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Yvon Chouinard, 2013 Inamori Prize Recipient

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Yvon Chouinard, 2013 Inamori Ethics Prize Recipient J. Lucas Hii

Since receiving the Inamori Prize in 2013, Patagonia CEO Yvon Chouinard has continued the vision that environmental responsibility can be coupled with a successful business. Recently, after the federal decision to reduce the size of two national monuments drastically, Patagonia published on their website an opposition to the action titled “The President Stole Your Land” and are now fighting to keep the land protected under the Antiquities Act. Bears Ears and Grand Staircase–Escalante National Monuments are prized natural areas in Utah that are appreciated by climbers, nature lovers, and the local Native American community alike.¹ Chouinard recently has increasingly vocalized opposition to federal directives to back out of climate agreements and a disregard for the decisions that would damage the environment.

Surprisingly branching out of gear and clothing sales, Patagonia started sponsoring regenerative organic agriculture. “Patagonia Provisions” brings the eco-friendly mentality to address a growing food crisis driven by the food industry’s current model of mass production. Patagonia Provisions supports local food producers, and attempts to repair the food chain currently reliant on GMOs, pesticides and herbicides to maximize production and minimize cost.² Patagonia also has a worn wear initiative supporting the purchase and recycling of past clothing and gear, which reduces the carbon footprint and the ecological impact that the clothing industry has on the environment.³ Patagonia Action Works also supports local grassroots activist organizations connecting people to address the environmental crisis.⁴ On top of internally sponsored directives, Patagonia, under the initiative of Chouinard, is still part of the “1% for the Planet” network of businesses and nonprofits that work together to give back to the environment.⁵

A glance across the Patagonia website resembles a bulletin board more focused on social and environmental justice than selling clothing. A trip to the company blog “The Cleanest Line” will reveal myriad blog posts echoing the stories of the company’s adventurous CEO, with a feature by Chouinard titled “Telling the Dam Truth.”⁶ The article addresses the misconception that the vast growth of green energy coming from dams is actually destructive and damaging to river ecosystems. As the reluctant CEO, Chouinard’s life philosophy is best encapsulated in his own words:

“I never wanted to be a businessman, but now that I am, I am determined to use my company and my voice to help solve the world’s great environmental challenges. At Patagonia, we’ve spent more than forty years trying to protect the wild places our customers and employees love, and encouraging others to join the fight to save our planet—including from threats that often go overlooked or are misunderstood.”⁷

Outside of the business that was built from the back of a butcher shop in Ventura, CA, Chouinard is respected as a climber, kayaker, surfer, fisherman, and explorer of the wild parts of this beautiful planet.⁸ This deep appreciation of nature can be observed in the core values that Patagonia and Chouinard display. A renowned climber with first ascents on iconic walls such as *El Capitan* and the *Dawn Wall*, Chouinard is a key pioneer of the growing sport of rock climbing including a more natural method of climbing rock: using cams, nuts, and carabineers that leave rock undamaged without the need to hammer in bolts.⁹ On top of rock climbing, Chouinard has had multiple practical publications including *Climbing Ice*, *The Responsible Company: What We’ve Learned from Patagonia’s First 40 years*, and the central philosophy of Patagonia contained in *Let My People Go Surfing*.

The sentiments expressed in Chouinard’s philosophical manual for growing an environmentally responsible, respected company titled *Let My People Go Surfing* still ring true in the actions of the company as a whole, and the individual initiatives Chouinard supports.

Notes

1. “*The President Stole Your Land*,” Patagonia, 2017, <http://www.patagonia.com/protect-public-lands.html>.
2. Yvon Chouinard, “*Patagonia Provisions: Why Food?*,” 2018, <https://www.patagoniaprovisions.com/pages/why-food-essay>.
3. “*Worn Wear*,” Patagonia, 2018, <https://wornwear.patagonia.com/>.
4. “*Action Works*,” Patagonia, 2018, <https://www.patagonia.com/actionworks/>.
5. “*Why We Exist*,” 1% For the Planet, 2018, <https://www.onepercentfortheplanet.org/why-we-exist>.
6. Yvon Chouinard. “*Telling the Dam Truth*,” 2018, <https://www.patagonia.com/blog/2018/04/telling-the-dam-truth/>.
7. Yvon Chouinard. “*Telling the Dam Truth*.”
8. Yvon Chouinard and N. Klein, 1970. *Let My People Go Surfing: The Education of a Reluctant Businessman, Including 10 More Years of Business Unusual* (Second ed.). New York: Penguin Books.
9. Yvon Chouinard and N. Klein, *Let My People Go Surfing*.