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Shades of Green

By Andrew J. Hoffman

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Shades *of* Green

By Andrew J. Hoffman | Illustration by Christopher Silas Neal

In the eyes of many, the environmental movement has split into two camps, one that partners with business and the other that doesn't. This bipolar view, however, is too simplistic. Using social networking tools, the author reveals the intricate web of relationships that exist between business and environmentalists and suggests ways that these relationships could become even more fruitful.

ON APRIL 22, 1990, an estimated 200 million people from 140 nations participated in the 20th anniversary reenactment of Earth Day. Although the day's events once again focused on the degradation of the environment, its tone was markedly different from that of the original event. Where the first Earth Day angrily denounced corporations as unwelcome villains, the 1990 Earth Day fully embraced them as invited partners. Corporations were



prominent participants, funding the day's events and staging special demonstrations of their green activities.

This participation led *The New York Times* to observe that “this multimillion-dollar orchestration of the event bore little resemblance to the grassroots movement driving the event 20 years before.”¹ *Time* called the event “a commercial mugging.”² Explicit in these observations is the sentiment that corporations had co-opted Earth Day and, by inference, the environmental movement as a whole. Implicit in these observations is a statement that corporations are not a legitimate partner in the environmental movement. Indeed, there is a great deal of tension in the environmental movement about the relationship between environmental nongovernmental organizations (ENGOs) and corporations.

A recent book by Christine MacDonald, Conservation International's (CI) former media manager, expresses outrage at ENGOs accepting donations from oil, lumber, and mining industries without holding them accountable for ongoing pollution. In her book, *Green Inc.: An Environmental Insider Reveals How a Good Cause Has Gone Bad*, MacDonald charges that the association between ENGOs and corporations has led to a system of co-optation, where the outcome is greenwashing. Even longtime environmentalist James Gustave Speth, dean of the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, criticizes today's environmental movement for its willingness to work “within the system” through “pragmatic and incremental” actions. “What is needed,” he states, “is transformative change in the system itself.”³

In the eyes of many, a schism is emerging between two camps of environmentalists: the *dark greens* and the *bright greens*. The dark green ENGOs—such as Greenpeace USA and Friends of the Earth (FOE)—seek radical social change to solve environmental problems, often by confronting corporations. The bright green ENGOs—such as CI and the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF)—work within the system, often in close alliance with corporations, to solve environmental problems.⁴

In the article “Harnessing Purity and Pragmatism” in the fall 2007 issue of the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, authors Alana Conner and Keith Epstein describe the core of this schism as the tension between purity and pragmatism; they suggest that the gulf between them is widening. But in the end, the authors conclude, both camps are needed for the environmental movement to achieve its objectives. The authors argue that the ability of more moderate, consensus-oriented ENGOs to operate as change agents is enhanced by the presence of more radical, conflict-oriented ENGOs through what is called the “radical flank effect.”⁵ The radicals, in effect, make it possible for the moderates to effect change.

Although the image of two camps—one bright green and the other dark green—is compelling, the real world is more complex. The environmental movement is not divided in two, but is instead made up of a wide variety of ENGOs exhibiting varying shades of green.

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Some ENGOs refuse to work with any corporation, whereas other ENGOs will seemingly work with anyone. Most ENGOs, however, lie somewhere between these two poles and engage in various types of partnerships with different types of corporations.

To better understand the diverse ways that ENGOs engage with corporations, it is helpful to examine the environmental movement through a network lens.⁶ One of the best ways to do this is to use social networking tools that create visual maps of these relationships. For the purposes of this article I have developed two maps, one showing the relationships that ENGOs have with individual corporations and the other showing the relationships ENGOs have with various industry sectors.

These maps (which will be discussed in more detail later) reveal that there are in fact five different types of ENGOs (Isolates, Captives, Independents, Bridges, and Mediators), not just two (bright and dark greens), and that each of these five types of ENGOs plays a different yet important role in defining and advancing the goals of the environmental movement.

