

financial district, and neighborhood decay with resulting crime and violence.

Although SPUR-like organizations have been civic and community adjuncts to government in San Francisco since the early 1900s, the association as it is constituted today was formed in October 1959 when the Blyth-Zellerbach Committee pledged funds to assist SPUR in developing professional staff support. Although the members, numbering some 1,100, are citizen activists, they are, as Evers points out, "citizen activists of a certain kind—citizen intelligentsia, for want of a better word. SPUR is not a headline-seeking, viewpoint organization; it spurs other people to do things and tends to attract people who are sophisticated in matters of government and the environment."

At the heart of the SPUR process are its working committees that deal with issues from transportation, urban design and open space to social issues and housing. Committee recommendations on particular issues are then presented to a 20-member executive committee or to the larger 60-member board of directors. The end result of the laborious SPUR process of investigation, interviews, meetings with community groups and public officials, research and analysis, is published reports. SPUR reports in recent years have dealt with such issues as the San Francisco Municipal Railway and the future of commerce and industry in the city.

SPUR's muscle and influence, according to Evers, come from the long-standing reliability and impressiveness of a SPUR report. "The thing that helps SPUR is the quality of the reports it does—they're read," Evers emphasizes. "People know that over a period of 20 years a lot of research, investigation and thought has gone into them. Because a SPUR report is respected, we have no trouble working with government agencies. For example, when we put out our report on the Municipal Railway we worked with MUNI very directly, and subsequently have spent continuing time helping them implement our initial report. To illustrate this cooperation: we went through the MUNI budget and pointed out where they'd frequently made duplicative requests. They wrote us a letter thanking us for the competency of our review."

In Evers' estimation, SPUR tries to avoid polarizing viewpoints by "seeking solutions that move forward with a reasonable compromise."

SPUR also expects to provide input to a regional environmental plan recently unveiled by the Association of Bay Area Governments for the San Francisco Bay Area. The ABAG plan, which

in the words of task-force chairperson Dianne Feinstein is an experiment "to see if local governments, working together, can develop workable solutions to environmental problems," has specific proposals ranging from land-use management and transportation controls to reviving farms and initiating sewage-treatment plants.

"Everyone talks about regional government," Evers reflected. "What we're really talking about is a consolidation of regional agencies that already exist. Right now there's no coordination among agencies, unless it's a voluntary one initiated by staff members."

The very demographic dynamics of the Bay Area, a nine-county region populated by close to five million people, with San Francisco as its economic and cultural hub, would indeed warrant a coordinated regional approach. Although the ABAG proposal will certainly stir up controversy, SPUR plans to be involved. As Evers opined on the need for regional consolidation: "County boundaries simply don't relate to anything any more, other than how far you once could ride a horse in a day."

SACRAMENTO

Friends of the River

*A river is more than an amenity,
it is a treasure.*

—JUSTICE OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

Through the years, many of California's wild rivers have been battlegrounds, marking the lines of division between developers and environmentalists. One of the most famous wild-river battles occurred in the early 1900s when San Francisco saw the hydroelectric potential of the Hetch Hetchy Valley. The environmentalists lost the fight to save Hetch Hetchy, but the larger struggle to protect the wild rivers of the state was on.

The memory of Hetch Hetchy has spurred succeeding generations to battle for the Eel River, the Stanislaus, the American, parts of the Tuolumne, and what little now remains of the once-extensive wild-water system of California.

Leading the effort is Friends of the River, organized in 1973 during the referendum effort to save the Stanislaus. Stressing the environmental magic of running rivers, FOTR points out that without legislative protection of the few still left, California's once-magnificent wild rivers will be but a history-book memory for the next generation.

"We have a gut-level reaction that California has enough dams, and instead of constructing more we need to learn how to properly manage

those we already have," points out Friends of the River director Mark Dubois. "Dams lock in the future. By not developing quite as fast as we've been doing, we keep our options open and whether or not a river should be dammed can be a decision for future generations with new perspectives."

