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SACRED ZONES: EXAMINING WILDERNESS IN YELLOWSTONE, MAINE AND
RUSSIA

By

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Thesis

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science
Environmental Studies

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ABSTRACT

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Sacred Zones: Examining Wilderness in Yellowstone, Maine and Russia

Chairperson: Phil Condon

This thesis seeks to examine issues of resource conservation and recreational access in three regions of immense historical and ecological significance: Yellowstone National Park, the North Woods of Maine, and the protected nature reserve system of Siberia. By applying a combination of direct professional experience, current research and ongoing environmental policy action, the thesis attempts to provide an accurate picture of current and future challenges facing the three regions. Part I, "Yellowstone Paradox," traces the roots of Yellowstone's restrictions on recreational boating access in a post-WWII discourse of consumer recreation, the development of a sustainability ethic and its deployment as a rhetorical tactic by both advocates and opponents of park paddling access. Part II, "The Mill and the Mountain," examines the transition from logging to tourism in an economically depressed former mill town outside of Baxter State Park, where land managers struggle to balance visitor use and safety with the "forever wild" vision of the park's founder, Percival Baxter. Playing a key role in the region's future is Roxanne Quimby, founder of Burt's Bees Cosmetics, who proposes to found a 75,000 acre North Woods National Park adjacent to Baxter State Park. Part III, "Zapovednik," examines the *zapovedniki* (biological reserves) of the Russian Federation, where no-access conservation areas long protected by the Soviet government now face new pressures from resource extraction, poaching, and international ecotourism. As we continue into the 21st century, the three areas grow ever more vulnerable to resource degradation, climate change, and growing human impact. On a policy level, ongoing conservation efforts will require reevaluation of access regulations and new strategies for balancing the needs of visitors with protection of the resource. On a more abstract level, the future preservation of these areas demands an increased sense of stewardship through environmental education and engagement

SACRED ZONES: EXAMINING WILDERNESS IN YELLOWSTONE, MAINE, AND
RUSSIA

Lily Vonderheide

Spring Semester 2015

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PROLOGUE:

It's an odd thing to say, but I'm latitudinally challenged: except for a few Carolina beach vacations and one visit to Savannah, Georgia, I've rarely ventured south of the 39th parallel. For better or worse, my sense of landscape is grounded in the north, in dense forests and cold waters, my circadian rhythm tuned to a seasonal 4/4 time with sustained winters and grace note summers. I enjoy skiing and wood stoves and feeling chilly; I love the smell of ponderosa pines on a warm spring day and the way the aspens and birches turn golden in the autumn. The three places that I travel to in the following pages were not chosen randomly. It's not a coincidence that they are all home, or historically home, to moose, wolves and bears; sweepingly vast, forbiddingly cold; and still, even in this anthropocentric age, remote and mysterious. They are also far more fragile than their size and ruggedness would suggest.

My professional career in the North began age twenty, when I was offered a job as a tour guide in Glacier National Park. Riding the Amtrak out from Chicago, I arrived in East Glacier at midnight, when my new supervisor met me and drove me to the Two Medicine staff camp. It was a moonless night and the stars were so bright and Two Medicine Lake so still that I could see Rising Wolf Mountain reflected in the water. That was my introduction to Glacier, and over the next two summers I learned to introduce hundreds, maybe thousands, of visitors to the Rocky Mountain landscape, its flora and fauna, its tumultuous geologic history and tenuous future. This interpretive grounding led eventually to my later jobs in as a backcountry ranger in Maine and an environmental educator and guide in Yellowstone, and still later to my pursuit of a masters degree from the University of Montana.

Between Glacier and the rest, however, came a year in Russia, the crucible of my environmental career, although it was the only one of the three locations where I did *not* have an

outdoor job. I was, in fact, an English teacher. My classroom was a real classroom with walls, desks, textbooks and whiteboards, not the impromptu trailside lecture halls of the wilderness that I had grown accustomed to in Glacier – and I missed the woods. The wilderness of Russia was largely inaccessible to me, hugely distant in physical space, closed off by restricted access regulations and tangled bureaucracy. I studied the *zapovedniki*, the closed reserves, and longed to see them: Kamchatka with its geysers and glaciers; Ussuriland, where the Siberian north meets subtropical Asia; the sweeping steppes; Lake Baikal, which cradles 1600 endemic species and 20% of the world's freshwater. Unable to trek across Siberia, I settled for a more accessible ecosystem, the North Woods, scoring the position in Maine despite the eight-hour time zone difference between myself in Moscow and my phone interviewer in Millinocket. From Maine I headed west again to spend three summers working in Yellowstone, first for Ecology Project International and then Yellowstone-Glacier Adventures. This coming summer I will work as an interpretive ranger for the Park Service on the Grant-Kohrs Ranch in Deer Lodge. Once again, I've returned to the best classroom of all, the one with no whiteboards or textbooks, and no roof but the sky.

These northern landscapes have formed the heart of my professional and academic life, I hope that I will continue to walk among them for a lifetime to come.

INTRODUCTION:

The National Park Service Organic Act, signed in August of 1916, established the National Park Service and bound it to “promote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known as national parks, monuments, and reservations hereinafter specified by such means and measures as conform to the fundamental purpose of the said parks and reservations, which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”

The Organic Act has proved durable and successful: as of 2015, there are 401 NPS-administered sites, including national parks, monuments, recreation areas and other designations. The idea of a national park system also proved popular overseas, with many countries following the example of the US. However, the Organic Act is far from cut-and-dried. Almost a century later, the “fundamental purpose” of parks is still a front-lines policy concern, shaping the way public lands are managed on the most fundamental levels. The balance between conservation and enjoyment remains tenuous at best.

The passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964, forty-eight years after the Organic Act, added an additional facet to the question of public land use and conservation. The purpose of the Wilderness Act is to “secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness...A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain” (wilderness.net). The Wilderness Act implies a clear distinction between dedicated

wilderness and the national park system. Yet many questions, both philosophical and practical, apply to both.

What does it mean, physically and legally, for a landscape to be left “unimpaired” or “untrammelled” in light of the 21st century argument that human agency has shaped every corner of the earth? Can the concept of wilderness retain its validity in the Anthropocene era? Is the idea of a landscape where mankind is a mere visitor merely a historical artifact, an outdated notion, or does it still retain a compelling power in the American cultural consciousness? And if we say so, can we presume to speak for America as a whole, or is the idea of wilderness and the national park system tailored to specific social and economic groups that retain privileged access to wild spaces? Does the way in which wild spaces are portrayed in cultural and political discourse prioritize the needs and values of certain user groups over others on public lands?

Many scholars have struggled with these questions from legal, socio-cultural and environmental angles; the upcoming one hundredth anniversary of the Organic Act and the recent fiftieth anniversary of Wilderness Act renders the issue particularly topical and there is a wide range of scholarly literature. Cronon, in 1996, wrote a seminal article entitled “The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” which touched on various key critiques of the American label of wilderness, including the question of class privilege, the romanticized notion of the ‘primeval’ and the idealization of perceived ‘pristine’ landscapes at the expense of preserving landscapes ‘closer to home.’ In a 2001 response to Cronon, Cafaro argued that wilderness designation does not devalue less remote spaces – and indeed, goes on to invoke apocalyptic rhetoric, stating that “continued expansion of wilderness preserves, management and non-management for wildness, and limits to human consumption, mammonism, and numbers” are the only things that stand between our species and extinction.

In "Salvaging Wilderness from the Tomb of History: A Response to The National Parks: America's Best Idea," DeLuca continues to build off Cronon, writing that "to universalize the love of wilderness in service of a mythically united America is misleading. It is also to once again universalize a white, elite experience." The experiences that DeLuca references are specifically rooted in a romantic, Western European conception of wilderness and may serve to cancel alternative interpretations of what wild lands should look like and how they should be accessed.

Meanwhile, in "The American Dream: Technology, Tourism, and the Transformation of Wilderness" Marafiotte analyzes the ways in which post WWII technological innovations allowed increased motorized access and consequently impact on wild lands – a case for loving the wilderness "not wisely but too well." Marafiotte argues that, paradoxically, this laid the groundwork for the modern conservation movement: greater public interest and the rate of environmental degradation led to more formal protection guidelines for wild lands and the development of a sustainable use ethic.

The issues that DeLuca, Cronon, and Marafiotte raise are fiercely relevant to 21st century park and wilderness policy, particularly in the mountain West, which has experienced high rates of population growth in the past several decades (Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks). Many people are drawn to the region for its recreational opportunities, leading to increased pressure on the landscape itself, but also to high levels of conservation awareness and support for public lands.

In *Yellowstone Paradox*, I will focus on Yellowstone National Park, a hotbed of recreation and access issues, using a recent case study to touch on whether an "untrammelled" or 'pristine' landscape is truly possible in the 21st century, the relevance of a dualistic construction

of wilderness, and questions of access and denial framed in terms of recreation versus sustainability. The case study in question, still making headlines today, involves a management plan dating back to 1950 that bans non-motorized boat access on the rivers and streams of Yellowstone. Ostensibly instated to protect sensitive fishing grounds, the ban has survived several management reviews, despite a range of protest tactics by paddling proponents, from legal challenges by interest groups to illegal kayak runs down the Yellowstone River. The paddling ban is particularly fascinating as a topic of analysis because it is not only a current issue that continues to be hashed out in editorial columns across the West, but also the continuation of a debate that has lasted for decades. I will trace the roots of the ban in the post-war discourse of consumer recreation, the development of a sustainability ethic and its deployment as a rhetorical tactic by both sides, and the future of recreational access Yellowstone in the changing 21st century landscape.

In *The Mill and the Mountain*, I travel to the landscapes of northern Maine to examine a different kind of struggle: the rocky transition from logging to tourism in a dying mill town just outside the wilderness of Baxter State Park, where land managers struggle to balance visitor use and safety with the “forever wild” vision of the park’s founder, Percival Baxter. Playing a key role in the region’s future is Roxanne Quimby, founder of Burt’s Bees Cosmetics, who proposes to found a 75,000 acre North Woods National Park adjacent to Baxter State Park. She’s ready to donate the land – but locals oppose it and the Department of the Interior won’t accept it. It’s a fascinating situation that sheds new light on questions of sustainability, conservation and recreational access.

I will conclude by examining the *zapovedniki* (biological reserves) of the Russian Federation, where no-access conservation areas long protected by the Soviet government now

face new pressures from resource extraction, poaching, and international ecotourism. The reserves are based on the American national park system, but vary in significant ways; I will contrast Russian and American conceptions of *wilderness* in order to shed further light on both.

I chose to examine the three regions together because in addition to their ecological importance, they are all powerfully emblematic of the landscapes that our society values and thinks worth saving. However, my professional and intellectual engagement in no way concludes with this thesis, which is merely a starting point for a future of far more extensive writing and research. The questions I raise and occasionally fail to answer aren't forgotten – it's only that I'm still looking for the answers.

PART I: THE YELLOWSTONE PARADOX

Yellowstone may be defined by its iconic wildlife, but its lifeblood lies in its rivers – the sprawling, generous Lamar in its namesake valley, the Bechler cascading through backcountry waterfalls and hotspots, and the Yellowstone itself, slow and sinuous through the Hayden Valley, raging through the Grand Canyon and the Black Canyon, spilling out of the park down through Gardiner where the rafters put in, bound for Paradise.

I've hiked many times along these rivers. One June morning my students and I watched with spotting scopes as the alpha female of the Lamar Canyon wolf pack swam across the braided channels of the Lamar. On a hot July day I walked down the Black Canyon beside the cold green rapids of the Yellowstone, and in September of the same year I waded through the Bechler holding my pack above my head and gravel shifting under my bare feet; I can lay some claim to communion with the water. I also know, from years of working on boats, rowing crew on the Chicago River, driving tour boats in Glacier, drifting in the loon-haunted moonlight on Lower Togue Pond, how boating can offer an equally powerful wilderness connection. Carried out with the respect for wildlife and the environment that define good backpacking techniques, canoeing, kayaking and packrafting offer a low-impact means of accessing the backcountry. But boating, like land travel, carries with it certain risks – litter and human waste, damage to fragile riparian areas, disruption to wildlife that depend on the river systems, and the spread of invasive weeds – that require responsibility and careful management, especially in a heavily visited national park. The story of Yellowstone's rivers is still being written.

