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Earth First! A Founder's Story

Howie Wolke

6 April 2006

Dave Foreman's old Volkswagen bus wobbled on unbalanced tires to the northeast across the Plains of San Augustine on New Mexico Highway 12. The salsa at the Mexican restaurant in the town of Reserve had been so hot that Foreman and I were attempting—without success—to drown the fire in our mouths and bellies with large quantities of beer. Dave was driving, I was riding shotgun, and behind us, a large mass or protoplasm named Mike Roselle lay sprawled across the rear seat. Eyes glazed, half a shit-eating grin on his motionless lips, Roselle appeared to be dead, but in fact was simply stoned completely out of his gourd.

It was April 1980, and in the dry southwest spring the brown overgrazed rangeland of western New Mexico, awaiting the summer monsoon, had not yet a trace of green.

Dave was about to resign from his job as the Southwest Representative for The Wilderness Society (disagreements with a new executive director). I had recently quit my position as Wyoming Representative for Friends of the Earth, after the organization had eliminated my \$60 per month funding but asked me to stay on and raise my own loot. No thanks. My guiding business was very small back then, and when I

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wasn't guiding or exploring the wilds on my own, I worked as a political activist to protect wild country from the likes of the U.S. Forest Service—the very outfit that I'd once naively hoped to join as a protector of the woods.

In a process called RARE II (an acronym for the second “Roadless Area Review and Evaluation”), the Forest Service had just recommended that most of the unprotected roadless wildlands under its jurisdiction, except for a relatively few high altitude enclaves (“wilderness on the rocks”), be opened to road building, logging, mining, and other kinds of mischief incompatible with our vision of how things ought to be on the public's land.

Dave and I were frustrated by our movements' disastrous strategy. In a misbegotten effort to look “moderate”, the conservation movement had compromised away most roadless areas at the outset of the process. It did this by recommending that less than half of the remaining endangered national forest wildlands be protected as Wilderness. Dave had been involved in developing the strategy, though the primary architect of the disaster was a Sierra Club pro named Douglas Scott. I had been protesting the strategy as a lonely voice in Wyoming, but was handicapped by a reputation as an inexperienced young idealist lacking a sense of political reality. But now, Foreman agreed with me that collectively, we'd blown it. We were angry young men, DWD (dangerous when drunk), searching for a new approach to wildland conservation. Jimmy Carter was still President, and neither of us dreamed that Americans would soon replace him with a retired grade B movie actor named Ronald Reagan.

I make this last point because some accounts of the Earth First! founding wrongly suggest that it was a reaction to the anti-environmental extremism of the Reagan/James Watt years.

The gusty wind bullied Dave's hapless van back and forth across the nearly deserted highway. Hitler's revenge. It was a

good thing that Dave and I were engrossed in discussing a new idea, or I would have been scared shitless.

The new idea became Earth First! I don't remember the exact conversation, but I do remember this: we wanted to break from the stuffy mold of mainstream conservation, a mold I'd always had trouble conforming to anyway. We wanted to try a new approach that would allow us to express our true ideas on wilderness, no punches pulled. As the beer trickled down our throats, lubricated our tongues and drowned our inhibitions, we began to obliterate roads, demolish dams, reintroduce extirpated species, and in effect, restore a substantial measure of the bygone but not forgotten American wilderness.

We were delineating multi-million acre Ecological Preserves; at least one in every major ecological region of the U.S. As a guide, we used the Bailey-Kuchler "Eco-regions of the U.S." map that ironically, the Forest Service had distributed with its draft Environmental Impact Statement for RARE II. I'm still amazed at how well we knew that map, lacking one in the van. In general terms, we agreed that the conservation movement had become way too timid. Specifically, we felt that conservationists should advocate legal Wilderness designation, under the Wilderness Act of 1964, for every remaining public wildland that qualified. Furthermore, we wanted a substantial chunk of our lost wilderness back, so Wilderness Recovery Areas were a key component of our plan.

In the environmental movement of 1980, few dared to suggest that much more than a select group of the most scenic wildlands should be protected as Wilderness areas. Re-wilding was completely beyond the bounds of mainstream discussion. I remember a conversation with a prominent Jackson Hole attorney/conservationist: "But Howie, if we talk about restoring wilderness, the loggers and miners will argue that they should be allowed to cut, drill and dig anywhere, since wilderness can always be regenerated". "A good point", I acknowledged, "but

one that fails to address the need to restore wilds”. Full speed ahead, we’ll dodge the torpedoes later.

