

**A HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN WETLAND: AN ANALYSIS OF SOCIOCULTURAL
VALUES AND CINEMATIC DEPICTIONS**

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ABSTRACT

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In the early to mid 1900s the American wetland was considered a forbidden wasteland with the purpose of being dominated by humans. This perception remained dominant throughout the first half of the century and lessened throughout the latter half. In pop culture, this, too, was showcased. The 1954 release of *Creature from the Black Lagoon* mirrored sociocultural values on the American wetland during and before this decade. When pop culture was popularized in the 1950s, it became clear it had an impactful influence on the general population. However, it is unclear if pop culture exists as a product of human thought, or if it acts as an influencer for sociocultural values. To suggest the latter further, *Shrek* (2001) reflected the newly-instated admiration for the American wetland that occurred shortly before and during the film's theatrical release. Between this time, the sociocultural value of the American wetland and the cinematic depictions of wetlands demonstrated changes at similar intervals. Though it is unlikely that film caused a mass change in general perceptions, and federal and state policies, it is clear that cinematic depictions of the landscape had some influence over the sociocultural values on the American wetland.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the twelfth episode of the fifth season of *The X-Files* (1998), Scully and Mulder reimagine their versions of the events that led to the death of a teenager who claimed to be a vampire. In response to Mulder's comment on the absence of certain locations in small-town Texas that a vampire would typically reside, Sheriff Hartwell added: "We used to have swamps, only the EPA made us take to calling 'em 'wetlands'" (Bole, 1998, 0:23:54). Though only added as a filler joke, the context of this dialogue was born from something much greater. Hartwell's comment immediately prompts the question: Is the swamp different from the wetland, and if so, what separated the two? We know that the terms are now similar to the square vs the rectangle argument (i.e., a swamp is a wetland, but a wetland is not a swamp), but perhaps there is something bigger at hand. Could it be that rather than just two interchangeable nouns, perhaps there are much bigger connotations behind each word? To understand this, one must know the history of the American wetland and the change in sociocultural values endured throughout the twentieth century. Before this, and throughout its history, the American wetland saw rapid population growth and industrialization as the landscape was subjected to major development initiatives. Primarily, this drive to further develop America existed through the recognition of becoming a superpower in agriculture and industry, while also providing for an ever-growing population (Dahl and Allord, 1997). From the dawn of the twentieth century to present day, the American wetland underwent a multitude of mass drainage projects, vast acreage loss, and changes in public perceptions. Within this span of time, the sociocultural value of the American wetland changed, as conservation efforts, awareness campaigns, and environmental policies throughout the years relabeled the landscape as a beneficial ecosystem, rather than a forbidden wasteland (Grunwald, 2006; Gardner, 2011). Though the American wetland had already faced mass acreage loss by the 1920s (Dahl and Allord, 1997), the twentieth century marked the most eventful period for the landscape. The Everglades, the most notable of the American wetland, remained a topic of frequent environmental debate throughout this time. As Grunwald argued, "the Everglades ... remained a mystery to most Americans, inevitably compared to unexplored lands such as Tibet, Timbuktu, Quintana Roo, and Antarctica" (Grunwald, 2006, pp. 77). Additionally, pioneer naturalists believed that the American wetland was dominated by alligators, making them even more unfavourable to most individuals

(Grunwald 2006). This belief existed nation-wide, but, as Smardon stated in a late 1970s study, “sparse literature [was] available on visual, recreational, and educational values of inland or coastal wetlands” (Smardon 1978, pp. 537). This suggested that there was a tremendous lack of wetland-based literature in twentieth century America, thus, these general perceptions of the landscape were not based on academic findings. So, what then ignited, or perhaps reinforced, this nation-wide notion to vilify the American wetland, if there was a clear lack in academic literature?

In parallel, the pop-cultural portrayal of wetlands has also been far from favourable over the last century. As expressed by Vyomakesisri et al. (2020), pop culture is capable of altering the way in which an individual perceives real-world things. As pop culture continues to remain a means of communication, social development, and, to some, education, it becomes clearer that the pop cultural depictions of wetlands did not shine an incredibly positive light on the landscape. However, in unison with the newfound admiration for the American wetland, cinema, a worthy example of pop culture, had begun depicting a positive landscape in some instances, while increasing overtime. Like sociocultural values on the American wetland, cinematic depictions of the landscape experienced changes across the twentieth century. Perhaps this shift in cinematic depictions allowed for the change in sociocultural values on the real-world landscape, or at least played a role in the process at the very least. With this in mind, could one suggest that the negative depiction of wetlands in pop culture might have strengthened, or perhaps invoked, a pre-existing fear of the American wetland?

Throughout the chapters that follow, I will seek to answer a series of research questions. First, a review of the historical sociocultural values on the American wetland will provide an answer for the question: At what point did sociocultural values on the American wetland begin to demonstrate a positive change, and in response to what? Additionally, I will examine whether the change in terminology in the late 1940s/early 1950s from ‘swamp’ to ‘wetland’ signified anything for the American wetland. More specifically, did this change in terminology allow individuals to perceive the landscape differently by recognizing it with a term born without negative connotation? I will next explore whether the sociocultural value placed on the American wetland influenced cinematic depictions of the landscape, or if these cinematic depictions are symptomatic of those sociocultural values? The intention of this study is not to state that cinema influenced sociocultural values on the American wetland, however, the material will clearly identify a strong correlation

between the two. By deciphering a connection between pop culture and real-world understandings, the research will identify pop culture's role in depicting the natural world. The intention of this is to demonstrate the importance of pop culture in modern environmentalism and justify it as an educational tool.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this literature review, it will be made clear that there exists a connection between the sociocultural value of the American wetland and cinematic depictions of the landscape. This will contribute to the paper as it will provide grounds to suggest that particular films could have had an influence on the perceptions of the landscape during the time of their theatrical release. The reviewed content will establish the context needed to justify and discuss the coexistence of sociocultural value of the American wetland and cinematic depictions of the landscape. The chapter has been divided into three sections: landscape and culture; the American wetland; and pop culture and people.

2.2 Landscape and culture

The material of Schama (1995) argued the strong connection between landscape and culture, as the two are dependent on one another under certain lenses. With this, the functionality of a social setting finds its basis partly in its landscape. More specifically, cultures can often find their origin in environmental elements (Schama, 1995), and, as a lesser extreme, the presence of space and travel can heavily influence routine and interaction with one's local environment. But could the opposite be argued? Is it possible that perceptions of the natural world are born from culture, routine, and interaction? Although the Anthropocene, perhaps unconsciously, found its roots within the division of people and their environment, human experience and nature coexist on an indivisible frontier. In favour of this, Schama (1995) wrote: "Before it can ever be a repose for the senses, landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock." (Schama, 1995, pp. 6-7). This suggests that the perception of the natural world did not necessarily exist at the time of its creation, but, rather, at the time of our own creation. Following along this idea, Proulx (2022) argued that perceptions of the natural world occur simultaneously with one's perception of human life. The findings of Proulx (2022) were in relation to her experience and knowledge on the drainage projects endured by wetlands throughout the United Kingdom. However, for the sake of this research, her referenced work will draw on the

understandings of the human-environment relationship. Proulx (2022) further noted that people are “moving parts inside their landscapes” (Proulx, 2022, pp. 6), thus emphasizing this coexistence. In unison with this, Schama (1995) began his book with a quote by Henry David Thoreau in an 1856 journal entry that read: “It is vain to dream of a wildness distant from ourselves. There is none such.” (Schama, 1995, pp. xii). This provided the grounds to suggest that the perception of a landscape is born from the understanding of how humans are to interact with that particular landscape. More specifically, a mountain is tall, thus, humans shall climb it. A forest is captivating and full of life, thus, humans shall explore it. For the conversation on wetlands, this leaves a question on how the human perception of the landscape influenced a human connection to the landscape.

Before diving into this, it is important to unfold a greater connection between humans and landscape. Proulx (2022) argued that there exists a symbiotic, or mutually-benefitting, relationship between people and the natural realm. Often this relationship is born from art. Schama (1995) highlighted the existence of cultural practice and emotional capacities related to landscapes drawn from a relationship with art. While relating the story of Robin Hood, Schama (1995) noted that a common theme in each revised tale of the outlaw is the King’s new perception of the forest. He wrote: “A standard element of the greenwood plot in all the early versions has King Edward show up in the forest in heavy disguise ..., where he observes the virtues of an ideal realm. Loyalty, honor, chivalry, brotherhood, magnanimity, ... are all practiced in the greenwood, in painful contrast to their disappearance from the modern world of court and state.” (Schama, 1995, pp. 151). The art that is the tale of Robin Hood offered a new understanding on the relationship between people and landscape. The story emphasized that an individual’s perception of a landscape is commonly influenced by others’ interaction with that landscape. The findings of Schama (1995) and Proulx (2022) insinuate that perceptions of the natural world are fluid, thus, perceptions can be influenced by new ideas, findings, depictions, etc. By connecting art with its associated landscape, the human-environment relationship is strengthened far beyond the values held by the general public. Furthermore, if art were to solely draw on the positives, or the negatives, of a particular landscape, the perception of that landscape would follow suit. This presents a framework describing how individuals connected to the American wetland, thus forming sociocultural values in regard to the landscape.