Paddling into the 21st Century: an Analysis of Recreational Access in Yellowstone National Park

“Wilderness is a potent force and contested political site” writes DeLuca in ‘Salvaging Wilderness from the Tomb of History’...and its potency and controversy are nowhere clearer than in Yellowstone, America’s first and most famous national park.

Nearly three million people visited Yellowstone in 2013, traveling by private vehicle, bicycle, tour bus, foot and horseback. I was among them, coordinating eight-day environmental education trips for groups of high school students from Tokyo. City kids, they had never experienced or imagined anything as wild and strange as Yellowstone before. Of course they had studied it extensively in class before their trip – but nothing had prepared them for its sheer immensity and grandeur. The first bison spotted in the Lamar Valley, the first geyser eruption, and a glimpse of a wolf drew gasps from my students. I watched their conception of wild landscapes evolve before my eyes.

On the final day of the trip, we rafted on the Yellowstone River out of Gardiner, just beyond the park boundary; we were not among the visitors who filed for more than 2000 non-motorized vessel permits to canoe, kayak and float the 163 lakes open to recreational boating within the park. Thousands more floated the 86% of Grand Teton National Park lakes and streams and the 26 miles of the Snake River that are also open to watercraft (Waters 2013).

Yet 7500 miles of streams and backcountry waterways in the two parks are closed to paddlers, bans instituted in 1950 (Yellowstone) and 1962 (Grand Teton), ostensibly to discourage over-fishing in heavy use areas. After suffering financial depredations and low visitor numbers during the difficult years of the Great Depression and World War II, Yellowstone was experiencing a boom of unprecedented popularity.

In a section of the annual park report entitled “Management and Protection of Fish Resources,” the Park Service stated that “Heavy fishing pressure exerted on park waters during the post-war period made it necessary to add two new provisions to the park regulations. The first of these provides that fish may be taken from the Madison and Firehole Rivers only with artificial flies or single baited hooks and prohibits the use of other lures. The second prohibits the use of boats on park streams. These new regulations, which became effective on the opening of the fishing season on May 30, 1950, and the limit of take of five fish per person per day, which became effective a year earlier, have met with general approval of anglers and others who are interested in the protection of sport fishing in park waters” (Yellowstone and Grand Teton 2014).

In “The American Dream: Technology, Tourism and the Transformation of Wilderness” Marafiotte examines the sweeping economic, cultural and technological changes that altered the social landscape of America following World War II. Increased leisure time, the end of gas rationing and increased automobile ownership, and even groovy new ‘gadgets’ such as aluminum cook stoves and nylon backpacks made outdoor recreation more accessible to the American public than it had even been before. Yet from the perspective of conservation, this consumer-driven access had a downside: the accelerated degradation of public lands, especially since formal environmentalist and conservation ethics were still nascent in American society. The over-fishing of Yellowstone’s rivers can be tied directly to this post-war discourse of economic success and unchecked consumerism.

However, the urgency of the situation on wild lands accelerated the drive to protect them; many of the original writers of the Wilderness Act, though troubled by technology and consumerism, saw the potential to harness increased public support for new conservation policies.

In 1953 Howard Zahniser, the executive secretary of the Wilderness Society, addressed the Fourth American Forest Congress, stating that

In insisting that wilderness preservation be part of our public policy we are not disparaging our civilization but rather admiring it to the point of perpetuating it . . . We carry in our packs aluminum manufactured with the help of hydroelectric power from great reservoirs. We motor happily on paved highways to the approaches of our wilderness. We journey in streamliner trains and transcontinental airplanes to the conferences where we discuss wilderness preservation. . . . We enjoy the convenience and comfort of our way of living*urban, village and rural. It is because we want this civilization to endure and to be enjoyed on and on by healthful happy citizens that we want to see wilderness preservation included in our land-use programs (Marafiotte 2008)

Zahniser pinpoints one of the central paradoxes of land use that gained ground after World War II: the desire for the best of both worlds and the sense of wilderness as a place where a person could escape the hurly-burly of modern life. In the 21st century, wilderness and civilization, conceived as separate discursive spheres, persist in the public imagination. As Zahniser notes, we want wilderness, but we want to be able to drive to it. However, it can be argued that American conceptions of conservation and sustainable recreational use have evolved drastically since 1950. The paddling ban, instituted as a remedy to post-war growth, has persisted despite these evolutions. Many kayakers, pack-rafters and other recreational boaters would like to see it lifted, arguing that the science and policy behind the ban is outdated and no longer relevant, and that it has “denied three generations of Americans the outstanding experience of paddling the rivers in Yellowstone and Grand Teton” (HR 3492 River Paddling Protection Act:

Hearings before the Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation, 113th Congress, 2014).

The debate between Park Service and paddlers has simmered throughout the three generations, occasionally boiling over, as in 1986 when NPS officials caught two kayakers ‘poaching’ the class 5 rapids of the Black Canyon, hazed them back to civilization with a helicopter, and confiscated their kayaks.

In “Counting Coup Along the Yellowstone River,” Doug Ammons, one of the kayakers, described their court defense, writing that “we were sorry, but felt the restrictions were hypocritical and unjust. The park personnel claimed it all was for protecting the wildlife, but they let horses, flyfishermen, backpackers and everybody else in and additionally, they themselves had done far more harm joyriding at treetop level in a helicopter for eight hours and scaring every animal within twenty miles of the river.”

In July 2014, my second year leading science trips for Yellowstone-Glacier Adventures, I took a day off and traversed the Black Canyon the slow but legal way, on foot via the Yellowstone River Trail, which crosses rolling hills and marshes, dropping into riparian glades and juniper thickets, always descending toward the emerald ribbon of the Yellowstone. On the far side of the river the trail picks its way along the boulder-strewn canyon above steep passages where the river foams up and gentler flats where it eases through dry meadows. I found the skull of a bighorn ram placed on a rock beside the trail and farther down, the bones of an elk with flecks of blood and muscle still clinging on.

I was not apprehended by the Park Service, and the only airborne hazing I experienced was by a mother osprey when I accidentally hiked too close to her nest.

Ammons and his companions, by contrast, were fined \$25 each and their boats were impounded for two years. Their exploits were widely discussed in the paddling world and served as the inspiration for dozens of other guerilla paddlers. Some slipped under the radar, many others have been apprehended in less spectacular fashion, fined up to \$5000, and banned from the park for five years. Ammons himself has stepped away from such stunts in favor of watershed stewardship and a whitewater philosophy that speaks against the “radical dudism” of modern-day extreme kayakers. Instead, Ammons and others, represented by river conservation and recreation groups such as American Whitewater and the American Packrafters Association, have used legal tactics to lobby hard for the NPS to withdraw the ban.

In 2013, the Park Service drafted a river management plan that did not address paddling, except to state that it would remain prohibited. American Whitewater filed comments asking for a more transparent evaluation process, particularly a more in-depth assessment of the science behind the ban and the potential impact of paddling; this request was denied by the Park Service

At this point, Cynthia Lummis, Wyoming’s sole Congressional representative, stepped in to introduce HR 3492, the River Protection Paddling Act, which declared that “The rivers and streams of Yellowstone National Park and Grand Teton National Park shall be open to hand-propelled vessels as determined by the director of the National Park Service within 3 years of the date of enactment of this Act” – thus superseding the management plan established in 1950 and reiterated by the Federal Code of Regulations in 1971 (River Paddling Protection Act, H.R. 3492, 113th Congress, 2013). Shortly thereafter, the Department of the Interior testified before the House Committee on Natural Resources:

Although the Department supports expanding outdoor recreation opportunities, we strongly oppose H.R. 3492 as introduced....This legislation would set a

troubling precedent by disrupting the carefully balanced management of recreational activities and resource protection that the National Park Service (NPS) provides at Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks and that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) provides at the National Elk Refuge (US Department of the Interior 2013).

Furthermore, the Department stated:

The National Park Service Organic Act requires the NPS to provide for the enjoyment of park resources and values. This includes both opportunities for recreational activities and to experience the parks in their natural state. For over 40 years, the balanced approach provided by these regulations has successfully allowed for a variety of uses, including paddling, while also protecting the ability of park visitors to experience the solitude and wildness of pristine rivers in their natural state, without the visual intrusion of vehicles or watercraft.

In a corroborating statement, Bart Melton, the Yellowstone Program Manager for the National Parks Conservation Association, highlighted the potential impact on sensitive grizzly habitat and wrote that “Balancing conservation and recreation is important, but sacrificing conservation isn’t good for Yellowstone. We will continue to oppose this bill and urge those pushing hardest for it to come up with a reasonable proposal for the National Park Service to consider” (National Parks Conservation Association 2014).

Note the emphasis in these statements on the concept of balance. For anyone who has ever traveled through the park in, for example, July when the park averages 2 million visitors a month, the sense that *one* more vehicle or one more tourist or one more form of recreational

access will cause the whole thing to burst at the seams is essentially compelling. Yet on a deeper level, the concept of balancing human use against the protection of undeveloped landscapes is tied into long-standing notions of wilderness as separate from human agency, a discursive concept that Marafiotte refers to as the “primitivity-civilization dualism” (Marafiotte 2008). In “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature” Cronon critiques this conception of nature, writing that “this, then, is the central paradox: wilderness embodies a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural. If we allow ourselves to believe that nature, to be true, must also be wild, then our very presence in nature represents its fall. The place where we are is the place where nature is not.”

By pursuing this line of argument, which is fundamentally historical and based in nineteenth century western European Romanticism and American Transcendentalism, the Park Service and other proponents of the paddling ban expose themselves to accusations of being antiquated and elitist. The Park Service, in turn, responds that its guidelines are based in modern and scientifically-based management considerations that, far from being ‘elitist’ they seek a balance between humans and the larger ecosystem. In an essay for the George Wright Society entitled “Professionalism and its Discontents,” professor Diane Barthier-Bouchel argues that this may not be enough:

What, then, is to be done? If the problem truly reflects a more fundamental discord within the social contract between government and public, it is unreasonable to think that NPS alone can resolve the conflict. All NPS can do is to work toward making the public more aware of the complexity of tasks involved in operating and conserving the national parks and of demystifying the professional expertise necessary to their accomplishment. The public clearly understands and values its right of access to national parks: that much was

made clear by the shutdown. What it needs to develop is a better appreciation of the responsibilities involved in their conservation and of its role in contributing toward meeting them (Barthel-Bouchier 2014).

This falls in with the request by American Whitewater for an expanded public forum to discuss management concerns within the park system: absent this more nuanced understanding, it is easy for paddling advocates to make the simplistic argument that any notion of pristine nature in Yellowstone is an absolute myth and that many other uses are permitted in the park, so *why not let us enjoy it too?*

Interestingly, however, paddlers employ the same aesthetic and historical rhetoric, making much of the fact that Sigurd Olson and Olaus Murie, director and vice president of the Wilderness Society, were avid paddlers. In *Wapiti Wilderness*, Murie described canoeing with his sons on the Yellowstone River: “When you go into country by pack train the streams are only for crossing, or to camp beside. To know a stream you travel on it, struggle with it, live with it hour by hour and day by day.” For his part, Olson observed that “As long as there are young men with the light of adventure in their eyes or a touch of wildness in their souls, rapids will be run.” (McCarthy 2012).