Yet despite our movements’ reluctance to hit the throttle, for Dave and me embracing these ideas was easy, the natural result of our love of wild country. We were ranting and raving, excited, slightly drunk, yet possessing a clarity of vision that extended far beyond the Continental Divide rising to the east, beyond the Plains of San Augustine. As we approached the tiny town of Datil, we decided to start a new group. Wilderness designation for all remaining undeveloped public wildlands and our new comprehensive system of Ecological Preserves (including lots of Wilderness Recovery Areas) would anchor its platform.

Perhaps as important as the particulars, we wanted to avoid stuffiness, to mix a healthy dose of humor and irreverence with a no-compromise approach to wildland conservation. As I recall, the platform included sensible proposals such as a ban on clearcutting and negative human population growth, and a few more controversial ones, such as Wilderness designation for the moon. Those who supported our platform could join; those who didn’t could stay in the Sierra Club. As it turned out, many of our colleagues were in the latter category.

Suddenly, Dave blurted out the words “Earth First!” I liked it and we had a name. By then, our ranting had roused Roselle from his stupor and he, too, was getting excited. Then an idea for a logo came to mind and I said, “How about a clenched green fist in a circle with the words ‘Earth First’ around the perimeter?” Before we could say “Ayatolla Khomeini,” Roselle had drawn the logo and passed it up front where it met our hearty approval (the exclamation was added later). Earth First! was born.

Foreman and cohorts wear cowboy hats in the VW during a Earth First! roadshow in 1981.

The founding story of Earth First!, however, wouldn’t be complete without mentioning Mexico’s Pinacate Desert. The

unrealistic at times, but in the end credible in that my wild ideas are grounded in an environment that’s been alive and evolving for three and a half billion years.

For what could be more credible, more reasonable than protecting and restoring whatever still remains of wild nature (all of it!), the one environment in which we know, through the experience of history, that the grand journey of all known life can flourish for thousands of millennia? We might not have articulated it in 1980, but deep in our guts we knew that our “radicalism” was really the most credible, the most sensible of perspectives, and we learned this directly from the wilderness.

ness regarding our place in the biosphere. And we won't get there by watching the Discovery Channel or by "surfing" the web. Society's ideas regarding the natural world and humans as a part of it are contorted, warped. It shows in the terminology. And I don't think much can change if we rely only upon nightly news and the internet, books and seminars, symposiums and debates, letters and lobbyists, litigation and new laws.

We need perspective. We need action based upon that perspective. And we need new heroes, new stories, new dreams.

So, in addition to continuing to utilize all of the standard and essential educational and political channels, we'd better, somehow, re-acquaint our people and our leaders with the natural world. Let's get folks out of those cubicle fluorescent offices and into the sunlight, away from the corrupting power of the body politic and the almighty dollar, beyond the mind-numbing drone of incessant commercialism and euphemistic doublespeak and virtual reality. Let's help folks to rise above the lowest common denominator of crappy pop culture and get them out into the wilds, where true power and hope grow in the wind, rain and sun; in the big rocks over yonder beneath the old growth, in the blue waters beyond the living desert, in the waving prairie grasses, and deep within the untrammelled mountains where lives the untainted freedom to clearly think and act like real human animal beings. This will help to keep us sane enough to carry on, and to maintain a sense of humor and perspective in a world where few things are as they're generally perceived.

We can start with our kids, if it's too late for too many adults. Get them outside, for christsakes! Feed them real food, not McYucchs, so their bodies and brains work properly, and expose them to the real world, the one that's still worth saving.

I often think of the mountain wind atop unnamed summits deep in the pungent conifer wilds of the Salmon-Selway divide, and high upon the tundra expanses of the Absaroka plateaus. That's what keeps me going, stubborn and perhaps politically

Pinacate is within the Sonoran Desert bio-region, in the strip of land between the Arizona border and the northernmost shores of the Gulf of California. The Pinacate is now a Mexican National Park that more or less protects a vast area of lower Sonoran Desert habitats, including gardens of saguaro and senita and barrel cactus, minefields of cholla cacti, naked lava flows, volcanic craters, and the extinct volcanoes of Pinacate and adjacent peaks. Across the border to the north is the sweeping basin and range expanse of the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge and Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. Together, these areas constitute one of the wildest and most ecologically intact regions of subtropical desert left on Earth.¹

But beware! The landscape is Sahara-hot much of the year, and largely bone dry with no potable water. The Sonoran Desert is known for its giant cacti and numerous small trees and shrubs, most of which are heavily armed with thorns and spines that easily imbed themselves in human soft tissue. Worse, this desert is the global center of rattlesnake evolution, hosting more species than anywhere else, including the huge and aggressive western diamondback and the testy and particularly toxic Mojave rattler. There are also plenty of venomous scorpions, centipedes, black widows, kissing bugs and more, so think twice before endangering yourself. Furthermore, the Sonoran Desert has spawned Phoenix, the most toxic hazard of all.

