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“The Conscience of a Conservationist?
Barry Goldwater and Environmental Change in Postwar Arizona”

Barry Goldwater lived a life deeply invested in Arizona’s environment. Goldwater first came to public attention in Arizona through his river rafting movie. Flying around the state in 1939 and 1940, Goldwater screened a film of himself and his friends running the rapids of the Colorado River and then, in his prepared remarks, expounded on the benefits of experiencing Arizona’s natural beauty and wild spaces. Throughout his life, he escaped to a vacation lodge near Rainbow Bridge where he would ride horses, photograph local native peoples, lead hikes to the natural bridge, and generally escape from “civilization.” Within Phoenix, Goldwater spearheaded the efforts to protect Camelback Mountain and later helped form the Phoenix Mountains Preserve. At the same time, Goldwater worked in the Senate on legislation to increase use and development of the state’s natural resources, including Bureau of Reclamation proposals to build dams near the Grand Canyon and Department of Interior policies that led to the proliferation of coal mines and power plants on the Navajo Reservation. He did so to service the explosive growth of urban Arizona, growth that became a frequent target of environmental criticism and that author Edward Abbey likened to a “blob” devouring Arizona itself. This chapter will place Goldwater’s life and career amidst the dramatic environmental changes Arizona experienced in the latter half of the twentieth century. In doing so, it will explore the intersections of and conflicts between Goldwater’s devotion to economic growth and to Arizona’s natural environment.