

Sierra Club Rejects Move To Oppose Immigration

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Body

Members of the **Sierra Club**, one of the nation's largest and most influential environmental groups, have voted by a wide margin to reaffirm the **club**'s policy of taking no position on **immigration** into the United States, its officers announced today.

Officials of the **club** reacted with relief that bordered on glee to the outcome of the annual mail balloting, in which members turned aside an anti-**immigration** proposal mounted by an insurgent faction.

The board of directors, made up of the leaders of most chapters, and its professional staff had worked to defeat the ballot proposition, which called for **immigration** controls as one way to halt population growth. The proposal's supporters argued that the increasing population of the United States would intensify environmental damage.

About 84,000 of the **club**'s more than 550,000 members cast ballots, considerably more than the 60,000 or 70,000 members who usually vote, **club** officials said.

Of those who marked the **immigration** question on the ballot, 31,134, or 39.9 percent, voted in favor of the anti-**immigration** position, while 46,935, or just over 60.1 percent, voted for a competing proposal that reaffirmed the **club**'s existing policy.

Carl Pope, the **club**'s executive director, who is appointed by the board, said the results amounted to a landslide endorsement of the management's position by the most active of the **club**'s members.

"The **Sierra Club** cannot protect our environment by building a wall around our borders," he said. "The common-sense solution to reducing our population is birth control, not border patrols."

But Leon J. Kolankiewicz, a **Sierra Club** member and vice president of the Carrying Capacity Network, a group that advocates a moratorium on **immigration**, said that unless population growth is slowed, the **Sierra Club**'s "many laudable environmental initiatives will amount to little more than mopping the floor while leaving the spigot on."

For the past several months, vigorous campaigning on the question split the **club**. The organization's magazine had devoted large amounts of space to the debate, and both sides had established Web sites to detail their arguments.

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The club's leaders warned that a vote to take a stand against immigration would drive away minority groups, especially Hispanic and Asian people in the club's traditional stronghold of California.

Although most current and past officials of the club favored the position of the board, as did many local chapters of the club and leaders of other environmental organizations, the call for immigration restrictions drew the endorsement of many prominent figures from the environmental movement, including Lester R. Brown, president of the Worldwatch Institute.

And Sierra Club leaders accused outsiders of interfering in the club's internal politics by drumming up support for the anti-immigration initiative. Those outsiders, they said, opposed immigration for reasons that had nothing to do with the environment.

The Political Ecology Group, which is based in San Francisco and advocates environmental protection in addition to immigration rights, produced a study showing how several anti-immigration groups had worked on behalf of the ballot proposal to restrict immigration.

"These organizations are generally known for extremist, anti-immigrant work," the report said. It cited positions taken by groups like the Federation of American Immigration Reform and Californians for Population Stabilization.

The Sierra Club is unusual among major environmental groups in allowing its members to vote by mail every year, electing the board of directors and directing the club's policies through ballot initiatives.

Five of the fifteen board seats were contested this year; the winners of those races were David Brower, Chuck McGrady, and Michelle Perrault, all of whom were seeking re-election, and Jennifer Ferenstein and Veronica Eady.

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