

campaign that led to the preservation of an American landscape as a National Park: Yosemite, Great Smoky Mountains, Everglades, and Voyageurs. In these landmark campaigns, a prominent work of Nature writing, by a prominent author like John Muir, Horace Kephart, Marjory Stoneman Douglas, and Sigurd Olson, built upon and contributed to a definitional discourse that enabled people to see a specific landscape differently than it had been seen before. These cases also indicate that, as a landscape changes, the available means of persuasion change, too. Each chapter explores the lines of argument that can be emphasized by rhetors when the place in question defies traditional notions of beauty, grandeur, and purity. Campaigners can rely more or less on aesthetic, economic, scientific, historical, or recreational arguments, depending on the nature of the landscape itself and the rhetorical situation of the campaign. Finally, the last chapter explores the ongoing campaign for a Buffalo Commons National Park on the Great Plains. It follows a recent park debate as it evolves into a discourse of sustainability, and demonstrates how contemporary discussions about sustainable actions are inflected with the discourse of historical campaigns for preservation.

DEFINING PLACES: LITERARY NONFICTION AND THE NATIONAL PARK
MOVEMENT, 1864-PRESENT

by

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Chapter 1 The Yosemite Valley: Preserving an Aesthetic

High in the Sierra Mountains of northern California lies the Yosemite Valley, carved from granite rock by the motions of ancient glaciers. Only seven miles long and just a mile across at its widest point, the Valley is nearly one mile deep and surrounded by stunning geologic formations that are now among America's most known sights: El Capitan, Three Brothers, Cathedral Rock, Cathedral Spires, Half Dome, Royal Arches, North Dome, Glacier Point. Yosemite Falls and Bridalveil Falls spill from these geologic heights, engorged in the spring with snow melting from the Sierra peaks. The Merced River winds peacefully across the valley floor. The naturalist and writer John Muir believed that "no temple made with hands can compare with Yosemite" (Treasures 484). To him, it seemed "as if into this one mountain mansion, Nature had gathered her choicest treasures" to "draw her lovers into close and confiding communion with her" (485). In the backyard of this "mountain mansion" lies another natural wonder: the Mariposa Big Tree Grove, where 500 giant sequoias stand as high as 300 feet tall. They are among the oldest and largest living things on earth.

On June 30, 1864, President Abraham Lincoln signed into law the Yosemite Act, which granted these marvels, Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Big Tree Grove, to the state of California, and mandated that this region be "held for public use, resort, and recreation...inalienable for all time" (Yosemite Act). In that momentous year of civil war, the Yosemite Act of 1864 was an obscure and seemingly negligible piece of legislation, making institutional arrangements for the care of a small tract of land that most Americans would never see (Runte, Yosemite 21). Yet the Act set an historic precedent that continues to have far reaching effects: it was the first instance of landscape

preservation by the federal government, the precursor to the creation of Yellowstone National Park in 1872, and the model for the extensive National Park System we have today. The original Yosemite tract itself was surrounded by the larger Yosemite National Park in 1890, and now this once-remote place is visited by nearly four million people each year (NPS Stats).

Yosemite is currently just one of the 59 scenic National Parks and among the 401 park areas overseen by the National Park Service, which include historic sites, battlegrounds, seashores, and wilderness preserves.¹ These National Park sites are the most popular and revered forms of preservation in the U.S. The designation of “National Park” has been so significant to American culture that many working in the environmental and recreation fields even identify a National Park *movement* – a collective call for action that ultimately yields cumulative changes in both discourse and practice. A *movement* suggests advocacy in the face of adversity, and indeed the creation of a park is never an easy or obvious undertaking. It goes against the grain in a nation where land has always been defined as a commodity intended for private ownership and a resource for private enterprise. Every one of the 650 million acres of American land currently held in public trust has had to be passionately argued for, in campaigns that have been shaped by unique historical, cultural, and environmental circumstances.

This dissertation explores the rhetoric of these campaigns for preservation, with special attention to the role played by book-length works of literary nonfiction in celebrating and defining endangered landscapes. Many writers, scholars, and activists insist that literary nonfiction about the environment, often called “Nature writing,” has

¹ See Appendix A for a complete listing of the scenic National Parks and the years of their establishment. See the glossary for further definition of terms related to the National Park movement.

the power to influence environmental policy. In a 1986 interview, the well-known writer Barry Lopez stated his belief that “this area of writing will not only one day produce a major and lasting body of American literature, but...it might also provide the foundation for a reorganization of American political thought” (Lopez). This project is concerned with the potential for political efficacy that Lopez, and many others, see in literary nonfiction about the environment. It asks, essentially, what literary nonfiction can *do* to create policies and alter material circumstances, and specifically, how works of literary nonfiction about the environment have acted during episodes of the National Park movement.

Yosemite National Park provides a point of departure for this study. The Yosemite region arguably had its greatest advocate in the well-known naturalist and writer John Muir, and today’s historical and literary scholarship abounds with claims to the lasting influence of Muir’s writing not only in preserving Yosemite but also on environmental policies in general. John Muir’s essays, however, functioned within a larger discourse about Yosemite that grew and evolved over the later decades of the 19th century. Muir’s texts were enmeshed within a complex rhetorical ecology, defined by Nathaniel Rivers and Ryan Weber as a system of texts, writers, readers, institutions, objects, and history that function together to persuade audiences to new actions (188-89). This dissertation situates Muir, and other nonfiction writers who influenced the National Park movement, within the larger rhetorical ecologies in which their texts participated. It follows in the footsteps of Daniel Philippon’s *Conserving Words: How American Nature Writers Shaped the Environmental Movement*, in which Philippon demonstrates how five prominent Nature writers influenced environmental policy by each developing a

compelling environmental metaphor through their writing, and then channeling that metaphor into the public sphere through the texts of their advocacy organizations. Like Philippon, I take a rhetorical approach to analyzing how a single text of literary nonfiction functions in relationships with other texts, and other historical and institutional forces, to influence environmental policy.

Where Philippon explores the role of metaphor, however, I seek to understand the function of definition in the rhetorical process required to create a park. I argue that a literary nonfiction text can work within a larger textual ecology to generate a definitional discourse of place, and that these arguments about definition are critical in campaigns for park status. Though we often situate definitions as matters of essence, they are in fact debatable, as rhetoricians from Aristotle onward have established. This project relies specifically on Edward Schiappa's *Defining Reality*, in which he demonstrates that definitions entail certain values: embracing a definition means embracing a value set. For Schiappa, definitions articulate what "ought to be," and arguments about definitions can be oriented toward the future, and ultimately demand future changes in behavior in keeping with a definition's values. I argue that works of literary nonfiction have served, not just as durable art, but also as arguments, especially of definition, in the movement to preserve public lands. With new definitions come new values, enabling new actions like preservation and even restoration.

The four main case studies of this dissertation demonstrate how new definitions of place have emerged through works of literary nonfiction, each acting in relationship to a larger campaign that led to the preservation of a unique American landscape as a National Park. The first case study demonstrates the origins of park discourse in America,

examining the role of John Muir's *Picturesque California* (1888) in the campaign for Yosemite National Park in California. The second case, the campaign for Great Smoky Mountains National Park, analyzes an instance in which a nonfiction text, Horace Kephart's *Our Southern Highlanders* (1922), was overtly used in the decision-making process for one of the first Eastern parks. The third case on the Everglades National Park explores the relationship that a literary nonfiction text can have to the park institution even beyond its campaign era: Marjory Douglas's *The Everglades: River of Grass* (1947) epitomizes the region's definitional discourse and therefore has become central to the Everglades National Park, even after the era of park formation. The fourth case, Voyageurs National Park in Minnesota, considers an instance in which a work of literary nonfiction, Sigurd Olson's *The Singing Wilderness* (1956), participates in a definitional discourse that successfully valorizes an un-scenic and industrialized landscape. In each of these landmark campaigns, a prominent work of literary nonfiction built upon and contributed to a definitional discourse about an endangered place, enabling people to see that place differently than it had been seen before.

These cases indicate that the different character of each landscape provides rhetors with different available means of persuasion. How do arguments for preservation adapt when there are people already living in this place? And how do such arguments transform when the landscape is largely unknown and little studied? Or when the landscape in question is remote, ugly, or tainted by industry? Each chapter adds insight into the lines of argument that can be emphasized by rhetors when the place in question defies traditional notions of beauty, grandeur, and purity that were the hallmarks of the first national parks like Yosemite. Campaigners can rely more or less on aesthetic,

economic, scientific, historical, or recreational arguments, depending on the nature of the landscape itself. Finally, because the movement to preserve endangered places is ongoing today, the last chapter explores the case of the “Buffalo Commons,” a controversial proposal to preserve and restore parts of the Great Plains that have been damaged by agricultural mismanagement. This last chapter follows a park debate as it evolves into a debate about sustainability, and demonstrates how that debate is inflected with the discourse of historical campaigns for preservation.

In summary, this dissertation pursues three central inquiries about the rhetoric of campaigns for preservation. First, it attempts to understand the relationship between particular National Park campaigns and works of literary nonfiction that arguably influenced them. It asks how literary nonfiction texts have served, not just as durable art, but also as arguments, especially of definition and value, in the movement to preserve public lands. Second, it explores how literary nonfiction texts have participated in definitional discourses, helping to clarify, circulate, and amplify those discourses. In this way, it considers the ecological flow of rhetoric through textual systems that enables the creation of policies and institutions. And third, it seeks to understand how arguments for preservation have changed in response to the specific rhetorical situations in which they played out, how varying landscapes made available new means of persuasion, and how specific lines of argument for preservation became salient under unique historical, cultural, and environmental circumstances.

In the rest of this first chapter, I will further develop the theoretical underpinnings for an exploration of literary nonfiction and the National Parks. I situate my project among scholarship on the history of preservation and the rhetoric of the National Parks,

as well as scholarship on literary nonfiction, textual ecologies, and rhetorical definitions. Then, I begin this journey through the National Park movement with an analysis of the campaign to protect the Yosemite Valley state preserve by creating a larger Yosemite National Park. As the first instance of land set aside by the federal government from the public domain, Yosemite provides us with the earliest park discourse, including several significant texts by John Muir. It is a discourse that has been thoroughly studied: historical and rhetorical scholarship on Yosemite finds that Yosemite was consistently defined as a monument, that is, a work of art memorializing primitive America. Highlighting arguments about scenery and aesthetics, the Yosemite campaign also sets the stage for the transformations in argument that will arise as the park movement progresses into the twentieth century. At the end of this chapter, I will outline the remaining chapters that will examine the changing rhetorical circumstances of park campaigns and the definitional role that literary nonfiction has played in the effort to save unique and endangered places.

Theoretical Foundations

This dissertation arises from the nexus of four broad areas of scholarship concerning the National Parks, literary nonfiction, composition, and rhetoric. First, for scholars of the National Parks, it provides insight into the definitional discourses of historical campaigns for preservation; in this way, it expands understanding of the discourse of contemporary parks beyond their patriotic rhetoric. Second, it offers scholars of literary nonfiction, especially scholars of Nature writing, a rhetorical and ecological approach to questions of textual efficacy; it turns away from a traditional interest in the

biographies of leading authors and instead interprets key texts as epideictic arguments unfolding within larger textual, historical, social, and institutional contexts. Thirdly, for scholars of composition, particularly scholars of public writing, this dissertation provides case studies of how texts work together in systems to shape public life. Finally, for scholars of rhetoric, this project continues to expand our understanding of definitional arguments as value-laden and action-oriented. For environmental rhetoricians in particular, it provides evidence of the political potential of definitional discourse when channeled through broader campaigns, and for rhetorical historians, it demonstrates the development of special topoi for preservation in case studies that span more than a century. The following sections overview the research on the National Parks, literary nonfiction, rhetorical ecologies, and definitions, that provides the foundation for the methods and discoveries of this project.

The National Parks

Much of what we currently know about the campaigns for the National Parks derives from historical scholarship on the formation and management of the parks, which has flourished since the 1960's. Most useful among these texts is Alfred Runte's *National Parks: The American Experience* (2010). Runte delves into the political and cultural circumstances that conspired to make each development in the park system possible, from the conception of the idea to threats posed to the parks in the 21st century. In addition, Ken Burns and Dayton Duncan's feature documentary, *The National Parks: America's Best Idea* (2009), provides an entry point into many park stories in a lively and user-friendly way. Where Runte, Burns, and Duncan praise the park idea, Mark David

Spence's *Dispossessing the Wilderness* (1999) is an essential supplement, for its examination of the contributions and conflicts with Indian tribes on what have become parklands. Spence reminds us that the National Park idea is hardly ideal, and that real people's lives are entwined with decisions about preservation, a truth that resurfaces with critical consequences in several campaigns discussed in this dissertation. Finally, Richard Sellars' *Preserving Nature in the National Parks* (1998) describes the rise of scientific purposes for parklands, and the relationship of environmentalists to National Park leadership. Sellars particularly recognizes the National Park system as a manifestation of early conservation, a tangible legacy that environmentalism has inherited.

Contemporary historians of the parks identify several significant events preceding the creation of the Yosemite Valley state preserve in 1864, mentioned in the opening of this chapter. This series of developments enabled the creation of a national system of land preservation in a country that otherwise preferred private ownership and might easily have followed the European model of private parks owned by the leisure class. These precedents include the development of Niagara Falls, which became a cautionary tale when it was overrun by the tourist industry and sneered at by visiting Europeans; the formation of Arkansas Hot Springs Reservation in 1832; and the creation of city parks during the mid-nineteenth century, such as the formation of Central Park in New York City in 1853 (Runte, *National* 6-7; 22). Runte notes that the United States was rich in natural resources surpassing those of Europe, yet early Americans were acutely conscious of their lack of cultural artifacts and artistic history. He argues that it was the National Park idea that helped to transform America's abundant natural resources into cultural ones that became sources of pride for the young nation.

Park historians typically locate the beginning of the National Park movement with the Yosemite Act of 1864, in which the United States Congress created the Yosemite Valley state preserve and the Mariposa Big Tree Grove from federal lands and imparted them to the state of California to oversee for “public use, resort, and recreation” (Runte, National 24). The Yosemite and Mariposa preserves were the first instances of land set aside from the public domain, to be held in trust, in perpetuity, and managed by the government (in this case the state) for the purpose of public recreation. It was not until 1872 that Congress declared Yellowstone, the geologic “wonderland,” the first preserve officially titled “National Park.” If the Yellowstone area had been located within a state, rather than what was a territory at that time, it is possible that the federal government would have followed the precedent set by Yosemite, turning federal land over to the care of the state, and the entire National Park idea would have been lost. Instead, Yellowstone affirmed the right of the federal government to set aside lands from the public domain for uses other than settlement (Runte, National 30-36).

It was not until 1890 that two more National Parks were created, including Yosemite National Park, which was, essentially, a preservation in the Sierra Mountains surrounding the original state preserve in order to keep the “treasures” of the Yosemite Valley intact. Following the expansion of Yosemite, and spurred by the leadership of President Roosevelt at the turn of the century, a dozen more scenic parks were created from public lands in the early decades of the 1900’s, including Crater Lake National Park in Oregon (1902), Mesa Verde National Park in Colorado (1906), and Hawaii Volcanoes National Park (1916) (National Park Service). By 1916, with fifteen scenic National Parks designated, the Department of the Interior created a new branch, the National Park

Service (NPS), under the direction of Stephen Mather, to oversee the care and expansion of the nation's parks. In 1918, Horace Albright, who would become the second NPS Director, first used the word "system" to describe the parks. It was with the leadership of Mather (1916-1929) and then Albright (1929-1933) that the park system grew rapidly to encompass a greater variety of landscapes, including not just grand western mountains, but also hot springs, caves, seaside cliffs, inland lakes, and even swamplands (Rettie 13). This expansion of the park system, which continued throughout the mid-twentieth century, provides the central case studies in this dissertation, with support from regional histories that record the efforts to preserve the Great Smoky Mountains, the Everglades, and the Boundary Waters.

Importantly, the mission of the National Park Service (NPS) is one of *preservation*, rather than *conservation*. In this way, the NPS mission differs significantly from the mission of the United States Forest Service (USFS), though the two government bureaus are often confused and even pitted against each other as rival organizations. After the Forest Reserve Act of 1891 enabled scientifically managed forestry on public lands, the United States Forest Service was formed in 1905 as a branch of the United States Department of Agriculture headed by Gifford Pinchot. While National Forests include some recreational sites, their primary purpose is the sustainable harvesting of timber. By contrast, the National Park Service was created to "promote and regulate" the National Parks, which "conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and wildlife therein"; NPS must "provide for the enjoyment" of this scenery and wildlife "in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations" (Organic Act). While the mission of the United States Forest Service

focuses on *using* the land, the mission of the National Park Service focuses on *setting land aside* from use.

While scholarship on the history of the National Park system and the National Park Service are abundant and wide-ranging, scholarship on the rhetoric of the parks has been limited in its scope and methodology. I wish to point out trends in the current literature, from which my dissertation will take its departure. An examination of rhetorical scholarship on the parks indicates that, to date, there has been only brief study of the rhetorical workings of National Park campaigns and their impact on our current environmental discourse. Given this lack of attention, my dissertation takes a new direction in the study of park rhetoric, in its historical methodology and its environmental concerns.

Thus far, most rhetorical studies have focused primarily on the *nationalistic* discourse of the *contemporary* parks, rather than on the discourse of their formative campaigns (see Olwig, 1996; Byerly, 1996; Clark, 2004; Halloran and Clark, 2006). These studies evaluate the experience of the contemporary park visitor, to better understand how parks serve as symbols of the nation. Their analyses find that the national parks are no longer wilderness landscapes; instead they are representations of wilderness landscapes, a post-modern nature designed to foster a sense of national belonging for park visitors. The contemporary park visit is one that can take on an almost religious atmosphere of reverence, as tourists encounter a tamed, framed, and “picturesque” landscape now inscribed with national significance. These symbolic landscapes are “showplaces,” that remind visitors of the nation’s past accomplishments and instruct them in a communal identity. Such studies seize on the traditional themes of park rhetoric

for their subjects: the language of transcendence that has been influential since the days of John Muir, blended with the rhetoric of nationalism, such that the parks become the nation's temples, its sacred places. According to this collection of research, parklands have been preserved not for their value as environments, but for their value to the national identity.

From this body of work, my dissertation makes three important departures. First, while most rhetorical scholarship on the parks draws on the scene of the park landscape itself as the site of analysis, my dissertation focuses on the rhetorical work of texts now typically held within the National Park archives. My interest lies in the public campaigns that enabled people to see places differently than they had been seen before, and the variety of texts, especially literary nonfiction, that were involved in this persuasive effort. Such an archival method is usefully modeled in Yves Figueiredo's "Inventing Yosemite Valley: National Parks and the Language of Preservation" (2007), which analyzes the discourse of a set of Yosemite texts drawn from different genres and across decades. Figueiredo finds that the original National Parks were not motivated by environmental preservation, a concept that did not exist at the time, but by monumentalism – the desire to create a monument to the dying frontier, and to American unity, during the divisive era of the Civil War and Reconstruction. While still interested in the nationalistic themes typical of park scholarship, Figueiredo usefully models work within a park archive, accounting for a variety of genres that were active in shaping the public definition of a landscape. Building on Figueiredo's work, I will extend his study within my analysis of the Yosemite park campaign later in this chapter, and continue to apply his archival

method to the discourse of many other park campaigns that have not yet been studied through the lens of rhetoric.

Second, while scholarship on park rhetoric focuses on the relationship between parks and the discourse of nationalism, my study focuses on the contributions of park rhetoric to our contemporary environmental discourse. This focus is shared by one noteworthy rhetorical study, “Watkins, Yosemite, and the Birth of Environmentalism” (2000), in which Kevin DeLuca and Anne Demo turn away from the nationalistic themes of most park scholarship and offer a look at the environmental rhetoric of the parks through its images. DeLuca and Demo argue that, even though the ideology of environmentalism did not exist at the time of the first parks’ founding, we can still find the roots of environmental thinking through the rhetorical analysis of park texts. They analyze the images of Yosemite Valley taken by photographer Carlton Watkins in the 1860’s, and they suggest that these images made Yosemite into a pristine wilderness, by highlighting its lofty geographic features, flowing waterfalls, and uncut forests, and by erasing the signs of its Indian inhabitants and lower-class laborers. They conclude that Watkins’ images popularized a way of imagining nature as “untouched” that problematically persists today, keeping the focus of mainstream environmentalism on the preservation of natural scenes, rather than on issues of environmental justice. DeLuca and Demo’s article is quite significant among park scholarship: they suggest that we can find the emergence of our contemporary environmentalism in our national park archives, and thereby chart the continuing influence of park discourse today. This inheritance will be the focus of the final chapter of this dissertation.

Third, while most contemporary park scholarship focuses on the definition of parks as national symbols, my dissertation traces the variety of defining arguments that can be salient in park campaigns, including the economic, scientific, and historic arguments for creating new parks. While early parks like Yosemite were primarily defined as national symbols, later park campaigns highlight other salient means of defining landscapes. Because parks are complex cultural phenomena, it is certainly important to keep in mind their significance to nationalistic discourses, but I also seek the variations and patterns in ways that one might argue for a park. In this sense, my project potentially informs the study of the rhetoric of contemporary park sites: I find that the deeper rhetorical histories present in the formative park campaigns still manifest in the rhetoric that greets and informs park visitors. By looking beyond the nationalistic rhetoric of the National Parks, this dissertation examines how past controversies over individual parks continue to inform our contemporary discourse about threatened places; a consequence of such a study may be to alter our understanding of the meaning and value of places already preserved.

Literary Nonfiction about the Environment

The texts by Muir, Kephart, Douglas, and Olson that are central to this study are a type of literary nonfiction frequently categorized as “Nature writing.” However, this term has served as a broad and sometimes troubling generic designation. Daniel Payne notes that the term “Nature writing” suggests literary boundaries often uncomfortable to Nature writers themselves; authors Edward Abbey and Barry Lopez, for example, have complained about being confined to the category (6). When Payne notes the limits of the

term “Nature writing,” he is aware that it comes encumbered with the inheritance of natural history. It is also subject to the view furthered by John Elder and Robert Finch in *The Norton Book of Nature Writing*, that “the personal element – that is the filtering of experience through an individual sensibility – is central to...the Nature writing tradition” (28). It is further burdened with recent criticism of the term “nature,” a term that has often been used to indicate a separation of humans from their surroundings (see Cronon, 1996; Olwig 1996; Nash, 2001). All of these factors make it difficult to define exactly what “Nature writing” must be by any criteria – certainly not all texts of the genre rely on the personal narrative or echo the conventions of natural history writing.

Additionally complicating matters, works of literary nonfiction labeled “Nature writing” can be inherently layered. In his 1998 essay, “Toxic Discourse,” Lawrence Buell moves us closer to an understanding of literary nonfiction when he calls it “an oxymoronic multigenre” (659). We can apply this term to the whole category of literary nonfiction, for we find multiple genres at work within it. The texts in this study, while all “literary nonfiction” at the broadest level of genre, also arguably represent more specific generic designations: *Picturesque California* is a tourist text; *Our Southern Highlanders* is an early ethnography; *The Everglades: River of Grass* is an environmental history; and *The Singing Wilderness* is a personal wilderness narrative. Keeping in mind Carolyn Miller’s formulation that genres provide strategic responses to unmet social needs, these more specific generic designations can help us to see differences among these works of Nature writing and to question how each provided an exigent response to a local situation.

In Buell's "oxymoronic multigenre," the boundaries of such generic categories are meant to be fluid and emergent; thus Buell's term also denotes the tendency of any *individual* work of literary nonfiction to *blend* and *display* multiple genres within it. These genres include the prosaic (non-literary) genres, as Carolyn Miller calls them - from magazine features to sketchbook drawings to scientific logs to campaign brochures. John Muir's *Picturesque California*, for example, includes episodes of travel writing, promotional writing, poetry, and scientific description, and these various genres can be present within a single chapter of the text. At the same time, within a work of literary nonfiction, many of these non-literary genres are on display: they are selected, excerpted, reframed, and exposed to readers for scrutiny. These rhetorical artifacts often serve as the research substance and object of inquiry for the literary nonfiction text itself. Indeed literary nonfiction does a good deal of rhetorical analysis within its pages, and when a work of literary nonfiction displays and evaluates a discourse, it serves to interpret and anchor the meaning of the texts within it. For example, as I will describe in Chapter 3, Marjory Douglas's *The Everglades: River of Grass* includes extracts from travel diaries, budgets, scientists' observation notes, editorials, and letters, each framed to call attention to how previous speakers have named and defined the Everglades. In texts like Douglas's, through the author's selection, arrangement, and commentary on textual excerpts, readers hear the many voices that contribute to building a discourse and are called to pay attention its effects.

Buell suggests, then, that literary nonfiction is actually a meta-genre: a single work of literary nonfiction acts within more specific genre boundaries, and simultaneously combines multiple genres within it, such that there can be no "pure" form

called “Nature writing.” In light of these complexities, I find it useful to think of this realm of literature so often called “Nature writing,” as “literary nonfiction about the environment” or “environmental nonfiction,” and I use all three of these terms interchangeably throughout this dissertation. Of course, the term “environment” continues to be an object of debate arising from the environmental justice movement, which has productively opened the definition of the environment to include both human and non-human elements of the world, as well as all habitats from wilderness to metropolis. In this way, environment has emerged as an ultimate term, in Kenneth Burke’s sense of the word – one that transcends the divisions between groups and has a unifying effect. This terminology keeps our attention on the dual focus of this study: the capacities of literary nonfiction, and particularly, its influence on what we now call “the environment.”

Just as DeLuca and Demo treat visuals as the most salient of park texts in their study of Yosemite, I suggest here that literary nonfiction texts have had a particularly critical, yet understudied, function in park campaigns. Indeed Nature writing is especially known for its influence on environmental policy-making. Over the past two decades, a number of scholars, namely ecocritics, have explored the question of *how* literary nonfiction about the environment can achieve political effects, typically through literary analysis of isolated key texts and study of the biographies of their noteworthy authors. We witness this approach in studies of Rachel Carson, Aldo Leopold, Theodore Roosevelt, Henry David Thoreau, and John Muir, to name just a few writers prominent in the Nature writing canon (see Slovic, 1992; Payne, 1996; Roorda, 1998; Finch and Elder, 2002). These studies of Nature writing typically offer two perspectives on how a text

achieves political influence. The first perspective posits that the popularity of a text enables the individual writer to become a more effective environmental advocate in other forums. A second perspective posits that Nature writing heightens a reader's consciousness, which is a first step towards political action; readers who learn about endangered landscapes, for example, are thought to be more likely to act in alignment with their newfound understanding (e.g. to vote, to donate money). Classic studies of Nature writing have usefully analyzed how works in this genre have developed individual writer-activists and raised public awareness, both critical components in the process of policy-making (see especially Slovic 1992; Buell 1995; Payne 1996).

These approaches to the question of *how* a text achieves political influence tend, however, to gloss over the rhetorical workings of texts themselves. I suggest here that we might expand our understandings of the power of literary nonfiction by viewing such works as rhetorical performances that are inherently argumentative. Specifically, we can think of literary nonfiction texts as rhetorical performances in the epideictic genre. In *The New Rhetoric*, Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca define the epideictic genre as argumentative discourse that “sets out to increase the intensity of adherence to certain values, which might not be contested when considered on their own but may nevertheless not prevail against other values that might come into conflict with them. The speaker tries to establish a sense of communion centered around particular values recognized by the audience” (51). This type of discourse is not merely for show or display, as it is described in the classical tradition. Nor should it be confused with deliberative discourse, in which action is the ultimate goal. Rather, as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca define it, epideictic

rhetoric celebrates and affirms certain values that predispose an audience toward future “effective action” in keeping with this value set (49).

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca emphasize the *literary* character of this type of argument, noting that, in the epideictic genre, the speaker “uses the whole range of means available to the rhetorician for purposes of amplification and enhancement. In epideictic [sic] oratory every device of literary art is appropriate, for it is a matter of combining all the factors that can promote this communion of the audience” (51). This definition usefully opens the epideictic genre beyond Aristotle’s formulation of the speech of praise or blame, the “show-piece” serving for ceremony or entertainment. Using Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s definition, I analyze the ways that literary nonfiction texts make value-laden arguments that promote future actions towards endangered places when specific deliberative arguments come along. Classic studies of Nature writing also tend to work within the paradigm that a single text and a single author can change a policy, create an institution, or reform public thinking on a contentious issue like the formation of a new National Park. I suggest in the next section that, rather than focusing only on the key texts or individual lives of park champions, we can usefully deepen our understanding of how the epideictic rhetoric of a literary nonfiction text achieves its effects, by studying how specific texts act within a larger *rhetorical ecology* to build a park discourse – and eventually, an environmental one.

Rhetorical Ecologies

The idea of “rhetorical ecology” as I employ it here emerges from research about public writing in composition studies. Scholars promoting this concept are especially

interested in disrupting and reformulating the model of rhetorical situation that underlies much analysis in rhetoric and composition: the single writer composing a single text for single audience. In *The Wealth of Reality: An Ecology of Composition*, Margaret Syverson suggests that “our theories of composing have been somewhat atomistic, focusing on individual writers, individual texts, isolated acts, processes, or artifacts” (Syverson 8). Her concern is that “by privileging the individual writer composing in isolation, we have slighted or ignored compelling evidence that writing...occurs in ecological systems involving not only social but also environmental structures” (Syverson 9). Subsequent rhetoric and composition scholars echo Syverson’s concerns. Nancy Welch critiques the fascination in English studies with “the lone artistic revolutionary” and argues that there are “limits of a poetics/politics fixated on solitary acts of writing” (Welch 477, 485). Jenny Edbauer, analyzing the rhetorician’s standard model of rhetorical situation, calls for scholars and teachers to “reclai[m] rhetoric from artificially elementary frameworks” that can “mask the fluidity of rhetoric” as it moves across situations, between writers, and from text to text (Edbauer 9, 20). In “Ecological, Pedagogical, Public Rhetoric,” Nathaniel Rivers and Ryan Weber agree with Edbauer that “rhetorics move and evolve,” but “too often theories of rhetorical situation...act as if rhetoric sits still” (194).

All of these writers suggest that, as a result of our “atomizing” models of writers and texts, theories of how writing operates in the public sphere are equally constrained. While they use various terms to discuss the issue (e.g. public rhetoric, public writing, ecologies of composition), they all express their concern that separating writers, texts, and audiences from the larger forces that shape them - from the complexities of

interaction and influence – limits our understanding of *how* writing operates *effectively* in the public sphere. In response, they offer the “rhetorical ecology” as a potentially productive unit of analysis in our studies of writers, texts, and audiences.

A rhetorical ecology is a system of writers, readers, and texts, situated in relationship with the historical, institutional, social, and material forces that shape them, and which they shape in return. The idea of rhetorical ecology emerged from Marilyn Cooper’s 1986 article, “The Ecology of Writing.” Cooper lays the groundwork for a new approach to studying writing, explaining that “an ecologist explores how writers interact to form systems: all characteristics of any individual writer or piece of writing both determine and are determined by the characteristics of all the other writers and writings in the system” and that these systems are “inherently dynamic” (Cooper 368). Over a decade later, Margaret Syverson uses Cooper’s idea of the ecological system to complicate the study of the composing process itself. Syverson situates the writer, the reader, and the text at the “nexus of complex social structures,” including the layers of personal, institutional, and global influences that bear on the composing process. For Syverson, these influences might range from the specific technologies a writer uses to the disciplinary practices that inform the structure of a text (Syverson 6-7).

While many scholars working in this area, like Cooper and Syverson, employ rhetorical ecology to better understand the actions of rhetorical production, rhetorical ecology is also a useful concept to study how rhetorical productions lead to greater sociopolitical actions. The theorist of public writing, taking an ecological view, conceives of any sociopolitical change, such as the creation of a policy or institution, as a rhetorical process that emerges from multiple writers and multiple texts, across time, rather than the

work of any individual author or text. Thinking about rhetoric *ecologically* supports the study of public discourse that yields action, which is diffuse and fluid. Importantly, rhetorical ecology draws our attention to “the dimension of movement” in rhetoric (Edbauer 20). It invites us to consider how a rhetorical element, like a figure, a metaphor, or a definition, moves and transforms across many speakers, texts, audiences, and institutions.

An important model for tracing rhetorical ecologies is Daniel Philippon’s book, *Conserving Words: How American Nature Writers Shaped the Environmental Movement* (2004). Philippon uses the concept of metaphor to understand how works of Nature writing, embedded in ecological webs, have influenced environmental thinking and policy-making. Like many scholars of Nature writing, Philippon focuses with tremendous archival depth on the biographical stories of five fairly canonical writers; yet, he also makes three significant departures. First, he examines each writer’s full body of work in light of the scope and multiplicity of a lifetime of writings. Second, he introduces the concept of metaphor, and argues that each writer promoted a usable metaphor for Nature through his or her life’s work. And third, he focuses on the work of organizations, which disseminate the writer’s metaphor to change a system of thinking and acting towards the land. Through these three differences, Philippon’s work furthers our understanding of the fractured, multilayered, and webbed ways that Nature texts interact with public discourses in order to create environmental policies.

Continuing some of the work Philippon began, and in contrast to much previous scholarship, I situate influential works of Nature writing within the larger discourses of place in which they participated, and I consider the rhetorical production of these

discourses diffusely, across many texts and over time.² In addition, I examine their production across a community of writers, rather than through the work of individual leaders or authors. Following the model set by Phillippon in *Conserving Words*, I offer the concept of definition as a means for understanding *how* epideictic texts of Nature writing, acting within larger discourses of place, have been able to influence real-world outcomes, specifically the creation of new National Parks.

Definitional Discourses

In park campaigns, matters of definition often underlie the public's or decision-makers' willingness to grant park status. Whether subtly or overtly, campaigners grapple with questions about the *meaning* of a place and how to name, describe, and persuade others of that meaning. Is the Yosemite Valley a remote wilderness, or a monument to the nation? Are the Great Smoky Mountains an impoverished backwater, or an untapped economic resource? Is the Everglades a swamp, or, in fact, a river of grass (and what, exactly, *is* a river of grass)? Are the Boundary Waters a warehouse of natural resources, or an historical landmark with unique national significance? These are not trivial semantic choices. Rather, they are critical acts of definition made in arguments for park status.

While many rhetoricians from Aristotle to Richard Weaver have theorized about definition, this study is primarily grounded in the theoretical work of Edward Schiappa.

² It is important to acknowledge the specific scope of my dissertation. Given how expansive a rhetorical ecology can be, I am examining one part of the ecological system, those documents oriented toward a wide public and often national readership. Other potential documents include institutional memos, personal letters, or meeting minutes, that certainly were enmeshed in the same ecological system as nationally-oriented, literary and publicity texts. Indeed, the effective work of redefining landscapes happened there, too, as well as in arguments to the public at large. My dissertation examines the work of outwardly-focused public campaigns, which informed and pressured other inwardly-focused, organizational processes required to yield new policies and institutions.

In *Defining Reality*, Schiappa notes that we typically treat definitions as matters of essence: in everyday parlance, definitions explain simply what *is*, and in everyday settings, disagreements over definitions are settled with the aid of dictionaries or by those in a position of power to define, e.g. a specialist in a field. But as we are reminded in *The New Rhetoric*, definitions only “enjoy the status of facts so long as they remain unchallenged” (Perelman 211). Schiappa is interested in what happens when definitions are challenged, especially in legal and policy debates. At moments of “definitional rupture,” when disputes arise about the meaning of a word, definitions become more visibly rhetorical and the act of persuasion required for adherence becomes more overt. Schiappa calls these acts of persuasion *definitive* discourse, or what I call *definitional* discourse, meaning “discourse that defines, whether in an explicit discourse about a definition, discourse that argues from a particular definition, or discourse that stipulates a view of reality via an argument by definition” (xi). The term *definitional discourse* expands our view of definition: it asks us to think beyond a word or phrase offered by a dictionary to instead consider how terms become meaningful through protracted, diffuse, and oftentimes subtle forms of argument. Indeed Schiappa suggests in *Defining Reality* that some of the most powerful arguments about definition happen through *naming* and *description*, which we may overlook as argumentative at all (111).

Significantly, Schiappa proposes that definitions entail certain values: embracing a definition means embracing a value set. As explanations of how a word “ought to be” used, rather than what a word simply “is,” arguments of definition are oriented toward the future, and ultimately demand future changes in behavior, in keeping with a definition’s values. For example, Schiappa details a case study of the terms “person” and “human

life” in debates over abortion rights; each speaker in the debate defines these terms differently, based on his or her value set, with the intent of achieving a specific future outcome, such as legal protection for abortion rights. Schiappa insists on this relationship between definitions, values, and future actions, arguing that “a successful new definition changes not only recognizable patterns of linguistic behavior but also our understanding of the world and the attitudes and behaviors we adopt toward various parts of that world” (32). In this project, I explore definitional discourses using Schiappa’s formulation of definitions as rhetorical, value-laden, and oriented towards future action. Specifically, I focus on the development of definitional discourses of place: how places are defined and redefined for the public through discourses that are built across texts and over time; how those definitions become embedded with values, especially through the descriptive, epideictic forms of literary nonfiction texts; and how they enable new actions like preservation and even restoration.

Looking across the textual ecologies of the National Parks studied in this dissertation, I argue that a specific set of value-based arguments consistently shape definitional discourses of place. In *The New Rhetoric*, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca outline several common lines of argument called the *loci* that are used for establishing and ordering evaluations. In keeping with the topical tradition established by Aristotle, the *loci* provide routine topics that a speaker can draw upon to formulate arguments and to help an audience connect with the subject at hand. In Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s schema, some *loci* can be categorized as *quantitative* or *qualitative*. Quantitative *loci* include, for example, diversity, commonality, and durability (e.g. one thing is better than another because it is more durable or lasting), while qualitative *loci* include uniqueness,

originality, and irreparability (e.g. one thing is better than another because it is rarer and more easily lost) (85-93). Where a quantitative argument fails, an antithetical qualitative argument may succeed. The authors explain that “each locus can be confronted by one that is contrary to it: thus, to the classical locus of the superiority of the lasting, one may oppose the romantic locus of the superiority of that which is precarious and fleeting” (85). Importantly, certain audiences tend to prefer one locus in any such pair. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca observe that it is “possible to characterize societies not only by the particular values they prize most, but by the intensity with which they adhere to one or the other of a pair of antithetical loci” (85). Thus the use of loci as sources of argument is highly patterned within and across similar rhetorical situations, because certain loci tend to be especially effective with certain audiences and to indicate that audience’s shared values.

In the following case studies, I find that rhetors, from Nature writers to park campaigners, reliably draw on specific, qualitative *loci* when articulating new definitions of places to American audiences. Their definitions point out what is unique or rare about a landscape, more than what it has in common with other landscapes; what is original or ancient in that landscape, more than what is new and evolving; and what is threatened or irreparable about that place, more than which of its features are durable and lasting. Furthermore, when formulating definitions, rhetors rely on another locus, aside from the qualitative: the locus of essence, which accords “a higher value” to those individuals or objects that embody a type most fully (94). In literary nonfiction and many other texts about the National Parks, rhetors evidence these appeals in their descriptions, by defining

landscapes as unique, original, and irreparable, and as essential demonstrations of their type (e.g. the best mountain canyon).

Such *loci* simultaneously provide a speaker with ways to begin redefining a landscape and ways to connect that landscape to a recognizable set of communal values that audiences already support. Importantly, definitional arguments about places change in response to social, historical, *and geographic* situations. That is to say, the available means of persuasion vary with the landscape itself. A speaker constructing an evaluative definition of a specific landscape responds to the questions generated by the *loci*: what features of this landscape are most unique? How does this landscape tell an origin story, whether ecological or human? In what ways is this specific landscape threatened, e.g. by over-logging, commercial hunting, etc.? What type of landscape is this, and how does it best exemplify the essential features of its type?

I find in the case studies of this project that definitions are assumed, emerging, or actively debated in many texts within the rhetorical ecology of a specific park, and they are developed through the extended epideictic argument that is the particular capacity of literary nonfiction. If rhetors can persuade audiences that a landscape's definition aligns with their existing values, they may convince their listeners of the need to preserve such a unique, original, and irreparable place. We might initially assume that the public criteria for what kinds of places are worthy of being preserved is already fully formed, fixed in the public mind and embedded in its discourse. But while preservation is certainly a decision based on common terms of understanding, the public's ideas about what types of places count as worthy of protection are anything but fixed, and the criteria for preservation are debatable in each era. Beginning with the case study of Yosemite in the

1850's, we will see how each generation, across more than a century, debates which places deserve public attention, protection, and resources.

Defining Yosemite Valley

The case of Yosemite National Park provides a model for the study of definitional discourse in literary nonfiction and related park campaigns. Yosemite has been studied extensively by historians, as well as by a few rhetorical scholars, who point to the rapid coherence of a discourse that defined the Yosemite Valley based on its aesthetic properties, as a work of art wrought by the hand of God. The Yosemite Valley and its neighboring grove of sequoia trees were described in numerous late-nineteenth century texts as monuments of the young American nation, rivaling the cultural treasures of Europe in their beauty and sublimity. In 1890, Yosemite National Park was created in the high Sierra Mountains as a means of protecting the watershed that fed this monumental Yosemite Valley. Many historians attribute the creation of this new park in large part to John Muir and two related articles he wrote for *Century* magazine.

While both the discourse and campaign of Yosemite National Park has been extensively studied, I wish to reconsider the common claim that Muir's *Century* articles were especially influential in the push to preserve the high Sierra. In this case study, I reassess the influence of Muir's articles by reading them in relationship to *Picturesque California*, a robust collection of essays edited by Muir in the late 1880's. I argue that his oft-acclaimed *Century* articles are a reiteration and extension of the rhetorical work begun in *Picturesque California*, in which we encounter a larger definitional discourse that extends the meaning of the Yosemite Valley to the entire Sierra Mountain range, and

locates the Sierra in the heart of the American West. This case study demonstrates how a definitional discourse draws on the loci of uniqueness, originality, threat, and essence, how a work of literary nonfiction can amend a discourse that has been built across many texts and over time, and how a definition of place circulates through campaign arguments. Further, this additional rhetorical study of Yosemite demonstrates the prominent role of aesthetic arguments in National Park campaigns; Yosemite's "sublime" aesthetic became the standard for National Park formation that future park campaigns needed to respond to.

Monumental Yosemite

When President Lincoln signed the Yosemite Act of 1864, the Yosemite Valley was still only recently known to white Americans. A mountain guide named Joseph Walker may have glimpsed the Valley as early as 1833, when he was leading a group of mountaineers through the Sierra, but finding the descent too steep, the group passed on. At that time, the Ahwahneechee tribe inhabited the Valley, until they were systematically dispossessed, beginning in the winter of 1851 with the arrival of an army contingent that is now remembered as the "Mariposa Battalion." One member of the battalion, Dr. Lafayette Bunnell, created the first known record of an American's impressions of the Valley and named many of its features, though his observations would not be published until 1880 (Runte, *Yosemite* 10-12). In the early and mid-1850's, small parties of travelers visited Yosemite Valley and its neighboring sequoia forests, and these groups shared news of their "discovery" in California publications and the Eastern press.

In the brief period between the arrival of white men to Yosemite Valley in 1851, and Lincoln's signing of the Yosemite Act in 1864, notable writers and artists joined the succession of travelers, and their work generated a discourse that portrayed Yosemite as a place of natural grandeur so replete in its beauty that it rivaled the high cultural art forms and sublime landscapes of Europe. American Studies scholar Yves Figueiredo analyzes this discourse extensively in his study, "Inventing Yosemite Valley: National Parks and the Language of Preservation." Figueiredo evaluates seven 19th century Yosemite texts, selected to include tourist texts, personal narratives, government reports, and public education pieces written by scientists. His discursive analysis, which works with texts across genres and decades, provides an incredibly useful model of work within a park archive, especially as it demonstrates how a region's definitional discourse is embedded within the descriptive language of its texts.

Figueiredo's representative sample of seven texts demonstrates three significant motifs in Yosemite discourse. First, Figueiredo observes that Yosemite texts rely on numbers, especially to express the size and age of Yosemite's features, including the neighboring sequoia trees. Often these figures are very precise and "aimed at conveying a sense of objectivity," even though it was impossible for parties of leisure travelers to measure El Capitan or Yosemite Falls with any accuracy; their figures were often "gross exaggerations" (17). Likewise, when indicating the age of natural phenomena, Yosemite texts use dramatic comparisons, connecting the age of rocks or sequoias to Biblical times or ancient Egypt (18).

Figueiredo also observes that Yosemite texts rely on superlatives to express the grandeur of the region: its waterfalls are *the highest* in the world, its forests are *the most*

beautiful anyone has ever seen, and “everything, from rocks to waterfalls, and from chasms to peaks, [is] subject to being praised in such a way that the rest of the world seemed no more than a mere foil for the magnificent Sierra” (18). Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, Figueiredo observes that 19th century Yosemite texts rely on a vocabulary of architecture when describing the Valley. They use words like colonnade, temple, cathedral, spire, wall, tower, dome, column, pillar, and even castle to convey the shape of the landscape (18-21). Importantly, several texts even use the word “monument” to describe the Valley or the sequoias, indicating that they are “noble,” “enduring,” “something from the past,” and “something big” (20). This vocabulary enabled writers to compare the Yosemite Valley to the well-known tourist sites of Europe, and thereby make Yosemite into a site of artistic cultural capital they felt America was sorely lacking. The insistent use of architectural comparisons is “emblematic of a general endeavor to endow the American landscape with a cultural quality” and to make America seem more beautiful to the leisure class, who often traveled to what they deemed to be more aesthetically pleasing places in Europe (19).

