

The Politics of the Glen Canyon Dam: Challenging the Status Quo of Water Policy in the West

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The struggle to appropriate Colorado River water, while striving to mitigate the negative impacts of doing so, embodies the very essence of Western water policy. One of its defining controversies is over the Glen Canyon Dam at Lake Powell. During the past decade, groups and individuals have openly opposed the presence and operation of the Glen Canyon Dam. These groups claim that the environmental and cultural costs of the dam outweigh its benefits. State and federal decision makers presently think otherwise. The purpose of this paper is to identify and analyze the actors who are striving to influence policy on the Glen Canyon Dam, their specific arguments, and the effects their efforts have had or likely will have. The paper concludes that while support for the proposal to decommission the dam is growing, it appears unlikely that any political decision to do so will occur in the near future.

INTRODUCTION

For nearly a century, the Colorado River has been at the center of Western water politics. Its drainage basin encompasses seven western states which include Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona and California. As such, it has been the victim of more interstate water policy conflict than perhaps any other river in the West. More recently, an era of environmental policy concern that views dams with ever more scrutiny has focused on some of the Colorado's more controversial water development projects. The biggest culprit, many argue, is the Glen Canyon Dam. Although it was built only 41 years ago, the Glen Canyon Dam is already under fierce fire by some who would like to see it decommissioned and the reservoir behind it drained. Others, such as the state and federal governments and a majority of the populations of the surrounding states, feel otherwise.

The purpose of this work is to identify who the actors trying to influence policy are, analyze their arguments in the context of past and present policy concerning the dam, and assess what impacts their efforts are having or likely will have. Thus, the logical order in which these issues are discussed is (1) Actors, (2) Conditions, (3) Arguments and Behaviors, and (4) Outcomes. The study will conclude that while momentum for decommissioning is growing, it does not appear that any political decisions in favor of doing so will likely be made in the near future; and that if the lake is to be drained, Mother Nature will have to drain it herself.

DISCUSSION

ACTORS

Because the Glen Canyon Dam is tied to the much larger Colorado River System, and because policy on the dam has impacts throughout the system, the number of actors trying to influence policy on the system at large is stifling. However, because the dam is located at the tail end of the upper basin and most of the water withdrawals come from much higher or much lower on the river, those who are directly trying to influence policy on the dam itself are relatively few. In a broad sense, there are certainly numerous actors attempting to influence policy in some small way, but for the purposes of this study, it is the most significant actors that will be discussed.

When building the Glen Canyon Dam was still being debated, during the mid 1950s, the primary actors involved were the congressional delegates from the upper basin states, the Bureau of Reclamation, and the Sierra Club. The delegates, leery of California making use of their water before they could get to it, pushed heavily to get Congress to pass the Colorado River Storage Project, of which the Glen Canyon Dam was a part (Ashley and Jones 2002, 273). During the early 1960s, the Bureau was to some degree still enjoying its glory days of dam building, and Commissioner Floyd Dominy was persistently working to fulfill his dream of entirely harnessing the Colorado River (Martin 1989, 12). The Sierra Club, on the other hand, had crafted a deal with Congress to accept the Glen Canyon Dam and five other dams on the

upper Colorado River, provided that Echo Park and Dinosaur National Monument were left alone (Reisner 1986, 295). Thus, they forfeited the right to protest the construction of the Glen Canyon Dam—a decision that Sierra Club director David Brower would sorely regret.

Once the dam was built, it was only a decade or two before its ecological impacts were being noticed. Because the dam blocked the natural flow and deposition of sediment, and because the water being released from the reservoir was significantly colder than the relatively shallow Colorado River, the ecology of the lower basin began to change. Ultimately interested in the protection and preservation of the Grand Canyon, environmental groups such as the Sierra Club and the Grand Canyon Trust, as well as various river rafting organizations, began hotly contesting the operation of the Glen Canyon Dam (Grand Canyon River Guides 1992). By the mid 1990s, only slightly more than thirty years after the dam's construction, yet convinced that the dam had outlived its purpose and wishing to see the canyon restored to its pristine natural state, Richard Ingebretsen founded the Glen Canyon Institute (GCI) to advocate decommissioning the dam and restoring Glen Canyon (Ingebretsen 2004). Among those immediately getting behind Ingebretsen were former director of the Sierra Club David Brower, former director of the Bureau of Reclamation Dan Beard, and former Bureau of Reclamation scientist Dave Wegner (Peterson 2004a). Each of these men was to become a key component of the GCI's legitimacy.

