

MARK DUBOIS, Director, Friends of the River, in a speech at Columbia College, Columbia, California, March 3, 1981.

(In the winter of 1981, during the midst of the most intense rains--and hence massive flooding of the Stanislaus Canyon--that California had seen in nearly one hundred years, Mark Dubois came back to look at the destruction. Scheduled to address an audience of disheartened supporters at the local college, Mark himself had to address his own despair as he searched his soul for new directions. And, as has always been his custom, he found it: the first call for reconciliation and understanding

"I'm curious, if you had a chance to vote tonight--for the river, for the dam, for undecided--and don't be intimidated by the Stanislaus slide show we just saw--how would you vote? For the dam, fill 'er up? (A dozen hands go up.) How many pro-river? (Some forty hands go up.) Undecided? (Another dozen or so.)

I'm going to talk about some broader issues. There was a recent article in the San Francisco Chronicle/Examiner, and I guess when I first saw these slides tonight, I was reminded why I spend as much time as I spend working for the Stanislaus River. In the past few years, it seems I've gotten caught in playing the numbers game, adding acre-feet and cfs. and kilowatt-hours and learned a whole bunch

of numbers. Seeing the slides reminded me why I'm doing what I'm doing.

The article in the Chronicle was exciting to me because it described what I've been feeling and a lot of others have been feeling: that we can have both, that there are alternatives! It is not an either/or situation. It's possible to preserve the canyon, and it's possible to have the lights we have. The article I mentioned in the Chronicle, it came out in December 1980. It talked about a few simple technologies that are on the horizon. A real simple one is photo-voltaic cells. Right now, they've decreased their cost from literally thousands of dollars down to six dollars per kilowatt. It's still very expensive in terms of what we're paying right now. We've been investing all our dollars into big hydroelectric power plants and nuclear power plants rather than than looking into alternatives that are more benign. I know those alternatives are not very far away if we collectively made a choice to use them.

The article also talked about bio-dynamic gardening that's being developed in France. I've heard about other techniques used by people right in this country. People in the Midwest are starting to practice this "new" thing called organic farming. Not because they're into organic gardening by any means, but because they've discovered that by practicing the old techniques, the soil is turning into

clay, and they have to keep putting more and more chemical fertilizers on it to keep it going, to extend it. They're finding out that by practicing this thing called organic farming, they are getting maybe one-third to one-quarter less bushels per acre, but at the same time, their children are going to be able to use that land. If they keep going at the present rate, their children are not going to be able to use that land. They've found it in their economic interest to convert to this crazy sort of--or they thought it was crazy--farming, and maybe it's not so crazy.

I think that one of the things we've learned about in the past few years is what we are presently doing to agriculture in California. The practices we are using right now are going to turn the Central Valley into a big salt desert. Juaques Cousteau was giving a talk and said that every culture in history he had looked at that had irrigated agriculture had eventually ruined themselves. And he was asked: "Did anybody not do that?" He answered, "No." They all basically misused their resources. They overused them and overabused them. And they all dried up and blew away.

I started out working on the Stanislaus because of the magic of that canyon. Since then, I've learned about how we practice agriculture in California, and the more I know the more I realize we're doing things that will make us dry up and blow away

I was raised in a time of hearing about destruction all over, about hearing of the Aswan Dam being built on the Nile River. It covered a few old Egyptian archaeological

sites, but they moved a few of them--it's interesting watching technology move things that have been there for thousands of years. The other thing with Aswan Dam: they tried to make the Egyptian desert bloom, but they also made the eastern end of the Mediterranean Ocean die. The Nile drained much of Africa, and it used to bring sediment, and all this sediment used to feed the eastern Mediterranean. But they put that dam in there and it held back all the nutrients so the Eastern Mediterranean died. All those cultures that had lived there for thousands of years lost everything they had because they no longer had the subsistence for the farming and fishing. They couldn't do that anymore.

New Melones Dam was a great idea back in the 1950s. The people that invested all their hearts and spirits in the making of it came from all the things America had known. Bigger and better was the best way to go. And yet we are now entering the 1980s and we've learned a whole lot, especially in the past few decades. And I guess somehow I hope we can use what we learned in the past decade and learn how to start walking a little more lightly on our land.

The people in Europe--places like Sweden, Switzerland and Germany--usually aren't considered to be "too far behind us." And if anybody should go over there, they'll find they have a similar standard of living. They also get by on half the energy we get by on. I say: Are we civilized?

Another dimension to me of the Stanislaus battle is that: it hasn't felt good because it's been a battle,

a battle of people yelling at each other. This January, I had the opportunity to be on New Melones Reservoir, and as I was paddeling down in my kayak, I saw three young people in a boat approaching me.

As we passed, one of them said, "Gee, where'd you come from?"

And I said, "Well, Camp 9."

"Oh, are you one of those river rats?"

And I said, "Well, I never thought of myself as that, but I guess it's probably so."

And they said a couple other things, then one, ~~in~~ in a really hostile tone, said to his friend, "Shoot the rat."

I looked over my shoulder and I saw a shotgun being aimed right at me. I kept going, and when I was pretty well out of range, I heard a shot go off and saw these little pellets land all around me. I was really incredible struck with how much has been going on. In Vietnam, I remember, they were shooting at the "gooks." As long as they weren't people, as long as you didn't see them, it was okay to shoot them. And then I realized that similar attitudes have surfaced in the past few years, especially up in the foothills and in the Central Valley. At times, things have really gotten ugly.

I've been spending a little bit of time with a few others . . . wandering down to the Valley and talking with farmers. And after talking to them, I found that 80 percent

of the gibberish we're supposed to be fighting about is invalid, it's not real. There's been some myths perpetuated about what we both stand for. They were pretty sure I wanted their land flooded. They were sure I wanted to go back to the stone age and have all the lights go out. Well, they were surprised, and it took them awhile to understand that's not what I stood for.