Countering this, Todd Wilkinson, writing for the *Jackson Hole News*, took comments on the issue from Donald Murie, Olaus’s youngest son. Donald Murie stated that “There are many other areas that still retain the feel of the Earth as it is without us or our stuff. My fear is that once boating is allowed, it will go overboard....If I may speak for the Murie family, I’m sure they would all agree that any activity that takes place in a national park should be for the enjoyment and hopefully inspiration offered by the natural landscape and its denizens, not for

any other form of recreation. I may incur the wrath of my son to say this, but I would exclude running rapids in raft or kayak.”

The Murie name confers legitimacy, inferring an unbroken connection to a long history of American conservationism. Similarly, in formal statements on the issue, both sides use language grounded in environmentalism and nature imagery. In a video speech, Ryan Jordan, the president of the American Packrafter’s Association, described packrafting as a “positive and pristine wilderness experience... A ban on pack-rafting in Grand Teton and Yellowstone National Parks makes no sense at all. It shows a lack of respect and service to the people by public employees. I can’t imagine that these decision makers are considering how beneficial pack-rafting can be in Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Park. Pack-rafting is a quiet, human-powered sport that perfectly integrates with wilderness use management. Plus, it can relieve congestion in heavily-traveled river corridors where there’s a lot of horse and foot traffic.”

The words “quiet,” “simple,” and “sustainable” surface again and again. Contrast this to the National Parks Conservation Association testimony: “The bill opens untouched rivers and streams that total approximately three and a half times the length of the entire Mississippi River. Increased human impact on these sensitive lands could harm sensitive wildlife species such as grizzly bears by increasing the potential for conflict in their most critical and core habitat” (NPCA 2013). The Greater Yellowstone Coalition notes that “allowing such access will make pristine Yellowstone and Grand Teton streams vulnerable to the invasive weeds and aquatic species that have taken over many parts of the West, threatening native vegetation and wildlife forage” (Waters 2013).

By grounding the discussion in management and conservation, the Greater Yellowstone Coalition and the NPCA steer away from the loaded questions of rights and access. The use of science is a well-recognized technique for legitimizing a rhetorical position, but in this case they have a point: opening the rivers to paddling would have an undeniable physical impact, both in the need for increased access infrastructure, potential degradation of riparian corridors, and the disruption of wildlife movement patterns, particularly in the Lamar and Hayden valleys.

At this point, it might be helpful to distinguish packrafters from kayakers. Although there's considerable overlap, and their end goal is the same, the arguments are framed very differently. A packraft is essentially a sturdy inflatable boat, light enough to be carried in a backpack. The most durable can handle some whitewater, but they're generally used on streams, lakes and rivers to extend the scope of multi-day wilderness trips. Packrafters portray themselves as conservationists and wilderness lovers who are simply seeking to express their love of wild places.

Whitewater kayakers, on the other hand, tend to focus on the question of access: which recreational interests are allowed in, and who makes the decision? The Black and Grand Canyon are repeatedly described as world class whitewater, incomparable to anything found outside the park. Aaron Pruzan, who runs a kayak outfitting business in Jackson, WY, testified in support of HR 3492: "To live so near to these amazing rivers and yet be unable to experience them is a constant frustration for me, many other residents of the area surrounding the Parks, and many visitors" (HR 3492 River Paddling Protection Act: Hearings before the Subcommittee on Public Lands and Environmental Regulation, 2013). This is a powerful argument that appeals to a larger, nebulous sense of being shut out: Barthel-Bouchier puts it well when she states that even when visitors understand the needs for Park Service management restrictions, they resent them:

... the control that concerns them is not over how to deal with invasive insect or plant populations or how to manage staff and provide services. Rather, the loss of control is more a fear of one's self being controlled, of not being allowed to hunt, fish, or picnic when and as one will. This in turn reflects a broader current in American culture, often positively referred to as rugged individualism, negatively as a refusal to respect the claims of the commons.

In an interview for a local online journal, Pruzan goes on to say that "(Banning boats on it) is a little like saying people can't climb the Grand Teton...It's hard to say any kayaker is more impactful than a fisherman, walking along the riverside or on the river bottom" (Dayton 2013).

Grayson Schaffer, a writer for Outside Magazine, takes the argument even further in an article entitled "The National Parks are About to Get a Lot More Fun:"

[Speaking for] the people who are most desperate to be allowed in: the paddlers, mountain bikers, and other adventure-sports athletes who are banned from many of the nation's best natural playgrounds. It's an outdated stance that overlooks the role these activities now play in our relationship with wild places, and it seriously undercuts public support for an expansive and growing park system. (Schaffer 2014)

Schaffer goes on to make a token argument that more recreational use will generate a stronger conservation ethic, but the word "playground" frankly implies a landscape that exists for human enjoyment. It is dialectically opposed to the carefully-crafted arguments of the American Packrafters Association and similar advocates for low-impact use. "Playground," in fact, connotes an entire range of negative associations for many wilderness and national park advocates, and taps into the vein of post-war consumerism and self-gratification examined by Marafiotte. For opponents, it also implies a slippery slope of BASE jumpers, ATV riders, snow-

kickers and other pursuers of extreme sports who would clutter the landscape and require expensive rescues when they got into trouble. Chief Ranger Tim Reid states that “our charter is not to accommodate everything that comes down the pipe” (Freihofer 2013).

Mike Clark, former executive director of the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, appeals directly to ideas of what natural areas should look like: “Do we really wish to see a flotilla of brightly colored boats filling up every major stream in Yellowstone? Does such a spectacle enhance the beauty and the natural aesthetics of an untrammelled river corridor?” (Clark 2014).

Brad Meiklejohn, president of the American Packraft Association, disagrees, saying that shutting paddlers out is “like the director of the Smithsonian saying, ‘No, there’s plenty of other museums, you don’t need to come in here. We think you’re going to degrade the exhibits and offend the other patrons’” (Farmen 2014). This fits into the claim that the Park Service is “elitist” and biased against kayakers and packrafters, perceiving them as low-class, “freelance dirtbags” (Farmen 2014).

By emphasizing the low impact of paddling and arguing that opposition to paddling is outdated and purely aesthetic, public advocates such as Meiklejohn, Pruzan and Jordan try to avoid drawing attention to the negative connotations of the playground mentality. Rob Lesser, who accompanied Doug Ammons on the illegal 1986 Black Canyon run, even admitted in an interview with *Canoe & Kayak* that “every effort must be made to portray floating as a natural and non-impactful form of wild country use. It should not be a case of yahoo kayakers just out to get their jollies. Think pack rafters traveling the Yellowstone backcountry via the river systems...it offers such a richer experience” (quoted in Buchanan 2013).

What this tactic obscures, however, is that the desire to break into a previously forbidden place, to pit oneself against high water, is at least as much driven by personal fulfillment as environmental ethics.

The discursive construction of American wilderness has always tapped into this frontier mentality, the idea of man against wilderness. In 1930, Robert Marshall wrote the essay “The Problem of the Wilderness,” which touches presciently on the questions of use and access:

Adventure, whether physical or mental, implies breaking into unpenetrated ground, venturing beyond the boundary of normal aptitude, extending oneself to the limit of capacity, courageously facing peril. Life without the chance for such exertions would be for many persons a dreary game, scarcely bearable in its horrible banality.

This mentality is reflected by kayakers such as EG, a local paddler who penned a blog post entitled “Yellowstone National Problem” after his brother and friends were apprehended and fined for “intent to kayak” in 2008. EG posts pictures of several waterfalls and rapids in the park, with captions such as “The epic Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone amazing class V canyons,” a “sick slide just dormant ready to be fired” and a “dope rapid” (EGCreekin 2008).



Photo ©2014 by Joshua Theurer

The author visiting Colonnade Falls on a September 2014 backpacking trip to the “Cascade Corner” Bechler region of Yellowstone: site for peaceful contemplation or a “nasty 70 footer yet to be hucked”? (EGCreekin 2008)

The pros and cons can go back and forth, tossing out green buzz words and quoting Murie at each other until the rivers dry up, but what of the legal arguments? Which side, if either, has the stronger position?

Many advocates on both sides were troubled by the implications of the original text of HR 3492, which would have essentially given Congress the power to overrule management decisions made by the Department of Interior. The Greater Yellowstone Coalition, in its statement of opposition, wrote:

GYC strongly opposes this legislation. It strips away the discretion of the National Park Service and sets a perilous precedent for legislating uses into some of our nation’s most cherished natural areas without a public process or adequate environmental analysis. This legislation would undercut existing laws and regulations which for years have protected the many values of rivers in Yellowstone and Grand Teton. (Waters 2013)

With counseling from American Whitewater, the bill was revised and the language altered to preserve the Park Service's management discretion, while the Park was allotted a three year grace period to assess 7500 miles of waterways for paddling suitability, an impact analysis that would cost an estimated \$4 million dollars. It was then introduced in the Senate by Sen. John Barrasso (R-WY), bundled into the Public Access and Lands Improvement Act, a piece of legislation that was, as Kevin Colburn of American Whitewater notes dryly, "the subject of significant opposition within the conservation community and Congress." The bill attracted wide-scale negative press, and in February 2014, American Whitewater withdrew their support, stating that

...we recognized this situation as one that was rapidly headed for a long, heated, damaging, and distracting fight. The legislative effort we hoped would lead to a meaningful debate and science-based management was being taken in the wrong direction. The resources required to fully engage in a struggle of this scale and nature would consume significant organizational resources and prevent us from engaging in countless other high-priority projects. Our capacity to continue our original strategy on the river management plan in these parks, and other high priority regional and national projects would be threatened (Colburn 2014).

Essentially American Whitewater concluded that to continue the debate would damage not only the organization, but the public perception of paddling access in general. However, they state that they hold out hope that the future will bring new opportunities for meaningful, science-based debate on the subject. What might that debate look like and sound like?

Cronon wrote that "The wilderness dualism tends to cast any use as *ab*-use, and thereby denies us a middle ground in which responsible use and non-use might attain some kind of

balanced, sustainable relationship... “ This is the elusive middle ground that all the various parties want for Yellowstone – but nobody can quite agree on where it lies.

The River Paddling Protection Act, abandoned by its allies, has stalled in the Senate: Govtrack.us estimates that it has only an 11% chance of passing through committee and only a 3% chance of being enacted (River Paddling Protection Act, H.R. 3492, 113th Congress, 2013). In early 2015, Cynthia Lummis introduced a new bill, HR 974, which calls for an impact study on the effects of opening Yellowstone’s waterways to recreational boating; as of this writing, the bill has yet to pass. However, the pressure to open Yellowstone’s rivers will only continue to grow. American Whitewater has a point: there is a need for the Park Service to engage in the public forum and to clarify their management decisions. It is no cop-out to state that both sides have excellent points to make and that they are fundamentally invested in conservation and sustainable use – but what will that use look like?

Friskies is referring specifically to designated wilderness in the following passage, but I think it resonates for Yellowstone as well:

The fact that there is no place in the United States (or the world) that has not been impacted by human activity (pre- or post-1492) is, according to a forward-looking interpretation of wilderness, beside the point. Wilderness areas are places that have been *relatively* untrammeled in the past, and, just as importantly, they are places where we have agreed to allow natural processes to proceed in a somewhat free and unhampered manner in the future. From this perspective, wilderness designation establishes a covenant between humans and a particular landscape. Rather than emphasizing our separation from nature, wilderness designation instantiates a unique form of human-nature relationship—one characterized by

human forbearance, humility, respect and non-instrumentality. It is not dualistic, but potentially dialogical (Friskics 2008).

What covenant do we hold for the national park system? Having established that Yellowstone is by no means a pristine landscape, and that indeed the dualistic construction of wilderness and civilization may be limiting to future conservation efforts, may we still set it apart? It is, after all, one of the largest intact ecosystems on the planet, and thus world class in ways much larger than whitewater. In the Age of the Anthropocene, must every wild corner, in Cronon's phrase, "bend to our will," and become our playground? For all the times I've traveled there, Yellowstone has never been my playground, I have done my best to leave it unimpaired, and to teach my students to do the same.