2.3 The American wetland

As will be made evident later in this paper, a historical chronology through academic literature is crucial to recognizing the sociocultural values on the American wetland throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first century. Beauchamp (1987), Meyer (1994), Dahl and Allord (1997), Vileisis (1997), Grunwald (2006), and Gardner (2011) all indicated clear changes in the sociocultural value of the American wetland throughout the twentieth century and into the early twenty-first century. The provided literature made it clear that perceptions of the landscape remained dominantly negative from the 1900s to the 1940s. Throughout these decades, Beauchamp (1987), Meyer (1994), Dahl and Allord (1997), and Vileisis (1997) provided detailed discussion on the various drainage projects, federal and state policies, and emergences of literature that impacted the American wetland, while Grunwald (2006) primarily focused on the events that impacted the Everglades. Though the Everglades had gained National Park status in 1947, the authors made it clear that this was minimal when compared to the overarching negative perceptions toward the landscape. This will be further understood in Chapter 3 when I go into greater detail on the efforts against the American wetland. Upon the arrival of the 1950s and bleeding into the 1960s, small but clear evidence began to emerge that general perceptions of the landscape were undergoing change. Meyer (1994), Dahl and Allord (1997), Vileisis (1997), and Grunwald (2006) had indicated a shift in sociocultural values during this time. Alongside this, Dahl and Allord (1997) and Gardner (2011) noted that this shift had become much more evident once the 1970s had arrived. Clear focus began to streamline toward emerging conservation efforts and environmental movements. This was especially emphasized by Meyer (1994) and Vileisis (1997) who further noted the role of government representatives on changing policy to favour the landscape (e.g., Nixon's founding of the EPA, Carter's Executive Order to minimize wetland damage, etc.). Dahl and Allord (1997) and Grunwald (2006) had noted the unfortunate start to the 1980s with Reagan's new anti-environment policy and the surge in wetland acreage loss. Meyer (1994), Dahl and Allord (1997), Vileisis (1997), Grunwald (2006) and Gardner (2011) had all indicated that the mid-1980s and onward saw consistent positives for the landscape (e.g., the recognition of American Wetlands Month, etc.). Chapter 3 will additionally further explore the change in sociocultural values on the American wetland from the 1950s leading to the early 2000s.

2.4 Pop culture and wetlands

Popular culture, or pop culture for short, is hardly close to having a perfect definition, yet the combination of the two terms exists across a spectrum of understandings. Brummett (1991) recognizes an endorsement-worthy definition that described pop culture as artifacts accessible to society both intellectually and logistically. More specifically, this definition suggests that pop culture exists as physically- and mentally-obtainable resources that can be understood by a general audience. Furthermore, Brummett (1991) put emphasis on ‘popular’ by defining pop culture as deeply felt, commonly intelligible, and widely accessible patterns of symbolic action and meaning. Piggy-backing on this, Vyomakesisri et al. (2020) defined pop culture as “a collection of thoughts, ideas, attitudes, perspectives, images ... preferred by the mainstream population ...” (Vyomakesisri et al., 2020, pp. 9). These definitions put emphasis on the characteristics of something to define it as pop culture rather than the thing itself. For example, a storybook is not pop culture; rather, the plotline, the setting, the theme, etc. of that storybook make it definable as pop culture. Brummett (1991) goes further to suggest that pop cultural depictions are born from hierarchical motives (e.g., political ideas, trends, etc.). With that, it becomes clear that there exists a connection between sociocultural values and pop culture. Later in his preface, Brummett (1995) described that pop culture has an ability to shape the public. To contextualize the Brummett (1995) definition further, Vyomakesisri et al. (2020) noted that pop culture exists at the center of our lives. These definitions by Brummett (1995) and Vyomakesisri et al. (2020) suggest that pop culture and sociocultural values are symptomatic of one another. More specifically, these definitions indicate that the theme pushed forth by a pop cultural work is likely influenced by a pre-existing societal understanding. Additionally, the flipped could be argued, as pop culture reinforces, or perhaps creates, new perceptions based on that work’s content. Through this, the existence of a relationship between pop culture and sociocultural values is made clear. Thus, it exists within reason to suggest that pop culture, though not completely, is capable of changing one’s perception of a real-world thing. To reiterate, Schama (1995) noted the irrefutable connection between landscape and art. An example provided was the tale of Robin Hood, that of which falls under the definitions of pop culture described by Brummett (1995) and Vyomakesisri et al. (2020). With that, the connection Schama (1995) made between general perception of a landscape with its portrayal through art could be argued in the case of pop cultural depictions.

As made clear above, pop culture is ubiquitous, thus, a study on the impact pop culture has on a particular landscape would be improbable. To present a more achievable study, pop culture will be narrowed to film. The reasoning behind this is justified through the revolutionization of pop culture. Vyomakesisri et al. (2020) noted that pop culture was popularized in the 1950s and 1960s as a result of increased disposable income born from the baby boomer years, to which the term was then coined in the 1980s. Amongst some other things, cinema was one of the most popular examples of pop culture during its popularization. Though not specifically stated, it would be fair to suggest that this was because film was not as easily accessible until this time. Novels, music, and other forms of pop culture had already been perfected, while film could only get better from its current standing, thus promising a popular status. The final remarks of Schama (1995) emphasized the popularity of art around the world, especially in regard to the perceptions of a landscape. As an example of pop culture, evidence must exist showcasing film's ability to do what art has done for centuries, however, in order to maintain an achievable study, this research will be narrowed down to the contiguous United States. Before addressing this question, it is important to note the findings of Anonymous (2010). For clarity, the authors requested to be recognized as anonymous contributors, thus, the material is to be referenced as Anonymous (2010). This study noted that film exists as two things in regard to sociocultural values. Firstly, film reflects a culture's anxieties, beliefs, and values. Secondly, film is an asset in shaping and solidifying a culture's beliefs (Anonymous, 2010). This suggested that cinematic depictions are both influenced by and influencing general perceptions from a society.

To illustrate this, Bahk (2010) focused on the relationship between *Medicine Man* (1992) and personal values on forest management. For context, *Medicine Man* followed the story of an expert pharmaceutical specialist who believed the cure for cancer could be found in Amazonian flora. The film puts heavy emphasis on the importance of forest life and indigenous values (McTiernan, 1992). The study analyzed over two-hundred participants separated into two groups: those who watched *Medicine Man* (the experimental group); and those who watched a movie unrelated to environmental risks or hazards with a similar runtime (the control group). Bahk (2010) provided all participants with a questionnaire that asked for their attitudes towards a series of unrelated topics, followed by opinions on forest preservation. This was done to prevent any biases from appearing in the results. Bahk (2010) found that the experimental group demonstrated significantly more value toward forest preservation than the control group. Bahk (2010) noted that

these values were not only expressed in the moment but persisted for some time. This was demonstrated by the higher average donations provided from the experimental group to the Arbor Day Foundation and similar organizations. It was further noted that this instance is fairly common. Because of this, Bahk (2010) argued that the influence of film should be celebrated in education as the congregation of the two would greatly benefit modern school-systems. More specifically, he wrote: “Film is seen as an effective means of supplementing what ‘words only’ cannot attain in education” (Bahk, 2010, pp. 10). In regard to wetland-based academic literature, Meyer (1994), Vileisis (1997), and Grunwald (2006) had indicated that education on the topic existed throughout the twentieth century. However, Smardon (1978) had clarified that though it existed, it tremendously lacked. Perhaps, in relation to the previous statement made by Bahk (2010), cinema had more power in influencing sociocultural values than academic literature, mainly due to the abundance of one and scarcity of the other.

Another example of the relationship between pop culture and landscape was made clear by Hudson et al. (2011). This study focused on the connection between *Motorcycle Diaries* (2004) and general perceptions on South America. For context, *Motorcycle Diaries* followed the story of two men who take a motorcycle trip from Brazil to Peru, learning about the exploitation of the working class labour force (Salles, 2004). The film heavily emphasized the beauty of many Latin and South American countries (i.e., Argentina, Peru, Brazil, etc.) as it used real clips to show-off the landscape. Though the study collected samples from three different countries (i.e., Canada, Spain, and USA), I will only focus on the results and conclusions found within the American participants. Hudson et al. (2011) tasked nearly one hundred fifty students with watching the film before answering a survey. The survey asked participants to rate South America on the topic of destination-related attributes to determine if South America was suitable for their tourism requirements. These attributes were broken down into eight categories: comfort/security; interest/adventure; natural state; touristic facilitation; resort atmosphere/climate; cultural similarity; inexpensiveness; and lack of language barrier (Hudson et al., 2011). This survey was administered both before and after the film. Hudson et al. (2011) found that interest in traveling to South American or acknowledging Latin/South American countries as destinations had increased after watching the film. The authors further concluded that the release of the film was used by a number of travel agencies to help promote destination travel amongst the sector (Hudson et al., 2011). As made evident in these findings, sociocultural values are partly influenced when an

individual is exposed to pop culture, especially film. In some instances, as suggested by Bahk (2010) and Hudson et al. (2011), values can change after one interaction. One could then suggest that a constant exposure to film with similar themes would only continue to reinforce this change in sociocultural values amongst those who view it. This logic provides a framework to suggest that the sociocultural value of the American wetland has a strong correlation with cinematic depictions of the landscape.

2.5 Methodology

In order to adequately assess the presented works, each chapter will see a different methodological breakdown. In Chapter 3, I will undergo a historical chronology to highlight many drainage projects, policy changes, and other efforts that would have impacted the American wetland. In doing so, I will develop a sense of generational changes in sociocultural value of the American wetland. Additionally, I assess the impact of the change in standard terminology from 'swamp' or 'marsh' to 'wetland'. I will also examine any recorded changes, or lack there of, in government values, conservation and movement efforts, and general public opinions towards the American wetlands that unfolded over the twentieth century. The data will be comprised of government policies and legislature, scientific articles, and scholarly papers that were written in/for/about the United States. The United States is the selected study area for two reasons: American documents and scientific articles about the topic are far more abundant, and the United States holds many notable wetlands (i.e., the Everglades).

In Chapter 4, I will use the reasoning provided by Brummett (1991) and Vyomakesisri et al. (2020) to understand the role of wetlands in cinema. The Chapter will assess cinematic depictions as two categories: 1) Wetlands as the subject; and 2) Wetlands as the setting. The former will review films that were produced with the intention of highlighting wetlands under a particular light (i.e., propagandic films and documentaries). A small assessment will be done to highlight any important narrations made throughout the film that were intended to influence the audience. The selected films are *The Winged Scourge* (1943) and *Waters of Destiny* (1955). The latter will review films that were produced with the goal of entertainment that included a wetland as its setting. To reiterate, Vyomakesisri et al. (2020) emphasized that pop culture revolutionized in the 1950s. Using this, I decided to select *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954), which had its

theatrical release within this timeframe, thus making it a justifiable selection for the analysis. In order to properly discover a change over a period of time, I selected a film that was temporally distant from the former while also representing a more modern depiction. Thus, I selected *Shrek* (2001) as its theatrical release occurred right after the turn of the century. Similar to the review of the former, this review will draw on any deliberate remarks about the landscape. Additionally, though, this review will emphasize any hidden connotations that could have caused an individual to form a perception toward the cinematic wetland that could have influenced their perception of the real-world landscape. Analyzing and comparing these films will illustrate a shift in the cinematic depiction of wetlands, and how they relate to the shifting sociocultural value of the American wetland.