Of course, efforts to influence policy are never one-sided. Criticisms of the operation and presence of the dam were quickly met with opposition by entities such as the nonprofit group Friends of Lake Powell (FLP). Based out of Page, Arizona, FLP claims to represent the more than three million people who visit Lake Powell each year. They cite the significant economic impact on Page resulting from such an attraction and assert that the economy would be decimated without the motorized water sport industry that the lake draws (FLP "Facts" 2004). Other actors include the Federal Department of Energy's Western Area Power Administration (the agency in charge of marketing and selling power generated by the dam), the Navajo Generating Station (a coal-fired power plant that draws water from the reservoir for its cooling towers), the city of Page, Arizona, and the motorized water recreation industry (Peterson 2004a). Each of these entities has something to lose should the dam be decommissioned.

Decommissioning is also dramatically opposed by the state and federal legislative delegates of Utah and Arizona, who fear the loss of millions of visitors to the Glen Canyon National Recreation Area each year. Perhaps more than anything else, it is votes that these representatives stand to lose should they support decommissioning, since the vast majority of the conservative populace of the surrounding states view decommissioning as radical and are therefore in stark opposition to the proposal.

CONDITIONS

The water rights law that the West was founded on, which formed the groundwork for the conditions that would later surround the Glen Canyon Dam, is called "Prior Appropriations." Its mantra is "first in time, first in right" (Cook 2004). Thus, to keep California from taking all the water in the Colorado before any of the other surrounding states had a chance to secure their shares, the Colorado River Compact (CRC) of 1922 was born. This became the cornerstone for what would later be called the "Law of the River." Essentially, this is a compendium of laws and judicial rulings, over the past century, that directly addresses the rights and allocation of Colorado River water. The CRC divided water allocation into upper and lower basins and provided that each basin be allocated 7.5 million acre feet (maf) of water annually (Colorado River Compact 1922, Article III). It also imposed a duty on the upper basin to deliver a rolling average of 75maf over ten years to the lower basin (Compact 1922, Article III). In other words, the CRC provided that in the event that the flow of the river could not deliver the 7.5maf to each basin in any given year, the upper basin would bear the loss (Compact 1922, Article III). In 1948 the Upper Colorado River Basin Compact was signed, which created the Upper Colorado River Commission and further apportioned the upper basin's annual allotment to its four member states (Bureau of Reclamation 2004). These acts paved the way for the Colorado River Storage Project (CRSP) of 1956, which provided a comprehensive upper basin water resource development plan authorizing the construction of the Glen Canyon Dam and three others as "main stem" or "cash register" dams (Cook 2004). The term "cash register" is used because the CRSP outlines one of their primary purposes as generating power. According to Wayne Cook, former Commissioner of the Upper Colorado River Commission, the sale of the power generated is then used to fund a host of smaller developments for irrigation called "participating" projects, also commissioned by the CRSP (Cook 2004). Thus, without cash register dams, he argues, smaller projects such as the ones that provide water to Utah and Colorado farmers would be nearly impossible (Cook 2004). Therefore, because the Glen Canyon Dam is a cash register dam, one of the biggest challenges that its opponents have had to deal with is its power generation.

In 1970, President Nixon signed the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) (Switzer 2001, 20). This act required the completion of an Environmental Impact Statement for all federal government projects. Because the dam had already been built, no such statement was ever required of it. In 1982, however, in response to a lawsuit by the Environmental Defense Fund, the Bureau of Reclamation ordered the completion of the Glen Canyon Environmental Studies (GCES), of which Dave Wegner (now a GCI board member) was lead scientist (Farmer 1999, 184). At first, the

studies were simply an investigation into the impact of the Glen Canyon Dam on the surrounding environment (National Research Council 1996, 5). However, in 1989, when Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan came under pressure from Congress, which was supported by the science of the GCES, he ordered the completion of an official Environmental Impact Statement on the Dam, thus the GCES served as important groundwork (Peterson 2004a).

