



# In the Thick of It: My Life in the Sierra Club

*Michael McCloskey*

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In an age when many of the major environmental policies established over the past four decades are under siege, Michael McCloskey reminds us of better days. . . days when conservation initiatives were seen not as political lightning rods, but as opportunities to cope with disturbing threats to the quality of our environment. In 1961, a young let's-get-it-done McCloskey was hired as the Sierra Club's first field representative for the Northwest. From there, for nearly forty years, he rose to guide the oldest and most powerful environmental organization in the world. He helped to pave the way for the original Wilderness Act in 1964, and as the club's conservation director worked to see it implemented. He successfully lobbied for the creation of new national parks and wilderness areas, the North Cascades and Redwood National Park among them. As executive director, he was present at the creation of Earthday in 1970, directed lobbying for the enactment of over one hundred environmental laws, and watched Sierra Club membership rise from about 70,000 to more than 500,000. In the nineties, he led the Sierra Club in mounting fights against attempts to undercut EPA regulations and against trade agreements that curtailed environmental programs.

His tenure was no walk in the park or smooth glide across a placid mountain lake. The large and very public Sierra Club was fraught with brush fires, seismic tremors, and pitched battles, both within and without. He survived the ouster of his mentor, the charismatic but controversial David Brower, succeeding him as the second executive director in the club's history, and put the Sierra Club back on firm financial footing. Under less than ideal political circumstances, McCloskey helped to keep the environmental agenda moving steadily forward, even in the face of Ronald Reagan's virulently pro-development Interior Secretary James Watt (whom he was instrumental in expelling from office).

*In the Thick of It* describes not only McCloskey's life as an environmental activist; it reveals the inner workings and politics of one of the nation's most influential environmental nonprofit organizations during an era of ground-breaking environmental legislation. In addition to sharing the details of battles exhilaratingly won and disappointingly lost on the environmental front, he demonstrates how it is indeed possible to turn idealism and hope into practical action that can make an impact at the national level. With this book McCloskey offers not only invaluable insight into the past, but also inspiration to carry into the future.

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