

Proposal: NON-VIOLENT DIRECT ACTION FOR THE PROTECTION OF
THREATENED WILDERNESS AND WILDLIFE. STANISLAUS
RIVER CANYON, SPRING 1979.

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NON-VIOLENT DIRECT ACTION FOR PROTECTION OF THREATENED WILDERNESS
AT THE STANISLAUS RIVER FOR SPRING 1979

Plans for nonviolent direct action at the Stanislaus River and elsewhere are going forward for this spring. Please support, question, comment on or add alternatives to the ideas presented here.

Background

The destruction of California's wilderness and wildlife continues every place these resources still exist. One of the key battlegrounds in the fight to protect some of these places is the Stanislaus River Army Corps' Canyon. The New Melones Dam Project has already obliterated the living canyon at the damsite and damaged it severely at three road and bridge construction areas. The most dramatic and total destruction to the canyon - its flooding by the dam - is nearly upon us now. This is the long-anticipated event which has always sparked opposition to New Melones, and the threat of inundation of the living land is probably the most important motivation of the anti-dam movement.

The Stanislaus is still home to many, many people - in almost every sense except for property ownership - and it has been for thousands of years. It is also home to a beautiful and delicate web of life. The area is visited by 80,000 people annually.

Non-violent direct action - including mass and highly visible events - have been going on since the early 1970's and have included letter and petition drives, a full scale public campaign for Prop 17 in 1974, the Row for the River (Camp Nine to San Francisco in 1974) and the Walk for the Stanislaus (Parrotts Ferry to Sacramento in 1978) two rallies with over 1000 people at the State Capitol (1975, 1978) human billboards, packed hearings and more.

In addition, a large protest rally took place last fall in the valley behind the Army Corps' proposed Warm Springs Dam in Sonoma County. There was a decade-long occupation behind the proposed Tocks

Island Dam on the Delaware River - the dam was never built. Across the nation people have put their bodies in front of bulldozers to stop freeway construction.

Filling Schedule for New Melones Dam

(*FLASH* - as of this date, the U.S. Government has decided not to fill New Melones beyond the state's Decision 1422 ruling until the court cases are decided. D 1422 allows filling to the South Fork Stanislaus, with higher levels later on, or during floods.)

MARCH 15 - Projected completion date for archeologic "mitigation" work in lower canyon, including townsite of Melones

APRIL 1 - Corps' date for closing lower dam outlets and beginning filling of reservoir. A large flood could cause filling above elevation 735 (the top of the old Melones reservoir) before this time. A late runoff could hold the water back after this date. However it seems extremely likely that the inundation of currently free-flowing river (above elevation 735) will begin in early April.

APRIL, MAY, JUNE - The Army Corps will fill the reservoir attempting to reach elevation 808 where they can test the hydroelectric facilities and turn the project over to the US Bureau of Reclamation. (The roadbed of the old Parrotts Ferry Bridge is 844) We believe the legal filling period ends June 30. If the snowpack is inadequate to reach 808, the Corps will try again between November 1979 and June 1980. If the runoff is heavy, the reservoir could reach the South Fork (880) this year.

OUTLINE OF NON-VIOLENT DIRECT ACTION POSSIBILITIES

We can make the inundation of the Stanislaus Canyon below Parrotts the best publicized destruction of a wilderness in history, and place considerable pressure on decisionmakers to limit the filling. FOR is currently assessing whether to try to get legislation for this purpose through Congress, and the following actions must be carefully coordinated with any such attempt.

1. Witness and vigil - a constant encampment on the rising reservoir, probably at the upper end where new stretches of river are being inundated, for the entire period of March 15 - June 30. Done by affinity groups (explained here later). This could begin as a resettlement of the town of Melones after the archeologists depart.

2. Mass event(s) at the river. At Parrotts Ferry? A funeral for the river downstream? A dedication of the river upstream around the time of the official Dam Dedication ceremony? Memorial Day? Easter vacation? Vigil at Governor's office?
3. Non-violent resistance or civil disobedience to the destruction at the river, in S.F., L.A. and Sacramento, or both.
4. Coordinated urban demonstration by affinity groups returned from the witness.

WITNESS AT THE RIVER

We are the river's friends, and have long attributed to the Stanislaus, and to all wilderness, the quality of life. The Stanislaus is also home to many of us. We must have a presence there as it is being destroyed.