PART II: THE MILL AND THE MOUNTAIN

I now want to travel east, 2700 miles east but no further south, to the balsam forests of northern Maine in the fall of 2010, when I worked as a backcountry ranger in Baxter State Park. River access is not much of a problem in this part of the world; unlike the West, there's an endless, glorious slosh of lightly-traveled bogs, lakes, ponds and rivers, all with rolling, evocative names: the Allagash, the Penobscot, Wassataquoik, Ambajejus, Mooselookmeguntic. Bear jams aren't much of a problem either: the bears are wary and the black balsam woods swallow them up as quickly as you can spot them bolt across a road. Moose, however, are everywhere, particularly in the fall rut and particularly around the protected waters of Baxter. An enraged moose is every bit as dangerous, and considerably dimmer, than a grizzly, a fact lost on many visitors intent on getting the perfect photo. Something about the intoxicating combination of autumn colors, gorgeous mountain scenery, and moose wading in blue waters makes amateur wildlife photographers abandon all common sense. It was my task as a ranger to restore it, doing a much more tactful job of it than a bull moose might. As Baxter grows in popularity, wildlife-human confrontations become more and more inevitable, one of many resource management concerns that the park addresses in its own inimitable style.

It was 9 AM on a late September morning when I pulled up to Ranger Bill's cabin at Roaring Brook campground, a short hike from Sandy Stream Pond. Bill waved to me from the window and I knew he'd be out in a moment, just as soon as he finished listening to the Writer's Almanac on his battery-powered radio. He'd bring coffee too; I knew the ritual and timed my arrival accordingly. Sandy Stream Pond was the last site on my moose patrol. It was a beautiful day and I had already spent two hours warning photographers at other ponds about the hazards of harassing wildlife.

“What’s the outlook?” I said to Bill while we sipped hot coffee on the porch. “Brief me.”

“Counted eight moose on the pond last night,” Bill said. “Some big bulls. And photographers have been going in since I’ve been up; I think a bunch went in before dawn too. You’ll have an interesting situation on your hands.”

Contemplating this, still clutching my coffee, I walked down to the pond.

Sand Stream is the Holy Grail of North Woods photography because it opens westward to the Great Gulf of the Katahdin massif, its waters are deep blue, and it almost always hosts at least one moose. A canny photographer can get all of this into a single dramatic shot. On this morning, three cow moose were posing obligingly in the shallows while a crowd snapped from safely across the water. At first glance, I saw neither bulls nor gonzo photographers, so I continued to follow the trail around the pond.

Halfway down, I came alert to grunting and thrashing in the willows. It wasn’t a bull moose, however, but a portly French Canadian dressed in camo with a camera lens as big as my torso. *Then* I saw the bull in the water only a few meters away.

I indicated to the Canadian that he should vacate the willows. Affecting not to understand, he lifted his camera. The bull likewise raised his head, dripping pond weeds, and stared at us with mad, hazy eyes. I stepped back toward the trail. The Canadian, finally, made to do the same, but his lens strap was tangled in the willows. It was a tense moment, but the bull backed down first, opting to crash away and leave the water further down; I heard a cry as his exit roused another lurking photographer, but again there was no confrontation.

With another sip of my coffee I continued down the trail.

1) Mill Town

If you leave the big cities of the Northeast and push north on I-95, through New Hampshire, past Kennebunkport, skipping the hipster charms of Portland, bypassing Bangor, into a landscape of bogs, moose, and balsam fir, you'll eventually reach Millinocket, Maine, a broken-down town on the edge of a sea of beautiful nothing.

Millinocket did not yet exist when Thoreau wrote of the Great North Woods:

“What is most striking in the Maine wilderness is the continuousness of the forest, with fewer open intervals or glades than you had imagined. Except the few burnt-lands, the narrow intervals on the rivers, the bare tops of the high mountains, and the lakes and streams, the forest is uninterrupted. It is even more grim and wild than you had anticipated, a damp and intricate wilderness, in the spring everywhere wet and miry. The aspect of the country, indeed, is universally stern and savage...”

Millinocket, built on mills, carved out of that savage country only thirty-six years after Thoreau's visit, weathered two world wars and the Great Depression without changing appreciably. Year in, year out, the mills chewed up the North Woods and spat them out as paper pulp. The money was good: in its heyday, the 1960's and 70's, the Great Northern Paper Company employed 4,000 workers and provided some of the highest wages in the state. And then, far from Millinocket, economies and technologies evolved, the layoffs began, the population drifted away, and in 2008, the Millinocket mill closed for good. Unemployment spiked to 20%, while the 2010 census revealed that the population has shrunk at least 42% from 1970. If you drive down Central Street today, you'll find a main drag with many of the businesses boarded up, a Hannaford's, a Laundromat, and a feeble cottage industry based on

moose tchotchkes. The mill structures are slowly being torn down: gathering to watch the demolition process is a popular local spectator sport.

If this sounds like an old story, “Death of a Mill Town,” if you think you can already guess the tragic but inevitable ending, guess again.

There’s another way into Millinocket: it starts at Springer Mountain, Georgia, and snakes 2200 miles north up the eastern spine of the continent, crossing rocks, rivers and the 100 Mile Wilderness to culminate with a last killer climb up Baxter Peak, Mount Katahdin. From there, it’s a 25 mile walk or hitchhike into town. This is the Appalachian Trail, and it’s not the fast way, but by the time you get there, a greasy hamburger and a Schlitz from one the few functioning restaurants make the town feel like the pinnacle of civilization.

Millinocket makes a reluctant base camp for the trail and the mountain: its relationship can be best summed up as ambivalent.

In an August 214 article for the Portland Press Herald, Ed Girsra, a local, observed that “If you tore down the mill stack and the mountain in the same day, people would notice the mill stack was gone first...That’s a reality in this town” (Richardson 2014, August 18).

It’s a telling statement, because Katahdin is one hell of a mountain, rearing up out of the forests above town like a boreal Uluru – table-topped, abrupt, intimidating, and given, like most solitary massifs, to moods expressed in weather: gauzes and cloaks of clouds, lightning, wind and summer snow squalls.

Katahdin drew over 63,000 visitors in 2013, and nearly all of them (save the 589 northbound thru-hikers finishing the AT) passed through Millinocket on their way into the park, spending an average of \$187.86 per person in the local area, delineated as the thirty small towns that dot the region.

There are no gear stores in Millinocket (except a gas station where you can buy flashlights, camo, and 100-proof DEET), few restaurants, and fewer lodging choices.

It's not a destination, and that's by choice: many residents see the future in timber, not tourism. When I first came to the area in late 2010, there was still hope that the mills would be reopened: a Canadian company, Cate Street Capital, was about to purchase the properties with the intention of bringing them out of idle – this of course before demolition of the main mill commenced in early 2013.

I came to town as a backcountry ranger, not a thru-hiker, but my needs were similar: trail food, a Laundromat, alcohol, and free wifi at the public library. These things Millinocket provided, and for that I still retain a kind of wry affection for it, but most visitors have bigger needs than mine and more money to spend, if only there was somewhere to spend it. In a 2008 economic impact survey, the Baxter State Park Authority interviewed park visitors about their needs and discovered that locally unavailable items ranged from outdoor gear and clothing to such basic supplies as cough drops, double D batteries, and garbage bags. Nothing is for sale within Baxter State Park itself, but by using data from the Maine State Planning Office, the survey determined that the “the total economic activity in Maine generated by visitors to Baxter State Park was \$6.9 million, sustaining the equivalent of 87 fulltime jobs and \$2 million in household earnings.” These figures are a powerful argument for the redemptive effect of tourism on a depressed town.

2) The Park

The juxtaposition of the town and the park, could, at this point, use some explaining. The first aspect is that Baxter State Park is not in fact a state park at all, at least in the sense of being

administered by the state. The park's land was donated in trust over a period of years, 1930 – 1962, by Percival Baxter, the former governor of Maine, who used his own fortune to purchase the land. The first 6000 acre parcel that Baxter donated included the Katahdin massif itself and was purchased from the Great Northern Paper Company; subsequent donations and purchases have brought the total size to 209,644 acres. Baxter was explicit about his goals for the park, writing that the land

...shall forever be retained and used for state forest, public park and recreational purposes...shall forever be kept and remain in the natural wild state...shall forever be kept and remain as a sanctuary for beasts and birds,” and in its Scientific Forest Management Area, shall “become a show place for those interested in forestry, a place where a continuing timber crop can be cultivated, harvested and sold...an example and an inspiration to others.

Further, he sketched out a six-point mission statement, which still guides park management policy:

- To protect the natural resources of the Park for their intrinsic value and for the enjoyment of present and future generations.
- To provide various appropriate recreational opportunities to Park visitors.
- To conduct exemplary sustainable forest management operations within the 29,537 acre Scientific Forest Management Area of the Park.
- To maintain the facilities, infrastructure and data systems of the Park.
- To provide for the safety of Park staff and visitors.
- To manage and protect the fiscal integrity and independence of the Park for current and future generations.

To ensure this, the fine print of Baxter's donation dictated the formation of the Baxter State Park Authority, a three person council consisting of the Attorney General, the Director of the Maine Forest Service and the Commissioner of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, who are granted full power in the control and management of the Park and in the exercise of all Trust obligations.

The Baxter State Park Authority, or more informally, just the Authority, manages the park through a designated Park Director and four administrators: the Chief Ranger, the Park Naturalist, a Business Manager, and a Resource Manager. These people, the agents of the Authority, are housed in a handsome wooden building in Millinocket. Although this headquarters is located nineteen miles from the park, it offers a number of conveniences that are not permitted within the park boundaries: electricity, internet, and running water. As such, it serves multiple functions – visitor center, office space, administrative headquarters, staff vehicle yard, and employee training center. One aspect of being autonomous from the state and federal park systems is intimacy: Baxter State Park employs around twenty-two year-round and thirty-nine seasonal employees; Grand Teton National Park, a third larger, employs over three hundred, not counting hundreds of seasonal concessions workers.

In Millinocket, providing jobs for sixty to seventy people makes the park one of the area's most significant employers, and many of the employees, particularly the campground rangers, are natives, or at least northern Mainers, the northern part being a fine distinction. My backcountry ranger partner, Erica, who hailed from Dover-Foxcroft, fifty-two miles down the road, was deemed local enough to pass, but everywhere else, particularly Portland and points south, was simply called "away."

I was pitied as a flatlander, but many of my coworkers kindly pointed out that at least I didn't hail from Massachusetts, Connecticut, or New Hampshire, the Mainer axis of bad drivers with out-of-state plates.

As in the rest of Millinocket, the park staff always gave off a faint background hum of disdain for these people from away, although without them, most of us would have been short a job – a wilderness park that has no services, paved roads, or permanent infrastructure save a handful of cabins, campgrounds, and maintenance sheds doesn't need sixty people to run it. The majority of the staff members, including myself, spent our days in visitor liaison: greeting, informing, intercepting, and cleaning up after hikers and campers.

The relationship between Baxter, its staff, and its visitors is very different from a typical state or national park. The most crucial difference is that the Authority, in cooperation with the park director and administrators, is free to interpret Percival Baxter's mandate as they see fit, granting unprecedented flexibility in shaping park policy. The former director, Irvin "Buzz" Caverly, made management calls based on his long personal acquaintance with Baxter and his first-hand understanding of the former governor's vision for the park; the current director, Jensen Bissell, relies on the Articles of Trust and Deeds of Gift that comprise Baxter's constitution.

Both Caverly and Bissell supported a fixed capacity model of visitor control, one policy in keeping with Baxter's vision that would be inconceivable in a popular national park such as Yellowstone. The idea of limiting the number of cars and day hikers in Yellowstone is a fantasy; in Baxter, it's controlled by the Day Use Parking Reservation System, or DUPR, the idea being that there are a limited number of parking spaces at the three most popular Katahdin trailheads, and when those parking spaces are filled, the fragile mountain terrain is at hiker capacity.

