

## Greenpeace, Earth First!, PETA

*Radical Fringe Tactics Move Toward Center Stage*

By Neil Hrab

*Summary: Last month's Organization Trends profiled the radical tactics of three "direct action" groups—Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, Rainforest Action Network and the Ruckus Society. In part II, author Neil Hrab looks at three other groups that use calculated acts of disruption for political ends. Radicals are using these "direct action" tactics to win more and more influence, and bypass normal political processes.*

### Greenpeace

The grand-daddy of environmental direct action is Greenpeace. This organization has long functioned as a kind of protest "skunkworks," dedicated to finding ever-more-unorthodox strategies for activists to use to confront their opponents. Examine the current activities of any radical group protesting capitalism, corporations or globalization and it's likely that Greenpeace pioneered their tactics. A September 2001 *Boston Globe* article summarized the standard Greenpeace methods of operation: "...rappelling down skyscrapers, occupying abandoned oil rigs, and putting inflatable dinghies between whales and hunters with harpoons." This is one group that has done it all.

Started in 1971 by activists in Vancouver, Canada, it is now an international organization, headquartered in the Netherlands, with 41 national affiliates and a global membership of 2.8 million. Greenpeace's reach is world-wide, stretching through the developed world and into many Third World states as well. The total revenue that Greenpeace International (GI),



Equipped with their own fleet of ships, Greenpeace activists frequently engage in illegal activity such as interfering with commercial shipping.

the group's central coordinating body, takes in each year has been estimated at around \$50 million; GI is believed to have around \$17 million in assets. The group used to be much larger in terms of membership. As one analyst of Greenpeace's fortunes has noted, "at its peak in the mid-1980s, the organization had more than 5 million supporters worldwide—including celebrities such as Sting, Sir Elton John and Tom Jones, who supported its save-the-rainforest campaigns." By 1994, its membership stood at 4 million. By 2000, it was estimated at 2.4 million—so the latest figure of 2.8 million indicates it may have turned the corner. Some people within the group believe Greenpeace's obsession with "direct action" may be what drove those numbers down. "The public is bored with seeing us chaining ourselves to ships

and cranes," one anonymous activist told Britain's *Sunday Times* in 2000. "The trouble is, that's what we do best."

Greenpeace USA, the US affiliate headquartered in Washington, DC, claims

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250,000 members, down from more than one million members in the early 1990s, when it was a cash cow for Greenpeace International. Greenpeace USA is a non-profit 501(c)(4) lobby organization that works “to change current environmental policies and practices” through what it calls “grassroots lobbying for various legislative initiatives.” It reported \$10.7 million in 2001 revenue and has assets of \$9.3 million. Under IRS legislation, its activities are treated as tax exempt but are not charitable and tax-deductible. A separate Greenpeace Fund, which is registered as a 501(c)(3) organization, “focuses on research and education on environmental issues.” Its activities are treated as charitable. The Greenpeace Fund had 2002 revenues of \$8.7 million and assets of \$7.5 million.

Some observers question the propriety of this arrangement. In September 2003, a watchdog group called Public Interest Watch based in Washington, DC released a report entitled “Green Peace, Dirty Money: Tax Violations in the World of Non-Profits.” Public Interest Watch (PIW) claims to

have evidence that Greenpeace has “knowingly and systematically violated United States tax laws.”

“At the heart of the matter is the way in which Greenpeace’s complex corporate structure masks its misuse of tax-exempt contributions,” says Mike Hardiman, former executive director of PIW. “The IRS very clearly differentiates between taxable and tax-exempt contributions, and the ways in which they can be used,” Hardiman says. “Greenpeace has devised a system for diverting tax-exempt funds into non-exempt organizations within its empire and using the money for improper and illegal purposes. It is plainly a case of money laundering.” Public Interest Watch contends that over a three year period one Greenpeace entity diverted over \$24 million in tax-deductible contributions that were supposed to be used for charitable, educational or scientific programs, but instead financed advocacy campaigns.