3. THE AMERICAN WETLAND

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, it will be made clear that the sociocultural value of the American wetland underwent immense changes throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This chapter will outline the historical context required to develop a sense of generational changes in sociocultural value of the American wetland. Additionally, the change in standard terminology from ‘swamp’ or ‘marsh’ to ‘wetland’ will be highlighted to recognize this further. As made clear today, sociocultural values on the American wetland were not always negative, thus, this chapter will prove why that change occurred, and perhaps provide insight on how to strengthen these values even further today.

3.2 Sociocultural history of the American wetland

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, scholarly literature on the sociocultural value of the American wetland indicated that the vast majority of the American population assumed the landscape as predominantly negative (Beauchamp, 1987; Meyer, 1994; Dahl and Allord, 1997; Vileisis, 1997; Grunwald, 2006; Gardner, 2011). The Reclamation Act of 1902 was put in place, which prompted the use of the term reclamation when describing wetland drainage projects (Beauchamp, 1987). For context, this Act was enacted to provide compensation to repay construction costs for the transformation of wetlands into dry land for human use (i.e., reclamation) (Bureau of Reclamation, 2018). The enactment of this provided justification for costly drainage projects. The turn of the century was abundant with land surveys, especially those conducted on the American wetland. Records indicated that surveyors recognized the landscape as nothing more than nuisances in need of being drained (Meyer, 1994), while others, on a more extreme note, referred to the landscape as God-forsaken hellscapes (Grunwald, 2006; Gardner, 2011). Within most of these surveys, the value of wetland wildlife (i.e., waterfowl) was commonly acknowledged. Ironically though, this acknowledgement was only placed upon the birds, rather than the landscape as a whole. This existed as a result of the American appeal to hunt as waterfowl were widely recognized as game birds (Grunwald, 2006). In 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt

engaged in the discourse on waterfowl, attempting to encourage the public to place more value of the wildlife by setting aside land to act as a waterfowl sanctuary (Meyer, 1994). In 1902, the Flager's Model Land Company conducted a survey to determine whether the Everglades could be crossed by Florida's new proposed railway (Grunwald, 2006). William Krome, the leading surveyor, described his time in the wetland as a 'half year of hell', pointing out the various things he found wrong with the landscape. These findings include: 'mosquito clouds as thick as pudding'; 'an endless run of keys, bays, rivers, and lagoons'; and 'muck covering fine farming land' (Grunwald, 2006). The conclusion of the survey suggested that the Everglades were no fit for a railway but could be redeemed through other projects. The Everglades' redemption would take the form of a mass drainage project to ensure disappearance of the large mosquito population, and clear space for fine farming land (Grunwald, 2006). The sociocultural value of the American wetland was heavily influenced by its relation to available farmland. Countless drainage projects were in the works to 'redeem the landscape' (Grunwald, 2006). Such projects include the drainage and cultivation of Horicon Marsh in 1904 (Dahl and Allord, 1997). Those disconnected from the projects even viewed the American wetland as blockers to new available land with great economic abilities. With that, it was understood that wetland destruction was to be respected as a public duty (Meyer, 1994; Gardner, 2011). The federal government, too, played a role in wetland assessment in the early 1900s. For Congress, this was made clear at the turn of the century through the *Leovy vs. the United States* (Gardner, 2011). The case syllabus indicated that the federal representatives were arguing how the construction and maintenance of dams, levees, and other drainage projects in Louisiana would refurbish swamps into redeemable land (U.S. Supreme Court, 1900). At a smaller-scale, state governments united at the National Drainage Conferences in 1906 and 1907. Here, officials from large-wetland states (e.g., Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, etc.) lobbied for a federally-funded program that would provide financial assistance to drainage projects (Vileisis, 1997). This acted as a baseline for various Acts and projects that emerged throughout the next few decades.

Throughout the 1910s, drainage projects continued to be proposed and constructed across the country, with a vast majority targeting the Everglades (Dahl and Allord, 1997; Grunwald, 2006). The land purchases noted to have occurred in the early 1900s were being fulfilled at this time as Americans had now begun populating the Everglades. A majority of these settlers were living on a promise that the Everglades were to be drained and that no flooding – caused by initial

drainage projects – could ever happen again (Vileisis, 1997; Grunwald, 2006). Not only was flood prevention on the line, but Americans believed they were at war with wetlands, and their drainage was morally equivalent to battle (Meyer 1994). In 1912, it was frequently reiterated that draining swamplands was a public duty (Meyer, 1994). In the following year, landowners were promised a drained Everglades (Grunwald, 2006), which was obviously not kept. Ironically though, the amount of drained land had doubled throughout the decade (Meyer, 1994), however, when put into numbers, drained land was still minimal when compared with what remained of the Everglades. Piggy-backing on this, landowners began to recognize their land purchases as wastes of money (Vileisis, 1997), likely due to the impracticality of the proposed drainage projects. The phrase ‘when the Everglades are drained’ was considered interchangeable with ‘when pigs can fly’, as the likelihood of this mass drainage project seemed to be low in the public’s mind (Grunwald, 2006). In order to compensate for failing to keep their promise on flood prevention and mass drainage, the American government enacted the Flood Control Act in 1917, giving the Army Corps of Engineers rights to put flood-control measures in place (Vileisis, 1997). Unfortunately, one could infer that the Act was not very effective at the start, as a large percentage of wetland acreage had been impacted by high water tables to some degree (Beauchamp, 1987). In addition to landowners, government officials of all levels were beginning to voice their quarrel with the American wetland. New descriptor words of the landscape had emerged during the late 1910s, including ‘handicapping’, ‘mosquito-breeding’, ‘inedible bird-harbours’ (Meyer, 1994) and ‘home to every bug imaginable’ (Grunwald, 2006). Such phrases were common-tongue during this time period, recognizing a general attitude towards the landscape. The adjective ‘inedible bird-harbours’ is especially important as it proposed a clear decline in interest of game birds found in the American landscape. Furthermore, resource companies saw increasing demands in materials used for drainage projects during this time (e.g., cypress, lumber, etc.) (Vileisis, 1997). One could infer that the surge in materials was partially influenced by the general perception of the landscape. Very little change was occurring throughout the decade with respect to the sociocultural value placed upon the landscape. It could even be strongly argued that the perception of the American wetland had only worsened throughout the 1910s. Meyer (1994), Dahl and Allord (1997), and Vileisis (1997) all indicated that this decade saw an abundance of drainage districts, as well as the most loss and modification of wetland acreage in recorded United States history. Additional sources explained that this mass depletion in acreage was to allow for two key development aspects

– farming and urban sprawl. In regard to farming, agricultural practices that took place on drained wetlands were often deemed highly productive (Meyer, 1994) and rewarding (Vileisis, 1997). In terms of urban sprawl, many states with notable wetland acreage saw a mass increase in industry districts and residence areas within the 1910s (Meyer, 1994; Grunwald, 2006).

By 1920, all forty-eight contiguous states had established a Wildlife and Fisheries Stewardship Office, demonstrating a new upcoming respect for the natural world, including the American wetland. Simultaneous to this though, the production rates of drainage machinery and equipment had increased exponentially (Vileisis, 1997). Though the Stewardship Office was established with the intention of environmental protection, the state of California had recorded a loss of roughly seventy-percent of its natural wetlands in 1922 (Vileisis, 1997). This can be related back to a finding by Grunwald (2006), which suggested that there was clear sociocultural value toward wetland wildlife but not the landscape itself. However, despite all these efforts to ‘improve’ the United States by eliminating the American wetland, projects within the Everglades were shattered by hurricanes and flooding events that took place in the mid to late 1920s – one of which was recorded as one of the worst storms to ever impact with the country (Vileisis, 1997; Grunwald, 2006). Immediately after the storm, the Flood Control Act was revisited and altered in 1928 (Vileisis, 1997). Outside of the Act’s revision, while still in response to these natural disasters, Americans were divided on how to proceed on their relationship with the American wetland (Meyer, 1994). Many individuals argued in favour of wetland preservation, however, these parties did not necessarily exist in harmony. One argument was in opposition to mass drainage projects as a decrease in wetland acreage suggested a decrease in available game land (Meyer, 1994; Grunwald, 2006). The other argument, much of which was expressed by environmental authors, was in favour of wetland preservation because of the landscape’s beauty and idleness (Meyer, 1994). However, those opposing wetland conservation still remained dominant during this time. This was clear through the release of surveys and related literature which had recognized the American wetland only as miles of weeds and venomous snakes (Meyer, 1994). During this time, in 1926, the use of the term wetland was first used, but not with the same grammatical regulations as it is today. More specifically, the term was not written as a compound word, nor was it recognized as a proper noun. Rather, the term was used as a descriptive word by characterizing an area as ‘wet land’ (Vileisis, 1997).