“The DUPR system is new for 2010,” my new boss, Marcia Williamson, explained on my first tour of the park. “Before we put it in place, people used to start lining up *here*” – we were still a good two miles from the Togue Pond entrance gate – “at one o’clock in the morning to make sure they got a parking space. Now they can reserve one and as long as they check in before 7 AM, it’s theirs.”

She acknowledged that the system was still working out the kinks. For instance, a long line still formed outside the gates on summer mornings before 7, when unclaimed DUPR spaces were distributed first-come first-serve to more spontaneous types.

Campsite access has traditionally been managed through a rolling reservations system that opens in January, with the interesting stipulation that sites at the most popular locations can only be reserved in person or through the mail, leading to diehards camping out in the yard at BSP headquarters on the night before reservations open in order to get first crack at the best spots.

All dispersed (i.e. not established site) camping *in* the Park is illegal, as even a ranger found out when he invited his brother to camp out on the grass behind his staff cabin for a few days. Marcia spied the blaze-orange tent from afar and investigated; the brother was ousted.

With her tiny frame and stylishly-cut white hair, my new boss might have looked like anyone’s favorite grandmother, but when it came to maintaining law and order there was steel underneath.

I quickly learned that her concern stemmed not just from adherence to Baxter’s rules, but to her own dedication to the principles of Leave No Trace, a philosophy that she embraced with evangelical fervor.

On my first tour, Tom Power, a trainee seasonal ranger, met us at the entrance station. A stocky older man who'd worked the mill in a former life, he was enjoying a snack of raw green beans as we pulled up. When Marcia unrolled the truck window, he hastily stuffed several into his mouth; a few more escaped onto the ground.

"Tom," Marcia said. "You dropped some green beans."

"S'okay," Tom said. "I've still got plenty."

Marcia smiled sweetly.

"No, Tom. I want you to pick them up."

The big man got down and scabbled in the gravel for his fallen beans.

"Have you taken a Leave No Trace employee training yet?" Marcia said. "No? Remind me to get you signed up."

I was to see a great deal of the gate-keepers because my staff cabin was located on park-owned land outside the gates. I often crossed the boundary several times a day, usually bypassing long lines of visitors waiting to get in.

My cabin was located down a gated, mile-long drive that I partly shared with a Girl Scout camp, a pre-existing establishment which had been grandfathered in and allowed, albeit grudgingly, to retain its indoor plumbing, telephone lines, and electrical connections. My cabin, on the other hand, had been stripped of these amenities in order to bring it into line with the rustic spirit of the park.

I didn't care, I had a screened porch that faced Lower Togue Pond (which at 384 acres is a pond only by Maine standards), cold running water drawn up from the pond by Honda generator pump, and a private canoe. If I wanted electricity I could go to Millinocket.

The Lower Togue cabin, however, was only intended to be a base camp: my real duties were atop Katahdin, protecting the resource.

Katahdin, because of its extreme vertical relief, is ecologically distinct from the surrounding Maine wilderness: the terrain and vegetation above treeline resemble sub-arctic conditions otherwise found hundreds of miles to the north in Canada. The plateau of the massif, known as the Tableland, harbors a number of rare and/or endemic species, including marshy sedge meadow communities, Bicknell's thrush and American pipits, the Katahdin arctic butterfly, and alpine plants such Labrador tea, diapensia, and mountain cranberry, scattered amid tumbles of granite boulders and wind-washed meadows. It's a wild and enchanting landscape, which Thoreau described as "no man's garden," but a fragile one. The openness of the plateau, after the steep, narrow climb to the top, invites hikers to stray off trail, where their footprints quickly stamp social trails into the slow-growing vegetation. Of course this is a problem in any alpine environment, but Katahdin's popularity with hikers, along with the scarcity of high peaks in New England, a factor which tends to channel climbers onto a handful of alpine landscapes (Mt. Washington in New Hampshire and Mt. Mansfield in Vermont are two others that suffer from this) greatly magnifies the problem. In 2002 the Authority decided to combat trail sprawl by creating a series of string fences which were no more complex than stakes driven into the ground with cord strung between them at ankle height, following the contours of the trail. Some visitors initially objected on aesthetic grounds, but the resulting landscape recovery, documented through a series of annual photos, was striking.

Of course, these string fences were hardly more durable than the ground they protected; they snapped, blew away, fell down, or got kicked over on a daily basis. Fence repair was a crucial part of my backcountry patrol duties; as I hiked over the Tableland with cord and stakes, I

also took notes on fresh social trail damage and looked behind boulders to count ‘toilet paper flowers,’ a surefire indication of housetrained humans out of their element. Marcia reacted to every new report of garbage and toilet paper above treeline with the resigned sigh of a woman whose life’s work will never be finished. Yes, God knows, we were many miles from a flush toilet, but that should have dawned on anybody visiting Baxter long before they reached the Tableland.

How many more Leave No Trace brochures and trailhead signs could you possibly foist on people before they got the message?

Visitor impact mitigation in a popular park hinges fundamentally on the balance between interpretation and enforcement. Because of the small size of the Authority, the depth of its funding pool, and the scope of its mandate, Baxter has more flexibility than most parks in determining this balance. Some of the most noticeable differences begin at the gate: Baxter forbids pets, firearms, motorcycles, recreational vehicles over a certain height and length, and bicycles except on the main park roads. Unprepared visitors who show up with any these items will find themselves firmly turned away.

Under Marcia’s tenure as the Interpretive Specialist, Leave No Trace information in the form of both hands-on classes for visiting groups and educational materials at entrance gates and trailheads had proliferated – but that was merely an opening salvo in the park campaign. The real key for Baxter is active face-time with rangers. A visitor climbing one of the most popular trails on a summer day can expect to interact with rangers between two and four times – once at the entrance gate, at least once at the trailhead, possibly twice if climbing the peak from Chimney Pond via the Roaring Brook campground, and again if a patrol ranger (such as myself in 2010) happens to be on the scene for a little low-key, impromptu interpretation. A typical conversation

might start with the ranger introducing him or herself, touch on the weather and the scenery, and segue to the fragile alpine habitat, such as the rare and fragile Bigelow's sedge, which – oh hey, there's one now. Yes, right there. Under your boot. Or the conversation might turn to the native wildlife, such as those juncos flocking around to eat the granola that you've strewn all over your lunch spot.

In my experience, individual rangers were also given somewhat more autonomy to determine their interpretive style than their federal counterparts; the approach varied according to personal inclination.

Ranger Rich Elliot, for instance, had been a covert operations officer in Afghanistan, and applied essentially the same principles to protecting the resource that he had used under heavy fire during the first democratic elections in Kabul. He was 6'4" with perfectly gelled black hair, and generally stomped around the Chimney Pond campground in camo and knee-high tube socks that his wife made him wear for fear of ticks. (This was man whose chest was still riddled with shrapnel and his wife's concern was *Lyme disease*?) He breakfasted on four Ibuprofen, two Percocets, and a multivitamin every morning, and took great glee in shouting ridiculous things from the back room as I answered hikers' questions in the office of the Chimney Pond ranger station.

Me, advising someone on wilderness first aid: "You know, you can make an excellent immobilizing splint from a foam sleeping pad."

Rich (from the back, bellowing) "I CAN MAKE A SPLINT OUT OF A MOOSE FEMUR!"

A teenage hiker: Hey, my friends say this mountain is an extinct volcano, but I think it was formed by glaciers, who's right?

Rich: “TELL YOUR FRIENDS THEY’RE FULL OF SHIT!”

“Wow,” the teenage hiker said. “You guys are like, the coolest rangers I’ve ever met.”

It was an idiosyncratic but surprisingly effective interpretive style. People liked Rich, and when he told them not to trample the diapensia, they listened.

However, patrol and resource protection was primarily the responsibility of the wilderness patrol ranger. As a campground ranger, Rich – and other rangers stationed at campgrounds throughout the park – were primarily responsible for maintaining the site and protecting not the resource, but the hikers, a 24/7 task.

The 2013 Baxter State Park Operation Report observes that:

Although hard to verify with existing scientific data, the past decade has left Park managers with the growing conviction that Park visitors are increasingly unprepared for the physical, mental and environmental challenges that are often a part of an excursion into a wilderness environment... This lack of preparedness often seems closely paired with a false perception that help or assistance is always close at hand, convenient to utilize and with zero cost to the visitor. Increasingly visitors display an attitude of expectation more akin to an amusement park attraction, where the element of thrill and danger are illusions wrapped in an invisible net of safety and security... Over the past decade, our attempts to address these concerns have largely been oriented toward increasing the venues, volumes and specificity of information we target to Park visitors, particularly through:

- Information on sign and bulletin boards near hiker registration boxes at trailhead

Ranger Stations

- Information on the Park website, Newsletter, Gatehouse handouts etc.

- Face to face information provided by Park Staff

Like resource protection, visitor safety is a universal issue for parks, but again, Baxter has greater discretion than state or national parks. Year-round, visitors are required to sign in at ranger stations and trailheads with their names, the number of hikers in the party, and their planned route. Children under six are forbidden above treeline, and hikers planning to climb to the summit are advised to observe posted cut-off times for starting their hike: for instance the cut-off time to climb from the Chimney Pond campground, halfway up the mountain, is 1 PM. Rangers can and will strongly dissuade straggling hikers if they feel there's a risk that they'll run out of daylight before finishing.

In winter, the safety regulations become stricter. Parties wishing to hike above treeline must submit a registration form seven days in advance detailing winter hiking experience, emergency contact information for all members of the party, routes and destination, and the name and address of the designated trip leader. Solo winter hikers and campers must submit, in addition to this form, a Winter Solo Camping Form with an explanation of why you plan to hike alone, your goals for the trip, a list of your gear including the brand and color of your tent, emergency contact and medical info, and an assessment of your food and fuel supply.

These regulations are in a constant state of revision and evaluation: for instance, prior to 2009, winter users were required to submit the registration form two weeks in advance, camp overnight at Roaring Brook (located at the foot of the mountain), travel with a minimum group of four, and comply with mandatory equipment and minimum food requirements.

Many users, however, pointed out that these rules, intended to protect visitors and staff, actually made recreation *less* safe, noting that two winter-savvy hikers would be safer and travel more quickly than the same pair plus two less experienced members they might be obliged to

invite in order to make up the minimum party size. When Ben Woodward assumed the role of Chief Ranger in 2009, he oversaw the adaptation of the winter use rules to their current, slightly more relaxed incarnation.

This is not to say, however, that the balance between resource protection, recreation and visitor safety has reached a platonic ideal in Baxter. An ongoing source of contention involves the Appalachian Trail, whose northern terminus lies on Baxter Peak, the highest point on the Katahdin massif. After 2200 rocky miles, AT thru-hikers make the final climb to the summit, pose for photos in front of the peak sign, and then hitchhike or shuttle into Millinocket for a taste of civilization, such as it is. For a fee of \$10, thru-hikers waiting to summit can camp at the foot of the mountain in a small reserved campground, the Birches, which has a maximum capacity of twelve. During the peak summer months, Baxter also employs a trail liaison (usually a former thru-hiker) who welcomes hikers entering the park and familiarizes them with Baxter and its regulations. Most thru-hikers are well-behaved and welcome. However, with the increasing popularity of the Appalachian Trail, the staff members at Baxter have observed a growing contingent of recalcitrant individuals who struggle to adapt to the park after months of relatively unregulated hiking and camping on state and federal lands. In a December 2014 letter to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, director Jensen Bissell expressed the Authority's concern with certain hiker behaviors, including the tendency to hike in large, disruptive groups, "tagging" and other vandalism of natural resources in the park, and a number of hikers with dogs who have been caught presenting forged service papers claiming disability in order to sneak their animals into the park. The public use of drugs and alcohol has also been a concern: in addition to loud partying at the hiker campground, it's a common sight on a late summer day to see a large crowd of cheering people on Baxter Peak with a gushing bottle of champagne, an open violation of

Maine law. While understandable, the party atmosphere is arguably un conducive to the “forever wild” vision of Percival Baxter, and disruptive to spectacular wilderness experience of climbing Katahdin. Bissell and the Baxter Park Authority propose a number of potential solutions, ranging from instituting a permit system to limit the number of AT hikers accessing Katahdin all the way to rerouting the final portion of the trail to bypass the park and the mountain altogether. For those who view Katahdin as an iconic and integral part of the Appalachian Trail, the latter solution would be drastic, but it remains on the table as long as management problems persist.