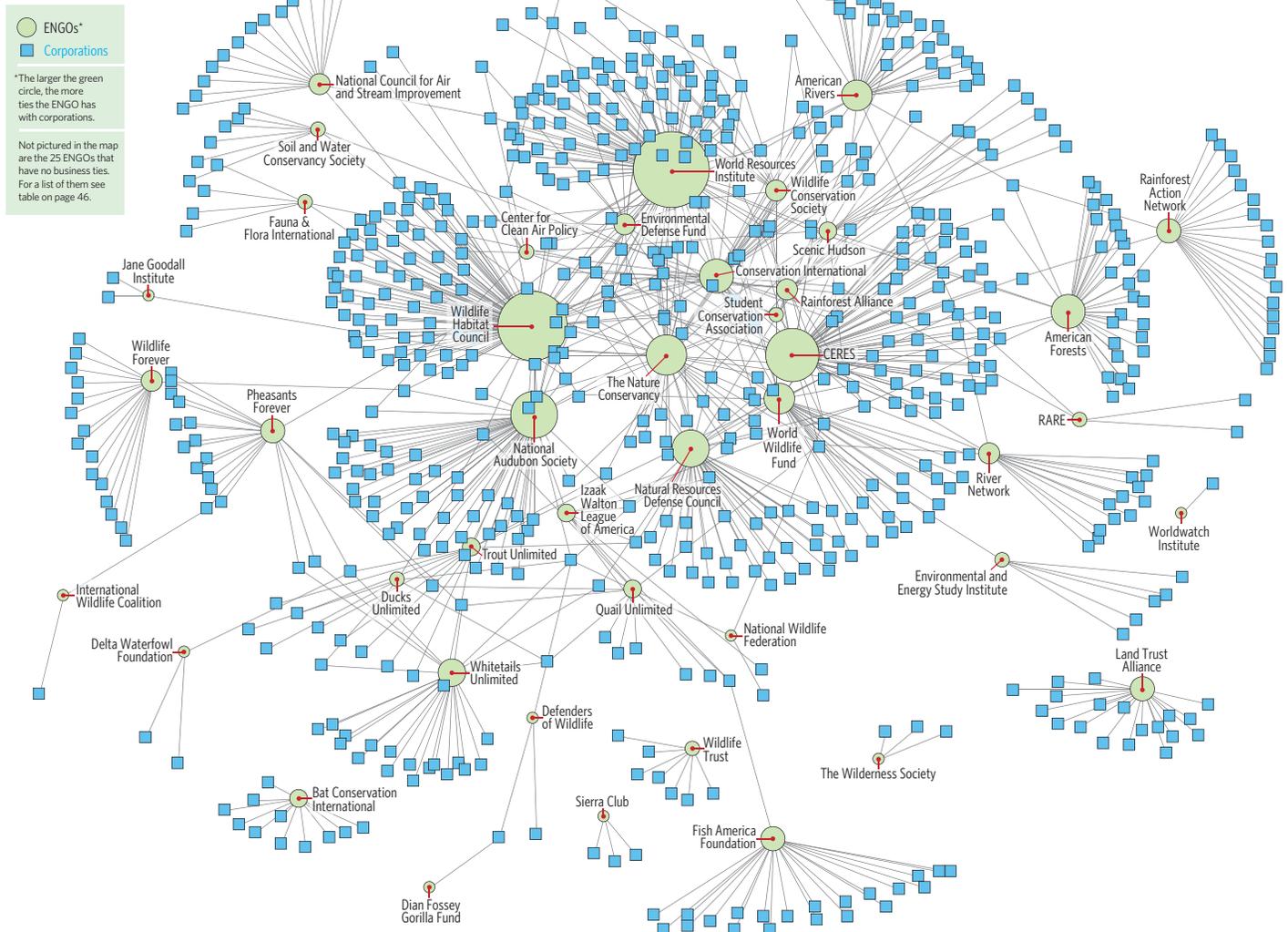
By using these maps and the information they reveal, ENGO leaders can better understand the role that their organization and other ENGOs play in the environmental movement. These maps can also help corporate leaders better understand the environmental movement and how they fit into it. With this kind of information, more effective coordination and collaboration among ENGOs and between ENGOs and corporations becomes possible.

Surveying the Environmental Movement

The 6,493 organizations that filed 501(c)(3) forms with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service in 2005 calling themselves environmental groups⁷ represent a diverse array of organizations. Some ENGOs—such as the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)—are staffed with lawyers and scientists and work within existing institutions to bring about corporate and social change in a collaborative style, while others—such as Greenpeace (or in the most extreme case, Earth First! and the Earth Liberation Front)—remain outside those institutions, relying on less professionally oriented staffs and working in a more confrontational style. Some ENGOs—such as The Nature Conservancy (TNC)—seek to protect nature for its innate value, while others—such as Ducks Unlimited—seek to protect nature for the purposes of hunting and fishing within it. Some ENGOs—such as the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES)—are explicitly organized to engage corporations, while others—such as the League of Conservation Voters (LCV)—avoid such engagement by explicit mission.

This diversity is a historical product of the changes that have occurred in the environmental movement over the past century. In the early part of the 20th century a wilderness ideology prevailed, and environmental issues were cast primarily as managing natural resources for social benefit. ENGOs formed during that period, such as the Sierra Club, focused much of their efforts on pressing federal and state governments to set aside some of their vast landholdings as protected wilderness areas. Corporations didn't factor much into the equation. When new types of environmental activists entered the movement in the 1960s and 1970s, the ideologies shifted and the priorities became the protection of natural ecosystems from

Ties Between Environmental NGOs and Corporations



the ravages of mankind. ENGOS formed during this time, such as Greenpeace, focused much of their efforts on pressing businesses to stop polluting and pillaging the environment. These ENGOS tended to be suspicious of corporations and confrontational in their style of work.

In the early 1990s a new breed of environmentalist emerged, one that was more pragmatic and looked for ways to use market incentives to entice business to become more green. Environmentally oriented investors used their money to punish or reward corporate behavior; green consumers used their buying power to lure corporations into offering organic food and recyclable products; and business insiders used business logic to persuade corporations that being green was revenue enhancing. As part of this shift, ENGOS began to work in collaboration with business. One of the earliest such alliances was the National Wildlife Federation's (NWF) Corporate Conservation Council. Formed in 1982, the council fostered dialogue between NWF and Fortune 500 companies on issues

of environmental conservation. But it wasn't until 1990 that the most prominent example of these types of partnerships was formed, one between McDonald's Corp. and EDF that targeted waste reduction opportunities in the fast food business. The most notable result of this alliance was McDonald's shift from polystyrene clamshell containers to paper wraps. Today, a wide range of companies engage with ENGOS on issues as varied as climate change, habitat protection, water rights, and international development.

