

The Hirano Family and Takeda Hisayoshi: Allies Against Dam Construction

As Japan modernized in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, dams were constructed. During the early twentieth century, a proposal to build a dam in Oze and harness the land's hydroelectric power received official backing.

Standing up for nature

Pioneer and environmentalist Hirano Chozo (1870–1930) was the first to oppose the dam project. He had built a house near Lake Ozenuma—later known as Chozo Hut—in 1915 and made it his permanent home in 1922, despite the harsh winters.

In 1923, Hirano traveled to Tokyo and presented a petition to Mizuno Rentaro, the Home Minister, urging him to reconsider the construction project. The following year, Hirano found an ally in Takeda Hisayoshi (1883–1972), a botany professor and avid mountaineer. Takeda had visited Oze nearly two decades earlier and wrote extensively about its inspiring

landscape for the Japanese Alpine Club's newsletter.

A family affair

Takeda was well connected to the political elite, in part because his father, Ernest Satow (1843–1929), was a prominent British diplomat with close ties to the Japanese government. Takeda helped shift public opinion about the Oze dam proposal by writing about the land's ecological importance in newspapers and magazines. The project was eventually scrapped, and the Oze region became part of Nikko National Park in 1934. Oze National Park was established as a separate entity in 2007.

Following World War II, the dam proposal for Oze was revived as Japanese leaders sought to rebuild the economy. Takeda was once again a vocal opponent and joined forces with Hirano's son, Hirano Choei (1903–1988), to stop the project. In 1949, Takeda helped establish the Oze Conservation Association, which later became the Nature Conservation Society of Japan. He earned the nickname "Father of Oze" for his unwavering efforts to protect the land. There is a memorial hall in his

honor in the village of Hinoemata.