Introduction Roots and Branches *Environmentalism and the American West*

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ONE can hardly imagine the history of the American West without reckoning with the region's environment. Such mid-twentieth-century historians as Walter Prescott Webb and James Malin recognized that nature mattered; it shaped the region's historical experience in fundamental ways.[1] Living with, managing, and identifying with the natural world has remained central to the western experience from the time humans have inhabited this place and continues to be critical to historians' understanding. Although environmental historians maintain this connection to the natural world is universal and not regional, the West and its history have been particularly identified with the environment because of the region's aridity and its extremes.[2] The essays included in this issue, "Environmentalism and the American West," advance our understanding of the regional environment and the people who developed and managed, preserved and protected, used and enjoyed the land, water, and wildlife that coexisted and interacted with westerners.

Broad social movements do not emerge out of nowhere or remain static, and environmentalism is no different. In the American West, environmentalism has deep roots and has been characterized by its constant evolution. Moreover, a central way the region and the nation entwined in power was through resource management and federal agencies charged with governing land, water, animals, and associated economic practices.[3] Accordingly, regional environmentalism is also part of the national story. The bureaucracies that became the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Reclamation, the National Park Service, and others were institutionalized around the turn of the twentieth century during what is known as the progressive conservation movement, a movement with institutions that proved far more significant in the West by far than elsewhere in the nation.

Conservation encompassed a broad movement to solve myriad problems and promote the efficient use of natural resources. A national movement of experts, conservation made particularly strong impacts in the West, where public land remained unclaimed as private property and thus allowed easier access for federal managers. For example, presidents and Congress reserved vast tracts of forests and rangelands from private settlement; while state and federal governments, along with private interests, built dams for power and irrigation. Government conservation sought a utilitarian ethos articulated by Gifford Pinchot: "the greatest good for the greatest number for the longest time."[4]

Doing so required a twofold approach. On the one hand, conservationists would prevent exploitation of resources; that is, they restrained private activity that might degrade the environment. The cut-and-run philosophy that guided the late nineteenth-century timber industry in the upper Midwest, for instance, had destroyed communities and impoverished the land. Conservationists sought to prevent a repeat performance of wanton wastefulness; they saw the West as a last best hope. So, conservation-minded citizens and officials sought to protect forests, watersheds, and other ecosystems from degradation by overcutting and overgrazing. This approach required restraint imposed by federal authority.

Besides regulating economic activities, conservationists enabled what they deemed efficient development. Deploying a stable of scientists and engineers, conservationists believed they could guide resource use so as to not diminish nature's capacity while promoting equitable growth. Federally-sponsored dams and irrigation projects were the most obvious examples in the early twentieth century, but grazing regulations and emerging urban zoning laws were a piece. They aimed to generate private wealth over the long run. This approach demanded positive investment.

In important ways, the conservation movement in the West set the stage for subsequent environmental management and degradation, as well as the social and political movements that struggled to protect and shape the region's natural world. Environmentalism grew out of conservation's roots but developed new branches, too. Conservation's utilitarian principles continued guiding resource management into the post-World War II era

with a high degree of support from a public desiring cheap hydroelectricity, park space, or forest management. However, broader cultural and economic trends — including a shift to a more urban and consumer-oriented economy and profound demographic changes — found that consensus fracturing. The essays within the *Journal of the West* illuminate these trends.

Arguably, the most pivotal moment in postwar conservation history was the challenge to a dam the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation proposed in Dinosaur National Monument at Echo Park, a campaign that succeeded by 1956.[5] However, many of the principals, such as Bernard DeVoto, were involved in an earlier and similar effort when conservationists successfully prevented a plan by grazers and supportive politicians to privatize public rangelands. The "Great Land Grab," as it was known, is the subject of Matthew Allen Pearce's article. In it, Pearce details how conservationists emphasized ecological damage done by grazing and alerted the public of the attempt to remove federal safeguards so that ranchers would enjoy almost unimpeded access to grazing lands. This early postwar story helped usher in a new era of environmentalism characterized by popular protest against activities that the public believed would damage nature. Although not as dramatic as defeating a big dam, conservationists set an important precedent in staring down a powerful extractive lobby (i.e., grazers) and their congressional allies, while convincing a broad swath of the American public that protecting resources was a public duty.

No account of environmentalism in the West would be complete without addressing rivers. Long a defining feature of the region, water has been essential in promoting settlement and economic development. Water management has fallen to state and federal agencies, while citizens at different times have pushed for both more and less damming. Three pieces in this issue tell three distinct stories of the hydraulic West and in doing so demonstrate the malleable experience westerners have forged with water and the various meanings environmentalists have attached to rivers.

