

PROFILE

THE MASTER STRATEGIST

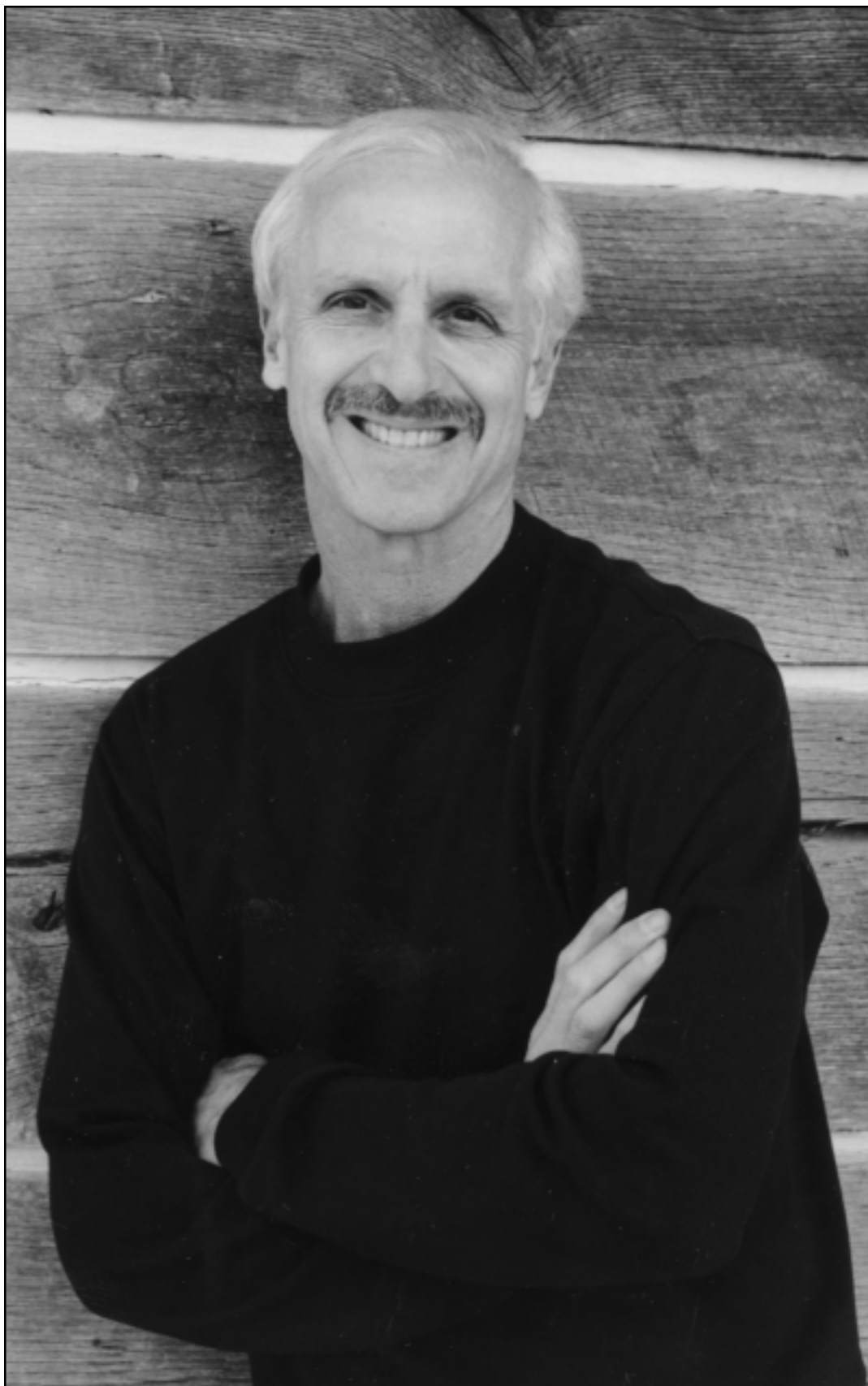
Far more than a grantmaker, Pew Charitable Trusts environmental chief Joshua Reichert is the principal architect of and driving force behind many of the most successful environmental campaigns launched over the past decade. In the process, he has also emerged as one of the most important players in the national policy debate

At a congressional hearing a few years ago, Helen Chenoweth, then a Republican member of Congress representing a district in Idaho, declared that communities in her state were “being crushed by an inaccessible and faceless movement wielding great power and influence,” battling to prevent development of the national forests. She was describing the Pew Charitable Trusts, the nation’s largest philanthropic funder of environmental causes. Actually, there is a face behind the movement — with a dapper mustache no less — and it belongs to Joshua Reichert, who directs the foundation’s Environmental Division.