"There are also economic reasons why we should protect our rivers," Dubois says. "Many vital fishing industries have been destroyed because of the intrusion of big water projects. Recreational value is also often lost. Our land has a certain value and it's important for all of society to wake up to this fact."

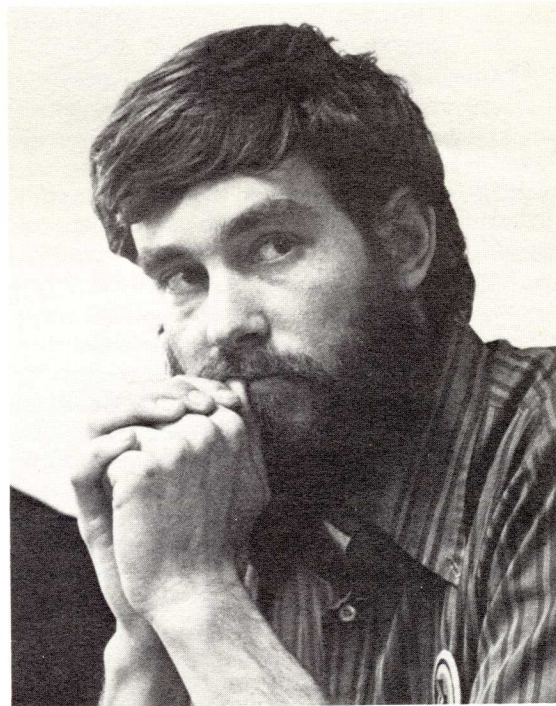
Although such entities as the Bureau of Reclamation stress the need to dam rivers, Friends of the River has called for a system of water conservation to avoid the necessity of future dam-building. Besides consumer and industrial water conservation, the group advocates such other measures as improved irrigation methods and recycling of waste water.

As an example of mismanagement connected with the complicated environmental intricacies of wild waters, Dubois cites problems brought on by the drought. "Early last year the water developers said they were going to milk the drought for everything they could get," he recalls. "Problems arose because the federal government sold all the surplus water they had in the second year of the drought, rather than holding on to it. Our dams are designed to supply enough water to last through a seven-year drought, but all the interim water was sold out of ignorance—farmers just get used to having all that good, cheap water!"

The influence of the powerful water lobby poses a formidable threat to Friends of the River and other grass-roots organizations. Although Dubois feels many appointments by the present governor have been pro-environment, many appointees in fact being taken from the ranks of the environmental movement itself, maintaining environmental principles over the incessant lobbying of water interests can still be difficult. "Watching people being lobbied by water-development interests every day, I'm inclined to think it'd be easy to get out of touch with why you got there in that position of power in the first place," Dubois observes.

FOTR is the "ultimate" grass-roots effort, according to a staffer. And indeed, they avoid the usual high-powered slickness that characterizes many public-action and advocacy groups.

The main staff and volunteers share a house that doubles as living quarters and headquarters. FOTR staff has no salary setup, but the four full-time and one part-time mainsprings of the group



Mark Dubois

can receive \$150 a month to meet personal expenses.

Because of its small staff and spartan operating budget, FOTR has had difficulty in the past recruiting large numbers of volunteers or involving in a long-range way Californians concerned with the protection of wild rivers. Currently, one staff volunteer has begun the task of developing a Friends of the River outreach program to tap the resources of citizen volunteers.

The grass-roots fight to save wild waters has ranged from citizen attempts to protect their own local watershed to long-standing battles to stop such major construction as the Auburn Dam project. Although environmentalists argue that there are indeed economic reasons for protecting wild rivers, it still comes down to the question of whether the treasure that is the river will be dammed, or left free for the generations.

A Friends of the River publication probably best sums up the gut-level environmentalist position: "All rivers share a 'riverness,' be they singing creeks or powerful, rolling currents. The streams shape the land and the life around them. Like the bulk of a great mountain, the motion of a river exerts a strong force on those who observe or live with it, molding their thoughts and actions . . .

"Like ourselves, a river is a life and a process. To those who treasure it, it has no price." *