The 1930s perhaps marked the most eventful decade in the twentieth century for the American wetland. Indeed, this decade saw a tremendous spike in wetland modification, as numerous large-scale flood-control projects (Dahl and Allord, 1997) and other drainage and re-drainage projects were initiated by the early 1930s (Vileisis, 1997; Grunwald, 2006). Before these projects were implemented, some of the prairie states had already drained almost all of their respective wetlands (Dahl and Allord, 1997). Ironically though, various Acts and Bills were put in place to regulate and protect the wildlife living in the American wetland (Beauchamp, 1987; Meyer, 1994; Vileisis, 1997), reiterating the initial claim made by Grunwald (2006). An example of such is the Federal Aid to Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937 which provided incentives for states to purchase fishing and game land to be rid of any potential drainage projects (Meyer, 1994). At this time, the language used regarding the American wetland had changed, as individuals started to associate the wildlife with the landscape (Grunwald, 2006). In the wake of industrialization, the sociocultural value of the American wetland was often revisited as a response to major declines in waterfowl populations (Vileisis, 1997). However, the incentive to save the Everglades was fairly low, even amongst those who were in favour of this initiative for quite some time. The reasoning behind this was due to the shockwave effects felt by The Great Depression (Vileisis, 1997; Grunwald 2006). Due to this lack in motivation and, consequently, household profit, those in favour of drainage projects were able to act with less opposition. In 1931, a mass demand for sugarcane erupted, which then nearly doubled within the decade (Dahl and Allord, 1997). As such, a majority of the American wetland, including the Everglades, took a big hit when the Sugar Act of 1934 was enacted (Dahl and Allord, 1997). With the passing of the Act, southern Florida underwent immense drainage to meet new and greater demands for sugarcane production. As a result, yields roughly doubled between 1934 and 1939 (Dahl and Allord, 1997). Though mainly working toward mosquito removal, the upbringing of new ditches and dikes during this time assisted with agricultural conversion (Vileisis, 1997). Additionally, the Flood Control Act was revisited yet again in 1936 (Vileisis, 1997), and free engineering services were provided to those who wished to drain wetlands on purchased land (Dahl and Allord, 1997).

The early 1940s mainly furthered the results of the ambitious efforts made during the 1930s. Sugarcane production had officially surpassed a two hundred-percent increase in 1941 (Dahl and Allord, 1997), while mosquito ditches were completed and operating in a number of states by 1942 (Vileisis, 1997). Even with the implementation of the ditches, mosquitoes were still

recognized as enemies to the American people though. In 1943, in collaboration with Walt Disney Productions, Inter-American Affairs produced the short film *The Winged Scourge* (Gardner, 2011); later to be discussed in Chapter 4. The film emphasized a twisted narrative of ‘the war on mosquitoes’ that ‘will greatly impact humanity unless dealt with’ (Disney and Roberts, 1943). In 1944, the American government further developed their free engineering services by implementing a cost-sharing program that offered to partially fund ‘justifiable’ drainage projects (Dahl and Allord, 1997). In the same year, The Flood Control Act was once again revisited, this time authorizing the construction of major drainage projects that were once undefined by current Act definitions (Beauchamp, 1987). This then prompted a sum of state-funded projects that could be justified under the Act revision (Vileisis, 1997). The series of unfortunate events endured by the American wetland came to a sudden halt as a response to World War II. This was due to the significant decrease in resources and operators from the industry which delayed a majority of construction and drainage projects (Vileisis, 1997; Grunwald, 2006). The 1940s were not all bad, though. This decade brought forth scientific discoveries regarding the wetland, which one could infer were mainly possible because of the intensive delays put on construction and drainage projects (Meyer, 1994). The most prominent of these findings was with regard to the movement of energy through wetlands. Ecologists learned that the extent to which wetlands can absorb solar energy is vital to feeding the food chain (Meyer, 1994). These discoveries concluded that the provisions of the American wetland were far more valuable than once understood (Meyer, 1994). It was also noticed by countless individuals who farmed on their purchased lands that the dying off of the wetland vegetation prompted waterfowl to harvest their crops (Vileisis, 1997). In the mid to late 1940s, it became clear that respect for the American wetland was growing. For example, in 1947, the Everglades obtained National Park status (Meyer 1994; Grunwald, 2006). Though the landscape was still associated with the negative connotations of terms such as swamp and marsh, the achievement of National Park status had allowed for the landscape to be reconsidered (Grunwald, 2006). Unfortunately, though, America was still not confident in the wetland.

In the late years of the 1940s and early 1950s, the term ‘wetland’ had made its way into most dictionaries (Meyer, 1994). A question was proposed earlier in this paper that suggested perhaps the change in terminology may have begun to shine the American wetland under a new light. Up to this point, sociocultural values on swamps, bog, marshes, etc. were primarily negative. Public perceptions issued the landscape as unfit for people, government officials recognized the

conquest of the American wetland in equivalence to winning a war, and literature identifying the benefits of the biome was still heavily inadequate and under-researched (Vileisis, 1997; Grunwald, 2006; Gardner, 2011). However, the emergence of the term ‘wetland’ was born without any harmful connotations (Meyer, 1994). It is not explicitly stated what impact this had on the American wetland at the time, but changes in sociocultural value occurred after the word’s origin, thus, one could infer that a change in terminology allowed for individuals to perceive the landscape differently.

When the 1950s arrived, annual acreage loss rates were comparable to previous decades (Meyer, 1994; Grunwald, 2006). Alongside this, early years of the decade saw large investments in wetland-to-farm conversion projects (Vileisis, 1997). Rather than revisiting the Flood Control Act yet again, Congress enacted a new piece of legislation in 1954: the Federal Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (Beauchamp, 1987; Dahl and Allord, 1997; Vileisis, 1997). This Act allowed for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to construct drainage outlets (Beauchamp, 1987), while granting the federal government subsidization and facilitation of wetland loss (Dahl and Allord, 1997). This prompted mass drainage projects for the next four years to support the development of new suburbs across north-central states (Meyer, 1994; Vileisis, 1997). In 1955, in collaboration with the Central and Southern Florida Flood Control District, the United States Army Corps of Engineers released a documentary film highlighting the drainage efforts of these engineers after WWII, titled *Waters of Destiny* (Grunwald, 2006); later to be discussed in Chapter 4. The documentary further confirmed the mass drainage projects endured by the Everglades. In the same year, another mass drainage project began taking place in the southern state of Florida. The repeal of the Sugar Act, in response to the Castro administration’s ban on sugar imports to Cuba, prompted quick wetland conversion efforts in the Everglades (Grunwald, 2006). In order to continue to meet demands with the Act’s retraction, large-scale sugarcane production had to further develop in an area where production was already established. Thus, the Everglades underwent another mass drainage project in the latter half of the decade. The division between those in favour and those opposed to the American wetland’s presence was still very much alive though. Countless authors wrote about their positive perceptions of the landscape and its supported wildlife: such as Paul Errington’s *Of Men and Marshes* (Vileisis, 1997). Additionally, education on the American wetland was gaining more recognition (Dahl and Allord, 1997). The American wetland had yet to see such positives in its history. This achievement was even

highlighted as the start of something much greater for the landscape when referencing its sociocultural value. (Dahl and Allord, 1997; Vileisis, 1997). Following this, development over the American wetland had begun to slow down nearing the end of the 1950s (Vileisis, 1997). A majority of drainage projects endured by the American wetland had already been put in place and demand for future projects declined to all-time lows (Dahl and Allord, 1997). Furthermore, discussion on the draining of the Everglades had halted entirely with reference to a public recognition of National Park status (Grunwald, 2006), and the USDA began vocalizing discouragement against remaining drainage projects (Vileisis, 1997). However, the American wetland continued to face acreage loss to some degree (Vileisis, 1997).

Throughout the early 1960s, there was an emergence of more evidence suggesting support for the American wetland, especially in Congress. Primarily, this evidence was seen through the enactment of three Acts supporting wetland preservation (Vileisis, 1997). The Wetlands Loan Act was enacted in 1961 to provide incentive for the purchase of fast-disappearing habitats. This Act was created with the intentions of providing waterfowl with federal and state administrated acreage. The Drainage Referral Act was enacted in 1962 to eliminate any drainage incentives provided by the Department of Agriculture in Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota (Vileisis, 1997). The Agricultural Appropriations Act was enacted in 1963 to mandate the principles of the Drainage Referral Act across the entire country. Appreciation for the American wetland was still marginally wildlife-based, but it was now clearer that the wildlife's existence was dependent on the health of the landscape. More specifically, Vileisis (1997) had noted: "wetlands depended on ducks – or at least American appreciation of ducks – for their very existence" (Vileisis, 1997, pp. 205). Though the American wetland had yet to receive its well-deserved recognition, this was still a win for the landscape. Following that, for the first time in history, the Supreme Court had even recognized the value of the American wetland in a 1964 case. In short, Squaw's Hole case followed a dispute between a yacht club and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in regard to the club's plan to fill in a local marsh on purchased land. Supreme Court Judge Horace Cahill upheld the DNR's findings and concluded that both public and private environments are to be valued (Vileisis, 1997). Emerging evidence continued to prove that Florida's natural environment (e.g., the Everglades) was an asset to be treasured, which prompted discussion on the state government's role in environmental protection. This discourse soon turned into action as Florida's governor soon became the state's first environmental governor (Grunwald,

2006). Claude Roy Kirk Jr. was tremendously controversial during his time in office, however, his appointment of Nathaniel Pryor Reed allowed for state politics to play a role in the Everglades' conservation campaign (Grunwald, 2006). In the closing years of the 1960s, the American wetland had been put into a rather awkward predicament. As noted by both Vileisis (1997) and Grunwald (2006), the Green Revolution had begun, forcing Americans to either side with the American wetland or with the opposition. In short, the Green Revolution was a response to increased food demands after evidence showed global population growth was surpassing food production (Allosso, 2019). As previously mentioned, it was commonly recognized that converting wetlands to farmland promised large yields (Grunwald, 2006). Thus, population pressures brought a need for "farming and the extension of agriculture onto marginal lands" (Allosso, 2019, pp. 193), such as wetlands. However, support from the agricultural sector, and in some cases the general public, to develop wetlands was at an all-time low. Rachel Caron's *Silent Spring*, which came out during this time, also played a huge role in influencing Americans' sociocultural value of the American wetland. Upon its publication, Carson's work inspired Americans to prioritize environmental quality and demand government representatives do the same. It became clear that the general population began to feel for the landscape at a capacity never seen before. Furthermore, a secret poll conducted under Nixon indicated that environmental degradation was the second most urgent concern of the American population, just behind the Vietnam conflict (Grunwald, 2006). Within the same period of time, the Supreme Court had finally begun approving various wetland regulations that were not approved with the sole purpose of compensating farmers. Rather, these new regulations were brought forth in support of the American wetland and wildlife living there (Meyer, 1994).

