



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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

---

## U.S. citizens prevent construction of nuclear power plant in Bodega Bay, California 1962-64

- Anti-Nuclear Power Movement (1960s-1980s)

Fall  
1962  
to: October  
1964

**Country:** United States

**Location City/State/Province:** *Bodega Bay, California*

**Goals:**

To cancel Pacific Gas and Electric's plan to build the nation's first commercially viable nuclear power plant in the headlands of Bodega Bay, California.

### Methods

**Methods in 1st segment:**

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 025. Displays of portraits
- 039. Parades
- 048. Protest meetings

**Methods in 2nd segment:**

- 001. Public speeches
- 009. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books

**Methods in 3rd segment:**

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 021. Delivering symbolic objects
- 036. Performances of plays and music
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

**Methods in 4th segment:**

**Methods in 5th segment:**

**Methods in 6th segment:**

**Additional methods (Timing Unknown):**

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 015. Group lobbying
- 016. Picketing

**Notes on Methods:**

No dates could be found for the involvement of the democratic groups in San Francisco, though it is suspected they became involved from early 1963 until May 1963. Included in the actions surrounding and involving the democratic parties were letters of protest and support (002), group lobbying (015), and picketing (016).

It is also unknown whether there were more anti-nuclear plant actions after May 1963; at that time, the AEC was evaluating the plant and did not decide until October 1964 to cancel it. This is such a long time period that the NCAPBHH may have conducted more actions or negative publicity, but no information has been found so far on that time period.

Many of the politicians that joined the campaign also created legislation advocating for further plant site investigation.

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Defense

**Cluster:**

Environment

**Group characterization:**

- Conservationists
- community members
- scientists
- students

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

The Northern California Association to Preserve Bodega Head and Harbour (NCAPBHH; created by Harold Gilliam, Joel Hedgpeth, and J.B. Neilands), especially David Pesonen - the executive secretary

Karl Kortum

Jean Kortum

**Partners:**

Rose Gaffney

Doris Sloan

**External allies:**

Berkeley Graduate Students

Parents and Others for Pure Milk

San Francisco's Democratic Clubs

Clair Engle

Scott Newhall

James Carr

Pierre St. Amand

Stewart Udall

**Involvement of social elites:**

Malvina Reynolds

Lu Watters, a musician

California Democratic Council

Edmund Brown

Glenn Anderson

Phillip Burton

James Carr

Stewart Udall, Secretary of the Interior

Clair Engle

## **Joining/exiting order of social groups**

### **Groups in 1st Segment:**

- Berkeley graduate students
- Northern California Association to Preserve Bodega Head and Harbour
- Sierra Club

### **Groups in 2nd Segment:**

- Sierra Club (exit)

### **Groups in 3rd Segment:**

- California Democratic Council
- Parents and Others for Pure Milk
- San Franciscan Democrat Clubs
- Sonoma State College students
- U.S. Department of the Interior

### **Groups in 4th Segment:**

### **Groups in 5th Segment:**

### **Groups in 6th Segment:**

*Segment Length: 4 months*

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**

Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E)

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

Not known

**Campaigner violence:**

None known

**Repressive Violence:**

None known

## Success Outcome

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

6 points out of 6 points

**Survival:**

1 point out of 1 points

**Growth:**

3 points out of 3 points

**Notes on outcomes:**

The combined efforts of many different individuals and groups that mostly unified under the Northern California Association to Preserve Bodega Head and Harbour successfully altered both the Atomic Energy Commission and Department of the Interior's opinions about PG&E's nuclear power plant construction. Their disapproval of PG&E's plans resulted in the cancellation of the plant all together.

---

In 1954, Congress approved the Atomic Energy Act in an attempt to jumpstart nuclear energy in the United States. The Atomic Energy Commission was charged with creating a positive image of the peaceful applications of nuclear power as well as with regulating safety measures.

Bodega Bay became one of the first regions to be considered for a nuclear power plant. Bodega Bay is a scenic inlet of the Pacific Ocean in northern California, then a preserved town of 350 people, mainly fishermen. Before the announcement about a power plant, the University of California at Berkeley had expressed interest in building a marine research station in the Head to study the region's rich ecology and the Sierra Club had also advocated for the California Division of Beaches and Parks to acquire the land and preserve its aesthetic beauty. Sonoma County officials, however, were not so keen on creating yet another park in the area, and were more interested in developing the land. Their wish was met when the California utility Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) approached the county proposing to create a nuclear power plant in the region. On May 23, 1958, PG&E announced its acquisition of Bodega Head in its plans to build the nation's first commercially viable nuclear power plant.

Rose Gaffney, an inhabitant of Bodega Bay who owned a large sect of the Head, was the first citizen to be notified of PG&E's plans when she was told by the utility that her land was being taken by the clause of eminent domain. The only other individual to be notified was Edgar Wayburn, a physician and chair of the Sierra Club, who had received an anonymous letter warning him of the land acquisition. On behalf of the Sierra Club, Wayburn contacted the California Public Utilities Commission (PUC) requesting that it think about the aesthetics and land use of the potential plant site. The PUC refused, however, saying that the issue of plant location fell under the jurisdiction of the utility's management. Despite citizens' expectations that the Sierra Club

should act further, the group was fragmented on the issue, and played little role throughout the controversy.

