

The Sierra Club's Policy on Conflict of Interest

As part of its effort to maintain the highest of ethical standards for the Sierra Club, the Club's Board of Directors has asked that each chapter be sure that each volunteer leader within its jurisdiction is given a copy of the Club's Conflict of Interest policy.

The Southern Sierran prints that policy below. If you have questions, call the Angeles Chapter's Executive Committee Chair Bonnie Sharpe or any member of the Executive Committee at the Chapter office, 213-387-4287.

Preamble: Every person elected or appointed to a position of authority in an organization has a duty of loyalty to, and must act in the interests of, that organization. A conflict of interest is a situation that exists when someone's loyalty may be divided between the first organization and a second person or organization. No one should be faulted merely because a conflict of interest situation exists. A problem arises only when someone takes action related to the conflict. A person in a conflict of interest situation may act appropriately by respecting his/her duty of loyalty, or may act inappropriately by violating it. It is the action — the behavior — that is or is not appropriate.

General Policy: As part of their duty of loyalty to the Sierra Club, volunteers and staff have an obligation and responsibility (1) to disclose any conflict or potential conflict of interest on any issue promptly as such conflict arises, (2) to abstain from participation in FINAL deliberations and decisions concerning that issue, and (3) to abstain from public comment upon that issue.

Definition: A conflict of interest situation exists when the interests or concerns of any volunteer or staff member, or said person's immediate family, or any party, group or organization to which said person has allegiance, may be seen as competing with the interests or concerns of the Sierra Club. Volunteers and staff should be keenly sensitive to any interpretation of their actions which could create the appearance of a conflict of interest situation, and should seek to avoid any such appearance.

Applicability: This policy applies to all volunteers, including volunteer leaders who are authorized to vote in the decision of any Club entity at the Group, Chapter, Committee or National level, to all volunteers who are authorized to speak on behalf of the Sierra Club, paid to all staff, including staff of Chapters, Groups or Committees, and including all independent contractors.

Existence of a Conflict of Interest Situation: When there is a doubt as to whether a conflict of interest situation exists, the matter shall be resolved by a vote of the authorized voting members of the Club entity involved, excluding the person concerning whose situation the doubt has arisen or, in the case of any staff member, by the Executive Director. The Board of Directors is the final arbiter on all matters involving conflict of interest situations.

Obligation to Disclose: Disclosure shall be to the Club entity (group or chapter executive committee, internal or issue committee, or Board of Directors or other national entity) most directly involved or, in the case of staff, to the Executive Director. At least annually, or at the time the situation arises, all volunteer leaders and staff shall disclose any conflict of interest situation. As least annually, all volunteer leaders and staff members shall disclose any direct or indirect benefits that they are receiving or will receive as a result of agreements between the Sierra Club and any outside party. However, existence of a minor interest in pension fund investments and third party-managed funds shall not constitute a conflict of interest.

Obligation to Abstain from Deliberations: When any such conflict of interest situation is relevant to a matter requiring action by any Club entity within which, or over which, the person concerned has any authority, decision-making role, or voice, the interested person shall call it to the attention of that entity and shall retire from the room in which the Club entity is meeting and shall not participate in the final deliberations regarding the matter. However, that person has the right to, and should, upon request, provide the Club entity with any and all relevant information they may have concerning the matter.

Obligation to Abstain from Decision: In any conflict of interest situation, the person concerned shall not vote or otherwise participate in any decision concerning that matter.

Documentation: The minutes of the meeting of the Club entity shall reflect that the conflict of interest was disclosed and that the interested person was not present during the final deliberation or vote and did not vote.

Obligation to Abstain from Public Statement: No volunteer or staff member shall make any public statement, as a Sierra Club spokesperson, on any issue (internal or external) regarding which they may have a possible conflict of interest. All volunteers and staff shall refrain from public comment, as a Sierra Club spokesperson, about conflict of interest issues except as authorized by the President.

Notice and Review of Policy: A copy of this conflict of interest policy shall be furnished to each volunteer leader and staff member who is presently serving the Sierra Club, or who may hereafter become associated with it. This policy shall be reviewed annually as a part of a meeting of each Club entity for the information and guidance of volunteer leaders, and any new volunteer leaders shall be advised of the policy upon undertaking the duties of their office. This policy shall be prominently included in the employment manual for all existing and new staff members.

Adopted 11/10-11/90.