

1988, protecting parts of more than 40 rivers.

Each step of the way, they had to work with Oregon's senior senator, Mark Hatfield, who sponsored most of the legislation.

"He was the godfather," Kerr says. "The only way you saved wilderness then was, you had to have the senior senator from that state going along with it."

Kerr, Monteith and Lillebo all made trips to Washington, D.C., to lobby Hatfield and others for Oregon wilderness protection. But they didn't look like lobbyists. More like John Fogarty, with their flannel shirts and blue jeans.

So Kerr's mother bought him a sport coat. It was a 40-regular, and they kept it at a make-shift office in D.C. so they could wear it on visits. "We joked that you had to be a 40-regular to work at ONRC," mused Monteith. "Even so, in D.C., you still looked like a fool in a sports jacket."

Monteith says the group's strategy was based on a "six-year cycle" with Hatfield: "He was our arch-enemy for five years, then when election time rolled around, he was our friend. It was a long, long rivalry, but we always got something out of him."

Hatfield attended the ONRC's annual conference following passage of the 1984 wilderness bill — to a rousing ovation. It was an election year.

Tom Imeson, who was Hatfield's legislative aide and Oregon field director from 1969 to 1985, says he had "a pretty good relationship" with ONRC, particularly with Lillebo, whom Imeson credits for convincing Hatfield to include large areas of Eastern Oregon into the '84 bill.

"Tim had a very down-home, persuasive manner," says Imeson. "He has a stamp on the east side wilderness areas that is unlike anyone else in the state."

Good Science, Good Lawyers

The renaming to ONRC marked a transformation from a behind-the-scenes support group for coalition members to a more traditional environmental group. The main office was moved to Portland in 1988. The number of paid staff grew.

The 1980s also marked a big shift in strategy, away from legislation and toward more litigation. Hatfield had flat-out told conservationists that he would not sponsor another

major wilderness bill after 1984. "This meant our strategy of getting a wilderness bill on a six-year cycle wasn't going to work," Kerr says.

There were two other important developments. First the federal forest agencies were creating long range "forest plans" to guide management of the federal forests. More importantly, biologists and other scientists were generating reams of new information about the impact logging was having on old-growth forests and the wildlife living in them. The science showed that the northern spotted owl was in serious decline.



Early ONRC staff with Andy Kerr (lower center) and Tim Lillebo (upper left).

Conservationists had the ammo they needed for success, but it would take the better part of a decade. ONRC was just one of several groups to see the potential to use this emerging science as a way to halt logging in federal forests. In fact, ONRC had to be convinced by others that the owl was their ticket to success. They began filing administrative appeals of individual timber sales and broader forest management plans. When the agencies didn't do what they wanted, they started filing lawsuits.

Court injunctions and rulings against the USFS and BLM eventually brought logging to a near-halt across the region in the late 1980s and early 1990s. National groups had weighed in with financial and political support. The Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, working on behalf of various conservation groups, was instrumental in achieving a series of federal court victories.

Eventually, Clinton's 1994 forest plan brought down federal forest logging to a fraction of what it was. Other rulings and actions, including Clinton's roadless and riparian area

management rules, put another 58 million acres of federal forests nationwide under limited protection.

Although many conservation groups joined forces to bring about a change in federal land management, ONRC was instrumental in "nationalizing" the old-growth issue. When *Time* featured the spotted owl on its cover in June 1991, it was Kerr who was featured in a side story, characterized as a "white collar terrorist."

But Andy Stahl, who was instrumental in advancing the cause of old growth protection while with the National Wildlife Federation in the mid 1980s and later with the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, said good science, good lawyers, and a Democratic president and senate contributed more to protecting federal lands.

"Had Bill Clinton not won the election in 1992, things might have been very different," Stahl says. "It took the actions of top lawyers and top scientists, combined with some of the nation's top lobbyists, to prevail. That's not very 'grassroots,' but it is what eventually prevailed."

Kerr is realistic about ONRC's role during the old growth fight. "What ONRC could do is start fights but not finish them," he says.

In the 1990s, ONRC became more "professional," hiring specialists to deal with more complex issues. Doug Heiken, a lawyer who runs the Eugene field office, spends much of his time on legal challenges and the administrative rules and regulations the Bush administration is now attempting to reverse many of the Clinton administration's environmental policies.

ONRC also started its own political action committee and has launched a campaign to get five million acres — virtually every remaining roadless area in Oregon — added to the wilderness system. Led by longtime field rep Wendell Wood, ONRC is trying to reform management of wildlife refuges and water rights in the Klamath Basin.

All that requires a lot of money, which Tom Giesen, who served on ONRC's board before resigning in a dispute over Monteith's leadership in the late 1980s, doesn't like. Too much reliance on foundation money has made conservation groups, including ONRC, less independent and effective, he says.

"The foundations control the agenda," says Giesen, now a graduate student in

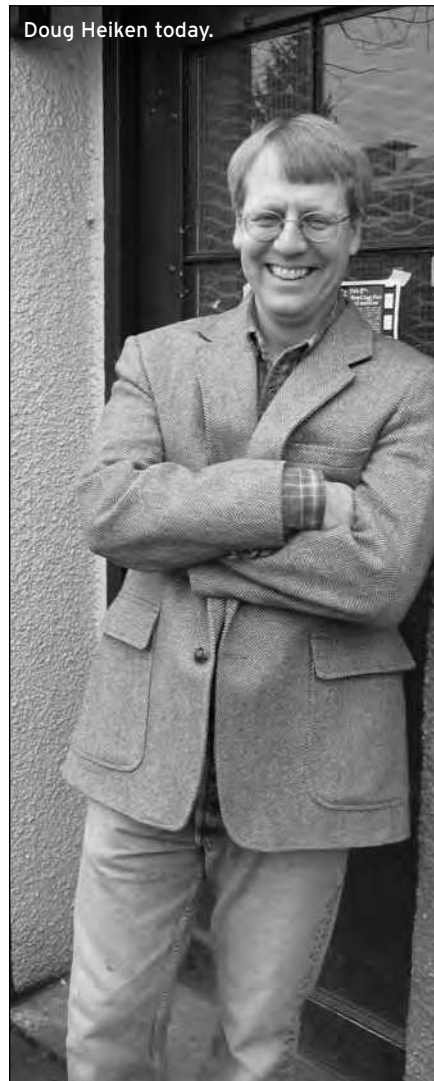
forestry at OSU. "It changed the movement. It's now focused on maintaining income rather than focusing purely on environmental protection."

Regna Merritt, the current executive director of ONRC, says the group has more technical expertise but is committed to its roots. "The passion of the staff and our members remains the same," she says. "Although we have more folks with biology and law degrees on the staff, a degree is not necessary if you come with the intelligence and passion for doing this work."

EW

For more information about ONRC's anniversary party and fund-raiser Feb. 21 at LCC, call ONRC's Eugene office at 344-0675 or visit the group's web site at: www.onrc.org The deadline for reservations is Feb. 13.

Doug Heiken today.



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