

“Constant Pressure, Constantly Applied”: Remembering Bob Witzeman, 1927–2014

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the life and grassroots activism of Bob Witzeman on behalf of indigenous peoples and the environment in the Southwestern United States during the last 45 years. Witzeman’s actions, formula for success, and victories are detailed here to provide time-tested strategies and inspiration. This article is both a tribute to Witzeman’s environmental justice work and an invitation to continue the work that he began.

INTRODUCTION

LONG BEFORE THE LOVE CANAL campaign and the efforts to halt the PCB landfill in Warren County, North Carolina, a group of environmentalists and American Indian activists in Arizona fought the construction during the 1970s and 1980s of largescale and expensive dam, aqueduct, flood control, and irrigation projects that were a part of the United States Bureau of Reclamation’s (USBR) infamous Central Arizona Project (CAP).¹ Dr. Robert (Bob) Witzeman was a key member of what a journalist called the “little people”—relentless conservationists, Yavapai Indians, and citizen taxpayers—who formed a

coalition of organizations to resist the building of the \$1 billion Orme Dam at the confluence of the Salt and Verde Rivers, as well as other CAP projects.² A key component of CAP, Orme Dam would have flooded the Fort McDowell Indian Reservation, home of the Yavapai people, and the

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¹Tom Kuhn, “CAP Canal to Ruin Desert, Hearing Told,” *Arizona Republic* (Phoenix), May 3, 1973; Thomas W. Pew, “Last Squeeze on the Colorado: Central Arizona Project Dooms Wildlife, Rewards Developers,” *Defenders—The Magazine of the Defenders of Wildlife*, August 1975; Maricopa Audubon Society, “Salt River Project Policy Blamed for Flood Damage,” News Release, March 8, 1978; Robert A. Witzeman, “Protection Available ‘Almost Overnight,’” *Phoenix Gazette*, January 15, 1979.

²Mike Tulemello, “Orme Proves ‘Little’ People Can Win,” *Sunday Tribune* (Mesa, Arizona), October 11, 1981. For excellent sources regarding Bob, see: John J. Harrigan, “Ornithologist Fears for Habitat of Rails,” *Arizona Republic* (Phoenix), December 20, 1973; Pew, “Last Squeeze on the Colorado”; “CAP Unneeded, Won’t Be Finished, Foe Says,” *Scottsdale Daily Progress*, October 17, 1977; Ruth Norris, “Audubon People,” *Audubon Magazine*, September 1981; James R. Udall, “Desert Eagles,” *Audubon Magazine* 88 (January 1986), 28; Clay Thompson, “A Fowl Smell: Bird Watchers Follow Their Noses to the Best Spots,” *Phoenix Gazette*, September 17, 1988; Gene Varn, “Audubon Members Insist Organization Not Just for Birds: Focus Is on Worldwide Conservation,” *Arizona Republic* (Phoenix), September 18, 1989, A5; Jim Burns, “Our Riparian Warrior,” *Arizona Republic* (Phoenix), September 7, 2007; “A Life Remembered: Bob Witzeman 1927–2014,” video played at memorial service for Bob Witzeman, 2014; “Robert Allen Witzeman,” Obituary, *Arizona Daily Star* (Tucson), <<http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/tucson/obituary.aspx?pid=172354657>> (accessed August 2, 2015); “Celebration of Life: Bob Witzeman,” memorial service program, Phoenix Zoo, Phoenix, Arizona, December 27, 2014; Editor, “In Memoriam: Robert A. Witzeman, MD (Remembrances Compiled by the Editor),” *Cactus Wrendition* (Maricopa Audubon Society), LXVIII (Winter 2014), 16, <<http://www.maricopaaudubon.org/Wrendition%20Winter%202014.pdf>> (accessed July 3, 2015); Kenn Kaufman, “Monument to a Brave Bird Watcher,” *Bird Watcher’s Digest* (January/February 2015), 18–24.

habitat of rare desert-nesting bald eagle pairs.³ According to historian Ron Schilling, “You had David, represented by the Indians [and] the environmentalists, versus Goliath, which was most of the Arizona congressional delegation [and] the major water officials in the county and state governments.”⁴ With Bob’s invaluable leadership, help, advisement, and activism, the “little people” ultimately won, defeating the Orme Dam project and thus creating one of the most inspiring come-from-behind environmental and indigenous rights victories in U.S. history.