3.) Quimby Land

Rerouting the Appalachian Trail would have a significant effect both on the park and the flow of traffic through Millinocket. The park would welcome the reduced pressure on staff and resources, but the economy of Millinocket would suffer. However, a new factor has the potential to dramatically alter both the visitor patterns and cash flow of the Katahdin region: the creation of a 70,000 acre national park to the east of Baxter. An organization called RESTORE first floated the idea of a 3.2 million acre North Woods national park in the early 1990’s: the proposal met intense public and legislative opposition and has largely been dismissed as unfeasible.

However, Roxanne Quimby, the multi-millionaire co-founder of Burt’s Bees cosmetics, proposes to donate 150,000 acres, a much more manageable acreage, to the Department of the Interior for a proposed national park and national recreation area. Quimby sits on the board of the National Park Foundation and is personally acquainted with Ken Salazar, the former Secretary of the Interior, factors that lend real-world political heft to her vision.

This is not, however, a vision that many residents of Millinocket initially shared. Quimby first proposed the park in 2011, but opposition to her stems to her first land purchases in the area in 2004: one of her first acts was to close the land to hunting, fishing, and snowmobiling, uses that local residents had been enjoying in the area for decades.

A young Baxter State Park ranger, Russ Porter, a lifelong Millinocket resident, told me how angry he had been to find the roads and woods where he grew up roaming suddenly shut to him, with locked gates and No Trespassing signs barring access to thousands of acres of land. He loved Baxter, but the North Woods were *his* in a way that the park could never be; they were endless trees and unlimited freedom.

Quimby's closure of the property and then her proposed national park touched a nerve with northern Mainers, representing loss of access and the intrusion of both outsiders and the federal government. Unlike the other parts of the United States, particularly the West, public land ownership is rare in Maine: only 6% of the land is managed by the state or federal government, and federal agency is widely distrusted. Opposition to Quimby was fierce and personal: a "Ban Roxanne" movement with bumper stickers and a Facebook page sprang up.

Perhaps realizing that her own burned bridges presented a serious obstacle, Quimby has recently stepped out of the spotlight in favor of her son Lucas St. Clair, a hunter and fisherman who is regarded as more sympathetic to local concerns and generally better liked and trusted. Under St. Clair's guidance, large amounts of acreage have recently been re-opened to hunting, and the proposed national park has evolved into a 70,000 acre park combined with an 80,000 acre national recreation area, which would still be open to multiple uses. From overwhelming antagonism, St. Clair has coaxed cooperation from town and business leaders in Millinocket and East Millinocket. As of March 2015, some 200 local business leaders have agreed to support the

plan, provided that St. Clair agrees to a number of conditions, a list of which St. Clair recently supplied to Nick Sambides of the *Bangor Daily News*:

1. The project would be 150,000 acres, with a \$40 million endowment to help pay for operations and maintenance;
2. Include a National Park that would provide recreation opportunities such as hiking, camping, horseback riding, fishing and cross-country skiing;
3. Include a national recreation area that would permanently protect access for hunting and snowmobiling, in addition to the activities allowed in the national park;
4. Include snowmobile trails in the national recreation area, including a permanent north-south route and an east-west route, generally along existing ITS 85, ITS 83 and the existing Club Trail 114;
5. Ensure that business and forest products industry activities in the region would be exempt from any new or additional Clean Air Act requirements;
6. Ensure that the National Park Service would have no authority over timber harvesting outside the boundary of the national park and national recreation area, and would be prohibited from asserting a “buffer” of any kind;
7. Ensure that any management plan honor and educate the public about the rich cultural logging heritage of the North Maine Woods;
8. Require local timber be used for infrastructure, to the extent possible;
9. Require the National Park Service to give preference to Maine-based companies for concession, outfitter and guide contracts and permits; and
10. Ensure that Maine residents will have input on the project’s management plan through an ongoing advisory committee.

Millinocket's ongoing concern with the timber industry is reflected in these conditions: many still hold onto the idea that timber, not tourism, is the future of northern Maine. Mark Marston, the vice chairman of the anti-park Maine Woods Coalition, told a *New York Times* reporter in 2014 that "if a park comes in, it would shut the mills...People in Millinocket don't make what they used to, but at least they're working, which is better than seasonal jobs at a park" (quoted in Seelye 2014).

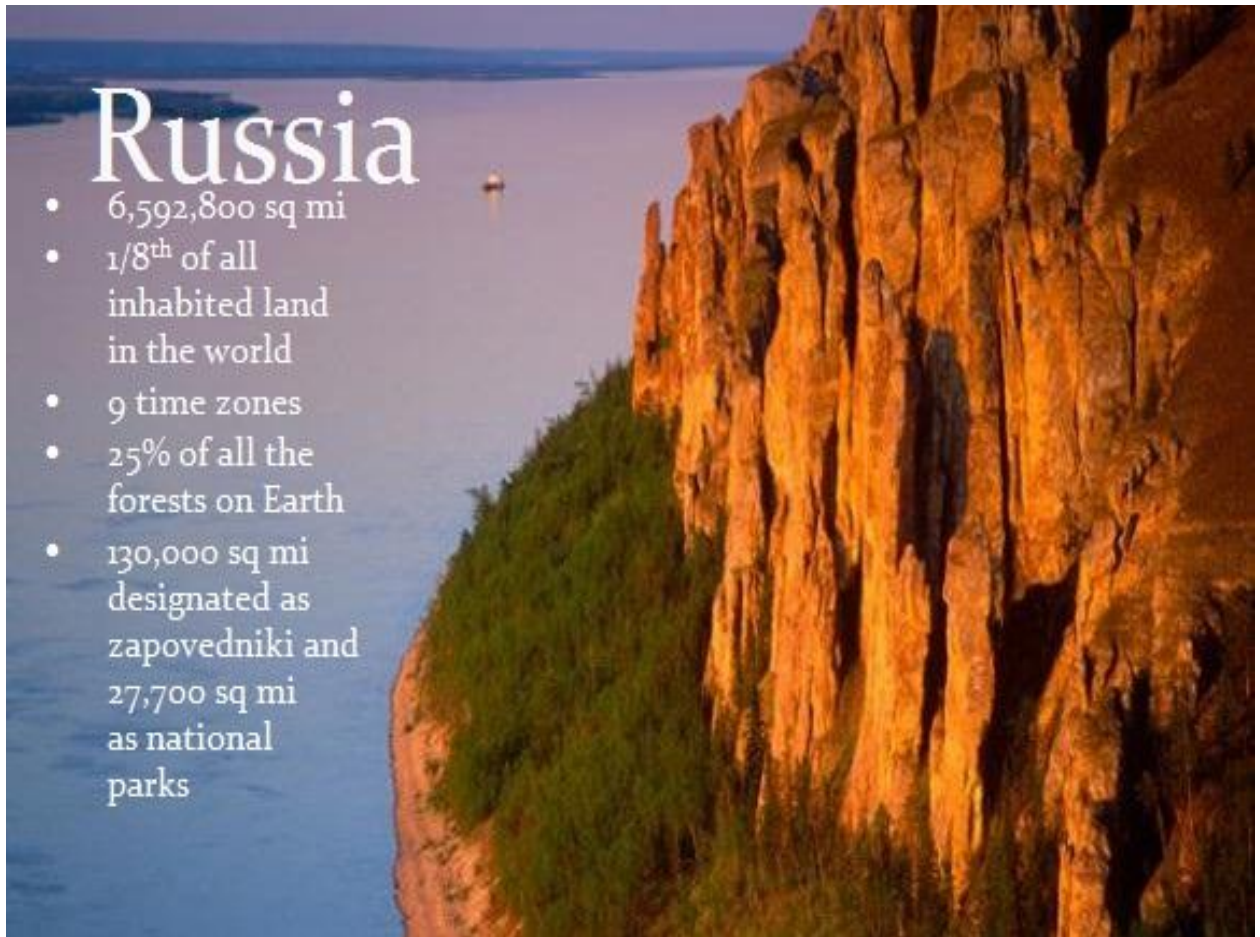
Proponents, on the other hand, argue that the national park brand will draw in thousands of visitors, create jobs in gateway communities and dramatically boost the economy of the region, citing the effect that Acadia National Park, the only existing park in the northeast exerts on the surrounding area. Baxter draws in approximately 60,000 visitors per year, but the title of "National Park" is powerfully symbolic, one of Quimby and St. Clair's main arguments for not simply donating the land to Baxter, the Nature Conservancy, or another private conservation organization. It's inarguable, however, that the national park brand will dramatically change the character of the North Woods – a plus or minus depending on one's perspective. Like Russ Porter, the Baxter ranger, many northern Mainers grew up deeply immersed in the forest landscape: hiking, but also fishing, hunting, and logging; many view themselves as the rightful stewards and inheritors of the landscape. In the years ahead, will Millinocket find a way to reconcile its logging heritage with an environmental future?

PART III: ZAPOVEDNIK: a political analysis of wilderness in Russia

Russia, like northern Maine, is a place where the boundlessness and richness of the landscape obscures its fragility, a place where the wild always seems to be creeping in around the cracks. Percival Baxter wrote of his park: “Man is born to die. His works are short-lived. Buildings crumble, monuments decay, and wealth vanishes, but Katahdin in all its glory forever shall remain....” (Baxter quoted in Baxter State Park), a quote that seems equally apt when one looks at photographs of Chernobyl and other abandoned Soviet sites, reclaimed and repopulated by wolves and brown bears, no country’s citizens. Even in Moscow, a city of eleven million people, moose and wild boar haunt the larger parks, and wolves prowl the perimeter. Russia gives the impression that concrete high-rises and glittering boulevards are every minute on the edge of being devoured by encroaching wilderness. It’s a deceptive impression: decades of Soviet ecological mismanagement and globalized, post-Soviet industrialization have left the country’s lakes and waterways contaminated by mine waster or drained dry for disastrous agricultural initiatives, its vast forests diminished and its wildlife endangered.

My story of Russia comes from the detachment and distance that I felt there, golden birch forests viewed from a bus window, pigeons on the ledge of my 26-story apartment building, the howl of feral dogs on a dark winter day. It’s a story of the places where you can’t go, the forbidden zones – except that now you *can* go, if you’re a wealthy eco-tourist, a miner, or a logger employed by a multinational corporation. The poachers, technically, are still barred, but China is close and its appetite for illegal wildlife voracious.

Like Yellowstone, the Russian park system stands on the edge of a 21st century frontier. The demand for new levels of access has replaced the push for territorial expansion; globalization is the new manifest destiny.



Foundations of the *zapovednik* system

The establishment of Yellowstone, the world's first national park, did not go unmarked outside of North America. A number of factors contributed to increased public and state interest in the creation of protected areas around the globe in the late nineteenth century. One major concern was the environmental damage wrought by post-Industrial Revolution resource extraction activities; another was the spread of the western European Romantic movement, which idealized the concept of wilderness and untrammelled nature. In pre-Revolutionary Russia, the academic and elite section of Russia society (particularly in the Russian Academy of Sciences) coupled these issues with political and economic criticism of the Tsarist regime, which

was perceived as promoting unchecked capitalism and environmental exploitation (Ostergren 2010).