The Grand Canyon Protection Act of 1992 was the next major law to affect the dam. On its third run through Congress, it was finally passed as a result of the huge lobbying effort of environmental groups like the Sierra Club as well as numerous river rafting enthusiasts (Grand Canyon River Guides 1992). According to Chris Peterson, executive director of the Glen Canyon Institution, the act had two main purposes. The first was to reemphasize the prior mandate for completion of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and the second was to set forth the health and protection of the Grand Canyon ecosystem as the number one principle for the operation of the dam (Peterson 2004a). The Draft Environmental Impact Statement was put out in 1995, and the Final EIS in 1996 (Grand Canyon Trust 2004). In it were nine different dam operation scenarios; however, not included was the option of decommissioning the dam. In October of 1996, Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt signed the Record of Decision (ROD) which outlined the new flow rules that were chosen based on the “modified low-fluctuating flow” scenario described as one of the nine alternatives (Jacobs and Wescoat 2002, 13). Further, the ROD outlined that an adaptive management technique be applied to the operation of the dam which was to be overseen by two federal advisory committees: the Adaptive Management Work Group and the Technical Work Group. Both committees consist of representatives from a wide range of interests including tribal groups, basin states, environmental groups, recreation interests, federal purchase contractors, and the U.S. Geological Survey (Jacobs and Wescoat 2002, 13). Both groups help administer the adaptive management program and make recommendations to the Secretary of the Interior on how to meet the requirements of the Grand Canyon Protection Act (Jacobs and Wescoat 2002, 13).

This management technique continues today on the Colorado River at the Glen Canyon Dam. However, since the EIS was completed, some, like Richard Ingebretsen, have wondered why the option of decommissioning the dam was not included. This is perhaps a good example, he believes, of only operating within the strict boundaries of the status quo. The Bureau of Reclamation is an agency that builds dams—not destroys them. In fact, the procedure for decommissioning a dam is not even in the Federal Registry (the guidebook for federal operational procedures) (Ingebretsen 2004). The dam damning sentiment is shared by many more than just one rouge Ingebretsen, as it seems to be gaining momentum among many individuals across the nation. In his recent book,

Dam Politics: Restoring America's Rivers, William Lowry chronicles the movement to condemn dams on rivers all over the country including those on the Neuse, Kennebec, Elwa, Clyde, and other rivers (Lowry 2003, 84). Former Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt is perhaps one of the movement's most notable figures. In an article for *Open Spaces Magazine*, Babbitt wrote,

During the New Deal, President Franklin Roosevelt and his Interior Secretary, Harold Ickes, toured the West dedicating dams before large, enthusiastic crowds. Now, at the end of the century, I am out touring the country with a different message—it is time to un-dedicate some of those dams by removing them and letting the rivers run free (1998).

He further noted on another occasion, “I want to be the first secretary to tear down a big dam” (Miller 2000, 168). Surprisingly, however, the Glen Canyon Dam was not to be the one. In July 2000 during a radio interview in Page, Arizona, Secretary Babbitt claimed adamant opposition to any effort to decommission Glen Canyon Dam (Babbitt 2000). A prominent figure in the river restoration movement going against the proposal to decommission the Glen Canyon Dam seemed to many to bolster support for those trying to preserve it.

Despite this, Ingebretsen hopes that the approval to bring down the Elwa Dam in Washington State will set a precedent for federal dam removal that will challenge the status quo for dam policy in the West (Ingebretsen 2004). But “old habits are hard to break,” as they say, and the Elwa is caught up in congressional appropriations limbo and the bill doesn't appear to be coming out anytime soon.

ARGUMENTS AND BEHAVIORS

During the eighties and early nineties, groups like the Sierra Club, the Grand Canyon Trust, the Environmental Defense Fund, Grand Canyon River Guides, and others were largely successful in their lobbying efforts to pass the Grand Canyon Protection Act and push for the completion of the Environmental Impact Study on the Glen Canyon Dam. However, the bulk of political effort in the past decade to reform policy surrounding the dam has been waged by the Glen Canyon Institute. To counter their efforts, there is the group Friends of Lake Powell. Both groups promote their vision of recreation as principle incentives to support their position. Of course, these are not the only groups. As was mentioned earlier, there are stakeholders involved from a range of interests. However, these groups seem to be making the most noise and thus for the purpose of this study became the primary focus.