Following the victory against the Orme Dam, Bob and his allies went on to criticize, critique, and ultimately beat other CAP projects.⁵ As a result of his efforts, Bob was one of the most successful and outspoken environmental justice activists of the last 40 years, particularly in the American Southwest. He died in August 2014. This essay considers Bob Witzeman’s grassroots initiatives and ends with a call for action.⁶

DISCUSSION

The victory against the Orme Dam and other CAP schemes set Bob on a course that would pit him against the largest names in politics, economic development, and scientific research during the last 40 years of his life. Indeed, Bob had a knack for confronting, educating, and oftentimes scolding politicians such as Arizona Governor Bruce Babbitt, Representatives Jim Kolbe and Morris K. Udall, and Senators Barry Goldwater, Dennis DeConcini, Jon Kyl, and John McCain. “The C.A.P. is socialism for all the freeloaders at the Federal water trough,” proclaimed Bob. He frequently criticized large governmental organizations.⁷ “I get angry when these well-financed

special interests lie to the public about their intentions,” Bob stated. “Righteous indignation sets in when I see the [USBR] use our tax dollars to destroy a river in order to line the pockets of some wealthy real estate developers.”⁸ He loved to spoil their plans. Few government organizations, politicians, engineers, government agencies, developers, mining companies, ranchers, timber industries, or universities were spared Bob’s critique.⁹

Bob eventually took on an active role in the Maricopa Audubon Society (MAS), a Phoenix-based local chapter of the National Audubon Society.¹⁰ Although he was born and raised in Ohio, he moved to Arizona in 1958 and became busy starting his medical practice in anesthesiology. As he told an *Audubon Magazine* reporter in 1981, “I’m just a birdwatcher who got into [activism] by accident.”¹¹ Bob learned the language of scientists and economists in order to win arguments and effectively utilize the media. He knew the law and the full particulars of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Endangered Species Act, legislation that was passed just as Bob was taking a more active and activist role in conservation.¹² According to his wife Janet, “with the passage of NEPA, he had a tool to help in the fights by being able to answer environmental impact statements and sometimes going to court.”¹³ He became president of MAS in June 1973 and served in that capacity until May 1979, when he became conservation chairman, a position that he held until his death more than 35 years later. Bob retired from his medical practice in March 1986 “so he could devote all his time to conservation battles.”¹⁴

³Robert Witzeman, *Press Releases of the Maricopa Audubon Society and its Friends and Allies, 1973–1991*, vol. 1 (Phoenix: Maricopa Audubon Society, 2014), 14, <<http://www.maricopaudubon.org/Press%20Releases.html>> (accessed July 3, 2015).

⁴PBS, “Orme Dam.” Frank Welch makes the same claims: Central Arizona Project, “Oral History Transcripts: Frank Welch.” June 22, 2006, 4, <<http://www.cap-az.com/about-us/oral-history-transcripts>> (accessed August 5, 2015).

⁵Keith Bagwell, “Need for New Dam Disputed,” *Daily Progress* (Scottsdale, AZ), August 5, 1982; Mary A. M. Gindhart, “Cliff Dam’s Demise Reverses Mind-set On Water Projects,” *Arizona Republic*, June 28, 1987; Carolina Butler, author interview, August 5, 2015; Central Arizona Project, “Oral History Transcripts: Bruce Babbitt”; Robert Witzeman, “Statement of Robert Witzeman, M.D., 4-16-85 to Governor’s Committee on Plan 6 Funding,” 1–4; Bob Witzeman, “Cliff Dam Goes to Court and Congress,” *Cactus Wrendition* (Maricopa Audubon Society), September–October 1985, 8–9; UPI, “Cliff Dam Foe Urges House Panel to Halt It,” *Phoenix Gazette*, April 11, 1986, B9, E5; Chris Gehlker, “Tribute to Bob Witzeman,” *Canyon Echo* (Sierra Club, Grand Canyon Chapter), October 1999, 3.

⁶Bob’s memorial service card included a favorite quotation of his by Margaret Mead (“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has”). “Celebration of Life.”

⁷Iver Peterson, “Arizona Cheers as Canal Carries Colorado River Water to Phoenix,” *New York Times*, November 17, 1985, 26. See also Doug Frerichs, “Audubon Society to Monitor Bird Habitat During Dam Work,” *Phoenix Gazette*, [n.d.] May 1989.

⁸“One Gung-ho Individual Can Make All the Difference,” *Audubon Activist*, September 1986, 12.

⁹Bob Witzeman, “Rancher Subsidies Hit Consumers Twice,” *Arizona Republic*, April 26, 1991, A13; Robert Witzeman, “Why We Need the Endangered Species Act,” *Arizona Wildlife News* 37 (Spring 1996), 8–9; Bob Witzeman, “Leave Our Burned Trees Alone, Smoky: Burned, Remnant Trees Important to Forest Health, Bird Species,” *Canyon Echo* (Sierra Club, Grand Canyon Chapter), March 1997; Bob Witzeman, “The Great Forest Health Myth,” *Cactus Wrendition* (Maricopa Audubon Society), n.d. [1997?], 5; Robert Witzeman, “Bring Mount Graham into Much Sharper Focus,” *Columbus Dispatch*, January 19, 1998; Bob Witzeman, “Mines Don’t Pay Fee,” *Arizona Republic*, May 15, 1998.

¹⁰Janet Witzeman to author, e-mails, May 25, June 3, July 1, 2015; Cile Rice, author interview, July 29, 2015.