“Greenpeace is cheating the taxpayer by accepting tax-deductible contributions, and then misusing the funds,” Hardiman asserts. “They are accepting taxpayer subsidized funds for charity and education, and then using it to hang banners on buildings and break into nuclear power stations.” The complaint is pending with the IRS.

With a staff and budget now comparable to many mainstream environmental groups, Greenpeace activists continue to undertake radical “direct action” tactics. They routinely stage stunts that violate laws in order to generate publicity for their cause.

## Anti-Bush and Anti-Corporate Campaigns

Lately Greenpeace has energized its members by linking its attacks on Bush Administration policies to its attacks on corporations. These are more than simple verbal assaults.

- In 2001 Greenpeace dumped five tons of coal onto a street just a short distance from the home of Vice-President Dick Cheney to protest the Administration’s energy

policies.

- On Earth Day [April 22] in 2001 Greenpeace USA leader John Passacantando—who called President Bush the “face of a thousand opponents” because he represents “the oil, coal, plutonium, auto and gas industries”—was arrested with Rainforest Action Network founder Randy Hayes for locking himself to a gate during an anti-Bush protest in Washington, DC. The protest blockaded the entrance to the Environmental Protection Agency. (Passacantando, a veteran of the activist group Ozone Action, is a former executive director of the Florence and John Schumann Foundation whose president is PBS muse Bill Moyers. Moyers is the father of Passacantando’s first wife.)

- Last year Passacantando was one of 15 Greenpeace activists arrested in the Netherlands outside Dow Chemical headquarters in Amsterdam. Displaying seven barrels of what they said was contaminated soil from a major chemical spill in India, the activists disrupted traffic and distracted motorists by hanging giant posters on Dow’s headquarters building.

- In December 2003, Greenpeace USA went on trial as a corporate entity for an incident in the spring of 2003 where two activists boarded a cargo ship off the coast of Florida that allegedly carried timber logged from the Amazon rainforest. Other Greenpeace activists in inflatable boats allegedly tried to prevent Coast Guard vessels from halting the attempted takeover (See sidebar on page 7). Greenpeace defends itself with arguments like those used by the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society. Said a Greenpeace spokesman: “While the U.S. watches its borders for drugs and counterfeit Gucci bags, no law yet exists to stop importation of most wood illegally cut in other countries...We

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took action when our government failed to.” Said Passacantando: “Never before has our government criminally prosecuted an entire organization for the free speech activities of its supporters.” Of course, illegally boarding a ship is more akin to piracy than free speech. Couldn’t Greenpeacers have lawfully assembled at dock-side to make their point?

## Anti-Military Activities

Greenpeace also protests against military installations and military exercises. While Greenpeace rhetoric is often pacifist, it usually takes second place to environmental advocacy. But Greenpeace involvement with anti-war organizations shows its penchant for savvy risk-taking. By championing the anti-Iraq war cause, it is broadening its appeal to the most militant student protestors. Like labor unions that have tapped student energies to support union campaigns against global free trade (known as the “Teamster-turtle” alliance), Greenpeace is using the anti-war/anti-globalization cause to pull student protestors into its environmental crusades.

If Greenpeace can win even a small portion of the anti-globalization movement to become dues-paying members, it will take an important step to rebuilding its depleted membership.

- In March 2003, activists used the Greenpeace flagship *Rainbow Warrior* and a flotilla of inflatable rafts to blockade a joint Spanish-U.S.-run naval base in southwestern Spain. The activists wanted to stop an American freighter from transporting supplies to coalition forces on patrol in the Persian Gulf region. Their effort to sabotage preparation for the war in Iraq resulted in two arrests.
- That month Greenpeace activists also blockaded the official residence of Australia prime minister John Howard to protest his support for the U.S. decision to go to war against Saddam Hussein.

