



Global Nonviolent Action Database

Published on *Global Nonviolent Action Database* (<https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu>)

Redwood Rabbis protect northern California trees, 1995-1999

1995

to:

1999

Country: United States

Location City/State/Province: Humboldt County, California

Goals:

Primary: to protect an old growth forest in Humboldt County (Northern California) called Headwaters Forest

Secondary: the protection of all redwood forests in Northern California

Their mission statement is:

"The Redwood Rabbis seek to carry out the Judaic imperative, laid out in the Book of Genesis, to guard the earth. Invoking the Jewish tradition in defense of ancient forests and other threatened ecosystems, the Redwood Rabbis are part of a larger effort to create an environmental constituency within the Jewish community and to build bridges between diverse religious and secular communities to advocate more effectively for ecological land management and environmental protection."

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 020. Prayer and worship

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 013. Deputations

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 020. Prayer and worship
- 029. Symbolic reclamations
- 043. Political mourning
- 167. Pray-in
- 170. Nonviolent invasion

Methods in 4th segment:

Methods in 5th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 015. Group lobbying

Methods in 6th segment:

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 002. Letters of opposition or support

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Environment

Group characterization:

- Jewish environmental activists
- Rabbis

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

The main speaker for the group, at least in this campaign, appears to have been Rabbi Lester Scharnberg

Partners:

One of my sources listed The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life as a partner to the organization. Christian and secular groups worked with Redwood Rabbis for a presentation at a shareholders' meeting. Interfaith groups also held press conferences during the campaign. Secular groups such as Earth First! were also involved in the planting of trees, although it is not clear if the group's members did so as members of the group.

External allies:

Other environmental groups such as the Sierra Club

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

A timeline on joining order was not available. However, it appears that the group started with only a few rabbis and grew to several hundred people who joined them during stage III for nonviolent seed plantings

Segment Length: *Approximately 10 months*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Maxxam, a logging company

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

The CEO, his rabbi and other Jewish company officials attempted to counter the arguments of Redwood Rabbis with theological arguments of their own (20)

Campaigner violence:

None known

Repressive Violence:

None known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

4 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

Because the company agreed to protect a significant amount of the Headwaters Forest and change its logging practices elsewhere, although they agreed to this as part of a deal that let them log 200,000 acres of forest.

Maxxam, a logging company run by CEO Charles Hurwitz, took over Pacific Lumber Company in 1986. Hurwitz doubled the rate of logging in Northern California forests, including Headwaters forest, an old-growth redwood forest in Humboldt County, California. Environmental activists were outraged and began to organize to protect the Headwaters forest. Several rabbis realized that Hurwitz was Jewish, and decided that they might be able to use Jewish theology to persuade him to change his mind and protect the forests. Jewish theology includes a number of admonitions to protect the trees, including a rule that only trees that are barren of fruit may be cut down in a captured city.

The rabbis began writing letters to him in 1995, asking him to reconsider. For example, right before Yom Kippur (the Jewish day of atonement) that year, Congregation B'nai Ha-Aretz (Children of the Earth) sent a letter to Hurwitz, asking him to repent for the damage he had caused to the forests. In 1996, rabbi Lester Scharnberg denounced Hurwitz's actions at an interfaith press conference, leading Hurwitz's rabbi (rabbi Karff) to call Scharnberg and ask that Scharnberg not be so harsh towards a member of his congregation who was in his eyes a good Jew and a major donor to the synagogue. Karff suggested that Scharnberg and Hurwitz meet, an invitation both accepted. Scharnberg says that the meeting was an eye-opener for Hurwitz, who before hadn't realized that a rabbi "was aligned with 'conga drums, dreadlocks, tie-dye, and hippie radicals who threaten to kill, maim,' and so forth." Scharnberg said, 'I'm not aligning myself with people who kill, but I am an environmentalist.'"

The activists asked if they could plant redwood seedlings on riverbanks that had been stripped of trees by Maxxam's logging, but were denied permission to enter company property. They decided to disobey this law, but to do so in a way that would make it clear that they were trying to follow Jewish law.

In January of 1997, between 100 and 250 activists held a ceremony for the Jewish New Year of the Trees holiday at which they wore prayer shawls and someone recited the Kaddish, which is the Jewish prayer of mourning, in honor of the creatures that had lived in the now destroyed area of forest. The local Sierra Club chapter made a presentation and then the activists walked onto

company land and planted the seeds. Amazingly, the company did nothing to block them (an Earth First! activist alleged that previously they had been beaten up or arrested for trying to cross onto property land and said it reminded him of “parting the Red Sea”).

In 1998, the activists joined with Christian and secular activists to make a presentation at the company’s shareholder meeting. This meeting led to angry encounters between the two sides, but no violence. Jews on either side debated whose interpretation of the Torah and Jewish law was correct. Jewish (and other) pressure continued against Hurwitz and Maxxam through 1999, when they agreed to preserve 7,470 acre part of the Headwater Forest and change their logging practices in other parts of the forests they owned. The governor of California bought the land and it became a public forest. Today, Redwood Rabbis continue to campaign elsewhere for further protection of the redwood forests.

Research Notes

Sources:

Zuckerman, Seth. "Natural Resources - November/December 1998 - Sierra Magazine - Sierra Club." Sierra Club Home Page: Explore, Enjoy and Protect the Planet. Web. 17 Dec. 2009. <<http://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/199811/rabbis.asp>>.

"Redwood Rabbis." Jewish Engaged Projects. Yale. Web. 17 Dec. 2009.
<http://fore.research.yale.edu/religion/judaism/projects/redwood_rabbis.html>.

Additional Notes:

Edited by Max Rennebohm (30/07/2011)

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Jasper Goldberg, 11/11/2009

A project of Swarthmore College, including Peace and Conflict Studies, the Peace Collection, and the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility.

Copyright Swarthmore College.



Global Nonviolent Action Database is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).

Original website design and artwork created by [Daniel Hunter](#).

Permissions beyond the scope of this license may be available at <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu>.

Registered users can [login](#) to the website.

Source URL (retrieved on 04/02/2020 - 19:28): <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/redwood-rabbis-protect-northern-california-trees-1995-1999>