

HIJACKING

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

How Pew Charitable Trusts has co-opted the management process using paid-for science and a well-oiled media machine.



late 2006, “Fisheries Face Collapse by 2048!” was the headline read and heard around the world – at least in the world of Washington, DC. It just so happened that Congress was debating the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act at that precise moment. The press stories sighted a study led by Dr. Boris Worm of Dalhousie University.

While objective observers might question elements of the study, it was the media hype that the Pew Charitable Trusts (“Pew” or “the Trust”) wanted out there as part of a carefully orchestrated campaign to influence the Congressional debate on the Nation’s primary fisheries law. Dr. Worm, a regular recipient of funding from Pew, working with SeaWeb, a Pew-funded public research group that specializes in media campaigns, worked on the message and the timing to get as much media coverage as possible. They were successful. Big media loves a crisis, and when you have the money and the manpower it’s easy to plant a good fish tale.

Dr. Worm’s article was quickly labeled by top fisheries scientists and managers for what it really was – a Pew advocacy piece like much of his prior work funded by the Trust. The kicker at the end of the piece calling for “no-fishing marine reserves” as the cure was the final giveaway, a goal high on the agenda of most Pew funded organizations! Worm’s work in the past had been branded “invalid,” “misleading” and “undermining the trust placed in science.” As it turns out this was a textbook study in disseminating misinformation disguised as science to a willing media with the express purpose of influencing Congressional debate. Such scare tactics have become the darling of the radical environmental movement.

The media firestorm was part of a broader, coordinated attack that included misleading ad campaigns aimed at smearing key politicians facing re-election. The targeted Members of Congress just happened to be those involved in crafting scientifically sound legislation that also recognized the needs of recreational fishermen and industry. This campaign was led by another Pew-funded environmental group, the Marine Fish Conservation Network.

The Pew Charitable Trusts is the 800-pound gorilla of ocean issues. Created with funding from the Sun Oil Company and sitting on a \$4.1 billion war chest, it is an organization that refuses to let reality get in the way of their agenda. In public documents their self-mandated mission is to “save” the oceans. They claim that the primary purpose (of the Trust) ‘is to award grants to other organizations as well as direct planning and conducting projects and initiatives that carryout the organizations religious, charitable, scientific, literary and educational purposes.’ This validates that Pew grant recipients are carrying out the ideas and motivations of Pew. The impact of such tactics is changing the direction of fisheries policy. True management and conservation is gradually being replaced by a call to stop all fishing through the use of paid-for science funneled to the media through Pew-financed conduits, and touted by Pew-funded environmental organizations. Much of their agenda is anti-fishing, even on well managed, rebuilt or rebuilding fish stocks, to the point of being little more than a cleverly disguised attack on the public’s access to the ocean. That’s recreational fishermen like us.

For example, Pew funding has enabled ecologists to drive the scientific agenda for the implementation of California’s Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA), which is now on course to close 20% of that state’s waters to recreational fishing. Pew Fellows serve on the Science Advisory Team of the MLPA, where they push closures

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while ignoring current fishery management practices, which, on the West Coast, are already the most restrictive in the world! Fishermen proposed a constructive network of MPA's that exceeded Pew-funded scientific guidelines, but the political faction wanted blood! Their network lobbied the Governor for an even more extreme proposal and now California's angling community is fighting a losing battle to stop a runaway train that is making it harder to find a place to fish.

Pew is a major grant provider to universities and professors in the marine sciences and the major provider of funds to environmental groups that push the party line. Those groups include The National Environmental Trust, Oceana, Earthjustice Legal Defense, the New England Aquarium, the Public Interest Research Group, National Audubon Society, National Resources Defense Council, Sierra Club, Conservation Law Foundation, Marine Conservation Biology Institute, Marine Fish Conservation Network, Wildlife Conservation Society, Friends of the Earth and the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership. Combined, these groups have received over \$200 million of Pew money and most have openly endorsed the implementation of arbitrary no-fishing zones!

The Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership is particularly worrisome. It is attempting to become an umbrella group for sportsman's organizations and has attracted the participation of some fishing organizations with the lure of Pew money. The American Sportfishing Association and the Coastal Conservation Association are among the board members of the Partnership. And when the going got tough during the Magnuson Act reauthorization, they ended up on the same page as the Pew-funded groups.

This is what Congressman Pombo, then chair of the House Resources Committee had to say recently. "Throughout the long process to reauthorize the Magnuson Act the RFA was consistently at the table, insisting on sound conservation policies based on the most accurate science. Their goal was clear, a sustainable fishery so that this generation of recreational fishermen and the following generations would have fish to catch. **Most of the other organizations engaged in this debate had other agendas or were totally missing in action.** At the end of the 109th Congress it was clear to me that the RFA was the only player left insisting on protecting the future of recreational fishing. I will always be grateful to them and respect their tenacity during what proved to be a difficult reauthorization."

Since the implementation of the Sustainable Fisheries Act in 1996 the management of U.S. fisheries, while far from perfect, has become a model for the rest of the world. Yet Pew continues to use scare tactics to drive its agenda domestically while the most egregious problems can easily be found abroad. Their agenda may sound laudable, but the reality is that their goal is to stop fishing. Pew used the money of its well-heeled donors like a school-yard bully during the debate and attacked those who stood in their way. Pew has seriously damaged the ability of recreational fishermen to do what we love to do – go fishing.