.

While government employees and agencies frequently have been the targets of harassment or violence, in the majority of cases both local and national law enforcement agencies nonetheless have failed to take legal action (and often, even to investigate). On the contrary, certain government agencies have issued 'don't resist/don't enforce' orders to their personnel. Thus, while the Forest Service has documented numerous flagrant and provocative violations of federal regulations by Wise Use activists in Nevada's Toiyabe National Forest area alone, and while Forest Service and other agency installations have been bombed in Nevada and elsewhere, Toiyabe Supervisor Jim Nelson complains that the U.S. Justice Department has all but refused to answer his requests for assistance. Instead, the Forest Service has issued conduct cards to employees warning them that they may be arrested by local law enforcement for violating Wise Use county ordinances.

When does  
Right wing  
harassment  
and  
violence  
become a  
danger to  
a society?  
What prevents  
the project  
from doing  
monitoring  
so-called  
eco-terrorism

This climate of escalating harassment and violence has had a number of disturbing effects, some more obvious than others. The most obvious is the direct effect it has on the lives of people who are targets of these unacceptable and often illegal actions. Individuals find themselves in danger of harassment and violence simply due to their association with environmental positions or government agencies. They fear for their lives, the lives of their families, their jobs, and their ability to live in their communities. However, while such attacks may be directed at individuals, they are nevertheless *not personal*. This climate of harassment and violence is intended to retard the ability of environmental and other groups to do their work and promote environmentally sound, community oriented solutions to natural resource controversies. 7

Fear and intimidation cause activists to diminish or abandon their activism, and groups to redirect their energies towards self-defense. In the face of assault, environmental organizations, labor unions and other groups that might potentially coalesce tend to withdraw from alliances that could expand their bases of power and support, due to natural defensive reactions as well as fear of opening themselves to additional assault from the opponents of their would-be allies. Democracy itself is compromised in many instances critically compromised as supporters of civil discourse and civic participation are silenced and avenues (even physical locations) for dialog are closed off. These are some of the less obvious effects of harassment and violence. *Property Rights* ?

Attacks on individuals aim not simply to silence a few opponents, but rather by their example to silence as much of the opposition as possible. They are one component of a larger campaign against the environmental movement and others calling for sustainable environmental and economic practices. Accordingly, any initiative to address the problem of harassment and violence against people working on environmental issues must address this larger dynamic.

Aside from the publication of David Helvarg's *The War Against the Greens* and isolated efforts by Western States Center and other groups, very few resources have been dedicated to counteracting this problem. Until recently, national environmental organizations generally have not addressed this issue that disproportionately affects their members, in part due to fears of abetting the intimidation by publicizing it. Unchecked, the problem has worsened. Targets of violence and harassment are increasingly seeking the assistance of the Western States Center because of its experience in dealing with the Wise Use Movement, and of other groups with experience counselling targets of different kinds of harassment. However, the demand is beyond the current capacity of Western States Center to meet. //

#### OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

Although the Wise Use Movement and other radical right-wing forces are the apparent beneficiaries of the current climate of intimidation across the West and the nation, the perpetrators of harassment and violence make themselves vulnerable by their very actions. The concern of mainstream institutions about the problem of violence and the current news media interest in anti-government and right-wing violence, triggered in large part by the Oklahoma City bombing incident, provide opportunities for proactive as well defensive action.

Indeed, this heightened media interest enabled the Western States Center to draw the attention of national papers like the *New York Times* to links between the Wise Use Movement and armed citizen militia

groups. Many reporters and news agencies have expressed an interest in ongoing coverage of these kind of issues. Also, we are likely to see additional national forums to expose right-wing violence such as the informal hearings conducted recently by Rep. Schumer of New York, which featured environmental activists among the "victims" of militia and Wise Use attacks. Western States Center's proposed initiative will take advantage of these developments to publicize its findings, and we expect the problem to diminish as individuals and communities choose to avoid association with violence.

Importantly, the issues of violence and access to democratic structures hold the potential of breaking the isolation of targeted groups and individuals by drawing mainline churches, civil rights groups and other institutions that take no official position on natural resource issues into a tactical alliance with those condemning violence and defending free speech and a civil society. This process is already underway in Washington state, where the Coalition for a Liveable Washington is working with churches to respond to the rising problem of harassment and violence. This Western States Center initiative will greatly strengthen such education and organizing efforts, and will facilitate the involvement of other constituencies in this process.

In short, there is a dire need for assistance to the targets of Wise Use-related harassment and violence, and both the timing of the initiative and the issues of violence and harassment themselves will lend this project significant proactive opportunities.

#### **INITIATIVE ON HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE**

The Western States Center is seeking funds to expand the work of our Wise Use Public Exposure Project in order to: a) assist individuals and groups who are targets (or potential targets) of Wise Use-related harassment and violence; and b) take measures that document and enable preventative actions to stop such harassment/violence. The Center will work closely with other groups with expertise in preventing/confronting harassment, and with representatives of the environmental community and other constituencies affected by this problem.