Mapping the Relationships

To better understand the complex and varied ways that ENGOS and corporations interact, it helps to use social networking software to draw visual maps of the environmental movement. These types of maps (see above) have been used in a variety of fields to help people gain greater insight into the relationships that exist among groups of people or among groups of organizations.

To begin making a network map of the environmental movement

I narrowed the list of 6,493 U.S. environmental organizations to the 69 NGOs with the largest annual budgets, as listed in the *Encyclopedia of Associations*.⁸ These NGOs range in size from 100 members to 1.2 million (average 136,000); in budget from \$1 million to \$245 million (average \$18.5 million); and in date of formation from 1875 to 1995 (average 1958). Although the sample is biased toward large national and international NGOs, it is a useful sample for developing a picture of the complexity of an influential segment of the environmental movement.

Next, I analyzed each NGO's Web site to identify the relationships it has with companies in the form of project partnerships, alliances, financial support, or other joint relationships. Nearly two-thirds of the 69 NGOs had some type of relationship with corporations, but 25 had none. All of these data were entered into the UCINET Social Network Analysis Software,⁹ which generated the two social networking maps.

The first map (on page 43) represents the relationships that NGOs have with individual corporations. The NGOs are depicted as green circles and the corporations are depicted as blue squares. Relationships between the two are represented by lines connecting them. (To simplify the map, the names of the NGOs are listed but the names of the corporations are not.) The map shows the relationships that 44 NGOs have with 664 corporations through 869 ties (with a range of 1 to 102 business ties per NGO and an average of 19.75). These are what some call the bright green environmentalists. Not pictured on the map are the 25 NGOs that have no relationships with business. These are what some call the dark green environmentalists. (A list of these NGOs, called Isolates, can be found in the table on page 46.)

Looking even closer at the map, however, we can begin to see an even greater diversity of positions or roles in the network. First, we can measure *centrality* in the network; those NGOs in the *core* of the network will have a greater degree of influence than those on the *periphery* through the strength of their channels of interaction. Centrality is generally measured in two ways. The first is simply the number of ties an NGO has with corporations—what is called degree centrality. This is represented by the size of the green circle within the network map; the larger the circle, the greater the number of direct ties. The second and more telling measure is the interconnectedness of those ties—what is called eigenvector centrality. This is represented by the placement of the green circle on the map, with those in the middle being more central. Think of a popularity contest or Google's Page Rank when you think of eigenvector centrality in a network map. It's not just the number of connections one has, but also how connected those connections are. So NGOs like CI, TNC, and the World Resources Institute (WRI) have both high degree and eigenvector centrality, and are therefore highly central to the network and closely linked with much of its members. Alongside these core NGOs, we can also see others—such as the Student Conservation Association, Center for Clean Air Policy, Rainforest Alliance, and Scenic Hudson—that have less direct ties to business (low degree) but are still central to the network because of their high eigenvector.

Looking at the periphery of the map, we can see multiple positions as well. There are NGOs on the periphery—such as Fish America Foundation and Rainforest Action Network (RAN)—that have many

direct ties to business (high degree), but few of those ties link to the core of the network (low eigenvector). There are also NGOs on the periphery of the network—such as the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund and the International Wildlife Coalition—that have few direct ties to business (low degree) and few links to the core of the network (low eigenvector). And then there are other NGOs—such as The Wilderness Society and the Land Trust Alliance—that have their own discrete networks (low and high degree, respectively) with no ties to the core (zero eigenvector).