Danilina notes that timber over-harvesting, the loss of virgin steppe habitat, and the decline of commercially valuable fur-bearing animals were of particular concern (Danilina 2001). In response, several leading academics proposed copying the North American model by setting aside large tracts of undeveloped lands for preservation. The term they used for these areas was *zapovednik*, which is usually translated as “nature preserve,” but has linguistic roots that imply both restriction and sacredness, something that is hallowed and set aside to be protected. Many of the original proponents of the system envisioned parks that would rival or even surpass Yellowstone in their beauty and value to the country.

In 1908 the scientist GA Kozhevnikov wrote that

These areas must be ‘*zapovedniki*’ in the full sense of the word.... Here, any actions violating the natural conditions of the struggle for existence are not permissible and nothing should be eliminated, nothing should be added or improved, nature should be left as it is and we shall watch the results. The areas within *zapovedniki* are of enormous significance, so their establishment must be primarily the concern of the state; though it can, of course, be a matter of a public and private initiative, the state must be ahead here (Danilina 2001)”

The first *zapovednik* established as part of the new formal reserve system was designated in 1916 in the Republic of Buryatia, on the northeast shores of Lake Baikal. Spanning 958 square miles, its primary purpose was to protect populations of Barguzin sables, a valuable fur-bearing species. The Ilmensky *zapovednik*, located in the Urals and containing unique geologic features, followed in 1919 (Ostergren 2010).

However, the use of the reserves was yet to be fully clarified. Danilina notes that there was a great deal of debate between academics and policy makers— should the reserves be national parks set aside for the enjoyment of the people, as in the American model? Should they exist as game reserves for species such as the Barguzin sable? Or should they be strictly scientific reserves accessible only to researchers? These issues, of course, were vastly complicated by the political, economic and cultural upheaval of the Revolution, although Lenin, himself an advocate for conservation measures, passed a 1921 decree entitled “On the Protection of Monuments of Nature, Gardens, and Parks,” which granted legal recognition to the system and established the priority of scientific research in the reserves.

In a brief history of the *zapovednik* system, Russian Conservation News notes that new reserves continued to be established and research conducted, even as scientists were persecuted under Stalin’s increasingly repressive regime (Center for Russian Nature Conservation 2007). One such scientist was Franz Shillinger, a passionate advocate for the system directly involved in the creation of twenty reserves. Shillinger suffered political denunciation and arrest before dying in a labor camp in 1943. The rise of Trofim Lysenko, a politically favored agricultural scientist, marked another blow for both Soviet science and the reserve system. Under his utilitarian policies, the total acreage of the *zapovedniki* was slashed from 12.6 million hectares to just 1.3 million (Ostergren 2010). Additionally, alien plant and animal species (including such blatantly non-native species as zebras and rheas) were introduced as part of the acclimatization policy, which was intended to bolster the material productivity of the reserves.

Many reserves were liquidated or permanently degraded, although some, often protected by their sheer remoteness, survived virtually intact: as Ostergren notes, “ironically, Stalin’s

actions tended to eliminate degraded *zapovedniki* and maintained areas with relatively undisturbed conditions” (Ostergren 2010).

Overall, the system proved resilient and began to benefit from renewed political support beginning in the late 1960’s. In 1978, the Soviet state’s participation in the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere program resulted in the Kavkazsky *zapovednik* being declared an international biosphere reserve, the first of forty-one eventually designated in the Russian Federation. In 1981 the General Statute of National *Zapovedniki* reaffirmed the scientific mission and conservation value of the reserves. Danilina notes, however, that the good intentions of this statute were undermined by failure to account for the unique characteristics, individual histories, and local livelihoods encompassing each reserve.

The collapse of the Soviet regime saw funding for the *zapovedniki* slashed by 60 – 80%, although thirty-two new reserves were created in the 1990s. The Law on Specially Protected Natural Areas, passed in 1995, clarified the role and mission of reserve managers and placed increased emphasis on public awareness and environmental education (Danilina 2001; Ostergren 2010). Another significant factor was the increased involvement of international organizations and conservation NGO’s such as the World Wildlife Fund.

In the following pages I will attempt to analyze the *zapovednik* system through a series of lens, beginning with a historical and political analysis of the role of the state both before and after the fall of the Soviet Union, followed by an economic perspective on the environmental effects of post-Soviet neoliberalism, and finally an overview of the international and domestic network of NGO’s, local actors, and governmental agencies that shape reserve policy today. Each element will of necessity be brief and hardly all-encompassing; hopefully they provide a useful guide and starting point for further in-depth analysis.

Archipelago of freedom: *zapovedniki* and the changing role of the state

In analyzing the history of the reserve system, there is no simple way to separate the official scientific mandate from the role of the Soviet state. In fact, through a combination of dogmatic policy implementation, state-sanctioned anti-scientific rhetoric, and persecution of scientists and academics, the state sought to redefine science itself.

As Weiner notes, the *zapovednik* system was originally modeled on a series of discursive conceptions about the natural world, chiefly “that discrete natural communities existed, that they normally maintained themselves in a state of balance, that they represented healthy and pristine nature, and, correspondingly, that humans existed outside nature as a pathological force” (Wiener 1999). This conceptualization of nature as a space removed from society was a key factor in the formation of the reserves. However, beginning in the 1930’s, Soviet utilitarian policy and new, politically-driven forms of knowledge began to undermine these formerly accepted ecological concepts. The rise of Trofim Lysenko and his allies, mentioned above, was a particular turning point. Nature, according to Lysenko’s doctrine, could be defined only by its usefulness to man. The practical implications of this materialist/utilitarian doctrine were manifested as a series of policies intended to increase the usefulness and economic productivity of the reserves. In addition to the widespread introduction of alien species, disruptive measures included supplemental feeding of animals deemed commercially valuable, mass vegetation replantings, and predator control. To suggest that these policies were destructive to the ecosystem, or to argue that nature should be sacrosanct and set apart from mankind, was to speak against Marxism itself. Scientific dissent could be a death sentence: Franz Shillinger was far from the only scientist to disappear during the purges of the late 1930’s. “Science for science’s sake” was widely condemned as bourgeois, and the life sciences were said to be “infested” with

anti-Soviet elements (Weiner 1999). However, the idea of *zapovedniki* as hallowed spaces continued to pervade the Russian consciousness. The argument has been made that the *zapovedniki* were inviolate on a cultural and symbolic as well as ecological level, representing a space removed from the oppression of the Stalinist state: they were the so-called “archipelago of freedom” that stood in direct contrast to the state-controlled Gulag system. In fact, as Weiner notes, many scientists chose to relocate their research into remote reserves, seeking physical and psychological distance from academic oppression; although publicly condemned, ecology research continued and even quietly, subversively flourished through the decades of purges, war, and political turmoil.

Thus, the intensely centralized nature of state power and lack of independent agency management under Stalin nearly brought about the collapse of the *zapovednik* system – but may also have contributed to saving it. With Stalin’s death, the liquidation of the reserve system almost immediately ceased; Khrushchev’s similar attempts to convert reserves for material production in the early 1960’s ground to a halt as soon as he lost power in 1964 (Ostergren and Shvarts 1998).

The Land Legislation Act of 1968 reemphasized the scientific mission of the *zapovedniki*, particularly the concept that they should remain inaccessible save for select scientists and reserve managers. However, growing interest in environmental issues, coupled with internal social liberalization, led to an increase in tourism within the Soviet Union. Demand for publicly accessible natural spaces led in 1971 to the creation of a separate national park system, administered by the Federal Forest Service. Beginning in the late 1960’s, the Soviet state increasingly wielded environmentalism as a political tool. Participation in the worldwide UNESCO biosphere reserves program is a particularly strong example of the ways in which the

state used environmental rhetoric as a means of bolstering legitimacy on the world stage (Ostergren 2010.)

However, both Weiner and Thomas make the case that various actors employed environmental rhetoric *against* the state. Glasnost opened the public forum to criticism of various aspects of Soviet policy, with environmental (mis)management a key point for activist groups. The legalization of NGO's in the late 1980's also represented a significant change in the relationship between the central state, Soviet citizens, and the environment.

The zapovednik system, having weathered the Russian Revolution and 70 years of Soviet governance, reaffirmed its inherent stability by surviving the collapse of the Soviet Union largely intact, albeit with funding cut by up to 80%. The post-Soviet government embraced a renewed environmental discourse, passing legislation governing the management of reserves and designating dozens of new protected areas in the last decade of the 20th century. However, the lack of funding and on-the-ground enforcement for the legislation led to a severe legitimacy gap, particularly the charge that government was seeking to bolster its environmental image by creating new reserves in remote areas while avoiding more immediate and severe environmental issues such as widespread industrial pollution. Simultaneously, problems within the existing zapovedniks – illegal construction and logging, poaching, trespassing, and other violations went unresolved, with violators seldom forced to answer for their actions.

In “Networks, Network Change and Environmental Pollution,” Venable asks: “What can explain both the paradox of Soviet environmental policy and the changes of the post-Soviet era? Why did the Soviet system produce failure in pollution control and success in wilderness protection? Why has the Russian Federation seen successful policy enactment but failed implementation in both of these issues?” Possible answers to these question require an analysis

of the political and economic forces at work in the post-Soviet Russian Federation, particularly the influence of changing market pressures and global neoliberalism.

Shifting Markets

The reduction in federal funding was one of the most significant challenges for the *zapovednik* system following the breakup of the Soviet Union. The 1995 Law on Specially Protected Natural Areas attempted to address this issue by legitimizing pathways for reserve managers to pursue alternate funding sources on a variety of scales, ranging from international donations, local support, souvenir sales, and newly levied taxes (Ostergren 1997). However, these multiple sources were inherently unpredictable and relied heavily on the fund-raising abilities of individual reserve directors. Ostergren and Shvarts provide a breakdown of the average funding percentages: “foreign (7.2 percent), regional support from subjects of the Russian Federation (14.3 percent), municipal funds, ecological funds (although these have declined because money is now directed toward more pressing problems such as clean water or breathable air), and domestic donations from industry and banks” (Ostergren and Shvarts 1998). In 1994 the World Bank, one of the most significant international funders, provided a \$110 million loan to bolster the creation of an Environmental Framework Program with the stated goals of assisting the Russian government to

- 1) Strengthen and streamline federal and regional institutional structures for environmental and natural resource management
- 2) Improve federal and regional environmental policy and strategy formulation and implementation
- 3) Upgrade environmental and natural resource management systems

- 4) Assist in the financing of economically viable, high priority resource recovery/pollution abatement projects in the country
- 5) Facilitate the flow of donor funds and resources to the environmental protection sector (World Bank Group: Environmental Management Project)

In 2000, the World Bank also provided \$60 million to the Ministry of Natural Resources for a Sustainable Forestry Pilot Project with the intention, among other goals, of improving “market-oriented forest policies” and “supporting the development of a more favorable environment for private investment in the sector” (World Bank Group: Projects). With an estimated \$49 billion per year gained through trade liberalization (World Bank Group: Policies), intense pressure continues to be levied to open markets in all sectors. Natural resource extraction in particular has been deemed in need of development: the abrupt transition to a free market economy came as a shock after decades of centrally controlled, massively inefficient and heavily subsidized economic production practices that emphasized output over profitability (Venable 2005). While the federal government has retained ownership over 95% of open lands (encompassing 22 – 25% of all the forests in the world) privatization has dominated the approach to natural resource management.

In a February 2014 report, the World Bank considers the environmental impact of Russia’s accession to the World Trade Organization, noting that trade liberalization has both potential negative and positive ramifications for the environmental future of Russia. The overall analysis, which delves into fiscal regulation, international tariffs, and the potential adoption of greener technologies, is beyond the scope of this paper: the key takeaway message is that the trade liberalization is now a fixture that will continue to shape Russian environmental policy for the foreseeable future (World Bank 2014).