Reichert was named to that position in 1990, at a time when the leadership of the Trusts, based on the fortune of Sun Oil Company founder Joseph N. Pew, was undergoing a major transition. Reichert brought a decidedly different approach to environmental grantmaking, starting with an objection to the word itself. “The most common term used by foundations to refer to themselves is that of ‘grantmaker’ or ‘funder,’” he says. “These are terms that clearly suggest a greater emphasis on providing money than on achieving the results that are at the heart of their giving. But foundations should not be in the business of spending money simply to support good work. They should be in the business of achieving specific goals that benefit society.”

Those aren’t just words with which most “funders” might agree in principle, for in the last 12 years Reichert has created a reputation for intense involvement with environmental organizations as the Trusts focus on achieving those specific goals. “Pew has been anything but hands off,” wrote Douglas Jehl of the *New York Times* last year. The charity has served “as the behind-the-scenes architect of highly visible recent campaigns to preserve national forests and combat global warming.” And where no adequate vehicle exists to accomplish one of those specific goals, Pew creates them, a technique which, while not unheard of, sharply distinguishes it from other environmental philanthropies and has led to some singular successes — and some heated discussion. “With its deep pockets and focus on aggressive political advocacy, Pew is not only the most important new player but also the most controversial, among fellow environmentalists and its opponents in industry,” according to the *Times*.

And perhaps the most successful, too. Un-



Photograph by
Silvia Arroyo



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der Reichert, Pew has quintupled its spending on environmental campaigns, and he believes the results speak for themselves. And they better. “We are extremely results oriented and hold ourselves and our partners accountable for performance,” Reichert says. To him, results are measured in discrete quanta, such as specific fisheries restored or metric tons of carbon dioxide not emitted. Or 58.5 million acres, the amount of the national forests set aside under President Clinton’s “roadless rule,” which was finalized last year. When the Forest Service started considering a temporary moratorium in 1998, to be followed by new internal planning guidelines, Pew joined with wilderness advocates from around the country to seek a permanent, nationwide regulation protecting all remaining roadless areas. They launched the Heritage Forests Campaign, which eventually involved 600 organizations. Pew “was the force behind the effort that generated more than a million public comments” for the rule, the *Times* reported. Those comments were critical backing for the Forest Service during the rulemaking and will probably also be instrumental in combatting the current industry-backed litigation over the regulation.

Reichert is a student of how people and societies function — perhaps the perfect background for his work. He received a bachelor’s degree in applied behavioral sciences from the University of California at Davis in 1972 and a doctorate in social anthropology from Princeton in 1979. The author of over 40 publications, he worked for a time as a field operations director for the United Farmworkers union in California, a staffer in the House of Representatives, a vice president of Conservation International, and executive director of the National Security Archive before moving to Philadelphia 12 years ago to lead Pew’s move toward activist environmental philanthropy.

He began building a team that resembles the staff of an environmental organization, which makes sense, since he runs his division like an environmental organization. His team consists of lawyers and scientists with established reputations in policy advocacy. They work less as a review panel for proposals than as the environmental movement’s equivalent of a Wall Street firm — making “strategic investments in activities seeking practical solutions to difficult problems facing society,” Reichert calls it in a well-practiced sound bite.

The work of the Trusts focuses on the United States and Canada and has three specific goals, which indeed do address some of the most difficult problems facing society: reducing greenhouse gas emissions, protecting old-growth forests and wilderness ecosystems on public lands, and halting the destruction of the marine environment. Solutions to these problems, Reichert believes, lie in strengthening the scope and enforcement of environmental laws and policies. Climate stability won’t be achieved by voluntary individual action alone, he believes, but will require government regulations that mandate reductions in carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gasses.

Such large scale reforms require public education, media work, litigation, and strong public pressure. All of which in turn requires not only grand vision, but a lot of hard planning and implementation. “Many of the organizations and initiatives that we have taken a leadership role in creating and for which we are known, such as the National Environmental Trust, Oceana, Sea Web, the Ocean Law Project, the Heritage Forest Campaign, and Clear The Air, to name just a few, required a year and sometimes two to develop,” says Reichert. “They involved a great deal of labor and creative input on the part of our professional staff and a tremendous amount of time soliciting feedback and opinions from people and organizations throughout the scientific, environmental, public health, and policymaking communities. They were not a result of proposals coming in through the mail. In this respect, we are far more of a strategic design team than a grantmaking entity.”