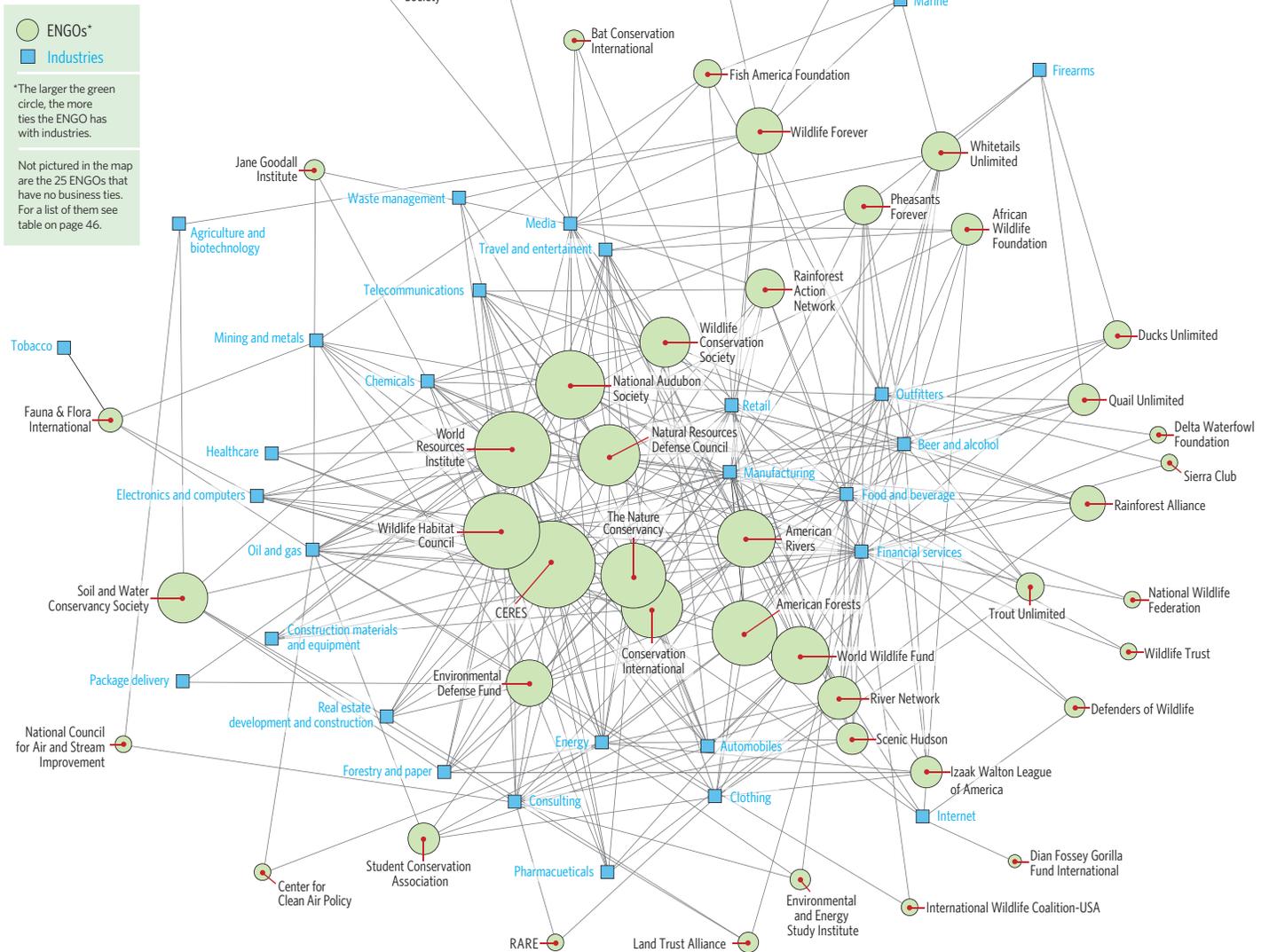
A closer look at the map reveals other interesting insights. For example, the NGOs that defined their focus as “conservation” in the *Encyclopedia of Associations* were more central to the corporate network than those that defined their focus as “environmental protection” or “pollution control.” Seventy-three percent of the conservation NGOs had ties to business, compared with only 33 percent of the environmental protection NGOs and just 18 percent of the pollution control NGOs.

The reason for this variation is that the objectives of the three types of NGOs are different. The term “conservation” refers to groups that seek the preservation and protection of the environment and the natural things within it, some for its own sake, others for the benefit of human beings. “Environmental protection” is a broader term, addressing actions at international, national, and local levels to prevent and, where possible, reverse environmental degradation of ecosystems. This term often has a legislative component to it. “Pollution control” refers to the direct control of emissions and effluents into air, water, or soil from consumption, heating, agriculture, mining, manufacturing, transportation, and other human activities that, left unchecked, will degrade the environment. These clusters represent three overlapping but distinct movements within the environmental movement, with the former geared more toward protection of nature and the latter two focused more on challenging corporate activities.

This map, however, looks only at one dimension by which to measure an NGO's connections to business (by measuring their connections to individual corporations). A second way to look at these relationships is to look at the industry sectors that NGOs are connected to. So instead of mapping Ford Motor Co., General Motors Corp., and Toyota Motor Corp. separately, for example, all of these companies can be grouped together within the “automobiles” sector. When the map is redrawn by using NGOs' relationships to sectors rather than individual corporations, a new portrait of the environmental movement emerges. Again, NGOs are depicted as green circles and the sectors with which they have relationships are depicted as blue squares. The size of the green circle corresponds to the number of sectoral ties the NGO has.

The first thing one notices when looking at this map (on page 45) is that NGOs that share sectoral ties are clustered together. In fact, the clustering of NGOs along sectoral lines is clearer than the clustering based on specific company ties. One cluster of NGOs, for example, is in the upper right corner of the map because of its ties with sporting goods companies like those in the firearms, outfitters, and marine sectors. Another cluster of NGOs forms on the lower left side of the map because of their ties with resource extraction companies like those in the mining and metals, oil and gas, and forestry and paper sectors. And in the center of the map,

Ties Between Environmental NGOs and Industries



the manufacturing, food and beverage, financial services, and retail sectors are the most central form of sectoral engagement.