¹¹Norris, “Audubon People.”

¹²Bob Witzeman, “Endangered Species Act at the Crossroads,” *Cactus Wrendition* (Maricopa Audubon Society), November–December 1990; Witzeman, “Why We Need the Endangered Species Act”; Bob Witzeman, “Endangered Species Act Under Attack,” *Cactus Wrendition* (Maricopa Audubon Society), Winter 2004, 5; Robert Witzeman, “Act Helped Save Falcon,” *Arizona Republic*, November 29, 1999, B6. Bob also wrote at least three separate updates regarding Oak Flat, the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA): Bob Witzeman, “National Audubon Society at the Crossroads,” *Cactus Wrendition* (Maricopa Audubon Society), Winter 2004, 9; Winter 2005, 6–7; Fall 2005, 6–7; Bob Witzeman, “Rep. Gosar Removes NEPA Oversight from Oak Flat Land Swap,” *Cactus Wrendition* (Maricopa Audubon Society), Fall 2011, 13–14; Bob Witzeman, “Oak Flat Update,” *Cactus Wrendition* (Maricopa Audubon Society), Winter 2013, 14.

¹³Janet Witzeman to author, e-mail, June 3, 2015.

¹⁴Robert A. Witzeman, “Dear Colleague,” letter, May 25, 1986; Janet Witzeman to author, e-mail, June 3, 2015.

One of Bob's greatest and longest lasting campaigns was against the University of Arizona (UA) and its research partners, including the Vatican, German and Italian research institutes, and U.S. universities.¹⁵ In the 1980s, UA astronomers and other research scientists selected Mount Graham, a sacred place to Western Apache people and ecologically unique mountain in Arizona, as the site for new astrophysical development, including a large telescope inappropriately named the Columbus Project. Bob was an early opponent of UA's efforts. He began speaking out publically about Mount Graham in early 1987—a delay brought about because of his retirement from practicing medicine.¹⁶ He lobbied elected officials, created thick spiral-bound press packets, and travelled throughout the U.S. and Europe to attempt to stop this project.¹⁷ He paid for Western Apache people to travel globally and meet with elected officials, government agencies, scientists, and university administrations, among other people. Bob helped to launch what was at the time the largest coalition of environmental and indigenous rights organizations in the U.S. It would be difficult today to imagine any living Mount Graham red squirrels, one of the most imperiled mammals on the planet, without Bob's efforts and organizing abilities.¹⁸ Although three telescopes were ultimately built, the astronomer's grand plans were curtailed.¹⁹

Bob was at the forefront of every single major environmental and human rights struggle and victory in the

Southwest from the early 1970s onwards.²⁰ In fact, he did not take a break from environmental justice related work from at least 1972, when he read his first Environmental Impact Statement regarding the Orme Dam construction, until he died in 2014.²¹ According to his wife, he “moved from Orme to Cliff, to Mt. Graham, to the copper mine at Oak Flat and at the same time—many fights concerning logging of old growth forests, grazing, roads through important wildlife habitat.”²² Bob helped to stop the construction of Orme and Cliff dams, as well as Charleston, Conner, Hooker, and Buttes dams, the Kofa Power Lines, and the Rio Verde Road. Among many other initiatives, he worked with MAS to make certain that the Topock Marsh was not dredged, that the Spur Cross Exchange was halted, and that grazing on the Salt and Verde Rivers was altered to aid bald eagles. He worked tirelessly to ensure that Maricopa County voters rejected the Rio Salado Taxing District.²³ In the case of astrophysical development on Mount Graham, with which Bob concerned himself for the last 30 years of his life, the number of telescopes was limited to three from over 17 planned. Many universities dropped their participation in the project because of Bob's organizing.²⁴

His track record of protecting indigenous people's land and riparian areas (bird habitat along the banks of a river, within in a desert landscape) is likely unparalleled in the Southwest.²⁵ Scott Burge, a longtime friend of Bob's, said, in the case of Hooker, Charleston, and Buttes dams, “they were proposed but never authorized.” However, said Burge, “[USBR] was intent on having Cliff Dam built and when that failed, there was no chance the other dams would be authorized by Congress. Bob had already written about the negative aspects of those dams.” According to Burge, USBR officials “knew that if they tried to push for them, they would find Bob sitting on the court house steps.”²⁶ As Burge put it, “[Bob] changed the face of Arizona. Without him, Arizona would have been dramatically different.”²⁷

From the headquarters in his house or “war room,” as he referred to it, he launched assaults on any politician, businessman, company, or government agency that threatened human and indigenous rights, the environment, or protected

¹⁵See Joel T. Helfrich, “A Mountain of Politics: The Struggle for *dzìł nchaa si'an* (Mount Graham), 1871–2002” (PhD dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2010); Joel T. Helfrich, “Cultural Survival in Action: Ola Cassadore Davis and the Struggle for *dzìł nchaa si'an* (Mount Graham),” *Native American and Indigenous Studies Journal*, 1 (Fall 2014) 151–175.