Naturally, all of these attractions (except for Phoenix) were enticing to Foreman, Roselle and myself. And for Bart Koehler and Ron Kezar, who rounded out the five man Pinacate foray, prior to the road trip across New Mexico. Kezar was a longtime grassroots volunteer wilderness activist in west Texas and New Mexico, and Koehler had recently preceded Foreman in resign-

¹ Unfortunately, the wilds of Organ Pipe and Cabeza are now being crushed, eroded and trashed by huge troops of illegal migrants plus drug smugglers and border patrol agents tearing across the fragile desert in four wheel drive vehicles.

ing from The Wilderness Society, for whom he had been a regional representative, based in Wyoming.

The five of us had gone south of the border to drink ungodly quantities of beer, eat fresh shrimp, and climb Pinacate Peak. We did all of these things, but contrary to some reports, including one on the “Sixty Minutes” TV show, Earth First! was not incepted at a sleazy bar in the red light district of San Luis, Mexico. In fact, you could say that it all began in the Pinacate, even though the actual founding was in New Mexico.

We reached the Pinacate in Dave’s van, no minor feat considering that the starter didn’t work, so each attempt at locomotion required a four man push start, with Dave getting the cush job of popping the clutch. But the wheeled box got us into the volcanic desert, as close to the north slopes of Pinacate Peak as a primitive maze of two-track jeep roads would take us. We drank our customary evening beer, and then slept (passed out) under the Mexican sky next to an expanse of broken black lava rock. From this camp, the mountain’s rounded summit appeared to be within a day’s round-trip hike.

Next morning, the five of us crossed the volcanic rubble discussing the conservation movements’ failure to save much wilderness, the recent failure of Dave’s first marriage and the impending failure of Bart’s second engagement. We also debated which of the two imposing summits ahead was the actual peak (why carry maps anyway?). In deference to Roselle’s politics, we chose the one on the left.

By early afternoon we staggered to its summit: tired, hot, bloated and hung over. The view was a 360 degree panorama of some of the most inhospitable desert on Earth: sand dunes, black lava, giant cacti, volcanic cinders and craters, the low but rugged ranges of the Cabeza to the north, and barely visible to the southwest, the azure waters of the Gulf of California.

Atop the summit, Koehler, Foreman and I continued the ongoing discussion of wilderness politics, while Roselle deftly rolled and smoked a funny smelling cigarette. “Reality is for

redwood and a porcupine (or between a lawyer and a quail). In today’s political climate, one that is dominated by global corporate powers and their elected and appointed toadies who have little contact with the natural world, the Orwellian nightmare of “doublespeak” is here, and has been since long before 1984. Trees cause pollution. Abortion foes are “pro-life”. Politicians who enact massive corporate subsidies are “conservative”. Those who work to protect and conserve the planet are “radicals”. Civilian casualties are “collateral damage”. A butchered, hacked up eroded forest isn’t a timber sale, it’s a “fuel reduction project” or a “regeneration cut”.

And I’m the Pope.

We now live in the age of euphemisms, intended to sanitize ugly realities so that those with vested interests in maintaining them will face minimal opposition. Whatever happened to honest English? What’s disheartening is that the euphemistic verbal assault has been so widely accepted by so many with so little question. Our thought processes are trained by language; eventually the language we accept represents to a great extent the way we think (if we’re not, like, real careful). So gradually, citizens come to accept erstwhile absurdities as “reality”. If we don’t quite buy into trees as polluters, we do come to accept abortion rights foes as “pro-life”, Dick Cheney as “conservative”, and a denuded road-scarred mountain as “scientific multiple use management”.

Orwell spins in his grave as we sit hapless in the glare of computer screens and televisions, learning that electronic flares are “pages” and “files” or that life is a sit-com. And that saving the planet’s environment is just another socio-political issue to be weighed against various socio-economic tradeoffs. What a crock!

Any profound progress that we might make toward a sustainable future rich in wild evolving life presupposes not only a drastic halt to human population growth and human-created carbon emissions, but also a quantum leap in human conscious-

cancer). All the media wanted to discuss, it seemed, were tree spikes, car bombs and anarchy. For me, it became increasingly difficult to promote wilderness under the Earth First! banner.

