

## *Citizens United* Decision

On January 21, 2010 the United States Supreme Court found in the *Citizens United* case that political spending is a form of protected speech under the First Amendment, and that government may not keep corporations or unions from spending money to support or oppose individual candidates in elections as long as their efforts are not coordinated with a candidate or with the candidate's campaign or agents. This ruling removed restrictions in place for decades that have limited campaign spending from corporations and unleashed a new wave of cash into our electoral process that may make it significantly more difficult to address environmental issues.

The Sierra Club believes that the *Citizens United* decision, if not checked by congressional action will continue to:

- Decrease the dedication of members of Congress and the state legislatures to the long-term best interests of the nation and the states by increasing their obligations to powerful corporate and other commercial interests;
- Shift political power away from voters to corporations and moneyed interests;
- Reduce the quality and diversity of candidates for public office by increasing the already distorting role of money in elections; and
- Decrease public trust in the power of voting and public-interest lobbying.

The Sierra Club therefore urges Congress to take action that:

- Affirms the individual and collective rights, privileges and responsibilities pertaining to persons, as set forth in the Constitution, inhere only to natural persons and that corporations are not natural persons;
- Upholds First Amendment protections for freedom of speech and to petition the government;
- Mandates public disclosure of all political activity without regard to an organization's influence, size, longevity or any other factor which would create an un-democratic and inequitable system of disclosure;
- Maintains longstanding privacy protections for individuals to support the non-political work of social welfare organizations; and
- Will lead to overturning the holding in *Citizens United*.

*Adopted by the Board of Directors, April 21, 2011*