There are two aesthetics at work in this Yosemite discourse: it is both picturesque and sublime. The picturesque refers to the scene that can be framed by the traveler, as if it were a work of art. The practice of “picturesque touring” began in the late 1700’s in England, when tourists would travel to places, often in continental Europe, that were considered “picturesque” by virtue of their repetition in paintings, sketches, and written descriptions. These tourists would sometimes take mirrors called “Claude glasses,” so named after the founding picturesque artist Claude Lorrain, and use these mirrors to frame the landscape, like a small painting that might be hung on a wall at home, or a

postcard that might be sent to a friend (Byerly 54). In “The Uses of Landscape: the Picturesque Aesthetic and the National Park System,” Alison Byerly suggests that these practices made the ordinary tourist into an artist and the landscapes he looked at became “found art” by virtue of their framing (55). Figueiredo suggests that, in Yosemite discourse, a trip through Yosemite Valley was “broken down into a series of points of view,” in which the traveler pauses at routine sites to take in a prescribed scene, as if looking at a landscape painting (24). In this way the viewer experienced a civilized encounter with a wild place; in a landscape that is picturesque, nature becomes as socially constrained as art (24).

The picturesque can be understood, however, as a variation on the sublime landscape, one that, in Edmund Burke’s formulation, is imbued with both beauty and terror. The picturesque tourist does not view the landscape directly because it overwhelms. As Figueiredo indicates, Yosemite texts emphasize the proportions, age, and superlative qualities of the Valley and the Big Trees to drive home the sublimity of viewing them. Yosemite texts insist upon the natural “wild” and “virgin” landscape, suggesting that the Valley is untouched by humans. The Yosemite Valley and its neighboring sequoia forests are therefore pure manifestations of God’s creation, making them a perfect place for contemplation, reflection, and spiritual inspiration (26).

Figueiredo’s astute analysis is based on seven carefully selected texts published between 1855 and 1894, suggesting that Yosemite texts came to “share a rhetoric which is surprisingly coherent and stable” over several decades (15). Interestingly, a closer inspection of eight of the *earliest* texts of the Yosemite canon, including several prominent *visual* texts, published in the short span between 1855 and 1864, all

demonstrate the significant features cited by Figueiredo and indicate that this Yosemite rhetoric cohered extremely quickly. A rhetorical analysis of these earliest texts also suggests that the motifs Figueiredo observes are in fact qualitative loci in disguise, rooted in the unique, the original, and the essential. In attempting to express to the public the sublimity of the Yosemite Valley, early Yosemite writers and artists turned to the qualitative loci to generate their arguments about what the Yosemite Valley is and what it means. That is to say, their descriptions drew on the qualitative loci to invent a definition for Yosemite and to inscribe it with recognizable values.

Writers and artists argue for Yosemite's uniqueness whenever they respond to the Valley's features with surprise. The earliest Yosemite publicist, for example, was James Mason Hutchings, who led a small party of tourists to the Valley in 1855. Hutchings' commentary "California for Waterfalls" appeared in the *Mariposa Gazette* in August 1855 and was reprinted in the *San Francisco Daily California Chronicle* (Browning 213). Hutchings' piece emphasizes the startling height of the rock formations, and the exclamatory reviews of the travelers, who "never expected to behold so beautiful a sight!" (Hutchings 214). A year later, Warren Baer composed an account of his 1856 journey with Lafayette Bunnell, "A Trip to the Yosemite Falls." Baer is hyperbolic as he attempts to express the landscape, claiming an "inability to convey even a faint idea of the accumulated mass of grandeur and loveliness that gradually unfolds itself to the startled gaze of the eager traveler" (Baer 220). Like Hutchings, Baer is preoccupied with the measurement of the valley's features, evidence to him that the landscape of the Yosemite is more magnificent even than the "Alps of Switzerland or the valleys of Italy" (Baer 220). In Baer's assessment, "Nature is here triumphant over Art and Genius." Even

the so-called men of science who surveyed the Sierras in the 1860's participated in a common discourse about the aesthetics of Yosemite. William H. Brewer of the California Geological Survey visited Yosemite, but this man of science was just as overcome by the aesthetics of the Yosemite scene and expresses his awe in much the same language. Brewer first reports measurements of the waterfalls and the rock formations, and then ruminates, "I question if the world furnishes a parallel...certainly there is none known." To Brewer, even the relatively modest Bridalveil Falls seems "vastly finer than any waterfall in Switzerland...in fact finer than any in Europe" (qtd in Runte, National 18). Whether expressed in awe-inspiring measurements or superlative declarations, the exclamations of Baer and Brewer suggest that the raw, unadorned landscape of the American West exceeds the beauty of Europe's most renowned landscapes and most carefully crafted and revered artworks. It is a new kind of art that is unique in all the world.

Yosemite's qualities of ancientness are often on display, whenever writers exclaim about the age of the Valley's rock formations or neighboring sequoia trees. In the winter of 1860-61, for example, noted writer and orator Thomas Starr King published a series of letters about his travels to Yosemite in the *Boston Evening Transcript*. King reminds readers that one of the giant sequoias in the Mariposa Grove "is three hundred years older than the Norman Conquest and the great Hildebrand," emphasizing just how old it was "in the time of the first Crusade." He also suggests that the sequoia "antedates the foundation stone of the oldest Gothic spire of Europe," a comparison that suggests the superiority of a natural wonder over a manmade art – since the one is clearly ancient, the other fleeting (King, A Vacation). Similarly, the geologist Clarence King visited the

Valley in 1864. Upon reaching Inspiration Point, King writes that he goes by the famous location feeling as if he somehow doesn't belong "to that army of literary travelers who have planted themselves and burst into rhetoric" (qtd in Deluca and Demo 246). King's image of writers "bursting into rhetoric" is instructive: it suggests just how routinized the Yosemite discourse had become in less than ten years' time. Ironically, though King sees himself as apart from the "literary travelers," he nonetheless describes Yosemite in the same familiar prose in *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada*, an account of his 1864 trip. King compares the natural scene of Yosemite to the monuments of ancient Egypt, proclaiming that "no fragment of human work, broken pillar or sand-worn image half lifted over pathetic desert – none of these link the past and today with anything like the power of these monuments of living antiquity" (qtd in Runte, National 20). These moments, which for Figueiredo indicate motifs of numerical measurement, are simultaneously imbued with the qualitative loci: audiences would value this ancient landscape - especially in an America that felt too young and too new in its politics and culture.

Yosemite Valley is also rendered in these earliest writings as a landscape that is the best of its type. Renowned visual representations of the Valley and the Big Trees played an important role in shaping this aspect of the public understanding of Yosemite; these early paintings and engravings of the Valley embody in their visual rhetoric the same motifs of size, architecture, and the superlative that Figueiredo outlines, while overall they value Yosemite as an *essential* mountain valley. In 1861, Carlton Watkins took the first photographs of Yosemite and the giant sequoias. These photographs were critical to the public's understanding of Yosemite as an essential mountain valley. As

Keven DeLuca and Anne Demo argue in “Imaging Nature: Watkins, Yosemite, and the Birth of Environmentalism,” Watkins’ photographs crafted a public image of the Yosemite Valley as a pristine paradise, free from human habitation, industry, debris, or predatory animals – lush and Edenic, as valleys “should be.” Watkins’ photographs circulated as a traveling exhibit throughout the East (Runte, *National* 21) and twenty-four of his thirty plates were also published later that year in Josiah Whitney’s *Yosemite Book* (DeLuca and Demo 245). Soon after, in 1863, the painter Albert Bierstadt, who had become famous for his mural-sized paintings of the Rocky Mountains, spent two months of the late summer in Yosemite, painting a series of large-scale representations of the Valley’s rock formations and waterfalls. Bierstadt’s paintings captured the depth of the Valley against the height of its rock formations, depicting it as the very essence of what a mountain valley ought to look like. One painting, *Domes of Yosemite*, measured nine and a half by fifteen feet. The size of the canvas helped to bring home to viewers the grandeur of scale in Yosemite, and “the style was seen as bolstering the argument that American scenery also exceeded the sensations of the Alps” (Runte, *Yosemite* 21). In this sense, Yosemite might also have been considered in this moment as the essential *American* landscape.

Yves Figueiredo argues that the features of Yosemite’s 19th century texts comprise a “monumentalist discourse,” meaning a language that remembers and celebrates America’s primitive scene (13). He suggests that “what was preserved in Yosemite was not so much a natural site as a cultural discourse on nature that was supposedly still wild and virgin in the mountains of California,” which served to remind the war-torn nation of its origins and its special call to Manifest Destiny (26). I would

like to suggest that Figueiredo's "monumentalist discourse" is in fact a *definitional* discourse of place. It was constructed over time and across many types of texts that cohere around a common language for expressing and valorizing the meaning of a place. Relying on Figueiredo's analysis, we can see that Yosemite is characterized as a monument that embodies the aesthetic qualities that were valued in other artistic objects, such as European cathedrals. Written in a pre-conservation era, the preservation of Yosemite was not "environmental" in its impulses so much as nationalistic in its desire to preserve a distinctly American scene. And as Alfred Runte argues in *Yosemite: The Embattled Wilderness*, "The more such descriptions appeared in the popular press, the more Americans realized what Yosemite, symbolically, might mean to their culture" (15). It may seem that the idea of preserving Yosemite appeared out of nowhere, given that the emparkment of public lands was completely unprecedented, yet it was an act intimately tied, through decades of discourse, to American national identity.

This definitional discourse was also employed in the brief 1864 campaign to preserve Yosemite. In the winter and spring of that year, Israel Ward Raymond, the California state representative of the Central American Steamship Transit Company of New York, wrote to Senator John Conness of California, suggesting the preservation of the Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Big Tree Grove. He was, evidently, furthering an idea that had been generated in conversation with Conness and others. Raymond's letter to Conness included a photograph of the Valley taken at Inspiration Point. He described the heights of the precipices and the walls of the Valley, and he emphasized its remote and untouched nature (Runte, *Yosemite* 18-19). Senator Conness initiated the proposal in the legislature, passing around copies of Carleton Watkins' photographs in the halls of

Congress (DeLuca and Demo 251). In his speech to the Senate Committee on Public Lands, Conness called the Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Gove “some of the greatest wonders of the world.” Matters of national pride were clearly at stake when he brought up a well-known incident from the 1862 World’s Fair in London: a group of Americans had transported an enormous section of a sequoia tree for display at the fair, but the British “declared it be a Yankee invention, made from beginning to end,” saying it was “an utter untruth that such trees grew in the country” (qtd in Runte, Yosemite 20). Thus Conness’s bill became “a measure in defense of American pride and patriotism,” at a time when the country’s burgeoning national identity was torn by Civil War and demeaned by Europeans (Runte, Yosemite 20).

Within a year of the Yosemite Act, the renowned architect Frederick Law Olmsted, who served on the California Commission to oversee the care of Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Tree Grove, already assessed the Yosemite Act as one of national importance. In his 1865 *Report on the Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Tree Grove*, now known as his “treatise on preservation,” Olmsted recalls:

It was during one of the darkest hours, before Sherman had begun the march upon Atlanta or Grant his terrible movement through the Wilderness, when the paintings of Bierstadt and the photographs of Watkins, both productions of the War time, had given to the people on the Atlantic some idea of the sublimity of the Yosemite.

In Olmsted’s formulation, the meaning of Yosemite emerged during wartime, a tragic era that gave rise to great art. Olmsted places the Yosemite Act in the context of other national monuments constructed at that time: the formation of the Capitol Dome, the

completion of the Treasury building and the Academy of Arts, and the design of Central Park in New York (designed, of course, by Olmsted himself). In this way, Olmsted situates the preservation of Yosemite Valley among other great works of architecture that represent American democracy, such that his speech reminds the country of its own sublime possessions. Thus America establishes at last its own architecture – its works of art, its cultural sites – which are both built *and* natural. Thus by 1865 Yosemite Valley and its neighboring Mariposa Big Tree Grove were firmly defined for the American public as monuments, recollecting America’s primitive scene, reminding the country of its unique national inheritance. They had become the artistic objects of the nation, or as Alfred Runte puts it, “a cultural resource,” and with that came the imperative of continued preservation (Runte, National 27).

The Campaign for Yosemite National Park

Scholarly consensus suggests that on the matter of continued preservation, the Yosemite had no greater advocate than John Muir.³ Studies of Yosemite, National Parks, conservation, wilderness, and Muir himself abound with claims about his significant role in shaping the American conservation movement, in general, and protecting Yosemite Valley, specifically. Muir scholar Terry Gifford calls him a “wilderness sage and founding father of the American conservation movement” (13). Roderick Nash writes

³ John Muir (b. 1848 d. 1914) was a naturalist, a writer, and the renowned guardian of America’s western landscapes, especially the Yosemite Valley. Born in Scotland to a strict Calvinist minister, he immigrated with his family at age eleven to central Wisconsin. After brief study of geology and botany at the University of Wisconsin, he wandered the country and arrived in California in March 1868, where he lived for the rest of life. He spent considerable time living in Yosemite Valley, studying the geology of the Sierra, and writing about his philosophy of “the scripture of Nature.” Eventually he extended his travels to all parts of the western United States and Alaska, and published fourteen books, mostly about his travels. Extensive biographical work has been done on Muir’s life, the development of his wilderness philosophy, his contributions to geological knowledge, his founding of the Sierra Club, and his role in the National Park movement (see Jones, 1964; Gifford, 1992; Nash, 2001; and Worster, 2008).

that “as a publicizer of the American wilderness, Muir had no equal” and names him a “champion” of Nature (122). Alfred Runte closely echoes Nash’s language with his claim that “preservation was to find its indefatigable publicist and champion” in John Muir (Yosemite 47). Stanford Demars, in *The Tourist in Yosemite*, suggests that it was Muir’s “alliance with and ability to influence such prominent personalities as Robert Underwood Johnson...and Theodore Roosevelt” that “produced for him a degree of exaltation as a wilderness prophet unmatched in his time or since” (62). The literary scholar Daniel Payne, recognizing the many writers who have praised Muir before him, insists that it is “hard to overstate the importance of John Muir’s contribution to the wilderness preservation movement” (85). Gifford suggests that Muir’s “profound influence” on the wilderness preservation movement derives from his “challenging example: a visionary botanist, geologist, mountaineer, lobbyist, and instinctive ecologist” who was an “accommodated man, at home in the universe and actively participating in its continued well-being” (13). Such words of high praise seem as much a routine entre into contemporary discussions of Muir as they were the routine entre into early discussions of the Yosemite Valley he so loved.

In their arguments about Muir’s influence, Nash, Runte, Demars, and Payne argue that Muir’s writings were influential because they heightened public consciousness about the beauty of American Nature and the general tenets of conservation, by re-articulating the beliefs of Transcendentalism and furthering public understanding of Nature in both religious and scientific terms. At times these scholars also focus on Muir’s activism, analyzing how his writing argued for specific policies. In *Voices in the Wilderness: American Nature Writing and Environmental Politics*, Payne suggests that Muir was the

first American Nature writer to “effectively combine esthetic, ecological, economic, and ethical rationales into a persuasive polemic for political change” (2), such as in the case of his campaign to prevent the construction of a dam that would flood Hetch-Hetchy Valley (100-102).⁴ Gifford argues that Muir’s writings especially influenced the National Park movement and the establishment of Yosemite National Park (15). She claims that Muir’s essays “resulted in the establishment of Yosemite National Park in 1890,” when combined with the lobbying efforts of Robert Underwood Johnson, the associate editor of the popular New York-based *Century Magazine* (15). As Holway Jones likewise declares in *John Muir and the Sierra Club*, it was “primarily through the influence of these two men” that “the government set aside a large area as a ‘federal forest reserve’ surrounding the state-controlled Yosemite Valley” in 1890 (Jones 8).

Muir had already advocated for a National Park in the Sierras twice before, in 1881 and again in 1888, by the time he met with Robert Underwood Johnson in June 1889. As the story goes, Johnson visited Muir with an interest in recruiting him to write a few articles for *Century*. While camping in Yosemite Valley, Muir and Johnson were acutely aware of the hotels, saloon, fields, pigsties, deforestation, and damage from grazing sheep and cattle. In fact, the Yosemite Park Commission, the state governing body charged with the care of Yosemite, had been plagued for a decade by accusations that they were mismanaging Yosemite’s natural treasures.⁵ Both men felt there was

⁴ In 1901, the city of San Francisco asked the federal government for permission to use the Hetch-Hetchy Valley, located within the Yosemite National Park, as a site for a municipal dam. The dam would create a reservoir to serve the growing city. According to Christine Oravec, the conflict pitted the values of preservation against the values of conservation, asking whether it was just for one specific locality to claim, control, and benefit from the resources within the park’s boundaries. The conflict went on for over a decade; John Muir spearheaded the opposition. In 1913, however, Congress deeded the land to San Francisco. Hetch Hetchy Valley was flooded in 1923 (Oravec).

⁵ The Yosemite Park Commission was formed in 1864 to oversee the care of the Yosemite Valley preserve. In the 1870’s and 1880’s, the Commission was frequently accused of mismanaging the park’s natural

rampant commercialization of the Valley that degraded Yosemite's sublime scenery, and the deforestation and over-grazing that compromised the integrity and aesthetics of land throughout the Sierras. They agreed that a new National Park in the Sierras, modeled on the Yellowstone National Park that had been created in 1872, would be the best protection for Yosemite Valley, and Johnson asked Muir to write two articles for *Century* about the idea (Worster 310-312; Runte, *Yosemite* 53-54; Runte, *National* 52; Nash 131-132).

Most historical accounts of the park campaign cast Muir and Johnson as the sole rhetors in the effort to expand Yosemite into a full-fledged National Park like Yellowstone. In these narratives, Muir is consistently figured as the lone writer who radically changed public perception of the Yosemite region with two strategic essays that appeared in *Century Magazine* in 1890, such that, added to the lobbying efforts of Johnson, a new park was born. Like many claims about the influence of nonfiction writing on environmental policy, this typical version of the park story relies on the comfortable assumption that "most public change happens through a single author writing a single text for a single audience" (Rivers and Weber 189). But Muir's *Century* essays were part of a well-established, multi-vocal definitional discourse of place, and they functioned in relationship to other significant regional texts. I would like to give special consideration to one of these regional texts, an impressive work of literary nonfiction that Muir produced in the years immediately preceding the 1890 push for the park bill. Beginning in 1887, Muir took part in writing and editing a two-volume serial

resources. John Muir and other critics cited the Commission for policies such as fencing the Valley's meadows; cutting trees to achieve better views from the porch of a Yosemite hotel; and allowing contractors to cultivate and mow hay on the valley floor. Their overall approach was to create a garden-like Nature, rather than to allow an uncultivated wilderness. This tension persists in the field of park management today (Demars 49-50).

anthology called *Picturesque California*, a work that has received little attention in studies of Muir's writing, and certainly in studies of Yosemite National Park. I argue that Muir's *Century* essays are an iteration of the arguments made in this book-length work of literary nonfiction: together, these writings extended the definition of the Yosemite Valley to the larger region surrounding it.

Picturesque California

Picturesque California and the Region West of the Rocky Mountains, from Alaska to Mexico is an extravagant text. Produced by J. Dewing Publishing Company, which had locations in New York and San Francisco, the book was modeled on William Cullen Bryant's popular *Picturesque America* (1872) (Worster 483). The text, designed to attract tourists to the West, was released serially from 1888 to 1890; archival copies are bound into two large volumes of over two hundred pages each. The two volumes present twenty-six essays and poems by fifteen writers, including Joaquin Miller, George Hamlin Fitch, C.C. Goodwin, Muir's friend Jeanne Carr, and six essays by Muir himself. Each region of California is represented, including Muir's four essays about the high Sierras, as well as essays and poems about Utah, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Montana, Yellowstone National Park, the Pacific Northwest, and Alaska. The book also displays over six hundred images by some twenty artists, including Thomas Moran, Julian Rix, W.M. Cary, and George Spiel. Each essay is lavishly illustrated using printing techniques that were cutting-edge at the time, integrating text with drawings and inserted photogravures, making it as much a showpiece as a descriptive tourist text. Together, the

essays and artworks promoted the West, not just as a storehouse of resources for profit, but also as a land of scenic beauty that is the heritage of the nation.

Importantly, Muir's essays in *Picturesque California* situate the Yosemite Valley in their larger context within the Sierra Mountains. The text bursts with the language of numbers and measurements, art and architecture, comparisons to Europe, and superlative declarations; the features of the Yosemite Valley remain "unrivaled," "majestic," "the noblest," "most sublime" and "most beautiful," and the Valley is still a "glorious temple" and the "grand mountain mansion" into which "Nature had gathered her choicest treasures" (Muir, Yosemite). Yet, in *Picturesque California*, we learn early in the text that Yosemite is not the only valley of its type. Surrounding the Yosemite, Muir sees "to the right and left in the same zone many other valleys of the same type," and though they are not so famous as Yosemite, they are "not a whit less interesting, either in regard to the sublimity of their architecture, or the grandeur and beauty of their falling waters" (Muir, Peaks 2). This point is reiterated later in Muir's essay "The Yosemite Valley," in which he notes that all of these other valleys that "occupy the same relative positions on the flank of the range" were in fact "formed by the same forces in the same kind of granite, and have similar waterfalls, sculpture, and vegetation" (81). While it may seem somewhat paradoxical that Yosemite is utterly unique, and yet reproduced throughout the Sierra range, it appears that Muir did not see his expansive claim as a demotion of Yosemite. Rather, he saw it as a promotion of all valleys, indeed all features of the Sierra, which are equally sublime. He explains that "before the Sierra was explored, Yosemite was generally regarded as a solitary, unrelated wonder," suggesting that other recent discoveries in the Sierra form a chain of interrelated "wonders" (Muir, Yosemite 81).

Muir describes these related wonders of the Sierra, like Hetch Hetchy Valley and Mount Shasta, using the familiar language of the unique, ancient, and superlative that earlier writers used to define the Yosemite Valley as a sublime monument to God and nation. While many valleys and features of the Sierras are reproduced across the entire mountain range, they are a chain of interconnected wonders that, by virtue of this multiplicity, becomes *a unique region* in the country and in the world. The forests of the Sierra, for example, are compared to other impressive forests in the world, but these forests are not like “the dark malarial selvas [rainforests] of the Amazon and Orinoco...nor of the monotonous uniformity of the Deodar forests of the Himalaya, or of the pine woods of the Atlantic States” (Muir, Yosemite 51). Rather, they are filled with giant sequoias, long a part of Yosemite’s discourse, that “wave in the open sunshine” (51). At times, certain features of the Sierra are highlighted as unique, such as Mount Shasta, which “maintains a far more impressive and commanding individuality than another other mountain within the limits of California” (Muir, Mount 145). The uniqueness of specific features, however, is downplayed in order to amplify the uniqueness of the region as a unified whole.

For the geologically-minded Muir, the entire Sierra region is strongly defined by its ancientness. In “Peaks and Glaciers of the High Sierra,” the essay that opens *Picturesque California*, Muir educates readers about “the existence of active glaciers in the Sierra,” which were unknown until October 1871, when Muir himself “made the discovery of Black Mountain Glacier and measured its movements” (Muir, Peaks 3). Muir impresses upon the reader a sense of wonder that something so ancient is still present and “living” here in the Sierra (Muir, Peaks 3). He also emphasizes that these

ancient glaciers have shaped the landscape into its “characteristic sculptures,” making “eloquent monuments” (9, 15). Mount Shasta, which is the focus of an entire essay, is also characterized by an ancient geology: it was built by volcanic activity, and it still bears the craters of earlier volcanoes, which Muir calls “telling monuments of Nature’s mountain fires” (Muir, Mount 155). And, of course, there are also the ancient trees, “fortunate old trees that have passed their thousandth birthday,” no longer confined to the Mariposa Big Tree Grove, but rather spread throughout the Sierras (Muir, Yosemite 53). Interestingly, even the Yosemite Valley itself is cast as ‘old’ in this text, when contrasted to the new discoveries of the Sierra. A picture on page 67, for example, shows a group of gilded-age tourists in hats and waistcoats, studying a small, tumble-down cabin that is titled “Lamon’s cabin – first home in Yosemite.” Though the cabin is less than forty years old, it now appears a curiosity, a relic of a long-gone pioneering past.

These unique and ancient Sierras are truly superlative, the very best of their type in the world. Muir unabashedly compares the Sierras to the Alps, in his essay “The Passes of the High Sierra.” The Sonora Pass, for example, is “878 feet higher than the highest carriage-pass in Switzerland” (20). He writes that, overall, “compared with the well-known passes of Switzerland, those of the south half of the Sierra are somewhat higher, but they contain less ice and snow, and enjoy a better summer climate, making them on the whole, more open and approachable” (20). In “Peaks and Glaciers of the High Sierra,” Muir suggests that one might spot “some gigantic castle with turret and battlement, or a gothic cathedral” in the rock formations that is “more lavishly spired than any ever chiseled by art” (15). Similarly, “the sugar-pine surpasses all the other pines in the world, not only in size, but also in kingly majesty and beauty. It towers sublimely

from every ridge and canyon of the range” (Muir, Yosemite 51). In such passages, the language of superlative comparison now applies not just to Yosemite, but to the whole Sierra *range*. Basically, the Sierras are a superior mountain range, being taller, more temperate, more aesthetically pleasing, more accessible to tourists, and possessing, quite simply, “features to which all topography is subordinate” (Muir, Peaks 15). In short, Americans ought to visit “the wonders of our unrivaled plains and mountains” before traveling abroad (Muir, Passes 34).

The unique, ancient, and superlative qualities of the Sierra yield a landscape that is equal in aesthetic value to Yosemite itself. Like Yosemite, this landscape is sublime, but also like Yosemite, the Sierra landscape can be captured and tamed by the text - and the tourist - to render it picturesque. This dual aesthetic is introduced on the very first page of *Picturesque California*, in which Muir describes a sweeping view of the Sierras from the floor of Yosemite Valley. From that vantage point, “the thousand landscapes of the Sierra are thus beheld in one view, massed into one sublime picture, and such is the marvelous purity of the atmosphere that it seems as near and clear as a painting on a parlor wall” (Muir, Peaks 1). The engravings and photogravures in *Picturesque California* provide critical support to the text’s claims that the Sierra is both a “landscape stretched sublimely away in fresh wildness” and “a truly beautiful and well-balanced picture” (Passes 28; Peaks 7). On page 9, for example, the picture “Minarets from the West” includes a round inset off to the side, replicating the picture-glass that early tourists used to frame natural scenes. In this case, the rugged, rocky, and even barren wild landscape of the minarets is framed and tamed by focusing the picture-glass on the step-like waterfall descending from its peaks. This inset is titled “glacial amphitheatre” – not

an untamed wilderness, but rather the site of a high-cultural, even classical, artistic performance. Similarly, an image of Mount Lyell on page 10 is sketched as if it were a framed postcard or a small drawing-room painting, with an elaborate border of braided flowering vines and a pair of nesting song birds at the top left corner. Other images, like a picture of the “North Wall of the Upper Merced, below Mt. Lyell,” on page 65, include an easel and paintbrushes in the foreground, with the easel showing a partial rendering of the larger scene that stretches in the background. Through these images, the text instructs potential tourists about the meaning of California: the natural landscape of the Sierra is equivalent in beauty and worth to Europe’s cultural landscape.

Importantly, *Picturesque California* introduces a new characteristic to the familiar definitional discourse: Muir hints throughout his essays that the Sierras are *threatened*. He interrupts a description of the sequoia forests to lament that, “unfortunately, fire and axe are already busy on many of the more accessible portions of the belt, spreading sure destruction,” and to speculate that “unless protective measure be speedily adopted and applied, in a few decades all that may be left of this noblest of trees will be a few hacked and scarred monuments” (Muir, Yosemite 53). Later, in “Mount Shasta,” Muir reflects that even this remote place bears the marks of human interference – indeed that all “the great wilds of our country once held to be boundless and inexhaustible are rapidly being invaded and overrun in every direction” and Muir fears that “every landscape low and high seems doomed to be trampled” (173). While the Yosemite had recently been perceived by the public as threatened, due to the mismanagement of the Yosemite Park Commission, *Picturesque California* helped to extend that definition to the remote and comparatively unpublicized Sierra.

I have thus far been talking primarily about Muir's definitional work on the Sierra Mountains, but his essays in *Picturesque California* were situated within the rhetorical ecology of the anthology itself. As an anthology, *Picturesque California* is a work of literary nonfiction that obviously displays multiple voices that together create a coherent discourse of place. Other writers within the two volumes echo the familiar Yosemite discourse, with all its unique, ancient, superlative, and threatened qualities. Interestingly, regardless of the location they write about, from Santa Cruz to the San Joaquin Valley, the Yosemite region of the Sierra serves as the point of reference and the primary aesthetic against which all other landscapes must be compared. George Hamlin Fitch writes, for example, that "the big trees of Santa Cruz are simply enormous redwoods; but they bear so close a resemblance to the true Gigantea of the Sierra that only an expert naturalist is able to distinguish between them" (Fitch 255). If one has never seen the Calaveras or Mariposa groves, the trees in Santa Cruz will give the traveler "a good idea of those giants of the forests" (255). The message, of course, is that a trip to Santa Cruz is almost like a trip to the Sierras – a close approximation of the essential California. In such passages, the writers of *Picturesque California* contribute to the discourse that defines Yosemite by its sublime and picturesque aesthetic as a monument to the nation, and they likewise help to extend that definition to the surrounding Sierra region.

There are only inklings of a proposed National Park in the text, such as when Muir suggests that "the Shasta region may be reserved as a national park, with special reference to the preservation of its fine forests and game" (Muir, Mount 153). Later he adds, "The Shasta region is still fresh unspoiled wilderness... Would it not then be a fine thing to set it apart like the Yellowstone... as a National Park for the welfare and benefit

of all mankind, preserving its fountains and forests and all its glad life in primeval beauty?" (Muir, Mount 174). The park, however, is never a central idea or argument. Instead of directly arguing for a National Park, then, *Picturesque California* extends the meaning of the word "Yosemite" itself to become a definition of a special kind of landscape. In "The Yosemite Valley," Muir even plays with the word, explaining how the granite wall surrounding King's River Valley "assumes Yosemiteic forms and dimensions" (86). Here, "Yosemite" becomes an adjective, a word that invokes the meaning established over decades. These two volumes of *Picturesque California* did for Yosemite exactly what needed to be done in 1888: emphasize the definition of the Yosemite Valley through its familiar monumental discourse and extend that definition to the surrounding region of the high Sierra.

Muir's Century Magazine Articles

While Muir wrote and edited installments of *Picturesque California* in 1889 and 1890, the idea of a Yosemite National Park gathered some momentum, spurred by further accusations of the Yosemite Park Commission's mismanagement of the Valley preserve that Johnson printed in *Century* in January 1890. In March, William Vandever, the Representative from Los Angeles, introduced a bill (HR 8350) that proposed to preserve two hundred square miles of land surrounding Yosemite Valley. Vandever acted on the advice of William Hammond Hall, a state engineer who had suggested that the Merced River watershed needed to be protected to maintain the aesthetic qualities of the Valley; historians speculate that Vandever may also have been acting in collaboration with the Southern Pacific Railroad Company, who had an obvious economic interest in sustaining

the watershed for the growth of the farming industry in the San Joaquin Valley - not to mention increased tourism to the area. However, this original bill's boundaries encompassed only 230 square miles surrounding the Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Grove, and it excluded some key portions of the Merced River watershed, like the Tuolumne River watershed and Lake Tenaya. In response, Muir wrote to Johnson that the new park needed to include all of the headwaters that flowed into Yosemite Valley. Johnson agreed and argued this case before House Committee on Public Lands on June 2, 1890 (Jones 43; Runte, Yosemite 54-58; Worster 314).

Later that summer, in August 1890, the first of Muir's two famed articles, "The Treasures of the Yosemite," appeared in *Century*. It was followed one month later by "Features of the Proposed Yosemite Park." As arguments for a new National Park, these articles build upon the characterizations and rhetorical strategies evidenced in *Picturesque California*. As in that text, Muir frequently writes about Yosemite exactly as readers expect: it is "the most divinely beautiful and sublime" and it has "the most striking and sublime features on the grandest scale" (Muir, Treasures 483; 484). Some of the language directly echoes earlier Muir pieces: the Valley is a "temple," a "garden," a "mountain mansion" of "choicest treasures." Muir also describes the sequoia trees, a familiar feature of Yosemite discourse, in their equally familiar language – the "king trees," each a "majestic old monument," giants that "live for five or six thousand years" (487). At the same time, these essays also incorporate the extended definitional discourse that was so evident in *Picturesque California*: they rely on the locus of threat, and they play with the meaning of the word "Yosemite" itself.

First, Muir amplifies his characterization of the Sierras as threatened. Building on the definitional work of *Picturesque California*, Muir lays out his case: at least five lumber mills operate near the main sequoia forest, where “waste far exceeds use”; sheep grazing in the valley and surrounding mountains trample and strip the foliage “as if devoured by locusts”; shepherds burn wooded areas to increase pasturage and forest fires spread (487). Photographs show not just the familiar sublime vistas of Yosemite Valley, but also its destruction. One photograph, a stretch of open field with mountains rising beyond the tree line, carries the caption, “The Leidig Meadows plowed up in October, 1888, to raise hay” (487). Amplifying the threat to a landscape, as we will see in other case studies, is crucial to any park campaign. While in future campaigns, threat might be applied to resources, ecosystems, or historical artifacts, in the pre-environmental era of the 1880’s, the “threat” is primarily to the aesthetic qualities of the landscape.

As in *Picturesque California*, Muir’s second important move in this *Century* article is to situate the Yosemite within its larger watershed “in the heart of the Sierra Nevada” (483). While he introduced the notion of “many Yosemites” in *Picturesque California*, in “Treasures” he describes these extensive valleys and canyons in rich detail. Muir canvasses the area surrounding Yosemite, describing how the larger Yosemite Valley breaks into “four other little Yosemites...making a series of five in all” (490). These “little Yosemites” have a “wealth of Yosemite furniture” (490). While Muir began to play with the word “Yosemite” in *Picturesque California*, in “Treasures” the word is freed from its single location and can be used to name and define other places. Based on Muir’s descriptions of the “little Yosemites,” the word comes to mean “a place of sublime scenery in the Sierra.” Muir then leads readers into the high Sierra, where he

describes the lakes, rivers, and waterfalls that flow into the five Yosemite, emphasizing how numerous and abundant they are. These bodies of water unite the entire region through “five hundred miles of flooded waterfalls all chanting together” (497). In a description that presages ecological thinking, Muir explains that all of the streams that flow into the Yosemite Valley “are as closely related to it as are the fingers to the palm of the hand” (487). In his explanation of the watershed, Muir extends the definition of the Yosemite to the region of the Sierra: readers can now think of “Yosemite” as a larger sublime territory with a monumental valley at its center.

Muir’s curious use of the word “Yosemite” in “Treasures” becomes more pronounced in his second *Century* article, “Features of the Proposed Yosemite National Park.” In describing the Big Tuolumne Canyon, which runs from Tuolumne Meadows to Hetch Hetchy Valley, Muir creates an extended comparison to Yosemite: “throughout [the canyon’s] whole extent Yosemite features are displayed on a grand scale – domes, El Capitan rocks, gables, Sentinels, Royal Arches, glacier points, Cathedral Spires, etc. There is even a Half Dome among its wealth of rock forms...” (662). Muir concludes his description of the canyon by urging readers to traverse its full length, because even “with wide variations” it is still “a Yosemite Valley from end to end” (663). Likewise the Hetch Hetchy Valley appears in Muir’s second essay as “a Yosemite Valley,” which, like the Big Tuolumne Canyon, mirrors many of Yosemite’s famous and defining features: like Yosemite, it is closed at one end by a large mountain rock; like Yosemite, it was formed by large and ancient glaciers; like Yosemite, it has a river flowing through it. Surprisingly, in some features Hetch Hetchy even surpasses the famous Yosemite Valley, in the “peaceful, floating, swaying gracefulness” of its main waterfall; and Muir even at

one point suggests that Hetch Hetchy is the original California discovery, having been spotted for the first time a full year before white Americans entered Yosemite (664). Thus, in this second essay, the meaning of “Yosemite” continues to expand as it is applied to one new place in the Sierras after another, eventually broadening in definition to signify a “species” of scenery. Or, put another way, the word comes to signify the chain of inter-related wonders referenced earlier in *Picturesque California* (663).

Admittedly some of these wonders are greater than others, but even the least of these wonders are still greater than most. The falls of the Big Tuolumne Canyon, for example, “are quite small in volume as compared with those of Yosemite and Hetch Hetchy.” Yet “many of them are very beautiful,” and “in any other country would be regarded as wonders” (Muir, *Features* 662-663). Muir’s claim affirms the belief that America has a greater *national* natural heritage than most countries, and by this virtue a place like Yosemite and its surrounding region should be preserved in a National Park as a monument to the *nation*.

Thus in his two *Century* essays, Muir argues directly for the creation of Yosemite National Park, at a moment when the park bill was quickly nearing its passage: “Steps are now being taken towards the creation of a national park about the Yosemite, and great is the need, not only for the sake of the adjacent forests, but for the valley itself” (*Treasures* 487). Muir argues that the reach of this park should be wide, including “all the fountain region above Yosemite, with its peaks, canyons, snow fields, glaciers, forests, and streams...to make it an harmonious unity instead of a fragment, great though the fragment may be” (487). In “*Features*,” he predicts that “unless reserved or protected the whole region will soon or late [sic] be devastated by lumbermen and sheepmen, and so of

course be made unfit for use as a pleasure ground” (667). If such destruction is allowed to continue, “even the Yosemite will then suffer in the disturbance effected on the watershed,” despite its protected status (667). Where *Picturesque California* subtly expanded the regional definition, hinted at threat, and suggested the need for protection, Muir’s *Century* essays end with emphatic statements about the wholeness of the region, and the need for greater regional protection to preserve its superior scenery.

Preserving Monumental Scenery

Muir’s second article, printed in *Century* magazine in September 1890, included a map “showing the present Yosemite reservation, the watershed of the Valley, and the limits of the proposed national park,” which were the limits set by the first Vandever bill (666). An editorial footnote added by Johnson indicates, “As we go to press, the Committee [on Public Lands of the House of Representatives] seems disposed to extend the north and south limits eastward to the Nevada line, thus adding an equal amount to the area here indicated” (666). William Vandever introduced this second bill (HR 12187), proposing a 1500 square mile Yosemite National Park to surround the seven square miles of state preserve within its boundaries (Jones 45; Runte, Yosemite 55). The bill passed both houses swiftly, “with virtually no discussion,” on September 29 and 30, and was signed into law by President Harrison on October 1, 1890 (Runte, Yosemite 55). The state preserve was incorporated into the National Park in 1906 (83).

Muir’s essays in *Century* certainly contributed a compelling argument for the creation of Yosemite National Park, by extending the well-established definitional discourse of Yosemite Valley to the surrounding Sierras. But any claims to causal

influence are limited, given that his articles appeared months after the initial proposal of the first Vandever bill, and within weeks of the bill's final passage, while Muir himself was on a three-month stint in Alaska (Runte, *Yosemite* 55). While his *Century* articles may have provided a last push of public sentiment, the definition and the value of the Yosemite Valley had already been established in the years and indeed in the decades before, and the extension of that definition to the greater Sierra region was ongoing through the work of texts like *Picturesque California*. The Yosemite region became a National Park after 40 years of building a regional discourse that defined it as a sublimely picturesque and therefore monumental place. The campaign, if it could be called by so formal a name, relied on a well-established definitional discourse and extended the application of this familiar definition to a larger territory.

Interestingly, Yosemite turned out to be not the second National Park, but the third. A group of prominent Californians led a parallel campaign for the preservation of several groves of giant sequoias. This campaign played out for over a decade, from 1878 until the passage of the park bill creating Sequoia and General Grant National Park on September 8, 1890, three weeks before the passage of the Yosemite National Park bill (Worster 321). The campaign for sequoia preservation may have highlighted a line of argument different from the aesthetic arguments favored by the Yosemite campaign. Runte, in his history of the National Parks, notes that the sequoia campaign sought the endorsement by the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the California Academy of Sciences (51). This brief evidence suggests that, while the Yosemite campaign focused primarily on the aesthetic value of sublime scenery, the sequoia campaign may have focused more on arguments for preservation related to the

scientific value of natural wonders. Later campaigns in the mid-twentieth century, like the campaign for Everglades National Park, would amplify this line of argument with the help of the growing field of ecological science. Yet the sequoia groves were not a radically different place from Yosemite. The sequoia campaign, though separate, no doubt benefitted from and contributed to the robust Yosemite discourse that had always included the sequoias as an essential feature of the Yosemite landscape. As we have seen, the Yosemite and sequoia discourses were very much intertwined, both commonly defined as monuments by their aesthetic qualities.

Importantly, the Yosemite campaign itself also included many lines of argument, aside from the aesthetic. We can find in its discourse the precedents of all the National Park campaigns that followed. While Yosemite discourse focused primarily on the sublimity of the Sierra scenery, it also included arguments about the economic value of parks. These economic arguments at times focused on the uselessness of the land for other purposes, like mining, logging, and farming. Muir wrote to Johnson that the Sierras “are not valuable for any use other than the use of beauty. No other interests would suffer” by the creation of a large National Park around the Valley (qtd in Jones 44). This argument, however, seems somewhat contradictory to the arguments that the region was threatened by extensive human use for grazing, milling, and logging. The park was also at times figured as an economic boon to the region, as noted above, in that the preservation of the watershed would enable farming in the San Joaquin Valley, and that a larger park would draw increased tourism to the area. Indeed it may be that the final park bill was largely driven by a representative of the Southern Pacific Railroad, Daniel K. Zumwalt, advocating for the economic interests of the railroad (Runte, National 53).

The Yosemite discourse also includes occasional gestures to arguments about the scientific value of the region. The geologically-minded Muir was constantly educating his audiences about the nature of glaciers, and he found the high Sierras valuable for continued scientific investigation of their movements. As a keen observer of wildlife and a lover of plants, he also included observations about the flora and fauna of the Valley and the Sierras in his writings. The Yosemite discourse also occasionally emphasizes the importance of recreation – leisure time in the outdoors - for human well-being. Olmsted’s 1865 Report makes an extensive argument that recreation is necessary for human flourishing, and that it has all too often been the privilege of able-bodied, upper-class men, excluding those who may need it most – the sick, women, children, and people of every social class. Indeed for Olmsted, a public preserve like Yosemite held the promise that “the great mass of society” would be able to enjoy outdoor recreation (Olmsted). Yet while these various lines of argument were all present at moments within the Yosemite discourse, its major arguments focused primarily on the grandeur of the scenery and its aesthetic value to the nation, and similar aesthetic praises often provided the foundational line of argument in the park campaigns that followed.

Rhetorical Ecologies of the National Park Movement

The campaign for Yosemite National Park demonstrates an interesting case in which the texts that historians have identified as the most influential to the Yosemite campaign are not book-length works of literary nonfiction, but rather two short essays by Muir. Questioning these influence claims brings to light the essays’ close relationship with Muir’s *Picturesque California*, a stunning text that is not recognized as influential at

all. Yet if these three texts can be called “influential,” it is because all three are in fact carrying on the work of a larger discourse about Yosemite Valley and its relationship to the region of the high Sierra. The brief campaign for Yosemite National Park relied on the public support created by this definitional discourse. In the Yosemite case, we see the coherence of the Yosemite discourse around the topos of aesthetics, and in “Inventing Yosemite Valley,” Figueiredo suggests that this Yosemite discourse became *the* “preservationist discourse” (31).

This study of the campaign for Yosemite National Park adds to the wealth of existing scholarship on the Yosemite Valley, its discourse of place epitomized in the work of Muir, and the process by which it became a park. But relatively little scholarship exists on other park campaigns, their contributions to environmental discourse, or the rhetorical work of the texts that were influential in their formation. The remaining case studies seek to understand the variations and commonalities in National Park campaigns as the park movement persisted into the 20th century. They ask: how is a definitional discourse built over time and across the work of many writers? How are book-park relationships created, and how have they varied, in the effort preserve endangered places? And, finally, how have arguments for preservation evolved – that is, how have campaigns succeeded in their persuasive goals when they have fewer or simply different rhetorical resources to work with?

Moving from the late nineteenth and into the early twentieth century, Chapter Two, “The Great Smoky Mountains: Preserving a Resource,” examines the work of a text that was directly implicated in the decision to create a National Park in Southern Appalachia, and it demonstrates the growing place of economic arguments in park

discourse. I analyze the central role of Horace Kephart's ethnogeography, *Our Southern Highlanders* (1922) in redefining Southern Appalachia, an eastern landscape that had been viewed as an impoverished backwater. At a time when the National Park Service was seeking parklands on the east coast, Kephart's text characterized Southern Appalachia as an essentially eastern landscape, and its people as original Americans. Kephart argues that this region is rich with potential but its people are isolated from economic opportunities and deserve federal intervention. His redefinition spoke directly to the progressive sentiments of his readers. This text was given to the NPS committee and its definition enabled arguments for a National Park as an economic resource to support a distressed region. Kephart's definition circulated widely in campaign materials, resulting in the creation of a park that, in addition to its aesthetic values, was embraced for its economic promise.