A second consideration with regard to this map is the diversity of sector ties that each NGO possesses. NGOs with ties to a narrow set of sectors (those with smaller circles) will likely be more parochial in the types of issues they engage in and tend to represent more of the interests of their corporate partners. Those NGOs with ties to a broader set of sectors (those with larger circles) will be more likely to engage in a diversity of issues. So, for example, some of the sporting NGOs in the sample—such as Trout Unlimited (TU)—are primarily connected to sporting goods companies and will be more likely to engage on issues related primarily to the preservation of their members’ ability to continue to hunt in nature (and use the equipment provided by their corporate partners).

Looking more deeply at the data, we also should observe the

sectors that certain NGOs choose not to engage. For example, only 29 percent of NGOs that identified their focus as “forestry” in the *Encyclopedia of Associations* had ties with the forest and paper sector. This could be a deliberate attempt by these NGOs to avoid co-optation by the industries they target, or it could suggest that NGOs and corporations define the concept and the sector differently. And finally, we can dig even deeper to assess interactions among sectors engaged. For example, on a humorous note, 100 percent of firearms companies have ties with NGOs that also have ties with beer and alcohol companies, suggesting that it may be wise to stay out of the woods during hunting season!

Defining NGOs’ Roles

Using these network maps, we should make two important distinctions when we analyze an NGO’s relationships with corporations.

The first is the ENGO's position between the core and the periphery of the corporate network. The second is the diversity of sectoral ties that the ENGO has. These dual distinctions create a matrix of five possible roles that an ENGO can adopt to engage with corporations (see table on right). The five roles are Isolate, Mediator, Bridge, Independent, and Captive.

The choices that an ENGO makes on where to position itself within the matrix has important implications for the degree of autonomy and influence it can have.¹⁰ Think of ties as channels of information and resources. They allow ENGOs to influence the members of the network through the spread of ideas, and they are channels that work in reverse. The ties in the network represent the dual (and at times competing) goals of gaining influence with and remaining autonomous from corporations. Some ENGOs choose to remain autonomous by staying disconnected from the network, free to pursue and realize interests without constraint from other actors in the system. But this autonomy comes at the cost of a reduced ability to influence the corporate network directly.

Other ENGOs wish to influence corporations more directly by developing deeper ties within the network. This influence, however, increases the risk of a loss of autonomy from the corporations with which they engage. ENGOs can gain resources through network linkages, like financial contributions necessary to exert greater influence, but they can be susceptible to co-optive influence by the corporations with which they connect.

In the sample of ENGOs in this paper, those with business ties had, on average, larger budgets than had ENGOs with no business ties (\$24.3 million compared with \$7.6 million).¹¹ For some critics, such as MacDonald, this is too much of a lure toward co-optation of interests.

For each ENGO, the choice of which types of corporations and how many of them to engage with becomes both a strategic consideration and a compelling statement about the ability of the movement as a whole to accomplish its goals. The critical questions for each ENGO are the extent to which it wishes to remain autonomous and the extent to which it wishes to have influence by integrating

Five Roles Played by Environmental NGOs

CENTRALITY IN THE CORPORATE NETWORK

	Core	Periphery	Disconnected
HIGH DIVERSITY OF SECTOR TIES	<p>MEDIATOR</p> <p>CERES</p> <p>Conservation International</p> <p>Environmental Defense Fund</p> <p>National Audubon Society</p> <p>Natural Resources Defense Council</p> <p>The Nature Conservancy</p> <p>Wildlife Conservation Society</p> <p>Wildlife Habitat Council</p> <p>World Resources Institute</p> <p>World Wildlife Fund</p>	<p>INDEPENDENT</p> <p>American Forests</p> <p>American Rivers</p> <p>Pheasants Forever</p> <p>Rainforest Action Network</p> <p>River Network</p> <p>Soil and Water Conservation Society</p> <p>Whitetails Unlimited</p> <p>Wildlife Forever</p>	<p>ISOLATE</p> <p>America the Beautiful Fund</p> <p>Center for Ecoliteracy</p> <p>Center for Health, Environment & Justice</p> <p>Clean Water Action</p> <p>Clean Water Fund</p> <p>Coastal Conservation Association</p> <p>Community Environmental Council</p> <p>The Conservancy Association</p> <p>Earth Island Institute</p> <p>Ecological Society of America</p> <p>Environmental Action Foundation</p> <p>Environmental Assessment Association</p> <p>Forest Guild</p> <p>Friends of the Earth</p> <p>Global Warming International Center</p> <p>Great Lakes Fishery Commission</p> <p>Greater Yellowstone Coalition</p> <p>Greenpeace USA</p> <p>International Water Association</p> <p>League of Conservation Voters</p> <p>The Land Institute</p> <p>Marine and Coastal Management</p> <p>The Wildlife Society</p> <p>Water Environment Federation</p> <p>Waterfowl U.S.A.</p>
LOW DIVERSITY OF SECTOR TIES	<p>BRIDGE</p> <p>Center for Clean Air Policy</p> <p>Rainforest Alliance</p> <p>Scenic Hudson</p> <p>Student Conservation Association</p>	<p>CAPTIVE</p> <p>African Wildlife Foundation</p> <p>Bat Conservation International</p> <p>Defenders of Wildlife</p> <p>Delta Waterfowl Foundation</p> <p>Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund</p> <p>Ducks Unlimited</p> <p>Environmental and Energy Study Institute</p> <p>Fauna & Flora International</p> <p>Fish America Foundation</p> <p>International Wildlife Coalition—USA</p> <p>Izaak Walton League of America</p> <p>Jane Goodall Institute</p> <p>Land Trust Alliance</p> <p>National Council for Air and Stream Improvement</p> <p>National Wildlife Federation</p> <p>Quail Unlimited</p> <p>RARE</p> <p>Sierra Club</p> <p>The Wilderness Society</p> <p>Trout Unlimited</p> <p>Wildlife Trust</p> <p>Worldwatch Institute</p>	

itself to varying degrees within the network. Each of the five roles carries with it a different risk and reward.