An example is the Ocean Law Project, recently merged into Oceana, “which has made a huge contribution to protecting certain marine mammals and sea turtles and prompting more sustainable management plans in a variety of different fisheries,” according to Reichert. “We began by contacting several talented attorneys to conduct a comprehensive assessment of every relevant federal environmental policy in order to explore what opportunities might exist to use the law as an instrument to promote more effective marine conservation — statutes ranging from the Clean Water Act to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act to the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act. That study, which took a year and was over 600 pages in length, was vetted and reviewed by a relatively large number of people from the environmental community who were assembled by the Trusts on several different oc-

casions to provide both peer review and to discuss next steps. Ultimately, based on extensive feedback and our own judgment, we decided to assemble a top-notch litigation team to mount legal challenges to the government in instances where they were clearly not obeying existing environmental laws. From the time we started the exploration process until the legal team had been recruited and put in place took more than two years.”

During its nearly four-year tenure, the project persuaded a federal court to enjoin fishing of Alaska pollock in areas critical to the survival of endangered Steller sea lions; won another case that shut down longline fishing in several million square miles of the Pacific ocean in order to protect four endangered or threatened species of sea turtles; succeeded in getting a federal judge to require the government to analyze and remedy the habitat damage caused by fishing in five regions in the United States; and won decisions in New England and the Pacific that held the National Marine Fisheries Service in violation of federal law for failing to control bycatch and halt overfishing.

The best known example of prominent victories attributable to a Pew-created organization is the National Environmental Trust. NET’s president, Phillip Clapp, has been a favored green voice in news accounts over the last year reporting President Bush’s retreat on U.S. involvement in the climate treaty and the administration’s regulatory rollback campaign. NET was one of Reichert’s first projects at Pew, when, according to a recent article in the *Wall Street Journal*, he realized that “no environmental group had the ability to do the polling, advertising, grassroots organizing, and media work,” needed to conduct successful national campaigns on multiple environmental issues. He designed the organizational structure and mission for NET, and Pew took the lead in organizing funding from a consortium of foundations to get it established. Which placed it in perfect position to greet the ascendancy of Newt Gingrich and the Contract with America. The 104th Congress was sworn in and NET opened its doors on the same day, January 3, 1995.

NET coordinated the environmental community’s response to the Contract, designing and implementing a multi-million-dollar campaign to block the Republican leg-

islation. One of the first measures to be introduced was the Regulatory Reform Act, championed by Senator Bob Dole, who was gearing up for his presidential campaign. The law would, in NET’s analysis, have doubled the time for rulemaking by environmental, health, and safety agencies by adding a series of procedural and administrative hurdles. The organization used focus groups to tap into public concern and chose a Department of Agriculture rule that, in response to several illnesses and deaths caused by outbreaks of *E coli* bacteria at fast food outlets, would have changed meat inspection procedures for the first time since 1907. The image of indifference to tainted meat was as vivid as it was in Upton Sinclair’s day, and as compelling, helping the Democrats’ filibuster of the bill to survive three cloture votes, killing the measure.

The following year, NET joined forces with the Natural Resources Defense Council, also supported by Pew, in an organized campaign to strengthen the Safe Drinking Water Act. In 1997, it was the new National Ambient Air Quality Standards for particulates and nitrogen oxides. In 1998, a nationwide media education effort on the danger of phthalates, a dangerous plastic softener used extensively in children’s toys; within a month, 90 percent of U.S. toy manufacturers announced that they were phasing the chemical out.

With all these successes, Reichert is far from satisfied. “One of the more frustrating aspects of environmental work is the rather daily reminder that the global environment is going to hell in a hand basket,” he says, acknowledging that Pew’s — his — biggest failure is the absence of a meaningful U.S. policy on climate change. “Although we certainly need good science to underpin decisionmaking,” Reichert says, “the decision to address global warming and many other environmental problems is not so much of a scientific challenge as it is a political and a moral one. The ultimate question is what kind of world we want to leave for our children. Humanity can probably survive in a world marred by pollution and devoid of many species of life and natural places. But do we really want to live in that kind of world, much less leave it to future generations? This is not to say that we don’t need a better understanding of the causes and consequences of environmental problems, but our major problem is frequently not a lack of information. It is an unwillingness to act.”

An unwillingness that, clearly, does not characterize Joshua Reichert. •

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