Chapter Three, "The Everglades: Preserving an Ecosystem," explores the meaning of a text that became fundamentally aligned with the Everglades National Park, although it was published over a decade after the initial park campaign; and it introduces the significant topos of scientific study as a reason for park formation. In this central case study, I delve into the role of Marjory Douglas's environmental history, *The Everglades: River of Grass* (1947), in Everglades discourse. Until the early 20th century, the public defined the Everglades as a mysterious, godforsaken swamp, a definition that authorized draining the land for agriculture. Scholars have considered Douglas's redefinition of the Everglades as a river ecosystem to be an original redefinition, and her work is displayed throughout the park. I argue, however, that this redefinition happened decades before Douglas's book was published, through the work of scientists who studied the Everglades

in the 1920's and 1930's. This coterie of nationally prominent scientists argued that the Everglades ecosystem should be preserved for its scientific value, as a place for study and learning. Douglas's text builds upon and extends the definition of place established by these earlier works and channeled through the park campaign. Her text serves as a capstone in the arc of a regional discourse and supports the ongoing work of an institution that today preserves a rare and still-threatened ecosystem.

Chapter Four takes us to the 1960's campaign for Voyageurs National Park, in the region of northern Minnesota known as the Boundary Waters. "The Boundary Waters: Preserving an Experience" evaluates the role of a literary nonfiction text in valorizing an un-scenic and industrialized landscape, and it explores arguments about the historical and recreational value of parks. I examine the influential writings of Sigurd Olson, a prominent Nature writer and conservationist in the 1950's and 1960's, whose work helped to shape the identity of this remote region. Olson's personal wilderness narrative, *The Singing Wilderness* (1956), deepened a regional discourse that took shape over decades. Like Muir's *Picturesque California*, his work extended the definition of a better-known area called the Quetico-Superior to a neighboring territory that was lesser-known and damaged by logging; Olson's writing helped to paint this region as a continuous whole, an extensive recreational wilderness rich with the history of the early American fur trade. Through analysis of this definition in the Voyageurs Park campaign materials, I argue that, though the "available means of persuasion" shift in each time and place, by the mid-twentieth century, campaigns for preservation had solidified their rhetorical strategies of redefinition and reevaluation.

Chapter Five, “The Great Plains: Inheriting the Discourse of Preservation” explores how arguments for preservation have evolved into discussions of sustainability. In response to depopulation and ecological damage in the Great Plains, Frank and Deborah Popper proposed the creation of a one million acre, federally managed Buffalo Commons preserve, encompassing portions of ten Plains states. The idea sparked a vociferous public debate about the viability of agriculture, restoration, preservation, and cultural life in the Plains region. Anne Matthews’ work of literary journalism, *Where the Buffalo Roam* (1993), follows the Poppers as they travel the Great Plains and talk with citizens about the challenges facing their land. Matthews’ text captures a region in the midst of redefinition, displaying the discourse of its renegotiation, and it brings attention to an ongoing struggle to protect a dying landscape. In the case of the Buffalo Commons, aesthetic, economic, scientific, historic, and recreational rationales are equally essential in strategizing to save a threatened place.

In the journey through these case studies, I explore routine claims about the influence of a specific text and its noteworthy author on preservation policies, questioning why this text and author are perceived to have had a greater influence than others. I develop an understanding of the role of definition in saving threatened places, especially how definitions draw upon the qualitative *loci* and emerge through descriptive language. I also analyze how literary nonfiction texts can amplify and extend regional definitions, reach wider audiences than previous texts, connect to the concerns of their unique historical moments, and participate in multi-textual efforts to change the public’s perception of a place. Finally, I identify and elaborate the rhetorical characteristics of persuasive efforts to create new parks, especially by parsing the major lines of argument,

in addition to aesthetics, that rhetors can employ in park campaigns. It is my hope that such rhetorical study will contribute to our fuller understanding of how to argue more effectively in the 21st century for the salvation of endangered places.

Chapter 2 The Great Smoky Mountains: Preserving a Resource

The National Park movement began in the West with the creation of scenic parks like Yosemite during the late 19th century, but it did not take long for citizens along the eastern seaboard to begin seeking parks in their states, too. The park movement spread eastward before the turn of the 20th century and the call for parks in the East rapidly gained momentum after the formation of the National Park Service in 1916. Great Smoky Mountains National Park was one of the first National Parks to be created in the East. It encompasses over 500,000 acres of the lower Appalachian Mountains along the border between North Carolina and Tennessee, and today it is the most frequently visited National Park, welcoming over nine million visitors each year – six million more than the monumental Yosemite (NPS Stats). Yet, because of differences in geography, human history, and campaign era, this region of Southern Appalachia demanded a much longer persuasive campaign than Yosemite required: it would take seventeen years from the scouting of the park site in 1923, until the Great Smoky Mountains National Park officially opened to the public on September 2, 1940.

On its opening day, the *Asheville Citizen-Times* reported that over 10,000 spectators gathered at the Newfound Gap, on the Tennessee-North Carolina border, to witness President Roosevelt dedicate the park (McKown). From where he stood on the grandstand, the majestic, thickly-forested Smoky Mountains rose to his left and right. While the President waxed lyrical about the “trees...that stood before our forefathers ever came to this continent” and the “brooks that still run as clear as on the day the first pioneer cupped his hand and drank from them,” he argued that Americans must be as brave as their pioneer ancestors, in facing “dangers far more deadly than...those that the

frontiersmen had to face” (Roosevelt). Though Roosevelt was preoccupied with the looming threat of fascism abroad, his choice to cast back to the “pioneer days” and “pioneer spirit” was rhetorically significant for the Great Smoky Mountain setting. In recalling early Americans’ first encounters with the eastern mountains, Roosevelt elided more than one hundred and fifty years of human and environmental history that had changed the Great Smokies; the Park Service would soon make similar omissions, turning a blind eye to recent modernization of the region, in order to render for park visitors a more “authentic” early American wilderness landscape. Essentially, Roosevelt’s dedication speech ignored a major fact: it wasn’t just that “pioneers” had come, over one hundred and fifty years earlier, to the region he dedicated as the Great Smoky Mountains National Park - it was that there were, in fact, people living there. And, until the arrival of the park, there had been many more.

As we know from the study of Yosemite National Park’s regional discourse, the rhetorical erasure of human inhabitants from the landscape is a powerful argumentative move in redefining a place, with ramifications as profound as their physical erasure. We saw that the earliest American texts about the Yosemite Valley depicted the region as if it was unpopulated and its landscape untouched by human civilization (DeLuca and Demo). This erasure was possible for many reasons, including Yosemite’s location in the West, a region with relatively little white settlement and Edenic status in the American imagination. The challenge faced by park campaigners for Yosemite was to demonstrate the aesthetic value and hence national significance of a large swath of the Sierras, as representative of the primitive American West. As we will see in this chapter, in the Appalachian Mountains, park campaigners faced a different challenge. The Great Smoky

park area was located in the East, the center of American civilization, a significant stretch of country perceived to be crowded, cultivated, industrialized, regulated, and fully known. The East was where people already were, and the people were a fact of the mountains that needed to be understood and interpreted by those who became invested in the Great Smoky campaign.

Many writers, most frequently fiction writers, took on the role of interpreting Appalachian people and culture for a greater public. One of the most renowned interpreters of Appalachian life, and a prominent park campaigner, was Horace Kephart, a librarian turned outdoorsman who became a popular writer of the Smokies. Not much is known about Kephart's life before 1904, when he moved to Western North Carolina (Pierce 217). His career is best understood through his legacy of writings and public involvement in the campaign for the Great Smoky Park. While Kephart wrote many articles for outdoor magazines and even a popular field guide in the early 1900's, he emerged on the public stage with the success of his book *Our Southern Highlanders: A Narrative of Adventure in the Southern Appalachian Mountains and a Study of Life Among the Mountaineers*. First printed in 1913, and republished with additional chapters during Prohibition in 1922, *Our Southern Highlanders* is still claimed by some to be "arguably the most significant book ever published about the Southern Mountains" and its writer is still dubbed "most responsible for the Great Smoky Mountains National Park" (Roberts iii).

Of course, Kephart was not the first writer to depict life in the Southern Appalachians. By the time of the Great Smoky campaign in the 1920's, the mountain residents had a stable place in the American imagination, a reputation that was created,

circulated, and reified by numerous “local color” writers at the end of the nineteenth century (Shapiro xiii), as well as by Kephart’s closest contemporary, Margaret Morley, author of *The Carolina Mountains*. The backwoods people known frequently as hillbillies, home-folks, or mountaineers, were most often depicted as violent and lawless moonshiners; poor and ignorant mountain farmers; or backward yet picturesque pioneer Americans. Consequently their landscape was portrayed as mysterious and dangerous, isolated and infertile, or pure and primitive. Admittedly Kephart’s text plays with some of these well-known stereotypes, and his work has been criticized in the modern era for its role in “othering” Appalachian culture (Dunn 256). Regardless of our contemporary understanding of its social views, however, *Our Southern Highlanders* makes key argumentative moves that enabled it to play a prominent role in the campaign for the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

Though the influence of *Our Southern Highlanders* on the park campaign is frequently cited, and Kephart is often credited for his impact, no scholarship has actually explored these claims. How did Kephart’s text rise – and quickly too - to the status of “most significant”? And what, exactly, was its significance, especially to the park campaign? Ralph Roberts, editor of a recent edition of the text, proposes that it was Kephart’s “vivid first-person accounts of mountain life and places” that “both raised interest in the Southern Mountains and gave Kephart the reputation and credibility needed in espousing the cause of a great national park to preserve the wilderness” (vii-viii). Roberts’ claim suggests that *Our Southern Highlanders* increased Kephart’s ethos; indeed it certainly promoted his name on a national stage. As detailed in Chapter One, this type of argument is typically made in discussions about how environmental

nonfiction texts influence practical outcomes; the individual writer is believed to be a more effective environmental advocate, due to the popular reception of his or her text. In this way, the rhetorical workings of the text itself are frequently disregarded. However, I would again suggest that a literary nonfiction text, like Kephart's, exceeds its effect on the writer's personal reputation and has an efficacy of its own. Indeed, before Kephart himself became an official park campaign spokesperson for the North Carolina Park Commission, *Our Southern Highlanders* was in the hands of the federally appointed Southern Appalachian National Park Committee, when it met for the first time in March, 1923, to discuss potential locations for a National Park east of the Mississippi River (Pierce 53). Why was Kephart's text selected by the Committee, and how did it shape the views of those decision makers?

In this chapter, I argue that Horace Kephart's *Our Southern Highlanders* competed with other well-known texts about the Southern mountains by providing a usable definition of the region. In contrast to previous and competing texts, such as Margaret Morley's *The Carolina Mountains*, Kephart advances a favorable twist on an older, more derogatory definition of place: he suggests that the Appalachians are a remote, difficult, *yet ripe* terrain, and its people are *resourceful* though isolated from economic opportunities. Kephart's definition succeeded above others for two reasons. First, *Our Southern Highlanders* spoke effectively to a clearly defined Northeastern audience, by associating the Southern mountaineer culture with commonly shared values, and by connecting with readers' progressive political beliefs. Secondly, *Our Southern Highlanders* succeeded in arguing for the protection of the landscape by casting it as an original and threatened landscape that epitomized the essential features of the East.

Eventually, park boosters embraced Kephart's regional definition, and his definition of the region was repeated in many arguments that were made in newspapers, magazines, speeches, and brochures. In addition to the campaign's emphasis on the aesthetics of the Smokies, Kephart's regional definition lent itself to a line of argument that had been nascent in previous park campaigns: the viability of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park as an economic resource that would accrue benefits to the underserved people of the region.

In the pages that follow, I contextualize Kephart's text among those of his fellow regional writers, especially Margaret Morley's, considering the tradition that they inherited and the competing regional definitions they offer. Then, I provide a close reading of Kephart's text and its key rhetorical moves, specifically its rendering of the mountain culture and landscape in terms of commonly held values. After a brief history of the park campaign, I will explore the variety of promotional materials that circulated Kephart's definition, during the years of most intensive park formation, from 1924-1940. In the end, I will return to a consideration of the consequences of this particular definitional act for the people and their landscape.

Defining Appalachia

Like the Green Mountains in Vermont or the Alleghenies in Pennsylvania, the Great Smoky Mountains form a subrange of the Appalachian Mountain chain. Located near the southern end of the Appalachians, the Smokies extend from Pigeon River in western North Carolina, westward to Deals Gap in Tennessee and southward to Fontana Lake, and are transected by the smaller Balsam range. The Smokies, which are now

almost fully encompassed by the National Park, support the largest protected area of old growth forest in the East. This forest is maintained by steady rainfall throughout the year, which also feeds countless mountain streams and waterfalls that continue to carve the mountains and flow into the major rivers – the Pigeon, the Tuckasegee, and the Little Tennessee. The landscape is characterized by steep mountain peaks, some over a mile high, that plunge abruptly into open valleys. Mist, rising from these valleys to shroud the peaks, gives the mountains the “smoky” appearance for which they are renowned (Frome 15-19).

The campaign to preserve this eastern mountainscape played out amidst the social backdrop of America in the 1910’s, 1920’s, and 1930’s. In tracing the debates over the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, it is important to keep in mind how rural places and rural cultures contrasted to the living experiences of most Americans. During this era, more than fifty percent of Americans lived in cities, increased from just thirty-five percent in 1890. Most of these cities were located in the Northeast and Midwest, which, fifty years after the Civil War, still defined themselves as culturally divided from the South. Industrialization, with the concomitant corporatizing of the American economy, provided middle-income jobs to more people, expanding the middle class. This middle class was more mobile than ever – a trend that greatly shaped the park movement - with over eight million cars on the roads and access to railroads that now stretched to all parts of the country. The growing industrial economy attracted a new wave of immigrants, especially from Southern and Eastern Europe, but these mostly Catholic and Jewish immigrants often met with xenophobia as they competed for jobs, housing, and healthcare. With urbanization, industrialization, and immigration came many social

problems in public health, poverty, education, and crime. As a consequence of this rapidly changing social landscape, the era was characterized by the discourse of Progressivism, a public faith in the government to provide public attention, regulations, and tax dollars to remedy all social ills (Diner 4-6, 200-201). Capitalizing on these trends in American culture, many writers depicted the Southern Appalachian Mountains as a strange, faraway place, unlike other places in America, and home to people who were unlike other Americans.

It was this cultural context of progressive America that shaped Horace Kephart and against which the influence of *Our Southern Highlanders* must be considered. Before he became an outdoorsman and acclaimed writer, Horace Kephart was himself an urbanite, a well-educated and successful librarian. Born in 1862 in Pennsylvania and raised in Iowa, Kephart began his professional life at the Yale University library. He later settled in St. Louis, Missouri, where he was a librarian at the Mercantile Library from 1890 to 1903. In his early adulthood, Kephart wrote numerous articles about camping and hiking, his hobbies, for popular periodicals such as *Forest and Stream* (Frome 147-49).

When the writer's struggle with alcoholism destroyed his family life, a heartbroken Kephart headed east, where he settled in a cabin at Hazel Creek in western North Carolina. In this remote area in the Great Smoky Mountains, which he famously called "the back of beyond," Kephart lived an isolated life for several years, grieving for his family and rebuilding his health. It was there that he compiled his first book-length work from his previous articles, *The Book of Camping and Woodcraft*, published in 1906 (Frome 151). Kephart found the mountains had a healing power, and later said that he owed his life to them (Pierce 58). In 1910, however, he was forced to move from his

cabin at Hazel Creek when the land was purchased by the Ritter Lumber Company. Previously, lumber companies had been unable to log at higher altitudes due to the precipitous terrain, but with advances in technology in the early 1900's, companies were able to enter the upper reaches of the mountains for extensive timber cutting. Kephart moved to nearby Bryson City, but it was the loss of his cabin at Hazel Creek that likely prompted Kephart to advocate for preservation in the Great Smokies through his writing (Pierce 57-58). Ironically, many fellow mountain dwellers would eventually lose their homes as a result of his advocacy.

Our Southern Highlanders was first printed by Outing Publishing of New York in 1913. It was reprinted by the MacMillan Company of New York just nine years later with additional material covering the effects of Prohibition on life in the mountains, and it would not go out of print until the 1960's.⁶ In the second edition, Kephart begins with a preface arguing the need for a new perspective on mountain life in a new era. The text proceeds with three chapters of basic history and description of the geography and people, specifically in the region of the Appalachians running from southwestern Virginia through western North Carolina and into northern Georgia. Then, Kephart describes his experiences with bear hunting and moonshining; six full chapters are devoted to this latter topic, three of them added in the second edition. The remainder of the text focuses on the culture of the mountain people. Kephart reflects on how the landscape has affected mountain culture, especially how the mountaineers view outsiders. He describes at length their physical appearance and physical health; the effects of poverty on their homes and habits; and the nuances of mountain dialect. The text ends with a discussion of the

⁶ The present study relies on the Land of the Sky 2001 reprint of this second edition.

national origins of the highlanders, and the impact of development and industry on the region. Like the experienced research librarian he was, Kephart contextualizes his work in relationship to a vast body of other writing and research about the region.

Ralph Roberts notes that the book was a landmark in Kephart's writing career: "...as significant as [Kephart's magazine work] was in the field of outdoor writing," it "pales when compared to this book" (Roberts v-vi). Roberts claims that the book was "well received, even among the mountain folk themselves," saying that "the mountaineers called it 'that book,' but it soon became *the book* about Appalachia" (vi). While one might question his interpretation of the phrase "that book," *Our Southern Highlanders* was indeed heralded with widespread publicity by Northeastern and urban readership, with advertisements and reviews in major newspapers in Boston, New York, Chicago, and San Francisco. The first edition was awarded the Patterson Cup of Literary Excellence in November 1913 and was declared "the best book on the subject ever published" by Dr. William Frost, the president of Berea College and a frequent commentator on the subject of Appalachian life and culture (Advertisement 8).⁷

It is noteworthy that Kephart's work received such acclaim, because he was hardly the first to write about Appalachia. In the rest of this section, I will describe how many of the "local color" writers who first defined the Southern Appalachians promoted Northern stereotypes about Southern landscapes and Southern people, especially people who lived in the mountains. Looking closely at one of these texts, I argue that Margaret Morley's popular book *The Carolina Mountains* defined the region as essentially Southern, a definition that had limited appeal to a *national* park movement. Then, I argue

⁷ It should be noted that Kephart relied heavily on Dr. Frost's writings, and treated his opinions favorably.

that Horace Kephart's *Our Southern Highlanders* defined the region differently, drawing on the methods of early ethnogeographers to craft appeals that played on the progressive sentiments of his readership, and providing a definition that would ultimately have greater use value for the National Park agenda.

Local Color Writing: A Strange Land and a Peculiar People

Early definitions of the Appalachian region, including its people, are evident in a long history of literature about the southern mountains that preceded the appearance of *Our Southern Highlanders*. One early defining characterization of the southern mountains was a *savage* region. For example, an 1843 story by Edgar Allen Poe, "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains," recounts "strange stories told about these Ragged Hills," and fears of "the uncouth and fierce races of men who tenanted their groves and caverns" (Poe). Kephart would later talk back to Poe's characterization of the mountains as mysterious and the mountain people as violent. Another definition that formed early on, one that perhaps took the strongest hold, defined the mountaineers as poor and ignorant. A newspaper clipping from the *Scientific American* of the same era, 1849, states: "We believe that in different parts of North and South Carolina, and Georgia, there exists a race called the Crackers...who are said to be descended of Scottish Highlanders." The brief article stresses that this "race" of "*poor white people* in the South" is "represented as being very poor," "ignorant," and "very acute in making bargains," and that they lead "idle lives" – a state of depravity from which new manufacturers in the region might rescue them (Article 11). Interestingly, this article situates these characterizations as *belief* and *representation*, rather than fact. In the decades to follow, however, these

characterizations were often treated as truth, as the *essence* of the mountains and the mountain people. As noted in Chapter One, such claims, typical of definitional arguments, are often presented as inarguable and create the illusion of fact (Schiappa 5).

The idea of Appalachia as a region both *savage* and *poor* never went away, but rather became incorporated into a broader regional definition, as more travelers came in contact with mountain culture. In a landmark study, *Appalachia on Our Mind: The Southern Mountains and Mountaineers in American Consciousness*, historian Henry Shapiro asserts that the early local color tradition, popular in American magazine writing from 1870-1890, solidified the definition of Appalachia into “a strange land inhabited by a peculiar people” (Shapiro xi). The phrase derives from the title of the first known local color sketch about Appalachia, written by William Wallace Harney and printed in *Lippincott’s* magazine in 1873 (3). Harney writes about the “curiosities” of the mountains, and the “quaint speech and patient poverty” of the “scenes and people we met” while traveling in Appalachia (Harney 220).

Local color writing typically appeared in magazines that targeted largely Eastern and urban audiences, and in the late nineteenth century, good local color pieces helped to sell more magazines. Writers would go in search of interesting “little corners,” in the Appalachian Mountains and elsewhere, generally traveling by train, from which they would “stumble” into “another world,” and proceed to marvel at the curiosities of speech and custom in a small town setting (Shapiro 12). While many of these pieces took the form of nonfiction narratives, others used the quaint setting as a backdrop for fiction, especially short stories. Particularly popular were the short stories of Mary Noailles Murfree, who published under the pen name Charles Egbert Craddock. Her 1884

collection of short stories, *In the Tennessee Mountains* – all of which had previously appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* – featured a narrator who spoke with a vocabulary and tone very different from the dialect of the main characters; their melodramatic plots are combined with flowery descriptions of the landscape. Many of these local color writings are now collected in Kevin O'Donnell and Helen Hollingsworth's anthology, *Seekers of Scenery*; they include writers like Louise Coffin Jones, James Lane Allen, Charles Dudley Warner, and Rebecca Harding Davis.

Shapiro argues that, “reiterated in some 90 sketches and more than 125 short stories published between 1870 and 1890,” local color writing “established Appalachia in the public consciousness as a discrete region, in but not of America” (18). Consequently, the prevailing definition of Appalachia as a “strange land inhabited by a peculiar people” became the basis for public action, beginning with the imposition of Protestant missionary work in the mountains. In the decades after 1890, many people, including “travelers, writers, missionaries, economists, geographers, sociologists, teachers, geologists, land developers, and industrialists,” believed it their task to *normalize* Appalachia, either by “Americanizing” the “native-born Americans of Appalachia” or by “replicating in the southern mountains the social, economic and cultural patterns which prevailed elsewhere in the nation” (31). We see these normalizing impulses at work in the writings of Kephart and his contemporaries of the early 20th century, like Margaret Morley: they seek, in various ways, to redefine the Appalachian Mountains as a knowable part of America.

Margaret Morley: A Southern Appalachia

Margaret Morley was, in a way, Kephart's closest contemporary, because her popular book *The Carolina Mountains* appeared simultaneously with *Our Southern Highlanders*. Published in 1913 by the Houghton Mifflin Company of Boston and reprinted for many decades, it provides an apt comparison to Kephart's text. By examining the texts together, we can see how they treated their common subject matter with some significant differences. While both texts attempt to normalize Appalachia's perceived strangeness and peculiarity, *The Carolina Mountains* does so by describing Appalachia as belonging to the American South, and the mountain people as inherently Southerners.

Morley's text adheres closely to the conventions of the local color tradition. Though it is a book-length work, *The Carolina Mountains* demonstrates the typically picturesque view that many writers took towards the Great Smokies and those who lived there. At the time of her writing, Morley lived in Connecticut, but frequently visited the artists' colony at Tryon, in North Carolina, which was the inspiration for *The Carolina Mountains*. As the book opens, Morley describes the view of the peach blossoms from the train window:

As the train sweeps over the country, one flower-wreathed picture follows another: here a tumble-down cabin with peach trees in ecstatic bloom at one corner, there a hollow filled with airy pink blossoms ...the sordid little village, the unpainted house, the slope, the hilltop, each and everything... is an adorable picture by grace of the blossoming peach trees (5).

In typical local-color fashion, Morley situates herself as a traveler, a visitor to the mountains, and therefore a dispassionate observer of local ways. In this way she can identify more fully with her audience, the “newcomer” or “stranger” to the mountains – specifically, her *Northern* reader, unfamiliar with this vernal Southern landscape (6).⁸ Like the local color writers before her, Morley addresses these readers as “you,” drawing them into an imaginary relationship with her and the place she describes.

Most importantly, this passage, like numerous others, normalizes the unfamiliar Appalachian landscape by casting it in the familiar mode of the *picturesque*. Like the early writers and painters of the Yosemite, Morley describes the mountain region as an “adorable picture,” made so in the act of seeing, such that the tourist becomes the artist who has stumbled upon the artistic scene. Where the “tumble-down cabin,” the “sordid little village” or the “unpainted house” might be interpreted by the Northern traveler as alarming signs of rural poverty, they are here translated as beautiful, contained, and interpretable. Viewed from the safe distance of the ever-moving train, “this smiling land” is merely rustic and charming (7).

Once the strange landscape has been rendered safe by peach blossoms, Morley continues to “normalize” the Appalachian scene by “Southernizing” it. Following again in the local color tradition, Morley exits the train at “Traumfest,” an “enchanted” place nestled in “the enfolding mountains, so dreamy” (6). Once off the train, Morley suggests that “you” might encounter three types of people: hurried Northerners, sleepy Southerners, and “Northerners who are in the process of Southernization” (12). Morley casts back to the antebellum images of the Old South, saying that the villagers of

⁸ Shapiro notes that local color writing was never published in the cities of the South or West, a trend that persists with later texts like Kephart’s and Morley’s (xiv). In addition to the construction of the audience within the text itself, their choice of publishing venues also suggests a Northern and urban readership.

Traumfest “for the most part have come from the old plantations,” including a few who are even authentic Southern slaves, “survivors of the old regime” (13,14). While Morley emphasizes the “Southern-ness” of the people, she also consistently describes the Southern flora and fauna in contrast to that of the North, and she depicts built landscapes so that the Southern cities are never quite urban. Morley describes with amusement the Southern mountaineers’ belief that Asheville is a metropolis, but Asheville can never be New York, “in spite of its urban airs” because “there is the balmy languor of the South and the mellow voice of the negro” that make it a “happy escape from the turmoil and strife of a city” (105).

Though Morley spends much time Southernizing the cities and towns of the Appalachian landscape, she devotes relatively little attention to the lifestyle and habits of Asheville’s city dwellers, villagers from the old plantations, African Americans, or Cherokee Indians. Instead, a substantive portion of *The Carolina Mountains* is devoted to normalizing those “peculiar people,” the mountaineers – white people, not foreign-born, who defy her audience’s assumptions of whiteness and American-ness. When detailing the lives of the mountaineers, Morley consistently transforms conditions of poverty into state-of-nature simplicity. Early on, for example, Morley meets “an ancient native of the forest,” who tells her “We’re powerful poor around here,” but this declaration is followed by the reassurance that “you know [he] does not think himself poor at all.” Indeed, he is a slow-moving Southerner, and “he has plenty of time, the thing he values most” (13).

This pattern is followed closely in a chapter titled “The People,” which begins “life here in many ways is yet primitive,” and then immediately translates “primitive” by saying that “one breathes the fresh air and gets down to elemental things”; in the end,

“primitive” sounds like a great escape from city life after all (124). In this way, the “unsanitary condition of the poorer homes” is not a cause for concern, because the “natural” aid of “the hot sun, the free winds, the wide spaces, and the scattered population” eliminate any threat to public health (125). Though typhoid fever strikes in the mountains often, it “appears in a light form that seldom results fatally” (125-6). Men who are illiterate are first described as having “no future,” but any readers who would feel concern for them are instantly reassured that the highlander “does not know that anything is wanting” (126). Morley’s description of the mountaineers insists that, though the outsider may think so, this is not a place of need.⁹

Morley does acknowledge the need for economic development in the region, but she suggests that such development would best derive from private Northern investment. She describes, for example, how the city of Asheville experienced “that influx of Northern travel...which was to give it its next wave of prosperity” (102). Later, Morley describes the Biltmore Estate, a sprawling, gilded mansion set on 125,000 acres, owned by George Washington Vanderbilt II and designed by Frederick Law Olmstead, renowned New York architect and author of the famous Yosemite “treatise on preservation” of 1865. The Biltmore Estate stands out to Morley as “the highest type of progress that one wishes to see at work in the mountains,” not because it employs thousands of local laborers, but because it “transforms by enhancing instead of diminishing beauty” (123).

⁹ Given that the local color writing of the late 1800’s led to Appalachia being defined as “needy,” a definition that persists today, we could see Morley’s view as radical. Shapiro notes that neediness is not an inherent quality, but one ascribed (xv). Morley refuses to ascribe neediness here, such that in this one respect, it is possible that Morley takes the people’s contentment on their own terms, rather than insisting on hers.

Morley's general preference for this type of individual and private development over public interference is most clearly apparent in Chapter Four, "The Southern Appalachian National Park." It may seem from the title that Morley is making a direct argument for greater public investment in the region through the National Park Service. In reality, however, the chapter is a celebration of the recently designated Pisgah National Forest in western North Carolina.¹⁰ Morley's use of "National Park" in place of "National Forest" represents a frequent misunderstanding that existed at the time of the nuances between a National Forest and a National Park: both include "pleasure grounds" open to the public, but the former was premised on utilitarian conservation, while the latter was premised on scenic preservation. Morley recognizes the new National Forest as a public investment that "will cover but a small portion of the mountain region," and says that it is ultimately "the people themselves who must keep the country beautiful" (29).

In this chapter, Morley also describes at length the flora, fauna, and geography of the Smokies, saying that "these ancient mountains, the oldest in the country, perhaps in the world" have moved "into the calm old age of mountain life" (28). Hardly meaning to disparage the Smokies with this description, Morley insists that "nowhere else is nature so friendly" (28). It is Morley's hope that the National Forest will "preserve those picturesque skylines so characteristic of these mountains" and "[supplant] the charm of wildness with the grace of beauty" (30-31). The chapter ends with a telling refrain: "Lovely, indeed, are the forests" (31).

¹⁰ The Weeks Law, passed in 1911, a legacy of Gifford Pinchot, designated National Forest areas in three Eastern states, to be overseen by the United States Forest Service. These areas included lands that had already been denuded by timbering, with consequences to local rivers and streams. The newly ordained National Forest areas would be managed through "scientific forestry," as a means of preserving the health of their watersheds.

Morley's Appalachia is indeed a lovely and a friendly Appalachia. Further, it is a Southern Appalachia, and her South is one that is already economically dependent on Northern travelers. In every respect, Morley is catering to her Northern audience, persuading them to see the Appalachians as a "normal" part of America: the South, which is always defined against the North. It is a place where her audience will be welcomed and even privileged visitors, experiencing a lifestyle of simplicity "close to nature." In many respects, Morley figures Appalachia in a way that was already familiar to her readers, as a location for retreat from dirty, noisy, industrialized city life. The Great Smokies had already been defined by their healthful climate: the region was proposed as a prime location for a health resort as early as 1885, when Dr. Henry Marcy of Boston suggested to the American Academy of Medicine that Western North Carolina would be an ideal location for a park, specifically to provide climactic treatment for diseases (McCoy 5-6). A health resort in the region would have been a sure source of Northern tourist investment, one that Morley would have approved.

One might think that this particular view would have appealed to park campaigners, who would later argue that increased tourism, especially from the North and Midwest, would benefit the region's economy. Yet, such arguments could not be supported by Morley's text. The reasons to visit this Southern location are for one's health and creativity, to soak in the beauty of the landscape and the quaintness of the folk. There is no *need* here, and thus no warrant for public action. Morley's stance may have privileged her Northern readership, but it defied the progressive sentiments of her day. Her definition was not as favorable to a park campaign because she sees the mountains as essentially *Southern* – not *Eastern* or *American* – and as "sweet rather than majestic"

(18). Her picturesque is static and her mountaineer a romantic primitive, content in his native state. She does not define the region in a way that would invite or enable a large-scale, public, economic intervention, such as a National Park.

Morley's contemporary editors defend Morley's attitudes, especially her romanticizing treatment of the highlanders, saying that her "generalities and stereotypes appear to be intended to describe and categorize, not to demean or judge" and "her words, though somewhat patronizing, are never malicious" (ix). Interestingly, they suggest "we see much the same treatment in Horace Kephart's *Our Southern Highlanders*, published in the same year as *The Carolina Mountains*" (ix). In many ways, their claim is true: Kephart was most certainly the product of his education, his social standing, and his era, and there are times when he paints the mountain people as "peculiar." Why, then, did Kephart's book achieve a greater effective legacy than Morley's, when at times it similarly stereotyped the mountaineers as simple folk, isolated from mainstream law, culture, and education?

Horace Kephart: An American Appalachia

A close reading of Kephart's text demonstrates that *Our Southern Highlanders* makes critical argumentative moves, in ways quite different from *The Carolina Mountains*. While Morley defines the region as essentially Southern, and its people as quaint and content, Kephart defines the region as essentially Eastern, hence a part of original America, and its people as original Americans, essential patriots, and fellow citizens who are in need of greater economic opportunities. Kephart's descriptions yielded a definition of place that was much more capacious for social action and appealed

directly to the progressive sentiments of those decision-makers who would later rely on his text for arguments in favor of the park.

From the outset, Kephart establishes his ethos differently from local color writers like Harney, Murfree, and Morley: while they are outsiders to the region, identifying with their Northern readers, Kephart claims insider status. He sets the exigence for his project as a lack of “intimate local knowledge,” painting the Appalachians as a region little known to the average American (13). He writes, “The Alps and the Rockies, the Pyrenees and the Harz are more familiar to the American people...than are the Black, the Balsam, and the Great Smoky Mountains” (15). Yet Kephart acknowledges the tradition of writing about the Appalachians by setting himself in conversation with other texts. He refers to Poe, Mary Noailles Murfree, and John Fox Jr., among others, and recognizes (like the astute Henry Shapiro, decades later) that in their writing,

we do meet characters more genial than feudists and illicit distillers; nonetheless, when we have closed the book, who is it that stands out clearest as type and pattern of the mountaineer? ...the Appalachian people remain in public estimation to-day, as Poe judged them, an uncouth and fierce race of men, inhabiting a wild mountain region little known. The Southern highlands themselves are a mysterious realm (13).

Even though some critics, like Durwood Dunn, label Kephart a local color writer, Kephart himself dismisses the work of local color writers, such as Murfree, and later indicates his distaste for many other “impressionistic writers” who “strive after effect at any cost” (311).

Instead, Kephart demonstrates his respect for ethnographic writers of the region, such as William Frost (18) and Ellen Churchill Semple (23), by displaying segments of their texts as corroborating evidence for the claims he makes about the region. These writers, both scholars, represent a burgeoning interest at the turn of the 20th century in recording the lives and cultures of various American groups, from the people of the New Jersey Pinelands to the immigrant cultures of urban ghettos. Semple's influence on Kephart is especially noticeable. One of the first American women to become a geographer, Semple studied the subfield of ethnogeography, or "anthropogeography," the relationship between human culture and the environment. Like many ethnogeographers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, she embraced environmental determinism. For example, in "The Anglo-Saxons of the Kentucky Mountains: A Study in Anthropogeography," published in *The Geographical Journal* in 1901, Semple suggests that the shape and form of the Appalachian mountains themselves created a culture of ignorance among backwoods dwellers in Kentucky. While her work at times served to disrupt a belief in racial determinism, it also contributed to the perception of mountaineering culture as deficient (Lewis).

Through his choice of references, Kephart aligns *Our Southern Highlanders* with this tradition of ethnogeography, and he situates himself as a first-person participant observer interested in the ways that land shapes culture. Kephart's genre was specifically chosen to achieve different ends than those of the local color writer: by dealing in observable phenomena and allying his work with what was considered an authoritative and even cutting-edge academic approach, he can make actionable arguments in a way that local color writers never intended to. By situating himself as an ethnogeographer – a

researcher - Kephart promises that he will define the true Appalachia. In this way, Kephart's understanding of the region immediately becomes a "persuasive definition," in Richard Robinson's terms, because it "consists in getting someone to alter his valuations under the false impression that he is not altering his valuations but correcting his knowledge of the facts" (Robinson 170).

Kephart indicates to readers that there are new facts to be considered: he is offering a new definition for a new era. In the 1922 Preface, he claims that it is high time for such an update, seeing as "we have had the war. We are having an attempt at Prohibition. Even in the farthest reaches of Appalachia people realize that the world has been upset, and that old ways, old notions, old convictions perhaps, must give place to new ones" (1). In clear contrast to Morley's picturesque mountains, Kephart acknowledges that change is coming to the Smokies, and that the notion of the picturesque no longer applies here. Like Morley, his opening also includes a view of "a log cabin where time still lingers a century belated," but unlike Morley, Kephart suggests that the life this cabin represents is slowly changing, even if "they die hard, those old ways in the mountains. Some of them were good ways too. They were picturesque, at least" (3). As we saw in *The Carolina Mountains*, and in the Yosemite Park campaign, the picturesque aesthetic was a driving desire of early preservation - the desire to freeze the landscape in the perfectly found, yet created, moment. Here, early in his text, Kephart finds the perfect cabin scene (imagine: surrounded by peach blossoms), and dismisses it. In the use of the past tense - they *were* indeed good ways - Kephart suggests that times are changing in the mountains, too, and the picturesque ideal, furthered by writers like Morley, no longer defines this place. How then, shall it be defined? If a definition

indicates the essence of the thing, the real truth about it, then what is the essence of the Smokies?

Kephart relies on Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's schema of qualitative *loci*, especially originality and uniqueness, as well as the locus of essence, to craft his most compelling arguments regarding the meaning of the mountains and mountaineers. Kephart proceeds to argue that the Great Smoky Mountains are an Eastern landscape that is both original and unique not just to this country, but to the world. He argues that these Eastern mountains are old, even older than the mountains in the West; he describes them as "primitive" and "primeval," "among the very ancients of the Earth." Kephart even goes so far as to suggest that they are the *original mountains of the world*, claiming that they were "old, very old, before the Alps and the Andes, the Rockies and the Himalayas were molded into their primal shapes" and they are covered with the "first hardwoods of America – perhaps those of Europe, too" (52-53). Here Kephart relies on the loci of originality to heighten the value of the Smokies in the eyes of his readers. He goes on to argue that the Eastern mountains have "a character all their own," relying on the loci of uniqueness to demonstrate that they have a character different from the Western mountains, such as the Rockies, and even a character different from the mountains of Europe. The difference, he suggests, is in the structure, for the Appalachians rise "abruptly from a low base" such that "their apparent height is more impressive than that of many a loftier summit in the West, which forms only a protuberance on an elevated plateau" (51). By emphasizing their unique and ancient character, Kephart attempts to make the Smokies the most noteworthy mountains in the eyes of his readers.

Hardly the rolling, friendly mountains of Morley's Carolina, Kephart's Smokies are most frequently described as steep, rough, narrow, massive, and precipitous – the qualities of mountainous landscapes which were especially valued in the formation of the first Western parks. His descriptions suggest that they embody the very essence of mountain-hood, and thus acquire a higher value than any other mountains. Not only do these mountains represent the essence of mountainousness, they also represent the essence of the East, and their features become manifestations of their essence. Kephart describes the Smokies as representing the best qualities of the East, claiming that “the greatest mountain system of eastern America is massed in our Southland,” in the Great Smoky Mountains (14); one can imagine that Morley, by contrast, would have claimed the Smokies as the greatest *Southern* mountain system. To further the connection, Kephart describes other prominent features of the mountains that make them superlative examples of Eastern geography; for example, the region is “by nature one of the best fruit regions in eastern America” (38). To Kephart, the Great Smoky Mountains represent the whole of the Eastern geography, for “as one climbs from the river to one of the main peaks, he passes successively through the same floral zones he would encounter in traveling from mid-Georgia to southern Canada” (53). Using this synecdoche, Kephart argues that the Smokies represent the whole of the Eastern United States.

If the Smokies embody the whole of the East, then no matter where a reader may dwell in the East, the Smokies will have a terrain that is familiar and beautiful to him, too. Indeed, in an important move, Kephart frequently calls the Smokies “our mountains,” by which he both identifies himself in solidarity with the local mountaineers, and also invites his Northeastern readership into co-ownership – because they are also

Easterners, these mountains belong to them too. This imagined ownership of a place one has not seen in person will later become a key idea of the National Park campaign.

In his treatment of the mountaineers, Kephart similarly turns to the loci of originality, uniqueness, and essence to redefine the mountaineers as Americans – indeed, as the original patriots who epitomize the best of American character. This definition of the mountain people is especially evident in the chapter “Who are the Mountaineers?”, which offers a history of how the mountaineers came to be in Appalachia. In this tale, Kephart claims to provide a more accurate history of the mountaineers, arguing that they are not in fact descended from convicts, child slaves, and indentured servants who were sent to the New World in poverty and against their will, and who became the “poor whites” of the South (429). Rather, the mountaineers are really descended from the Scotch-Irish, or the Ulstermen of Ireland (435). Kephart frequently emphasizes this Anglo-Saxon heritage, calling them the “clans[m]en of elder Britain” (322). In his chapters, “The Land of Do Without,” and “The Mountain Dialect” Kephart emphasizes the connection between the mountaineers’ dialect and older forms of English, claiming that the mountaineers speak “to-day the language of Piers the Ploughman,” the original and therefore most valuable form of English (322).

As Anglo-Saxons, the mountaineers are easily portrayed as the pioneering settlers of America. Kephart explains that the Scotch-Irish were cast out of their home territory by a succession of tyrants, immigrated to Pennsylvania and gradually migrated into the Southern lowlands. They were “our westernmost frontiersmen” (435), our true “pioneers” (439). Because of their history of persecution, this ethnic group detested authority in all its forms and developed that particularly American quality, “an intense individualism”

(439). Included among their lot, Kephart argues, were the great American folk heroes, “Daniel Boone, and the ancestors of David Crockett, Samuel Houston, John C. Calhoun, ‘Stonewall’ Jackson, and Abraham Lincoln” himself. Before the American Revolution began, a group of these pioneers known as the Regulators, in an attempt to escape the “persecutions of the aristocracy” that controlled trading in North Carolina, actually established “the first republic in America” in 1772, in the Watauga region west of the Appalachian mountains (440). Kephart draws on the words of writer John Fiske as he argues that Appalachia is actually the birthplace of American democracy:

...in a certain sense the Shenandoah Valley and adjacent Appalachian regions may be called [the] cradle [of American democracy]. [...] The notions [such as “social equality” and “unchecked individualism”]...which characterized Jeffersonian democracy, flourished greatly on the frontier and have thence been propagated eastward through the older communities.... (qtd in Kephart 442)

Using this version of the mountaineers’ history, Kephart argues that the same mountaineers who are maligned in early 20th century America are actually the original Americans, the first settlers, the brave pioneers, the independent rebels who fought for American freedom, the forefathers of our great American forefathers themselves. This appeal to originality emphasizes the value of the mountaineers to the whole of American culture – indeed in Kephart’s figuration *the idea of America is entirely derived from them* - and this history seeks to create a sense of common identity between the Eastern reader and the mountaineer. The humble mountaineer who is little known to the greater

populace is in fact the long-forgotten progenitor of the whole nation. In an age of resisted immigration, the mountaineer could hold no higher status among Kephart's readers than this pedigree of "pure" Anglo-Saxon and pioneer roots.

Such arguments can seem tidy and even heavy-handed; it is certainly hard to find them convincing in our era. It is important to note, however, that Kephart's definitions of the mountains and the mountaineers are at times inconsistent. They seem to be emergent, that is, they are still taking shape through his writing. Even as he asserts newness and change in the Smokies, there are moments when he actively seeks "those features that seemed to me most picturesque." We see this tension throughout the text, places where Kephart furthers a new definition of place, and then shortly after, falls back on the stock characters he claims are inaccurate. Likewise, it is important to note that Kephart was speaking to an audience with very different predispositions than our own. In the way Kephart uses the loci of originality, uniqueness, and essence in his characterizations, he plays directly into what we would identify as the racist, classist, and xenophobic sentiments that prevailed in his era – but if Kephart can't seem to escape the language furnished by his era, it may be that using some of the ambient vocabulary and familiar stereotypes helped to make his book accessible and maximally powerful to his Eastern, American, patriotic, middle-class, educated, and progressive readership.¹¹

¹¹ This tendency has given some contemporary historians grounds for criticism. In 1988, Durwood Dunn published a study of the village of Cades Cove, one of the communities dispossessed by the arrival of the park. Dunn writes in direct response to the work of Horace Kephart, calling *Our Southern Highlanders* "the nadir of Southern Appalachian stereotypes" and accuses Kephart, of "completely distort[ing] and misrepresent[ing] mountain life and customs" (xiv). He argues that writers like Kephart portrayed the mountaineers as simpletons who resisted modernization. Using public and private records from Cades Cove, he demonstrates that enthusiasm existed in the community for new schools, new roads, new frame houses, and new farming techniques. Communities like Cades Cove were close-knit and had strong leaders, like John Oliver, who would later crusade against eminent domain. Dunn's criticism is warranted and insightful: his outrage at this stereotyping reminds us that a popular work of literary nonfiction can have

Kephart may indeed rely on some stereotypes about the mountaineers, but he also makes key moves that take his arguments beyond the stereotype and into the realm of actionable argument. We see such rhetorical movement in his descriptions of the mountaineers' poverty. The economic system of the mountains is a "primitive" one, driven by scarcity, barter, credit, subsistence farming, and hunting, with no professions or specializations (33). In the indicatively named chapter "The Land of Do Without," Kephart describes the clothing, houses, technologies, and customs of the mountaineers. Interestingly, he describes the homespun clothing, cabins, and rope beds that Morley and other local colorists describe, but then notes that "nowadays" frame houses and store-bought clothes and beds are more common, even though they may be of inferior quality (308, 315, 319). Kephart also describes the use of kerosene lamps, instead of electricity; the lack of a clock, carpeting, or any books in the mountaineer home; and the use of lye to make soap and kettles for boiling clothes. He reminds the reader that he is "describing an average mountain home" and that the "picture here given are typical of that mass" of mountain families (321). While the "average" mountaineer lives in a way that "preserves traits and manners...transmitted almost unchanged from ancient times" (meaning, it seems, pioneer times), there are also "hundreds of backwoods families" who live in even more dire conditions (321-22).