Meanwhile, in 1959, a small group of residents created the Bodega Bay Chamber of Commerce to rally more support to oppose the plant; the group became inactive after a short period, however. In late 1959, 1,300 Sonoma County citizens signed a petition sent to the PUC protesting the scenic destruction of their living space.

Public criticism of PG&E's plans dwindled due to the utility's strong public image campaign. In 1962, the PUC held public hearings in San Francisco discussing the plant's construction, at which PG&E presented its plans, but they were largely unattended due to the lack of public interest.

Dr. Joel Hedgpeth, director of the Marine Biology Program at the University of the Pacific and vehemently opposed to the plant from the beginning, was disappointed in the Sierra Club's passivity. He took it upon himself to appeal to the Atomic Energy Commission regarding reactor safety issues. He sent letters to the AEC and to Congressman Clem Miller advocating intervention in the plant construction.

Another man observing the lack of activity was Karl Kortum, founder and director of the San Franciscan Maritime Museum. Kortum, incensed by the need for action, wrote a piece to friend and editor Scott Newhall at the San Francisco *Chronicle* denouncing PG&E's actions and lack of public engagement on the issue. He called for Bodega citizens to "take five minutes to write a letter [to the Public Utilities Commission]." His editorial was effective and motivated over 240 letters and 1,000 petition signatures, which were sent to the PUC requesting that the hearings be reopened. The PUC agreed.

Then, enthused *Chronicle* writer Harold Gilliam, Hedgpeth, and Berkeley professor J.B. Neilands (who had collected the aforementioned 1,000 signatures at the Berkeley Food Cooperative) created the Northern California Association to Preserve Bodega Head and Harbour (NCAPBHH), or "the association" as they called it.

The PUC reopened its public hearings at which Gaffney led a vibrant presentation of the ecological richness of the Head. Sierra Club staff members David Pesonen, their conservation editor, and Phillip Berry, their lawyer, also spoke, pressuring the PUC to become proactive and think of the "highest and best use of the land." Phillip Flint of the Sierra Club accused PG&E of collusion and also blamed the University of California at Berkeley for abandoning its plans to build a marine research station in Bodega, which then allowed PG&E to pursue their nuclear power plant plans. Despite the vocal opposition to the project at the hearings, the PUC approved PG&E's application.

Pesonen, who had spoken at the hearings, then left the Sierra Club frustrated with their passivity and joined the NCAPBHH. He became the executive secretary and the most significant leader in the fight against PG&E.

In 1962, Pesonen published a series of articles in the Sebastopol Times that accused PG&E of collusion with county officials. He divulged that PG&E had held secret talks with the local politicians and that Berkeley University and the Beaches and Parks Division of Bodega Bay – which had previously been interested in acquiring the area – had likewise been influenced by "subtle perhaps political pressure" from the AEC, the governor, or PG&E.

In the fall of 1962, Pesonen, along with a few other Sierra Club members and Berkeley graduate students, held a meeting attended by 150 community members about the safety hazards and the political implications of the nuclear power plant. This meeting signified the change of the campaign from aesthetic concerns to those of safety. They concluded the talk by urging the attendees to create their own neighborhood meetings and begin letter-writing campaigns. The association then organized with three strategies: citizen protest, legal intervention, and negative publicity for the local politicians.

In the legal realm, they sent four requests for a new PUC hearing, all of which were rejected. For citizen protest and negative publicity, the association picked one local politician, "Nin" Giudotti, (who was involved in the secret talks with PG&E) and rallied the other "Nin-haters" to begin a recall petition drive citing violation of the Brown Act (which prohibited such collusion). The "Nin-haters" also began a parade in his hometown during which they displayed his image drawn and quartered. On a 1963 ballot, the Nin recall petition failed.

In January 1963, the campaign began a friendlier grassroots campaign, leafleting and traveling door-door to reach out to more community members. The association published a pamphlet outlining potential detrimental health effects using the “food-chain” argument: cows’ could digest radioactive fallout in the grass and the community’s milk could be contaminated as a result. The campaign thus took a turn from the prior aesthetic and lifestyle concerns from the beginning movement to life-threatening health concerns. PG&E weakly responded to the pamphlet by calling the association scientifically ignorant and accusing them of misinformation.

They were able to mobilize local community members, and in May 1963, Sonoma State College students organized a sympathy march, stating that each citizen should have the “privilege and also the responsibility to voice his own reasoned opinion in any public matter.” In the same month – Memorial Day 1963 – the association led a demonstration of 250-350 people in which protesters released 1,500 balloons into the air saying, “This balloon could represent a radioactive molecule of strontium-90 or iodine-131 [...] PG&E hopes to build a nuclear plant at this spot, close to the world’s biggest active earthquake fault. Tell your local newspaper where you found this balloon.”