¹⁶Denise E. Swibold, “Mount Graham Preferred as Site for Radio Telescope,” *Arizona Daily Wildcat* (University of Arizona), October 28, 1983, 1; Robert A. Witzeman to R. B. Tippeconnic, letter, January 15, 1987; Ward Harkavy, “In Love With the Squirrel,” *Phoenix New Times*, September 6–12, 1989; Doug Frerichs, “Mount Graham: Foes Plan ‘Holy War’ to Block Telescope,” *Phoenix Gazette*, January 24, 1990.

¹⁷Bob created the best collections of documents relating to Mount Graham: Mt. Graham Coalition, *Living Land, Sacred Land (The Case Against the Mt. Graham Observatory)*, self-published compendium, 1995; Mt. Graham Coalition, *Mt. Graham—A Vulnerable Old-Growth Summit Boreal Forest—An Irreplaceable Cradle of Evolution*, self-published compendium, September 2002. Various lobbying packets were filled with Bob's handwritten notes, as were the 12,000 documents he kept in his files that pertained only to Mount Graham.

¹⁸Robert A. Witzeman, “Protect Mt. Graham,” letter to editor, *Scottsdale Arizona Progress*, September 28, 1988, 5; Robert A. Witzeman, “No Rush on Scopes,” letter to editor, *Phoenix Gazette*, September 29, 1988, 5; Bob Witzeman, “Mt. Graham Red Squirrel at the Crossroads,” *Arizona Wildlife News*, August 1989.

¹⁹For comments from Bob regarding Mount Graham, see: Keith Bagwell, “Mt. Graham Squirrels Face Starvation in Winter, Group Says,” *Arizona Daily Star*, September 13, 1989, 2B; Douglas Kreutz, “Red Squirrels Need Feeding, Official Says,” *Arizona Daily Star*, September 22, 1989; Dawn Grimes, “45 Hold Rally at Smithsonian to Protest Mt. Graham Scopes,” *Arizona Daily Star*, February 7, 1990; R. Gustav Niebuhr, “Heavenly Plan Pits a Graceful Squirrel Against Holy See,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 1, 1990, A1; Bob Downing, “Red Squirrels Threaten Giant Telescope Project,” *Akron Beacon Journal*, July 7, 1991, A1, 8–9.

²⁰Editor, “In Memoriam: Robert A. Witzeman, MD (Remembrances Compiled by the Editor),” *Cactus Wrendition* (Maricopa Audubon Society), LXVIII (Winter 2014), 16, <<http://www.maricopaadubon.org/Wrendition%20Winter%202014.pdf>> (accessed July 3, 2015).

²¹Bob Witzeman, “Verde River Tour Planned,” *Phoenix Gazette*, October 18, 1973.

²²Janet Witzeman to author, e-mail, June 3, 2015.

²³Mary A. M. Gindhart, “Rio Salado's Deal with Audubon Society Miffs Rock Industry,” *Arizona Republic*, August 21, 1987; Witzeman, “Statement of Robert Witzeman,” 2–4.

²⁴Helfrich, “A Mountain of Politics,” 209–221.

²⁵Scott Burge, “Forward—A Look Back at the Last Millennium: Maricopa Audubon Society's Conservation Accomplishments,” in Witzeman, *Press Releases*, vol. 1, 1–2; Burns, “Our Riparian Warrior.”

²⁶Janet Witzeman to author, e-mail, July 29, 2015.

²⁷Burge, author interview, August 4, 2015. See Bob's comments regarding the Glen Canyon Dam: Tensie Whelan, “Glen Canyon Dam: Selling the Environment Down the River,” *Audubon Activist*, November/December 1989, 5.

places in Arizona. Armed with a station for sending out mailings, a typewriter, rows of file folders and boxes, and eventually a fax machine, copier, and computer, Bob was able to take on and often slay giants. Bob testified at numerous hearings by the Forest Service (USFS), Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and Arizona Game and Fish Department, among others, according to his wife.²⁸ “I never met anyone like Bob,” stated Burge. “He would go to any public meeting with a politician, municipal government, anywhere, grab the podium, and take over.”²⁹

Bob was regularly recognized for his grassroots activism. According to a biographical sketch at the time, “through an aggressively educational campaign to the public on the environmental, social and economic fallacies of Orme Dam,” Bob was able to defeat the project, despite opposition from the “entire [Arizona] Congressional delegation . . . and the largest newspaper in the state.” The *Phoenix New Times* praised Bob in its 1984 yearbook as a “dissident” and effective “troublemaker.” In 1999, the Southwest Forest Alliance, Center for Biological Diversity, Sierra Club, and Audubon Society presented Bob with a lifetime achievement award. In her letter to various supporters, environmental activist Anne Carl wrote, “Bob has made all the right people feel uncomfortable.” Throughout the rest of his life, he participated in the annual Orme Dam Victory Days parade and celebration on the Fort McDowell Yavapai Indian Reservation.³⁰

²⁸Janet Witzeman to author, e-mail, June 3, 2015.