Like Morley and the local colorists, Kephart says that the mountaineers bear such poverty "with a sardonic grin" (325) and "Charity...is declined with patrician dignity or open scorn" (327). But Kephart does not stop there: where Morley consistently neutralized mountain poverty, transforming it into rustic simplicity, Kephart ultimately

lasting consequences for a culture and a region. We can therefore see Dunn's critique as a warrant to investigate how and why *Our Southern Highlanders* became so effective in its setting.

renders it painful and intolerable. While the mountaineers might bear scarcity “high-minded and unashamed,” they shouldn’t have to (329). He suggests in his closing statements that his descriptions of mountain poverty might be “taken as an impertinence” by the mountaineers, but he understands that “a plain and friendly statement of their actual condition, published to the world, is the surest way to awaken the nation to consciousness of its duties toward a region that it has been so long and so singularly neglected” (329). He ends his chapter on rural poverty with a castigating peroration directed to civic leaders: “The worst enemies of the mountain people are those public men who, knowing the true state of things, yet conceal or deny the facts in order to salve a sore local pride” (329). Speaking to a readership immersed in the sentiments of progressivism, and using the tools of ethnogeography to pull back the veil on an inaccessible culture, Kephart hits his mark. Through his writing, Appalachia becomes more than a “strange land inhabited by a peculiar people.” It is the birthplace of America itself, and here fellow Americans are suffering. Though they may be too proud for charity – an admirable trait indeed - their need is made clear to the reading public.

Of course, other writers also cast the mountaineers as needy, as Henry Shapiro argues in *Appalachia on Our Mind*, but Kephart frames this need as an *economic* problem, stating directly in the last line of his book that “It is an economic problem, fundamentally, that the mountaineer has to face” (469). Though the stereotypical moonshiner appears in his text, that character is tapping a black market to mitigate economic hardship; and though a stereotypical poor farmer appears in his text, Kephart assures us that he is only in need of knowledge of modern farming in order to thrive. Throughout *Our Southern Highlanders*, Kephart insists that the roots of the

mountaineers' economic problems are not the results of morals or character traits, but of economic structures. On this basis, he argues directly for *public* and *national* intervention. Near the end of his tome, Kephart states that education for Appalachian children will provide the mountaineers with "trained leaders of their own" and that "here is where the nation at large is summoned by a solemn duty" to create vocational schools in the mountains and establish "model farms in each county" that will teach the best farming techniques (468).

While the text argues most directly for educational measures to aid economic betterment, it also more subtly argues against the investment of private corporations in the mountains. While for Morley, private investments were a means for economic betterment in the region, for Kephart, they signify destruction of a landscape and a culture that he finds worthy of preservation. In sections describing the landscape, Kephart draws again on loci of quality to argue that this environment is *threatened*, and if destroyed much further, could be *irreparable*. Here in the Smokies "the last great hardwood forests of our country stand in primeval majesty, mutely awaiting their imminent doom" (53). When it comes to preservation, not even the most basic game protection laws have applied to these mountains; private hunters have ravaged the animal populations such that "the deer are all but exterminated in most districts, turkeys and even squirrels are rather scarce, and good trout fishing is limited to stocked waters" (69-70). "New and unwelcome [neighbors] swarm in" as the lands are "bought up by corporations," bringing with them "devastating forces" (456). Kephart was quick to criticize the industrial forces that seemed to care more for profit than for people like the mountaineers. In a statement that smacks with terrible irony, he writes, "The curse of our

invading civilization is that its vanguard is composed of men who care nothing for the welfare of the people they dispossess” (457).

It is important to remember that no part of *Our Southern Highlanders* calls directly for public preservation of Appalachian land. Yet, in his definition of the Southern mountains and mountaineers, Kephart elevates their value in the eyes of his readers. *Our Southern Highlanders* argues that Appalachia as inherently a part of the East, hence a part of original America, and its people are original Americans and essential patriots. Furthermore, Kephart suggests that the Appalachians are a remote, difficult, yet uniquely ripe terrain. With a new definition of place, the text then promotes a related understanding of the causes of regional poverty and cultural norms, such that a new value can be ascribed to the culture and the landscape itself. Kephart leads us through these initial arguments of fact, cause, and value, paving the way for arguments for action – specifically, opening the door to arguments for a large-scale federal and economic intervention like a National Park. In casting the land as unique, original, and irreparable, Kephart prepares his audience to hear and to make such arguments, beyond the boundaries of this text, in the newspapers, magazines, circulars, and speeches that were soon to turn their enthusiasm in favor of a National Park in the Great Smoky Mountains.

The Campaign for the Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Numerous historians, including Gatewood, Campbell, Frome, and Pierce, have rendered accounts of the legislative maneuvering required to pass the Swanson-McKellar bill, which created the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and established the federal apparatus for buying the land. In these accounts, historians recognize the contribution of

Kephart's *Our Southern Highlanders*, as well as Margaret Morley's *The Carolina Mountains*, as texts that helped to promote the National Park idea by "enthusiastically describ[ing] the natural beauty of the Great Smoky Mountains," thereby increasing public recognition of the aesthetic value of the Smokies (Gatewood 166; see also Lankford 47). As we have seen, however, these texts did much more than describe the mountain scenery, and much more was at stake in the campaign than the preservation of an Edenic landscape. I would like to tell the story of the park's formation from a different perspective, by taking a closer look at the rhetorical activity happening on the ground, in newspapers, pamphlets, and speeches that were aimed at changing the perceptions, and ultimately the actions, of an audience of private citizens. These campaign materials suggest that the definition of place embraced by Horace Kephart had a wide circulation, adding a new thread to a park discourse that had been, up to the 1920's, primarily concerned with landscape aesthetics. In the Great Smoky Park campaign, however, it became more possible to argue for a National Park as a local economic resource. These economic arguments proved effective in galvanizing public sentiment in favor of the park, but also had an unintended consequence: the dispossession of the people who were, in Kephart's view, supposed to be the greatest beneficiaries of the park's largess.

A National Park in the East

Before the campaign for the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in the mid-1920's, all national parks had been created from existing federal lands, or donated to the government by wealthy, private landowners. In the Great Smoky region, however, the 515,225 acres that constituted the proposed park were all privately owned, in more than

6,600 tracts. Eighty-five percent of that area was owned by timber and pulp companies; the rest, by private citizens (Campbell 12). The Great Smoky campaign therefore required a much more expansive effort at public persuasion: citizens of the affected states had to be persuaded to vote for legislators who would support the park bill; and then they needed to be convinced of the merits of donating money to a park fund for the purchase of lands; and landowners, wealthy and poor, corporate and citizen alike, needed to be convinced of the value of selling their land to the government. At each step in the process, citizens of the Southern mountains were inundated with messages about the potential of a Great Smoky Mountains National Park to transform their economic landscape.

This transformation in discourse can be seen even within the two phases of the Great Smoky park campaign itself. The first campaign for a park in Western North Carolina was initiated in 1893, when the General Assembly of North Carolina resolved to “instruct” their congressmen “in relation to the establishment of a national park in western North Carolina” (McCoy 6). On November 22, 1899, a group of interested men gathered in Asheville to form the Appalachian National Park Association. McCoy recounts that meeting, based on the secretary’s, Dr. Chase Ambler’s, account, as well as on coverage in *The Asheville Citizen* on November 23, 1899. The speeches given by Locke Craig, future governor of North Carolina, and Marion Butler, U.S. Senator for North Carolina, extol the aesthetic qualities of the Smoky Mountains. Locke Craig praises the mountains for their “fertile valleys sleeping peacefully beneath giant cliffs,” and the climate of a “region where winter lingers not” and “the mountains swell with life” and “clothe themselves in garments of emerald leaf” (McCoy 12). Butler likewise

praises the mountains and insists that “when you leave, you long to be back” (McCoy 15). Relying also on the language of conservation and “scientific forestry,” ideas which were gaining circulation at that time, both men argue that these lush forests are “being denuded” and that a National Park would be the best means of preservation, especially for the safekeeping of the mountain watersheds (McCoy 15). In short, the discourse of this late 19th century effort fully reflected the same rhetoric and interests of campaigns in the West. This early campaign persisted until 1905, at which point the Association dissolved in frustration, in part due to questions about the “constitutional warrant for the acquisition of private lands for such a public use,” a legal issue that did not affect the Western parks carved from public lands (*Proceedings* 21). The campaign was also beset by opposition from lumber companies that were working their way up the mountain slopes and harvesting the ancient hardwoods (Frome 177). Six years later, in 1911, the federal Weeks Law allowed for the creation of National Forest lands in the Great Smokies, though as previously noted, these lands were meant for harvesting timber according to scientific principles, rather than wilderness preservation (Ambler Jr. 3).

When the Great Smoky Mountains park campaign resurged in 1923, it did so in a very different rhetorical context. Significantly, the National Park Service (NPS) had been formed in 1916, as a branch of the Department of the Interior devoted exclusively to the maintenance *and creation* of national parklands. With the advent of the NPS, the country institutionalized its commitment to wilderness preservation. Thus, the value of preserving land at all was no longer at issue, and park debates focused instead on whether landscapes met the Park Service’s standards for aesthetic value. They also focused, as we will see, on a park site’s potential benefits to the surrounding communities. In 1923, Stephen Mather,

the first director of the NPS, stated in his annual report that he wanted additional parks established east of the Mississippi River¹², though he was not yet sure of the legal means for acquiring such lands (Pierce 51).

Many communities responded to Mather's declaration with proposals for parks in their locales, including a group from Knoxville and a group from Asheville, proposing the Great Smoky Mountains site. In March, 1924, Secretary of the Interior Hubert Work and Mather convened the Southern Appalachian National Park Committee, an investigatory committee of five men of varied backgrounds in public service and preservation, to weigh the merits of proposed sites in the Southern Appalachians.¹³ One member, Harlan Kelsey, a conservationist from Massachusetts and former president of the Appalachian Mountain Club, was a special advocate for the Great Smoky Mountains site. It was he who gave the other members of the committee copies of Horace Kephart's *Our Southern Highlanders*, saying that it "contained the truest description of the area available" ("Acts of Congress"). The committee proceeded to read applications and conduct visits to the most promising sites, including a visit to the Great Smoky Mountains site in July 1924. Ultimately, they sought nothing less than a sublime aesthetic encounter:

scenery of a quality so unusual and impressive, or natural features
so extraordinary, as to possess national interest and importance, as

¹² Acadia National Park in Maine was the first and only Eastern park at that time. It was created in 1919 when George Dorr and a contingent of other wealthy landowners donated their land on Mount Desert Island to the federal government.

¹³ The members of the Southern Appalachian National Park Committee were: Harlan P. Kelsey, Massachusetts, representing the Appalachian Mountain Club; William C. Gregg, New Jersey, representing the American Civic Association; Col. Genn S. Smith, representing the United States Geological Survey; Congressman H.W. Temple, Pennsylvania; and Major W.A. Welch, New York, General Manager of Palisades Interstate Park (Campbell 22). Note that all of these gentlemen were from the Northeast.

contra-distinguished from local interest. The national parks, therefore, must not be lowered in standard, dignity, and prestige by the inclusion of areas which express in less than the highest terms the particular class or type of exhibit which they represent.

(Kephart, A National Park)

In other words, they sought a landscape that was original, unique, and essentially representative of its type of geography. As we saw above, Kephart's *Our Southern Highlanders* argues insistently that the landscape of the Great Smokies demonstrate all of these qualities.

A small leaflet called *Picture News of Recreational America*, distributed to members of the National Parks Association in October 1924, shows a photograph of the Southern Appalachian National Park Committee with its five members on the cover. They are observing the landscape from a point on "North Carolina's most famous mountain." The pamphlet is just one sheet of paper, printed back and front, folded in half. In addition to the cover photo, it contains six photographs showing mountain views in Georgia, Virginia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. Combined with brief text, the pamphlet demonstrates what had become a typical National Park discourse about the quality of the scenery (National Parks Association). A July editorial in *The New York Times* likewise argues that the Great Smoky Mountains are equal in beauty and worthiness to the landscapes in the West. Kephart makes such arguments from essence in *Our Southern Highlanders*, and they surface again in nearly all of the campaign literature ("A Smoky Mountains Park"). It is critical to note that the quality of the scenery persists as the primary argument throughout the park campaign, especially in arguments to

national audiences; aesthetic superiority is never abandoned as the main reason for preservation. These arguments emphasize the value of an Eastern park, embodying the best of the East, and rivaling the West in aesthetics. Yet as the campaign evolved, so did the discourse, especially in arguments to local audiences.

In December 1924, the Southern Appalachian National Park Committee reported their findings, declaring the Blue Ridge site in Virginia their first choice for a new National Park in the East, though they admitted that the Great Smoky Mountains site was superior in scenery; Mammoth Cave in Kentucky was also a prime site. The selection was practical, given the proximity of the Blue Ridge to major population centers; furthermore, the committee hoped that a Great Smoky Mountains park could follow the formation of a park in the Blue Ridge. While some park boosters were discouraged, others took the decision as approval to pursue a park bill – which they did, vigorously combining efforts with Virginia and Kentucky so that the three favored park plans would be approved on the same bill. Just two months later, on February 21, 1925, President Coolidge signed an act of Congress (68th Congress S.B. 4109, H.R. 11980) that allowed for the Secretary of the Interior to appoint a commission that would determine park boundaries for all three sites, and receive donations of land (Pierce 78). It was from this momentous act, which decreed that the *states* must *donate* the land to the federal government, that “the complications, conflicts, and struggles began in earnest” (Frome 185). It would take eleven years for the states of North Carolina and Tennessee to buy all the land for the proposed park, from 1925 until the final court cases were settled in 1936. During this time, amidst the familiar discourse on aesthetics and the spiritual value of natural scenery, a debate emerged in the Great Smokies campaign about the value of

parks as *economic resources*. These new arguments emphasize the value of providing a major, public economic intervention for a long-suffering yet truly worthy segment of the American people. The next section analyzes several promotional texts that best represent the campaign's larger rhetorical ecology, and highlights how economic arguments manifested alongside the aesthetic rhetoric of this park discourse.

A National Park as an Economic Resource

In response to the announcement of the Southern Appalachian National Park Committee, the North Carolina Park Commission created a company, the Great Smoky Mountains Inc., to serve as the entity that would receive donations for purchasing land for the park. In addition, the Park Commission formed a state campaign committee and appointed Horace Kephart chief of park publicity (Lankford 57). It is no surprise, then, that Kephart himself wrote some of the campaign material, and his writings continue to forward the arguments about the land and people that he had developed in the extended form of his literary nonfiction. Like Muir, the bard of Yosemite, Kephart's fame as a writer provided him not just with greater ethos, but a broader institutional structure through which to circulate his definition of place.

In 1925, after the passage of the first Southern Appalachian park bill, Kephart and his close friend George Masa, a photographer, produced a pamphlet called *A National Park in the Great Smoky Mountains* for the Swain County Chamber of Commerce. In response to relatively low public support for a park in the area, or for a park at this particular location,¹⁴ the pamphlet specifically targets a local North Carolinian audience,

¹⁴ Many citizens favored a second site in North Carolina in the Grandfather Mountain-Linville Gorge area that had also been examined by the Committee, but it was eliminated from the running, citing the superior

summoning them to support the Great Smoky park site and to match the people of Tennessee in their enthusiasm. As in *Our Southern Highlanders*, the pamphlet argues from the locus of essence, that the Great Smoky Mountains site embodies the best of the East and rivals the West in aesthetics. Kephart claims that this park will be a “New Wonderland,” an allusion to the great geological features of Yellowstone, the original park; yet this park is also completely unique, and will “not duplicate anything in the western parks.” Again emphasizing the Eastern location of the park, he asserts that it will showcase the “climax of eastern America,” its highest peaks and steepest mountains. Finally, the region is largely unexplored, with “no roads into the Smokies until this present year,” so that the public may witness an original wilderness - again, just as their pioneering and patriotic forefathers did in “aboriginal times.”

Significantly, Kephart’s 1925 pamphlet simultaneously weaves references to economic advancement throughout. Early on, he acknowledges that travel is expensive and most Americans cannot afford to travel to the Western parks, such that an Eastern park would be more affordable and desirable for them. With this captive audience of millions at hand, more roads are being created and paved, echoing the need for road-building cited in *Our Southern Highlanders*, to link the mountaineers to commerce. The park, Kephart suggests, would be built on land that is not useful for anything else – no railroads, no mines or mining prospects, no water power sites, no high-tension power lines (his argument, however, seems to overlook the encroaching timber interests in the area). Previously in park discourse, such arguments about the uselessness of the lands for

quality of scenery at the Great Smokies site (Pierce 75). These groups were dissatisfied with the choice of the Southern Appalachian National Park Committee, but eventually the Grandfather Mountain-Linville Gorge supporters were persuaded to support the Great Smokies proposal, rather than risk losing the park entirely for lack of support from North Carolinians (Campbell 30).

other economic purposes ended with claims about their enduring aesthetic value. For Kephart, however, these claims about the economic *uselessness* of the land culminate in arguments about the economic *usefulness* of a park, calling it “a money-making investment for the State.” He notes a part of the income to the state would come from the tremendous number of cars coming into the state, in the form of gas taxes, as well as from the “construction of Federal highways and bridle-paths” and “camp sites...with dining halls seating a thousand people or more, amusement halls, rest rooms, cottages for campers, and everything else that the millions would require.” Kephart is tremendously optimistic about these economic benefits, claiming, “Every trade and business associated with tourist life would plant itself on that park border and thrive. Real estate values would double, quadruple, multiply indefinitely.” Kephart’s optimism might be best summarized by his emphatic claim to ultimate economic sustainability, when he exclaims “SUCH REVENUE WOULD GO ON FOREVER.”

The descriptions of economic benefits are detailed largely in a section entitled “What a Park Would Do for the Native People.” Kephart seemed at this time to be under the impression that the parklands would not disturb the mountaineers, whom he viewed as beneficiaries of the park. He writes first, in a section called “Ideal Camping Country,” that the park area “includes no settlement.” What sawmills and farms there are “the government would not disturb” and those few farms “would be bought up at fair prices and the occupants permitted to stay...until they died.” But Kephart doesn’t leave his emphasis there, on the near-emptiness of the park site. He continues in “What a Park Would Do for the Native People” to explain how the building and employment required would give “employment at fair wages to hundreds of mountaineers who are now ekeing

out a scanty subsistence.” He explicitly mentions the mountaineers, and requires only half of a sentence to indicate the economic conditions that his readership is already familiar with. Cast in light of the arguments made at the end of *Our Southern Highlanders*, the park becomes the national economic intervention that, according to Kephart, the mountaineers so desperately need.

These economic arguments, especially their benefits to the mountaineers, appear during the same era in another pamphlet entitled “Save Our Mountains.” Circulated by the Great Smoky Mountains Inc. of Asheville (the park’s corporate holding company), and the Great Smoky Mountains Conservation Association, the pamphlet foregrounds the aesthetic arguments that were already the standard fare of park discourse, though these arguments are situated in religious terms, connecting park formation to Christendom, and by extension to American-ness. It begins with the Biblical verse, “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help,” and argues that it is the duty of Christian people to protect God’s creation, his outdoor “cathedral-like forest,” from destruction. But the flow of Christian imagery is interrupted by the matter-of-fact commentary that many Park enthusiasts “regard the Park primarily as a playground” (in contrast to a cathedral), while others “look upon the Park chiefly as an investment to yield immense profit by bringing literally millions of tourists into Tennessee and North Carolina, as it undoubtedly will, for within a radius of six hundred miles are teeming cities...”. The writer goes on to consider that “forest conservation means water conservation” and this will “establish not far from the Smokies an American Ruhr.” Such claims suggest that the writer’s economic optimism runs deep, though the pamphlet ends by saying that these considerations “fall short of equaling in force the dominant motive behind the campaign,”

which they suggest is really the drive to “keep something sacred” – a Muirian reason indeed. Yet by raising these economic factors near the end of the text, and then emphasizing their relative unimportance, the writers only succeed in amplifying this line of argument.

Economic arguments like these began as a subtle element of the campaign discourse and grew in importance as park proponents faced increasing counter-campaigning by the logging industry, led by Reuben Robertson, CEO of the Champion Fibre Company. In an effort to protect the company’s extensive holdings in the Smokies, Robertson’s counterattacks seized on the same progressive concerns evoked by park proponents. Even before the federal committee made its decision regarding potential park sites, the Champion Fibre Company published an advertisement on December 2, 1925, in the *Jackson County Journal* (a county situated on the proposed park boundary), that emphasized the company’s significance to North Carolina’s economy. The ad describes Champion’s leaders as “enthusiastic” citizens of North Carolina, and notes that North Carolinians hold stock in the company; that they have “about two thousand employees directly on [their] payrolls” who are also residents of North Carolina; and that there are about two thousand more residents of the state whose livelihoods result from Champion’s successful timber harvest (*Champion Fibre Company*, replicated in Lankford 53). If the park campaign wanted to make job creation an issue, Champion was up to the fight. Robertson consistently argued that the principles of scientific forestry, or conservation, as espoused by the United States Forest Service, if pursued on proposed park lands, would provide the most sustainable economic structure for the region, as well as enough recreational area to generate a smaller, but still profitable, tourist industry.

Robertson routinely incorporated his message of scientific forestry into his talks, and when he spoke before the business or forestry communities during the mid-1920's, the park campaign was his subject, whether subtly or overtly. His talks, such as one given to the regional business executives of the Pen & Plate Club in 1926, actually re-circulate the language of the campaign to argue for the formation of National *Forests* instead of National Parks. Robertson invokes the same images of a primitive, pioneer landscape that the park campaigners favored. In his opening remarks, he says we all “at times think back with longing to the romantic days when the trappers and the pioneers could travel from the Hudson to the Mississippi without leaving the unbroken cover of natural foliage which the Indians knew as the ‘long house’.” But this forest fringe, he argues, has been pushed back “increasing distances from centers of population,” as part of the “price of economic progress.” Well aware of the criticisms leveled against the timber industry by the likes of Kephart, Robertson tries to dispel the image of the logger as “prowling” the countryside, replacing it with the image of the smart, conscientious conservationist. He argues that scientific forestry will “provide the greatest opportunity to the greatest number,” using the familiar slogan of progressivism to establish the economic benefits of conservation. Further, he argues that this approach will also preserve the hardwood forests in perpetuity. He insists that his views are “compelled by economic need...to utilize our forests not wastelessly, but as nearly wastelessly as human limitations permit.” Robertson’s language echoes the classic disposition of the progressive era: his purposes are utilitarian, intending to use the land for the betterment of all society.

As this 1926 speech demonstrates, Robertson criticizes the park campaign for ignoring the economic growth of the region. Robertson argues that “when purchased for

park purposes that land must be used for park purposes only. No utilization, no economic considerations enter into the problem. Aesthetic considerations alone control.” It seems that Robertson was not at all convinced by arguments from Kephart and others that revenue from tourism would “go on forever.” In his speech to the Pen and Plate Club, Robertson also foresees the decimation of industry due to the park, arguing that there will be “serious economic loss involved in destroying the industrial activities that have become dependent on the products of these forests.” These charges seem, in retrospect, to overlook the subtleties of the campaign materials that were already in circulation, such as those described above, in which economic reasons appear as strong secondary arguments for the park. It seems likely that Robertson’s counterarguments, and similar campaigning by the logging industry in newspaper ads, anti-park pamphlets, and speeches, spurred the use of economic arguments as a larger part of the pro-park rhetoric.

By 1928, when the Great Smoky Mountains Publishing Company Inc. produced a booklet called *Land of the Everlasting Hills*, arguments about the economic value of a park seem to have become routine. They are no longer subordinated to other arguments. Rather, *Land of the Everlasting Hills* gives equal presence to economic arguments, comingling economic arguments in favor of the park proportionately with those that characteristically describe the age and beauty of the mountains, and the hiking and horseback riding prospects for visitors. At the very same time, the pamphlet details the building of new roads and railroads in the region. It also celebrates the promise of hydroelectric power that will result from preserving the mountain watersheds. The “constant flow of volume and power” found in the Great Smoky Mountains waterways is “of inestimable value to all the adjoining sections of the mountain region.” Again, this

advancement in power production will enable industrial developments near the park, which is emphasized in the pamphlet by displaying aerial photographs of the industrial plants that have already been built near the proposed park's boundaries. The writer of *Land of the Everlasting Hills* stresses the "abundance of labor" in the mountain region, and the "low cost of living for industrial employees"; new companies near the park are already "spending many millions of dollars and employing thousands of workers." By 1928, in the eyes of park campaigners, the National Park had become integral to the vision of a sustainable economy in a historically depressed and economically isolated region.

In evaluating anew the campaign materials from the 1920's park movement, the debate between park advocates and logging interests proves more complex than a simple nature vs. industry binary, such as described by historian Jesse Lankford. Lankford, when laying out the history of the lumber companies' opposition to the park campaign, summarizes the conflict as "a classic battle between [preservation] and industrial consumption. It was also a confrontation between two different forms of business activity – tourism versus manufacturing" (70). In a sampling of park materials from 1925 to 1928, however, we can see that it was, at heart, a debate over the very definition of a park: is a park a place of recreation, a land outside the system of commercial interest? Or, is a park in fact *a resource*, land serving the economy in preserved form as effectively as it would if it were open to logging? The progression of these economic arguments in the span of just a few years indicates a significant transformation in park discourse. First, the definition of "park" opened up to include the effects of preservation on surrounding land, demonstrating an early ecosystemic thinking that would become powerful in future park

campaigns. Second, in the Great Smokies, preservation came to be figured as *fully compatible* with the paradigm of industrial production - indeed essential to it.

It is important to note that such arguments had been attempted before, most notably, during the Hetch-Hetchy controversy, from 1905 to 1913, over the proposal to flood the Hetch-Hetchy Valley in Yosemite National Park, in order to create a reservoir that would provide drinking water to the growing city of San Francisco. When arguments about the valley's aesthetic value had little impact on lawmakers and the public, preservationists, including John Muir, adopted the same economic register as their opponents, trying to persuade the public and Congress that the Hetch-Hetchy Valley had more economic value and overall public benefit as an additional attraction within Yosemite park, than it would as a public reservoir (Oravec). In the Hetch-Hetchy case, the preservationists lost, when economic arguments were judged to be apart from the ideals of preservation. In the Great Smoky Mountains, however, the paradigm of preservation won out over conservation, in a situation where economic development was at stake: for the first time, a park campaign succeeded in defining a "park" as an economic structure that would provide the greatest good to the greatest number of people.

The Fate of the Mountaineers

It remains debatable whether the mountaineers of the Great Smokies were among those who received the greatest good of the park. In *Our Southern Highlanders*, Kephart argued for a major national, economic intervention in the Southern Appalachians, to improve the economic stability of the average mountain-dwelling family. The National Park became just such a major economic intervention. However, the success of the park

campaigners' arguments had material consequences for the mountaineers, who lived both outside and inside the park boundaries.

Land buying began in 1926 and continued until 1936, prolonged in part due to the financial constraints of the state governments during the Great Depression; as well as by lawsuits, especially one brought by John Oliver, who owned 300 acres and was an influential leader in Cades Cove, a town that would be completely dismantled by the park. Most park historians cover in detail the financial and legal transactions of the campaign that ultimately yielded the full acreage of the park. As historian David Pierce writes, however, "most historical accounts of the establishment of the park tend to gloss over the removal of families from the Smokies" (Pierce 157). Earlier authors, like Laura Thornborough, even portray the removal as "a great opportunity" for farmers, who moved to more fertile ground near the bigger cities (Pierce 157). In his foundational history on the subject, historian Carlos Campbell reflects, "the establishment of a national park, like the building of a hydroelectric dam or other large-scale project, unavoidably imposes on a few for the benefit to the whole public...no big public or utility project could be carried out without the right to condemn the property of some who do not want to sell" (Campbell 99). In these accounts, the park is cast as a "gift of the public" for "Uncle Sam." This "gift" consisted of about twelve hundred farms, as well as five thousand lots and summer homes that were sold and dismantled by the National Park Service. Over four thousand people were removed (Pierce 155).

In some respects, the attention paid to the image of the mountaineers during the park campaign helped to dispel the stereotypes of the violent and lawless moonshiner, the poor and ignorant mountain farmer, and the picturesque pioneer American. In 1926, just

four years after *Our Southern Highlanders* was reprinted, a *National Geographic* article by Melville Chater, called “Motor-coaching through North Carolina,” displayed a modernizing mountaineer to the world. The park campaign solicited this article as part of its publicizing efforts. Chater sings the praises of changes in education, citing the state’s decent per capita expenditures and the general decline in illiteracy among “the mountain folk” (Chater 518). This emphasis on an upwardly-mobile population appears again in *Land of the Everlasting Hills* in 1928. A picture of a girl and boy walking barefoot on a dirt path is captioned: “Children go to school here too. Contrary to opinion in some sources, ignorance does not abound among the people of the Great Smoky Mountains.” The author credits “enlightenment” in the mountains to “schools and churches and contact with friends” from other regions. As the decade progressed, the mountaineers were depicted, in some views, as “modernizing” and “joining” American society, not unlike the immigrants against whom they were so frequently contrasted.

By 1933, George McCoy and George Masa suggest in their *Guide to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park*, that the “current of social progress” would “soon have swept away the beauties of the old life” if it were not for the coming of the National Park. There is an irony here: by characterizing the mountain people as isolated and in need of opportunities, Kephart and others like him invited interventions on a grand scale that would bring the mountaineers into the economic bounty of America. The great economic intervention that was the National Park altered the mountaineers’ lives dramatically, even dismantling their homes and dispersing their communities. Yet, on the other side of park formation, it is not the park, but other forms of cultural development (e.g. schooling and the increase of industry in the area) that are held up as the reasons for the mountaineers’

“progress” or even their “disappearance” from the Great Smokies. The park becomes the savior of mountaineer culture in a new way: it will preserve forever their “pioneering American” way of life that was dying to modernity.

While National Parks were initially prized as means of natural preservation, in the 1930’s, they also became museums of cultural preservation. Early on, some older mountaineers were allowed to remain within the park until their deaths, and these mountaineers were interpreted by the National Park Service for visitors. No longer poor and ignorant, wild and lawless, they were instead re-created exactly as Kephart had defined them, as original Americans. McCoy and Masa’s 1933 pamphlet for visitors echoes very closely the language of *Our Southern Highlanders*, describing the mountaineers as original Saxons, descendants of “that homogeneous racial group” that gave birth to patriotic forefathers such as “Boone, Sevier, Clark...Jackson, Lincoln, Crockett and Sergeant York.” The pamphlet devotes four pages to describing “the American frontiersman, upstanding, clean-cut, independent, resourceful, and brave,” and his “cabins, typical of the frontier.” According to McCoy and Masa, the National Park Service “realizes the great asset afforded the park by the presence of the rough-hewn cabin, the highlander, and the folk-songs and ballads” filled with “the language of Shakespeare.” They anticipate that “the educational program” of the park will soon be put in place that will include “folk festivals,” to “acquaint visitors with the customs of the mountain people.” A later *National Geographic* article by Leonard Roy, written in 1936, notes, “in perhaps two decades, the mountain family may pass from within the Park area. Many mountain folk, however, will live on in the same primitive manner all around the borders of the park, adding ‘human interest’ to scenic beauty” (Roy 244). In Roy’s view,

the mountaineers merge Kephart's original American landscape – primitive pioneers matched with primitive hardwood forests. As “rugged as [their] own Carolina hills,” in the words of Melville Chater, there were made to seem unique, original features of the landscape, and as benign as Kephart's black bear who wouldn't harm a soul.

The voices of the mountaineers themselves are difficult to find in the park archives. Durwood Dunn's work on the dismantled community of Cades Cove goes the furthest in seeking the real fabric of mountaineers' lives before the park, as he recreates the trials of John Oliver and his fight to save his land and the integrity of Cades Cove. In other histories, a few scraps appear. Campbell recorded a sign posted near Cades Cove, directed at Colonel Chapman, one of the federal agents involved in the process of condemning and purchasing park land. The sign read:

COL CHAPMAN YOU AND HOAST ARE NOTFY LET THE
COVE PEOPL ALONE. GET OUT. GET GONE. 40 M. LIMIT.

(Campbell 98)

Other remnants are found in occasional letters to the local newspapers, such as a Cades Cove resident who wrote in to remind readers, “Our ancestors fought in the American revolution. Have we not right to life, liberty, home, and happiness?” (Pierce 160). These historical remnants suggest that there is room for further research into the mountaineers' defense of their communities and their own acts of self-definition.

The Legacy of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park Campaign

Horace Kephart did not live to defend the mountaineers from their mistreatment at the hands of the “public men” he so fervently believed would serve them well. He died in a car accident in 1931, before the height of the Great Smoky Mountain eminent domain controversies. It remains to speculation whether Kephart would have interceded on behalf of the mountaineering community; many of his personal papers and correspondences are also lost, and so his thoughts on the land-buying, if they differed from greater public sentiment, are not known.

Sadly, Kephart did not live to see the opening of the park, either. At his passing, many people in the region mourned his loss. In a scrapbook kept by his friend George Masa, an obituary clipped from a local newspaper remembers Kephart as one

who contributed toward making life today, and in coming generations, more worth living. . . .Kephart was not the first man to vision a great park to preserve for future generations the glory of uncut forests upon majestic mountainsides. But he was the first to bring that vision into the realm of the practical. . . .As a result of his writings, the nation learned of the unique beauty of the Smokies; as a result of his writings, a park actually began to be discussed; and as a result of his writings, the park today is an about-to-be-accomplished project.

As demonstrated in this encomium, even at the hour of his death, Kephart was immediately christened the voice of the Great Smoky Park movement, and his writing was ascribed a quality of real effectiveness, for which he is still praised.

The case of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park demonstrates how a noteworthy work of literary nonfiction crafted a politically effective definition of place through a series of careful rhetorical decisions. First, Kephart aligns his definitional discourse with the progressive sentiments of readers in his era. Second, far more than calling attention to the beauty of the Smokies, he relies on qualitative loci to argue the originality and uniqueness of *both* the landscape and the culture found there. Third, he makes a critical genre choice, by divorcing himself from the local color tradition and writing in the genre of ethnogeography; this decision allows him to traffic in “facts” rather than stories and opinions. As a mountain insider, a participant-observer, Kephart redefined the mountaineers as original, pioneering Americans. Rather than poor, isolated, lawless, and apart from American culture, the mountaineers needed only greater opportunities for their resourcefulness to thrive. *Our Southern Highlanders* created an actionable argument, by laying definitional groundwork that opened the road for policy to follow. It was taken up by park boosters immediately because its formulation of the region invited not only preservation, but also federal intervention, not just for the sake of the landscape, but for the sake of the American people living there.

Kephart’s definition proved fruitful within the Great Smoky Mountains National Park campaign, suggesting that a definitional discourse can support specific argumentative appeals for preservation. In the Great Smoky Mountains National Park campaign, Kephart’s definition of place worked well with economic appeals for creating new parks: while economic arguments had been nascent in previous park campaigns, they emerged as robust and viable arguments for park formation in the case of the Great Smokies. The park campaigners’ early economic appeals responded to anti-park

arguments made by key industries, but they also eventually included industrial growth as a naturally compatible outcome of preservation. As the park movement progressed into the 1930's, when government action was used to stimulate economic growth, the New Deal gave rise to more parks intended to serve not only as monuments of a national identity, as Yosemite once had, but also as economic resources like Great Smoky.

The economic arguments made in the campaign for the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, which figured industrial activity as fully compatible with landscape preservation, reveal one of the core criticisms of the park system: such a system treats one portion of a place as valuable, while enabling unchecked exploitation outside of arbitrary boundaries. While the campaign for Yosemite invoked the importance of preserving a watershed for scenic preservation, and the campaign for Great Smoky argued the importance of watershed preservation for industrial growth, neither campaign fully articulated the interconnectedness of all parts of a region as a living system that is continuous across human-created boundaries. During the 1930's, park campaigners discovered new rhetorical means to move beyond arguments for watershed preservation and developed new terms to express the nuanced relationships playing out among the elements within landscapes, from water and climate, to flora and fauna: in the campaign for Everglades National Park, the growth of ecological science combined with unique geographic, historical, and institutional circumstances in a persuasive effort to redefine and rescue the endangered Everglades swamp in South Florida.

Chapter 3 The Everglades: Preserving an Ecosystem

Everglades National Park opened to the public on December 7, 1947, at a dedication ceremony held in Everglades City, Florida. The small town of 700 residents sat on Florida's western coast, at the gateway to the Ten Thousand Islands and just off the Tamiami Trail, the first highway to cross the state from Miami to the Gulf of Mexico. To the south of Everglades City lay 424,000 acres of newly created parkland. Carved from the complex subtropical and tropical ecosystem that forms the tip of the Floridian peninsula, the new park boundary included portions of saw grass prairie, hardwood hammocks, pinelands, marshes, and coastal waters. The park abounded with plant life not found anywhere else in the country: royal palms, gumbo limbo trees, species of orchids, strangler figs. Perhaps more apparent was its unique wildlife. At that time of year, the dry season, animals gathered around any available pool of water, so visitors traveling for the dedication event were likely to see spectacular congregations of alligators and crocodiles, as well as ibis, roseate spoonbills, great white herons, wood storks, flamingoes, and many other species of birds for which the Everglades had become famous.

Everglades City witnessed considerable pomp and circumstance that day. State and national dignitaries gave remarks, including President Harry Truman, Florida Governor Millard Caldwell, Senators Spessard L. Holland and Claude Pepper, Interior Secretary Julius Krug, and *Miami Herald* Editor-in-Chief, John Pennekamp. The "Father of the Park," Ernest Coe, had a plaque dedicated to him. A delegation of the Seminole tribe gave President Truman a hand-woven shirt in a traditional Seminole pattern. A Native American soloist, WahNese Red Rock, sang the Star Spangled Banner, accompanied by the Fort Myers High School Band. The President received a

commemorative postage stamp signed by the Postmaster General. And Claus Senghaas, manager of the Rod and Gun Club of Everglades City, baked a cake six feet wide in the shape of Florida for the dedication luncheon (Bellamy; “Truman”; Trumbull).

President Truman, standing on a palmetto-thatched platform in front of 10,000 spectators broadcast his dedication speech to the nation (Bellamy). He pointed out the great differences between the Everglades and the twenty-seven National Parks that had come before it: “Here are no lofty peaks seeking the sky, no mighty glaciers or rushing streams wearing away the uplifted land. Here is land tranquil in its quiet beauty, serving not as the source of water but as the last receiver of it.” Truman’s speech acknowledged the perception that the Everglades were not a beautiful landscape. Flat and watery, seemingly un-navigable and uninhabitable, the Everglades had been defined as a godforsaken and mysterious swamp. Unlike other National Parks marked by their impressive geological features, the Everglades were frightening in their strangeness. Until the 1920’s, very little was known about them, and few white people had entered, let alone studied, this remote landscape. As a consequence of these early definitions, huge swaths of the watery wilderness had been drained to create farmland and to build the city of Miami.

Truman, however, also acknowledged that the national understanding of the Everglades was changing, saying that “this Everglades area has more than its share of features unique to these United States...To its natural abundance we owe the spectacular plant and animal life that distinguishes this place from all others in our country.” Gradually the public was coming to recognize the Everglades as a unique, original, and threatened landscape, one that needed to be safeguarded as much as any mountain,

canyon, or cavern. These values were attached to a new definition of the Everglades not as a jungle or a swamp, but as an ecosystem, rich with complex interrelationships between flora, fauna, climate, hydrology, and geology. At the dedication ceremony that December day, Senator Claude Pepper used a new term in an effort to express this changing view of the Everglades. He said, “Here more than one million visitors will soon come each year to enjoy this marvelous museum of nature” where “they will see...a constellation of sparkling lakes, streams, bays and inaccessible swamps in this *river of grass*” (Everglades National Park Dedication Pamphlet, emphasis added).

River of grass. This defining phrase for the Everglades was hardly a month old. It came from the title of a book that had just been published on November 6, 1947. That book was *The Everglades: River of Grass*, by Marjory Stoneman Douglas. Douglas was a journalist for *The Miami Herald* and a nationally known writer for the *Saturday Evening Post*, and she had spent years researching and writing *River of Grass* as part of the popular Rivers of America series. Douglas’s phrase, and the descriptions in the book itself, successfully replaced the image of the mysterious and godforsaken swamp with the image of a river – a place where plant, animal, and human life thrives, a place that is navigable and not just inhabitable, but *essential* for human existence. This redefinition was so effective that today, Douglas is remembered as “the bard of the Everglades” and excerpts from her book appear on materials all throughout the park. The editor of *Audubon* magazine once went so far as to call her book “the classic book on America’s tropic national park” (Douglas, “Forgotten Man”). So pervasive is her defining phrase, and so thoroughly has her text become aligned with the park, that it might seem she single-handedly pioneered this new way of thinking about the Everglades.

Discourse, however, rarely works in such a streamlined system. Indeed the timing of Douglas's book release – just one month before the park's opening – indicates that her text did not belong to the park campaign's rhetorical machinery. Rather, Douglas's text captures an existing discourse built by many writers and thinkers who came before her, especially Charles Torrey Simpson, John Kunkel Small, and David Fairchild, the scientists whose writings called attention to the Everglades as a complex, rare, and scientifically valuable ecosystem that was suffering from encroaching urban and agricultural development. Other important contributors included landscape architect Ernest Coe and the many intellectuals who participated in the campaign for Everglades National Park, from the first formal suggestion of the park idea in 1928, until the passage of the park bill in 1934.

The Everglades campaigners faced new challenges in arguing for a National Park. They could not rely on the sublime aesthetics used in campaigns for Yosemite and other early parks. And with the 1920's land and agricultural booms in South Florida, they could not rely on the economic appeals that pertained in the impoverished region of Southern Appalachia. Instead, campaigners looked through scientific eyes at what the landscape itself could offer. With the infusion of scientific thinking, the campaign for Everglades National Park introduced a new line of argument for preservation, and significantly expanded the National Park Service criteria for "park worthy" landscapes (cf Davis, Grunwald, McCally, Sellars, Villeisis, and Wilhelm).

This chapter inquires into the relationship between Douglas's work of literary nonfiction about an endangered and contested landscape, and the institution with which it has become so closely affiliated. Though it is hardly a relationship of simple cause and

effect, it is nonetheless one that speaks to Barry Lopez's claim that literary nonfiction about the environment can "reorganize political thought." In this chapter, I argue that Douglas's book, *The Everglades: River of Grass*, captures and showcases a discourse about the Everglades that developed through the work of ecologists, writers, and preservationists in the 1920's and 30's. This discourse reached the public through the campaign for the Everglades National Park, preparing audiences to receive this definition in its fullest form through Douglas's text. First I will examine older definitions of the Everglades, and then I will turn to the work of scientists, especially David Fairchild, a world-renowned botanist who became integral to the park campaign. While many historians have traced the development of the park campaign and indicated its use of scientific discourse, I offer here a rhetorical understanding of the Everglades regional discourse. I analyze its transformation as an act of redefinition that happened across speakers, genres, and audiences, and that added to the "available means of persuasion" for a National Park. Finally, I will consider the composition of Douglas's text itself, including its structure as an environmental history; its strongly definitional language; its critical take on the ideals of American progress; and its ongoing relationship to the park institution. In the end, I suggest that Douglas's text became a capstone in the arc of the Everglades' regional discourse, forming a durable rhetorical foundation for continued Everglades activism through the late 20th century.

Defining the Everglades

Before delving into discussion of Everglades discourse, it is helpful to understand the basic workings of the Everglades ecosystem *in its natural state*. This distinction is

important. In the present day, the Everglades exist as a highly engineered environment. Due to the present water control regime of the Army Corps of Engineers, the expansion of Miami's suburbs, and the demands of Florida's agricultural industry, the Everglades is arguably a different ecosystem today than it was in the pre-settlement days of the 19th century, or even at the time of the park campaign in the late 1920's and early 1930's. Some writers speak of the "historical Everglades," while environmental historian David McCally uses the terms "pre-drainage" to describe the ecosystem as it formed through natural forces, and "developmental" to describe the ecosystem as it has been re-shaped by human forces.

In its natural, pre-drainage state, the Everglades were wetlands, covering three million acres and encompassing nearly all of southern Florida. Geologically, south Florida was a nearly level bed of limestone, "flat as a dining room table," as the famed botanist David Fairchild put it, with slight depressions that tilt towards the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean (Fairchild, Retention 2). At the head of the Everglades sat Lake Okeechobee, a name that means "Big Water" in Seminole, at twenty feet above sea level (Davis 26). During the rainy season, from May to November, water flowed from the Kissimmee River, located to the north, through Lake Okeechobee, and exited the lake's southern rim through numerous small streams. In a landscape with little relief, these streams quickly merged to form a wide, thin sheet of water, creeping westward toward Big Cypress Swamp and southward toward the Gulf of Mexico (McCally 29). The water traveled over a bed of soft soil known simply as "Everglades muck," spread like frosting atop the foundation of porous limestone rock. This water traveled just a few feet per minute, taking up to four months to complete its 120-mile journey to the sea (Davis 25).

