

The punch line: I am suspended from leading Sierra Club hikes. This sentence was delivered by people named Daniel and Marla of the National Sierra Club.

1. A friend asked why. Did someone die? No. If someone died, it probably would have been OK.
2. I was suspended for violating their "equity and justice" policies. For violating policies to make activities "inclusive".
3. The charge: I took photos of women on Sierra Club hikes.
4. There is no transparency to the process. I have no way to know who made such a claim or who filed the charge against me. I suspect it was a particular person who had a grudge against me unrelated to the charge. I have no idea if he had any idea how Draconian their response would be.
5. I do know that they hired investigators to interview a "large number" of people (their words). They looked at my activities far beyond anything to do with the Sierra Club.
6. The worst they could come up with: One woman who said to the investigators it was "creepy". They would not even tell me if that one woman had ever been on any hikes with me.
7. They admitted that the policy I had supposedly violated is a new policy from 2021. They admitted that Sierra Club officials and hike leaders get many notices, so it would be easy to miss the notification about this policy change.
8. As far as I know the word "photos" is not a part of this policy. It is a vague catch-all of "inclusiveness". Meaning that anything could be declared a violation of inclusiveness.
9. I noted that we used to have many hike leaders, each with his or her own style. Some go fast, some go slow. I was known as one who stopped to take photos of the scenery and of the participants. Almost all participants were in posed photos.

I regularly let people know I would be taking the photos and sharing them. They should let me know if they don't want to be in photos and/or avoid posing in photos.

10. Many people made a point of joining my hikes exactly because I took the photos and shared them.
11. Those hikers who enjoyed my style of leading hikes and taking photos are now excluded from having that experience. That is the effect of their "inclusiveness".
12. I have been leading these Sierra Club hikes for decades. As far as I can remember, no one on the

hikes complained about my behavior. The worst that happened on rare occasion: Someone didn't like appearing in a photo that was shared and asked that it be removed. I think I had slightly more such requests from men than from women.

13. I noted to Daniel and Marla that there was a lack of proportionality to the sentence I was given vs the charge. I noted that I know of people who were charged with criminal assault causing injury who were asked to do non-violence training and given a period of probation. Their activities were not restricted. Daniel and Marla claimed that my violation required a "Serious Level Correction".
14. My first words in response: This is what makes people vote for Trump. I have always hated the argument that "both sides" are crazy. The Trump side of crazy distributes disinformation. Obstructs urgently needed work to solve the Climate Crisis. And sows real violence. Yes, our side is "woke" but how bad can that be? Apparently, quite bad. Yes, I already knew that. This is just one more example.
15. The investigation apparently began a year ago. I was interviewed in March with no notice that would have allowed me to gather information or witnesses. I never heard anything again. I assumed the case was filed away as settled based on the facts I presented in that interview. Now, in October they sentence me. Again, with no prior notice.
16. During the investigation I noted that the Sierra Club has limited resources. The interviewer was a lawyer. I noted that we could use a lawyer for our local Outings to fight the property owners who were illegally placing boulders in parking spaces at many trailheads. I said I never asked for that because I assumed the Climate Crisis was a higher priority for Sierra Club lawyers. Apparently, not as high as someone taking photos on hikes.
17. They started off by noting that I am clearly a "passionate and determined advocate for the Sierra Club". I have no idea how much they know. I joined the Sierra Club in 1981 and have been a Life Member for decades. I have served on the Sierra Club Santa Barbara Group Executive Committee (board) since being asked to serve in the late 1990s. I have been leading hikes for decades. I have helped organize many events and actions. I have spent countless hours in public hearings and writing letters on behalf of Sierra Club issues and causes.
18. Part of my work has also been publicly to promote the Sierra Club. I have been a reporter for the Edhat regional news service almost since its founding over 20 years ago. One of the highlights of my reporting is showing photos of people enjoying our Sierra Club outings. Of all of the articles at Edhat News, mine are among the most viewed. Typically a couple of thousand views per article. The Sierra Club is not always viewed in a favorable manner. But a wide

range of people like to see the photos of people enjoying themselves on our hikes.

19. Many of my photos are also used in our Condor Call newspaper, which goes out in print to about 5,000 Sierra Club member households.
20. Did I mention I don't get paid for any of this?
21. I did mention that I am quite sure I was investigated because one person had a grudge against me. Daniel and Marla said I could file a claim of "retaliation" against this person.
22. I pointed out that kind of misses the point. No retaliation would be possible except for their odd interpretation of "inclusive". And their disproportionate response to what they claim is a violation of a very vague policy. That is the real problem.
23. They said I could appeal the decision. There is clearly no point. For the same reason. They have enough information to know that the charge is not a serious charge at all. And certainly to know that the response is totally disproportionate.
24. There was no warning. At no time did anyone from the Sierra Club hierarchy ask me to stop taking photos on the hikes. On the contrary, I was regularly thanked for the photos. At the end of the year, the Sierra Club has a Holiday Party. My photos are shown as a highlight of the party. My photos are also featured at our table at many events.
25. Even the police give warnings in many cases rather than throwing the full force of the law against violators. And those are cases that in principle could cause injury or death.
26. As a journalist and photojournalist I know that it is legal to take photos of people in public places. It is also legal to use the photos for a wide range of "newsworthy" purposes. The Sierra Club is not challenging that. Instead they are making an astonishing claim that photographing people on the hikes is a threat to "inclusiveness". Again, I was not warned. I was not given a chance to lead hikes without taking photos. I was just banned from leading all hikes. I am not sure how this works if other people on the hikes want to take photos.
27. I noted above that we used to have many hike leaders with different styles. In the past few years, almost all of the local hike leaders have resigned. There was not a single reason. But most said they were done dealing with an ever-growing list of Sierra Club rules and requirements. When I started going on Sierra Club hikes in the 1980s there was no waiver. You just signed in with contact information. Then there was a brief waiver saying that you are responsible for your own safety. The waiver grew to an absurd length that is impossible to read at sign in.

The leader who wrote that original short waiver resigned when it became absurdly long.

28. But there was another round of resignations more recently. Hike leaders were obligated to fulfill an Outings Leader Training (OLT). You might think this was about the challenges we might face as outings leaders. Things like making sure that people are prepared for the outing. That they have adequate water and proper clothing. That we are prepared for a wide range of problems that might arise. No. The OLT had questions like, "What would you do if a man showed up for a hike in a dress". I have no idea what I was supposed to do with such a question. I hoped such questions would have correct answers so we could learn what they were trying to teach us. No such luck. This "training" was too much for several hike leaders.
29. I pointed out to Daniel and Marla that after leading hikes and writing articles about them for decades, people will want to know why it all came to a sudden end. I noted that no matter how gently or nicely I explain what happened, at least some of these people are going to be quite angry with the Sierra Club. I asked how they think that will affect the public perception of the Sierra Club.