²⁹Burge, author interview, August 4, 2015.

³⁰Rocky Mountain Center on Environment, “Environmental Awards” program, Denver, Colorado, October 17, 1977, cover, 4–5; “Orme Dam Protestor Chosen for Award,” *Arizona Republic* (Phoenix), October 16, 1977; “Environment Award Winners Named,” *Denver Post*, October 20, 1977; “CAP Unneeded, Won’t Be Finished, Foe Says”; press clipping, *Wildlife Views*, April 1979, 9; Norris, “Audubon People”; Victor Dricks, “This Is a Story About . . .,” *Phoenix Gazette*, May 22, 1982; State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry, “Announcing the 1983 Sol Feinstone Environmental Awards” program, 1983; n.a., “Biographical Sketch,” n.d. [likely 1982]; *Phoenix New Times*, “Troublemakers: The Gang of Six Has Let the Air Out of Some Big Tires,” *Best of Phoenix 1984 Yearbook*, 34; Eagle Foundation, “Bald Eagle Person of the Year Award,” brochure, 11; Jay Brasher to Dr. Robert A. Witzeman, letter, May 5, 1988; Robert A. Witzeman, “Thirsty, Costly Cotton Gulping Up Precious Water,” *Phoenix Gazette*, May 5, 1988. See also Robert A. Witzeman, “A Lot of Hairs Split in Defense of Farmers,” *Arizona Republic*, March 18, 1989; “Verde River, Arizona” (June 1990), *1990 Calendar of the American Rivers*; Anne Carl, “Dear Environmental Colleague,” confidential letter, [n.d., likely April 1999]; Brock Evans to Anne Carl, letter, May 5, 1999; Steve Yozwiak, “Retired Physician Honored for Environmental Work,” *Arizona Republic*, May 12, 1999, B3; Ace Peterson, “Conservation Awards 1999,” *Arizona Wildlife News*, Summer 1999, 10; Bob Witzeman, “Science without Humanity: The Mt. Graham Telescope Project,” *Cactus Wrendition* (Maricopa Audubon Society), L (Winter 2002–2003), 8, <http://www.maricopaaudubon.org/web-content/audubon-wrendition/cactus_wren_winter02-03-pg7-8.htm> (accessed June 30, 2015); Bob Witzeman, “Science without Humanity: The Mt. Graham Telescope Project,” *Arizona Wildlife News* (Arizona Wildlife Federation), 45 (Winter 2003), 4, <<http://www.nwfaffiliates.org/sites/azwildlife.org/ht/a/GetDocumentAction/i/60928>> (accessed June 30, 2015).

He mailed thousands of often lengthy letters, as well as massive lobbying packets, to elected officials, journalists, activists, and allies. According to Carolina Butler, a longtime friend and fellow activist against the Orme Dam, in terms of letter writing, “Nobody beats Bob.”³¹ Congressmen Udall and Kolbe, and Senators DeConcini and McCain, among many others, all have letters from Bob in their archives. He was on a first-name basis with many elected officials and Bob could be extremely persuasive. Bob was “completely at peace with himself. He had his eye on the ball and the ball was the world can be a better place,” as Burge saw it. Furthermore, “he knew that the politicians had a thousand issues and he had one [issue] and all of his contacts, so he knew he could win”—a great strategy that worked well for him.³²

During the last 45 years of his life, Bob published hundreds of op-eds and letters to the editor, and faxed countless press releases to his media contacts. For 35 years, Bob wrote the conservation opinion columns for MAS’s newsletter, the *Cactus Wrendition*.³³ He always looked at the larger picture of any environmental issue.³⁴ With regards to the dams that were part of CAP, Bob wrote or assisted with more than 120 press releases from 1973 until 1986.³⁵ Bob created MAS’s first news release in 1973.³⁶ According to Janet Witzeman, “He wrote fund raising brochures and we had many mailing parties at our house to send them out along with envelopes asking for money to help pay lawyers and print brochures. He passed out postcards at meetings and environmental events—getting people to write to their congressman or the [USFS] or BLM etc.” His letters were published in major daily newspapers, including the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*.³⁷ After having the same letter published

³¹Carolina Butler, author interview, August 5, 2015. See Carolina Butler, ed., *Oral History of the Yavapai* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015).

³²Burge, author interview, August 4, 2015; Norris, “Audubon People.”

³³For all of Witzeman’s columns in the *Cactus Wrendition* since 2000, see <<http://www.maricopaaudubon.org/nwsltr.html>> (accessed July 3, 2015). See also Bob Witzeman, “Efficiency Makes Sense,” *Arizona Republic*, March 26, 1991; Bob Witzeman, “Another Perspective on Forest Restoration,” *Arizona Conservation Voter*, Fall 2000; Bob Witzeman, “‘Pre-Settlement Restoration’—The Trojan Horse of the Logging Industry,” *Canyon Echo* (Sierra Club, Grand Canyon Chapter), May–June 2001, 3; Robert Witzeman, “Recipe for Disaster,” *Arizona Republic*, June 14, 2003, B9; “Dragons Can Fly at the Riparian Preserve,” *Gilbert Republic*, July 25, 2005.