As the water traveled, it provided sustenance to saw grass, a type of long, pale grass with razor sharp edges that spread out prairie-like over the region. Saw grass is a unique plant, particularly in that it does not require much phosphorous for growth, so it succeeded in the phosphorous-poor soil of the Everglades (Grunwald 18). In this way, the Everglades was “not quite land and not quite water, but a soggy confusion of the two,” as Michael Grunwald puts it in *The Swamp*, his lively history of the subject (9). This saw grass prairie was dotted with “hammocks,” islands of hardwood trees clustered together. To the west, the Everglades met the sea in saltwater marshes and beaches, with strings of tiny islands along the Gulf coast, in the area now known as the Ten Thousand Islands. Further south, water flowed into the Atlantic at Cape Sable and the land gave way to the islands known as the Florida Keys.

While the saw grass prairie contained relatively little wildlife, the hardwood hammocks and coastline provided habitats for a wide variety of plant and animal species (McCally 80). Botanists like John Kunkel Small, working in the early 20th century, catalogued native plants, including Royal Palms, cabbage palm, pine, gumbo limbo trees, strangler fig, varieties of orchids, and mangroves, to name just a very few (McCally 70-76). Animals included alligators, crocodiles, manatees, loggerhead turtles, Florida panthers, crayfish, gar fish, pink shrimp, zebra butterflies, tree snails, and birds like flamingoes, osprey, wood storks, white ibis, roseate spoonbills, and great white herons. Many of the species found in the Everglades were not found anywhere else in the continental United States, and some were not found anywhere else in the world (Grunwald 12). These species thrived in the Everglades because they were able to adapt

to its specific climate, geology, and hydrology, surviving in alternating rainy and dry seasons (National Park Service, “Everglades”).

Knowing its geology and hydrology, one realizes that it “is not intuitive to think of the Everglades as a river, as Douglas did,” largely because rivers “are not typically grassy and sixty miles across” (Davis 25). Also, unlike all other formations called “river,” the Everglades are not obviously a channel of water that runs between banks, flowing rapidly into a larger body of water. And finally, the Everglades are not easily navigable by boat, and therefore are useless for commerce – one of the major human uses of a river. Before “river of grass” came into parlance, another phrase typically defined the Everglades: *mysterious godforsaken swamp*. Ultimately, this definition authorized the project known as “Everglades reclamation,” the draining of South Florida’s wetlands that enabled widespread agricultural and urban development.

The Mysterious Godforsaken Swamp

Today, scientists and the public recognize the Everglades as a composition of varied and specific types of *wetlands* (e.g. saltwater marsh), each with a different ecological make up (Meindl, “Water” 114). But environmental historian Ann Vileisis notes that before the late 20th century, the Everglades was inarguably a “swamp,” a single term that was generally understood to apply to “all lands habitually wet” – and any traveler who had seen them would most certainly agree to their habitual wetness (Vileisis 73). Swamps were not places to be appreciated for their beauty or ecological abundance. Vileisis writes in her history of American wetlands that, in early America, “the publication of fictional, exaggerated, and misleading depictions of mythic marshes and

swamps helped to shape the reputation of wetlands” as haunted and dangerous places (60-61). A survey of writing about South Florida demonstrates that early Everglades discourse fits within the larger tradition of “swampland” rhetoric, and imagines the Everglades as a *mysterious* and *godforsaken* swamp.

Pre-20th century writers frequently characterized the Everglades as mysterious, meaning enchanting, mystical, strange, or even quite simply, unknown. Before the 19th century, European imperialists encountered the southern Florida coast while exploring the Caribbean, and though they were able to peruse the coastline, it was generally difficult to gain information about the interior of the peninsula. While the native Calusa tribe, and the later transplanted Seminole tribe, knew how to use narrow pine canoes and poles to move through the dense saw grass, it was very difficult for Europeans to navigate with their wider, heavier, paddled boats.

Despite limited opportunities for observation, however, colonial writers reported many fantastical sights to their European audiences. Several sixteenth-century writers ruminated on the possibility that the mythical Fountain of Youth existed in Florida; some even speculated that Juan Ponce de Leon had been seeking the fabled waters when he first encountered Florida in 1513 (La Gorce 1). In 1565, John Spark, a British observer, suspected it to be the home of a serpent with three heads and four feet - not to mention lions, tigers, and unicorns (Grunwald 24). Historian Thomas Hallock suggests that the physical distance between Florida and European readers, as well as the difficulty of obtaining first-hand knowledge, enabled explorers to fill the *idea* of Florida with exotic creations; Florida’s early literature is therefore as often a product of literary imagination and the rhetorical aims of imperialism as much as observation (Hallock 26).

Over three centuries, European explorers, Spanish and English colonial settlers, and eventually American citizens developed northern Florida, but the southern end of the peninsula remained largely uncharted through the 19th century. When the United States acquired Florida from Spain in 1822, maps left the lower interior of the territory blank, or filled it using only the cartographic symbol for “sedges growing in water” (Vileisis 52). During the second Seminole war, from 1835-1842, in which the stated goal was the removal of the Seminole Indians to a reservation in Oklahoma, generals gave their troops blank maps to fill in as they pursued the tribe (Grunwald 38; Dix and MacGonigle 516). The Seminole survived because of their superior ability to hide within the dense foliage of the Everglades, and the United States army could claim little victory other than exploration of what had previously been unknown territory, including the “discovery” of Lake Okeechobee (Grunwald 52).

As American settlers spread throughout Florida, more natural history was written of the state, but of the Everglades there was little to say. Sidney Lanier’s natural history, *Florida: Its Scenery, Climate, and History* (1875), offers lengthy accounts of every other region in the state, from Jacksonville to Key West, but treats “Lake Okeechobee and the Everglades” in just two pages. Lanier speculates on the extent of the lake, suggesting that its “length is probably from forty to fifty miles, its width is about twenty miles” and “its waters probably escape through the Everglades” (Lanier 151). In Lanier’s tentative description, we see that the Everglades ecosystem was just beginning to be understood, and it would take many more decades to develop that brief description. As late as 1905, when more settlers were moving to South Florida, Edwin Dix and John MacGonigle wrote a piece for *Century Magazine* entitled “The Everglades of Florida: A Region of

Mystery.” The Editor’s introduction to their piece names the Everglades as “the land of Ponce de Leon and the fabled fountain of youth,” and a “region of mystery” (Dix and MacGonigle 512). The characterization of the Everglades as a “mystery” persisted into the late 1920’s, glimpsed whenever a speaker invoked the Everglades as mystical, exotic, or uncharted.

Pre-20th century writers also frequently characterized the Everglades as a godforsaken swamp, a place that was dangerous, isolated, diseased, or frightening. This characterization gained particular public traction from the reports of soldiers during the first and second Seminole wars; the landscape seemed to add the challenges of navigation and dangers of disease to the already treacherous experience of warfare. Grunwald highlights Jacob Motte’s *Journey into Wilderness: An Army Surgeon’s Account of Life in Field and Camp during the Creek and Seminole Wars, 1836-1838*, in which Motte describes the army “wading in morasses and swamps waist deep, exposed to noxious vapours and subject to the whims of drenching rains or the scorching sun.” Motte calls the landscape “nothing but barren wastes” as well as “interminable,” “dreary,” and “desolate” (qtd in Grunwald 42). Other soldiers write about the mosquitos, which unbeknownst to them, transmitted malaria, dengue fever, and yellow fever. Grunwald notes that “illness killed four times as many Americans as the Seminoles killed” during the Seminole wars, no doubt reinforcing the public’s ancient belief in swamps as places of disease and death (44). In the end, the U.S. army abandoned the Seminoles to the Everglades and the commanding general, Alexander Webb, said that he “could not wish them all in a worse place” (qtd in Grunwald 53).

Perhaps the most vehement statement on the essence of the Everglades comes from an 1848 government report compiled by a Florida lawyer named Buckingham Smith (Grunwald 58; Meindl, Environmental 31; Vileisis 262). Shortly after Florida attained statehood in 1845, the state government sought help from the federal government on surveying and potentially draining the Everglades. It was believed that drainage would expose the Everglades soils and make the land in South Florida saleable for settlement and usable for agriculture. Consequently, the federal government solicited a report to provide more information on the practicability of draining the Everglades. Smith, an historian by training, created his report using his own observations of the terrain during a five week trip to the region, as well as solicited testimony from army personnel and engineers who had traveled there (Grunwald 59; Meindl, Environmental 31).

Smith states in his report that the Everglades are “nearly or quite valueless to the United States,” and in their untouched state they are “suitable only for the haunt of noxious vermin, or the resort of pestilent reptiles” (U.S. Senate Report 334). Interestingly, in this same report, Smith writes quite poetically about the Everglades, describing what was then known about the relationship of water, saw grass, tides, rock, and soil (28-29). He even waxes sublime in prose reminiscent of the Yosemite, saying that “the profound and wild solitude of the place” can even induce “awakened and excited curiosity” and “feelings bordering on awe,” that in a person “of romantic imagination” would yield “poetic” effects (29). However, sentences later, Smith backtracks: if one is of “practical” and “utilitarian” mind, then “the first and abiding impression” of the Everglades “is the utter worthlessness to civilized man, in its present condition, for any useful or practical object, of the entire region” (29). Indeed the word

“worthless” is used six times in the document to describe the Everglades - and once “even less than worthless” (34).

Smith’s intolerance for the landscape seems almost exaggerated and calculated to align with the prevailing political sentiment of his day: a utilitarian view of nature that found “worth” only in land that could be cultivated. The ever-present water, “noxious vermin,” and “pestilent reptiles” of the Everglades were worthless, perhaps, but beneath this swamp there was the Everglades muck: a soil created by generations of decayed vegetable matter, continuously watered by the tides. Many of those who contributed to Smith’s report suspected that this soil was especially good for agriculture, and that, combined with the warm climate, South Florida could become an agricultural boon to the nation if only the water and wildlife could be removed from the picture. In a testimony included in the report, Colonel William S. Harney offers his opinion that the Everglades soil “would be the best sugar land of the south, and also excellent for rice and corn. [...] Its being made susceptible to cultivation, (and, instead of being, as now, a waste of waters, fit only for the resort of reptiles), would be a happy epoch for Florida” (U.S. Senate Report 45). Harney makes a significant series of rhetorical turns in this passage: he highlights the potential productivity of the soil; he indicates the negative definition of the Everglades, declared a “waste”; and he links the soil with the value of agrarian production. In this pragmatic argument, an action is judged favorable because its imagined consequences are favorable; Harney “infer[s] the superiority” of drainage “from the usefulness of its consequences” (Perelman 266, 268). This pattern becomes the script for the next seventy years of pro-drainage discourse, saturated with claims about the *uselessness* of a land submerged and the *usefulness* of a cultivated soil.

“Reclaiming” the Swamp

The definition of the Everglades as a mysterious and godforsaken swamp was used to inaugurate the project of Everglades Reclamation, a term that encompasses all efforts to dredge canals, build levees, reroute rivers, and drain the wetlands of South Florida to make them available as farmlands. “Reclamation” is a strange term to an environmentalist’s ear: to *reclaim* means “to save from an undesirable state; to bring back...to a better or more acceptable condition; to restore to a good spiritual or moral state” (OED). This terminology casts Nature itself as “the enemy of progress” (Garrett 264). In the 19th century, cultivation was “a good spiritual and moral state” for land, and nature was impeding what many Floridians believed to be nothing less than the state’s “agricultural destiny” (McCally 85). With a negative definition of the Everglades firmly in place, the United States government was authorized by Smith’s report to act against a perceived enemy.

The United States first codified the project of wetlands reclamation in 1849 and 1850, passing a series of laws now known as the Swamp Lands Acts. These acts required the Secretary of the Interior to catalogue all federally-owned swamplands and to cede them back to the states in which they were located (Vilesis 73-77). Under the Swamp Lands Acts, “swamps” were defined as “lands made unfit...for cultivation” by excessive water and were intended to enable states to take charge of draining their own wetlands for farming (73). However, due to a lack of funds and organization at the state level, it was several decades before Floridians first attempted to transform wetlands into farmland in the 1880’s.

Drainage of the Everglades and surrounding wetlands began in 1881, under the direction of Hamilton Disston, who purchased four million acres of Florida wetland from the state. Disston's purchase became the core of the "Everglades Drainage District," and his corps built the first canals north and east of Lake Okeechobee (McCally 89). Governor Napoleon Bonaparte Broward continued these drainage efforts in 1905 (92). However, many of the original engineering designs did not fully drain the land, or caused flooding in places that were previously dry (McCally 104-105). It wasn't until 1912 that the Board of Consulting Engineers proposed a larger system of levies and pumps that would eventually bring about the long-imagined agricultural vision (115).

The drainage of the Everglades and its surrounding wetlands enabled the city of Miami to grow rapidly in the late 1910's and 1920's. After World War I, Florida strove to capitalize on Europe's demand for food, by extending agriculture deeper into the Everglades. This effort was supported by a project to levy Lake Okeechobee, one of the primary sources of water to the Everglades, and also one of the primary causes of flooding. Towns sprang up below the levy, and farm sales boomed again (Davis 262). By 1925, South Florida's urban life depended on 435 miles of canals, pumping stations, secondary canals, ditches, and sixteen locks and dams. The city of Miami grew rapidly, from a population of 30,000 in 1920 to 177,000 by 1925 – growth of almost 600% in five years (Smiley 47). The land boom of the early 1920's was a frenzy: property values in Miami increased 1,000 percent, and building extended into suburbs, bulldozing Everglades hammocks to make way for subdivisions (Davis 270).

Many writers helped to promote South Florida throughout the early decades of Reclamation. As early as 1884, William Wallace Harney wrote that on his first visit to

the Everglades, “it was all raw, wild, unknown” (Harney 605). Since Reclamation began, however, his boat has easily traveled the canal system down the previously un-navigable Caloosahatchee, and now the “Northern tourist can explore the described region, and pronounce for himself upon the accuracy of the theory, and the character of the land reclaimed” (605). In 1912, the Florida agency in charge of Reclamation paid for a trip for members of the national press to see the work that had been accomplished. The tour was planned for April, the end of the dry season, so the region’s waters were at their lowest; consequently, favorable reports about the success of drainage efforts abounded in national newspapers (McCally 108).

In a 1914 edition of *The Tropic Magazine*, M.C. Perrine demonstrates the writers’ real rhetorical project: the project of redefinition. In an article called “A Peaceful Conquest,” Perrine acknowledges, “There are thousands of people today who, when Florida is mentioned, immediately conjure up visions of the alligators and swamps that were pictured in those old school books, and it is difficult to get them to see it otherwise.” These people believe that the region is “either swampy marsh or jungle.” But Perrine strives to assure his readers this land has been made useful by “government reclamation of waste lands” (Perrine 8). After discussion of the fine soil quality, Perrine describes a journey that begins through “tropical jungles with palms and orchid covered live oaks” and then becomes a journey “through grapefruit groves...past occasional groups of mango and avocado trees, and over prairies which have yielded their full quota to the trucker” (14). He concludes that one will long remember a trip on South Florida’s waterways, not for its wild nature, but for its agricultural abundance, proclaiming that

“surely such a trip will drive away the last vestige of those school-day impressions!” (14). The article ends with a sketch of a branch heavy-laden with oranges.

Perrine, like other writers in *The Tropic Magazine*, focuses on the presumed quality of the soil, the navigability of the canals, and the size and variety of fruits, all supported by the ethos of personal testimony. The goal of writers like Harney and Perrine was to demonstrate to national readers that the Florida Everglades of the past had been successfully replaced with a “Florida Agricultural District” of the present and future. These writers hoped that when the public thought of South Florida, it would not think of a mysterious, godforsaken swamp, but rather a useful and inviting garden.

Unfortunately, Florida settlers who first attempted farming in the “reclaimed” region did not find a useful and inviting garden. As a scientist named Roland Harper wrote in *Economic Geography* in 1927, “Although the ‘boosters’ in all parts of Florida are continually boasting of the richness of their soil, there is little doubt that...Florida would rank below all other states in the Union in that respect” (Harper 340). The problems were many. The region was surprisingly susceptible to frost. A heavy rainy season easily submerged fields again. Plus, there were problems with the crops: new crops grew quickly and then withered. Only Bermuda grass, meant for grazing, grew abundantly – but the cows that fed on it died. Settlers called this mysterious illness “reclaiming disease,” and they could not imagine that it was caused by nutrient deficiencies in the supposedly “rich” Everglades muck (McCally 125-26). And then there was the problem of disappearing soil: when exposed to the air, bacteria that were normally suppressed by constant water coverage bloomed and feasted on the decomposing vegetable matter (Davis 263). Gradually farmers switched to crops that

grew best – oranges, strawberries, and similar “truck crops” that would not grow further north, or which Floridian farmers could monopolize in the winter (Harper 341). But it took years of chemical experimentation and further drainage controls to make the former wetland agriculturally productive.

Disruptive Definitions

The definition of the Everglades as a mysterious and godforsaken swamp took form over centuries and solidified during the 19th century, and this definition was utilized by governments and land developers when it served their interests. However, it is important to note that this definition was never absolute or uninterrupted by counter-definitions. Often a single writer’s text – including Jacob Motte’s and Buckingham Smith’s – included rare moments of appreciation for the character of the Everglades landscape. And a few writers, like William Bartram in his *Travels* (1791), even praised the landscape and viewed it as a garden cultivated by Mother Nature herself.¹⁵ At the turn of the 20th century, as the public became aware of threats to the Everglades from human actions, challenges to redefining the Everglades as an agricultural land began to emerge in clearer tones.

The controversy over plume hunting first called attention to the fragility of nature in the Everglades. From the 1880’s until the early 1900’s, bird feathers were popular adornments for women’s hats, and often not just feathers, but entire birds were used.

¹⁵ William Bartram (b.1739 d.1823) was the first to express an early ecological appreciation of the Everglades. He traveled in Florida from 1774 to 1777, gathering plant and animal specimens for a British naturalist and recording his observations, which were published in a lengthy book in 1791. Bartram describes the “rich” plant and animal life of South Florida in terms familiar to English gardeners at the time, for example, describing sink holes as fountain-like (Porter 49-53). He also views the landscape as both sublime and picturesque; in this way he is a precursor to America’s “spiritual naturalists” like Muir (Vileisis 53-54).

Plume hunting was an international industry, and Everglades rookeries were especially at risk, because of the sheer abundance, variety, and uniqueness of the birds found there. Plume hunters typically shot out entire rookeries, leaving unwanted skins and baby birds to be eaten by crows and vultures (Davis 175). Plume hunters in South Florida shot hundreds of thousands of birds a year, and because they killed nesting mothers, two generations of birds died. As a result, bird populations in the lower Everglades declined dramatically (Grunwald 120-22). Some historians suggest that the murder of game warden Guy Bradley in 1905 may have been a turning point. In response to Bradley's death, the Audubon Society called on the public to redefine the Everglades as a sanctuary for a diversity of wildlife (Grunwald 127; McIver 161-62).¹⁶

This counter-definition is apparent in Edwin Dix and John MacGonigle's essay "The Everglades: A Region of Mystery," which appeared in *Century Magazine* in March 1905, around the peak controversy over plume hunting in the Everglades. The authors begin by describing the Everglades in a very familiar way. They say, for example, that "nature guards the secrets of the Everglades," which is "unplotted and almost as unvisited as the darkest Africa" (513). Yet these passages are only intermittent. Dix and MacGonigle otherwise actively counter negative characterizations of the Everglades. They insist it has only "pure air" and "pure water," that give visitors "the perfect assurance of health" (526). They wax lyrical about the inviting climate, and suggest that

¹⁶In 1900, the Florida legislature passed a ban on plume hunting, but it did not provide funds for enforcement. The Florida Audubon Society tried to fill this gap by employing a lone game warden, Guy Bradley. However, in July 1905, Bradley was killed by a plume hunter who was poaching at Oyster Keys (Davis 186, 190). William Dutcher, President of the National Audubon Society, attempted to use Bradley's death to draw attention to the cause of bird protection. In a eulogy for Bradley he wrote that Bradley had died "that a few more plume birds might be secured to adorn heartless women's bonnets," calling him "the first martyr in the cause of bird protection" (Dutcher 218). Bradley's death caused but a brief stir, and over the next two years, other game wardens also died while trying to protect birds in other parts of the country (McIver 163-65).

the “mystery” of the Everglades only adds to its “charm and beauty” (525, 526). Then, Dix and MacGonigle boldly introduce another definition for the Everglades: they call it a lake, which they describe as fed by underground springs and surrounded by a limestone rim (521, 526). They describe the Everglades “lake” as a place of natural beauty, abounding in wildlife and interesting plants (527). In a significant move, Dix and MacGonigle say that this lake “has its place among the country’s native wonders, like the Mammoth Cave and Niagara Falls, the Yellowstone and Yosemite and the Grand Canyon of the Colorado, the Great Natural Bridge of Virginia and the newly discovered greater natural bridges of Utah” (514). The mysterious Everglades are valuable exactly as they are, they suggest, because “it is rather a good thing to have a little of Wonderland left” (514).

Interestingly, the idea of protection for the Everglades is echoed three years later, in Anthony and Julian Dimock’s *Florida Enchantments* (1908), about the authors’ travels in South Florida. In their chapter “Life in a Bird Rookery,” they observe a rookery destroyed by plume hunters, where of “fifteen thousand nests not fifteen were occupied” (Dimock 208). The Dimocks describe the beauty of the birds and observe the habits of mother birds and their young. Towards the end of the chapter, the authors lament that “all-the-year playgrounds of the coming generation” will soon lack “their most conspicuous charm,” the birds. The Dimocks argue that Florida’s wildlife can be restored “if the birds of Florida could secure the same protection as the beasts of the Yellowstone National Park” and they call on their readers to “bring back the glory of that lotus land: restock its waters and people again its forests for the education and enjoyment of the whole people, to whom it belongs” (Dimock 210-211).

In their praise for the Everglades landscape, Dix and MacGonigle, and Dimock and Dimock, argue for a new way that the Everglades *ought* to be defined, valued, and acted upon. They describe for readers some of the complex interactions of water, land, plants, and animals. And significantly, they also ask the public to see this landscape as nationally valuable, not as farmland, but as Nature itself. The Dimocks even ask their readers to take personal responsibility for the health of the Everglades, saying that the restoration of the Everglades will come from “an active public sentiment. And public sentiment in the concrete means YOU” (Dimock 211). In these turn-of-the-century texts, a naturalist’s appreciation of the landscape’s features is a premonition of a changing meaning for this increasingly besieged place.

In addition to the destruction wrought by plume hunting, the first five decades of drainage also had immediate effects on wild nature in the Everglades. The dehydrated muck was prone to combustion in the dry season, and caused wild fires. Hammocks were razed to create farms, build neighborhoods, and make way for the East Coast Railway, while destroying wildlife habitat. And lowered water levels affected the nesting and reproduction of the birds, even in rookeries that were not sought by hunters, causing additional decline in bird populations (Garrett 272). Disrupted water levels were devastating to plants and creatures that had adapted over millennia to the Everglades’ rainy and dry seasons, and these effects did not go unnoticed by scientists, who were beginning to study the Everglades from a new perspective, as an ecosystem.

The Emergence of the Ecological Everglades

In the midst of the drainage and development frenzy of the 1910's and 1920's, a small South Florida cohort began the work of redefining the Everglades not as a swamp, with all its negative connotations, but as an ecosystem, a place of abundant, non-human life forms existing in a system of complex relationships. These scientists were botanists and natural historians who were working at the fringes of the relatively young discipline of ecology, which was named as a formal discipline in 1866 by German biologist Ernst Haeckel. Haeckel was attempting to cohere the disparate body of knowledge that addressed the process of change in natural systems, generated by studies of natural history, botany, physiology, biogeography, hydrology, and evolution (McIntosh 353-54). It wasn't until the early 1900's that ecology began to establish itself institutionally (Golley 38). Though it was largely unknown to the public as a scientific specialty until the 1950's, by the early 1900's, conservationists called on the knowledge of ecologists to assist with the "scientific management" of forests, fisheries, and wildlife (McIntosh 355). It remained a loosely defined field, and many botanists, natural historians, and biologists contributed to the growth of ecology, though they did not work under that title.

The core concept to emerge from ecology is that of the ecosystem, an idea that evolved over many decades into the concept we know today. The seed of the concept first appeared in "The Lake as Microcosm," an article by Stephen Alfred Forbes (1887) in which Forbes considers the relationships among plant and animal species in an aquatic environment. His "microcosm" is a "system" in which "matter circulates, and controls operate to produce an equilibrium" (qtd Golley 36). Forbes wrongly assumes that the lake is completely isolated from its terrestrial surroundings, but his concept nonetheless strikes

on two key features: the idea of the system, and the striving of all environments towards equilibrium. Lake “microcosms” were the first to be studied widely in the 1890’s and early 1900’s, as a result of Forbes’s work (Golley 36). This trend adds particular significance to Dix and MacGonigle’s decision to call the Everglades a “lake” in 1905, making their choice the earliest effort to name the region as an ecosystem.

Another early form of the ecosystem concept was the “biotic community,” which imagined species in nature cooperating and competing for survival. Victor Shelford, an animal ecologist and one of the leaders in the development of ecological thinking, called ecology “the science of communities” (qtd McIntosh 355). He emphasized the importance of studying species in relationship to each other within a shared habitat, rather than studying an individual species alone (355). In the 1920’s and 1930’s, Aldo Leopold employed the analogy of the biotic community when developing his land ethic. Alfred George Tansley, a British plant ecologist, advanced the “community” concept to the fully defined “ecosystem” in his *Ecology* article “The Use and Abuse of Vegetational Concepts and Terms” (1935). In his formulation, an ecosystem includes the interactions of all plants and animals (the community) *plus* their relationship to every element of their physical and chemical surroundings, e.g. climate, geology, and hydrology. To Tansley, the ecosystem is a unit in a hierarchy of physical systems – that is, it cannot be isolated like Forbes’s lake “microcosm” – and it is constantly striving for equilibrium and stability (Golley 8, 29). Tansley provided the full definition of the ecosystem as we understand it today, but his term was not used routinely until the 1950’s, the era of ecological study that set the stage for the environmental movement (McIntosh 357).

It is important to note that the most influential scientists who helped to redefine the Everglades were botanists and natural historians, not ecologists. They were, however, participating in the greater project of ecology. Ecology grew slowly because it first required a descriptive base from which to approach questions of interrelationship, so until the 1920's, much of the work of any scientist studying plants and animals was devoted to "describing, largely qualitatively, the complex mantle of environments, vegetation, and animal communities" (McIntosh 358). In the Everglades during the 1910's and early 1920's, natural historians, botanists, and other scientists like ornithologists aided this larger descriptive project of ecology, by producing studies of South Florida that were essentially lists identifying animals and plants occupying a particular habitat (Golley 17). These scientists, some of whom would participate in the park campaign in the 1920's, had never heard the term "ecosystem," because it was not yet coined; it was never used in the park campaign, and the more limited term "biotic community" still reigned. But a review of the Everglades scientists' descriptive studies demonstrates that they gradually moved beyond "community" and towards "ecosystem": the nascent concept is evident whenever they question how species migrate and adapt, or consider the effects of physical and chemical changes on the health of the environment. These scientists developed a regional discourse that defined the Everglades as a system composed of many parts – plants and animals, and *also* water, rock, and climate – all related to each other in a complex balancing act.

Among this company of scientists were four men who had a particularly important role in advancing scientific understanding of the Everglades: John Kunkel Small, Charles Torrey Simpson, David Fairchild, and Harold Bailey. These scientists

shared friendship with each other, at times living in the same neighborhood and traveling in the same elite circles of Miami society. In their primary research or as a secondary hobby, each contributed to the descriptive base of knowledge about the Everglades and posed questions about its origins and adaptations.

John Kunkel Small was possibly the greatest contributor to the “descriptive base” of botanical knowledge of the Everglades.¹⁷ Beginning in 1901, Small traveled for extended periods in the Everglades, and he published ninety scientific papers and several books about South Florida’s plants, primarily for specialized audiences. Small was especially interested in the “subtropical” region of the Everglades, where plants from the temperate and tropical zones mingled. He was also interested in evolution and plant migration, considering how species found in tropical locations, like South America, may have reached South Florida (Rothra 125). Small traveled to the beautiful “Paradise Key” in 1903, and later advocated for it to become Royal Palm State Park in 1916 (Davis 216; Rothra 141).¹⁸

Charles Torrey Simpson, a friend of Small’s, contributed significantly to the public’s knowledge of the Everglades with the publication of his immensely popular books, *In Lower Florida Wilds* (1920), *Out of Doors in Florida* (1924), and *Florida*

¹⁷ John Kunkel Small (b.1869 d.1938) was trained in botany at Columbia University. He became the head curator of the New York Botanical Garden in 1898 and worked there for the rest of his life. Small was devoted to his family and sometimes brought his wife and four children on his extended plant-gathering trips to Florida. Small had many prominent connections with inventors and industrialists, such as Thomas Edison and Henry Ford. Despite his love of Florida, he always lived in Queens (Rothra 125).

¹⁸ Royal Palm State Park encompassed the Everglades’ largest hammock, known as Paradise Key, located 46 miles south of Miami. When Small saw it for the first time in 1903, he was only the third white person known to have seen it. Ten years later, many more people had seen it, and some had suggested that it be made a monument or a bird sanctuary. Mary May Jennings, the President of the Florida Federation of Women’s Clubs, pursued the creation of a state park at the site. John Kunkel Small, Charles Simpson, and David Fairchild were all strong supporters of Jennings’ campaign. The park came to fruition in 1916, and it would later be incorporated into the plan for Everglades National Park (Davis 215-21).

Wildlife (1932).¹⁹ Though the books were dense with scientific information, Simpson wrote with contagious enthusiasm for his subject, narrating his own adventures in the Everglades. Importantly, Simpson's books educated readers about the different types of landscapes that compose the Everglades region. *In Lower Florida Wilds*, for example, he describes the geological formation of Florida in "The Building of the Land"; the botanical riches of the Ten Thousand Islands; how tropical plants and birds migrated from Cuba to Florida; the cycles of natural fire that allowed for rebirth in the hammocks; and, in a chapter called "The Survival of the Fittest," the competitive relationships among species, such as the strangler fig and its host tree. Simpson's works addressed "amateur naturalists" and offered a descriptive primer, familiarizing readers with the basics of the Everglades' natural biology. During the National Park campaign, he would speak on radio programs and write for newspapers and magazines about the very same ideas covered in his books (Rothra 181-82).

While Small and Simpson were cataloging Everglades plant life, an ornithologist named Harold H. Bailey was building a similar descriptive base of South Florida's bird life.²⁰ Bailey published a book called *The Birds of Florida* in 1925, which was a detailed catalogue of 425 species of birds he observed in the Everglades, including hand painted

¹⁹ Charles Torrey Simpson (b. 1846 d. 1932) studied conchs, and he worked for the Smithsonian Institution and the National Museum of Natural History from 1889 until his retirement in 1902 (Rothra). He moved to Coconut Grove and built a home with a sprawling tropical garden known as "The Sentinels" (79). He thought his career was finished, yet more than half of his biography is devoted to the later period of his life, during which he was prolific in studying the Everglades and its tree snails (76). He also wrote and educated the public about tropical horticulture (95), and he became advocate for preservation as early as the 1916 campaign for Royal Palm State Park (124). Simpson tended his large property with his own hands (157), and enjoyed strolling his tropical gardens by moonlight in the nude (93). He was known for his hospitality and enjoyed teaching his many visitors about plants (91). Simpson was close friends with David Fairchild, who learned from the elder Simpson when they were neighbors in Coconut Grove (94).

²⁰ Harold H. Bailey (b.1878 d.1962) was the son of the ornithologist Harold B. Bailey, who founded the American Ornithological Union that was instrumental in the crusade against feathered hats. Bailey grew up in Newport News, VA and became an architect for the U.S. Navy. But he pursued ornithology as a hobby, publishing several articles and eventually his first book, *The Birds of Virginia*. Bailey's papers are housed at Virginia Tech ("More About"; Rhodes).

illustrations and hand drawn diagrams and maps. In the introduction, Bailey suggests that “To help save or prolong our diminishing wealth of faunal life, a large reservation in the ‘glades’, such as the Big Cypress and Lake Okeechobee, should be set aside for them as a State and National park” (Bailey vii). Among the birds discussed, Bailey describes the flamingo, which was formerly abundant in the state but was “driven out by the hunters and plumers. The last record of breeding birds...was in 1907” (31). For flamingoes and other popular Florida species, like the roseate spoonbill, Bailey describes when they were last seen and how “few remain of the countless number which might have been seen...in our state” (31). Bailey’s study of Florida’s birds educated his bird-watching audience about the ways that the health of Everglades fauna was vulnerable to human action.

For Bailey, Simpson, and Small, the Everglades were the primary focus of their studies and writings. By contrast, their colleague, David Fairchild, contributed to the public’s understanding of the Everglades by publishing frequently about his travels to the South Pacific, South Asia, and Africa.²¹ Fairchild worked with the United States Department of Agriculture, gathering seeds of tropical plants that had potential to grow in the United States, particularly in South Florida. In publications like *The National Geographic Magazine*, and later in several books, Fairchild established his reputation as a scientific authority and introduced the public to the nature of the tropics. Fairchild was interested in the Everglades as a hobby, as he lived there only when he was not traveling

²¹ David Fairchild (b. 1876 d. 1954) was trained in plant pathology at the University of Iowa and Rutgers University. He joined the United States Department of Agriculture in 1889 and was at the height of his illustrious career during the early 1900’s. Fairchild’s primary role with the USDA was collecting seeds around the world and studying their potential for introduction to the United States; he was responsible for introducing mangoes, papayas, and many other tropical fruits to the U.S. When he wasn’t traveling, Fairchild lived in Washington, D.C. and owned a second home known as “The Kampong” in Coconut Grove, which is now memorialized as the Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden (Lawrence). During his stays in Florida, Fairchild spent many afternoons visiting with Simpson at the Sentinels and learning from leisurely conversations with the seasoned naturalist (Rothra 94).

abroad or working in Washington, D.C. Fairchild's knowledge of the tropics helped him to understand the Everglades as a tropical ecosystem, one that was unique in the United States, but not mysterious or strange.

By 1922, Simpson, Fairchild, and Bailey were more than colleagues: they were neighbors living at least part of the year in Coconut Grove, and they were engaged in ongoing conversations with each other. They began to meet as a formal discussion group, to share their observations of the Everglades; its rapid, and to a scientist, obvious destruction due to drainage; and the possibility of preserving some of the region for study. The group, which included other interested members, called themselves the Florida Society of Natural History. It was among this group that the idea of preserving the Everglades began to incubate. The meeting minutes indicate that Harold Bailey first suggested forming a National Park south of Lake Okeechobee in 1923, and Fairchild echoed the idea in April 1924. The group debated the merits of the various institutional forms that preservation might take, including parks and wildlife sanctuaries (Bailey, Historian 13-A).

The work of these Everglades scientists, which built a richly descriptive base of the origins, interactions, and evolution of plant and animal life in the Everglades, wrought substantive changes on the definitional discourse of the Everglades, especially when it was channeled to a wide audience through the campaign for Everglades National Park. Eventually, this new discourse, which called attention to the interactions between the region's flora and fauna, and its understudied hydrology, geology, and climate, would prove to be the key to convincing the public and lawmakers that the Everglades deserved to be a National Park because of its scientific riches.

The Campaign for Everglades National Park

Until the launch of the Everglades National Park campaign in 1928, all National Parks had boasted significant geographical features, like mountains, hot springs, and geysers; and they were often described as useless for the highly valuable endeavor of farming. Indeed the campaign for the Great Smoky Mountains National Park frequently focused on the worthy geography of the Southern Appalachians – their steepness, their impressive vistas, and their lush valleys – as well as the difficulties of farming there. But the Everglades offered no obvious geographical glories to please the eye, and amidst the fever of Reclamation, farming was the future for Florida. Those who were interested in the preservation of the region had to secure a different available means of persuasion derived from the landscape itself.

Historians routinely acknowledge a discursive shift from “swamp” to “ecosystem” in arguments about the Everglades (cf Davis, Grunwald, McCally, Sellars, Villeisis, and Wilhelm). Indeed, it would be difficult to overlook: this discursive shift was paramount in debates about the potential for a park, and it was actively acknowledged by lawmakers in Congressional hearings in 1931 (Grunwald 208). The rhetors involved in the creation of the Everglades National Park were aware that they were making arguments for preservation in a way that had never been done before. In the study of National Parks and preservation policies, one cannot overstate how much the Everglades campaign was a game-changer: it introduced on a national stage a robust topos of *scientific usefulness* for generating arguments about preservation.

Previous treatments of the campaign for Everglades National Park generally attribute the success of the campaign to Ernest Coe, the man who initiated the formal park campaign. Coe was a Harvard-educated landscape architect from Connecticut, who moved to Coral Gables with his wife, Anna, in 1925, to design tropical estates during the land boom (Wilhelm 4). His involvement in the Everglades campaign is typically described as “obsessed,” “single-minded,” and “tireless”; he is called a “self-appointed committee of one” and a dedicated “citizen activist” on a “quest” (Grunwald 206, Villeisis 188, Pratt 46, Davis 328). Chris Wilhelm, who studies Coe’s role extensively, rather gently calls Coe “an effective and enthusiastic promoter of the park” (Wilhelm 100).

It is important to know, however, that Coe was heavily influenced in his views of the Everglades by the Florida Society of Natural History. After arriving in Florida, he attended meetings of the Society, where he began to learn from Fairchild, Simpson, and others about the plight of the Everglades as well as its inner workings. Coe quickly became an enthusiastic student of the Everglades and Bailey took him out into the wilderness frequently (Wilhelm 21). He also often took expeditions of his own, carrying few belongings and a large walking stick. When a neighbor took him to Cape Sable, in the lower Everglades, to gather wild orchids, Coe was overcome by their beauty and returned impassioned for the cause of saving the Everglades as a National Park (Davis 330). Years later, news reports credited Coe, or even his wife Anna, with the genesis of the park idea, but Bailey reminded them that Coe owed the idea and much of his Everglades education to the Florida Society of Natural History (Bailey, Historian 13-A).

The ideas of this scientific group also affected the young Marjory Stoneman Douglas, a writer who would become famous, two decades later, for channeling the work of the Everglades scientists in literary form. Douglas moved to Miami in 1915, to be closer to her father, Frank Stoneman, the editor-in-chief of *The Miami Herald*. She was just 25 years old, only three years out of Wellesley College and recently divorced. She wrote columns and poems for the *Herald*, until, in the mid-1920's, she began writing stories for magazines, especially *The Saturday Evening Post*, which printed many of her stories each year between 1925 and 1943. In 1926, Douglas had a small house built in the burgeoning suburb of Coconut Grove, on the edge of the Everglades, and became close friends with her neighbors, the Fairchilds (Douglas, Voice 171).

During this time, Harold Bailey took Douglas bird-watching in the Everglades and taught her about its wildlife (Davis 328). Also during this time, she became involved in the civic life of the region and established a reputation as an activist for many social causes, including women's suffrage and prison reform (Branch 126). With her reputation as a writer and social activist, Douglas was invited into the park planning process from the beginning. Over the years, she learned from members of the Florida Society of Natural History about the complex nature of the Everglades, and she contributed to building and circulating a changing Everglades discourse.

Previous treatments of the park campaign tend to focus on the biographical, private, and legal transactions of the effort to bring about the park, focusing on the personal correspondence of key participants in the campaign, especially Ernest Coe. My treatment focuses instead on the building of a definitional discourse across speakers, audiences, and genres. This section analyzes the rhetorical tools employed in the public

writings that promoted a new definition for the Everglades to a national audience from the time the campaign began in October 1928, until the passage of the park bill in May 1934. During the campaign, scientists, writers, and conservationists helped the public to understand the Everglades as an ecosystem, one that is unique, ancient, threatened, and irreparable, and therefore urgently in need of preservation. It was this definitional and value-laden work that Marjory Stoneman Douglas would rely upon in creating *The Everglades: River of Grass*, a decade later.

Proposing an Ecological Park

The campaign for Everglades National Park officially began in late October, 1928, when Ernest Coe sent a proposal to NPS Director, Stephen Mather, and Secretary of the Interior, Horace Albright, requesting National Park status for the Cape Sable area in the lower Everglades, the area that demonstrated the greatest tropical character. In his letter, Coe already uses the new definition of the Everglades as a rich, complex ecosystem – the definition developed in conversation among scientists over the previous decade. In support of this definition, he describes the varieties of flora, fauna, and terrain, amplifying the idea of biological variety (what today is called “biodiversity”) with lengthy lists. Relying on the information gleaned from the Florida Society scientists, Coe argues that the Everglades has “unique features of great value to the biologist, nature student, and artist” and that this place is increasingly threatened by the “intrusion of outside exploitation.” In an interesting move, he also asserts that the National Parks represent “the preeminent example of some one or many natural phenomena” and that the park system is currently missing an example of “sea-level physical characters” and “our

country's tropics." He offers the Cape Sable region as the essential example of this type of landscape. Coe's opening letter demonstrates the basics of the campaign discourse: an Everglades ecosystem, brimming with plants and animals, useful for study and education, that can be valued as unique, threatened, and the essence of this type of landscape. These basic threads were greatly elaborated by many other writers through the five and a half year campaign.

Apparently, the letter was very compelling to Mather and Albright, because among many requests they received for new park areas, Coe's earned him a hearing with the NPS (Williams). In 1923, while the Florida Society of Natural History was debating the form that a park might take, Mather was seeking park sites in the East and South, and he considered the potential of the Everglades for National Park status (Wilhelm 56). Perhaps for this reason, Coe's proposal was well-received, and the process moved quickly. Coe traveled to Washington D.C. in November to discuss the next steps. On December 5, 1928, Florida Senator Duncan Fletcher introduced the bill (S. 4707) requesting that the Interior Department investigate the region. On December 12, Coe met with interested people in Miami to form the Tropic Everglades Park Association. By December 29, the Association had letterhead, which stated its mission:

To promote acquaintance with the wonder of American tropics in the Cape Sable region of South Florida and adjacent areas -- Its scenic interests including its varied plant and animal life; much of it unique to this section. To co-operate with measures for this Cape Sable country's preservation as a national Park, where all forms of life will be preserved, and its varied other charms of tropic glades,

jungles, azure seas, emerald isles, lakes, rivers, and beaches will be forever consecrated to the benefit of all mankind.

While lengthy, this mission statement captures the core argument of the campaign. Yet, it also romanticizes the “wonders” of the landscape, which Coe had a tendency to do. As Wilhelm reminds us, “Coe was not a scientist trying to explain the inner workings of the Everglades,” but rather, he was a passionate citizen who saw the Everglades as fascinating (Wilhelm 35). While Coe was highly influential in the park campaign, he wasn’t the source of information about the Everglades. Rather, he served as one force in disseminating that information.

Coe, of course, knew considerably more than the average citizen. It’s important to emphasize just how little was understood about the Everglades as an ecosystem at this time among the public and even among scientists. The Florida Federation of Women’s Clubs, for example, voted on contradictory resolutions at their state-wide meeting on November 8, 1928: the first, to require more flood control from the state, in light of the devastation from the 1926 and 1928 hurricanes²²; and the second, to pledge their “hearty support and full cooperation to the creation of the Tropic Everglades National Park” (Resolutions). Their resolutions fail to grasp that the continued existence of the Everglades was premised on the healthy flow of water from the Lake Okeechobee watershed, the very region where they demanded more flood control.

²² On September 18, 1926, a powerful hurricane with 140 mile-per-hour winds made a direct hit to South Florida. As the eye of the hurricane passed over Miami, people saw the blue sky and emerged from their homes, only to be caught in the second onslaught. The storm surge broke a ¼ mile hole in the earthen dikes that held Lake Okeechobee, and nearly 400 people died in the flood. Florida Governor Martin promised that such floods would never devastate Florida again, but on September 16, 1928, another 140 mile-per-hour hurricane hit South Florida. The storm wrecked 21 miles of Lake Okeechobee’s dikes, killing 2,500 people, mostly black farm workers. Miamians pleaded with the federal government for greater flood control and the Army Corps of Engineers assumed control of levy building in 1929; they remain in charge of water control in South Florida today (Grunwald 187-94).

But the Federation of Women's Clubs could not have known any better: even among scientists, basic ecosystemic thinking was still emerging and knowledge about the Everglades was incomplete. For example, Robert M. Yerkees, a primatologist at Yale University, expresses in a letter to David Fairchild his enthusiasm for the park, and asks if "any of the anthropoid apes or perhaps even the Old World monkeys" might be introduced into the park area. "It would be an interesting experiment," he writes, "and if a big park should be established in Southern Florida, I should joyously enter into such an adventure." Joyous though he, and some tourists, might find that "adventure," Yerkees' suggestion seems oblivious to the delicate balance of the native habitat. Indeed in the 1920's, even the most learned Everglades scientists did not fully understand that delicate balance. J.K. Small, by that time recognized as the living expert on the Everglades, wrote in the January 1929 *Scientific Monthly* that most of the Everglades waters were supplied by "subterranean sources," a common understanding at the time (Small, Everglades 80). The misunderstanding is reinforced by John Oliver La Gorce in a 1930 issue of *National Geographic*, when he claims that "heavy rainfall and subterranean streams" keep the Everglades water fresh (La Gorce 26). And while scientists like David Fairchild were concerned about the effects of drainage at the local level, they believed that parts of the Everglades that were not yet dredged could be fully preserved.