- In April protestors in inflatable boats disrupted an official Australian naval ceremony as warships headed to the Persian Gulf. Ten Greenpeace protestors were arrested for attempting to board a ship to hang anti-war posters.

- In 2002 Greenpeace reached a plea bargain agreement with Department of Justice prosecutors. By agreeing not to trespass on U.S. military bases for five years, Greenpeace helped 15 of its members avoid lengthy jail terms for attempting to disrupt missile testing at California’s Vandenberg Air Force Base in July 2001. The protestors had entered restricted coastal waters by piloting inflatable boats into off-limits zones where they swam and donned diving equipment to disrupt missile tests. Greenpeace also paid \$150,000 in fines - equal to taxpayer costs - and agreed to pay \$500,000 should it violate the agreement. Still, Greenpeace claimed it was strong-armed into the agreement by a vengeful Bush Administration.

Measured by media attention, the international Greenpeace network seems just as powerful as it was in the 1980s. But in terms of membership, the organization is just coming out of a long spiral of declining popularity. Greenpeace USA is taking a risk in protesting issues outside of its core environmental concerns, but if its anti-war activities can win new converts, they will become an increasingly prominent part of the Greenpeace mission.

How do the big environmental groups like the Audubon Society and Sierra Club regard Greenpeace? Mostly they keep quiet. Like Greenpeace, they have experienced periodic declines in membership. Unlike it, however, they have shown little eagerness to identify themselves with direct action.

## Earthfirst!

Unlike Greenpeace, Earth First! (EF!) is not an incorporated nonprofit. It files no forms with the IRS to allow donors to take

a tax deduction on their contributions. It has no board of directors or officeholders who take responsibility for its actions. Indeed, it has no formal leadership, preferring to think of itself as “a movement” rather than an organization.

Founded in 1980, EF! operates in the shadows—and through the internet—as a semi-underground group. It’s hard to know who is accountable for EF! actions because the group cloaks itself in secrecy. We know there is a bi-monthly *Earth First! Journal* based in Tucson, Arizona (“Subscribers are welcome to use aliases for anonymity”), a state contact list that contains no names but only post box numbers, and a “Direct Action Fund” that accepts contributions. It also lists only a post box number in Canyon, California.

Earth First! literature is sprinkled with the word “monkeywrenching” - its euphemism for direct action. As explained by *Earth First! Journal*, the act of throwing a monkey wrench into a complex social mechanism is “a means of striking at the Earth’s destroyers at the point where they commit their crimes.”

Like the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, EF! justifies illegal activities by explaining that violence against living beings—including plants and animals—is qualitatively far worse than violence directed at inanimate objects. For example, it’s okay to destroy logging company equipment in order to save trees. For EF! private property is meaningless at best and a crime against nature at worst. Violence against property is really “the wilderness acting in self-defense.”

According to EF!:

*“Monkeywrenching is a step beyond civil disobedience. It is nonviolent, aimed only at inanimate objects, and at the pockethooks of the industrial despoilers. It is the final step in the defense of the wild, the deliberate action taken by the Earth defender when all other measures have failed, the process whereby the wilderness defender becomes the wilderness acting in self-defense.”*

The founding members of EF! are believed to have been no more than five people in the Tucson area. But one of them was veteran activist Dave Foreman, a former Wilderness Society lobbyist and onetime (1995-1997) member of the Sierra Club board of directors. Foreman drew his inspiration from a 1975 novel, *The Monkey Wrench Gang* by author Edward Abbey, which detailed the fictional adventures of a group of violence-prone, anti-growth environmental activists. The novel culminates in their attempt to blow up Arizona's Glen Canyon dam. Between 1980 and 1989, EF! members attempted in real life to copy the novel's fictional acts of "eco-sabotage." In 1981, for example, saboteurs believed to be affiliated with EF! engineered the sudden collapse of a power line connected to a Tucson radio tower.

