

Case 66

Goldman Environmental Prize

Richard and Rhoda Goldman Environmental Foundation, 1989

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I am greatly appreciative of the aims of the Goldman Environmental Prize and of the achievements of the Goldman Laureates. Efforts to protect the African environment will only succeed if such efforts render tangible benefits to the peoples of Africa through the sustainable use of the living and other natural resources on our continent. Recognition of the importance of this principle through the Goldman Environmental Prize will contribute to the world-wide promotion thereof and thus considerably enhance the status of this award amongst those countries burdened with large scale poverty.

—Nelson Mandela

Background. Richard and Rhoda Goldman had a long philanthropic history by the time they started the Goldman Environmental Prize. Since 1951, the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund has quietly made charitable donations to a wide range of causes, including the environment, Jewish affairs, the arts, and social services in the Goldman's native California.⁹⁹¹ But in 1989, the Goldmans decided to break their habit of quiet giving in order to honor leadership in environmental protection.

Strategy. Inspired by the MacArthur Fellows "Genius Grants," and the Nobel Prize, the Goldmans created a distinct organization, the Goldman Environmental Foundation, to administer a new award, to be given annually to six "environmental heroes" from around the world. According to its website, the Goldman Environmental Prize is given "for sustained and important efforts to preserve the natural environment, including but not limited to protecting endangered ecosystems and species, combating destructive development projects, promoting sustainability, influencing environmental policies and striving for environmental justice."⁹⁹² Nominations are accepted from either of two sources: "a network of thirty-one internationally known environmental organizations, and a confidential panel of environmental experts from more than forty-five nations, including citizen activists and prominent policymakers."⁹⁹³ Laureates are honored with a bronze sculpture and a monetary prize at an awards ceremony in San Francisco that is timed each year on or around Earth Day, and at a reception in Washington, D.C., at the National Geographic Society.⁹⁹⁴

Outcomes. The Goldman Environmental Prize is the largest award in the world honoring grassroots environmental activism.⁹⁹⁵ The awards now receive significant media coverage, and Goldman Laureates are generally invited to address such groups as the U.S. Congress and the World Bank. Endorsed by more than 100 heads of state, the Goldman Environmental Prize is often referred to as "the Nobel Prize for Environmentalists."⁹⁹⁶ And it is an appropriate moniker. The Goldman Prize has recognized and brought increased prominence to over one hundred champions of a host of environmental causes. In fact, in 2004, one of the earliest Goldman Laureates— Wangari Maathai of Kenya—was honored with the Nobel Peace Prize "for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace."⁹⁹⁷ Another member of the inaugural class of Laureates, Harrison Ngau Laing, used his prize money to finance a successful campaign for a seat in Malaysia's Parliament.⁹⁹⁸

Impact. The Goldman Environmental Prize has legitimated leadership in the field and continues to draw attention to a host of environmental challenges being tackled by grassroots activists around the world. According to President Clinton: "The Goldman Prize winners have raised awareness of important environmental issues and motivated people to preserve and protect natural treasures for future generations."⁹⁹⁹ By honoring achievement in the protection of the Earth, the Goldman Environmental Prize benefits not only its recipients or those who may aspire to win it. Rather, it

strengthens the environmental movement as a whole, and, by extension, benefits us all.

Notes

991. In 2002, for example (the most recent year for which data were available), the Goldman Fund gave out \$46.9 million. Available from the Foundation Center website at http://fdncenter.org/research/trends_analysis/top100giving.html.
992. <http://www.goldmanprize.org>.
993. Ibid.
994. Ibid.
995. When it was first given in 1990, the Goldman Prize gave out six awards of \$75,000. That amount has been raised over the years, and now stands at \$125,000, with no-strings-attached, given to each of the six winners.
996. Teresa Moore, "Rhoda Hass Goldman, Philanthropist, Dies at 71," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 2/19/1996.
997. Available from <http://www.nobelprize.org>.
998. Available from <http://www.goldmanprize.org>.
999. Available from <http://www.goldmanprize.org>.