Purposes of March 15 to June 30 encampment

- a. Expose as many people as possible to the process of destruction inherent in filling a reservoir. Help us to understand what we are fighting against in the anti-dam, pro-river/wilderness movement.
- b. Like the Quaker concept of witnessing, and like Greenpeace going out on the ice in Newfoundland to witness the clubbing of the baby seals, we will bring the destruction to many other people through our own witnessing.
- c. The encampment gives us a base from which to record the destruction in photos, video, film art and writing. A journal of the witness, properly edited, would be extremely powerful.
- d. The encampment would give the media a further story to cover - beyond the filling; they could also cover the response to the filling. The whole Stanislaus issue, and the campaign for limited filling, would gain addition exposure which it desperately needs. It would also give exposure to the deep commitment in the larger fight for wilderness - especially RARE II.
- e. The witness can bring politicians, community leaders, high school classes, and all sorts of different people to see the canyon. The canyon itself speaks most eloquently for partial filling, and these people will be much more likely to work for the Stanislaus after the witness.
- f. The action can serve as a model for river and wilderness activists elsewhere.
- g. It could serve as a powerful training site for possible civil disobedience

The idea of starting the encampment at the townsite of Melones (on the north side of the river upstream of the old Highway 49 Bridge between Melones Campground and the mine tailings) has several advantages. It emphasizes the long history of human occupation of the canyon with the Gold Rush ruins and the nearby Native American sites; it brings to the forefront the archeological and historic values of the canyon, an issue on which the Army Corps is very vulnerable because of their non-compliance with Federal preservation laws; and it emphasizes the whole canyon rather than just the river, helping to break the concept that we are all just thrill-seeking-rafters.

The Melones Campground is now closed because the Corps does not want the archeological work interfered with. After March 15 the area will remain closed, because of the rising reservoir. Although the old road down to the river has been closed off on both sides, access on foot should not be difficult, although this might rule out access to our disabled contingent, and maybe TV cameras. The Corps might decree the area off limits even to people on foot - they would then be in the dilemma of either denying access to people - lots of them - who want to be with the Stanislaus while the Corps destroys it, of allowing access and letting us publicize it as widely as possible. Bad publicity for them either way. If they denied access-for camping, we could refuse to abide and encamp anyway - we need to check this out very carefully beforehand. Other possibilities include making the encampment at Parrotts Ferry and walking down to the rising reservoir daily.

Affinity Group System

The actions protesting nuclear plants at Seabrook New Hampshire, Diablo Canyon California, Trojan Oregon and other dangerous installations such as the Rocky Flats Colorado nuclear arsenal used the organizing and communication system of affinity groups. The name can be

changed, but the system is a very strong one, and one we envision for the Witness and for Civil Disobedience should we decide to go that route. The concept is to have people form into families of from 5 to 20 people, who already know or get to know one another, and who have a shared understanding of what the activity is all about. A group can make its own decisions - so long as they fit into and are coordinated with the whole campaign - and are urged to help take responsibility for the steering and direction of the whole campaign as well. This system fosters the security of knowing the people one is most directly dealing with; shared commitment; a decentralized communications system.

Groups would hopefully cluster around existing organizations, or geographical locations, with a nucleus of people who already know each other and outsiders who are brought in. Potential groups - some already forming - include Davis, ARTA, Chico, several from ETC., Berkeley disabled people, Greenpeace Sacramento, Tuolumne County, various other river guide groups, Outdoors Unlimited S.F. and more. We need much thought on how to bring in a great diversity of people.

Possible activities at the witness

Creativity is important for the Witness, but the most important guiding rule for activities should be CLARITY OF OUR STATEMENT. Our first goal is simply self-education of what is happening to the river. Most, but not necessarily all, will further be protesting the destruction. Some possibilities for activities of affinity groups are:

- * Taking time to tell friends and neighbors where you are going and why - possibly asking their financial support or asking them to join with the group
- * Advising the local media of your intention, and inviting them to cover the story
- * Arranging for a teach-in of some kind during your stay, on such issues as the history of the canyon, the biology, the wilderness and river preservation movement, water and energy conservation, or forms of social protest
- * Once at the Witness, moving camp every day, possibly as much as

a quarter mile upstream depending on the rate of filling

- * Recording the destruction in film, art, words, any other way.
- * Protecting endangered wildlife in any way possible
- * Highlight or symbolize aspects of value of the canyon about to be buried. Possibly bring objects of value with you to be buried so that outsiders will better understand how valuable we feel the canyon is
- * Bring children to witness the destruction
- * Figure out ways to bring what you have learned at the Witness back out of the canyon to the world where the decisions about how much of the river will be saved are being made.