## Eco-Sabotage

In 1985 Foreman prepared a 350-page compendium of tips and tricks on eco-sabotage. Now in its third edition and available at amazon.com., *ECODEFENSE: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching* provides detailed instructions showing what dedicated activists can do to wreck power lines and facilities, disable heavy equipment, trash billboards, hinder logging—and not get caught.

The practice of "tree-spiking" is the tactic that made ECODEFENSE notorious. This involves driving a nail as deeply as possible into a tree intended for logging in order to disable any saw that comes in contact with it. ECODEFENSE calls tree-spiking "an extremely effective method of deterring timber sales which seems to be becoming more and more popular." According to the dust jacket, "No good American should ever go into the woods again without this book and, for example, a hammer and a few pounds of 60 penny nails. Spike a few trees now and then whenever you enter an area."

In 1987, tree-spiking claimed its first known casualty. A 23-year-old logging company employee suffered what the *San Francisco Chronicle* called "serious facial and neck injuries" after "he was struck by a jagged section of a saw after it ripped into a large nail buried in a redwood log."

George Anderson "incurred severe face lacerations, cuts on both jugular veins and the loss of upper and lower front teeth." Dave Foreman's response to the incident was chilling. "It's unfortunate this worker was injured and I wish him the best," he told the *San Francisco Chronicle*. "But the real destruction and injury is being perpetrated by Louisiana-Pacific and the Forest Service in liquidating old growth forests."

A year later, self-identified EF! member Mitch Friedman wrote the *Seattle Times* to complain about media references to tree-spiking as terrorism: "Logging has drastically changed the face of our land. Clear-cutting scars are everywhere, once-productive rivers are choked with silt, wildlife populations maintain but a tenuous grasp on survival, and the greenhouse effect - abetted by this deforestation - threatens the entire planet's climate. Isn't this ecological terrorism?... Tree spiking is not terrorism; it is a justifiably extreme and noble deed."

EF! tree-spiking has become so widespread that logging companies are forced to use metal detectors to prevent injuries like those George Anderson suffered. However, in 2001 British Columbia loggers discovered a new tree-spike that conventional metal detectors couldn't locate. The spike, reported the *Vancouver Sun*, is "made of concrete instead of metal... The concrete plugs are meant to splinter the metal blade of a logger's chain saw or break huge saws used in mills, wrecking machinery and sending broken metal and concrete shrapnel in every direction." The paper noted that "concrete spikes had all been placed in trees at eye level, or the level where a chain saw would be used to take down the tree" - exactly where they would cause most injury.

## Negative Publicity Changes EF! Tactics

EF! seems to have begun changing its tactics because of all the bad publicity. In 1989, an EF! team was caught vandalizing ski-lift supports at an Arizona resort. It also planned to disrupt operations at an Arizona nuclear power plant. Five defendants eventually went to jail for terms rang-

ing from 30 days to six years. The following year, however, an EF! spokesman claimed the group had abandoned violent tactics, including tree-spiking. EF! claimed it would thereafter opt for non-violent tactics such as sit-ins.

Why the moderation? In testimony before Congress in February 2002, James F. Jarboe, the FBI's domestic terrorism section chief, summarized what had happened:

*Disaffected environmentalists, in 1980, formed a radical group called "Earth First!" and engaged in a series of protests and civil disobedience events. In 1984, however, members introduced "tree spiking" ... a tactic to thwart logging. In 1992, the ELF [Earth Liberation Front] was founded in Brighton, England, by Earth First members who refused to abandon criminal acts as a tactic when others wished to mainstream Earth First... In 1994, founders of the San Francisco branch of Earth First published in "The Earth First Journal" a recommendation that Earth First mainstream itself in the United States, leaving criminal acts other than unlawful protests to the ELF.*

It's ironic that Earth First! campaigns have started to injure its own members when the organization claims to be moderating its tactics. In October 2003, 25-year-old Robert Bryan fell to his death while participating in a California EF! "tree-sit" (i.e. the equivalent of a sit-in or squatters' occupation, only high up in a tree.) EF!'s comment: "We never like to lose an activist."