I began to sense the end of a wild ride. We of the old guard still wished to be lions. Perhaps, though, we were dinosaurs, clinging to an idea that, for better or worse (worse in my mind), our movement had moved far beyond. With lots of fanfare, Foreman publicly quit EF! in 1990; I quietly left later that year. Too much baggage, too many diversions, adios mi amigos y amigas.

I have no regrets about my decade with Earth First! Some bitterness, yes, but no regrets. Today's EF! is an entirely different animal from the early wilderness lion, but whatever it is, it's alive and kicking. At least for a while, it spawned numerous effective wildland groups and proved to be a fine training ground for young activists. Perhaps most important, early EF! succeeded in changing the parameters of the wildland debate, making possible initiatives and successful campaigns that back in 1980 we barely dreamed possible. And even though it lost its original focus upon the wilds, EF!'s newer incarnation continues to peer off the edge of life's mesa of wild thought, into the unknown, far beyond what convention now defines as the limits of acceptable discourse. All in all, not a bad legacy for five pickled wilderness fanatics staggering across the Mexican desert. Or, more specifically, for three such fanatics in a creaky German box rolling across New Mexico in quest of homemade fried steak.

* * *

Ronald Reagan once asserted, in all seriousness, that trees are a major source of air pollution. This was pre-Alzheimers.

Such statements, though widely ridiculed, indicate that we live in a society horribly estranged from nature. For the most part, its leaders can't tell the difference between a

people who can't handle drugs", Mike had once noted. Bart, Dave and I opened the beer cans that we'd carried in our day packs, and downed the warm well-shaken up suds (our drug of choice) while the four of us watched incredulously as Ron Kezar first descended to the saddle between the two summits and then hiked and jogged up a steep rocky cactus-studded slope to the real summit of Pinacate Peak. Roselle's politics had led us astray; we were perched upon a slightly lower peak called "Carnegie Cone". A compulsive peak-bagger, Ron just couldn't let it go at that.

Some accounts of the Earth First! founding claim that as the five of us descended the two peaks, the vision of Earth First! crystallized. Wrong again. Yes, we continued to discuss wilderness politics, reinforcing our belief that the environmental movement had blown RARE II in a misguided frenzy to accommodate friends in the Carter Administration. We also stopped to photograph giant cacti and to extricate thorns from our bodies. But eventually, the conversation degenerated to the usual topics of the prospects for a resurgence of Pleistocene glaciation, our hopes for global economic collapse, and of course, our love lives. We were in favor of all three.

The boys were considered DWD, dangerous while drunk, in those days. Here Howie Wolke and Mike Roselle arm-wrestle as Dave Foreman (behind Howie) watches.

Nonetheless, this desert foray could be considered an essential prelude to the actual inception of Earth First!. Except for Roselle, who was new to wilderness politics but a veteran of the anti-war movement (in ensuing years he gained lots of experience working for a variety of environmental groups), we all had at least a few years of public land conservation, as well as liquid carbohydrate, under our belts. And our time together stimulated the consideration of alternatives to traditional environmental compromise.

Thus, although Bart and Ron weren't physically with us in the Plains of San Augustine, their ideas certainly helped to rein-

force the founding. They weren't with us because after we left the Pinacate, we deposited Bart in Tucson to follow his lower brain to a woman he'd met earlier on the trip, and we left Ron in Glenwood, New Mexico to tend a non-traditional garden near the house that he and Dave rented together.

So, by the end of that long day's drive across New Mexico, Earth First! had been born, and Roselle and I were helping Dave demolish a healthy portion of his mother's renowned chicken-fried steak at her house in the sprawling suburbs of Albuquerque. That's really how it all began.

* * *

Far from the desert sands and petrified lava flows of the Pinacate, the African lion is the savanna queen, the alpha animal, the big cheese: a critter that might eat your slothful posterior. The lion is a superbly adapted predator, a top trophic level carnivore, perhaps with no terrestrial equal on Earth. Ecologically, the lion is a specialist, capturing and eating other mammals, including humans, with frightening efficiency. Thus, the lion's niche is narrow, targeting mammals. She eats little vegetable matter and almost no other kinds of animals. In her absence, her prey may overpopulate the range, depleting forage that feeds and shelters multitudes of other species, dramatically effecting ecosystem function.

