

In addition to refining their message, environmental groups are navigating a post-McCain-Feingold campaign finance landscape that provides a new chance to elevate the profile of green issues. A slew of new political organizations — including several backed by or including environmentalists — are raising money to defeat Bush now that the Democratic Party can no longer collect unlimited “soft money” contributions.

“It means a lot of different constituencies, certainly the environmental community, are going to have to take more responsibility ... in terms of getting out the vote and directly communicating with citizens and voters,” says League of Conservation Voters (LCV) political strategist Mark Longabaugh.

Environment2004, one of the new groups, plans to research blocs of voters receptive to its message, while leveraging the clout of its members to attack the Bush record in battleground states. Meanwhile, LCV and the Sierra Club are working with labor officials and other interest groups in America Votes, which will attempt to vastly increase coordination among liberal-leaning groups’ voter mobilization efforts later in the year. Another new organization uniting the top officials of several interest groups, America Coming Together, plans to raise and spend over \$90 million on the presidential and congressional races in nearly 20 states.

“Outside groups are going to influence the debate more than they used to,” says the Center for Responsive Politics’ Steven Weiss.

LCV, which in the past has focused far

more on congressional elections, this time will spend millions across several swing states to beat Bush, and enviros say their logistical plans are evolving alongside their message. Longabaugh and other environmentalists believe they must devote more resources to grassroots organizing and voter contact strategies after large TV buys didn’t prove decisive in 2002 races. LCV plans to field more than 20,000 volunteers in four states alone, including Florida and New Mexico.

### The Primary Season

While green groups consistently attack the administration’s record with a flood of reports and statements on the latest rollback, their political voice remains somewhat muted in the primary season. To date, major environmental groups’ primary strategy looks designed to avoid falling out of favor with a candidate who may capture the nomination — green groups are simply not powerful enough to risk irritating the nominee if they back the wrong guy.

Organizations like LCV show no sign that they will make an endorsement until the nomination battle is over or effectively so. But they are not completely ignoring the primaries either, leading LCV to adopt the rather awkward posture this month of issuing a report stating Sens. John Kerry and Joseph Lieberman have the best green records, while endorsing neither because the group says any of the candidates is a big improvement over Bush.

The major candidates themselves are offering substantive environmental platforms

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