TABLE 2.1: Examples of Trade-Liberalization-Induced Effects Expected on The Environment

EFFECTS	DEFINITION	NEGATIVE EFFECT ON ENVIRONMENT, IF ...	POSITIVE EFFECT ON ENVIRONMENT, IF ...
Scale	<i>Increase in economic activity, holding the product mix constant</i>	... trade induces a contraction of output	... growing trade creates national wealth that is used for environmental protection
Composition	<i>Sector mix changes</i>	... pollution-intensive sectors expand	... pollution-intensive sectors contract
Technique	<i>Technology changes</i>	... less efficient and eco-friendly technologies enter the production process	... more efficient and eco-friendly technologies enter the production process

The *zapovedniki*, long sheltered by the Soviet system, have not been isolated from this pervasive neoliberal discourse: there is ever-increasing pressure to make them economically viable in the new market. Whether this manifests in any given reserve as sustainable forestry, ecotourism, production of forest products or other forms of commoditization depends upon a variety of factors, including the availability of potential natural resources, the presence of exploitable buffer zones around pristine wilderness areas, and the financial stability of the reserve.

On a local scale, the *zapovedniki* support a variety of unofficial economies, including the livelihoods of the scientists and reserve managers who have quietly poached, grazed livestock, and harvested forest products from the reserves since the 1920's. Danilina writes that “*Zapovedniks*, separated from the outside world, lived according to their own laws.” This independence was traditionally tolerated by the Soviet authorities with the understanding that unpredictable funding, meager salaries, and in many cases vast distances from any formal infrastructure forced reserve staff to pursue legally questionable activities just to survive.

However, increased access to international markets has led to new pressures at the local level. The voracious Asian black market for animal parts has led to an unprecedented increase in poaching incidents, while housing development pressures from a newly wealthy class encroach on the boundaries of many reserves, particularly those in proximity to developed areas. Simultaneously, the lack of funding has made it increasingly difficult for reserve managers to enforce regulations and confront violators (Ostergren and Shvarts 1998).

In an attempt to secure funding and respond to changing market pressures, many reserve managers have turned to investment in alternative economies, including ecotourism, scientific guiding and the production of souvenirs and sustainable forest products. These initiatives have been bolstered by financial and logistical support from international organizations such as the World Wildlife Fund and the Global Environmental Facility. Such support may take the form of infrastructure development initiatives, environmental education programs, or the facilitation of domestic environmental NGO's. Although many Russians involved in the administration of the reserves argue that such development violates the original scientific mission, others make the case that the *zapovedniki* system must adapt in order to survive.

Ecotourism and the Role of NGO's

Domestic NGO's became legal in the late 1980's during the period of *glasnost* under Gorbachev, with fascinatingly mixed results for the *zapovednik* system. Weiner observes that

When citizens gained an increasing say in major issues of public concern, the highly symbolic politics of the struggle for *zapovedniki* seemed increasingly abstract and irrelevant. With the legalization of 'informal' nongovernmental groups in 1987, the *druzhiny* [student activist groups] were no longer the lone knights defending their fragile

holdout of civic autonomy against the massed forces of the Party-state bureaucratic machine (Weiner 1999).

In addition to a funding crisis, therefore, the *zapovedniki* also suffered a form of existential crisis. For many decades of Soviet rule, the *zapovedniki* had been defined as a space set apart from the same authoritarian state that made their existence possible. In the vacuum left by that state's disintegration, areas once deemed *sacred* and *forbidden* floundered for national relevance. On the international scale, however, various environmental and developmental institutions saw an unprecedented opportunity to exert influence in formerly inaccessible areas. In addition to the WWF and GEF/World Bank mentioned above, such institutions included UNESCO, NATO and the US Forest Service. Working, for practical and financial reasons, within the established framework of Russian protected areas, these actors engaged in a reciprocal relationship with regional and local environmental managers, with one side bringing international clout, financial resources, and organizational capacity, while the other provided access to local governmental and non-governmental networks as well as providing a more complete picture of the political-economic and socio-cultural conditions on the ground (Venable 2005).

These international agencies pumped tens of millions of dollars into Russian environmental development with the end goal of fostering a self-sufficient network of conservation organizations. One of the chief obstacles to achieving this was – and in fact continues to be – the lack of organized environmental networks on a national scale. Most domestic organizations are small and poorly connected; most international agencies choose to deal with local actors directly, bypassing Moscow. Several factors may account for this: a key one is the lack of a large middle class willing to commit financially and ethically to

environmental conservation; currently almost no funding for domestic organizations comes from membership dues (Venable 2005). The grassroots-level organizational and fund-raising capacity taken for granted by those used to working in a Western conservation setting is spotty to nonexistent within Russia.

Putin-era cutbacks to governmental natural resource management agencies also continue to exacerbate the issue and increase reliance on international support. Fred Strebeig notes that the 2010 federal budget for the 107 million acre Russian park system would keep the 84 million acre US park system running for eight days. Strebeigh also writes of the psychological effect that such cutbacks and reductions to policy-leveraging capacity had on government agencies: feelings of powerlessness and lack of responsibility, followed by mass departures as officials quit rather than compromise their commitment to natural resource protection.

With all this in mind, environmental education and public involvement have been key points for both international and domestic actors. *Russian Conservation News*, for instance, was a joint publication effort by Biodiversity Conservation Center, a domestic organization founded by a Yale-educated Russian conservationist, and various agencies including the US National Park Service and the Nature Conservancy. Between 1994 and 2004 *Russian Conservation News* provided up-to-date scientific, political, and economic information on the state of the zapovednik, information which had formerly been disorganized or otherwise publicly inaccessible. Other, more local initiatives include children's activity programs, park cleanup volunteer days, and the construction of interpretive trails within the national parks and the buffer zones of the zapovedniki. The construction of interpretive centers, roads, trails and other infrastructure have also been focal points of the attempt build Russian environmental awareness.



Sustainable ecotourism?

This brings us to ecotourism, a concept still poorly understood by Russians and generally viewed as the exclusive purview of wealthy foreigners. In a 2001 article for *Russian Conservation News*, Natalia Moralyova cites the questions she often hears as a representative of the Ecotourism Development Fund: "What is ecotourism?" "Why do we have to develop ecotourism in zapovedniks?" "What are the threats to zapovedniks and how do we avoid them?" "What forms of tourism are appropriate for zapovedniks?" "What are the goals and challenges of developing ecotourism in zapovedniks?" Moralyova suggests that the *zapovednik* staff themselves take on the role promoting sustainable ecotourism, taking care to involve local and regional actors, noting that

...this can change relations with the administration of the region and with the local population: the *zapovednik* ceases to be a closed institution that bows to the will

of the state but has no relation to the economic or social problems of the region. Instead, it becomes an advantageous partner capable of offering the regional administration an ecotourism program that will ultimately increase the flow of visitors to the region, create jobs, improve the investment climate, stimulate national culture, and beget an influx of supplemental resources for the region's economy. People begin to take pride in the *zapovednik*, which has become a true regional center of cultural education.

The US Forest Service, among other agencies, has also created partnership programs to train reserve managers and develop protected area management plans tailored to specific reserves and regions. Moralyova's vision is idealistic, but in keeping with the international actors' local-level policies, it does seem to suggest that the future survival of the reserve system cannot depend upon the federal government. Do such decentralized initiatives represent a full pendulum swing from the state management of the USSR? Does the patchwork nature of current policy and the autonomy granted to individual managers offer more flexibility, more vulnerability, or both?

Many Russian scientists insist that opening *zapovednik* buffer zones to ecotourism is strictly temporary, a stopgap measure until the federal government provides more funding and the reserves can return to pure science rather than catering to the public. However, I would argue that the wind is not blowing this way. Putin's government certainly has authoritarian elements, but the precise combination of state control and scientific discourse that kept the reserves sacrosanct for so many decades is no longer extant. This does not necessarily mean that the reserves will be degraded: almost all human activity is still confined to 0.3 – 5% of the total area, largely within the buffer zones (Danilina 2001). Most advocates for conservation still strongly believe that the interior areas should remain undeveloped and undisturbed.

Will the *zapovedniki* be able to renegotiate their relationship with the state? Will the demand for natural resources, driven by international market forces, eventually signal the end of untouched wilderness? Or will ecotourism and environmental education generate public interest and investment that will protect the *zapovedniki* in the absence of the state? So far, the 21st century remains uncharted territory for the Russian park system.

CONCLUSION:

On a blustery March day in 2014, I conducted a walking interview with a young woman named Elena Nikolaevna, who works as a ranger and environmental educator in several zapovedniki across Russia. We crossed the University of Montana campus, hunched against the wild wind tearing down Hellgate Canyon, as she explained her nascent career field. Nikolaevna received a masters from UM while studying park management and interpretive methodology in Glacier National Park, inevitably contrasting American and Russian attitudes to conservation. Her own country, she believes, still has far to go in building the sense of national ownership in the park system that Americans feel. However, building that sense of investment may be key to the survival of the reserves, giving young Russians a sense that their landscape is linked to their own futures. Conservation education is a brand-new field in Russia, and Nikolaeva, a small woman with a wide smile, is optimistic.

Personal investment is also a theme in Yellowstone: who are the people for whom the park was created? And what, as in Maine, if the people don't even feel that they'd enjoy or benefit from a national park? What if they think they were stewarding the land just fine, thank you, before it was gated off for parkland? How can they engage and feel invested in their landscape?

When we discuss Yellowstone, or the North Woods, or Siberia, we are talking about something larger than mere physical terrain, measured in square miles. Yellowstone, to many people, is *the* national park, a synecdoche for the entire system. Siberia, the wild East, has traditionally represented frontier territory and wild space in the Russian psyche, much as the mountain West has been represented in the USA. And finally, the North Woods were the original embodiment of wilderness in American nature writing, with the black forests and high mountains

that Thoreau called “no man’s garden.” Simply put, when we imagine wild landscapes, these are the places that come to mind, and as such their comparison serves as a prism for examining larger issues in our relationship to the natural world. They are at once familiar and mysterious.

We have configured the world to our taste and to our own human scale, but there are still places on the planet that are bigger and wilder than we are, even in the era of the Anthropocene. In this sense of awe, this feeling of connection to something larger than ourselves, lies the ultimate salvation of the sacred zones.

CODA:

This is a story from 2012, when I worked for Ecology Project International in Yellowstone. We were escorting a group of tough Yankee kids from a Quaker school in Rhode Island. I'd loved these kids from the moment I'd read their pre-course debrief -- one had the middle name of "Audubon" - and they did not disappoint. They were lovely kids, bright and thoughtful, and their chaperones were anxious to help us in any way they could.

One of the chaperones approached us on our second night in the Centennial Valley.

"You know, at home on Fridays we have a time called Meeting, where we all go together to the chapel and sit in silence for thirty minutes. If someone needs to speak, they can, but otherwise we just sit quietly and reflect on the week. Would it be possible to do something like that here this evening? Maybe up on the hill?"

Elizabeth, Toby and I were the leaders on this course. We huddled. Toby was worried; he liked the idea of the climb but thought it might be too late and dangerous coming back down. Eventually we talked him into it. We gathered everyone up after dinner and tackled the hill, which rose six hundred feet above the valley floor. Some climbed slow, some climbed fast, we all made it to the top. When everyone was ready, we explained that they were having a silent sit, and sent them off to be alone a while.

I found a place where I could see over the lip of the hill and still keep a watchful eye on everyone.

Our tents and the buildings of the Nature Conservancy's Sandhills Preserve were tiny below, the meadow a green shock in the sand-and-sage landscape. The scattered, marshy lakes of the Red Rocks refuge glittered like shards of a broken mirror. Somewhere far away the cows of

the J-Bar-El were bellowing and over the marshes the sandhill cranes were croaking their weird and beautiful song.

Then we gathered everyone up and hiked back down as the sun was setting. They were subdued but not unhappy, as if that holy hush of the world had entered them and made slow music of their darting minnow thoughts.

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