This new appreciation had become more prominent at the dawn of the 1970s as awareness had greatly increased on the environmental functions of the American wetland (Dahl and Allord, 1997). In support of this, at-the-time President Richard Nixon had coined the new decade as a 'decade of environmentalism' during his New Year's address (Grunwald, 2006), then founded the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) later that year (Vileisis, 1997). For reference, the EPA was formed with the intention of protecting both human and environmental health in response to the negative impacts of industrial pollution (United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2022). In collaboration with this, in 1971, Kirk Jr. had begun expressing to the public the issues of industrial and residential development when considering the natural world (Grunwald, 2006).

Government support was echoed even further through various statements from Supreme Court hearings throughout the mid 1970s (Meyer, 1994). A Wisconsin judge urged representatives to remind themselves that a majority of the remaining American wetlands belonged to those yet to be born, thus, precautions should be taken when considering the landscape as a new development zone. Furthermore, an American courtroom argued the complications on the landscape would result in complications for humanity (Meyer, 1994). Additionally, during this time, a long-standing dispute was settled, saving the Everglades from being transformed into an airport. This prompted Atlantic states to adopt wetland protection laws to ensure a similar dispute would not see the Supreme Court again (Vileisis, 1997). After Nixon's impeachment, and Jimmy Carter's election in 1977, an Executive Order was issued to minimize wetland damage (Meyer, 1994). With this, one could easily infer that the sociocultural value of the American wetland had ultimately changed. Ironically though, the Everglades underdog story was far from over, as it experienced a loss of thousands of acres during a raging fire in 1971. However, the opening of Disney World, which, too, greatly impacted Florida's wetlands, was more newsworthy during the time (Vileisis, 1997). The intentions were for the park's landscape to appear as natural as possible in reference to the pre-existing area; however, that natural beauty was artificially created during the park's construction. Disney World's planners were even aware of the environmental harm their landscaping of the area had on the landscape, but proceeded without hesitation (Vileisis, 1997). Though it was noted above that federal policy in support of the American wetland had been developing over the last couple decades, the effectiveness of those policies was lackluster. In support of this, higher annual acreage loss was recorded in the mid to late 1970s than in the 1950s and 1960s (Dahl and Allord, 1997), as wetland dredging continued through projects operated under the authority of the Army Corps (Grunwald 2006). Despite evidence of emerging wetland-based education and literature in this period, a late 1970s study found that there was still a significant lack of literature supporting the visual, recreational, and educational values of the American wetland (Smardon, 1979).

As the Reagan administration took office in 1981, the federal regard for the American wetland had experienced a shift that mirrored the early twentieth century. More specifically, in an early-1980s address, Reagan argued that environmental policy were blockages to free enterprise. He further emphasized that free enterprise should be of the utmost importance to the American population (Grunwald, 2006). Unfortunately, this influenced another spike in acreage loss as the

early to mid 1980s recorded high annual numbers similar to the previous decade (Dahl and Allord, 1997). Despite all of this, the early 1980s were not entirely negative for the American wetland. In 1981, positive media attention geared towards the Everglades had arisen after the release of a news article that normalized the existence of the National Park (Grunwald, 2006). The publication noted that the landscape was not a nuisance existing in the state, rather, the Everglades were equally as important as other Floridian attractions. In other regions of the United States, during an agricultural crisis, farmers were met with two options in order to remain debt-free between 1981 and 1986. The first option was to drain more land, while the second was to reduce their land and collect compensation from the USDA (Vileisis, 1997). Specifically in 1983, North Dakota led the other states as a large percentage of farmers there sold off land to ensure a personal debt-free decade (Vileisis, 1997). This made it clear that state-level changes in sociocultural values on the American wetland were occurring as North Dakota was one of the leading north-central states that took part in mass drainage projects earlier in the twentieth century. Those who chose to drain more land were under fire, as policy changes required farmers to meet certain environmental standards if they were to ever require funding for drainage projects (Vileisis, 1997). Changes to the Farm Bill, and the introduction of the Swampbuster federal policy and the Food Security Act in 1985 created a huge divide between environmentalists and anti-conservationist farmers (Vileisis, 1997). Swampbuster, though oddly named, eliminated all incentives and mechanisms that made wetland drainage feasible (Dahl and Allord, 1997), and the Food Security Act grandfathered all drainage projects put in place beforehand (Vileisis, 1997). In 1986, the Emergency Wetland Resources Act was enacted in hopes of curtailing wetland acreage loss (Dahl and Allord, 1997). In the same year, North Dakota, in a poor attempt, enacted its own law in hopes to encourage no net loss of wetlands in the state. The state then recorded its highest drainage rates of the decade in 1987 (Vileisis, 1997). Due to the nature of the issue, it is likely that this high rate of drainage was a result of antifederal influence, more specifically anti-Swampbuster influences (Dahl and Allord, 1997). The term ‘no net loss’ re-emerged in 1989, where the EPA adopted this goal under federal recognition (Meyer, 1994). In addition to this, the northeastern states were thriving in terms of wetland protection (Meyer, 1994). In the same year, an activist nightclub referred to as *Wetlands Preserve* was founded in New York (Gardner, 2011). The intentions of the club were to combine education on the landscape with classic rock concerts. Though small-scale, this demonstrated a clear positive in regard to the sociocultural value of the American wetland.

With this, large-scale value was seen more evidently with major improvements to the support, management, and restoration of the American wetland in the 1990s. More specifically, in 1991, Fish and Wildlife Services records indicated large acreage additions to the United States Wetland Inventory (Dahl and Allord, 1997). In the same year, the EPA dedicated the month of May as American Wetlands Month (Vileisis, 1997; Gardner, 2011). In addition to this, wetland-based literature saw a huge spike in reprints in the early 1990s (Vileisis, 1997). Once it became evident that less than half of the original Everglades acreage remained at this point in time, three-fifths of which was isolated in water-conservation areas (Dahl and Allord, 1997), efforts to restore the American wetland became a priority, with a main focus on the Everglades (Vileisis, 1997; Grunwald, 2006). This new focus on wetland restoration prompted the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP). The early stages of CERP proposed numerous water improvement projects in the late 1990s (Grunwald, 2006), one of which is to convert agricultural land back into wetlands (Gardner, 2011). Although the Everglades would never return to their former glory, giving life to it at the very least become a common value amongst the American population. Furthering the series of positives, in 1997, the federal government first recognized World Wetlands Day, a practice first founded in Iran (Grunwald, 2006). Before the turn of the century, Prince told the people to ‘party like it’s 1999’, and, by the sounds of it, the American wetland was invited.

In the early months of 2000, during his presidency, Bill Clinton signed a large-scale restoration budget for the Everglades (Grunwald, 2006). In 2001, an airport was once again proposed to substitute the great Florida wetland (i.e., the Everglades), but Clinton, in accordance with public demand, rejected the project. Grunwald (2006) had noted that this victory was proof that sometimes people talk louder than money ever can. The clear public support for the American wetland indicated something almost opposite of what was voiced during the dawn of the twentieth century, demonstrating a much more positive sociocultural value of the American wetland. The draining of the American wetland was not over though. Between 2004 and 2009, over sixty-thousand acres underwent developed for agricultural and residential needs (Proulx, 2022). The need for new land was still very much alive, and will persist so long as humanity does, however, these numbers are far from comparable to acreage loss experienced throughout the twentieth century. In 2008 and 2011, The Great Dismal Swamp endured raging wildfires, both of which prompted mass restoration studies, incentives, and efforts by NGOs, government officials, environmentalists, etc. (Proulx, 2022). It was clear though that the damage dealt was still being

felt by the landscape, and the American wetland's story was far from over. This time though, the general population cared about this landscape, and to a degree never seen before in the country's history. In support of America's natural world, which includes the American wetland, the United State's signed the Paris Agreement in 2015 which required signing countries to play a role in keeping rising temperatures at a minimum (Proulx, 2022). Though not specifically for the American wetland, the signing of the Agreement suggested that the general concern for the landscape was reaching new heights. A more recent example can be seen in 2021, when protest arose in response to a proposed landfill over a New Hampshire wetland (Ropeik and Vaughan, 2021). Numerous other examples can be seen across the country, even just within the last few years.

3.3 Conclusion

In summary, the American wetland experienced great shifts in sociocultural value throughout the twentieth century and the early twenty-first century. The literature has made it clear that although the state of the landscape is far from perfect now, the change in its perception promises a positive future. The Everglades were not saved by the end of the twentieth century, but the assumption they are doomed would be a stretch, as care for the landscape is far more abundant now than ever before (Grunwald, 2006). The same could be said for the American wetland as a whole, as it is difficult to weigh the damage dealt in the past with the new sociocultural value placed upon them today. It is clear though, that the landscape has made great strides. In recent years, the American wetland has been dedicated an entire month, prompting annual seminars, education events, and public displays (Gardner, 2011). Furthermore, this modern display of appreciation for the American wetland can be seen in the surge of social media content admiring the Everglades and other wetlands alike. Even with what appears to be a new beginning for the landscape, the war on wetlands is over. Yet, in some areas, the landscape is still subjected to drainage projects and water-alteration mechanisms of years past, and to suggest that the entire United States' population believes in the power of the American wetland would be inaccurate.

4. SOCIETY, CINEMA, AND SWAMPS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, it will be made evident that there exists a clear difference between films with ‘wetlands as the subject’ and films with ‘wetlands as the setting’. Though the primary point of this section will be to differentiate the two film types, this chapter will also show evidence of some similarities between the two in the ways in which they alter perceptions of the depicted landscape. More specifically, this chapter will outline the general themes of film when incorporating a wetland in their cinematic universe and noting if any similarities exist.

4.2 Wetlands as the subject

To reiterate, for a film to fall under this category, the main theme or plot of the film had to be directly in reference to the wetland landscape. Primarily, these types of films can be seen as educational, however, in the case of the American wetland, these films tend to be made to push a negative connotation. Examples of this exist in the form of propaganda films. By using the Oxford definition of propaganda, one could define a propaganda film as a cinematic product that presents “information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote or publicize a particular political cause or point of view” (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989). Additional films under this subcategory can be seen in the form of documentaries, so long as the topic is emphasizing wetlands in some way. The two films mentioned in Chapter 3, *The Winged Scourge* (1943) and *Waters of Destiny* (1955), fall under this subcategory. In the case of these films, the publicized point of view is that the American wetland produced and acted as direct a barrier to human health, development, and prosperity. As we know today, this was never true; rather, the American wetland offered, and continues to offer, a wide-range of environmental and aesthetic factors that prove to be beneficial to human livelihood (Smardon, 1978; Gardner, 2011).