Isolate

The most obvious type of ENGO is the *Isolate*, one that operates outside of the corporate network. Isolates made up the single largest group of the five categories, comprising 25 of the 69 ENGOs in the sample, or 36 percent. By refusing to partner with corporations, Isolates are able to maintain a sense of purity, but they limit their ability to influence corporate activity directly. This position

also limits the Isolate's access to financial resources, such as large pools of funding from corporations. The reason ENGOS choose to be Isolates can vary. For example, although Greenpeace and the LCV both make it clear that they do not work with corporations, their motivations are different. Greenpeace is more oppositional, avoiding direct ties with businesses because their mission is defined more by conflict. The LCV, however, is more ambivalent, avoiding direct ties as a form of disengagement necessary to maintain its impartiality and objectivity on political issues. Regardless of their motivations, Isolates form an ideological core that is divorced from the corporate sector's concerns. Because of this, Isolates generally promote the strongest statements and ideas about environmental protection, but they generally must rely on others to bring them into practice. These ENGOS often see themselves as the "true" supporters of the environmental cause. Other ENGOS can look to Isolates for a more pronounced statement of the objectives and interests of the movement. Isolates are the compass by which the movement can guide itself.

Mediator

At the opposite extreme from the Isolate is the *Mediator*, an ENGO that is central to the corporate network and also maintains a diverse set of sectoral ties. Some of the largest and best-known ENGOS are Mediators: EDF, CI, and TNC, for example. As a group, Mediators have the highest annual budgets (average \$56 million)¹² and the largest number of members (average 493,000) of the five roles (see graphs on page 48). Mediators make up 14 percent of the sample. They tend to be more pragmatic than others, fully engaging the corporate community through tight connections in the network. Because they partner with corporations from a diverse array of sectors, Mediators are not tied to any particular sector, giving them greater autonomy while also maximizing their ability to influence change through their large number of corporate ties. They have tremendous credibility within the corporate sector and therefore enjoy greater power to bring together ENGOS and corporations to diffuse new ideas and practices within the corporate sector. For example, the only five ENGOS that are members of the U.S. Climate Action Partnership—a consortium of blue-chip corporations including BP America Inc., Ford, General Motors, DuPont, and others (companies that are, coincidentally, some of the most prominent in this network map)—are Mediators. These five ENGOS are EDF, TNC, NRDC, WRI, and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). Many Mediators—such as WWF and EDF—develop their own corporate consortia to address issues such as climate change and habitat protection. But for some, such tight and prolonged connections to the corporate network also mean that these ENGOS risk co-optation and mission deflection as they seek to satisfy the interests of corporate benefactors and maintain their level of influence. Regardless, Mediators are the ENGOS that are most able to accomplish broad-scale changes within the corporate sector.

Bridge

Between these two extremes are three hybrid roles that ENGOS can play. The first of these roles is that of the *Bridge*. These ENGOS are central to the network, like the Mediators, allowing them to exert

influence on other ENGOS and corporations in the network. But they maintain a narrow spectrum of sectoral ties. As such, they act as Bridges, channeling between a specific set of corporate sector concerns and the rest of the network. There are fewer Bridges than any other type of ENGO, totaling just 6 percent of the organizations in the survey. The Rainforest Alliance and Scenic Hudson are examples of Bridge ENGOS. Bridges can be expected to inject specific ideas and interests into the network and, through their central position, help to gain greater engagement among the other ENGOS and corporations within the network for their acceptance. The Center for Clean Air Policy, for example, is a Bridge dedicated to solving climate, air quality, and energy problems and maintains ties primarily with the energy and oil and gas sectors. We can expect this ENGO to be influential in the broader network but to have perspectives that are chiefly representative of the composite of their interests and the oil and gas sector's interests. The converse may also be true: They are constrained in their autonomy from this narrow set of interests. In the end, Bridges can be counted on to inject specialized concerns into the core of the movement.

Independent

The next hybrid role is that of the *Independent*, ENGOS located at the periphery of the corporate network with few corporate partnerships but a wide variety of sectoral ties. Independents comprised 12 percent of the sample. Examples of Independents include RAN, American Forests, and several hunting and fishing organizations. These ENGOS have more autonomy than many other ENGOS because they have relations with a diverse number of sectors. But the amount of influence Independents have within the corporate network is limited because they do not have many central ties to business. These ENGOS use their relative autonomy to generate innovative solutions to change. Independents are particularly effective at developing solutions that involve collaboration among different sectors, but need Mediators to fully disseminate the solutions throughout the corporate network. The River Network, a group that helps freshwater protection organizations form and organize, is an example of an Independent. The River Network describes itself as "a catalyst for grassroots organization and action, a center for information and resources, a source of training and consultation, and a means of connection for groups working on related issues."¹³ It maintains ties with a diverse set of industry sectors but does not occupy a central location in the corporate network. Think of Independents as incubators for change from which ENGOS playing different roles can draw ideas and energy.