But it was exactly the overall lack of scientific information about the Everglades – its "mysterious" and "unknown" nature - that fruitfully fed the campaign for the Everglades National Park. Science increasingly held the public's attention and provided an acceptable path to new knowledge; the mysteries of the Everglades gave a knowledge-seeking exigence to the park campaign, in a way that it had not in other park campaigns.

David Fairchild initiated some of this discussion behind the scenes. When the Tropical Everglades Park Association formed in December 1928 to spearhead the campaign, Fairchild was invited as President because of his many scientific connections. In January 1929, he sent letters to dozens of “outstanding citizens” who were “broad-minded and active in civic affairs,” including renowned scientists like the head of the Museum of Natural History in New York, the Director of Botanical Activities at Harvard, the President of the National Geographic Society, and the famous inventor Thomas Edison. Fairchild’s initial letter, like Coe’s, describes a tropical ecosystem that is unique and threatened, and the only landscape of its type in the country:

This area is the most nearly tropical of any area in the United States. It comprises over two thousand square miles of land which is not of value for agriculture, but is an ideal place for... tropical animals and birds and reptiles as are found nowhere else in the United States.... The giant ibis, the scissor tailed kits, the white heron, the alligator [etc.]...the marvelous hammocks with wild and superbly beautiful palms, jungle trees, orchids [etc.]... are being burned so rapidly that in another generation they will all be things of the past, unless the protecting hand of the government preserves them. (Fairchild to Harbord Jan 1929)

Here, Fairchild provides his readers, a select yet public audience, with the basic language of the park movement, including lengthy lists of plant and animal life to amplify a sense of the region’s diversity (Fairchild, Letter to James Harbord). Thirty-nine recipients replied with enthusiastic endorsements, which Marjory Stoneman Douglas used in a 1930

Miami Herald article about the park. These initial contacts promoted discussions among scientists, and arguments from scientists to the public, about the nature and value of the region.

Shortly after Fairchild began sending letters to “outstanding citizens” in January 1929, George Pratt, President of the American Forestry Association, and Robert Yard, secretary of the National Park Association, learned of the latest development in the young campaign, and they were furious. Both men wrote to Fairchild to express their dismay at what they perceived to be a violation of National Park *standards*. Pratt wrote to Fairchild that he did not believe that the region “measures up to the standard required for a National Park” which he defined in aesthetic and spiritual terms, a la John Muir: as places where “one looks through the veil to meet the realities of nature and of the unfathomable power behind it” (Pratt, Letter to Fairchild). Meanwhile, Yard expressed concern that many would endorse the park idea without fully understanding the area itself, thereby creating a “public ballyhoo” that would “force the hand” of Congress, despite a lack of information about the region (Yard, Letter to Fairchild).

Pratt and Yard may have also been reacting, in part, to an article by zoologist Henry Ward in *Science* earlier that month. In a letter to the journal, Ward replies to a statement by scientist Willard Van Name, who claimed that business interests were co-opting the National Park system, making the National Parks merely pretty scenery for recreation. Ward disagrees: he notes that the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) recently reaffirmed its position that National Parks preserve areas that are significant for their natural marvels. The AAAS agreed with NPS officials that a National Park is “the finest example of its scenic type in the country” and “should not be

lowered in standard, dignity, and prestige by the inclusion of areas which express in less than the highest terms the particular class or kind of exhibit which they represent” (Ward 14). Ward argues that new parks should be held to this rigorous standard, and that areas not meeting this standard should be preserved in another form.

The debate about “park standards” was really a debate about the definition of a National Park – not only what a National Park *is*, but what it *ought to be*. If agreement could be reached among “men of science” and federal gatekeepers about what a National Park should be, that definition would determine how it might be acted upon. Ward’s letter tentatively indicates one possible action: if National Parks are defined as superlative examples of a “class” of scenery, then they might serve men of science, and the public generally, as sites for study. Ward quotes John Merriam, president of the Carnegie Institution, who called the National Park system a “super-university” with “educational value”; the AAAS likewise recognized the parks as “a national educational institution,” like a “natural museum” (Ward 15). The idea that National Parks might be useful for study was not new, but it had not yet been foregrounded in arguments for parks. Ward subtly suggests that “educational value” ought to be one of the new park standards, and “study” a more prevalent use of parks. Such a definition asks citizens to view parks not as a showman would view them, but as a scientist would (Grunwald 208; Davis 370).

In light of resistance from prominent figures like Pratt and Yard, the Everglades campaigners recognized the need to speak more vigorously to this issue of park standards, by demonstrating how the Everglades met both the *new* standard suggested by scientists like Ward – that is, as an important place for study of a distinct landscape - and the *gold* standard – the superior embodiment of a type of scenery. Those who knew the

region best faced the tremendous task of circulating as much information as possible about the complexity of its ecosystem, and the need to learn more. They focused on two key scientific principles: the biological abundance of plant and animal life, and the interactions of species that mutually depend on each other. They also needed to ascribe a new scenic value to the un-scenic Everglades landscape, and they did so by relying on the qualitative loci, recasting the landscape as an essentially *tropical* landscape, one that is unique, original, threatened, and, if left unprotected, completely irreparable.

*Re-educating the Public*²³

Campaigners began the redefinition process by responding directly to the public's misunderstandings about the Everglades. Like Dix and MacGonigle's article a generation earlier, their public writings frequently begin by invoking the old definition of the mysterious and godforsaken swamp. J.K. Small, for example, writes that the Everglades is a "very misconceived region" and "in the mind of the uninitiated the Everglades are a vast, more or less impenetrable jungle," though "nothing could be further from the real state of affairs" (Small, *Everglades* 80). Fairchild similarly begins one of his magazine articles by acknowledging vigorous resistance to the park idea from men who have never even traveled there. Confident in his own ethos, he claims that he knows the Everglades so well that he forgot others "still thought of it as a great jungle of tangled lianas and giant forest trees," merely "false images" that "lingered in the minds of many middle-aged persons" (Fairchild, *Retention* 2). By naming the Everglades first in familiar terms,

²³ The analysis in this section is based on 20 articles from the campaign era that were directed to varied public audiences in major scientific and news publications, between January 1929 and June 1934, when the park bill passed. The set also includes one speech by David Fairchild, delivered to the American Forestry Association in February 1929, and reprinted in *National Parks Magazine* in 1945. Especially highlighted here are articles by the most prominent spokespeople for the campaign.

the campaigners are able to correct what they see as a misperception based on a lack of scientific knowledge.

Much of the campaigners' writing focuses on educating readers about the rudiments of the Everglades as an ecosystem, beginning with the land itself. In an early article, printed in *American Forests* in March 1929, Coe points out the variety in types of landscape: an "ever-changing panorama" from groves of pines and hammocks of cypress, to open glades, to semi-tropic tree hammocks and near-tropic jungles, to areas of dwarf cypress, to lagoons and lakes (Coe, *Land* 162). Almost all campaign writers focus especially keenly on the abundance and variety of plant and animal life that is possible in such varied habitats. In "The Retention of a Wild Area in the Everglades," Fairchild says that the Everglades "contain more species than any other area of similar size in America." In the north, he explains, one can walk for miles and miles through areas that have only about a dozen types of plants, but in the Everglades, even small hammocks are dense with hundreds of different species (4). The campaign texts' diction consistently emphasizes this abundance: areas are "thickly covered" with plants, waterways are "teeming with fish," and the landscape is "effulgent with nature."

Claims to abundance are supported by long lists of plants and animals furnished to provide readers with the names of unfamiliar species. Importantly, these lists reflect the work of those early scientists who built the "descriptive base" of Everglades wildlife that is the necessary precursor to the ecosystem concept. In a typical list of plants, Marjory Stoneman Douglas names the mangrove, cypress, dwarf cypress, buttonwood, cabbage palm, bottlewood, gumbo limbo, mahogany, mastic wood, poisonwood, clinging ficus, strangler fig, water oak, coconut, sea grape, cocoplum, sea lavender, sea myrtle,

orchids, bromeliads, and cacti. The list trails off with “any number of others and everywhere the tough vines of the tropics that leap and snarl and bind,” leaving for the reader to imagine dozens and even hundreds of other trees that they have never seen before (Douglas, *Only Tropics* 42). Lists of animals tend to include crocodiles, alligators, sea turtles, snakes (never dangerous, of course), deer, bears, turkey, wildcats, panther, raccoon, mink, and otter, followed by a separate list of birds. In one fantastic letter to NPS Director Horace Albright, Gilbert Pearson, head of the National Association of Audubon Societies, proceeds to list 73 species of birds present in the Everglades, which, he notes, is only a partial list of the 128 species recently observed there by Arthur H. Howell of the U.S. Biological Survey, and, of course, less than one fourth the species observed by Harold Bailey in the early 1920’s (Pearson to Albright, 3 Mar 1930). Though a private communication, Pearson’s extreme example demonstrates the full effect of these lists upon a reader: throughout campaign writings, such lists amplify the sense of an almost unbelievable biological variety and abundance in readers’ minds.

Importantly, campaigners emphasize that the various and abundant life forms of the Everglades interact in a *system*, each part dependent upon the thriving of another. J.K. Small names several “plant associations,” encouraging readers to consider how plants exist in interesting relationships with each other. A favorite “plant association,” mentioned by many writers, is the strangler fig and its host tree; the strangler fig begins as an epiphyte (an air plant with no roots) living on the branches of a host tree. As the strangler grows, it eventually wraps around the host tree and kills it. But not all “associations” are so gruesome. For example, Fairchild takes the reader on an imagined boat journey, to witness a complex food chain:

One is forced into consideration of the chemical and physical factors of these Everglades: A vast level prairie of grass...covered one to two feet deep...with water as fresh as that in a rain barrel. Filled with an amazing growth of fresh water algae and insectivorous floating waterplants. Upon this mass of vegetation, increased through the action of sunlight and the formation of starch and protein compounds...live the myriads of fresh water animalculae which form the ideal food for fishes.... (Fairchild, Retention 10-11).

Here, Fairchild moves beyond the “biotic community” concept and towards the ecosystem concept, as he considers more fully both visible and invisible components of the system and their interactions. Fairchild writes as patient educator, teaching the reader about the social nature of animals in the wild, providing scientific vocabulary to name some phenomena, and explaining the reliance of each part of the system on every other part.

In 1932, the National Parks Association, perhaps in response to this rhetorical campaign, sent Frederick Law Olmstead and William P. Wharton on a fact-finding trip to the Everglades (Runte 121). In their fact-finding report, Olmstead and Wharton apply the same critical eye to the land-building process itself, with special interest in how the mangroves create coastal land with their interlocking root systems, and the action of “marine organisms” to form “coral like reefs” (Olmstead and Wharton 146). Their article summarizes a lesson learned: in the Everglades, even the layman realizes that “the processes of change, however limited, are so obviously active before one’s very

eyes...that they do seem to arrest the layman's attention and help him to realize that the world about him is not a static result" of geologic processes past, but "is a shifting scene in a continuous, eternal drama" (146).

Whether writing about plants, animals, or the land itself, campaign writers offer readers an introduction to the concepts of variety, interdependence, and constant adaptation that form the basis of ecosystemic thinking. At times, some writers even recognize the human dependence upon this ecosystem, when, for example, they allude to the mangroves and coastal islands that serve as breakers during hurricanes, an important function of coastal wetlands still underestimated today (Fairchild, *Are Everglades* 6; Coe, *Land* 162; Olmstead and Wharton 144). Writers proffer information about the flora, fauna, and geology that will help readers know what to look for when they finally arrive at the Everglades National Park, because only an astute observer can fully engage with this complex "biota" (Small 34; Olmstead and Wharton 143).

In this campaign discourse, scientists are valued as the supreme interpreters of a foreign landscape, and non-scientist writers like Coe and Douglas frequently defer to this greater authority. It was scientists who were invited to participate in a sightseeing trip, by blimp and by boat, with NPS Director Horace Albright and Congresswoman Ruth Bryan Owen, in February 1930. Fairchild wanted to ensure that the visitors fully understood the complex ecosystem that they were seeing; he feared that there was a "monotony" to the saw grass prairie, "which if not understood will lend itself to ridicule" (Fairchild to Owen, 19 Jan 1930). The intention of the trip was a "scientific" study of the park area. To interpret the raw evidence offered by the land itself, Fairchild invited the biologist Herman Bumpus, zoologist Thomas Barbour, and horticulturalist Harlan Kelsey on the

trip (Owens to Fairchild, 25 Jan 1930). Douglas, Coe, and Fairchild's wife Marian also attended - though due to limited space, Coe and Douglas had to ride in a basket below the dirigible (in physical deference to scientific authority!).

The group spent four days surveying the proposed park area. They saw hammocks from above, then mangroves on the Shark River, and the palms in Royal Palm State Park. They observed birds roosting by moonlight. At one point, a fisherman warned them of plume hunters in the area (Douglas, Wings 10). On their return, the party reported that the area "has education potentialities for the people of the United States which outweigh those offered by any existing National Park" (Bumpus, Letter to Albright). No doubt the visitors felt strongly about the educational nature of the place because of their own learning during the trip, experienced with the guidance of well-informed scientists.

In promoting the definition of the Everglades as an ecosystem, campaigners were simultaneously successful in developing the idea that parks are meant to be places for scientific study and learning. The prominent ecologist Victor Shelford expanded the rationale for this line of argument in a 1933 article in *Science*, in which he called for the creation of "first class nature sanctuaries," like National Parks, that would help scientists to study the "fluctuations" of "natural biotic communities." In a setting where factors are "allowed to go unmodified and uncontrolled," scientists would be able to determine what is normal and healthy for an ecosystem over the long term (Shelford 281). Pushed by Everglades advocates like Fairchild, Small, and Shelford, the potential of parks as places of study and learning became a prominent line of argument in National Park discourse for landscapes that could not claim great scenic value.

Re-valuing the Everglades

Throughout the campaign, scientists were instrumental in furthering the public's understanding of the Everglades as an ecosystem, but to make this definition actionable, campaigners also needed to connect that new definition to the public's most deeply held values. First, they invoked the value of the Everglades as the epitomic example of a tropical ecosystem, that is, as embodying the essential features of this type of landscape. In addition, by relying on the qualitative loci, Florida campaigners were able to characterize the previously undervalued Everglades landscape as *unique*, *original*, *threatened*, and even *irreparable*. Using Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's schema, we can see how South Florida's park campaigners connect the new definition of the Everglades as an ecosystem to a set of values deeply held by their audience.

The Everglades ecosystem is represented throughout the campaign as the essential tropical landscape. Indeed the original title of the park was the "Tropical Everglades National Park." It offers "a lure and inspiration typical of the tropics," while its flora, fauna, and climate are described as "typical of the tropics" (Coe, *The Land* 162). It is often compared to other foreign tropical locations that were exotic to the American imagination. J.K. Small compares it to "Cuba and the Bahamas" (Small, *Vegetation* 35). La Gorce notes that it lies "in practically the same latitude as Benares, India" and suggests that it "might be Africa rather than Florida" (La Gorce 33, 85). Fairchild, the tropical explorer himself, authoritatively compares it to Brazil in his piece "The Everglades National Park as an Introduction to the Tropics." He later claims that "it is the most nearly tropical area in the United States. Its plants and its animals are essentially strays from the great Caribbean basin" (Fairchild, *Retention* 4). In this way, campaigners

consistently, subtly argued that the Everglades embody the essence of tropical-ness. On these grounds it met the gold standard for admittance to the National Park system: it epitomized its type of scenery, one that was not yet represented among the parks.

Of course, tropical scenery was not represented among the parks because the Everglades were arguably the only such tropical location in the United States, which made it easy for campaigners to insist on the uniqueness of the place. This frequent valuation can best be seen in the endorsements collected by Fairchild throughout 1929 and printed in *The Miami Herald* in May 1930. Forty prominent citizens' remarks are included, with many variations expressing that "the region is unique," "absolutely" and in "many ways," for "there is nothing else like it in America" (Douglas, *Only Tropics* 42). Importantly, *its ecosystem is the source of its uniqueness*. Herman Bumpus, for example, proclaims, "Where among the existing national parks can one find the agencies of nature busily occupied in the process of rock formation and continent building? ...nowhere do we have wide level expanses teeming with minute animal life, industrious through the ages" – only here in the Everglades. Olmstead and Wharton echo the theme, pointing to the uniqueness of specific plants like mangroves and strangler figs (144), while Coe quotes Fairchild talking about the "strangeness of the alligator and the crocodile"; Fairchild also suggests that the Everglades hammocks are unique in the world, for "in no other tropical region of the world [has he] seen anything like these hammocks" (Coe, *Why Not* 5). Part of the area's uniqueness, then, derives from the very same "strangeness" of plants and animals that defined early characterizations: turned on its head, strange life forms are instead a bountiful ecosystem, now re-valued as special among all other American landscapes.

In this discourse, the Everglades are also prized for their originality, and both the landscape and its life forms are described as having a quality of ancientness, which slips into the campaign discourse through adjectives like “primeval” and “primitive.” As was the case in Great Smoky Mountains campaign, this “primeval” nature oddly does not cast that far back; rather, it recalls the time of European discovery, or the American frontier, which, in Florida, was hardly two decades past. Coe even suggests that the Everglades are still the “last great area of America’s primeval frontier” (Coe, *The Land* 162). Small’s writings on the Everglades perhaps best capture a sense of true ancientness, as he describes for readers the formation of the landscape’s features at the time that earliest man appeared on the scene, and encourages readers to think about how the landscape has changed in response to natural forces over time (Small, *Vegetation* 34). Douglas, in her more poetic rendering of the Everglades in newspaper pieces, writes that “it was the beginning of the world, where from the green and milky sea lifted and fell and lifted in slow centuries the coarse white earth,” remembering long-ago “swamps marked still with the unchanging tides...which no man has successfully marred” (Douglas, *Only Tropics* 42). One can sense in this passage Douglas’s fascination with the landscape’s ancient nature and its enduring qualities. While this valuation tends to be subtle in the campaign discourse, it would be greatly deepened and extended by Douglas’s text, *River of Grass*, over a decade later.

In their most compelling valuations, campaign writers demonstrate that this unique, original, and essentially tropical ecosystem needs to be saved because it is threatened by human interference. Arguments about threat focus on the decimation of bird populations, and the damage caused by fires. Birds, of course, had been dramatically

affected by poaching in the early 20th century, and campaign writers renew concerns about the health of bird populations. Oddly, some rely on the past issue of plume hunting, perhaps because the effects of drainage on wildlife were not yet fully understood.

Marjory Douglas's March 1931 essay, "Wings," in *The Saturday Evening Post*, makes the case that birds have not recovered from previous decades of plume hunting. She also argues that, despite bird protection laws, there is not enough enforcement to deter fishermen who sell to European and Cuban markets, or hunters who sell feathers to tourists as souvenirs. One oft-repeated fact is the near disappearance of flamingoes from the region by 1930, though they were once native to Florida (Fairchild, *Are Everglades* 29; Douglas, *Wings* 78; Coe, *Why Not* 5; La Gorce 71; Pratt 49). In her essay, Douglas sets up the National Park as the only viable solution for bird protection, because "it is unbelievably difficult to combat this seemingly implacable destruction of our rare American birds" (Douglas, *Wings* 11).

A more apparent threat, one obvious even to the casual traveler, was the threat of fire. Fires were rampant in South Florida in the late 1920's and early 1930's, especially during the dry season from 1931-1932. Some foresters speculated that fires were ignited by tourists, or by farmers and landowners attempting to clear trees from their land, leaving South Florida "reaping a somber harvest of fire and smoke" (Evans 344). The fires burned uncontrollably, until they hit sand or water, consuming up to 100,000 acres per week, including 90% of South Florida's pinelands; the loss of plant and wildlife was "enormous" (Evans 344). The botanist Edgar Wherry testifies that "no conservationist... can fail to be horrified by the utter ruin which has been wreaked on nature in most parts of that state," and he laments that "what were... magnificent

hammocks filled with luxurious tropical vegetation” had been “reduced to groups of pitiful charred stumps” (Wherry 536). Wherry, and other writers in *American Forests*, are skeptical that a National Park can even help to preserve the Everglades at this point, because the land is extraordinarily endangered – even to the point of irreparability (Editorial 351).

In truth, most of the fires in Florida were not manmade. A drought in the summer of 1931, combined with the effects of drainage, left Everglades muck exposed, and it dried to the point of combustion. Despite the visible evidence, only the boldest writers ventured to connect the facts of extreme land, animal, and plant destruction with their probable causes: drainage and development. J.K. Small, like the recent historian David McCally, writes about the nature of the Everglades in the past tense, saying that “the Everglades have, or should we say ONCE HAD” hammocks of tropical flora (Small, Everglades 83). The emphasis he places on the verb suggests that the Everglades in the park campaign era was already in a post-drainage, “developmental” state. Small goes so far as to call it a “development” state, implying the evils of what many called progress (Small, Everglades 87). He takes his analysis further in his 1929 book, *From Eden to Sahara*, in which he surveys the botanical treasures of the Everglades and documents Floridians’ “reckless, furious, even mad desire to destroy everything natural” (Small, From Eden 5). In Small’s travels in Florida, he sees many plant “skeletons” strewn across the landscape, the result of “DRAINAGE and FIRE!” that are making Florida “a barren dessert” (Small, From Eden 82).

Small’s accusations are echoed throughout the campaign, particularly by scientists. Olmstead and Wharton acknowledge that the landscape has been “more or less

completely butchered by exploitation,” and that canal building is causing salt-water intrusion and killing the delicate feeding system for wildlife. Fairchild emphasizes the harm that can be caused by “the slightest change in the conditions prevailing over this vast, shallow grass-filled pond” which can completely disrupt the entire system, such that “the whole thing might go down like a house of cards” (Fairchild, Retention 11-12). Wherry calls directly for Floridians to “refrain from draining swamps and building roads” – not just within the proposed park boundary, but in the entire region (537). Of course, such calls to action would not be heeded, but these scientists’ prophetic voices succeeded in recasting the Everglades as a critically imperiled ecosystem, one that would be beyond repair if developers persisted unchecked.

In these arguments, we see how a definition becomes actionable, when united with a widely held value set. The bountiful Everglades ecosystem, valued as essentially tropical, unique, ancient, threatened and irreparable, must be preserved. By the time the campaigners have worked their rhetorical charms, no other action will suffice. National Park status, it seems, holds at bay the drainage and development of South Florida, and protects the endangered flora and fauna. But the most novel reason for preservation of the area *as a National Park* – not a game preserve or other type of federal protection – derived from its potential as a place to study and learn about this fragile ecosystem. Indeed the park bill that passed through Congress on May 26, 1934, stated that no development could take place in the park that would interfere with the “preservation intact of the unique flora and fauna and the essential primitive natural conditions now prevailing in this area.”

The Everglades National Park had a long way to go before the public would learn firsthand about its unique ecosystem. As a result of the Depression, the park bill stipulated that funds would not be made available to the Department of the Interior for managing the park until 1939. This allowance also gave the state of Florida time to acquire large sections of land that were not already state-owned, which it would then donate to the federal government, according to the system established in the case of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park. Land acquisition, however, faced resistance from farmers, developers, and pro-drainage politicians: with the actions of Governor Spessard Holland, the original two million acre park proposed by Ernest Coe was reduced to 1.3 million acres. Though still one of America's largest parks, it excluded the upper Keys, Big Cypress Swamp, and land north of the Tamiami Trail, and created a 22,000-acre agriculture zone in the middle of the park (Grunwald 213). While it seemed to protect one-third of the historical Everglades, the plan left 80% of the greater South Florida ecosystem opened to exploitation.

But in June 1934, when the park bill passed, full preservation was still believed to be possible, and park proponents were waxing lyrical with victory. Frank Thone, announcing the creation of a "park without mountains" to readers of *The Science Newsletter*, names all the fascinating plants and creatures that will flourish in "the vast sea of grass that is the Everglades." Underlying Thone's word choice is the newly embraced definition of the Everglades as a valuable ecosystem. As scientists learned more about the workings of the Everglades, the definition evolved, from the mysterious, godforsaken swamp in the 1840's, to Dix and Macgonigle's "lake" in 1905, to Thone's "sea" in 1934. But while these terms attempted to convey the nature of the Everglades,

they still did not fully comprehend its workings. Over the next thirteen years, from 1934-1947, discoveries about the geology and hydrology of the Everglades gave rise to a new expression of the redefined Everglades, which was finally captured by Marjory Stoneman Douglas's famous phrase, "river of grass."

The Everglades: River of Grass

Marjory Stoneman Douglas played a supporting role in the campaign for Everglades National Park, through her articles in *The Saturday Evening Post* and *The Miami Herald* that actively or subtly advocated for preservation. But these contributions to the park campaign are outshined by what is considered to be her greatest work, *The Everglades: River of Grass*. Published in November 1947, the book was the thirty-fourth of sixty-five works in the popular Rivers of America series. Now known simply by its subtitle, *River of Grass*, the book offers a deeply ecological portrait of the Everglades, painting a rich picture of its unique, original, and endangered flora, fauna, geology, and hydrology. In contemporary criticism, *River of Grass* is generally understood as a dramatic departure from previous discourse about the Everglades. As Douglas's biographer, Jack Davis, puts it, "*River of Grass* redefined, even subverted" and "reconstituted" traditional understandings of the Everglades (Davis 359).

Expressing a similar view, critic Michael Branch lavishes praise on Douglas and her first book. Branch calls Douglas "the most eloquent and influential literary and activist voice raised on behalf of the Everglades." He sees her as "one of Florida's most esteemed citizens and one of America's finest literary exponents of the ecological, aesthetic, and spiritual value of wilderness" (126). He also extols her use of "literature as

her political and aesthetic vehicle” and believes that “she was among the first to awaken Americans to the beauty and importance of the Everglades” (126). Branch goes so far as to suggest that Douglas was “prescient in her grasp of the systemic nature of the Glades” as “one vast unified harmonious whole...the Kissimmee-Lake Okeechobee-Everglades watershed” (132). She was unique in understanding “the vitality and complexity of hydrological cycles” and she was “among the first” to recognize that floods and droughts were caused by human disruptions in the ecosystem (132). Branch argues that for these reasons Douglas and *River of Grass* should be fully incorporated into the Nature writing canon.

Douglas absolutely deserves high praise as an individual, for she devoted the second half of her long life to fighting for the restoration of the Everglades. And her book deserves high praise too, for as a work of literary nonfiction it offers an imaginative and lyrical look at a mistreated landscape. But I want to counter the notion suggested by Branch and Davis, that Douglas’s text breaks from previous discourse about the Everglades or that it offers a radically new or “subversive” definition of place. As we have seen, the Everglades were in a process of redefinition over many decades, and a critical rhetorical transformation took place through the 1920’s and 1930’s. I offer here a reading of Douglas’s *River of Grass* in light of the rhetorical change wrought by the park campaign. The phrase “river of grass” incisively captures a definition of the Everglades that had been in the making for several decades, but the text relies strongly on the discourse and concepts that were woven through the campaign for Everglades National Park. It builds on familiar discursive features while incorporating new scientific discoveries about the Everglades to render an increasingly nuanced definition of place.

The Rivers of America

In 1943, while the state of Florida was still trying to buy up the land for Everglades National Park almost ten years after the park bill passed, Hervey Allen, the editor of the Rivers of America series for Rinehart & Company, invited Douglas to write a book about the Miami River. In an interview with John Rothchild, Douglas recalls telling Allen, who was a good friend of hers: “Hervey, you can’t write a book about the Miami River. It’s only about an inch long.” But, eager for the publishing opportunity, she suggested that the Miami River “might be part of the Everglades” and asked Allen if she “could somehow use the Everglades to back up the Miami River.” Allen agreed that she could try to relate the two, and there, “on a writer’s whim and an editor’s decision, [she] was hooked with the idea that would consume [her] for the rest of [her] life” (Douglas, *Voice* 190). Perhaps because of Douglas’s involvement in the National Park campaign, she was already thinking of the Everglades in terms of its interconnectedness to rivers like the Miami, and saw it as having greater social exigence, too.

And perhaps because of her acquaintance with scientists like Fairchild, developed and deepened through the park campaign, Douglas knew the limits of her own knowledge about the Everglades. Soon after Allen’s visit, she began to seek experts to help with her project. John Pennekamp, editor-in-chief at the *Herald*, suggested she talk with Garald Parker, who worked for the U.S. Geological Survey in Miami. On her first visit, Douglas asked Parker for a straightforward definition of the Everglades, and he purportedly told her: “That’s easy; wherever you find a flow of fresh water south of Lake Okeechobee with a lot of saw grass growing up in it out of the rock, you can be sure that is the

Everglades” (qtd Davis 358). Parker emphasized to Douglas that the Everglades were not stagnant swamps, but rather a “subtle flow of water” (Douglas, Voice 191). Then, with the Rivers of America series in mind, she asked Parker if the Everglades could be called a river. Parker said that a river is merely “a body of fresh water moving more in one direction than the other.” Douglas looked over his maps of the Everglades, considering Parker’s basic definition, and thought: “If it’s running water and it comes curving down from Lake Okeechobee toward the Ten Thousand Islands, and if there are ridges on either side, maybe the ridges are an east bank and a west bank, and maybe the Ten Thousand Islands are a delta, and maybe this really is a river” (Douglas, Voice 191). Then she asked Parker if he thought it could reasonably be called a “river of grass,” and he said that it could.

Douglas proceeded to work on the book manuscript for the next three years, developing the definition of the Everglades as a river. The structure of her text was guided somewhat by the expectations for the Rivers of America books. The series was conceived by Constance Lindsey Skinner, and the first of its 65 books was published in 1937. Skinner viewed rivers as fundamental to the development of American society, and she wanted each book to offer a literary representation of a river and the regional civilization that grew up around it (Fitzgerald). The books follow a general template: the first chapter offers a cursory look at the river in its natural state, followed by a brief portrayal of Indian life in that region; and the majority of each book focuses on white settlement and the development of industry. Douglas’s *River of Grass* likewise describes the river’s natural state, portrays Indian life, and represents white settlement.

However, Douglas also innovates within this template significantly. Her first chapter, describing the natural conditions of the Everglades, is ten times longer than the typical naturalistic description, at fifty-one pages; no other book in the series even approaches the depth of Douglas's treatment of the natural environment (Davis 360). She also devotes hundreds of pages to describing Indian life in the Everglades and the connection of Indian culture to the natural cycles of the land; ultimately, she portrays their persecution as a deep injustice (Branch 130).²⁴ Finally, Douglas writes about white settlement with a critical eye. She questions the wisdom of white Americans' drainage and development in the Everglades, and she demands further protection for the region. Douglas's argument is also research-driven in every way. In many other Rivers of America books, "the narratives run to the highly anecdotal and often border on tall tales" (Davis 360). Douglas, however, rooted her work in up-to-date scientific and anthropological research. She worked especially closely with Parker, accompanying him on fieldwork in the Everglades as he attempted to resolve the problem of saltwater intrusion (358).²⁵

²⁴ The majority of Douglas's book covers human settlement in the Everglades, and Douglas, unlike many Rivers of America authors, includes Florida's Indians as a part of human settlement. Rather than treating them in a single chapter, she weaves their story throughout, and portrays them as righteous, humane, and virtuous in contrast to their white antagonists. In *River of Grass*, the Indian tribes also demonstrate the type of mindful relationship with the land that Douglas advocates (Branch 130). Douglas incorporated extensive research on the Calusa, Tequesta, Mayaimi, Milasuki, and Seminole, using recent anthropological data gathered by John Goggin, professor of archeology at the University of Florida, and David True, secretary of the Florida Historical Society (Douglas, Voice 192).

²⁵ Saltwater intrusion began to affect South Florida's artesian wells when drainage became partly successful in the 1910's. As canals channeled fresh water from the surface out to sea, the water table lowered, allowing saltwater to flow upstream with the tides and penetrate the soft limestone rock. At first, the city of Miami moved its drinking wells further inland, but as drainage continued, saltwater spread throughout the Biscayne Aquifer, Miami's only source of potable water. It was Gerald Parker who determined that the freshwater table needed to be held at 2.5 feet above sea level to stave off intrusion. As a result, the Army Corps built "saltwater control dams" on canals that drained to the sea near Miami, which held the water table upstream at the necessary 2.5 feet (McCally 145-47).

In this respect, Douglas arguably works in a different genre than preceding Rivers of America books, which offer “local color” and literary celebration, rather than critical history or political argument. Branch calls *River of Grass* an “epic literary environmental history”: epic in its scope, literary in its lyrical style, environmental in its concerns, and historical in its content (Branch 127). Indeed Douglas seems to be responding to many of the purposes for writing environmental history outlined by William Cronon in “The Uses of Environmental History,” especially the desire to “contribute to contemporary environmental politics,” to help readers “understand the past...[and] change the future,” and to “improv[e] human relationships with nature” (Cronon, Uses 3, 7). She also strives to “speak as much for the earth and the rest of creation as for the human past” (7). In these ways, the genre choice serves as a vehicle for Douglas to respond to a recurrent local situation – the degradation of her natural surroundings – by channeling her message through careful, research based, historical argument. Cronon, of course, is writing about academic environmental history, while Douglas, in filtering her history through a poetic sensibility, succeeds in achieving the literary style that draws a wide public readership to hear her argument. *River of Grass* made a major contribution to the Rivers of America series by working through a different generic structure, one that provided a platform for a careful, research-based argument that the Everglades is, indeed, a “river of grass.”

The Capstone of a Discourse

From the opening lines of *The Everglades: River of Grass*, Douglas announces her definitional project: “There *are* no other Everglades in the world. They *are*, they *have always been*, one of the unique regions of the earth, remote, never wholly known.

Nothing anywhere else *is* like them” (5, emphasis added). The use of being verbs in this opening and throughout the chapter signal that Douglas is speaking about the essential character and enduring qualities of the Everglades. By casting back to an infinite past, Douglas suggests that she offers an essential truth about this place. She also emphasizes the absolute singularity of the Everglades. She later notes that in the dictionary, under “glades,” one finds the description, “as in the Everglades” (8). In this way, she suggests that the Everglades have become self-defining, “their own, and only, best definition” (8). They cannot be ascribed old meanings like “swamp,” but must be studied from within to determine their essence. The opening paragraph continues, reaching its definitional declaration at a crescendo:

They are unique also in the simplicity, the diversity, the related harmony of the forms of life they enclose. The miracle of the light pours over the green and brown expanse of saw grass and of water, shining and slow-moving below, the grass and water that is the meaning and the central fact of the Everglades of Florida. *It is a river of grass.* (5-6, emphasis added)

In this now famous paragraph, Douglas lays out the definition, the “meaning and the central fact,” of the Everglades of Florida: saw grass, moving water, and interrelated life forms. These “facts” of the Everglades form an ecosystem that is a whole world unto itself, the critical understanding that was at the heart of the National Park campaign. The definition is fundamentally the same as that offered by previous writers, as early as Dix and MacGonigle in 1905. But where Dix and MacGonigle offered the misnomer “lake” and park campaigners the unfamiliar “biota,” Douglas offers a word that propels the

definition to new clarity. In using the term “river,” she summons the many associations that readers already have of rivers – indeed from reading books like the Rivers of America series - as natural places that are essential to human thriving. The choice of “river” allows Douglas to educate her readers by building on their expectations, and, later in the book, to make her full argument for restoration.

Using the same strategy employed by the park campaigners, Douglas offers this true meaning of the Everglades as a correction to a definition that has been based on scientific misunderstanding. She recalls the godforsaken swamp in language utterly familiar, a “region described as a series of vast, miasmatic swamps, poisonous lagoons, huge dismal marshes...labyrinths of dark trees hung and looped about with snakes and dripping mosses,” the source of “malignant tropical fevers and malarias” (6). She also recalls the “the mysterious Everglades,” a phrase used for so long that it has become “a meaningless platitude” (6). Douglas assures the reader that the Everglades are only mysterious to those “by whom their fundamental nature is not understood,” and thereby invites her reader to exceed such ignorance (6). By the time Douglas’s words reached their audience in late 1947, this move of dismissal and replacement was a tradition evidenced as early as Dix and MacGonigle’s writing, and used consistently throughout the National Park campaign. Douglas’s move is by this time a routine of Everglades discourse – the appropriate and recognizable entre into the arena.

After rehearsing an accepted definition in the first pages, replacing the old one, the first chapter is structured to educate readers about the components of the Everglades and how they work together as a system. Though Douglas still does not use the word *ecosystem* (recall that it would not be used widely until the 1950’s), her way of seeing

and of thinking about the Everglades is deeply ecosystemic. The first chapter is structured around the physical elements of the Everglades, each with a section devoted to it: “The Grass,” “The Water,” “The Rock,” and “Life on the Rock.” With this structure Douglas exceeds even the campaign writers, offering a systematic approach to a lesson in ecosystemic thinking, as she details the evolution of each element and its relationship to the others.

Douglas is able to offer much more information about the saw grass, water flow, and rock formation that simply was not known at the time of the campaign, such as the discovery that the Everglades water flowed from Lake Okeechobee. She explains the importance of this hydrology to the reader, dispelling the notion that the Everglades are fed by subterranean streams: “If Okeechobee and the lakes and marshes north that contribute to it, if rivers and swamps and ponds had not existed to hoard all that excess water in a great series of reservoirs by which the flow was constantly checked and regulated, there would have been no Everglades” (25). The system, she explains, is one of careful equilibrium, “like a set of scales on which the forces of the seasons, of the sun and the rains, the winds, the hurricanes, and the dewfalls, were balanced so that the life of the vast grass and all its encompassed and neighbor forms were kept secure” (25). Even without the term “ecosystem,” Douglas demonstrates the key concept that Fobes named in his study of lakes – the striving of all interrelated life forms toward stability and equilibrium, such that a small change ripples through the entire “microcosm.” One is reminded of Fairchild’s “house of cards” liable to fall, a house that now includes the hydrological system, too.

While Douglas unfolds the secret workings of the Everglades, she relies on other routine markers of Everglades discourse built up through the National Park campaign. Like the naturalists Bailey and Simpson, she recognizes that “life is everywhere here too, infinite and divisible,” and she develops the sense of abundant plant and animal life using the amplifying lists that were a staple of campaign writers (46). In a list that looks almost exactly like one printed seventeen years earlier in her May 1930 *Miami Herald* article, Douglas writes that the “jungle trees” of the hammocks include “stranglers...smooth red-brown gumbo limbos, ilex, eugenias, satinwoods, mastic, cherry laurel, paradise trees, the poisonous manchineel, the poisonwood, the Florida boxwood and hundreds more” (47). There is likewise an insistent naming of insects, birds, and other creatures. Given the extended space of literary nonfiction, Douglas describes many of these plants and animals at greater length in the section “Life on the Rock” (39-56). Notably, the writing in this section is driven by active verbs. She describes plants growing, rotting, and choking, and animals wading, flying, sliding, and darting, such that the Everglades is rendered a place that could not be mistaken for empty or “monotonous,” as Fairchild once feared.

As Douglas builds her case for restoration in the Everglades, she also relies on the familiar qualitative loci to connect with readers’ intrinsic values, and displays an Everglades that is essentially tropical, unique, deeply primitive, and above all, threatened even to the point of irreparability. However, unlike her campaign predecessors, who were eager to meet the gold standard for National Parkdom, Douglas does not insist that the Everglades are entirely tropical, but rather that some of their defining features are essentially tropical. Ever the patient educator, Douglas explains that while geographers

draw strict lines for where the temperate, sub-tropical, and tropical zones lie, the Everglades demonstrate qualities of all three: the vegetation of the hammocks “changes...from temperate to subtropic, to the full crammed tropic of the south,” at the tip of the Florida peninsula, which was the area that park campaigners focused on most often (52). Douglas especially emphasizes the relationship between the South Florida landscape and those of the true tropics, noting that the Everglades vegetation and animal life were actually transplanted by hurricanes and migrations from “Cuba and the West Indies” (47). She also notes that the Everglades have an essentially tropical climate. In particular, “the laws of the rain and of the seasons here are tropic laws,” divided as they are into the wet and dry seasons (15). Its tropical essence is reinforced in her descriptions of the early Calusa culture, when she describes how landscape and climate gave rise to a different way of life compared to those of other Indian cultures found in the United States (68-70). In this way, Douglas builds on the discourse of “tropical nature” initiated during the park campaign, while also amending it to reflect new scientific understandings of the region in its vast complexity.

Douglas also places great value on this landscape as unique, which is evident from the very opening line, as noted above. The Everglades’ uniqueness derives from the ecosystem itself. Importantly, Douglas claims that they are not just unique in the United States, as was often the rallying cry of the campaign, but also that they are unique in the whole world. Douglas only occasionally relates this uniqueness to *strangeness*, as in the case of the Heliconius butterfly, which is called “the strangest of all butterflies” (48). But this means only that it is “the only one of its tropical kind on this mainland” (48). Douglas does not generally find this landscape strange; rather, it is a perfectly coherent

and comprehensible system that is unique because its seeming complexity is actually so explicable. It is in the careful, deliberate explanation of its workings that Douglas supports her dramatic opening claim to its uniqueness.

Douglas extensively demonstrates the Everglades' qualities of ancientness, a form of qualitative appeal that played a relatively subtle and underdeveloped role in campaign arguments. While campaigners were quick to say that the place felt primeval or primitive, Douglas is able to build on this locus using new information about the geological origins of South Florida, learned from her tutelage with Gerald Parker. Critic Michael Branch suggests that Douglas's opening chapter is "remarkable for its powerful imaginative reconstruction of the ancient, subtropical wilderness that exists beneath and before what is now Florida" (Branch 128). Douglas describes the formation of the rock basin that lies beneath the Everglades, its existence through different geological ages, and how gradually plants and animals began to evolve. She repeats time markers, crafting sentences that flow like time itself: "Year after year after year, hundreds after hundreds of years, not so long as any geologic age but long in botanic time, far longer than anyone can be sure of, the saw grass grew. Four thousand years..." (Douglas, *Everglades* 11). The ancient landscape is perhaps what Douglas really wants readers to understand - that the Everglades were complete and thriving, long before the arrival of humans, especially white humans (Branch 129). She declares their constancy: "They were changeless. They are changed" - by people, of course (Douglas, *Everglades* 8).

The main thrust of Douglas's argument derives from this "truth." Douglas's display of a unique and ancient tropical ecosystem ultimately supports her case that, above all, the Everglades are threatened by the actions of American civilization. Douglas

demonstrates first that the Everglades were pure and viable in their natural state, saying, for example, that “the water of all these rivers was clean and clear...all these rivers were known to early sailors as ‘sweet water rivers,’ not a name but a description” (28). Later, she makes the case in the last four chapters that drainage and development have deeply harmed the Everglades ecosystem. She begins, of course, with the destruction of plume birds, telling the story of women’s hats, destroyed rookeries, and the slain Audubon warden, Guy Bradley (278-80). Then, she takes on drainage, telling the stories of Hamilton Disston and Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, followed by the stories of the 1926 and 1928 hurricanes and the levying of Lake Okeechobee. She considers the lake imprisoned, and the consequences ominous: “The lake water, which for so many centuries had flowed southward in the great arc of the saw grass river, was now impounded. Only the rains could flood the Everglades now” (348).

When the drainage program has been fully established in her narrative, Douglas begins the last chapter, “The Eleventh Hour,” with a harsh declaration: “The Everglades were dying” (349). But, she adds, “the cities did not feel it” (349) until, finally, the “choking acrid smoke” of the rampant fires of the 1930’s encroached on their homes and farms (376), and the saltwater intrusion that Gerald Parker was studying began to contaminate their drinking water (375). Douglas emphasizes that each problem was “never just a local problem, to be settled in makeshift bits and pieces” because “the Everglades were one thing, one vast unified harmonious whole, in which the old subtle balance...had been destroyed” (377). For Douglas, a threatened Everglades means a threatened South Florida, including its cities and suburbs, and here Douglas builds on a point made only subtly in the park campaign: people in South Florida are as

interdependent on the thriving of the Everglades as any other creature. “The nature of this whole region and the life of the coastal cities” must be considered together (377).

In these final chapters, Douglas furthers her argument in part by questioning some of the terms that have enabled the drainage program to proceed. Literary nonfiction has the tremendous capacity to display our discourse and our rhetorical inheritances to us, and in *River of Grass*, Douglas commands this function of literary nonfiction powerfully. Like J.K. Small, Douglas does not shy away from naming drainage as the problem, nor does she use the positive and obscuring word “reclamation.” Instead she calls attention to the word itself. “The word again was ‘drainage,’” she writes, using quotations to direct the reader’s attention to the word that, over decades, had become a term that stymied debate and authorized many thoughtless projects. In one passage she outright mocks the idea, saying it was only a vague “school boy’s logic” that drove the whole operation: “The drainage of the Everglades would be a Great Thing. Americans did Great Things. Therefore Americans would drain the Everglades” (286). Douglas puts “drainage” alongside “frontier” and “progress” as terms that have held sway in policy-making, with little rationale behind them. Early drainage efforts, for example, were characterized by “fine confusion and talk of progress,” rather than any scientific study of the Everglades themselves, “the intricate and subtle relation of soil, of fresh water and evaporation, of run off and salt intrusion, and all the consequences of disturbing the fine balance nature had set up in the past four thousand years” (287).