4.2.1 *The Winged Scourge* (1943)

The Winged Scourge was produced by Walt Disney Productions in 1943. The short film begins with a title card stating that this production was “filmed under the auspices of the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs” (Disney and Robert, 1943, 00:00:06), followed by a wanted poster depicting anopheles, or the ‘malaria mosquito’, as ‘public enemy number one’. The malaria mosquito is wanted for both the willful spread of disease and the theft of working hours (Disney and Roberts, 1943). The narrator gives a brief discussion of malaria’s spread, stating that the cycle can only exist so long as humans and mosquitoes co-exist (Disney and Roberts, 1943). Though the intention of the film was to inform a global audience about the spread of malaria (Bossert, 2018), the film was first released in the United States. In short, the narrator gives the viewer an ultimatum: it is either us or them. The narrator next tells a story of a healthy farmer who lost millions of dollars and everything he worked for after being bit by a mosquito, noting that “in all probability, [he] won’t die, but neither will he truly be alive” (Disney and Robert, 1943, 00:03:15). The narrator later tasked the well-known, and popularly adored, seven dwarves with ‘destroying the evil’ that is the malaria mosquito. The dwarves were instructed to cut weeds, spray oil and Paris green (a copper and arsenic chemical compound) on surface water and drain any water pools they could find as they were ‘menaces to human health’. These actions were defended with a statement suggesting these procedures would only impact mosquito larvae living in these ecosystems (Disney and Roberts, 1943). The dwarves were even tasked with burying household recyclables to avoid creating more breeding zones. The narrator clarified that if someone were to miss even one of these precautions, they too will suffer the same fate as the farmer from earlier. In a closing remark, emphasis was placed on the idea that wiping out mosquitoes would ensure health, safety, and happiness. In order to achieve this, it was made clear that the American wetland must be eliminated (Disney and Roberts, 1943).

The release of *The Winged Scourge* occurred shortly before many major drainage projects and the implementation of a cost-sharing program that gave incentive to those who wished to drain their own land (Dahl and Allord, 1997; Vileisis, 1997). Furthering the film’s relation with the time of its release, the beginning of the film first introduced the mosquito on a wanted poster. This was vital to pushing the propagandic narrative as the American population was already familiar with seeing wanted posters of the famous Great Depression-born criminals (e.g., Bonnie and Clyde)

(Bossert, 2018). It is likely that this was done to push an urgency in killing off the mosquito, and its breeding grounds, similar to the urgency of stopping those criminals. Though it is not mentioned how the film was shown to the general public, the film's popularity was made clear through the demand for prints as requested by the United States' Armed Forces (Bossert, 2018). To reiterate, the Army Corps, a branch of the U.S. Armed Forces, had authority over drainage projects during this time in respect to the Flood Control Act. Additionally, it is important to highlight that Walt Disney Productions produced this film. At the time of the short's release, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), which was Disney's first ever full length production, had already been released for over half of a decade. To suggest this film was popular would be an understatement, as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* soon became the highest grossing film of all time, a record of which it held for nearly two years (Walt Disney Archives, 2023). With this, it is safe to assume that the individuals were excited to see beloved characters from the previous film return to the big screen. Additionally, the film's immediate popularity made it clear that Disney played a huge role in pop culture, or at least cinema, during this time, thus, it is worth suggesting that the audience was large in count. Furthermore, it is worth highlighting the bridge between education and entertainment done so through *The Winged Scourge*. By using familiar characters of pop culture to push a narrative, whether it be propagandic or not, Disney was establishing a connection that proved the two were correlated, despite popular belief.

4.2.2 *Waters of Destiny* (1955)

Waters of Destiny is a 1955 documentary created under the supervision of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Central and Southern Florida Flood Control District (Grunwald, 2006). The documentary showcased the various drainage project done by the Corps after World War II. What differentiates *Waters of Destiny* from *The Winged Scourge* is that the latter pushed a propagandic narrative throughout the entire film, whereas the former emphasized propagandic connotations at the beginning of the film to allow for a skewed narrative to persist throughout the documentary. Thus, it is only important to highlight the documentary's introduction in the context of this chapter. Before stating this, the film begins with this open statement: "Tasteless. Colourless. Shouts, and sport, and laughter. Health and happiness and life itself. And then, all of a sudden [sound of lightning], death, as water shows its other face. Hideous, unrelenting, shrieking its rage.

The vicious scourge of mankind. Burying life and land under its relentless and merciless depths. This is the story of such water and its mastery by the determined hand of man” (Dutton, 1957, 0:00:03). The film immediately sets up the ‘two faces of water’ by separating them as Florida’s coastal water and Florida’s inland water. This was made even clearer when the narrator noted that Florida’s coastal community was perfect and smiled upon by nature, while the inland water was responsible for the elimination of farmland and agricultural profit, and the cause of many deaths in the event of natural disaster (Dutton, 1957). The narrator highlighted the constant back-and-forth between mass floods, droughts, and fires that occurred in the state. During this, the narrator stressed that in order to prevent these disasters from arising in the future, the landscape must be controlled by humanity. The irony in this is that science will soon discover that these drainage projects are actually causing these events, as the landscape is losing its ability to regulate the water table.

All of this occurred within the first few minutes of the film and by doing so, it set up a context to why the Everglades and other Floridian wetlands needed to be drained. The remainder of the film then went over the various projects undertaken by the Army Corps of Engineers, thanking them for their efforts and praising the public for their support and funding. The established context justified the use of terminology throughout the film that heavily villainized the American wetland. For example, the narrator recognized many inland water bodies (e.g., Lake Okeechobee) as ‘monsters in need of being tamed’ (Dutton, 1957). After unwrapping the various parties involved in the suppression of Florida’s wetlands, the narrator closed with a statement of enlightenment. After emphasizing that much work is still to come, he specified: “Flood control must proceed as fast as humanly possible, so that everyone, not only in this particular [area] of land, but everyone, everywhere, can share in the rich results of man’s mastery over the elements. Then it shall be that water, once the fierce, uncompromising enemy of this long, wide, low-lying land, will become its greatest ally. The rains may come, but there will be no fear in them. They are the waters of Florida’s unfolding destiny, and the bright promise of Florida’s future” (Dutton, 1957, 00:25:13). This statement was powerfully vocalized, similar to your typical inspirational speech, suggesting that the efforts demonstrated by the Army Corps throughout the documentary are comparable to the suppression of a legitimate enemy by the United States. Though the intention of the documentary was to showcase the various drainage projects of the 1950s, the narration made

it clear that there was a secondary goal, which was to villainize the American wetland, to provide justification for the further development over Florida's wetlands.

4.3 *Wetlands as the setting*

With that, it is clear that the goal of these propaganda films was to sway sociocultural values to oppose the American wetland, but could the same be said for fictional films with wetlands merely as the setting? That is, are the cinematic depictions in fictional films, perhaps unintentionally, reinforcing perceptions of the real-world landscape? To reiterate, for a film to fall under this subcategory, the premise of the film must not focus on the landscape for its plots, but rather have the landscape exist as a setting or backdrop for something bigger. Such examples include: the 'Fire Swamp' with its 'Rodents of Unusual Size' from *The Princess Bride* (1987) and the 'Bog of Eternal Stench' in *Labyrinth* (1986) (Gardner, 2011). However, in order to properly assess the changes between the 1950s and early twenty-first century, the films to be assessed are *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954) and *Shrek* (2001). Over the decades, cinema has used wetlands as a key setting for countless films. Because of this, it would be impossible to analyze every single film that included a cinematic depiction of the landscape, therefore, I have chosen to analyze the films *Creature from the Black Lagoon* and *Shrek* because of the times of their theatrical release. More specifically, the films were released when sociocultural values on the American wetland were experiencing a dominant perception (i.e., negative majority in the 1950s and positive majority in the early 2000s). In addition to this, the near half-century gap between the two films' releases provides a long enough period of time to identify clear differences in cinematic depictions of wetlands.

4.3.1 *Creature from the Black Lagoon (1954)*

The first film to undergo an analysis is the 1954 film *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, produced by William Alland and directed by Jack Arnold. The film begins with Dr. Carl Maia's discovery of an unusual fossil from the Devonian Geological Period in the depths of the Amazon. Immediately, Dr. Maia unites a group of experts to help him uncover possibly one of the most revolutionizing discoveries in modern science. After a series of failed attempts to unearth

something greater, the team is told of a lagoon down stream that may hold more samples worth exploring. Once arriving at the Black Lagoon, the team begins collecting samples while unknowingly being watched by a creature of the unknown. After their first encounter, it became clear to the team that this creature, the Gill-man, was a threat to their safety. Hesitant on what to do, the team argues as to whether they should hunt the creature or continue collecting samples with proper safety precautions. The team decides to remain at the lagoon but agree to only venture out when properly armed. Individually, the Gill-man attacked members of the team. After too many close calls, and some fatal encounters, the team agreed that it is time to cut their expedition short and only return with equipment that can adequately deal with the Gill-man. Before they can escape the lagoon, the team must remove a large mass of debris from the waterway to continue up the river. During their efforts, a member from the team, Dr. Kay Lawrence, was captured and brought to the Gill-man's hidden lair. After the team confronts the creature, the wounded Gill-man flees and the team leaves with Dr. Lawrence, all unharmed.