Captive

The last hybrid role that ENGOS play is the *Captive*. This is the largest group, comprising 32 percent of the ENGOS in the sample. Such a large number is to be expected, as ENGOS on the periphery are more likely to have a low number of corporate ties, and therefore a low number of sectoral ties. Like Independents, these ENGOS reside on the periphery of the corporate network with few ties to business. But Captives differ from Independents because the business ties that they do have are limited to only a few sectors. Six of the 10 hunting and fishing groups are Captives. They

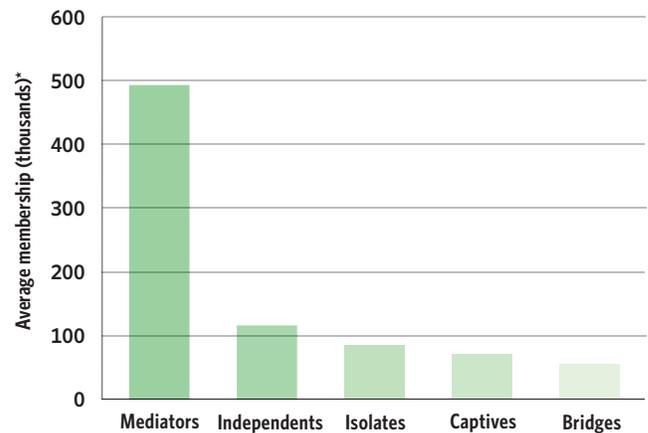
generally have ties to the marine, firearms, and beer and alcohol sectors, but not to many others. NGOs with more specific mandates, such as the African Wildlife Foundation and Fauna & Flora International, also fall into this category. Bat Conservation International, for example, is a Captive dedicated to education, conservation, and research related to bat habitat; it maintains ties with a small number of companies in the media and travel and entertainment sectors that can help it pursue its mission. Similarly, Worldwatch Institute describes itself as an “independent research organization” whose mission is “to generate and promote insights and ideas that empower decision makers to build an ecologically sustainable society that meets human needs.”¹⁴ As such, this NGO maintains a (very) small number of ties in the media sector. Because Captives choose not to be central to the network, their information channels are constrained to a narrow set of interests and influence, which also helps to maintain a greater degree of autonomy. These organizations may have greater credibility with the particular sectors they engage, but may become vulnerable to the biased influence of one set of corporate interests and therefore limited in their autonomy to act independently. Captives may be incubators for ideas and influence that remain localized and of interest to a specific cluster of the network and not the entire network. Think of Captives as more discrete incubators where new ideas can be tested in isolation.

Balancing Competing Interests

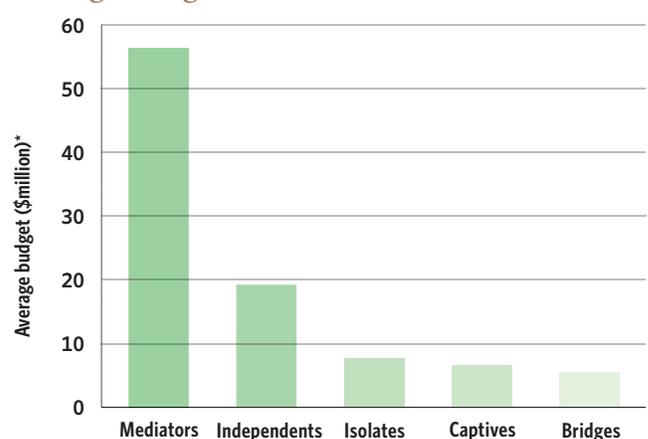
Regardless of which of the five roles an NGO plays, the organization must continually manage the tension between exerting influence over the corporate sector and maintaining autonomy from it. This task is as much about perception as it is about actual co-optation, and sometimes the balance between these competing interests goes awry, as it did in the case of TNC. In 2003, the world’s wealthiest NGO (with more than \$3 billion in assets) found itself the subject of a *Washington Post* exposé titled “Big Green.”¹⁵ Although no one would confuse TNC with Earth First!, critics charged that even considering the Mediator role that the organization plays, it cozied up too close to the corporate sector and engaged in questionable deals. In the wake of this scandal, TNC was the subject of a federal inquiry and an independent audit, and the organization was forced to distance itself from many of its corporate board members.