³⁴See, for example Dale Hajek, “Off-Roaders Assail Proposal: Clinton Plan Would Limit Forest Access,” *Arizona Republic*, January 6, 2000.

³⁵Witzeman, *Press Releases*, vol. I; Robert Witzeman, *Press Releases of the Maricopa Audubon Society and Its Friends and Allies, 1991–2008*, vol. II (Phoenix: Maricopa Audubon Society, 2014).

³⁶Witzeman, *Press Releases*, vol. I, 3–5.

³⁷Robert A. Witzeman, “Long List of Opponents to Telescope Project,” letter to editor, *Wall Street Journal*, July 6, 1990, A7; Robert Witzeman, “Where Buffalo Roam, the Peace Is Fragile,” letter to editor, *New York Times*, August 30, 1999, A19.

in four separate newspapers, Bob beamed, “It never hurts to send the same letter to all the papers.”³⁸

Witzeman filed Freedom of Information Act requests and cultivated friendships with a number of secret informants—some of whom he communicated with for decades. These were “inside” women and men—for example, biological scientists, researchers, astronomers, engineers, attorneys, and university professors—who provided him intel regarding, among other things, the machinations of UA leaders, astronomers, and politicians, as well as fudged building costs and astronomical studies. “Graduate students funneled him information. They knew about this older guy named Bob who did conservation work,” stated Burge. “Bob taught me that enemy identification is the key. We got secret memos all the time. They would be hostile to you in public meetings, then funnel materials to you after the fact, as long as you had not impugned their honor or insulted their character.”³⁹

No person seemed to know more about how to deal with the media. He would send out fax blasts and sign-on letters that included nearly every single major environmental organization in the world. He maintained a list of media contacts that he would put to good use anywhere he traveled. In fact, he seemed willing to go anywhere for causes in which he believed. Lawyer Brock Evans of the Endangered Species Coalition wrote, “one incident stands out as a supreme example of Bob’s total commitment to fight for his vision, whatever it takes. It was January 1996,” according to Evans, who was giving a speech in Columbus, Ohio. “As I was getting ready, I looked around the room and saw a familiar, yet totally out of context, face in the audience—Bob Witzeman!”⁴⁰

In 2002, Bob spoke during a rally in Phoenix to protest ongoing ecological destruction caused by Glen Canyon Dam and stresses placed on the Colorado River.⁴¹ The Living Rivers/Colorado Riverkeeper organization stated that “he ended his speech with advice for forcing action from the powers-that-be: ‘Constant pressure, constantly applied.’”⁴² Bob commented, “Don’t expect to win

overnight. And don’t focus on minor setbacks. Keep your eyes on the big picture.” Furthermore, Bob stated, “Sometimes you’ll lose an area but make tremendous gains in public awareness and support. Use that to win the next one,” he urged. In other places, Bob urged, “You have to be motivated to motivate others. Then let everyone play to their skills, whether they be speakers, writers, or organizers.” As Bob put it, environmental justice work is “a never-ending process. The only way to stay sane is to make it fun.”⁴³

Bob possessed an inexhaustible amount of energy—coupled with a tireless work ethic—that afforded him the ability to harness many of the skills in an activist’s tool-belt.⁴⁴ As climate change activists Hilary Moore and Joshua Kahn Russell wrote in their indispensable pamphlet, *Organizing Cools the Planet*, activists generally fall into one or a few of seven distinct organizing roles. Bob arguably had the skills to be considered a representative for all seven, sometimes in overlapping ways. He represented “direct support people” through his work for and with organizations such as MAS, Committee to Save the Fort McDowell Reservation, Citizens Concerned About the Project, Mount Graham Coalition, Apache Survival Coalition, and Apaches for Cultural Preservation, among many others. Bob was a “movement servicer” who offered specific skill sets such as his knowledge of law, research expertise, and media literacy to assist “different groups, networks, and institutions.” He was clearly an “amplifier” who was able to engage “political networks [and] media to highlight movement work and put pressure on targets.” Some of Bob’s best work was as a “bridge” who worked “at the intersections of different . . . movements,” such as that of indigenous and human rights and environmental groups. Indeed, while working with indigenous communities, he was able to build the largest U.S. coalition of native peoples and environmentalists at the time. He was a “mobilizer” who was able to “leverage broader networks [including large environmental and indigenous peoples’ organizations] to flex their muscles when needed,” even when he did not live in the areas about which these struggles were being waged. As a birdwatcher and photographer, as well as a superb writer, speaker, and storyteller, he acted as a “cultural worker” who was able to amplify stories and do so in careful and accountable ways. Lastly, he was a “community organizer” who embedded himself within various communities and stayed “for the long haul.”⁴⁵ Bob was “democracy in action,” the true embodiment of astounding citizenship and public ethics. One of his last actions taken on behalf of the environment and indigenous peoples was to create a poster for Salt River Indian Community Earth Day event in April 2014.