The initiative will:

- Establish and staff a telephone and electronic "hot line" to provide resource and referral information to individuals and organizations that are (or could become) targets of harassment and violence due to their beliefs and actions related to the environment. Information would include topics such as legal rights, legal assistance, law enforcement, personal and organizational security, the larger context of this problem, and details about groups/individuals associated with the attack.

It is impossible to accurately estimate the volume of calls we will handle. However, our experience indicates that the demand for assistance is significant and growing along with the problem itself. Already the Western States Center regularly receives reports of intimidation and harassment, and it is reasonable to expect that such reporting will increase sharply as environmentalists, public employees, resource workers and others learn of this initiative. Moreover, in addition to monitoring future incidents, in the early stages of the initiative we anticipate a large volume of calls regarding past incidents and the dedication of significant staff time to documenting this backlog.

- Develop a computer-based documentation system that enables incidents to be accurately and (where necessary) confidentially documented, resulting in a repository of information on such incidents of harassment and violence that is integrated with our larger research databases. An important motive here is to develop a *statistically significant* database of incidents capable of refuting charges that evidence of the problem of harassment is only anecdotal and that the situation is being exaggerated by environmentalists, civil rights groups and their allies.
- Analyze documented cases, including correlating these cases with other research on leaders and groups from Wise Use and other movements to establish patterns, explain trends, and where possible identify responsibility.
- Publish and disseminate the findings of the initiative in an annual report and through various other outlets. We imagine that a number of constituencies will make use of our reports, including environmental and other targeted groups, government, news media, and law enforcement. (Although our findings might be put to any number of uses including legal action or legislation, it is beyond the scope of this initiative to initiate lawsuits or other major undertakings.)
- Establish and staff an advisory committee to provide advice and expertise on methodology and analysis, represent a number of the constituencies affected by harassment and violence of the kind described in this proposal, and review publications before release, among other tasks. The Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment has agreed to join such a committee, and other members will be recruited in the start-up phase of the initiative.
- Assist in the development of training materials that can be used by environmental and other organizations to educate people about issues related to harassment and ways to help protect oneself from becoming a target.
- Assist in the establishment of a resource and referral network to link targets with people who agree to be part of in an "informal" support group/system for targets.

McPherson  
Report  
with  
Newspaper!

The Western States Center will integrate this initiative within our Wise Use Public Exposure Project, and staff will be responsible to the Western States Center. The initiative will focus on our eight-state region of Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Utah and Nevada. (Although the West is the cradle of the Wise Use Movement, the problems addressed in this proposal are national, and indeed international in scope. It is expected that this initiative may provide a model replicable elsewhere.)

Environmental  
is a traditional  
use of  
conservation

**QUALIFICATIONS OF THE WESTERN STATES CENTER**

The Western States Center has been monitoring Wise Use activity in the West for over three years and maintains a comprehensive database of information, which is shared with state and local organizations, journalists, and national environmental organizations and Wise Use clearinghouses. (A full project description is available upon request.) The Western States Center has assisted hundreds of environmental groups and activists, labor unions, public officials and others concerned about the Wise Use Movement and has developed an extensive network of local contacts across the West. Because we

are a recognized leader in Wise Use research, education, and organizing, many individuals in the environmental movement who have become targets of violence and harassment already turn to the Wise Use Public Exposure Project for information and support.

#### **HISTORY OF THE INITIATIVE, AND TIMELINE FOR ACTION**

In July of 1994, the Western States Center responded to an alarming rise in incidents of harassment of eastern Washington environmentalists with a one-day workshop on Wise Use, militia groups, and personal and organizational security. The workshop was organized in collaboration with the Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment (NWCAMH) and also featured Shiela O'Donnell, a private investigator with expertise in anti-environmental attacks. The event prompted a larger strategy session of eastern Washington environmental groups and their allies that dealt with the broader context of organizing in the face of strong Wise Use campaigns. It also solidified a communications network of activists and researchers concerned about the problems created by the Wise Use Movement.

Beginning in the spring of 1995, Northwest researchers, civil rights and environmental groups, individual targets of harassment, and funders began meeting to discuss appropriate measures to take in response to the escalating incidence of violence and harassment directed at persons due to their views and actions around the natural environment. That summer, a task force of these groups and individuals requested that the Western States Center expand its counter-Wise Use work to address the problem of harassment and violence. Many elements of this proposal were drawn from their recommendations.

The Western States Center would like to launch this new initiative in as timely a fashion as possible. We have begun to research funding sources for this proposal, and once we have determined that sufficient resources can be secured for full funding, we will proceed with initiative start-up activities such as planning, fundraising, acquisition of hardware and software, and hiring a staff person to run the initiative. We expect to bring staff on in December or January. In the meantime, we are providing educational materials to assist the Northwest Coalition Against Malicious Harassment, which in late August began conducting training sessions for leaders of environmental organizations and targets of harassment to provide immediate assistance.