On the other hand, the grizzly is a superbly adapted omnivore. Ecologically, he is a generalist, eating nearly anything within grasp: four-legged mammals, birds, fish, insects, carrion, grass, forbs, shrubs, berries, pine nuts, garbage, and occasionally, like the lion, people and their pets. Griz is less adept at capturing big prey than is the lion, but he survives because he can do so many other things, including hibernate. Yet magnificent though he is, the grizzly is less important to the way the ecosystem functions than is the lion. Rarely does the griz hold prey populations in check. Though feared by fellow creatures

otherwise shapely pink-nippled sun-drenched female breasts was somewhat distracting as I explained the ins and outs of below-cost timber sales.

Back to weird. At the '88 rendezvous in northeast Washington, a fellow who turned out to be an FBI informant conducted an informative workshop on how to disable a bulldozer. Good to see FBI informants informing. Soon, livid about the publication of *Ecodefense*, the FBI would infiltrate a small group of eco-saboteurs in Prescott, Arizona in order to snare Foreman, who was casual friends with one of the monkey wrenchers. Foreman and four others were busted; Dave got off with probation after a Fed accidentally taped himself admitting that Foreman wasn't a major perpetrator but needed to be "popped" in order to send a message. Other members of the "Arizona Five" did varying stints in prison. And many on the left vilified Foreman for not doing time.

In March 1989 Ed Abbey died, and a generation of wilderness lovers lost the creator of a thousand inspirations to defend wild country, dignity and freedom.

Proof that Foreman and Roselle once spoke happily with each other. Round River Rendezvous 1981.

By then, EF! was clearly divided into two camps, the old guard versus the new. Lions versus (Teddy) bears. Conservationists versus social activists. Hunters versus hunt saboteurs. Wilderness misanthropes versus bleeding heart leftists. Foreman and Roselle banged their Neanderthal noggins and ceased communicating. I no longer recognized the group that I'd helped spawn. On top of all the discord, the media became obsessed with tree spiking, a controversial monkey wrenching technique designed to stop timber sales. Then, in the spring of 1990, a bomb exploded in California EF! activist Judy Bari's car, severely injuring her and slightly injuring her friend Darryl Cherney. Both were leaders of the social activist contingent, and the horrifying event created yet another diversion (the bomber was never discovered; a few years later Judy died of

loved to typecast us greens as wimpy, ivory-tower, intellectual nerds. As increasing numbers of relatively humorless leftist ideologues (a redundancy?) joined EF!, the mind fuck was lost; they just didn't get it, and were offended or intimidated or both. Looking back, as young males suffering from testosterone poisoning, we too, sometimes forgot the mind-fuck and played the redneck role too seriously. And yes, we drank way too much.

There was also the anarchist thing, which evolved from our refusal to have a formal structure: a movement not an organization, no officers, leadership by example and initiative, and so forth. Whether or not this was a good idea is water under the bridge, but by the time Foreman and I quit EF! in 1990, ideological anarchy appeared to be deeply imbedded in the group's fabric (and gawd help us all if as individuals we fail to have at least a little anarchist within).

As the Reagan years (ignorance is bliss) dragged on, Earth First! grew beyond my wildest dreams, largely thanks to Dave Foreman's tireless full time efforts in the early '80's. But with growth and publicity, our ability to steer the ship diminished. Unintentionally, we'd created a vehicle for the counter-culture. EF! had become a vehicle for leftist, anarchist, anarchist-leftist, anti-hunting eco-feminists for gay social justice and new age woo-woo conductors of cosmic energy. To say the least, I began to feel out of place. In 1985's rendezvous in the shimmering aspens of Colorado's Uncompagne Plateau, I argued with an Oregon activist, to no avail, that it would be inappropriate for his EF! group to advocate legalizing pot. "Not our issue", I insisted, exasperated.

Nonetheless, sometimes I still enjoyed counter-cultural diversity. For example, at the '87 rendezvous under the big ponderosas of the Grand Canyon's north rim, I led a workshop on Forest Service malfeasance. I quickly noticed a fine diversity of bare-breasted women in the group. Viva la difference! Viva diversity! Still, the presence of a dozen or so big, small, round and

including us, he's the jack of all trades, not just the master of one. This is not to say that he is unimportant to ecosystem function, just that he, the generalist, effects many things somewhat but few things profoundly.