In 1995, the newly formed GCI invited former director of the Sierra Club David Brower and former Bureau of Reclamation Commissioner Floyd Dominy to the University of Utah to debate the issue. While the spirit of the evening was light hearted, it was obvious that both men still firmly believed in their sides of the issue. Referring to his decision to

let the dam be built in the late fifties in exchange for the salvation of Echo Park, Brower said, "I started building dams at age six. I most enjoyed destroying them. I got over the habit of dam building. Floyd's built some good ones, a few bad ones too. He's made a mistake or two, but so have I" (Farmer 1999, 182).

In October of 1996, the GCI held its second annual conference and it was decided that they would actively seek the decommissioning of the Glen Canyon Dam (Ingebretsen 2004). One month later the Sierra Club board voted unanimously to support the proposal to drain the lake and restore the canyon (Brower 1997). By 1997 the issue was gaining national recognition and Utah Congressional Representative Jim Hansen called for congressional hearings to address the issue. Testimony at those hearings came from a number of stakeholders including congressional and senate representatives from Arizona, Colorado, Utah, and other states, as well as the director of the Sierra Club, the president of Friends of Lake Powell, a representative from Western Area Power Administration, and many other agencies and organizations (Oversight Hearings 1997). The majority of the testimonies given at the hearing were strongly opposed to the proposal, citing that the economic, cultural, recreational, and even agricultural costs would be too heavy (Oversight Hearings 1997). Many, such as Congressmen Hansen and Cannon of Utah, used language bordering on mockery to describe those that favored the proposal. The message was clear: there was absolutely no federal- or state-sponsored support for draining Lake Powell.

Yet Ingebretsen and those in favor claimed the hearings as a relative success, asserting that the meetings brought publicity and credibility to the movement (Ingebretsen 2004). Former commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation Daniel Beard (now board member of the GCI) declared,

There was no mistaking the intent of the hearing.... The Western lawmakers on the panel wanted to use the forum to embarrass those who support restoration of the canyon.... But by holding the hearing in the first place, the panel gave legitimacy to the option of removing the dams because it tacitly admitted that dams are not permanent fixtures of the landscape. They are there because we made a political decision to build them. And they won't last forever (Joseph 1998, 48).

The net result: the dam was there to stay—at least for now.

However, the opponents of the dam were not deterred. The GCI launched a major fact-finding campaign to study some of the issues surrounding the dam that were not addressed in the adaptive management approach for operation. One such issue was the effects of the 1996 experimental floods conducted by the Bureau of Reclamation. Dave Wegner, lead scientist in the experiment, recognized that the outcome was not the success everyone hoped it would be. Unwilling to go before the public and continue what he calls the "misconception," Wegner became black-marked by the Clinton administration. When his position became conve-

niently expendable, and an offer that would have taken him to Guam was not what he was looking for, he resigned (Wegner 2004).

In April 1997, Wegner joined the GCI as a board member and began work on what would become the Citizens' Environmental Assessment (CEA) which was completed under the rules outlined by the National Environmental Policy Act (Ingebretsen 2004). The effort cost the GCI nearly \$250,000 and the document was completed and released by early 2001 (Peterson 2004b). It addressed topics including water loss, sediment deposition, water quality, impacts on ecology, dam safety, electricity production, and a number of other issues (Glen Canyon Institute 2000). The purpose of the CEA was to address the need for action on the decommissioning of the dam by presenting scientific facts. It is the use of science, Executive Director Chris Peterson says, that has moved the reputation of the GCI away from that of "crazy" as it was perceived in its early days, to more progressive, factual, and scientific (Peterson 2004b).

Thus, the GCI has largely crafted its scientific arguments for decommissioning around the data they collected during the completion of the CEA. Their primary arguments are as follows: (1) the dam is no longer needed and the purposes for which it was built can be served by other means; (2) given the evaporative loss and loss due to seepage, the lake is more wasteful than useful; (3) the dam is imposing serious pressure on habitat for native wildlife species such as the humpback chub; and (4) the dam will eventually expire due to sedimentation (Peterson 2005). While several of these arguments seem compelling, even to the skeptical, others counter that they are misguided. It is worth looking at each in detail.