I will now conduct an analysis of *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, drawing on specific examples of how the film portrays wetlands. Early in the film, the audience sees an excavation team discovering a fossilized hand, similar to a human's, but with webbing between the digits. The lead of the team, Dr. Carl Maia, disclosed that he must leave immediately to show his findings to other experts, and hopefully bring a fully-funded team to help discover other fossils from the Devonian Period. Right before the scene ends, the camera pans over to present a first glimpse of the Creature from the Black Lagoon (the Gill-man), as it appears above the surface water then submerges. Simultaneously, we are seeing the water for the first time. By pairing the introduction of the Gill-man with the introduction of the aquatic landscape, it suggested that these must be perceived together. Even as we venture off to a new scene, the feeling persists. For example, in the following scene, we are exposed to a new region of Brazil where we first meet Dr. David Reed and Dr. Kay Lawrence. Here, the raised eeriness from the water is heightened as the camera submerges beneath the surface of the marine environment focusing in on every living entity below (e.g., seaweed, fish, etc.). Though the scene was intended to display the work done by Dr. Reed and Dr. Lawrence, the cinematography offered a similar view of below surface water that allowed for an emotive response equal to the invoked feeling of the Gill-man's introduction. However, as the film progresses, it become unclear how the wetland was meant to be understood. The director's depiction of the landscape and the characters' dialogue when referencing the landscape functioned

as two different mediators when determining how to perceive the environment. The landscape was defined by the film makers with tense music and eerie visuals, whereas a majority of the characters in the film described the landscape as beautiful and worth preserving. This conflict is even more clear when Lucas, the boat captain, described the Black Lagoon as two things: ‘a paradise’ and ‘a place from which no one has returned’ (Arnold, 1954). Without actually seeing the depicted landscape, the audience is able to gather that the Black Lagoon is a place of mystery, and the characters should proceed with caution. Furthermore, it was stated by the characters that everything in this natural environment was a killer. It was not until Dr. Reed made a comparison between outer space and water that it became clear to me that the depiction of wetlands in this film allowed for a negative correlation. After their first confrontation with the Gill-man, Dr. Reed, while questioning why individuals would be hesitant to believe of the Gill-man’s existence, said: “We’ve just begun to learn about the water and its secrets, just as we’ve only touched on outer space. We don’t entirely rule out the possibility that there might be some form of life on another planet. Then why not some entirely different form of life in a world we already know is inhabited by millions of living creatures?” (Arnold, 1954, 00:46:24). This line established a connection to common discourse, as the statement made by Dr. Reed could be argued on behalf of the real-world landscape. The Gill-man, during essentially the entirety of its screen time, was feared for its strength compared to the average person. This was made clear by the Gill-man’s ability to kill with physical ease and its incredibly high pain-tolerance when shot with spears and bullets. Additionally, it was highlighted throughout the film that there was no obvious way for humans to communicate with the Gill-man, thus making it an object of the unknown. These characteristics demonstrated by the Gill-man justify any fear one would have for it, as well as for the imaginary realm of the Black Lagoon. Likewise, an individual would have every right to fear something similar in the real world if it were to exist. To insinuate this fear even further, Dr. Reed states that one should not doubt the existence of these creatures until proven otherwise. It is worth additionally noting that the time of this film’s theatrical release plays directly into the quote made by Dr. Reed. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, shortly before the release of *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, UFO sightings had quickly become a cultural phenomenon throughout the United States (Life on Other Worlds, n.d.). Thus, by comparing aliens, something most Americans believed in, to something that could exist below surface water, it is likely that the audience could

then believe in the existence of something similar to the Gill-man, and perhaps associate a landscape with it, similar to UFOs in the night sky.

Additionally, even the naming of the landscape allowed for a connection with real-world events. The Black Lagoon, a rather sinister name, could be compared to those that fall under the definition of the American wetland. Such comparison could be made with the Great Dismal Swamp, located on the Virginia-North Carolina border. The naming of the landscape came from the findings of a 1728 expedition led by Col. William Byrd II. Byrd concluded that the swamp was no place for a person as his team almost did not leave alive (Davis, 1971). Following along this notion of fear, a point made in *The Winged Scourge* could be compared to dialogue from *Creature from the Black Lagoon*. In *The Winged Scourge*, it was made clear that unless the malaria mosquito threat was dealt with now, it will soon act against humanity. This statement was used in support of the propagandic theme of the film. In *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, a movie with the goal of entertainment, a similar line was said. When discussing whether going after the Gill-man was the best way to proceed, Mark Williams argued that if they waited to act, the Gill-man could sneak up on them as they slept. This remark is notably similar to the one made in *The Winged Scourge*, therefore, to suggest that individuals could genuinely fear the idea of a ‘creature of the night’ would be within reason.

Often in modern cinema, films tend to conclude with a solution to the projected issue. In *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, the opposite had occurred. Upon rescuing Dr. Lawrence from captivity, the team agreed to let the wounded creature flee back into its natural environment. Though to some this may be a successful conclusion, as no more blood was shed and the parties went their separate ways, the idea that the creature was still at large may have stuck with some audience members. Bostwick (2015) noted that humanity craves a happy ending because: “[they] provide hope, instilling the belief that obstacles can be overcome, love can last, fences can be mended, and good can triumph” (Bostwick, 2015). By preventing the audience from seeing the Gill-man’s demise, or some other concluding resolution, it suggested that the Gill-man was a threat to be on the lookout for. Thus, any perceptions that the audience may have made in regard to the Gill-man, and the natural landscape, would have persisted after the film’s conclusion. Furthermore, the takeaway message for the characters is to stay away from the landscape, unless returning with some series of defensive mechanisms. *Creature from the Black Lagoon* provided a frame for a

broader understanding of wetlands as cinematic landscapes, while also allowing for a real-world connection to be made. The fear or wariness of wetlands expressed by the characters of the film was made clear up until the credits rolled. As previously established, film exists as both a reflection of sociocultural values and an asset to influencing perceptions (Anonymous, 2010). Thus, the same fear expressed by the characters could be shared by the film's audience. With that, it is worthy to suggest that *Creature from the Black Lagoon* could have played a role in policy discussion, as the audience members could have reflected their feelings when discussing the real-world landscape. This is only one of many examples in this subgenre, suggesting that further influence existed outside this film, strengthening the argument on cinema's role in sociocultural values, and perhaps policy discussion.

4.3.2 *Shrek (2001)*

The second film to be analyzed is the 2001 film *Shrek*, produced by DreamWorks Pictures and directed by Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jenson. *Shrek* follows the story of an ogre who finds himself in the middle of a political campaign to exile all fairy-tale creatures from kingdom grounds. After a confrontation to save a talking donkey, Shrek annoyingly discovers that his swamp has become a safe haven for fairy-tale creatures seeking refuge. In an attempt to get these uninvited guests off of his property, Shrek and Donkey take on a quest for Lord Farquaad to retrieve a princess for the Lord to wed. After rescuing Princess Fiona from a dragon-guarded castle, our hero learns that a life of isolation is not for him when he begins to develop feelings for Fiona during their journey back to the kingdom. After a misunderstanding between Shrek and Fiona, Shrek returns home to his swamp where he sees the Lord has kept his promise and removed the creatures from his home. However, Shrek does not appear to be happy, rather, he feels lonely for the first time in the film. Thankfully, Donkey is able to deliver Shrek to the kingdom just in time to stop the wedding and begin his new life as a married man.

I will now conduct an analysis of the film drawing on specific examples of how the film portrays wetlands. When we are first introduced to our protagonist, we are also introduced to this cinematic depiction of a swamp. We see Shrek interacting with his environment so familiarly that we have to assume it's his home, thus, we are perceiving both Shrek and the swamp simultaneously. The first early scenes of the film set us up by only exposing us to the activities

that happen in the swamp outside of Shrek's home. Such activities include bathing in hot mud and using slug secretion as toothpaste, emphasizing the gross characteristics of Shrek and the relationship with his home. As the closing chords of Smash Mouth's hit *Allstar* fade, the scene concludes with him confronting an angry mob. In a successful effort to scare the crowd, Shrek describes that he will make soup from their 'freshly-peeled skin' and spread the 'jelly from their eyes' on toast. At this point in the film, we have only been exposed to a disgusting, brutish character who lacks favourable traits, allowing us to make a perception solely based on negative connotations. The early scenes of the film lean into previous cinematic depictions of wetlands with the intention of making us perceive the landscape as grotesque. To support this, it is important to recognize the context of the film. *Shrek* was written in a universe where the 'real-side' of popular fictional characters can be seen (e.g., Sleeping Beauty is a narcoleptic, etc.). Therefore, it is safe to suggest that the negative portrayal of the swamp was done on purpose. More specifically, the landscape was portrayed in a way that mirrored past examples of cinematic depictions (e.g., *Creature from the Black Lagoon*) to poke fun at the once-believed understanding that wetlands, or at least swamps, were this disgusting and unhuman world. In the next scene, we are introduced to the polar opposite, a funny, young-at-heart talking donkey. The introduction of Donkey almost forced viewers to be drawn away from their perceptions of Shrek, as this new character had the likeable traits our protagonist lacked. To even further their divide, Donkey immediately touches on the lack of appeal of Shrek's swamp when he first sees it. The banter between the two carries on, almost acting as a debate between the human (i.e., Donkey) and the anti-human (i.e., Shrek). Heated, Shrek slams the door, and sits himself down at the dinner table. We are then reinvented into the series of grotesque events as Shrek pulls a candlestick-like mass of wax from his ear and places it atop the table. Suddenly, the scene conveys a feeling that is in no way comparable to what we have seen so far. Before fading into the next scene, we see Shrek at his dinner table, enjoying a nice meal. Both his fireplace and candle are illuminating the room, with the addition of aesthetic appeal offered by a floral centerpiece. We are presented with soft music, differing from the score we had been exposed to leading up to this point. We get our first glimpse at the beauty that Shrek could take part in. The story of Shrek had not as much to do with the landscape but rather the character, however, the character functioned as a vessel through which the audience could create that connection with his home, the swamp, a generalized depiction of the wetland. Upon its conclusion, the audience was immediately presented with a link between the swamp, its disgusting

provisions, and this relatable moment of bliss experienced by our protagonist as he enjoyed a meal. The introduction to the film functioned as an awakening to a new, more positive philosophy of wetlands, as any perceptions we had of Shrek could now be applied to the landscape.