Earth First! was designed to be a lion, not a bear. We were specialists, focused upon wildlands. And we were aggressive, working to be the cutting edge for wilderness, the shock troops, the warriors, the top predators of the conservation movement "ecosystem". We perceived this to be an empty niche and filled it. The niche was narrow, but we were lions; we planned to make a difference. We would work toward common goals with other conservation groups and with other movements, but we weren't the anti-nuclear, animal rights, labor or woman's movement. We founders were primarily about the wilds, and for the first few years EF! reflected our bias. In fact, most of its early activists, like Susan Morgan – who came to EF! as another refugee from The Wilderness Society to edit the newsletter after Foreman and I put out the first few issues – had backgrounds and experience in conservation, not social change.

Looking back at my Earth First! years, the splash we made in the media constantly amazed me, though it shouldn't have. After all, the conservation movement had become stuffy, mired in excess compromise. It had become increasingly severed from the spirit of John Muir, Bob Marshall and Aldo Leopold – icons who defined wildland conservation during the late 19th and early 20thcenturies. And we were offering something different.

The stone hammer symbolises a want to return to the pre-electric era, and the monkeywrench, well...

While the modern environmental movement exploded into public consciousness with Rachael Carson's *Silent Spring* and with Earth Day, 1970, wildland conservation was deemed to be less relevant by left-leaning urban sophisticates. This was ironic, because *Silent Spring* was about the toxic death of wild creatures. Yet wildland conservation was subsumed by a big-

ger, rapidly growing environmental movement that appeared to have more immediate relevance to urban America. And yes, toxic waste and fouled air kill quickly. But in the long run they kill no more thoroughly than does the gradual erosion of the earth's most basic fabric, wilderness and related wild habitats. Still, wildland conservation floundered as a poor cousin to popular environmentalism.

Then came Earth First!, with its irreverence, humor, guerilla theater, demonstrations, civil disobedience and its refusal to condemn non-violent ecological sabotage (monkey wrenching), all focused upon the *wilds*, something rather novel, especially from the media's standpoint. So the attention probably shouldn't have been a surprise.

One early goal of EF! was to expand the parameters of the wilderness debate in order to move the "center" further toward the wild end of the spectrum. This would allow the inevitable compromise (imposed by the political system) to protect more land, and it would allow groups like the Sierra Club and The Wilderness Society to take stronger positions without looking "radical".

Note that in 1980 the idea of protecting all roadless wild public lands was considered to be extreme, and most conservation activists bought into this thinking. Nowadays, nearly all such folks and even the government under former President Clinton supported protecting all national forest roadless areas, at least from roadbuilding and industrialization, if not as statutory Wilderness.

Similarly, our proposed removal of dams was then considered "whacko"; today this is mainstream. For example, a few years ago the Army Corps of Engineers held hearings on the proposed removal of four dams from the lower Snake River, and the Sierra Club now supports the removal of the West's greatest monstrosity, Glen Canyon Dam on what used to be the Colorado River. Various other dams from Maine to the Olympic Peninsula – including Montana's Milltown dam – are now be-

ing removed due to various unforeseen environmental consequences that nobody thought about prior to construction.

None of this is to claim that early Earth First! is solely responsible for such shifts in public debate and policy, but by articulating what others dared not, we certainly played a role in creating the shift. Make no mistake about this, however: we promoted dam removal, wilderness recovery and other so-called radical ideas not just to expand the debate and make the Sierra Club look reasonable, but because we believed very deeply in them.

A few other thoughts on early Earth First! are in order. Although in the early '80's Outside Magazine labeled us "The Real Monkey Wrench Gang," in the beginning there wasn't much discussion of monkey wrenching, other than our refusal to condemn it so long as it was non-violent toward life. But that was enough for the media to create a lasting association between EF! and ecological sabotage. Dave Foreman's 1985 publication of *Ecodefense, A Field Guide to Monkey Wrenching* and my own arrest and six month incarceration in '85 and '86 for eco-sabotage did little to allay the impression. Also, although the founders had read Edward Abbey's wonderful novel, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, and Ed's numerous other literary voyages had certainly inspired us, Gang wasn't a primary impetus in the founding, despite media reports to the contrary.

In addition, there was the redneck thing. While we made a big deal about human diversity within our movement – and we did have a great diversity of white middle class gringos – we founder types cultivated the beer-guzzling redneck image. This was partly because it was at least slightly true; also, it was to counter the tendency for social change and environmental groups to lose focus and drift into general left wing politics. By the way, Foreman has always been a Republican at heart, the G.O.P.'s anti-environmentalism notwithstanding.

But beyond the desire to block leftist drift, the redneck thing was a spoof to mind-fuck environmental opponents who