* Demonstrate how you and others can have a strong personal commitment to water and energy conservati
MASS EVENT(S) AT THE RIVER

Apart from send-offs for the Row for the River and the Walk for the Stanislaus, we know of no mass events in the canyon. The Witness will take place; there has been no decision made yet to have a mass event. It will depend on available energy, and assessments of the benefits and costs of such an action.

A strong case has been made for holding a river funeral;

"It should not compromise our efforts to save what is still living. A proper funeral if fitting as for a close friend. Eulogies are understood and taken at face value. There is a time for quiet dignity as well as for gutter-fighting. There is a time for plain grief and mourning. We are concerned that the public be able to identify with the campaign. As one among a series of actions, the funeral would be the epitome of quiet dignity, sorrow and respect. This may seem passive, but a funeral's symbolic force can be great, as well as healing. This would be only one of the pieces needed for a strong campaign."..."It emphasizes the totality of life and death, and is a clear expression of loss which is understandable, something common and within most people's experience." (The entire proposal is available.)

Other mass event ideas include a send-off for the start (or near the start) of the Witness, and a dedication of the river above Parrotts Ferry (almost as a People's Park) as a contrast to the official Dam dedication. Two obvious target dates for a large gathering are Easter vacation and Memorial Day.

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE OR INTERVENTION

We assume that what the Army Corps is doing in the Stanislaus Canyon is wrong. They would destroy vast communities of life and impoverish the human spirit, which the Stanislaus has enriched. The Bureau of Reclamation's economics of water discourage conservation, and their neglect has allowed agribusiness to drive small farmers off the land. What these agencies are doing is environmentally, economically and morally wrong.

Commitment to the canyon is very strong and very deep for many people. The Witness or mass events will have clear elements of protest in them. While we don't believe that violence or destruction on our part can help either our cause or the Stanislaus, a number of people want to take strong action in opposition to filling.

Civil disobedience is a tactic - a tool. It is not a cure-all, and it is not morally superior to other forms of non-violent action. People committing civil disobedience should be prepared to go to jail. Yet civil disobedience can be an extremely powerful tactic, and may be appropriate for the current situation on the Stanislaus.

Certain questions must be addressed before any individual, or any group, or the entire campaign moves toward CD. These include:

What are the personal motivations and commitment to such an action for each individual? These must be considered even before consideration of political effectiveness.

What will be the effect on the Stanislaus struggle? On the wilderness preservation movement?

CD is a way to contrast official negligence or evil with a non-violent, non-destructive refusal to abide by the law. In this case, the most offending law is the one allowing construction and filling of the dam, and the overall policy of dam-building and river destruction on many government levels.

Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King were the best known modern practitioners

of non-violent CD. Gandhi called it truth force. It cannot be confused with threats of destruction, or violence toward our opponents, despite their injustice. CD for the Stanislaus could paint a clear picture of the needless destruction, fueled by greed, and of our anguish and determination. (This would not be the place for anger or bitterness, although we must find a vent for these as well.)

Non-violent CD has been a component in many powerful campaigns - civil rights, Quakers during the Viet Nam War, blockade of arms to Pakistan, the anti-nuclear movement. This could be an early opportunity to apply this tactic to the campaign for protecting the rest of the life of the planet.

These CD proposals have been strongly influenced by the anti-nuclear movement of the past two years, which has brought the issue of nuclear power to new levels of exposure and controversy. The anti-nuclear movement is made up of a coalition of environmental and peace/disarmament activists, and the latter have a long history and considerable experience with this tactic which wilderness people lack. But our convictions are deep and widely sympathized with. People's lives are intimately connected with the wilderness, and have been with the Stanislaus for centuries. The Stanislaus is part of our home. We do not agree to taking the life of that place, even below Parrotts Ferry. It is wrong to destroy part of the food for the human spirit, and part of our human history.

