

Why the Environmental Movement Is Not Winning

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A searing new report says the environmental movement is not winning and lays the blame squarely on the failed policies of environmental funders. The movement hasn't won any "significant policy changes at the federal level in the United States since the 1980s" because funders have favored top-down elite strategies and have neglected to support a robust grassroots infrastructure. Environmental funders spent a whopping \$10 billion between 2000 and 2009 but achieved relatively little because they failed to underwrite grassroots groups that are essential for any large-scale change, the report says. Released in late February by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, *Cultivating the Grassroots* was written by Sarah Hansen, who served as executive director of the Environmental Grantmakers Association from 1998 to 2005.

Environmental funders mainly support large, professionalized environmental organizations instead of the scrappy community-based groups that are most heavily impacted by environmental harms. Organizations with annual budgets greater than \$5 million make up only 2 percent of all environmental groups, yet receive more than half of all environmental grants and donations.

The report makes the simple but profound argument that the current environmental funding strategy is not working and that, without targeting philanthropy at communities most impacted by environmental harms, the movement will continue to fail. "Our funding strategy is misaligned with the great perils our planet and environment face," Hansen writes.

"Environmental activists and funders all share a gnawing sense that something has to change. No sensible environmental activist would argue that we, as a field, have done what is needed to respond to environmental degradation," Hansen said in an interview.

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