More and more activists are killed or injured by dangerous EF! tactics. In April 2002, Beth O'Brien of Portland, Oregon, fell to her death during a tree-sit in Mount Hood National Forest. Jenna Griffith, a 20-year-old EF! activist, fell from a tree and suffered a head injury in 2001. Chris Coursey, a columnist for the *California Press Democrat*, put it best. If Earth First! really doesn't "like to lose an activist," he said, then perhaps "it should stop encouraging tree-sits as a logging protest."

Violence in EF! direct action cam-

paigns may have subsided, but EF! websites and the latest editions of ECODEFENSE still encourage activists to learn about “monkeywrenching” and other direct action tactics. And EF! members still romanticize the deeds of eco-saboteurs. In June 2001, for example, many Tucson residents feared eco-terror was returning to their region following a mysterious case of arson against a property development. John Stephens, an Arizona EF! member, told the *Daily Star* that EF! was not involved. But he added that arson was “a positive thing...Modern American environmental groups—although they’ve done a valiant effort—haven’t really slowed down sprawl. What are people supposed to do?”

## People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals

Unlike Earth First!, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) has learned the value of good public relations campaigns. The public increasingly associates PETA with humorous stunts or heart-wrenching promotions. Comely nude models denounce fur coats in PETA pin-up calendars. Mass mailings tell touching stories of animal cruelty and offer personalized return mail labels for a small donation.

PETA has successfully exploited legitimate public concern about animal welfare to raise very large sums of money. In 2002, it reported revenue of more than \$17 million and assets of about \$6.5 million. Most revenue comes in small amounts, often from PETA’s 300,000 members. PETA also benefits from the endorsement of celebrities such as Pamela Anderson (“Baywatch”), Dennis Franz (“NYPD Blue”) and best actress nominee Charlize Theron (“Monster”).

But PETA president and founder Ingrid Newkirk and other senior leaders have a habit of making extremist statements that undercut their organization’s increasing public acceptance. Newkirk has linked meat consumption to the Nazi Holocaust and rationalized violent direct actions. As Daniel T. Oliver documents in *Animal Rights: The Inhumane Crusade* (Capital Research Center, 1999), Newkirk has defended the Animal and Earth Libera-

tion Fronts, groups responsible for break-ins, vandalism and arson. Asked by *E Magazine* to comment on the \$12 million damage caused by a 1998 Earth Liberation Front attack on a Colorado ski resort, Newkirk observed, “People forget that a ski resort is anything other than a property investment or a place to have fun. They haven’t thought about the consequences for the environment or the animals.”

Kim Bartlett, publisher of *Animal People* magazine, worked for PETA in the 1980s but now disagrees with Newkirk’s policies. “I admired Ingrid in many respects,” Bartlett says, but Newkirk is “totally confrontational” and “doesn’t understand the concept of compromise.”

In 1999 the *Chronicle of Higher Education* asked Newkirk to comment on animal rights radicals who intimidate and terrorize university researchers to end animal testing. Her response: “If a threat will scare an experimenter from [continuing his work] - then so be it...When you see the resistance to basic humane treatment and to the acknowledgment of animals’ social needs, I find it small wonder that the laboratories aren’t all burning to the ground. If I had more guts, I’d light a match.” “We should all have the nerve to break down the gates and get the animals out, but most of us are not that brave. I feel guilty that I do not have the nerve,” she told *National Journal* a year later.

In 1998, Bruce Friedrich, PETA’s director of Vegan Outreach, wrote that the animal rights movement needed “direct action which utilizes a broader range of tactics, including secrecy and sabotage” to make it more effective. He denounced animal rights activists who opposed ecoterrorism, calling their reasoning “ill-conceived...poorly supported [and] obscene.”