Daniel E. Karalus investigates a central Idaho landscape in his study of the debates surrounding dam-building on the Clearwater River, a tributary of the Snake River. Beginning in the 1940s, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers sought to dam the watershed with up to 27 dams, but the dam-building bureaucracy had to settle for just one, Bruces Eddy, later renamed Dworshak Dam. Building on the work of other historians, Karalus traces how national concerns and groups refracted local knowledge and experience. Hunters, fishers, and other recreationists recognized that the dam and reservoir would alter the landscape and irrevocably change their connection to the place. They drew on their own experiences in their letters to political representatives in the nation's capital and conservationists in national organizations. One result of this approach, as Karalus shows, was that proponents and opponents could deploy their local, personal experiences, an approach that might reveal common ground between them. The local-national intersection is ubiquitous in western environmental issues.

Elsewhere in the West other needs were addressed. Ian Stacy draws our attention to a pivotal moment in conservation history, a moment of fracturing. Between conservationists who desired untrammeled nature and those who clung to the "greatest good" philosophy stood those who wanted easy recreation activities such as boating and fishing. This group — large but quiet (and understudied) — focused on recreation, and the Bureau of Reclamation heeded their call. The bureau's head, Floyd Dominy, saw outdoor recreation as a critical salve to urban-industrial America and believed reservoir recreation furnished a vital connection to nature that was becoming rarer in modern American life. Long a target of environmentalists (and environmental historians) for environmentally damaging activities, the Bureau of Reclamation and its bombastic leader Dominy receive a more nuanced treatment by Stacy that emphasizes the range of conservationists from multiple-use advocates to wilderness believers to recreationists happy to angle for non-native fish from motorized boats in the West's vast artificial reservoirs. Drawing our attention to the last group helps create a more complete portrait of western environmentalism.

But dams' and reservoirs' destinies in the American West may be changing, as Jeff Crane's surprising story about the Elwha River reveals. Located in the far northwestern corner of the continental United States, the Elwha River became the center of capitalist dreams to build in the early twentieth century an industrial empire on the Olympic Peninsula. Elwha and Glines Canyon Dams did not spark an industrial revolution, but they did destroy prodigious salmon runs and the economies and cultures they supported. Progressive managers and engineers believed they could have economic growth without costs. To that point, this was not an uncommon story in the West. Crane takes the story further, though, and finds a long and successful effort to remove both dams. Beginning in the 1970s, grassroots efforts by tribal groups and environmental organizations opposed the relicensing of the dams and eventually succeeded in getting Congress to pass legislation to remove the dams, something scheduled for later this year. The grassroots challenge to these dams continued and advanced the environmental movement, a direction leading now beyond challenging development and toward restoring landscapes degraded by a century or more of industrial development.

So far, these essays have focused on the West's wild and rural areas. However, lost amidst the identity of the

West as the region of wide open spaces is the urban West.[6] Elizabeth Carney turns our focus to the urban and suburban West to reveal that community well-being occupied significant attention of westerners. In these spaces where most westerners lived, activists — mostly women — worked to not only tidy up and beautify nature but to politicize gardening and native plant preservation as a partial antidote to unrestrained urbanization. Garden clubs and native plant societies developed systemic critiques of degraded wild and urban landscapes. These "outdoor housekeepers," as Carney calls them, worked to preserve rare native species, eliminate roadside pollution, and maintain needed park space. This piece demonstrates an earlier coalescing of environmentalist concerns, dating back to the 1920s and 1930s with continuity into the 1970s, as well as highlighting the central role women played in politicizing urban and suburban landscapes. This story, too, helps us see the shift away from the largely production-focused conservation movement toward the consumer-focused challenges environmentalism represented.[7]

Not all urban environmentalism was consumer-oriented, though. Adam Tompkins shows us how agriculture on the edge of cities generated environmental protest and ultimately policy changes. Farmworkers, mainly of Mexican origin, in the Phoenix metropolitan area sought protection from exposure to illness-producing pesticides. Workers, unions, and other advocates worked in the 1970s and 1980s to replace and strengthen monitoring of pesticides. In the 1970s, growers dominated the Board of Pesticide Control, a position from which they easily stifled stricter controls by pointing to scientific ambiguity regarding pesticides' harm to human health and pursuing a public relations campaign to misdirect the public's attention. Meanwhile, grassroots activists demanded the Environmental Protection Agency Act for human and ecological health. Not until the mid-1980s could a coalition accomplish more stringent restrictions and enforcement. Significantly, much as the other case studies also reveal, public demands spurred governmental response. In this case, an especially diverse coalition combined with traditional environmentalists (e.g., Sierra Club) joining with a farmworkers union to ultimately pass the Arizona Environmental Quality Act. Tompkins' study shows us the importance of grassroots protest, the centrality of health, and the diversity of interests and participants, all significant indicators of western environmentalism at the end of the twentieth century and beyond.