³⁸Robert Witzeman, “Ignoring Laws May Result in Extinction of Squirrels,” letter to editor, *Arizona Republic*, July 15, 1989; Robert Witzeman, “UofA Project Hurts,” letter to editor, *Phoenix Gazette*, July 21, 1989; Robert Witzeman, “Mountain Harmony,” letter to the editor, *Tempe, Mesa, Chandler Tribunes*, July 23, 1989; Robert Witzeman, “Environmental End Run,” letter to editor, *Tucson Citizen*, July 27, 1989.

³⁹Burge, author interview, August 4, 2015.

⁴⁰Evans to Carl, letter.

⁴¹See Russ Hemphill, “Powerful Thirst: Demand to Exceed Limits on River,” *Phoenix Gazette*, April 10, 1990, A1–2.

⁴²“Grand Canyon: Phoenix Takes Action,” *Living Rivers Currents* (Living Rivers/Colorado Riverkeeper), February 1, 2002, <<http://www.livingrivers.org/archives/article.cfm?NewsID=255>> (accessed June 30, 2015); “Grand Canyon: Challenging Adaptive Management,” *Living Rivers Currents* (Living Rivers/Colorado Riverkeeper), 2 (February 2002), 2, <http://www.livingrivers.org/pdfs/LRC_v2_n2.pdf> (accessed June 30, 2015). Activist and lawyer Brock Evans uses the phrase “Endless Pressure Endlessly Applied.” See <<http://brockevans.org/>> (accessed June 30, 2015). In 1999, Evans wrote, “As I am fond of saying, [Bob is] the finest exponent I know if our environmental formula for guaranteed success—endless pressure, endlessly applied.” Evans to Carl, letter.

⁴³“One Gung-ho Individual,” 12–13.

⁴⁴Burge, author interview, August 4, 2015.

⁴⁵Hilary Moore and Joshua Kahn Russell, *Organizing Cools the Planet: Tools and Reflections to Navigate the Climate Crisis* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2011), 25, <<https://organizingcoolstheplanet.wordpress.com/get-copies-of-ocp/>> (accessed June 26, 2015).

CONCLUSION: THE FIGHT BOB DID NOT LIVE TO WIN

During the last decade of his life, Bob was tirelessly working to protect Oak Flat (or Chich'il Bildagoteel in the Apache language), an area within Tonto National Forest that is sacred to Western Apache people. Since "time immemorial," Western Apaches have travelled to Oak Flat in order to conduct religious activities and girls' coming-of-age ceremonies. Oak Flat is also a valuable riparian area that is cherished by birders.⁴⁶ Bob was angry that McCain marginalized Western Apaches again and attempted an end run for a private mining company against an incredibly important ecological area that was significant and unique enough that both Presidents Dwight Eisenhower and Richard Nixon protected it.⁴⁷ Indeed, in 1955, Eisenhower signed Public Land Order 1229, which placed this land off limits to future mining activity.

After Bob's death, Arizona politicians gave large portions of this federal forest, including Oak Flat, to an international copper mining company, in exchange for degraded privately held land elsewhere in Arizona. The Arizona delegation attached a rider to a must-pass military appropriations bill in Congress that privatized 2,400 acres of this federal land. That Arizona's congressional delegation was unable to give the land away until after Bob's death speaks volumes about his abilities as an adversary.⁴⁸ "Bob is the only one in the conservation community who actually went out and investigated these places and found them to be degraded and worthless." Indeed, "Bob visited these sites and took photos and found them to be overgrazed, bone dry riverbeds with no riparian values," according to Janet Witzeman.⁴⁹

Bob had a tell it like it is attitude and was willing to call out the hypocrisy of the organizations he supported, such as Audubon Arizona (AA), the Nature Conservancy, and the Sonoran Institute. "It seems everybody is being bought off," exclaimed Bob.⁵⁰ Bob asked, "Were you

aware the National Audubon office in Phoenix (it's called Audubon Arizona) favors the RCC [Resolution Copper Company and Rio Tinto] mine land swap and has been bought off by their cash contributions to them?" The reason as Bob saw it was because of the money. "AA has published in their newsletters the hundreds of thousands of dollars the mine has given them annually in charitable contributions. It amounts to way over \$300,000. ... And National Audubon will receive some \$5,000,000 or so worth of land (some 1,000 acres) to add to their NAS research ranch in Elgin, Arizona, from RCC if the land swap is consummated." Wrote Bob, "What a tragedy to think Audubon is prostituting themselves and destroying an irreplaceable riparian and ecological treasure in GAAN (Devil's) Canyon and an extraordinary USFS campground wetland ecosystem removed permanently from mining by Eisenhower and Nixon."⁵¹ Bob proclaimed, "We would be brain dead to believe that the money they've given to Audubon Arizona doesn't have anything to do with the land exchange. ... It's a red flag."⁵²