The association also focused on keeping public interest high by holding outdoor picnics and involving other publicity stunts: Malvina Reynolds, a folk singer, wrote anti-nuclear songs for the campaign and popular jazz musician Lu Watters – though retired – played for the association and even created a song “Blues over Bodega” for them.

The campaign continued to grow. In San Francisco, Jean Kortum, Karl Kortum’s wife who had a short reporting career in Oakland, began an effort to engage the Democratic Party, which had adopted quality-of-life issues as a major platform, in the fight. She succeeded in getting Parents and Others for Pure Milk, a Democratic fallout group, to join first, and was later able to recruit the city’s Democratic Clubs. The political organizations picketed at the utility’s offices. After an intense letter-writing and lobbying campaign, she was also able to get the California Democratic Council to publicly accuse PG&E of collusion with Sonoma County officials which then enabled her to recruit larger politicians to support the association’s cause. Such joining politicians were Governor Edmund Brown, Lieutenant Governor Glenn Anderson (who even called for AEC to withdraw its plant approval), and Representative Phillip Burton (who created legislation advocating that the Department of the Interior investigate the plant site).

Jean Kortum then looked to recruit a key politician, Stewart Udall, a conservationist and Secretary of the Interior, and lobbied his office. Udall was hesitant to act, though, as he felt he needed more scientific evidence. Here *Chronicle* writer Harold Gilliam returned to the picture. He had been helping Udall write a new book, and on a trip to Washington D.C. for the project, met the AEC undersecretary James Carr, a public power advocate and foe of PG&E. Carr made public statements – such as one in Sacramento in February 1963 – against the Bodega Bay power plant that received considerable media coverage. His stance also succeeded in influencing Udall to begin the first challenge of the AEC. Udall’s concerns were mainly regarding the potentially hazardous location of the plant on the San Andreas Fault, and so pressured the Department of the Interior to do a thorough investigation of the proposed plant (sidestepping the AEC due to its lack of expertise in seismic safety).

Meanwhile, Pesonen and the association were also trying to find hard scientific evidence for their safety concerns. Pesonen conducted a radio broadcast calling for scientists to help their cause, inspiring California seismologist Pierre St. Amand to help. He visited the site with county member Doris Sloan and, after a two-day trip viewing the fault line, concluded that “a worse foundation condition would be tough to envision.” Amand communicated his conclusions to Gilliam at the Department of the Interior.

Udall was compelled by the evidence and on May 20, 1963, wrote a public letter to the AEC of this “grave concern,” urging them to conduct an on-site assessment. The letter received widespread attention, as media picked up on the now governmental controversy, like the *Chronicle*, which published an article titled “Bodega A-plant Risks Quake Peril, Udall Says.” Though the public was already swiftly gaining interest in the cause due to the substantiated safety concerns, Jean Kortum organized a letter-writing campaign to further rally public support for Udall’s request.

The AEC carried out the assessment, and as Udall expected, the results led them to view the fault line as too hazardous a

location. PG&E countered by redesigning their building plans to account for possible shifting. Clair Engle, a California senator, introduced a bill advocating for the delay of PG&E's building until substantial scientific evidence could disprove the safety concerns.

Facing widespread negative press, heavily involved public opinion, and substantial scientific evidence, the AEC decided to cancel the Bodega project. In October 1964, PG&E halted construction.

This decision influenced the growing controversy in Malibu, California, where the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power had proposed to build a nuclear power plant. Following a similar string of events, the Malibu plant was cancelled as well.

## Research Notes

### Influences:

The campaign influenced the cancellation of a proposed nuclear power plant in Malibu, California occurring shortly after.

### Sources:

Balogh, Brian. "The Centrifugal Push of Expertise." *Chain Reaction: Expert Debate and Public Participation in American Commercial Nuclear Power, 1945-1975*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991. Print.

Walker, J. Samuel. "Reactor at the Fault: The Bodega Bay Nuclear Power Plant Controversy, 1958-1964: A Case Study in the Politics of Technology." *University of California Press: Pacific Historical Review* 59.3 (Aug 1990): 323-48. Print.

Wellock, Thomas Raymond. "The Battle for Bodega Bay, 1958-1964." *Critical Masses: Opposition to Nuclear Power in California, 1958-1978*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1998. Print.

### Additional Notes:

For more detailed information on the scientific organizations involved, see *Chain Reaction: Expert Debate and Public Participation in American Commercial Nuclear Power, 1945-1975* under sources.

For more information on the anti-nuclear movement see Bill Moyer. *Doing Democracy: The MAP Model for Organizing Social Movements*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers, 2001.

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

Elliana Bisgaard-Church, 19/09/2011

**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 02/23/2020 - 18:17):** <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/us-citizens-prevent-construction-nuclear-power-plant-bodega-bay-california-1962-64>

### Links:

[1] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/wave-campaigns/anti-nuclear-power-movement-1960s-1980s>

[2] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/included-participation-more-one-social-class>

[3] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/local-community-or-neighborhood-level-campaign>