Although suburban and urban issues have become increasingly prominent, in recent years many of the West's critical environmental issues have remained in protected areas sometimes far from population centers. Yellowstone, the nation's first national park, is subject of Robert Pahre's study. Pahre explores how federal agencies and other stakeholders addressed environmental concerns in the Greater Yellowstone Area (GYA) across jurisdictional units. Two decades ago, as part of an environmental planning process, a group of federal administrators produced a collaborative document called *Vision for the Future* that presented ecosystem management as a goal for the GYA, an achievement for environmentalists who had pushed for it. However, the proposal mobilized local extractive industry groups who succeeded in watering it down in a proposal known simply as the *Framework*. Generally this process has been seen as evidence that collaboration was — and is — politically infeasible, but, using game theory to underpin his analysis, Pahre shows that cooperation has — and continues to — exist across agencies and ownership boundaries. This study suggests that environmentalists might not achieve all their goals but to focus on the obstacles is to miss the myriad ways collaboration continues to — and must — shape environmental management.

While Yellowstone management predicaments focused on cross-boundary issues, Peter S. Alagona examines cross-species dilemmas. Golden eagles arrived on California's Channel Islands in 1994 and immediately made a predatory impact taking feral pigs and island foxes in great numbers. Federal, state, and nongovernmental organizations worked together to eliminate the threats and enact a recovery of the endangered island fox. Alagona uses this story, however, to explore intriguing paradoxes in predator control and endangered species programs across the West. Controlling predators began with the arrival of Europeans, and only by the 1920s did some scientists begin questioning the ecological wisdom of eradicating select species. By the 1980s, it had become an article of faith among environmentalists and wide swaths of the public that predator control was misguided interference with nature and ethically suspect. Yet, as predators have staged comebacks in some western ecosystems, they threatened endangered species. Scientists, environmentalists, and the public have found themselves in a confounding position in which protecting endangered species in some circumstances requires predator control. Having changed peoples' minds about predators' ecological worth has made conservation biology a difficult balancing act. Competing public ideas about species' values, along with contradictory laws governing local and federal endangered species, make resolving this paradox of predators and endangered species challenging and a portent for future dilemmas in the West.

So, where does this leave us regarding environmentalism in the West? These excellent articles travel many of the West's landscapes and confront diverse environmental histories. Although by no means exhaustive of the stories to tell, the histories contained within this *Journal of the West* reveal much about the roots and branches of environmentalism.

These stories are rooted in the history of conservation in the West, but they do not remain there. The institutions created at the turn of the twentieth century to manage public resources continued to be central to westerners' economy and identity well into the post-WWII era. But whereas the conservation movement had largely been led by and for experts, this era found more involvement — indeed, insistence — from the public who saw federal agencies failing in fulfilling their roles as custodian of nature's resources. Grassroots activism emerged to challenge the Bureau of Reclamation, the U.S. Forest Service, and other agencies, as the essays by Pearce, Karalus, Crane, Pahre, and Alagona show us. And whereas the conservation movement had largely been about proper production of resources (i.e., making them available and not allowing overexploitation), other concerns were coming to the forefront. Recreational, aesthetic, and health concerns animated environmentalists as Stacy, Carney, and Tompkins reveal.[8] And although public lands and resources have received much attention, these essays also demonstrate the role of private spaces, too.

Collectively, these articles also point our attention in interesting directions. We can see environmentalist concerns in the interwar period, earlier than we typically note them, with garden clubs populated by middle-class women in suburban and urban landscapes. We see unusual couplings of partners in farmworker unions and environmentalists. We also have our attention drawn to the tricky balancing act of predators and endangered species in functioning ecosystems. In several essays, we witness the challenges of managing private places that have public impacts and public places with public and private effects. These somewhat surprising stories — or maybe they are just good reminders — teach us again that paradox and irony populate our environmental histories as much as anything. Finally, these essays illustrate for us how interconnected our environments and politics; our peoples and places; our pasts, present, and futures truly are

NOTES

1. Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Plains* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1931); James C. Malin, *The Grassland of North America: Prolegomena to its History* (Lawrence, KS: by the author, 1947).
2. For aridity generally, see Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); for the West as a land of extremes, see Susan Rhoades Neel, "A Place of Extremes: Nature, History, and the American West," in *A New Significance: Re-Envisioning the American West*, ed. by Clyde A. Milner II (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996): 105-24. These are indicative of other historical work.
3. Richard White, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), esp. 395-430.
4. Gifford Pinchot, *The Fight for Conservation* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1910), 48.
5. Mark W. T. Harvey, *A Symbol of Wilderness: Echo Park and the American Conservation Movement* (1994; Seattle: University of Washington, 2000).
6. Carl Abbott has noted that the West is both the most open and most urban of regions; *The Metropolitan Frontier: Cities in the American West* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1993).
7. This is a distinction Samuel P. Hays made in collaboration with Barbara D. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
8. This division is not meant to suggest there is not a relationship between production and consumption or that crossover between these issues and articles does not occur.

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