

Effect of Backlash on The Environmental Movement

The environmental movement started in the 1960s. It spanned issues such as clean air, water, nuclear energy, pollutants, and numerous other environmental impacts. The rise of these movements started because people began seeing the impacts that had been made on the environment. In “Nixon and The Environment” the author, Flippen, makes it clear that people were starting to see the consequences that came from environmental issues and had a growing concern for the environment. “The result was tremendous growth in environmental organizations, both in terms of the number of organizations and the membership within each” (Flippen, 5). In the 1980s many people started to oppose the environmental movement. The motivations behind this backlash included political, economic, and social reasons, ultimately these issues challenged the movement’s effectiveness and reshaped public discussions surrounding the environmental movement.

The political divide between Republicans and Democrats began to widen during this time, especially when it came to discussions about the environment. In 1982 Republicans in the House of Representatives released a report titled “The Specter of Environmentalism”. Conservative views began to go against the environmental movement and in many cases right leaning people saw environmentalists as “extremists.” Turner talks about this in “The Specter of Environmentalism: Wilderness, Environmental Politics, and the Evolution of the New Right.” She explains that “the report concluded that challenging environmental reform offered a political opportunity for the Republican party” (Turner, 123). This divide gave the Republican party a chance to get more votes from people who felt like they were being unfairly treated by new environmental bills being put into place. This “was a strategy that played particularly well in the American West, where citizens, local and state government officials, and their political allies in

Congress had grown increasingly angry at what they described as the environmentalists' "War on the West" (Turner, 123). Since this strategy was put into play it has caused a constant pushback against implementing new environmental laws. The debate that has come from this has spurred conversations about the legitimacy of the environmental movement and has created many roadblocks in the movement going forward.

Much of the backlash towards the environmental movement came from the fear of economic implications. Many rural communities were concerned about what federal land management policies would mean for economic pursuits on lands in the West. Joe Lane, a member of the National Cattlemen's Association, expresses many concerns in his testimony to the US congressional committee. He explains that "in our particular case, BLM policies regarding livestock grazing on the public lands appear to be designed to reduce that use" (Warren 558). He also provides context on limitations that new laws might cause for farmers and ranchers (Warren 558). In a letter to President Bush, Ann Basker, executive director of The Southern Oregon Resources Alliance, explains that "multiple use allows everyone a piece of the pie—miners, hikers, timber fallers, hunters, cattle grazers, picnic parties—all of us are able to get what we need from the land yet leave it for other users as well." Lane and Basker both believe that it should be up to the communities that live in these areas to decide these laws. This has continued to be a largely debated topic when discussing the implementation of land use laws and policies.

Another factor as to why there was pushback against the environmental movement was the social reasons. In Warren's text the impact that changing laws can have on many different people is highlighted. There are differing reasons for wanting the laws to change and for wanting the laws to stay the same. Native American communities were worried about what new laws and

conservation would mean for them (Warren, 562). In his testimony to the US congressional committee Larry Echohawk, tribal attorney for the Shoshone and Bannock tribes of Idaho, explains that “these rights are important not for economical reasons to the tribes. The Shoshone-Bannock treaty right does not give them an economic interest in commercial fishing or hunting. These are subsistence rights. They are important for ceremonial and religious purposes” (Warren, 562). This showcases the strong connection that many Native American tribes had with the land. Since the time of this testimony, federal land management policies have continued to change. There have not been many successes by Native American communities in keeping the land that they use under specific regulations that apply to them. It is still a contributing factor in the conversation when talking about environmental policies.

The reasons for opposition to the environmental movement were diverse. Political, economic, and social factors all played a role in people questioning the movement's efficacy and contributed to altering the general discourse surrounding the issues. These implications have lasted and still affect the discussions about environmental topics. Influences on current attitudes, political landscape, and societal perspectives have been shaped by past events. People's current opposing views towards the environmental movement stem from the ideas discussed in this paper. This historical context is important for navigating and addressing current environmental challenges such as sustainability and conservation.