This type of challenge is germane not only to Mediators. Other NGOs can run the risk of being perceived as co-opted. In fact, the perception that an Independent or Isolate has been co-opted could be more provocative than a Mediator being co-opted. After all, Mediators are expected to work with businesses. Recently, the Sierra Club, an Independent whose role lies on the periphery, has engaged in just such a provocative relationship. The Sierra Club has partnered with the Clorox Co. to provide a product endorsement of the company’s line of Green Works cleaning products. In return, the NGO will receive an undisclosed portion of the revenues. According to Carl Pope, the Sierra Club’s executive director: “I won’t pretend it’s not internally controversial; it is. But we decided it was more important to try to create this marketplace [for green cleaning products] than to keep the peace.” Pope sees the inconsistency as a critical element in gaining attention and therefore market acceptance for

Average Membership of Environmental NGOs



Average Budget of Environmental NGOs



*Figures are for 2005

green cleaning products. The key, he says, “is to combine a very well known cleaning brand with a very green brand. And we are the green brand.”¹⁶ Others within the environmental movement are watching this alliance very closely and skeptically.

Many NGOs, particularly hunting and fishing groups, are struggling with the tension of remaining autonomous from the corporate network and watching their financial resources and influence dwindle. One way to manage this tension is to create a governance structure that integrates both sides into the process. TU, for example, created a two-tier board. One tier is the “grassroots trustees” who are elected from the ranks of the volunteers. The second tier is the “at-large trustees” who are officially nominated by the board for their philanthropic history and the social ties they have to other wealthy donors.

Another way that NGOs can balance these competing tensions is to work together and coordinate their efforts (either explicitly or implicitly) with other types of NGOs. Groups on the periphery of the corporate network, for example, can play roles that those in the center cannot. And if coordinated properly, these two types of NGOs can create a force for change that neither could create separately. For example, an Isolate, such as FOE, may threaten to protest at an office supply company for its limited offerings of recycled paper, and a Mediator, such as WRI, can work with the company to develop recycled products. Who should play the protagonist?

Isolates are appropriate protestors when lots of pressure needs to be brought against a company. In other instances, however, it might be better to have the protestor be an ENGO with credibility and ties to the industry, in which case a Captive or Bridge would be more appropriate.

Individual ENGOs can sometimes play multiple roles simultaneously. EDF, for example, has shifted its original unofficial and confrontational slogan in the 1970s of “Sue the bastards” to today’s more collaborative official slogan of “Finding the ways that work.” But the ENGO did not give up its activist roots entirely. In 2007, when the energy company TXU proposed a series of coal-fired power plants in Texas, EDF staged protests and filed lawsuits. Then, when invited to participate in the negotiations over the leveraged buyout of the company, it hired Perella Weinberg Partners, a boutique investment bank, to advise it on using Wall Street tactics in negotiating mergers and acquisitions.

Rather than playing multiple roles within one organization, other ENGOs—such as FOE, LCV, and the Sierra Club—create multiple organizations to provide them with greater flexibility. These can include a coordinated 501(c)(3) charitable organization, a 501(c)(4) social welfare organization, or a political action committee (PAC).¹⁷ Each is restricted and empowered to conduct certain tactics and strategies by federal law.

As ENGOs consider what role(s) to play now and in the future, they must make sure that they maintain the financial and moral support of their constituency. When the role matches the expectations of the ENGO’s constituency, resources flow. But if an ENGO drifts too far from the expectations of its constituency, it may lose membership and donations. In the mid-1990s, for example, Greenpeace began to shift toward the core of the network by working with corporations in a less confrontational style. But members and employees became dissatisfied by the shift, and the reputation of the ENGO suffered. To correct this repositioning, the group staged an “eco-commando” action on the Brent Spar oil rig in 1995, being sure that the media were on hand to cover the event. This action reestablished Greenpeace’s confrontational image and moved it from the core back to the periphery of the corporate network.

Creating a Diverse Movement

Network maps that examine ENGOs’ relationships with business are powerful tools for helping ENGO managers consider more coordinated action among one another. They can also be helpful for corporate managers to distinguish among potential ENGO partners. There are many other maps, however, that can be drawn to help clarify the environmental movement. For example, I am conducting a study with Stephanie Bertels, an assistant professor at Simon Fraser University, analyzing the networks created by boards of directors of ENGOs, corporations, and foundations. Other types of network maps could be drawn based on other types of constituent partners in the environmental movement, such as ENGOs’ relationships with the general public, the media, and government policymakers.

The role an ENGO plays in the corporate network may have implications for the role it can play in these other networks, either opening up or closing off opportunities. For instance, playing the

role of Isolate in the corporate network may lend an ENGO credibility or maneuvering room in another network with policymakers or the general public. In the late 1990s, for example, the Sierra Club decided to oppose all logging on all federal lands. This effectively isolated them from negotiations with the government on the topic. But it opened up opportunities to appeal to a broader public by voicing a strong ideological position on the issue. As a result, other ENGOs gained the power to bargain with the government and corporations on logging on federal lands. It all comes down to the constituency an ENGO is trying to reach and the network of other players who are working on a particular issue.

Network mapping helps leaders see the possibilities for coordinated action. It is a powerful tool for visualizing the complexities of a social movement, such as the environmental movement, and developing a strategy that includes all members of the movement. The usefulness of these maps cannot be underestimated for understanding where an organization is and where it is going as part of an overall movement. Armed with that insight, leaders can achieve their organization’s goals more effectively. In the immortal words of Yogi Berra, “You got to be careful if you don’t know where you’re going, because you might not get there.” ■

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Notes

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