First, the GCI argues that the Glen Canyon Dam and Lake Powell are not necessary. This issue is probably the most difficult to deal with because there are so many factors involved. Indeed, this issue alone could constitute an entire paper if not an entire book. However suffice it to say that the GCI claims that the purposes for which the dam was built, i.e. to store water for upper basin use and allow the upper basin to meet its obligation to the lower basin, can be served by other means. Jane Bird, Deputy Director and General Council for the Upper Colorado River Commission, claims that without the dam, upper basin users would be in serious trouble during times of drought (Bird 2005). During these times, she argues, the upper basin can continue to use up to its full allotment from the CRC and still deliver its obligation to the lower basin because of the stored water behind the Glen Canyon Dam (Bird 2005). Were it not for such stored water, upper basin states would have to curtail their use of Colorado River Water in order to deliver their obligation to the lower basin. This argument only holds weight, counters Peterson, because the amount of water the upper basin delivers to the lower is calculated at Lee's Ferry, just beyond the Glen Canyon Dam (2005). If the CRC were altered, he asserts, so that delivery to the lower basin were calculated as it exited Lake Mead, then

the upper basin could fulfill its obligation and the lower basin could rely on the stored water in Lake Mead during times of drought rather than Lake Powell (Peterson 2005). While this would dramatically decrease the amount of stored water in open reservoirs, Peterson continues, it could be offset by storage in underground aquifers which would also address the problem of evaporative loss (2005). Furthermore, Peterson argues, when the upper basin has finally begun using its full allotment, then there will be no extra water to store in Lake Powell anyway. So in drought conditions, the upper basin would still be required to curtail its use despite Lake Powell (2005).

Second, the GCI, asserts that Lake Powell loses nearly 860,000 maf of water per year due to evaporation and ground seepage (GCI "Frequently Asked Questions" n.d.). This, it claims, is nearly enough to supply Los Angeles for a full year (GCI "Frequently Asked Questions" n.d.). While it is true that a substantial amount of water is lost by evaporation, this is simply the nature of storing water in the desert, counters Bird. She contends that given the deep and narrow nature of the canyon and its high altitude, it loses much less water than is, or would be lost, in other desert locations including Lake Mead (Bird, 2005).

Third, the GCI claims that the dam is placing serious pressure on lower basin habitat for native fish and wildlife and has resulted in the listing of four native fish species as endangered including the humpback chub (GCI 2000, 9). While this fact is not seriously contested, Bird points out that efforts to mitigate and recover endangered habitat by groups like the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program are largely funded by revenues generated by the sale of hydropower from the dam (2005). Without such power revenue, or alternate source of funding, it likely that these programs substantially undermined. Here again, the GCI contends that such recovery efforts would not be nearly as critical if the river were allowed to run unimpeded through Glen Canyon.

Finally, the GCI claims that given the rate of sedimentation behind the dam, it will likely expire much sooner than anticipated. It claims that nearly 100 million tons of sediment are deposited behind Glen Canyon dam each year (GCI "Sediment" n.d.). This sediment is slowly creeping its way up the back of the dam. The GCI predicts that within 150 years, sediment will have reached the height of the penstocks (which allow water to pass through the dam and its turbines creating electricity) rendering them useless (GCI "Sediment" n.d.). Bird contends however that the sediment could simply pass through the four bypass tubes located 96 feet below the penstocks therefore preserving, albeit somewhat decreasing, the dam's ability to generate electricity (2005). Moreover, if the sediment is not trapped by Glen Canyon Dam it would simply get trapped behind Hoover Dam thereby reducing its lifespan. Furthermore, many wonder what can be done with millions of tons of sediment which is in all likelihood, is high-

ly contaminated with hydrocarbons, solvents and other pollutants that are the byproduct of years of motorized recreation if the dam were ever decommissioned.