Already there are beginning to be demands - not needs - for New Melones water and power. There will be more demands. But available technology could reduce water and power use so new development of these resources in sensitive areas would not be needed. Society does not need to destroy the Stanislaus. But the interests which stand to benefit are pushing the government to make the value decision to sacrifice the canyon. We know where our values lie, and they are widely

shared. We must also be aware that dam builders are already asking for permission to enter the canyon of the Tuolumne River this spring to take core samples and other tests for their proposed dams on that river. Their requests may or may not be denied. They are planning dams, canals and channelizations for most of our other remaining rivers and creeks. Warm Springs Dam is under way; physical testing for the South Fork American dams may begin soon. We need to consider seriously how to meet these threats. On the Stanislaus we have always played the game with words and papers and votes. The opposition has used huge machines while we were talking and writing. It would be a mistake to allow them this advantage in other canyons.

METHODS OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE FOR THE STANISLAUS (POSSIBLE)

The Witness gives individuals a certain amount of power - after taking part in the witness, a person will understand what the Corps is doing to the canyon first-hand. If we decide on CD as a tactic, participants should have taken part in the Witness first. The Witness can also be the main location for TRAINING for CD - one-day long workshops to share goals, education on issues, tactics, plans and community before any participation in CD.

CD ideas so far conceived include:

Walking down to the dam and removing rocks from the structure - that is, physically dismantling it. Or simply sitting down at the level of the rising water on the dam. Either action would surely cause arrest - however, access to the dam itself would be difficult, if at all possible. Such action could be launched from the site of the encampment, or from the site of a rally, as occurred at Seabrook and Diablo Canyon Nuclear Plants. Reynolds Ferry is a possible staging area. At Diablo, everyone - including authorities - was advised beforehand what was to happen.

Groups returning from the witness could sit in at the Army Corps headquarters in Sacramento, and maybe simultaneously in San Francisco and/or L.A. Or on the access road to the dam. Urban actions might generate more media. This would have the advantage of keeping the Witness itself 'clean' and available to all those not wishing to be connected to possible CD.

If the Army Corps and the local sherriffs departments get together and decide that they will not allow our witness in the canyon under any circumstances, we will then have to decide whether or not to make our encampment anyway. The Corps could be made to look very bad by not allowing people who love the Stanislaus to be with it peocibly as the Corps destroys it. Nonetheless, we might be forced into our first CD if we went ahead against their rules. Many people would probably join us if the Corps said we could not have access to the river.

One final idea that has been talked over is for people to chain themselves to bridges, rocks or trees at a point where the Corps would have a choice of stopping filling - opening the outlets to the dam - or taking human life. There is a possibility that this tactic could delay filling. But people engaging in this would have to be aware that this implies a willingness to die for the Stanislaus River Canyon. The message which this sends to the outside world, and how the media would pick it up, would have to be very carefully considered. One idea for this tactic is for people to work in pairs - one at a public place (e.g. Parrotts Ferry Bridge) and one in hiding somewhere by the rising reservoir. The one in the public place would announce that the other was also out there. The authorities would have to find that person and cut the chains, stop filling, or drown the person.

More questions connected with the whole idea of CD include: how many people are willing to go to jail for the Stanislaus (so far, people tried and sentenced for Diablo Canyon - in San Luis Obispo County - have been given up to six months in jail, 2 years probation and \$400 fine. No one, even those who refused to sign the probation papers, has been made to serve over 2 months yet, and some have received a 30 day suspended sentence and \$100 fine. How many people would be willing to commit to the chaining option ? How would committing CD affect the future commitment of the individuals to political action ?

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There is, as you can see, much room for thought and action in these proposals. Since you care about the Stanislaus and the wilderness, please take some time to give your input - written if possible, or in person. Thanks !

A Partial Bibliography for the Nonviolent Direct Action Campaign

Resource Manual for a Living Revolution, Coover, Deacon, Esser, Moore, New Society Press, available from AFSC, 2160 Lake St., S.F., 94121; or Resource Center for Nonviolence, 515 Broadway, Santa Cruz, 95061, 343pp.

A Nonviolent Action Manual, Bill Moyer. Avail. 11 - through Bob Weisbe, AFSC, or PCNV (S.F. and Santa Cruz) 20pp.

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