During our heroes' journey to deliver Princess Fiona to Lord Farquaad, we see sides of Shrek that were not outright exposed to us throughout our first glimpses of the character. Under the night sky, Donkey begins to prod at Shrek's reluctance to connect with the world outside of his swamp. In an outburst, Shrek expressed that his disconnect from the outside world was not a result of his perceptions of society, rather, it was due to the outside world's perception of him. Shrek then told Donkey: "People take one look at me and go, 'Aah! Help! Run! A big, stupid, ugly ogre!' [sighs] They judge me before they even know me." (Adamson and Jenson, 2001, 00:47:36). As the previous chapter established, wetland-based literature was lacking throughout the twentieth century and what was written was often negative. For example, pioneer wetland-surveyors only recognized the landscape as mosquito-harboring or alligator-ridden, an assumption based on first impressions (Meyer, 1994; Grunwald 2006). So, just like Shrek experienced, sociocultural values towards wetlands were often determined by a single, uninformed interaction. Shrek's own feelings were even confirmed during the wedding scene that took place near the end of film. The wedding attendees gasped at the first sight of Shrek, but then awed at the idea of him in love. Once the outside world saw the beauty Shrek could take part in, suddenly their perceptions changed. To suggest a similar message, perhaps this line was directed at the real-world audience. The hot mud baths and the slug-secretion toothpaste made us assume that Shrek was repulsive. To reiterate my initial claim, Shrek served as a vessel for the swamp, and, too, a personification of the swamp, so by this logic, we assumed that the swamp was gross. As we got to see Shrek develop throughout the film, we learned to love the hero, thus, we learned to love swamp. Once Shrek and his new family return to the swamp at the end of the film, the original perception one may have had for the landscape was gone. It is important to clarify that the illustration of the swamp did not change. The depiction of the swamp mirrored the version of itself from the beginning of the film. This allowed for the audience to see that the landscape was never the issue, but our perception of it was. Reflecting on this, one could make a connection with the changes in sociocultural values placed upon the American wetland throughout the twentieth century.

In support of this, Caputi (2007) noted that the story revealed that Shrek felt comfortable with surroundings that “too often elicit only shame, suspicion, disdain, and distancing from the ‘master’ culture.” (Caputi, 2007, pp. 27). The central message of beauty residing in the eye of the beholder resonating from *Shrek* (2001), can influence, or perhaps craft, a connection between the American wetland and the general population. The intention of *Shrek* (2001) was to allow for the viewer to experience unconditional love for the other, but also for nature (Caputi, 2007). To some, the swamp may appear wicked or immoral, but the connection viewers made with Shrek allowed for a positive connection to the swamp as well. Shrek’s hygiene issues did not take away from the love we have for the character. And, likewise, the swamp’s grotesqueness can be valued by those who learn what it offers to Shrek. Comparatively, this lesson can be applied to the American wetland and remove any negative connotations one may have when perceiving the landscape.

4.3.3 Comparative analysis

Cinematic depictions of wetlands differ greatly across films. In the past, the cinematic wetland was dominantly a negative landscape. Often our characters would find trouble, hard times, or even evil, during their journey through the landscape. As we examine film across a temporal scale, we see the emergence of positive depictions that shine the landscape under a new light. This new portrayal occurred simultaneously with the change in sociocultural values, thus, the understandings of the real-world landscape (i.e., the American wetland) and the cinematic depictions of wetlands likely influenced one another to some extent. The films under review were *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954) and *Shrek* (2001). Using the logic from the opening statement, major differences between these two films are a result of the near-fifty year gap between their respective theatrical releases. Both films present the landscape alongside the things that live in them which allowed for the personification of the wetland. It is especially important to draw on the fact that an instance like this only happens with a landscape that does not often see heavy human activity. For example, while also playing on the quote by Dr. Reed in Subchapter 4.3.1, the belief of extra-terrestrial life has persisted throughout time without any definitive proof. In *The War of the Worlds* (1953), and in the 2005 remake, aliens land in a Californian small-town and immediately begin their conquest against the human race. This film did not result in a mass emigration from the state of California, as, amongst other things, people were familiar enough with

the region that the film did not instill any fear in them after its theatrical release. Therefore, the reason cinema likely played a role in the sociocultural values on the American wetland was due to the abundance of negative depictions in film. In the case of *Creature from the Black Lagoon* and other titles of this subgenre, the foreboding wetland was portrayed time and time again, thus, those unfamiliar with the real-world landscape could begin to identify it as unsafe for human activity. More specifically, the cinematic landscapes were, amongst many things, “places of horror, often regarded as home to a horrific marsh monster or swamp serpent lurking in their murky, watery depths” (Giblett, 1996, pp. 179). It is important to reiterate that those unfamiliar with the real-world landscape were large in sum due to the lack of wetland-based academic literature (Smardon, 1978). Furthermore, the Gill-man, a vessel for the cinematic wetland, proved to be a murderous, brutish monster, continuing to play on the idea that the landscape is not fit for human safety. In *Shrek*, he, too, was a vessel for the landscape, however, Shrek developed into a loveable, comedic hero. The film concluded with Shrek and his new family returning to the swamp to live happily ever after, allowing for a generally more positive perception of the landscape. With this, one could comfortably assume that the audience of *Creature from the Black Lagoon* left with a far worse perception of wetlands than those who watched *Shrek*.

To reiterate, Shrek’s ability to transform the perception of a cinematic landscape (Caputi, 2007), reflected, or perhaps reinforced, the changes in sociocultural values on the American wetland. This notion was strengthened as the character developed throughout the film, prompting the audience to develop a different perspective on the swamp. For example, while the swamp was initially perceived for the slug-secretion toothpaste, it later became the home of newlyweds Shrek and Fiona. This allowed for development in the perception of the American wetland as audiences could reimagine the real-world landscape. In *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, a change in perception never happened. The first glimpse of the Gill-man was presented with cinematographic effects that insinuated fear (i.e., tense music, eerie emotive appeals, etc.). The last visual of the landscape was of the Gill-man fleeing into the abyss after a confrontation with the excavation team. The landscape in *Creature from the Black Lagoon* was not subjected to the same transformation process that the landscape in *Shrek* was. In the 1950s, during the theatrical release of *Creature from the Black Lagoon*, the general perception of the American wetland was predominantly negative. This is further reinforced throughout the film, as the cinematic landscape is depicted as a hostile environment that harbours a monster. It would be unrealistic to suggest that

Creature from the Black Lagoon, and similar films of the same era, forced individuals to perceive the American wetland under a negative light during the times of their theatrical release. However, it is clear that pop culture (e.g., film) is capable of influencing and/or reflecting sociocultural values, therefore, *Creature from the Black Lagoon* could have aided a pre-existing perception. In the case of *Shrek*, its theatrical release occurred simultaneously with many ambitious efforts to preserve and restore the American wetland. Additionally, during this time, literature and research on the landscape had seen a huge increase. The theatrical release of *Shrek* did not act as a halt to the negative cinematic depictions of wetlands, rather, the film mirrored the new narrative that grew during the turn of the century. Negative cinematic depictions still exist to this day, and likely will persist for as long as film lasts, however, the transgression of the subgenre demonstrated by *Shrek* paved the way for more positive real-world perceptions and cinematic depictions.

5. CONCLUSIONS

To assume the sociocultural values on the American wetland and the cinematic depictions of the landscape are mutually-exclusive would be problematic. That being said, the changes in sociocultural values on the American wetland and the emergence of positive cinematic depictions of wetlands coincide, and, with the material sourced throughout this paper, clearly used one another to strengthen this progress. Such connections already existed with other natural landscapes for generations through positive artform depictions (Schama, 1995). Thus, without positive depictions of a landscape through art, could positive perceptions ever be felt toward that landscape? Similarly, without the change in terminology from a predominantly negative term (i.e., swamp) to a freshly-born word (i.e., wetland), could individuals have connected with the landscape to the same capacity that they do today? The research in Chapter 3 suggested that the change in terminology did, indeed, allow for perceptions to change as the once foreboding swamp was now the beautiful wetland. But it is unlikely that this instance was responsible for completely altering the sociocultural value of the American wetland. With that, perhaps this truth came to life with the help of cinema. The comparison between the connotations framed in *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954) and *Shrek* (2001) made it clear that cinematic wetlands underwent a change simultaneous to the perceptions of the real-world landscape. Furthermore, this transition exists across a multitude of cinema released around the times of these two films. More specifically, Grunwald (2006) noted that general fears toward the American wetland were because of alligator populations. In *Peter Pan* (1953), the audience feared the deadly ‘tick-tock croc’, the cause of Captain Hook’s demise; whereas, fifty-six years later, Disney’s audience, some of which may be the same, embraced Louis, a jazz-loving gator from *The Princess and the Frog* (2009). To suggest that this change in cinematic depictions brought forth changes in policy would be farfetched. But it is clear that these changes in cinematic depictions altered how an individual perceives such a creature (that which resides in the American wetland). Though the depiction of the foreboding swamp still exists in cinema, positive depictions are far more abundant now, making way for the idle wetland.

Cinema did not save the American wetland, but I believe that this research has made it clear that a correlation, to some degree, exists. This topic of study is heavily under-researched, as

made clear through the limited available literature addressing this topic. I believe that the findings of this thesis could open up the door for further research. Due to personal limitations, this project was only able to cover a couple examples of film that showcased cinematic depictions of wetlands. With adequate time and resources, a large-scale study could be conducted that includes various films from multiple time periods, rather than a comparison of two films separated by a half-century gap. Furthermore, this topic of study could be applied to other landscapes, similar to research done by Bahk (2010) and Hudson et al. (2011). As environmental management becomes vital in a world impacted by climate change, applying research to analyze the ways in which an individual connects to a natural landscape will be crucial. The perceptions of landscapes could be altered to favour the natural world so long as cinematic depictions begin highlighting their positives, or even providing a vessel to connect with like in *Shrek* (2001). In order to properly care for a landscape, it must be respected outside of its physical boundaries, rather than just noting general traits while trekking it. Thus, is cinema the key to unlocking a future where the sociocultural value of the American wetland is comparable to the mountain or the great plain? Or, thanks to characters like Shrek, is the war on wetlands nearing its end.

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