One of Douglas’s major arguments is that the Everglades were acted upon before they were completely understood through scientific means, which Douglas suggests is the type of research that should inform policy-making. Throughout the book, her

descriptions, like those of the park campaign, rely on scientific authority to make claims about the Everglades ecosystem. Many of her claims begin with or are interrupted by the phrase “they say” to indicate an external authority. For example, when describing South Florida’s geology, Douglas writes, “They say that was late in the earth’s history, a mere geologic yesterday. The Pliocene, they call it...They think it was nineteen million years ago” (34). Sometimes, the scientists and anthropologists hidden in “they” are declared, as in the general “the scientists are sure of the ice” (37). But science can be misused, too. Douglas also describes the harsh conditions on industrialized sugar cane farms, where “everything was worked out with scientific exactitude,” making the endeavor of farming work *against* the natural landscape (355). What Douglas wants to see in the Everglades is a science that works with and for the landscape. She calls for a unified system of water control to replace one that “is currently inadequate and confusing,” and that will allow excess water from Lake Okeechobee, unused by the cities, to be discharged into the Everglades and “permit the river of grass to flow again with sweet water” (382-83).

Douglas’s other argument is about every citizen’s ongoing responsibility for the Everglades, and she pointedly writes that it was “inertia and pigheadedness, greed and willfulness” that caused the destruction of the Everglades (376). Solutions have been slow in coming, Douglas argues, simply because the people in South Florida “could not get it through their heads that they had produced some of the worst conditions themselves, by their lack of cooperation, their selfishness, their mutual distrust and refusal to consider the truth of the whole situation” – that is, the truth of the meaning of the Everglades (383-84). One is reminded of Rachel Carson’s fable of a spring without birdsong and its closing line, “The people had done it themselves” (Carson 3). However,

Douglas writes about these negative qualities in the past tense, as if they existed in a long-ago era, rather than just months ago when she submitted the book manuscript (the text covers events to 1945). Yet she leaves readers hopeful. “There is a balance in man also, one which has set against his greed and his inertia and his foolishness,” she writes, “his courage, his will, his ability to slowly and painfully learn, and to work together” (Douglas, *Everglades* 385). Indeed she strives to help readers understand the past and change the future, which, according to Cronon, is one of the main purposes of environmental history. Importantly, though the National Park was already approved and in formation at the time of her writing, Douglas understands that this single act of preservation, which relies on limited and artificial boundaries, is not enough to “save” the Everglades, or South Florida: her epideictic text anticipates the deliberative work of future decades of restoration.

River of Grass captures and displays a discourse of place that developed over time, from the origins of the Florida Society of Natural History in the early 1920’s, through the campaign for Everglades National Park from 1928-1934. Douglas uses the basic definition of the Everglades as an ecosystem established during this era; further, she relies on customary rhetorical routines of Everglades discourse to reinforce the dismissal of an old definition of place and strengthen a revised one. She also draws on the same qualitative loci that campaigners used to help audiences revalue this misunderstood landscape. Importantly, *River of Grass* extends this discourse usefully through the affordances of literary environmental history. By including up-to-date scientific research available at the time of her writing, Douglas offers a more nuanced understanding of what the Everglades ecosystem entails when she rechristens it a “river of grass.” A friend

of Douglas's said years later that "with those three words [she] changed everybody's knowledge and educated the world as to what the Everglades meant" (Douglas, *Voice* 191). Rather than setting a precedent, however, *River of Grass* serves as the capstone of a regional discourse: together, the National Park campaign and *River of Grass* form the rhetorical foundation on which future efforts to save the Everglades would rely.

The Legacy of the Everglades National Park Campaign

River of Grass flew off the shelves when it appeared in print on November 6, 1947. The first printing of 5,000 copies was sold out by Christmas, and two more printings followed in December and February (Fitzgerald). Its popularity was no doubt spurred by recent events. The summer and fall of 1947 brought historic rainfall and two hurricanes to South Florida, reflooding the historical Everglades. While there were no casualties, the "water situation" quickly exceeded the infrastructure in place to manage it (Grunwald 218). And then, on December 7, 1947, the fanfare of the Everglades National Park dedication ceremony brought the wonders of South Florida into American living rooms.

Even as President Truman pointed to unique ecological features of the Everglades landscape in his dedication speech, he also used the opportunity to speak about the wise use of resources that continued to drive American development. He talked about conserving water and soil, advising Americans: "If we waste water through failure to build hydroelectric plants, we shall burn our reserves of oil and coal needlessly. If we waste our soil through erosion and failure to replenish our fields, we shall destroy the source of our people's food" (Truman). In the context of the Everglades, "wasting water"

meant “allowing it to flow to the ocean without first watering crops; wasting the soil meant allowing it to burn up after drainage, before it nourished vegetables and sugarcane” (Davis 394). Just as the Great Smoky Mountains National Park safeguarded a watershed that enabled manufacturing outside park boundaries, so the Everglades National Park safeguarded a water system for agriculture while freeing up surrounding lands for development.

While Truman gave his speech, the Army Corps of Engineers was drafting a water control plan that would provide water to the Everglades Park while strategically draining lands outside the park boundary, creating the agricultural land between Lake Okeechobee and the park known as the Everglades Agricultural Area. In this water control system, water flowed first to the growing city of Miami, then to agricultural lands, and then, what was left, through the Everglades. The Army Corps began to construct this water control system in 1948. It was in many ways the type of system that Douglas calls for at the end of *River of Grass*, but over decades it proved to be inadequate to her stated goal of restoring the natural hydrology of the Everglades (Davis 394).

Like many writers of literary nonfiction about the environment, Douglas’s increased ethos allowed her to take on leadership roles and become an effective political advocate for a place she loved. She became a “tireless guardian of the Glades” and continued to write against unchecked urban development that encroached on the hydrological system. In the 1960’s, when the Everglades National Park was threatened by lack of water, Douglas, at age 79, founded the group Friends of the Everglades to fight for better hydration of the park grounds. In the 1970’s, she led Friends of the Everglades to defeat plans for a jetport in Big Cypress Swamp (Branch 134). As the conservationism

of the early 20th century gave way to the environmentalism of the later 20th century, Douglas gradually came to denounce the conservationist philosophy behind water control schemes.

Douglas recognized that ever-expanding water control systems were not in keeping with the definition of place that she had advanced, and that no manmade system could adequately achieve the balance of Nature. As a consequence, Douglas organized citizens in favor of land acquisition, the re-flooding of drained areas of the historical Everglades, the restoration of the Kissimmee River, and the cleanup of agricultural pollution (Branch 134). Late in her life, Douglas received many awards and honors, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1993. The most meaningful act of recognition, though, was the creation of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Wilderness Area in Everglades National Park in 1997, which set aside 109,000 acres of saw grass prairie as completely natural wilderness. Here was an accolade that truly affirmed the ecological Everglades and the capacity of Nature to maintain its own balance. Near the end of her long life, Douglas wrote, “Florida has made great strides...but the degradation of the environment has become institutionalized, embedded in the nature of things” (Davis 25). She died in 1998, shortly after her 108th birthday.

The definition of the Everglades as an ecological system remains at the core of the Everglades National Park and its message to visitors. Arriving at the Ernest F. Coe Visitor’s Center, one sees, emblazoned on the first exhibit, the full opening paragraph of *River of Grass*, announcing “There are no other Everglades in the world...It is a river of grass.” Interestingly, a large, colorful mural greets visitors, condensing all of the Everglades’ many landscapes and most popular species into a single illustration. While

manatees, flamingoes, alligators, tree snails, saw grass, and palm trees would never be found all in one photograph, the illustration displays the biological diversity that the park campaigners argued so compellingly to protect. The campaign is remembered in a plaque on the outdoor viewing deck, recalling “The First Biological Park” and memorializing selections from Truman’s dedication speech that highlight the park’s “natural abundance.” Before exiting, visitors pause to learn about the park’s endangered hydrology. An electronic map illuminates Lake Okeechobee and shows the path of water in the pre-drainage Everglades, followed by today’s much more complicated flow of water, first to neighboring cities, then to agricultural lands, then to the parkland. By pushing a display of buttons, visitors can hear an engineer, an environmentalist, a park ranger, and a homeowner talk about their perspectives on water control in South Florida.

Outside, walking the Anhinga Trail, signs educate visitors about how alligators adapt to the dry season, carving out long “sloughs” with their powerful bodies where water collects, and a diversity of wildlife gathers to drink, including many species of wading birds. A walk on the Gumbo-Limbo Trail takes visitors through a hammock recovering from a natural fire, and signage asks them to look for the famous strangler fig, orange tree snails that Charles Simpson studied, and other native plants. Deeper into the park, overlooking the Marjory Stoneman Douglas Wilderness Area, visitors can learn about Royal Palm Hammock and the saw grass prairie, lessons complemented by fitting excerpts from *River of Grass*. Douglas’s book takes on a unique relationship to the institution in which it has become so wrapped up. While it did not “cause” the Everglades National Park, today it underwrites much of the educational work that the park does. At every turn the park strives to meet the standard that park campaigners originally

envisioned for it: a place where the public would learn more about the complexities of this unique and threatened ecosystem. It is supported in that work by Douglas's text, now the quintessence of the Everglades canon, though "no one, including Douglas, foresaw...the evolving importance of her book" (Davis 359).

It may be time, however, for the Everglades to undergo another discursive transformation, at least in its defining phrase. Douglas enthusiasts like Michael Branch claim that "Douglas's epic literary environmental history...continues to have an important impact upon policy makers at the highest levels" (134). An analysis of the "river of grass" definition in contemporary public policy arguments is outside the scope of this current project, but historian David McCally argues that the dominance of the "river of grass" phrase has become limiting in imagining new policies "because it provides an inaccurate description of the system" (83). In McCally's view, efforts have been skewed toward preserving only the saw grass prairie that the "river of grass" invokes (176). McCally's concern is that the phrase "wrongly suggests homogeneity, little hinting at the diversity of flora and fauna that once existed" in the historical Everglades and which many advocates would like to see restored (83). He calls for a new phrase that will better capture the "rich and varied pre-drainage environment," which has been forgotten, though Douglas understood it so well (83, 180). McCally recommends instead "the acceptance of an islands-and-seas image" that "would contribute greatly to the establishment of a sustainable system," by conveying the Everglades ecosystem in a way that makes clear the interdependence of various landscapes that compose the whole (176). But if McCally's assertion is true, it is only because "river of grass" has become disconnected from the definitional argument that Douglas makes through her book.

This study of *River of Grass* and its relationship to the Everglades National Park adds a new dimension to our understanding of the ways that literary nonfiction makes epideictic arguments about landscapes. In the two previous cases, literary nonfiction texts promoted definitional discourses that were then channeled through the rhetorical ecologies of their respective park campaigns. The case of the Everglades, however, demonstrates that a text can deepen a definitional discourse after an act of preservation has already happened. *River of Grass* replaces the old “mysterious godforsaken swamp,” once and for all, with an increasingly nuanced ecological understanding; it *extends* the definition developed through the work of scientists and the campaign for Everglades National Park. Further, *River of Grass* demonstrates the capacity of literary nonfiction to display a troubling rhetorical inheritance that has contributed to the environmental damage of a landscape. And, the case of *River of Grass* suggests that an epideictic text can have a lasting role, even becoming a literary capstone that continues to underwrite future actions towards an endangered place.

This case study also confirms that a definitional discourse can support a specific line of argument for preservation. The first National Park campaigns highlighted the topos of aesthetics, relying on the sublime qualities of the Yosemite Valley, preserved for the purpose of restoring the nation’s soul. The campaign for the Great Smoky Mountains, uplifting an economically oppressed region, emphasized the topos of economic resources, suggesting that a park could be used to help a region develop and prosper. In the Everglades, a definitional discourse about a rich and varied ecosystem proved especially compatible with arguments about the scientific value of preservation. This line of argument had previously taken the limited form of appeals for watershed protection to

preserve scenery or enable industry, but in the campaign for the Everglades, it developed into a robust appeal that set a precedent for future arguments for preservation based on the value of scientific study and education about threatened ecosystems.

In 1928, at the dawn of the Everglades park campaign, Ernest Coe thought that the Everglades were “the last large natural area of national-park caliber left in the country [that would] make a unique park” (Pratt 49). Hardly the last, thirty-one more scenic parks have been added to the National Park system since the Everglades park bill was passed in 1934. As the National Park movement developed into the mid-twentieth century, social and economic changes enabled greater numbers of people to travel to National Parks, and this shift in cultural practice influenced the lines of argument available to campaigners in their quest to preserve new types of landscapes that were not yet represented in the park system. In another remote, flat, and watery place, campaigners would come to rely on arguments about the historic and recreational value of parks in their effort to preserve Minnesota’s Boundary Waters.

Chapter 4 The Boundary Waters: Preserving an Experience

On January 8, 1971, almost a quarter century after the opening of Everglades National Park, Congress approved the legislation to create Voyageurs National Park on the international border between Minnesota and Ontario, in the area known as the Boundary Waters. Though this region was, like the Everglades, remote, flat, and watery, the park represented a very different type of landscape in the national system of preservation: a forested lakeland, in the northern reaches of the Midwest, characterized by a chain of interconnected waterways, numerous small islands, and extensive forests of pine, aspen, and birch. Upon signing the bill, President Richard Nixon proclaimed Voyageurs “uniquely scenic and historic” and a “superlative wilderness area.” Significantly, Nixon highlighted Voyageurs as “rich in the history of the early, exciting exploration of our great country” and a park that would “serve as a living legacy, linking generation to generation and century to century” (NPS, Voyageurs). The language of Nixon’s commemorative remarks on the park bill’s passage reflects the language of wilderness recreation and historical preservation that characterized the definitional discourse of the Boundary Waters and shaped the campaign for the new National Park.

The leader of the campaign, the Voyageurs National Park Association, celebrated a hard-won victory. While the campaign for Yosemite National Park had been comparatively brief, lasting about fourteen months, and campaigns for the Great Smoky Mountains and the Everglades each lasted about five years, the campaign for Voyageurs took nearly nine years, from the summer of 1962 until the bill’s passage in 1971. And, as in other cases, the park would not be officially formed until adequate land could be purchased and donated to the federal government, which would take another four years,

until April 1975. At the time, participants identified the protracted campaign as a result of tensions between preservationists, who sought the park, and industrialists, who supported multiple use policies; and between preservationists and local residents, who perceived a threat to their livelihoods and property. These tensions, however, are rooted in the larger challenges of the rhetorical landscape. From a rhetorical perspective, the campaign was protracted because it was difficult to argue for park status in this region using lines of argument that had supported previous park campaigns.

Specifically, the Boundary Waters landscape did not possess the sublime aesthetics that had traditionally characterized candidates for the park system. Like the Everglades, the region was flat and watery, lacking stunning geologic formations, mountain vistas, and lush valleys. However, unlike the Everglades, the climate was not ideal for year-round tourism; the harsh winters of northern Minnesota lasted half the year. Also unlike the Everglades, the Boundary Waters ecosystem, while rich in wild plant and animal life, was well-represented in other parts of the Northern, Midwestern, and Eastern United States; with pine trees, birch, oak, common deer, beavers, bears, and geese, it was difficult to claim that the area boasted a unique ecosystem. Furthermore, the economic benefits of a National Park in the region were unclear. While the proponents of the Great Smoky campaign sought an alternative to the largely subsistence economy of Southern Appalachia's interior, Northern Minnesota had an established pulpwood logging industry at the proposed park site; it also benefitted from summer tourism at nearby recreational areas, including the Boundary Waters Canoe Area in Superior National Forest. It was difficult to argue that a National Park would successfully bring enough new tourism to this remote area to make up for the losses to the paper industry, and it was questionable

whether residents would welcome more visitors to their quiet region. In light of the challenges posed by these specific geographic, social, and economic circumstances, park proponents needed to draw on a different available means of persuasion.

In their search for rhetorical means, campaigners in the Boundary Waters embraced a line of argument that had recently been successful in bringing many new areas under the purview of the National Park Service: the topos of *historical value*. By the 1960's, the National Park system included many sites that preserved significant places in America's history. The first National Historic Site added to the park system was Ford's Theater in 1932, and the mid-20th century saw a great increase in the number of such National Historic Sites, like Lincoln's birthplace, and even larger National Historic Parks, like Washington's Headquarters in Morristown, NJ. Between 1945 and 1970, thirty-eight such sites were added to the National Park System (National Park System, National Park System Areas).²⁶ Though campaigners in the Boundary Waters sought a *scenic* National Park, rather than an historic site, they capitalized on this flourishing trend by amplifying the region's significance to the frontier history of the United States.

Specifically, park campaigners celebrated the role of the Boundary Waters in the colonial era fur trade. In the late 1600's and throughout the 1700's, French and English fur traders used the region's system of interconnected waterways to meet Indian trading parties, who exchanged furs for colonial goods. These European fur traders were known as "voyageurs," which means "traveler" in French, and their primary trade route was dubbed "the Voyageurs Highway." A century after the fur trade ended, the name

²⁶ This number indicates areas that were designated as either a National Historic Site or a National Historic Park at the time of their authorization. It does not include sites that were originally brought into the park system as National Monuments, National Battlefields, or National Memorials and later re-designated as National Historic Sites or Historic Parks. Including these re-designated sites, the number of historic areas added to the park system in the mid-20th century is much higher.

“voyageur,” carried romantic associations. Historian Grace Lee Nute is credited with popularizing the voyageurs and making them into a romantic symbol of the northern frontier wilderness. As a doctoral student in history at Harvard University in the 1920’s, Nute studied under Frederick Jackson Turner, and she was highly influenced by his ideas about the importance of the frontier to American identity and its “closing” in the 1870’s. After graduating, Nute became a manuscripts curator at the Minnesota Historical Society, where she first encountered the archives of the fur trade. Based on these archives, she wrote *The Voyageur*, published in 1931, and *The Voyageur’s Highway*, published in 1941 (Publisher’s Note).

While rich in historically accurate detail, both books also create the voyageur as a character, “the singing canoe man who paddled the watery thoroughfares...while guiding explorers and transporting fur traders with their cargo through the verdant forests” (Publisher’s Note). Nute’s voyageur “imparted to the life of the fur-trading regime a sparkle that can be caught even at this distant day” (Nute 48). Her character came with a costume - a red cape, a feather in his cap, a beaded pouch with fringed sash to carry a pipe (48, 55). He also had a lively French slang, and a soundtrack, the *chansons* that she recites at length in her books (50-55). Nute attributed a prominent role to the voyageurs in exploring the western reaches of the continent. Historian David Backes argues that as a consequence of Nute’s restoration, the voyageurs may have had a greater influence on the Rainy Lake watershed as “a symbol, invoked by tourist promoters and wilderness preservationists,” than they did as travelers in their own era (Backes, Canoe 11).

In addition to the topos of historical value, park campaigners in the Boundary Waters drew on the topos of *recreational value*. Several decades before the Voyageurs

Park campaign of the 1960's, the eastern portion of the so-called Voyageur's Highway developed a coherent and politically-charged regional identity of its own as the Quetico-Superior. A popular canoeing and camping destination in the 1920's, 30's, and 40's, the Quetico-Superior was defined as a wilderness with important recreational value. These eastern portions of the Boundary Waters were preserved in the early 20th century through the creation of Superior National Forest in the U.S. and Quetico Provincial Park in Canada. In the struggle for the National Park, campaigners extended the definition of "wilderness" along the Voyageurs Highway, arguing that the western portion of the Boundary Waters was also a wilderness with recreational value and that a National Park in the western lakes of the Boundary Waters was an important final step in preserving the entire Voyageurs Highway in its untrammeled state. Like the campaign for Yosemite National Park, campaigners for the Boundary Waters extended a definition that had already applied for several decades to a segment of the region and argued for the need to preserve the integrity of the whole.

The definitional discourse creating a distinct Boundary Waters region relies strongly on the term *wilderness* and demonstrates a transformation of the wilderness concept over many decades by a multitude of writers, speakers, and artists. While many regional rhetors contributed to shaping this discourse, one holds a particularly special place: Sigurd Olson, a resident of Ely, Minnesota, who was well-known in national conservation circles in the 1950's, when he served as the ecologist for the Izaak Walton League, as a member of the U.S. President's Quetico-Superior Advisory Committee, and as the President of the National Parks Association. Olson had a reputation as a great diplomat, with jovial and gentle ways, and an expansive knowledge of the Boundary

Waters region. Today, however, Olson is primarily remembered as a Nature writer who channeled the Boundary Waters experience into his writing. Olson's *The Singing Wilderness* (1956), the first of his six books, takes a stance of wonder towards Nature; it expresses his belief in man's fundamental connection to the natural world and to other generations through the experience of wilderness. Building on the work of earlier writers, Olson defines the entire Boundary Waters region as a wilderness, meaning a place that is full of natural beauty, historical significance, and recreational potential. Defined as a place apart, wilderness exists in contrast to city environments and offers a place where busy modern families can enjoy time outdoors together – time that is not just desirable, but essential to human well-being.

None of Olson's book-length literary nonfiction, and few of his magazine articles, advocate for specific policies, such as the creation of a National Park, and Olson's biographer, David Backes, suggests that Olson tended to see his writing about wilderness experience as separate from his political advocacy (Backes, *Wilderness* 245). Yet Backes argues that Olson's work played a much greater persuasive role in its discursive setting. Today, Olson's work is most often compared to Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* (1949). At the time of its printing, however, Olson's work reached a popular audience much more quickly than Leopold's did. Until the mid-1960's, *The Singing Wilderness* outsold Leopold's text at more than twice the rate; *A Sand County Almanac* did not become popular until it was reissued as a paperback in 1966, enabling its easy circulation in university classrooms. Interestingly, Backes claims that Olson's work "played an important role in sowing the cultural field that *A Sand County Almanac* later reaped, for without a sense of beauty, joy, connectedness, and wonder, there is little motivation to

pay heed to, much less live, a land ethic” (Backes, *Wilderness* 257). Backes’s claim suggests that Olson’s work helped to shape the greater environmental discourse into which it entered. Put another way, Olson’s writing worked for the same purpose as his political advocacy: the preservation of wilderness through the delivery of a consistent message about what “wilderness” means, and why it is necessary to human thriving to preserve it.

As we have seen, such claims to influence about Nature writing are commonplace expressions based on a belief in the power of language to influence political change, rather than on an analysis of a text’s rhetorical workings or an examination of the proximate effects of its circulation. It is this claim to Olson’s influence that I will explore further here, by examining the role that Olson’s writings about wilderness played in the campaign for a National Park in the Boundary Waters. In previous chapters, we have seen examples of park campaigns that used the specificities of their rhetorical situation to introduce new ways of thinking about the possibilities of parklands for American culture. Similarly, in this chapter, I demonstrate how the arguments used in the *Voyageurs* National Park campaign are in some respects specific to its rhetorical situation: drawing on Olson’s writings and the wider regional discourse in which he participated, the *Voyageurs* campaign emphasized the specificities of the northern waterscape, the history of this region, and the social circumstances of mid-century modernity, and these specificities allowed campaigners to emphasize the value of a park for historic preservation and recreational experience.

Defining the Boundary Waters

The Boundary Waters region is composed of a chain of interconnected lakes and rivers that formed when glaciers moved across the low-lying basin of northern Minnesota, eroding and deepening the landscape (Heinselman 14-15). Understanding the geography of these waterways helps in following the progression of their preservation from east to west. The easternmost point of the Boundary Waters is the mouth of the Pigeon River where it empties into Lake Superior. Just south of the Pigeon River delta is the city of Grand Portage, now preserved as a National Monument to commemorate the pioneer trading post there. Moving westward up the Pigeon River and staying along the U.S.-Canada border, the international dividing line runs through a series of a dozen lakes: South Fowl, North Fowl, Gunflint, Saganaga, Knife, Basswood, Crooked, Lac la Croix, Little Vermillion, Crane, Sand Point, Namakan, and finally, Rainy. The U.S. Boundary Waters reach their westernmost point at the tip of Rainy Lake near the city of International Falls, which is located just south of the historic trading post of Fort Francis on the Canadian side. The international border splits each of these lakes approximately in half, with one portion of the lake belonging the United States, and the other portion to Canada. Hundreds of other interconnected lakes and rivers lie to the north and south of this primary chain along the international border. These bodies of water form the Rainy Lake and Pigeon River watersheds, the two major watersheds that compose the Boundary Waters. Most water in the region flows from Rainy Lake, north and west through Lake of the Woods and into Hudson Bay; or it flows south and east to Pigeon River and empties into Lake Superior. These two watersheds encompass 14,500 square miles across the international border (Searle 2).

Abundant winter snowfall and summer rain feed these rivers and lakes and also help to maintain extensive forests of pine, fir, spruce, aspen, birch, cedar, and maple. In *The Boundary Waters Wilderness Ecosystem*, forester and ecologist Miron Heinselman delves into the intricacies of this forest ecosystem. Wild rice grows on many waterways in the region, as do cranberry bogs, and wild raspberries and blueberries grow along the lakeshores. Noteworthy animals include deer, black bears, beavers, moose, pine martens, and one of the last remaining strongholds of gray wolves, as well as a variety of hawks, ducks, loons, and songbirds, and of course, an abundance of fish such as walleye, trout, pike, and bass. Many of these flora and fauna, while not unique to the area, nonetheless become metonymic for the region in Boundary Waters discourse, and the health of the animal populations for hunting and fishing, as well as for charm and character, were often invoked in the efforts for preservation in the area.

While today most of the Rainy Lake and Pigeon River watersheds are preserved, this preservation happened only piecemeal, and this step-wise growth left an international complex of institutions to oversee the Boundary Waters. Superior National Forest, created in 1909, now encompasses three million acres of land and water, extending from the city of Grand Marais on the edge of Lake Superior, westward to Crane Lake, southward nearly to Silver Bay, and northward to the Canadian border. The northernmost region of the forest is designated as the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (formerly the Boundary Waters Canoe Area). Contingent to this canoeing area, to the north, is Canada's Quetico Provincial Park, created in 1913, which covers 1.18 million acres. Bordering the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness to the west is Voyageurs

National Park, which includes the American portions of Rainy Lake and Namakan Lake and the entire Kabetogama Peninsula.

Though the region was brought under institutional control through piecemeal policies, preservationists (as well as ecologists and canoeists) have always viewed it as an integral whole, as evidenced by its common definitional discourse. From the early European traders to today's canoeists, writers rely on a common menu of features to describe the region, and they consistently use the term *wilderness* to define it. But wilderness has not been a stable term in American culture, and as the definition of wilderness has transformed over time, so too has the meaning of the Boundary Waters. In the following sections, I trace the evolution of the Boundary Waters definitional discourse of "wilderness." I begin with the "rugged frontier wilderness" of the early explorers. Then, I examine the "nostalgic frontier wilderness" prized by outdoorsmen in the 1920's, 30's, and 40's, and their efforts to build a coherent regional identity for the area they called the "Quetico-Superior." Finally, I analyze Sigurd Olson's 1956 text, *The Singing Wilderness*, which epitomizes the Boundary Waters discourse and defines the region as a "recreational wilderness" that provides essential outdoor experiences to all modern travelers.

Early Definitions: The Frontier Wilderness

The history of the Boundary Waters has been described in surprisingly routinized ways. A brief attention to these patterns will not only contextualize the region's development, but will also aid in understanding the discursive work of the region's literary nonfiction writers; that is to say, those features of the Boundary Waters that

historians identify as significant are often also celebrated by the region's literary voices. Historians of the Boundary Waters generally begin with the story of the glaciers, which melted for the last time between ten and fifteen thousand years ago, creating the Great Lakes and the Boundary Waters. The earliest evidence of human settlement in the Rainy Lake watershed dates back about nine thousand years (Backes, *Canoe* 1-2; Heinselman 37; Treur 31-32). Typically, the story of the glaciers is followed by a description of the Dakota and Ojibway tribes that settled in the region, covering their habits of dress, language, hunting, and fishing, with special mention of their birchbark canoes and the rock paintings left on cliffs in the area (Backes, *Canoe* 2-6; Heinselman 38-43; Treur 36-51).

The attention to Indian history ends, as if they ceased to have a history, with the arrival of European traders, who, in fact, relied on Indian guides to teach them canoe routes through the Boundary Waters (Heinselman 43). These early European fur traders who lived in the woods and were self-employed differed from the later French fur traders, the voyageurs, who participated in an institutionalized fur trade in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Treuer 57-58). Each Spring, the voyageurs canoed northwestward into Canada to meet Indian trading parties coming down from Lake Athabasca. The French traders offered knives, hatchets with metal blades, brass and copper pots, needles and thread, beads, woven fabric, and liquor, in exchange for beaver pelts and other animal skins (Backes, *Canoe* 5). Their northwesterly route was first explored in 1731 by the Canadian-born Frenchman *Sieur de la Verendrye* and a party of 100 men, who were searching for the mythical Northwest Passage to the Pacific (Heinselman 286; Treuer 57). The French established forts and trading posts as they

traveled west, and competed with Britain's Hudson Bay Company for dominance in the fur trade. Over decades, the trading companies developed a variety of branch routes extending from a basic east-west "trunk route," which traversed the 266-mile stretch that now forms the international boundary, from Grand Portage in the United States to Fort Francis in Canada (Morse 7). This trail, 242 miles of waterway and 24 miles of land trail, became the well-worn pathway that historian Grace Lee Nute later christened the "Voyageurs Highway" (Publisher's Note).

When the British gained control of the Rainy Lake watershed in the 1760's, the main trading route was revised: the new Voyageurs Highway cut through areas of harsh rapids and difficult portages to make a more direct path between trading posts. At the peak of the fur trade in the 1790's, this revised route was traveled by nearly 400 traders each year (Backes, Canoe 11; Heinselman 288). The Brits shared the route with a group of Scottish, French, and Euro-Ojibway Indians, who, in 1787, formed the Northwest Company to compete with the Hudson Bay Company. Called the Nor'westers, they wore a uniform of red knit hats and blue capes, and they were known for their endurance and the cheery *chansons*. It was this group of voyageurs who were later romanticized by 20th century writers.

Several voyageurs wrote about their adventures on the Voyageurs Highway, including the French Canadian "founder" Sieur de la Verendrye, and British travelers Alexander Mackenzie and David Thompson. In *David Thompson's narrative of his explorations in Western America, 1784-1812*, Thompson, a surveyor who made the first good maps of the region, describes a rugged wilderness, entailing some danger and much adventure. In one encounter, a bear comes snuffling and then slashing at the traveling

company's tent; one of the men shoots the bear and in the thrashing scene that follows, the tent collapses on three men and one woman inside, and the bear kicks them about before it dies (Thompson 48). In Thompson's view, the rugged wilderness has great fishing, especially trout, and an abundance of other beautiful and unusual animals, including moose, hare, quail, foxes, hawks, loons, and deer. Thompson also observes the Aurora Borealis and the "pleasing halos of the moon" (51), and devotes many pages to describing the cold and the snow, indicating the dangerous possibility of becoming "bewildered" and "perishing" in the snow drifts (52). Thompson also writes about the clearness of the water and the process of portaging canoes. I mention these specific examples because they demonstrate how Thompson directs the reader's attention to features of the landscape that, as we will soon see, remain the essential features of place in writings over a century later. Yet these features carry a different meaning for Thompson. For him, the Boundary Waters are a *frontier wilderness*, a place that combines the *dangers* of life *outside of civilization* with the *adventure narrative* of European discovery.

Thompson's definition of the Boundary Waters, and those of writers who follow him, demonstrates the changing meaning of the term *wilderness* in American culture. Historian William Cronon argues in his influential essay, "The Trouble with Wilderness," that wilderness is a culturally dependent term that has transformed over time. In its traditional definition, the word "wilderness" is derived from the same roots as "bewilder" and was originally indicative of the edges of civilization – a bewildering, desolate, and dangerous place. To be away from "the safe camps of social life" was to experience terror and even madness. In the Biblical tradition, for example, the wilderness is a place of

wandering, fear, thirst, hunger, and temptation (Cronon 70-71; Nash 8-9). But in the modern era, wilderness rarely signifies this fearful place. For Thompson, venturing away from civilization was not purely terrifying: his travels along new routes into the Canadian and American West took place within the institutionalized context of the fur trade, with the intention to establish outposts of civilization. His narrative suggests that the voyageurs' definition of the Boundary Waters as wilderness was already evolving from a place of bewildering danger to a place of adventure and human advancement.

Like the general term "wilderness," the meaning of the Boundary Waters changed dramatically in the century after Thompson's travels. In 1865, a geologist discovered beds of quartz containing gold and silver in the area, which led to a brief gold rush. Later, in the 1880's, several companies established iron ore mines, which profited from the country's industrial demand; logging companies followed, and the railways were extended as far north and west as Ely (Backes, *Canoe* 15-18; Heinselman 97). The pine forest logging that began in the 1880's changed the landscape in some significant ways. Loggers clear-cut large sections of red and white pine in the Rainy Lake watershed on both sides of the border, and their presence in the woods increased the incidence of forest fires that spread quickly. Areas decimated by fire rarely regrew pine; instead birch and aspen took over (Forester 16). Loggers also built dams for floating logs downstream, and these dams changed water levels in some lakes and flooded shorelines, killing trees along lake edges. Significantly, however, this era shaped the meaning of the Boundary Waters for those settlers who followed industry into the region (Witzig, *Eighty* 1). Many who worked for the mining and logging companies, like most turn-of-the-century Americans, defined the Boundary Waters as a resource to be harvested. This definition took root in

the local Euro-American culture and provided rhetorical means for opposition to preservation in the region, including during the Voyageurs National Park campaign.

In the midst of Minnesota's burgeoning industrial boom, however, there were some signs of a competing conservationist approach. In April 1891, the Minnesota state legislature approved a resolution requesting that President Benjamin Harrison create a National Park in Minnesota that encompassed a 100-mile stretch of land along the northern boundary of the state, between the mouth of the Vermilion River on the east and Lake of the Woods on the west (Treuer 90; Witzig, Eighty 1). This effort may represent a budding conservatism, spurred by the creation of three new National Parks in 1890, Yosemite among them. Like the similar effort underway in the Great Smoky Mountains, mentioned in Chapter 2, Minnesota's nineteenth century campaign argued the aesthetic value of the region. Neither Harrison nor the U.S. Congress acted upon Minnesota's request, perhaps confirming the difficulty of valorizing this particular landscape based on traditional aesthetic appeals. Yet with a different strategy under different historical circumstances, most of the land included in the initial park proposal would eventually be preserved in Voyageurs National Park, eighty years later.

It was not a National Park, but rather a National Forest, that became the first form of land protection in the Boundary Waters, eighteen years later, in 1909. Pressured by hunters concerned about unregulated hunting and the rapidly declining moose population, President Roosevelt created the Superior National Forest as a scientifically managed conservation area; notably, Canada followed suit with the creation of Quetico Provincial Park in 1913 (1). These two preserves, the first instances of federal intervention in the region, signaled a change in the meaning of the Boundary Waters. Backes suggests that

these interventions had the effect of solidifying the region into a place infused with cultural and political meaning. Having been brought fully into their national institutions, the region became more than Superior National Forest and Quetico Provincial Park: it became “the Quetico-Superior” (Backes, Canoe 23).

The Quetico-Superior: The Nostalgic Frontier Wilderness

By the 1920's, Quetico Provincial Park and Superior National Forest had become choice destinations for avid canoeists. During the 20's, 30's, and 40's, these canoeists intervened multiple times in a series political contests over roads, hydroelectric power, and the use of sea planes in the remote backcountry. Each controversy elicited widespread media coverage in the U.S. and Canada, and the debates helped to create a strong political identity for the “Quetico-Superior.” For more than three decades, this moniker applied to a relatively small portion of the Boundary Waters: it referred to just 3,200 square miles, or about 20% of the two major Boundary Waters watersheds, including only Quetico Provincial Park and the initial Superior National Forest (Backes, Canoe 78). Yet the term “Quetico-Superior” came to signify a specific region that had great national and historical significance as a wilderness, one that many writers described and characterized through a coherent Quetico-Superior discourse.

In their mid-century essays, Quetico-Superior writers define the region as, essentially, a *nostalgic frontier wilderness*: a place where a man can escape the confines of modern civilization and express his rugged individualism. William Cronon explains that this definition of wilderness motivated the preservation movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, at the time that the actual American frontier was “closing.” It was

promoted by men who wished to preserve for themselves places where they could escape from their elite circumstances and experience “regeneration and renewal” by mimicking cultural memories of explorers’ adventure travels in Nature (Cronon 78). As the Quetico-Superior became increasingly institutionalized and regulated, recreational outdoorsmen sought to maintain its wilderness character and thereby preserve a frontier adventure experience.

Backes suggests that the advertising for “canoe country” drew tourists to the Boundary Waters under false pretenses, by ignoring the damage that had been caused by earlier decades of pine logging. Many forests that had been clear cut or destroyed by fire were still decades from recovery, and consequently wildlife populations were also less healthy. It could take a day or more to paddle past decimated shorelines to the interior lakeland (Backes, *Canoe* 42-43). And though travel in the Superior National Forest was still quite difficult in the 1920’s, canoeists also noticed an increase in road building in the area for managed forestry. In 1923, a group of recreational enthusiasts, forming the Superior National Forest Recreation Association, strongly objected to the development of roads or trails in the forest that they believed was intended to provide protected recreational areas (Riis 138). In response, the Forest Service created three roadless areas in 1926 to maintain a wilderness that, according to Forest Service documents pertaining to the decision, offered the “virile and wholesome form of recreation off the beaten paths” that many canoeists desired (qtd Searle 31) and allowed for “the opportunity for the public to observe the conditions which existed in the pioneer phases of the nation’s development, and to engage in the forms of outdoor recreation characteristic of that

period” (qtd Langeland 20).²⁷ The Forest Service also committed to maintaining “natural screens” along lakeshores and campgrounds (Searle 32). These efforts sought to balance the mission of forestry with the demand for outdoor spaces that furnished frontier-like experiences.

In addition to damage from prior logging operations and road-building for managed forestry, the region’s wilderness character was also compromised by ongoing industrial schemes for the area. In 1925, Edward W. Backus, owner of the Backus-Brooks logging company and a prominent lumberman in the region, proposed to expand the use of hydroelectric power in Northern Minnesota. The Backus plan created a system of dams and water storage basins that would increase the number of power turbines in the region and make the flow to power turbines throughout the watershed “more uniform and dependable” (Searle 49). Backus believed this expansion of hydroelectricity would power his lumber mills at a lower cost and allow for the expansion of his company; he also argued that his plan augmented the general power resources for the Minnesota and Ontario Power Company, while enriching the economy of the area and capitalizing on the region’s natural resources (49). Conservationists, however, saw the plan as utterly destructive: the proposed dams and storage basins would raise water levels across the chain of border lakes anywhere from three to eighty feet. The consequence of higher lake levels would be loss of shoreline forests, islands, wildlife, historic portages, and campgrounds (Backes, Canoe 69; Langeland 19; Searle 48).

In September 1925, when Backus formally applied for a permit to begin hydroelectric development, his opponents, led by Ernest C. Oberholtzer, proposed an

²⁷ These roadless areas later became the Superior Roadless Primitive Area in 1938, then the Boundary Waters Canoe Area in 1958, and finally the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in 1978.

alternative plan. Oberholtzer's proposal treated the Boundary Waters as an extensive, integrated unit encompassing 14,500 square miles. It proposed to protect any unpreserved pieces of the region as an international forest, one that would maintain controlled logging and wilderness recreation areas, like Superior and Quetico (Searle 57). This conservationist proposal became known as the Quetico-Superior Program (Backes, Canoe 74). Though the international forest would never come to fruition, the Quetico-Superior Program articulated an aspiration for policy-making in the region, and debate over the Backus and Oberholtzer plans yielded several political developments that favored Oberholtzer's. In 1931, Congress approved the Shipstead-Nolan-Newton Act, which prevented changes to water levels and shoreline logging on federal land in the Boundary Waters (76). Then, in 1934, President Roosevelt created the President's Quetico-Superior Committee, which included three representatives appointed by the president, and one each from the Interior and Agriculture departments (77). Over the next three decades, the committee worked with the U.S., Minnesota, and Canadian governments to achieve a program of "protection, zoning, and proper resource use" in the Boundary Waters (Langeland 19). Essentially, the committee was charged with bringing practices in the region into alignment with the intentions of Oberholtzer's original Quetico-Superior Program.

A third significant contest in the effort to protect the Quetico-Superior was the fight to ban sea planes. In the 1940's, improvements in small plane technology made it possible for recreational fishermen to be flown into backcountry lakes, rather than paddle canoes for several days to reach remote areas with the best fishing. Entrepreneurs built fly-in resorts, and it was possible for a businessman in St. Louis to go fishing in the

Quetico-Superior for an overnight getaway. The United States Forest Service and many other conservation groups, however, sought restrictions on sea plane use in the area. Significantly, the campaign for the sea plane ban was Sigurd Olson's first endeavor as a paid conservationist; as the ecologist for the Izaak Walton League, he wrote numerous articles on the issue for *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Sports Afield*, and *Outdoor America*, among many others. Olson, and others, argued throughout the campaign that sea planes were antithetical to the wilderness character of the Quetico-Superior, and they interrupted the frontier wilderness experience afforded by canoe travel in remote areas. In 1949, President Truman issued an executive order that created an airspace reservation over Superior National Forest, the first airspace reservation meant to preserve the wilderness character of an area (Backes, Canoe 112-118; Backes, Wilderness 198-203; Langeland 21).

These three major controversies increased media coverage about the Quetico-Superior and its wilderness character (Backes, Canoe 78-79). It was during the media attention of the Backus campaign that the National Park Service also became involved in the region. Primarily, the NPS was responsible for working with the Civilian Conservation Corps on improving the state park system. In 1937, however, the NPS sent a representative to survey Superior National Forest's roadless areas, with the possibility of transferring them from the National Forest system to the National Park system (Witzig, Voyageurs 13). Though no such transfer happened, and it would be another twenty-five years before the Voyageurs National Park campaign, the groundwork for the campaign was already being laid through the definitional discourse-building accomplished during these earlier controversies.

The Quetico-Superior Writers

Quetico-Superior writers from the 1920's to the 1950's responded to the flurry of land controversies through articles in major news and outdoor publications in the United States and Canada and their writing created a distinctive area in the minds of conservation-savvy readers across the nation. In such articles, writers consistently describe the Quetico-Superior using a menu of features that builds into a coherent discourse. Through their writings, the definition of the region as a nostalgic frontier wilderness comes into full articulation. A sampling demonstrates the typical features of Quetico-Superior writing, especially the masculine desire for a pioneer-type experience.

By way of example, consider a typical article, "We Went La Verendrye's Way," written by Blair Fraser in 1954 for *MacLean's*, a Canadian magazine. That summer, Fraser, a writer and editor for the popular weekly, joined Sigurd Olson and four other men for a canoe trip along the Voyageurs Highway. The travelers were white men of professional and even elite status, but they prided themselves on their adventurous spirits and physical strength.²⁸ With road-building restrictions and the airspace reservation in place, travels to the region remained relatively difficult and rare. During their eighteen days together, the company rowed twenty miles or more per day, facing dangerous rapids, unpredictable weather, and vicious mosquitos and flies; they carried their canoes and sixty-pound packs through densely wooded peninsulas, over centuries-old portages,

²⁸ Fraser's article narrates the first of seven expeditions that this group traveled along the historic trails of the voyageurs. The elite group of international standing included Sigurd Olson, the Nature writer and conservationist from Ely, Minnesota; Eric Morse, national director of the Association of Canadian Clubs; Omond Solandt, a doctor involved with Canada's national defense research; Major General Elliot Rodger, vice chief of general staff for the Canadian army; Denis Coolican, president of the Canadian Bank Note Company; Blair Fraser, editor and writer for Maclean's magazine and a broadcaster; Antonius Lovink, the Netherlands Ambassador to Canada; John Endeman, a South African diplomat; and Tyler Thompson, U.S. Minister to Canada. Elliot Rodger did not attend the 1954 trip (Backes, *Wilderness Within*, 216).

along a route once used by eighteenth-century voyageurs. The men observed wildlife; camped under the stars; cooked fresh fish over campfires; and sang traditional *chansons* while they paddled. One of the men, Eric Morse, read to the group at night from writings by the original explorers in the region, including the writings of David Thompson (Fraser 52). Fraser, with his media connections, ensured that this particular trip gained attention from *Maclean's* and several other Canadian media venues. It was due to this extensive news coverage that Fraser, Sigurd Olson, and their companions became known to the public as the “modern-day voyageurs,” and they relished the title that connected them with an imaginative frontier adventure experience (Backes, *Wilderness* 216-217).

Fraser's narrative is just one of many Quetico-Superior texts that demonstrate the rhetoric of the nostalgic frontier wilderness. In my analysis, I also draw on “Canoe Country,” by Francis Lee Jaques, from a 1931 issue of *Natural History*; and Olaus Murie's “*The Falcon's Cruise on Border Lakes*,” from a 1947 issue of *The Living Wilderness*, a publication of the Wilderness Society. The discourse of the Quetico-Superior also circulated in news features, so I sample here from Harold H. Martin's “Embattled Wilderness,” from the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1948, and Fred Bodsworth's “The Fight to Keep the Wilderness Wild,” from *MacLean's* in 1951. Both of these articles overview the political issues involved in implementing the airspace reservation, yet their discourse of place is remarkably similar to that of the personal narratives. Including Fraser, all five articles describe the character of the Quetico-Superior in predictable ways, defining it as a place outside of civilization that affords a frontier adventure experience.