Bob was clearly ahead of the times. The concerns he raised in the 1970s about dam construction and the USBR have been supported in the recent past as various citizens and public officials have called for the abolishment of the USBR, a halt on any new dam projects, the elimination of government subsidies for desert agriculture, and even the removal of Glen Canyon Dam.⁵³ He certainly would have involved himself against plans to build new dams and reservoirs in Alaska, Colorado, and Texas.⁵⁴

Bob created and actively pursued a clear formula for success: intense and scrupulous research, enemy identification, no boundaries on range of values linked to an issue (as basis for recruitment of diverse allies; for example, he was willing to work with groups as diverse as Earth First!, native tribes, and hunting organizations), coalition building (he was willing to work with anyone or any group, so long as they agreed with him on the issue about which he was fighting), willingness to experiment and take calculated risks, deep personal engagement coupled with strategic and lateral thinking, educating the public, and endless pressure. This formula has been applied to a certain extent in the fight for Chich'il Bildagoteel, but it is

⁴⁶Bob Witzeman to Vernelda Grant, e-mail, "RE: Oak Flat/ Apache Leap Resolution Copper Bill," April 29, 2005.

⁴⁷Ryan Van Velzer, "Arizona Copper Mine Stirs Debate Pitting Profits vs Religion," *Yahoo News*, July 2, 2015, <<http://news.yahoo.com/arizona-copper-mine-stirs-debate-pitting-profits-vs-060945912-finance.html>> (accessed July 3, 2015).

⁴⁸Robert A. Witzeman to Congressman Harry Mitchell, letter, March 30, 2009, in *Cactus Wrendition* (Maricopa Audubon Society), LIX (Summer 2009), 3, <<http://www.maricopaaudubon.org/Wrendition%20Summer%2009.pdf>> (accessed July 1, 2015).

⁴⁹Janet Witzeman to author, e-mail, July 29, 2015. See his report here: <<http://www.mining-law-reform.info/landswap.htm>> (accessed October 25, 2015). Janet Witzeman to author, e-mail, June 3, 2015; Bob Witzeman, "Land Swap Threatens Our Public Lands: Oak Flat Campground on the Chopping Block," 2-sided flyer, n.d.; Bob Witzeman, "Devil's Canyon, Riparian Masterpiece Threatened by a Mine," 2-sided flyer, n.d.; Witzeman, "National Audubon Society at the Crossroads," Winter 2004, Winter 2005, and Fall 2005; Maricopa Audubon Society, "The Proposed Oak Flat Land Exchange," flyer, 2005; Bob Witzeman, "MAS Defends Cultural and Environmental Education," *Cactus Wrendition* (Maricopa Audubon Society), Spring 2007, 12–13; Witzeman, "Rep. Gosar"; Witzeman, "Oak Flat Update."

⁵⁰"LAND Outdoor Exchange," *Arizona Republic*, April 18, 2005.

⁵¹Bob Witzeman to author, e-mail, October 8, 2010. See also Witzeman, "National Audubon Society at the Crossroads," Winter 2004, Winter 2005, and Fall 2005; Witzeman, "MAS Defends Cultural and Environmental Education."

⁵²Jennifer Johnson, "Company Seeking Copper Mine Forges Pact with Town, Stakeholder Groups," *Cronkite News*, December 30, 2010, <<http://cronkitenewsonline.com/2010/12/company-seeking-copper-mine-forges-agreements-alliances-with-groups/>> (accessed November 2, 2015).

⁵³Daniel P. Beard, *Deadbeat Dams: Why We Should Abolish the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and Tear Down Glen Canyon Dam* (Johnson Books, 2015); J. E. O'Connor, J. J. Duda, and G. E. Grant, "1000 Dams Down and Counting," *Science*, May 1, 2015, 496–7.

⁵⁴See Ben Knight and Travis Rummel, dirs., *DamNation* (Felt Soul Media, 2014); Bruce Finley, "Parker Dam and Reservoir Offer Hope for Thirsty Colorado Communities," *Denver Post*, November 2, 2015.

clear that other scholars and activists must now step in where Bob let off. For as much as this essay is a tribute, it is also an invitation.⁵⁵ As his longtime friend and fellow activist (and conspirator) Frank Welsh put it during Bob Witzeman's memorial service, "His fight is over and now we must carry on" what he started.⁵⁶

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Davis (d. 2012), Mike Davis (d. 2013), Peter Warshall (d. 2013), Keith Basso (d. 2013), and Bob (d. 2014)—fierce crusaders all for social justice.

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⁵⁵John Welch to author, e-mail, November 18, 2015.

⁵⁶Frank Welsh, "For Doc Witzeman's Funeral," 2014; Frank Welsh, author interview, August 3, 2015.