PETA isn’t just all talk. In 2002, the Center for the Defense of Free Enterprise filed an IRS complaint against PETA, asking that its nonprofit status be revoked for “violations of tax laws and connections to unlawful activity.” The complaint, which is pending, notes that the Animal and

Earth Liberation Fronts (ALF and ELF) have committed more than 600 criminal acts since 1996 and caused more than \$43 million in damage, according to FBI estimates. These groups have been aided by PETA. In 1991 Washington State University professor John Gorham lost two years’ research on mad-cow disease after ALF members vandalized his office. Newkirk then proclaimed the ALF action a good example of direct action and PETA paid \$29,000 toward ALF’s legal defense costs. PETA also has contributed \$1,500 to an Earth Liberation Front free speech defense fund.

PETA thinks animal rights terrorism is morally legitimate. At a July 2001 animal rights gathering, Friedrich explained why:

*“[If animals] have the same right to be free from pain and suffering at our hands, then of course we are going to be, as a movement, blowing stuff up, and smashing windows. For the record, I don’t do this stuff, but I do advocate it. I think it’s a great way to bring about animal liberation. And considering the level of the atrocity and the level of the suffering, I think it would be a great thing if... all of these fast-food outlets and these slaughterhouses and these laboratories and the banks that fund them, exploded tomorrow... I think it’s perfectly appropriate for people to take bricks and toss them through the windows.”*

In early February, the FBI declared that the most serious domestic security danger Americans face comes from violent environmental and animal rights groups. Such groups, according to Phil Celestini, a supervisory special agent, will “now and for the foreseeable future [be] the top investigative priority” for the Agency’s anti-domestic-terror efforts.

## Conclusion

Most environmental organizations respect and cherish American political norms, including respect for the rule of law. So do the vast majority of animal rights supporters. But this is not true for what were once fringe elements in both movements. Unfortunately, they are growing in size and developing well-funded organizations that are increasingly influential. These extrem-

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ists frequently engage in illegal activities. Moreover, they make a point of defending the illegal actions of others, which they define as “non-violent.” These self-described “direct-action” tactics intimidate citizens, destroy property, and drain law enforcement authorities of money and manpower.

“Mainstream” environmental and animal rights groups acknowledge that “direct action” tactics will alienate potential supporters and give critics ammunition against their causes. But their relation to extremist groups is more complex and entangled than necessary.

Indeed, says philosophy professor Sahorta Sarkar, extremist group actions make “other organizations appear more ‘moderate’” and have “helped legitimize them in the eyes of the public.” The agenda of the Sierra Club, National Wilderness Society, Natural Resources Defense Council and other groups is opposed to property rights and free markets. But by contrast they seem more palatable to bureaucrats, elected officials and the public.

Myron Ebell, a policy analyst at the Competitive Enterprise Institute, says this delicate association is not far-fetched. He cites a remark by David Brower, a longtime eco-radical: “*I founded Friends of the Earth to make the Sierra Club look reasonable. Then I founded the Earth Island Institute to make Friends of the Earth look reasonable. Earth First! now makes us look reasonable. We’re still waiting for someone to come along and make Earth First! look reasonable.*”

As we noted in the first part of this report, direct action tactics employ a wide range of stratagems and stunts, many of them quite clever. Activists use such tactics because they offer unparalleled ways to capture public attention—and intimidate opponents. Nearly all direct action schemes, however, involve some violation or defiance of the law.

When radical activists use direct action and break the law, they claim they are exercising their right to civil disobedience. And they compare themselves to well-

known proponents of civil disobedience such as Henry David Thoreau. In a now famous mid 19th century incident, Thoreau staged a tax protest and went to jail for his actions.

But Thoreau accepted the consequences and did not howl that he was “singled out.” Today’s radicals rarely want to live with the consequences of their choices. When arrested, they claim persecution and demand immunity. They want freedom without responsibility.

Does direct action work? Does it achieve the activists’ goals? Certainly, it can get them on the evening news. But measure that against the public cost of disrespect for law. Advocacy organizations should not tolerate any direct-action group that would flout the law with impunity.

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