These are the arguments and controversies that are the result of the scientific approach that the GCI has taken. However, as time passes, the group is taking an increasingly more active role in promoting its normative claims about the value of decommissioning the dam as well. Speaking of the awesome nature of terrain of Glen Canyon—much of which is beginning to reveal itself as the lake level drops due to the current drought—Chris Peterson recently said in an interview, "Glen Canyon needs to be preserved. It is too special a place to store water in" (2005). Over 2000 archeological sites were identified in Glen Canyon before it was flooded (GCI "Citizens' Environmental Assessment" [CEA] 2000, 16). Many of the surrounding Native Americans, including the Hopi and Navajo, believe places like Rainbow Bridge are sacred and have been desecrated by the flooding of Glen Canyon (GCI CEA 2000, 16).

While it is unlikely that anyone would contest that Glen Canyon is an inspiring place, many assert that Lake Powell is equally as valuable. Indeed, Wallace Stegner himself, while politely condemning the dam, acknowledged the magnificence of the lake when he said, "Lake Powell is beautiful.... [T]he contact of deep blue water and uncompromising stone is bizarre and somehow exciting" (Farmer 1999, 171).

Friends of Lake Powell, cite the enormous benefit Lake Powell is to the economy of Page, Arizona (FLP "Facts" 2004). Motorized recreation on the lake and trout fishing below it draw millions of tourists a year to this area (FLP "Facts" 2004). Decommissioning, FLP claims, would decimate this economy (FLP "Facts" 2004). The GCI is not so convinced. They cite the tremendous amount of non-motorized tourism drawn to the Grand Canyon each year (Peterson 2004b). Rafting on the Colorado River in the Grand Canyon is so popular, that finally making it off the waiting list for a permit normally takes more than a decade (Grand Canyon NPS 2005). The GCI projects that with enough publicity, tourists interested in hiking, rafting, kayaking and exploring will be drawn to the area, therefore offsetting the loss from the absence of motorized recreation.

In this vein, the GCI has sought to advance its agenda by leading annual trips to Glen Canyon where it educates people about the impacts of the dam and the beauty of the canyon. It does this by giving guided hiking trips throughout some of Glen Canyon's most impressive destinations. More than perhaps any other one factor, Peterson says, "mother nature" may be the ultimate force in emptying the lake. After several years of severe drought, the lake level right now in Glen Canyon is below forty percent of normal (Peterson 2005). "Mother nature is draining the lake," he says. And the GCI aims to take advantage of that. They are making use of low water levels by showing visitors what the canyon was like before the dam. GCI's hope is that enough people will expe-

rience the canyon at low lake levels so that in wetter years, when the decision is made to fill the lake again, there will be a lot of people “kicking and screaming” (Peterson 2004b).

Living Rivers is an organization that broke off of the GCI but has pursued a more radical course. They have been known to patrol the water above the dam waving flags supporting decommissioning or dressing up in fish suits to protest the dam (the suits represent the endangered humpback chub and other fish in the river). Still other groups, such as American Rivers, while not pursuing action on Glen Canyon Dam specifically, have contributed a great deal to the national movement of river restoration (Anderson 2004).

Friends of Lake Powell, on the other hand, has worked to counter the progress of the Sierra Club and the GCI since 1997. They are committed to a public education and awareness campaign “to promote the social, recreational, environmental and economic benefits of Lake Powell, the Glen Canyon Dam and the surrounding Glen Canyon National Recreation Area” (FLP 2004b).

The group has a rapidly growing membership and claims to represent the millions of visitors that the lake attracts each year. To that end, representatives from FLP testified before the congressional hearings held in 1997 on behalf of such recreation lovers. Larry Tarp, then President of FLP, said in his testimony regarding the Glen Canyon Dam, “We will fight off any attempts by groups that seek to alter its status. We will support environmental improvements and represent the millions of people who love the area” (Tarp 1997). Friends of Lake Powell maintains a Web page devoted to countering claims of the GCI and produces pamphlets that refer to the members of the Sierra Club and Glen Canyon Institute as “radicals,” pushing a “phony, one-sided effort to advance their radical agenda” (FLP “History” n.d.).