At the same time, it was exciting for me to break through my old images and find out they were concerned about what they put on the land. They know they're putting really toxic poisons on the land, and they know what it's doing to the soil, and they're seriously looking for alternatives. And a lot of them are even trying to find ways to conserve water.

When I floated down New Melones, I was actually going from Camp 9 to Stockton, and it was nice to see almost the entire river. While I was in the valley, I saw a flock of geese flying south. They were flying in a formation which helped them conserve a lot of their energy, otherwise they wouldn't make it on their own. More importantly, they couldn't make it biting each other's neck while they're flying. Because if they did that, they would've died a long time ago . . . back in the frozen weather, so they've all learned to fly with each other. . . . I guess I've sensed we have to learn to do that, too. We need to learn how to fly with each other and help each other out and solve some of these serious problems we're all going to be facing--

all of us--in the next decade. All these problems will be catching up with us, and this next decade is going to be a big turning point.

I ended up going down to the Stanislaus on Saturday. I got down to the bridge and it felt like somebody had punched me in the stomach. But for the past few weeks, I've been knowing more than ever that the Stanislaus is going to be saved. I don't even know where that's coming from. .

As I walked up the river and looked down at all those trees that were dying, I felt a lot of pain. But after I got that pain out of me, I started feeling stronger than ever before. I started remembering what Melinda Wright had said a year ago on April 1st, when the reservoir first started rising over the town of Melones. She had said: "Parrotts Ferry is the limit--it's the end of the war on the American land. We aren't going to allow it to go any further than that."

As I stood there and watched the river flowing by, I realized that's still true for me. Some people think anyone who still says that is a little bit crazy, because Parrotts Ferry is underwater now and the water's gonna back up even further. There's gonna be a lot of pain and death this year in the Stanislaus canyon. . . .

In the past, water would exceed Parrotts Ferry three or four times a century. . . . Well, all of a sudden, it turns out this year happens to be . . . the wettest year on

record for the Stanislaus drainage--I go: "Great, good timing. Couldn't have timed it better, Mother Nature."

When I was recently going through a stack of old papers, I found an old envelope from an old fellow who lives in Virginia. He's probably in his late sixties now, and he said, " . . . the most beneficial thing I think I've ever done in my life was working to save the New River. You know it took us twelve years to save that river."

So I wrote him a quick postcard saying, "Thank you, we're on our eleventh year."

We've all got to keep going no matter what the odds are, no matter what we think. Because pessimism always wins. If I believe I don't have any power, it's true, I don't. I believe I do, I do have it. . . . I find it's just as easy to take that negative energy and turn it to a positive direction. We can't afford to hide our head in the sand anymore. . . .

The media has tried to distill the [Stanislaus] issue down to the public because it's a complex issue. It's often simplified down to "rafters vs. farmers." That's a nice easy thing to grab hold of. It also helps to polarize things; it's much easier for people to get excited about. It's not as much fun to try and get the issues out and get to the nitty gritty, the controversy and all the facts and figures. And besides that, who's interested?

Congress authorized an 8000 cfs. flood release, and that means they protected a 35,000 acre floodplain above

that 8000 cfs. flow. It would never flood above 8000 again. This winter the river flooded at 43,000, and downstream farmers never got more than 8000. And when the lower river was flowing at 7500 cf., zero was coming out of New Melones. So they were getting flood protection that they had never had in their life.

But it turns out some of them go to the press and say, "flood damage, flood damage. Just to save whitewater rapids!"

They decided they wanted to plant in an extra 1500 acres that are part of the public trust. The only problem is the Corps [Army Corps of Engineers] hadn't bought up the public trust yet. The Corps moved their bulldozers really fast, but they "forgot" to buy the flood easements. And so, because the Corps didn't buy it, they were able to-- a few owners were able to--say: "Look what happened to us." All because they had planted on the floodplain that they've known since 1962 would always get flooded. So what happened was that farmers carried dead trees and newspaper clippings into decision-makers, and said: "Lookit: dollars, trees on one side, and it's only a whitewater river on the other side. There's no dollars there, right . . . ?

We still haven't got the point across: that there's more than whitewater there. There's the integrity of the canyon that goes far beyond words and transcends words. But that doesn't equate yet with decision-makers,

so we're doing everything we can to try and make them aware of what's going on.

They operated the dam to maximize storage and not flood protection. As a result of that, when the storms came, the water wouldn't have gone nearly as far above Parrotts Ferry had that [minimal reservoir for flood control] been in the design books. They made a mistake in judgment. Their judgment is in continuing the old ways rather than looking at the resource.

A little while ago somebody asked me: "What about the campaign that slick L.A. publicity firm is doing-- putting us as all rafters vs. farmers?"

Well, my position is that we have to stay with the beauty and the love the river's always shared with us . . . and we've got to wake up to what we're doing to each other and our land.

I was raised for twenty-some-odd years of my life thinking that water is free, right? It comes out of a tap, just turn it on. And where it goes? Just flush it away, I don't care where it goes. It's all being taken care of by somebody else.

Well, I eventually became acquainted with the river, and I said, "Whoops, that water comes from some place." When I take something, it comes from someplace else. That's what people have to remember.

We haven't learned to take responsibility for our

"progress." We haven't learned to take responsibility for where our resources come from. I don't sense that people in Southern California want to rip off rivers. It's just lack of awareness. I feel the last five years have been quite progressive. People are starting to learn about themselves and take responsibility. . . . We have to start working to educate all of us, including Southern California and the Bay area, that we all have to take personal responsibility and help each other--just be gentle reminders to each other that we've got to learn how to use a little bit less."