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Lake Powell proposal

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hits flood of backlash

# Sierra Club pushes its idea to drain Glen Canyon lake

**By Matthew Brown**

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SALT LAKE CITY — An awkward pause or a burst of laughter are the common responses to news that the Sierra Club has added draining the nation's second-largest artificial lake to its agenda.

The reactions express a common disbelief that the country's oldest and most recognized environmental group would take on something almost as venerable as itself.

The Sierra Club's board earlier this month resolved to pull the plug on Lake Powell on the Utah-Arizona border and "let a river run through it." It's a plan that has the potential of unleashing a flood of opposition in the courts and Congress, both opponents and supporters of the idea agree.

They say draining the lake could undo decades of contracts, treaties and court rulings — collectively known as the "Law of the River" — that consider the water impounded by Glen Canyon Dam an integral piece of an elaborate scheme to divide the Colorado River among seven states.

Then there is the expected backlash from thousands of boaters and a zealous coalition of cities and towns that receive electrical power from the dam.

Even fellow environmentalists are wondering about the wisdom of the Sierra Club's move.

"At some point people are going to say, 'Hey, these guys are nuts. They're not practical,'" said an executive of another

national environmental group who asked not to be identified bashing a comrade. "But that's the risk you run when you go out in advance of public opinion."

Sierra Club President Adam Werbach sees his organization's role, however, as forming public opinion, not following it. And he says proposing to drain Lake Powell, which has become a recreational mecca and a source of hydro power for millions of people, is the perfect test of someone's true colors.

"It's the job of the Sierra Club to show what being green really means and it takes broad visionary strokes," Werbach says. "This is that type of

stroke."

One board member said it's only appropriate that the Sierra Club, given its history with the lake, would pass a resolution Nov. 16 to pursue the restoration of Glen Canyon.

That board member is 84-year-old David Brower, the senior spokesman of environmentalism who for four decades has shouldered the blame for losing Glen Canyon. In 1956, Brower recalls, he was executive director of the Sierra Club when its board cut a deal with western water interests to let Glen Canyon Dam go up in exchange for no dams at Echo Park or Split Mountain in

Dinosaur National Monument.

"I obeyed, much to my regret," Brower said by telephone from his home in Berkeley, Calif.

Brower said few people had explored the area, so environmentalists didn't know what they had given up in the deal. Brower didn't see the deep sandstone canyons cut by the Colorado River and its tributaries and teeming with vegetation and wildlife until several years later, until he took a "sad" float trip through the area before the reservoir began to fill.

Not until a visit here last month to speak on the topic did Brower see a realistic

Source: Glen Canyon Environmental Studies

chance of getting Glen Canyon back. Brower was told by the local Glen Canyon Institute, which has promoted the idea of at least lowering the lake, that government statistics show Lake Powell losing 1.5 million acre-feet of water a year through evaporation and through seepage into its sandstone banks.

An acre-foot is the amount of water a family of four consumes in a year.

Such losses should not be

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tolerated in the arid West, Brower says, and any of the states that jealously guard their shares of the river should be interested in recovering part of that wasted water.

Lake Powell exists to meet an obligation in a 74-year-old agreement called the Colorado River Compact. Under the pact, the so-called upper basin states of Wyoming, Utah, Colorado and New Mexico are obligated to deliver 7.5 million acre-feet a year to the lower basin states of Arizona, Nevada and California.

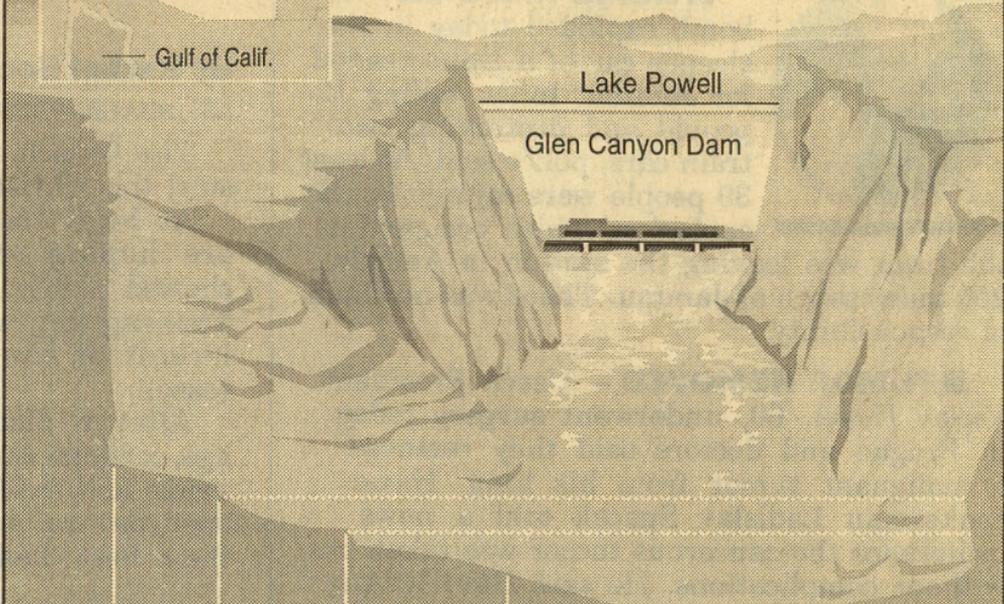


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**LAKE POWELL** snakes through a canyon in southern Utah behind Glen Canyon Dam.

# Refreshing the canyon

In an effort to restore the Grand Canyon's natural environment, dammed water will be released to stir up and spread nutrient-rich sediment downstream. The four-day, 8,000 cubic-foot-per-second flow is expected to repair damaged beaches and promote the growth of vegetation to fortify wildlife.



Canyon wall	Desert	Old high water zone	New high water zone	Marsh zone	River
Peregrine falcon*	Bighorn sheep	Mule deer			Humpback Chub fish*

Wild and plant life will ultimately be affected by sediment distribution from flooding into the new high water zone. Refreshed by nutrients, new vegetation will grow in sediment deposits, giving the ecosystem a boost. Where canyon life resides:

Cholla cactus

Mesquite

Willow

Grasses

\*Endangered species

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