Whatever its efforts, it appears that the organization doesn’t have a big chance of losing the lake—at least not by any political maneuvering on the part of the GCI. Since 1999, Representative Chris Cannon of Utah has attached a rider to the federal appropriations bills for the Department of the Interior that would prohibit federal funds from being used to further the cause of decommissioning (Miller 2000, 206). The language in the rider reads, “No funds appropriated for the Department of the Interior by this Act or any other Act shall be used to study or implement any plan to drain Lake Powell or to reduce the water level of the lake below the range of water levels required for the operation of the Glen Canyon Dam” (H.R. 221 2002). This political move, perhaps more than any other, has halted the progress of the proposal to decommission the dam. Without federal funds available to study the concerns raised by public interest groups, no further action can be taken.

OUTCOMES

Though the issue is far from over, and any definite outcomes are difficult to predict, one thing is certain: this is a big issue and its controversy is not going away. Both advocates and

opponents of decommissioning the dam are gaining supporters. Due to the efforts of a few key figures in the river restoration movement, such as Bruce Babbitt, along with congressional hearings on the topic, the politics of the Glen Canyon Dam has become a national issue.

In fact, the decommissioning of the Glen Canyon Dam has, according to Chris Peterson, in many ways become the ultimate conquest of the river restoration movement in the West. This is, he claims, because the Glen Canyon Dam epitomizes the destruction of wilderness by modern resource development (Peterson 2004b). Since the very first days of the dam, many have mourned the loss of Glen Canyon. Indeed, the modern environmental movement itself evolved in part from the Glen Canyon/Echo Park controversy.

Nevertheless, there are many others who view the Glen Canyon Dam and Lake Powell as one of the crown jewels of the West. Indeed, millions visit and millions of dollars are spent enjoying this wonder. Many visitors on both sides of the issue have concerns regarding the environment of the area: they worry about the impacts of draining the lake on the wildlife that has adapted to the lake environment.

In one sense, it seems that the issue is splitting along recreational preference lines. Some would like to see Glen Canyon restored in order to, as they say, experience it the way nature intended—on foot. Others, invested in the relatively expensive sport of motorized boating, with a heavenly place like Lake Powell to visit, do not want to see the lake go.

The battle is thus ongoing. The boaters are satisfied that federal legislation has created a road block for decommissioning, and the hikers and those who wish to see the natural canyon restored are hoping that either an ongoing drought or an ever-increasing support group will be enough to have Representative Cannon’s rider to annual appropriations bills lifted. While it is too early to be certain, the record of ultra-conservative congressional delegates in Utah does not bode well for the GCI. On the other hand, the lake is low and only getting lower.

CONCLUSION

In his article published in the *Stanford Environmental Law Journal*, author Scott Miller properly summarizes the dilemma currently facing policy makers over the Glen Canyon Dam:

Glen Canyon Dam was built on the assumption that it was necessary—period. Backing-up the presumed necessities were many benefits, including boating, trout fishing, river regulation, and power. But no consideration was given to the potential costs of creating Glen Canyon Dam. No environmental impact studies were conducted, no consideration was given to the impacts the dam would have on the downstream ecosystem in the Grand Canyon, no consideration was given to the Native Americans on the Plateau or the Mexicans to the south, and no consideration was given to The Place No One Knew. But the costs have become obvious—at least some of them—and they are farther-reaching than anyone had imagined (Miller 2000, 203).

This is the substance of arguments by proponents of decommissioning. Policy makers have attempted to address some of these issues as is evidenced by the Grand Canyon Protection Act, but other issues remain untouched. Interest groups on both sides of the issue are asking difficult questions and making legitimate arguments. Perhaps the only honest answer is that neither side is totally right or wrong.

However, the issue of decommissioning the Glen Canyon Dam has effectively been framed by Utah politicians as sheer absurdity, and therefore, any attempts to mandate further study of the issue have been blocked. Thus, the assumptions of necessity that Glen Canyon Dam was built on, whether right or wrong, continue to be the assumptions that are dictating policy today. Without a commission to study its necessity, the dam and the lake will stay put. The take-home lesson, then, is that environmental policy is often made by those who sometimes have their minds made up, and until the masses are “kicking and screaming” for decommissioning Glen Canyon Dam, those politicians, their colleagues, and the Congressional Appropriations Committees are unlikely to listen to the cry for reform.

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