First, in each of these five short pieces, it is customary to invoke the history of the voyageurs. In Quetico-Superior writing, the invocation of the voyageurs connects readers to the pioneering past of this landscape. It generally arises very early in the article, as with Jaques, who starts his second paragraph with “in 1731...we have the first recorded use by the white man of what are now the international boundary waters” (Jaques 634). In Martin’s article, the historical figures are invoked on the first page, when the article headline calls the area “one of the last remaining fragments of original America” and later celebrates the explorers “bearing the first great wealth of a continent” (Martin 22, 152). In Fraser’s article, the voyageurs are invoked in the very title, summoning the famous explorer La Verendrye, and the narrative describes the men’s desire to replicate as closely as they can the route and traveling conditions of the original voyageurs. Each writer evokes the sameness of the landscape today, suggesting that it is “primitive and unscarred,” just the same landscape “which the first explorers saw” (Bodsworth). Because of this sameness, today’s travelers can achieve a “sense of kinship with early explorers” by traveling over these routes and encountering the same challenges (Murie 12). Fraser emphasizes that this place is historic, but that it is a “neglected part of our heritage,” deserving more attention from travelers and conservationists than it has received (Fraser 56). Again and again the voyageurs are invoked, with their metonymic canoes, paddles, and portages; they are deployed to symbolize the historic character of the region and with the briefest mention can summon the whole of the pioneering past – a past that today’s travelers can also experience.

Second, each piece brims with familiar descriptions of scenery and landscape. Waterfowl float near passing canoes, and loons call in the evenings to visitors making

camp (Jaques 636; Murie 18; Martin 152). Other wildlife, like chirruping songbirds, white-tailed deer, and of course, fish, are sighted frequently from the water (Jaques 637; Murie 14; Martin 152, 154). Bears may visit a campsite and are typically pictured snuffling around one's tent – but unlike Thompson's bear, these are merely the curious sort (Jaques 637; Martin 150; Bodsworth). In the night, the timber wolves howl, and the sound thrills the “lucky” camper (Jaques 637; Martin 150). Aside from wildlife, the geological features draw much attention, especially the great size of rock cliffs and the marks of the glaciers (Jaques 635; Murie 12; Martin 23, 152; Bodsworth). Canoeists especially seek the Indian paintings on glacial cliffs that remind them of an ancient past (Murie 12, Martin 152). Descriptions of natural features and wildlife are accompanied by several large photos or, in the case of Jaques' and Murie's articles, illustrations hand drawn by the author himself. The images can be understood as rhetorical strategies to highlight the unique characteristics of a watery backcountry landscape that lacks classical mountain vistas.

A third routine feature in this discourse is the figure of the vacation traveler, and the depiction of the Boundary Waters as his recreational paradise away from the bustle of city life. Fraser prefers to emphasize exactly how rugged and challenging the conditions are, including the heavy packs, long hours and days of paddling, rapids, and weather. Fraser's point, of course, is that ruggedness is part of the fun – part of the encounter with the pioneering past. But most of these writers share tales of pleasant recreation, and some are rife with tips for making your trip as easy as possible. Jaques, for example, offers a paragraph of advice: “Keep the load...low in the canoe,” he writes. “Stay in camp if the water is too rough...Portages have been provided in all doubtful places by the rangers.

For comfort, keep dry..." (Jaques 638). He also emphasizes that camping and canoeing are inexpensive, safe, and comfortable forms of vacation travel (Jaques 638). Martin echoes this message of simplicity and ease, captioning one of his photographs, "You don't have to be an athlete to make a canoe trip into this land of woods and waters," and later adding that canoe paddling is "as gentle a form of exercise as has yet been devised" (Martin 150). Bodsworth likewise highlights the pleasure of canoe travel, as a place to "forget the civilized world and its worries," and to be "like the Indian before him," who "fishes only for his cooking fire" (Bodsworth). He voices this idea again through the words of an "industrialist" who tells the writer that canoe travel is "the only way [he] can have a *real vacation*" – that is, a vacation from modernity (Bodsworth, emphasis added).

A significant part of a "real vacation" or a recreational experience is memory-making. Murie's article, about his canoe trip with his wife and children, features the vacation theme most prominently; from the beginning, as the family drives with their canoe, "The Falcon," strapped to the roof of their car, they are greeted by people who imagine or remember their own trips to canoe country. For Murie, the memory-making experience of a canoe trip with his family is a strong motivation: he describes at length his wife's encounter with a Northern Pike – a story of "the one that got away" - and the supreme "excitement" that he, his wife, and their daughter all felt, along with a "deep satisfaction" at the fishing drama and a surety that "we three would never forget it" (Murie 15). The Murie family is similarly rewarded by their collective conquest of a particularly bad portage. As Murie tells the tale, he acknowledges that his story is a common narrative of group unification to surmount Nature's challenges, one that many others who travel to canoe country can tell (Murie 16). His acknowledgement of such

routine narratives suggests his full awareness that he is speaking within a discourse that, in 1931, was growing in its rhetorical routines and familiarity.

Finally, some of these writers are also prone to expounding on the sense of wonder and mystery that they feel while in Nature. Murie, for example, stands in the dusk “reverently,” wanting “only to look and feel and listen” to the “wild serenading of the loons” (Murie 14). He is able to maintain this sense of wonder only until “the penetrating drone of outboard motors” indicates when he has “left the wilderness” (Murie 18). Similarly, Martin notes that airplane noise disrupts the “intangible, almost indescribable quality of the wilderness,” and for the canoeman, “too great a concentration upon fishing...causes a man to miss the myriad more subtle pleasure that the wilderness offers to those who enter it with eyes and mind and heart all open to accept its mysteries” (Martin 150, 152). In each case, the interruption of modern technology – the machine in the garden, as it were - signifies a break with the wilderness experience, a disruption of the illusion that one has returned to the frontier.

These texts exemplify a consistent regional discourse for defining the Quetico-Superior, using a routine set of symbols to make similar claims about the rewarding experience of a recreational trip to the wilderness of the border lakes. Reading these pieces today, as a set, their similarities can seem exhausting. The writers do not make any moves to distinguish themselves from others; rather, they use language that situates them wholly within a growing tradition of Quetico-Superior writing. They behold a wilderness that is like Thompson’s in many ways, but lacking in claws, teeth, and perilous winters. It is a wilderness defined against modern, urbanized living, one where men (and sometimes

their families) might go to escape the burdens of industrial society, indulge in leisure, and remember a rugged past.

All five of these writers over decades and across international lines, were connected to Sigurd Olson through a web of writers and activists who cared about the Boundary Waters region and who participated actively in promoting a coherent regional definition of the Quetico-Superior as a nostalgic frontier wilderness.²⁹ And, as we have seen in the cases of Yosemite, the Great Smoky Mountains, and the Everglades, with redefinition comes reevaluation. Importantly, the routine features of these texts connect the landscape to the same set of value-based arguments that we have seen in other definitional discourses of place. The images of voyageurs, while indicating the potential for a pioneering experience, also summon the ancientness of this place, revaluing it for its originality. The “natural” components of the landscape - animals, rock faces, and Indian paintings – point to unique features of a landscape that is lacking classical mountain vistas. Finally, the interruptions of modern technologies in the midst of wonder hint at a “threat” to this wilderness scene.

In the next section, I explore how Sigurd Olson refined and extended this value-laden discourse of the Quetico-Superior through his best-selling essay collection, *The Singing Wilderness*. Olson’s popular first book reproduces the routine features of Quetico-Superior writing, from invocations of the voyageurs, to natural features of the

²⁹ More than a regional discourse connected these writers to Sigurd Olson. The earliest of the articles sampled here, “Canoe Country,” was written in 1931 by illustrator Francis Lee Jaques; twenty-five years later, he would illustrate *The Singing Wilderness*. In the 1947 article by Olaus Murie, the canoeing party stops at the Border Lakes Outfitting Company, where they are served by the owner, a “young Sig Olson, quiet spoken, efficient, recently back from the Tenth Mountain Division”; Olson gives “friendly advice, and made us feel that he was with us...and would share our adventure” (Murie 11). A few years later, Fred Bodsworth wrote “The Fight to the Keep the Wilderness Wild,” for *MacLean’s* after he took a canoe trip with Olson as part of the promotional effort to implement the no-fly zone. Finally, as noted above, Blair Fraser’s article, “The Embattled Wilderness,” appeared after he traveled with Olson for an August, 1954 canoe trip along the Voyageurs Highway (Backes, *Wilderness* 213-214).

landscape, to powerful memories of time outdoors. Yet, Olson's definition evolves from a nostalgic frontier wilderness to a new kind of recreational or even "re-creational" wilderness. Ultimately, like other Quetico-Superior writers, Olson is interested in *experience*, but his stance is more encompassing: he argues that the recreational wilderness landscape provides an essential experience necessary for human thriving.

Sigurd Olson: The Essential Quetico-Superior Writer

Sigurd Olson left a legacy through both his policy-making and his writing, but he grew into that path for a long time. He was prepared for his later career by the many pursuits of his early professional life: teaching high school biology, earning a Master's degree in zoology, serving as the dean of Ely Junior College, founding Border Lakes Outfitting Company, and writing short pieces for magazines like *Sports Afield*.³⁰ Through these pursuits, Olson gained knowledge and skill as a teacher, writer, outdoorsman, and ecologist, which prepared him to commit the second half of his life to his dual passions, wilderness advocacy and essay writing.

Olson's first paid conservation position came in 1947, when he was actively recruited as the ecologist for the Izaak Walton League, which included serving as their advisor to the Wilderness Society and their representative to the President's Quetico-

³⁰ Born in Chicago in 1899, Sigurd was the second son of a devout Baptist minister, Lawrence J. Olson and his wife, Ida May Olson. In 1906, Olson's family moved to Door County, WI. Like John Muir, Olson rejected the strict Christian notions of his father's church when he reached adulthood, but he developed a rich spiritual life through his outdoor experiences. Olson studied agriculture at the University of Wisconsin from 1918 to 1920 and then taught high school biology for nearly a decade in Ely, MN, where he lived with his wife, Elizabeth Uhrenholdt and two sons, Sigurd Jr. and Robert. Olson took his first canoe trip in the Boundary Waters in 1921, and starting in 1927, he occasionally published articles about fishing and camping in magazines such as *Field and Stream*, *Sports Afield*, and *American Forests*. He later spent 1931-32 in Champaign, Illinois, earning an MA in zoology with leading ecologist Victor Shelford. This degree allowed him to teach animal biology and human physiology at Ely Junior College, where he advanced to the position of Dean in 1936. In 1947, he resigned from Ely Junior College and pursued his desire to spend more time in nature and to write about it (Backes, Chronology xiii-xv).

Superior Committee. In this position, Olson spearheaded the campaign to ban sea planes in the backcountry, a political victory that won him notoriety in conservation circles. Then, beginning with his election as Vice President of the National Parks Association in 1951, Olson played a major role in preserving wilderness, especially large areas of Alaska. In 1963, he was invited to join the Alaska Task Force for the National Park Service and in 1964-65, he helped to prepare a report on potential national parklands in Alaska. While action on the report was delayed for many years, the Task Force's recommendations ultimately resulted in the National Interest Lands and Conservation Act of 1980, which preserved almost eighty million acres, nearly one-quarter of Alaskan land (Backes, Wilderness 299-300).

Olson also made a major contribution to conservation by lobbying for the 1964 Wilderness Act, which established the national criteria for preserving federal lands as wilderness. The Act defines wilderness as "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain" and also as "an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions" (Wilderness Act, Section 2c). This definition encompassed nine million acres of American land, which became recognized as "official wilderness." The Act also stipulates that new wilderness areas must be reviewed by federal and local governments, and a separate Act of Congress is required to add new land to the system (Nash 226). In this way, the Wilderness Act of 1964 preserved land as permanent sites of recreation and created an American *institution* controlled by a national bureaucracy.

The definition of *wilderness* enshrined in the Wilderness Act is consistent with the view of wilderness expressed in Olson's writings: wilderness is a place where humans visit; it is a place set apart from, rather than integrated into, human community. Olson's writing career developed in parallel with his career as a conservation advocate. He wrote in a variety of genres for magazines like *Field and Stream* and *Sports Afield*, including nonfiction adventure stories, short fiction, and essays on issues of conservation policy. Some of his pieces are ripe with his political views about wilderness, like "Wilderness and the Flambeau," which appeared in the Spring 1953 issue of *The Living Wilderness* and which describes the process of creating Flambeau River State Forest in north central Wisconsin. Olson, however, did not feel fulfilled by these types of writing. Instead, he vastly preferred the reflective pieces he wrote for a syndicated newspaper column called "America Out of Doors," from the late 1930's until the column's demise with the war effort by 1944 (Backes, *Wilderness* 167-68). Olson believed he was best suited to writing personal essays, the genre that allowed him to express his wilderness philosophy in a language that came naturally to him (Backes, *Wilderness* 188-89). In the early 1950's, he began to compile and rework his essays into a book.

Despite his love of the personal essay genre, it was unclear whether Olson's writing would be successful on the popular market; so far his work had appeared in publications that targeted readers who were already interested in sporting and conservation. He tried several times to market compilations of his essays to trade publishers, but he was deterred by agents and editors who believed that the general public was not interested in reading essays about outdoor experiences (Backes, *Wilderness* 241). But after several years on the conservation speaking circuit, Olson's enthusiastic

audiences convinced him that there was an audience for this type of Nature writing. He compiled the manuscript for *The Singing Wilderness* in 1953 and 1954, reworking published and unpublished articles and writing new essays; he also hired a literary agent, Marie Rodell, who had been Rachel Carson's agent for *The Sea Around Us* (1952). However, the manuscript was rejected by three publishers before Olson received a solicitation from Alfred A. Knopf. Mr. Knopf, who was an active conservationist himself, had heard Olson speak at a National Parks Association conference in New York the previous year, and Knopf believed that Olson had a new perspective to offer on the meaning of wilderness (240-42).

Sigurd Olson was fifty-seven years old when *The Singing Wilderness* was published in 1956, and its success was the culmination of a lifelong vocation to share his love of Nature through writing (Backes, *Wilderness* 258). *The Singing Wilderness* immediately earned great acclaim, making the *New York Times* best-seller list, and quickly going into its second printing. Olson began to receive fan mail from readers all over the U.S. and Canada. Of Olson's seven books and many writings, *The Singing Wilderness* remains representative of his major ideas about wilderness experience. It contains thirty-four essays, one introductory and the others arranged according the seasons they represent, a typical schema for Nature writing familiar to American readers from Thoreau's *Walden* (1854). The text is illustrated by Francis Lee Jaques, who was renowned for his depictions of northern flora and fauna.

As a collection of personal essays, *The Singing Wilderness* is ideally suited in its form to establish an extended and fully-fleshed definition of the Quetico-Superior. The personal essay is perhaps the classic form of nature writing. In their introduction to *The*

Norton Book of Nature Writing, Robert Finch and John Elder suggest that “the filtering of experience through an individual sensibility” is “central” to the nature writing tradition (Finch and Elder 28). They include Olson in a showcase of writers like Henry David Thoreau, John Burroughs, and John Muir. The personal essay was Olson’s favorite form because it enabled him to write about his cherished pastimes in the Boundary Waters: fishing, canoeing, camping, skiing, snowshoeing, bird watching and other animal observations. Insistently male, these pastimes are enjoyed alone or in the company of other men, such as a friend or son; occasionally, they provide the opportunity to show off one’s masculine prowess in front of a woman, such as a wife, mother, or grandmother. The narrative frequently indulges in flashbacks of past visits to familiar outdoor places, and memories of oneness with Nature experienced in boyhood. I call this type of environmental writing the “man-in-the-woods narrative.” Operating within the genre of personal experience, Olson is able to demonstrate through his own life stories the essential character of the Boundary Waters as historically valuable wilderness that yields personal rewards to those who spend time there. The rhetorical work of *The Singing Wilderness* is significant: these narratives epitomize the features of Quetico-Superior discourse that had been established in previous decades, amplify the celebration of the region’s unique character, and persuade a wider audience of the value of a visit to the Boundary Waters.

The Singing Wilderness: Or, the Recreational Wilderness

Like the Quetico-Superior writers before him, Olson defines the region through its pioneer history, especially the history of the voyageurs; the uniqueness of the

waterscape's natural features; and the joy of recreational experience in this environment. While Olson uses routine features of Quetico-Superior discourse, he elaborates the landscape's value as an ancient, unique, and especially threatened place. In *The Singing Wilderness*, the Quetico-Superior is also defined as the essential wilderness landscape, though not in the way one might expect. In 1934, Paul Riis proclaimed of the Quetico-Superior: "This area today constitutes America's supreme expression of a forested lakeland wilderness" (138). For Olson, the Quetico-Superior is exactly that, but not because of a catalogue of superior "forested lakeland" features. Rather, its superiority arises from the essential wilderness experience it offers. While Olson's definition retains some elements of the nostalgic frontier, it also reflects the trends of a new era, in which the Quetico-Superior is a recreational wilderness open to all.

From the very title of the book, wilderness is the obvious focus of Olson's attention, and Olson insistently describes this wilderness as untouched, unseen, age-old, timeless, primeval, and most especially, *primitive*. For Olson, the Quetico-Superior wilderness is an *original landscape*, one that has been fundamentally unchanged by human interaction over time. In Olson's cosmology, any contact with the land in its primitive state has the power to reconnect the visitor with his inner primitive character. For example, by participating in the ancient ritual of gathering around the campfire, a man "has reformed a link in his memory which was broken when men abandoned the life of the nomad and moved from the forests, plains, and mountains to the security of villages...he swiftly discovers something he had lost, a sense of belonging to the earth and to his kind" (106). Not just primitive rituals but the primitive landscape itself triggers this latent knowledge, as when Olson smells resins, saying that "our subconscious is so

impregnated with [the smell of resins], the memories they invoke are so involved with our ancient way of life” (56). Most memorably, Olson encounters timber wolves while skiing on a frozen river at night and writes that “in spite of reason and [his] knowledge of the predators, [his] ancient reactions were coming to the fore, intuitive warnings out of the past” (242). Olson responds to the “imagined threat” of the wolves “like a stone-age hunter cut off from his cave” (242-43). In similar episodes, Olson calls these instincts “racial experience,” and we “moderns” have nearly forgotten our ability to connect with the natural world in this effortless way. We can, however, recover that connection, through contact with a primitive land.

Just as we saw in the case of the Great Smoky Mountains, this ancient landscape is valorized by its link to the world of pioneer America. Even in the first pages, Olson describes travels in this region as “still by pack and canoe over the ancient trails of the Indians and voyageurs” (6). Olson sometimes acknowledges the Cree and Chippewa, and the “Indian” way of thinking about the land. For instance, Olson’s friend, Jack Linklater, who is part Cree, introduces Olson to the idea of “wilderness music,” which he claims to hear in wild places. Olson, who cannot hear what Linklater claims to hear, concludes that “this music was for Indians” and for “those who have lived close to nature all their lives” (198-99). Olson regards Minnesota’s Indians with reverence, yet some distance: they are magical and wise, but he can never interpret the mystery of the “Indian paintings on the cliffs east of Insula,” or find “the secret of the Chippewas” (27, 30). Like the Cherokee in North Carolina, like the Seminole in Florida, the Cree and Chippewa Indians are glorified for their perceived closeness with nature, but quickly forgotten. As Greg Breining writes, this erasure is “morally convenient,” as it elides an Indian removal, making way for a

preferred narrative of adventuring white men in “untrammeled” wilderness (Breining 120).

Like the Quetico-Superior writers before him, the image of Nute’s romantic voyageurs offers a more powerful legacy for Olson. Olson typically invokes the voyageurs while canoeing and portaging, as he surveys the landscape and imagines that it is perfectly unchanged from that era to this. Rowing past a “magnificent stand of white pine,” for example, Olson comments that those trees were “old when the voyageurs came through,” and “it must have looked to them as it did to us” (44). Sometimes, though, the voyageurs serve as an historical marker that demonstrates the aging landscape, as when, approaching a robust pine tree, he writes that it “was a sapling when the first voyageurs came through...some three hundred years ago” (169). Sometimes, the voyageurs are a part of Olson’s spiritual imaginary – a ghost-like presence on the rivers “when all the voyageurs of the past join the rapids in their shouting,” or in “ancient campsites” where “those voyageurs of the past camp with you” (79, 82). At times, Olson even applies the term to himself, as when he hears loons on Lake Saganaga: they were calling to him “as they had always called in welcome to a voyageur” (102).

In each instance, the voyageurs are a symbol – almost an adjective - for a time pre-civilization, when white men in America lived closer to the land, and were unburdened by the pace of urban life, which was left behind in Europe. To emphasize this point: Olson’s “primitive” and “pioneering” landscapes are the same, and both characterizations elide the realities of human alteration of the landscape. For Olson, trapping, fur trading, mining, and logging are all equally frontier activities that invited humans to live in closer contact with and greater dependence on their natural

surroundings. In Olson's view of the Boundary Waters, "history" and "wilderness" *are not antithetical terms*.

Olson suggests that in this original Quetico-Superior wilderness, one can reconnect with the voyageurs and the "ancient" past through visceral experiences. Olson's wilderness is filled with objects from the Northern landscape that act as portals (or perhaps more aptly, as portages) into the past and hence into a lost communion with Nature. An object like a cave painting, a birch bark canoe, or a trapper's cabin might connect a visitor with the past of Indians and voyageurs. A familiar waterscape or fishing pool can connect one with memories of special times spent there, and the camaraderie one has known there; sometimes this particular portal into the past is so strong that the presence of the now-absent person is even felt once again. Landscape objects can also keenly reconnect a wilderness visitor with his own childhood experiences of oneness with nature. Olson frequently returns to experiences of his childhood self when he interacts with animals – a squirrel, a mouse, a trout – that trigger memories of his boyhood, a nostalgia for his youthful freedom in the natural world, and reflections on the trajectory of his growing apart from it. But this apartness from nature can be remedied by other portals found in the wilderness, like a campfire, a pine knot, or a wild animal, which can reconnect man with his own animal nature, that "sense of belonging to the earth and to his kind" (107). Olson values the Quetico-Superior's primitive qualities above all.

Olson's Quetico-Superior is also a unique landscape, a forested lakeland unlike any other. Though the Quetico-Superior lacks traditional mountain vistas, Olson celebrates vistas of "moonrises and sunsets...the northern lights and the white mists of the river mouths at dawn" (99). His essays are filled with routine gestures and familiar

evocations that are recognizable to readers after decades (and even centuries) of Quetico-Superior writing: bears, beavers, cabins, campfires, canoes, cliffs, deer, fishing poles, loons, mice, the moon, paddles, portages, rocks, skis, snow shoes, songbirds, stars, trappers, trees, trout, waterscapes, and wolves – to name the most frequent of Olson’s signs. Some of these objects are natural, while others are manmade, but to Olson, the canoe and the cabin are natural objects – made from natural materials by a man’s own hands, they are a part of humans’ essential communion with the land – and all of these features, human and natural, are fundamentally characteristic of this special place.

At times one might wish to temper Olson’s enthusiasm for the Quetico-Superior’s uniqueness. After all, many of these creatures and features are found outside of the northern Minnesota landscape; the ubiquitous white-tailed deer that are always drinking at the lakeside, for example, are in fact not native to that region but have migrated from forested habitats in the Eastern and Southeastern United States. Yet to the extent that many of these animals and geographic features would be familiar to readers from other North American environments, the Quetico-Superior offers a unique experience of close encounter and observation. Many times in *The Singing Wilderness*, Olson narrates extensively his observations of an element of the landscape that might be otherwise ordinary – a rabbit, a squirrel, a rock - but which he is able to see in a new way in this place. In one memorable scene, Olson watches a mouse sliding down the sides of his tent, enjoying the “exhilarating toboggan it had found,” and he sees the mouse not as an ordinary household or field creature, but as one like himself, who delights in outdoor play (88). In another scene, Olson labors to select and transplant a scrub oak to his yard. When he encounters the scrub oak on a lakeshore in autumn, amidst the already bare maples and

aspens, he is able to see the small, twisted plant as beautiful, “full of character and strength” (142). It is this uniqueness of *experience* when one encounters the objects of Nature that Olson argues is the real value and meaning of the Quetico-Superior.

The chance to have unique wilderness experiences is Olson’s primary reason for visiting the Quetico-Superior, but the marks of civilization increasingly threaten the integrity of its wilderness character. In other discourses of place, writers who argue from the locus of *threat* speak in terms of tangible destruction to the land itself – clear cut areas devoid of trees, ruined watersheds, slaughtered animals, widespread fire. In the Quetico-Superior, threat is instead spiritual: Olson speaks about threat to the soul. At the outset of *The Singing Wilderness*, Olson writes that “there is a restlessness within us, an impatience with things as they are, which modern life with its comforts and distractions does not seem to satisfy”; we are, he believes, “sick animals” searching for the medicine that will heal our damaged souls (6-7). Olson finds this medicine in wilderness, and like the outdoorsmen of earlier Quetico-Superior political battles, he mourns any encroachment that will change the quality of the wilderness experience.

In “Farewell to Saganaga,” for example, Olson describes the abiding peacefulness he feels when he discovers this lake, a place he “learned to know and love” and “to feel at home” (100-101). For him, Saganaga was “a place secure and permanent in a world where values were always shifting and men no longer seemed to be sure of anything” (101). But then Olson learns that a road has been built to Saganaga, to open a new mining area, and when he next visits, he finds a lodge built on the lakeshore and partygoers arriving at the lodge by motorboat. Encountering these marks of civilization in what he believed to be “perfect” wilderness, Olson mourns the loss of “something old and

beautiful” and “beyond price” (103). In such incidents, marks of civilization threaten to alter the landscape’s wilderness character and consequently threaten to interrupt the wilderness experience. For Olson, civilization is a thief that “has robbed us of much of our sensitivity to smells, has dulled our original powers of perception” and rendered modern humans insecure, dissatisfied, and unhappy (57). Olson argues throughout *The Singing Wilderness* that personal experience in the wilderness is the “antidote to insecurity...a way of life with profound and abiding satisfactions” (83). In the wilderness, Olson suggests, we can finally find “moments when life could be good and play the natural outlet for energy” (89).

This emphasis on the spiritual character of Nature may seem contradictory to Olson’s scientific training as a zoologist and ecologist; one might expect him to educate his audience about the ecological destruction caused by road building and other tangible threats to the Quetico-Superior like logging. Olson’s resistance to an ecological definition of the region might also seem anachronistic, considering the era of his writing, in which the field of ecological science was gaining greater recognition and finding practical application to environmental issues. But it may be that the landscape itself did not invite an ecological definition, for Olson or the Quetico-Superior writers before him: the ecological features of the northern lakeland were relatively well-known, since they appeared in other landscapes around the country, and they were also relatively well-studied, given that ecological science began with the study of Midwestern lakes. The loci that routinely drive the formation of definitional discourse – uniqueness, originality, threat, and essence – could not find compelling expression through an ecological rendering of this place.

Thus, at times, Olson does describe ecological processes happening in nature, especially the geological changes and the symbiotic relationships between plants and animals, yet he often rejects these scientific commentaries as fundamentally unsatisfying explanations that capture neither the rich sensory experience nor the full meaning of wilderness. This tendency is best seen in the essay “Northern Lights,” where Olson witnesses the aurora borealis in a winter night sky. Even though he “knew what the astronomers and the physicists said, that they were caused by sunspots and areas of gaseous disturbance on the face of the sun,” he prefers to think of the Northern lights as “the ghost dance of the Chippewas” or even as he saw them when he was very young and “knew nothing then of protons or atoms.” As a child, he saw the Northern lights with “the wonderment only a child can know and a beauty that is enhanced by mystery” (185-87). In some ways, Olson may be likened to John Muir, a man of science who equally values nourishing the human spirit in Nature. Like Muir, Olson emphasizes awe as the proper response to natural phenomenon: they are not to be studied, but *experienced* through the senses and the spirit.

With Olson’s heightened emphasis on the wilderness experience, the definition of the Quetico-Superior continues to evolve for a new era through *The Singing Wilderness*. Of course, like many Quetico-Superior writers before him, Olson glorifies the “frontier experience,” to some extent, as William Cronon describes it:

If the frontier was passing, then men who had the means to do so should preserve for themselves some remnant of its wild landscape so that they might enjoy the regeneration and renewal that came from sleeping under the stars, participating in blood sports, and

living off the land. The frontier might be gone, but the frontier experience could still be had if only wilderness were preserved.

(78)

Some of this definition of wilderness is clearly woven into Olson's stories about the Quetico-Superior, as he strikes out alone on winter nights, comes face to face with wolves, sleeps in a trapper's cabin, and likens himself to the rugged men of the past. But Olson's wilderness also reckons with real modern Americans of the present.

Moving beyond the frontier wilderness, Olson incorporates elements of a newer definition of wilderness, one that might specifically appeal to the average American city-dweller: wilderness as a site of recreation for all modern humans, especially those living in urban and suburban environments. With his emphasis on "play," Olson can sometimes sound like he is already advertising in *The Singing Wilderness* for the National Park that is still fifteen years off. He imagines that if a man "could abandon himself" to wilderness play "once a month – or once a year, perhaps," it would "be good for his soul" (89). Here Olson alludes to the spiritual benefits of a yearly vacation, a luxury that was increasingly available to middle class families in the post-war era. It must be routine, he insists, because it is only through regular contact with wilderness that one grows in intimacy with the land, and reaps these spiritual benefits; one must work for them. One can also imagine that such a stream of yearly or even monthly visitors would also create a sustainable tourist-based economy in places like his hometown of Ely, but Olson cares little – at least in his essays - for the economic benefits of wilderness tourism. His literary focus is a spiritual one, as he shares his sense of wonder about the mysteries of the wilderness.

Cronon notes that this way of thinking about wilderness emerged in the post-Civil War era, and was embraced by people only as they had increasing leisure time and resources to travel away from their homes (78). Olson's wilderness welcomes humans and offers them a natural place. Importantly, though, the human role is restricted: as would later be stated in the Wilderness Act of 1964, wilderness is a place for visitors, travelers, and spectators; Olson suggests in his writing that they might visit "once a month or maybe once a year." But in Olson's wilderness schema, this recreation travel is not trivial, but essential to human flourishing. Olson had expressed this idea earlier in his 1946 piece "We Need Wilderness," which appeared in *National Parks Magazine*, where he directly argues for the value of wilderness preservation. In that essay, he says that wilderness plays "a real recreational role," and that "its real function will always be as a spiritual backlog in the high speed mechanical world in which live," the means by which we achieve "equilibrium." Importantly, though, a recreational wilderness is a place "untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain" (Wilderness Act, section 2c). The Quetico-Superior wilderness is fundamentally a place to *play*, *commune*, *refresh*, and *stand in wonder* before the beauty of Nature.

For Olson, then, the definition of wilderness incorporates elements of both the romanticized frontier and recreational leisure experiences, evidence of a changing socio-cultural landscape. With the economic and baby booms of the 1950's, middle class families had more opportunities to visit places further away, a trend reflected in the increasing popularity of the National Parks. Olson's essays describe the Quetico-Superior in a palatable and coherent form, around an idea that was gaining powerful currency with national audiences. His appeal lies in his call to return to spirituality in landscape, now

called “recreation,” which provided an alternative to what had become a primarily economic discourse in debates over preservation. With the help of texts like *The Singing Wilderness*, by the 1960’s, wilderness had become synonymous with recreation, and it was common practice to use political designations to make wilderness areas safe extensions of society. The campaign for Voyageurs National Park relied strategically on the familiar themes of historical voyagers, wildlife encounters, and leisure experience, relying on the well-established definitional discourse to promote the Quetico-Superior as a “recreational wilderness.”

The Campaign for Voyageurs National Park

While writers and advocates for the Boundary Waters saw the area as expansive and integrated, politically speaking, the definition “Quetico-Superior” applied to a very limited area. While Ernest Oberholtzer’s proposed Quetico-Superior Program encompassed the 14,500 square miles surrounding the border lakes, in actual preservation practice, the term only applied to the 3,200 miles that was contained within the “wilderness-tourist management system” (Backes, *Canoe* 78). The campaign for Voyageurs National Park sought to extend the reach of a sanctioned, institutionalized, and safe wilderness that was part of a regional system of preservation. It was Sigurd Olson who helped to extend the definition of the Quetico-Superior to the entirety of the Boundary Waters, using the unifying concept of the Voyageurs Highway to push the discourse westward. Though the majority of the campaign would inevitably focus on arguments about economics, the Quetico-Superior’s definitional discourse provided

secondary arguments about the historical and recreational value of parks that, in the end, became the enduring language of the Voyageurs National Park.

Preserving the Voyageurs' Highway

The launch of the Voyageurs National Park campaign was a continuation of the National Park Service's interest in the region that began in the 1930's. In 1958, Minnesota State Parks director U.W. Hella invited NPS officials to assist with updating the state-wide Parks and Recreation plans that they had helped to create in 1937-38. As part of this project, Hella traveled with a team of NPS and Minnesota recreational planners to survey potential park sites. Hella specifically asked the NPS representatives to assess any of these sites for National Park status. The last stop on the survey team's trip was the Kabetogama Peninsula, which protrudes into Rainy and Kabetogama Lakes, the western links in the border lakes chain. A member of the survey team, NPS planner Evan Haynes, thought that this area could meet National Park criteria; in fact, much of the area had been nominated for park status in the 1891 proposal. The planning team thought the area was similar to the lakes that lay east in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area and decided to further investigate its "recreational potential." Over the next two years, NPS officials continued to assess the landscape and formulate their recommendation for what type of "national area" the region might become (Witzig, *Voyageurs* 16-18).

Not surprisingly, Sigurd Olson, by then a celebrated voice of the Quetico-Superior, played a role in these formative conversations. On one particularly significant trip in the assessment process, in October 1961, Sigurd Olson served as a guide for a small party including the NPS Midwest regional director, Howard Baker; as a result,

Baker wrote to NPS director Conrad Wirth, advocating for “full-scale studies” of the region to consider National Park status, and he also spoke with Governor Elmer Andersen about promoting the idea that NPS was considering a National Park in Minnesota (19). An eager Andersen urged NPS to complete their study of the area, and in June 1962, Olson again served as guide, along with Russell Fridley of the Minnesota Historical Society, when Governor Andersen toured the Kabetogama Peninsula with Conrad Wirth and Howard Baker. Later, in dozens of stump speeches throughout the park campaign, Andersen begins by recollecting this day. “It was a beautiful day,” he recalls, and his opening remarks unfold a familiar definitional discourse:

The scenery around the peninsula could not have been more impressive. We could easily imagine the voyageurs of another era paddling their great canoes over the same area admiring very much the same scenery we were privileged to enjoy. [...] The Kabetogama Peninsula is an enormous recreational resource to a great degree in its natural state. For many years it has provided economic benefit, including vacation opportunities for many people. It should be made available for use by more people, while preserving its wilderness character for posterity. (Andersen 15)

Andersen’s routine opening remarks highlight the language of historical value and recreational wilderness, familiar from Quetico-Superior discourse. In fact, it was during this inaugural trip that Olson suggested the area’s unity with the Quetico-Superior by virtue of the “Voyageurs Highway,” which he had by then traveled several times with

Blair Fraser and friends. It was also during this trip that Olson supposedly suggested the name for the park that invokes these historic, yet mythical men (Backes, *Meaning* xvii).

In this setting, Olson, like Muir, Kephart, and Douglas in other times and places, played the role of guide and regional interpreter. As we have seen, such on-location visits with local park advocates, state and federal lawmakers, and NPS officials are routine features of park campaign machinery that provide park advocates an opportunity to disseminate and promote a region's definitional discourse, with the added emphasis of geographic *presence*. The discourse surrounding the June 1962 trip suggested a campaign strategy too: extending the definition of the Quetico-Superior from its well-established meaning in the east to the western links of the border lakes chain. Muir had employed this same strategy in arguing for Yosemite National Park, by extending the definition of the well-known Yosemite Valley to define the entirety of the Sierras. In the Boundary Waters, the definition "traveled" along the Voyageurs' Highway.

In the two years before the official park proposal debuted, Olson continued to promote the potential park site's historical value and define it as continuous with the Quetico-Superior. One opportunity to do so was perhaps, providential: in 1962, he was contacted by the chemist Dr. E.W. Davis, who had seen underwater divers searching the remains of a shipwreck site in Lake Superior and wondered if a similar search might uncover canoe wrecks in the Boundary Waters. He contacted Olson as an authority on the Voyageurs' Highway, to talk about the possibility. Olson was enthusiastic, and the two worked together to recruit a team of underwater archeologists. The team conducted a series of dives during 1962 that unearthed numerous artifacts from voyageurs' canoe wrecks, just as Davis and Olson had hoped (Treuer 109-110).

Olson narrates the underwater dig in a September 1963 article for *National Geographic Magazine*. In “Relics from the Rapids: Divers Explore the Watery Highway of Canada’s Voyageurs,” the 23-page article goes far beyond the dive itself, as Olson details the history of the fur trade and paints a picture of the voyageurs as romantic as Grace Lee Nute’s:

They paddled their great canoes from dawn until dark, packed enormous loads, faced storms, uncharted rivers, hostile Indians, and ruthless rivals with joy, abandon, and pride in their calling. A breed apart, they wore a distinctive, colorful costume.... These were the men who sang as they fought gales in their fragile canoes.

(422-23)

After establishing the heroism of the voyageurs and the dangers of the fur trade, Olson narrates the archeological dive that he witnessed, and tells of the “dramatic discoveries” that archeologists found in other wreck sites as well: axes, ice chisels, a gun, musketballs, gunflints, awls, knives, and brass kettles (432). In classic Olson style, the scene of the dives and the relics themselves reconnect him viscerally with the past, as if he “could see the haze of forgotten fires lying like a wraith over rows of canoes and wigwams along the shore” (430).

Notably, the park itself is already present in this 1963 article. One of the dives mentioned took place on the Namakan River, between Namakan Lake and Lac La Croix, on the eastern approach to the park site. On the two-page spread of the Boundary Waters map, the park appears as an outlined segment labeled “Proposed Voyageurs National Park (Boundary Indefinite)” (414). At the end of the article, in a section titled

“Voyageurs Survive as Northwoods Symbol,” Olson closes with resounding praise of the park idea, in passages that could be excerpts from *The Singing Wilderness*. He writes that the voyageurs live on “as a symbol of the deep love that North Americans have felt for 300 years” for the region and that “thousands of canoeists now paddle down the historic waterway,” and encounter “the same mysterious vistas...the same smells of balsam and pine, the same sounds...” (435). The article names the institutions – from Grand Portage National Monument to Quetico Provincial Park – that “keep the heart of this unique wilderness unchanged,” and concludes that “there is even hope that the United States Congress will recognize the great significance of the wilderness waterway of the voyageurs between Superior and Lake of the Woods by the establishment, in the Kabetogama—Rainy Lake region, of a Voyageurs National Park” (435). Interestingly, the article ends with “The End,” as if Olson has just told a fairy-tale, which has reached its culminating happy conclusion – a new National Park that completes the preservation of a valued historic area.

Olson’s 1963 *National Geographic* article reached a national audience and continued to be reprinted in smaller publications for several years, including the *Winona Sunday News*, *The Beaver: Magazine of the North*, and the *Ford Times*. The next year, Olson further amplified the continuity of the park with the Quetico-Superior region when he composed the introduction to the official NPS proposal, *The Proposed Voyageurs National Park*, issued in September 1964 (Witzig, *Voyageurs* 37). Olson’s introduction to this otherwise technical document emphasizes the need to protect the entire Voyageurs’ Highway in tact. The voyageur and the Voyageurs’ Highway, which appear as powerful symbols in *The Singing Wilderness*, would become the symbolic connection between the

well-known Quetico-Superior wilderness to the east and the unpreserved links of the Boundary Waters to the west. Campaigners for Voyageurs, however, would not have an easy time convincing the public to adopt this historically romanticized definition of the Kabetogama area and its surrounding waters.

The Voyageurs National Park Association

By 1964, the area that the NPS was considering for park status totaled 160,000 acres, including the entire Kabetogama Peninsula and the U.S. portions of Rainy and Kabetogama lakes. Ownership of the proposed park area was divided among small private owners (18%), the state of Minnesota (28%), the federal government (8%), and the Boise-Cascade Paper Company (46%) (Naddy 8). NPS officials believed that this region “included some scenic, geologic, archeological, and ecological features and characteristics not then included in the National Park System,” and that its characteristic waterways provided water-based recreational opportunities that would also be unique within the larger park system (Witzig, Voyageurs 22). Such rationale echoes the arguments made in the campaign for the Everglades National Park, suggesting that as the park system grew, one of its primary goals was to preserve representative samples of different types of American landscapes. Importantly, Isle Royale, in Michigan, was the only other scenic National Park in the Midwest at this time, so the opportunity to recognize the significance of a Midwestern landscape at the national level was also no doubt attractive to the regional branch of the park service.

Despite NPS’s official recommendation, many stakeholders challenged the Voyageurs Park proposal from a variety of angles. One challenge concerned the intrinsic

suitability of the region for a scenic National Park. Early on, even NPS officials raised questions about this matter in internal correspondence. One internal memo questioned the recreational potential of the park, advocating that the park must not be called “canoe country,” like the neighboring Boundary Waters Canoe Area, because of the dangers of canoeing (Witzig, Eighty 36). A second internal concern was that the lake levels in the proposed park area tended to be unstable, due to two neighboring dams (Witzig, Voyagers 23). A third concern was that the Kabetogama peninsula had been logged significantly and logging was still active in the proposed park area; a related concern was proximity to active logging in the neighboring National Forest, where pesticide spraying was allowed (Witzig, Eighty 41). Indeed, Heinselman points out that pulpwood logging, which was active in the Boundary Waters from 1935 to 1978, had a greater ecological impact on the area than the earlier era of big pine logging, which peaked in the early 1900’s; while many forests gradually recovered from the lesser damage of big pine logging, some areas were permanently changed in their ecological composition by pulpwood logging (Heinselman 125). Despite the routine claims in Quetico-Superior discourse that the landscape is “just the same” as in frontier days, later reports about the area’s natural resources focus on the changes in the landscape since the frontier era, and outline the park service’s plans to reintroduce “missing species” and restore the area’s original wilderness appearance (Bureau of Sport Fisheries). Based on Witzig’s accounts of early NPS communications, as well as these later reports, one can infer that officials were concerned that logging and damming rendered conditions on potential park property less *wild* or *original* than areas typically considered for National Park status.

Beyond aesthetic or ecological concerns, the greatest challenges to the park proposal were economic. These challenges were spearheaded by the Boise-Cascade Paper Company, by far the single largest landholder in the proposed area (Treur 116-117). In 1965, Boise-Cascade joined with a newly formed special interest organization, the Northland Multiple Use Association, in a campaign that raised objections to the park on economic grounds (Witzig, Voyageurs 62). In advertisements, editorials, and public hearings, Boise-Cascade and Northland argued that the Kabetogama region already provided ample, unregulated recreational opportunities while also allowing for industrial development. The anti-park campaign defined a park as a “lock up” of land that would actually restrict favorite recreational pastimes like hunting, boating, and airplane fly-ins. They also objected to the federal government taking land away from private landowners, who owned 64% of the area, and hence removing these private taxes from the local counties’ tax base. Further, they objected to restrictive policies that would make the park area a no-cut zone, bringing the total no-cut area in the border region to more than 700,000 acres and arguably compromising Minnesota’s ability to compete in the timber industry (Naddy 7). In place of these federal restrictions, Boise-Cascade and Northland advocated a “multiple use” approach to land management, which would allow for the development of private recreational holdings in the area, along with continued “sustainable yield” logging (Northland). This multiple use campaign positioned Boise-Cascade not only as a major economic force in the region, but also as a reasonable, good-citizen company that sought to balance economic concerns with conservation, exactly as in Superior National Forest.

One of Boise-Cascade's strategies was to suggest that they would indeed support a National Park in the region if it were created from already existing federal lands, rather than extending federal reach in the area. Boise-Cascade specifically suggested an alternative park site at Lac La Croix. This lake and its surrounds, however, were already protected wilderness within the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, overseen by the United States Forest Service. Because the Lac La Croix area was not logged, it was arguably the more pristine wilderness site that NPS was seeking (Witzig, *Voyagers* 56-57). In 1965, the counties most affected by the park site selection, St. Louis and Koochiching, commissioned a planning agency to reconnoiter the Kabetogama park site and make recommendations for future use. This group, Aguar, Jyring, and Whiteman, concluded that the Kabetogama site was well-suited for a multiple-use plan (Aguar et al 4). Importantly, they claimed that the area was "far less unique, less scenic, and less historic than other portions of the adjoining Border Area," a claim that validated Boise-Cascade's suggestion of an alternate park site further to the east (4). Though the United States Forest Service was clear that it would not cede any holdings to its rival agency, continued public conversation about a possible park at Lac La Croix, spurred by Boise Cascade, challenged the Voyageurs campaign for several years. Significantly, Boise-Cascade and Northland's campaign proved effective at inciting local resistance, which led to hesitation on the part of Representative John Blatnik, the congressman whose support was needed to introduce the legislation (Treur 115).

Until 1965, the National Park proposal gained its enthusiastic support from only a handful of prominent citizens like Sigurd Olson, but it did not have a formal campaign structure to further the cause to a wider public. In response to the multiple use campaign,

however, Governor Elmer Andersen organized a statewide group, the Voyageurs National Park Association (VNPA), in April 1965, after his term of office ended (Witzig, Voyageurs 60). At their first public meeting, held at Macalester College in the Twin Cities, Russell Fridley of the Minnesota Historical Society shared slides of artworks depicting the lives of the voyageurs, and the event was promoted under the headline “Voyageurs Lives to be Shown” (“Voyageurs” 6). Yet, despite the historical appeals of this first meeting, in responding to Boise-Cascade, the VNPA focused much of its campaign on economic arguments. They based many of their arguments on a study by Robert Sielaff, chairman of the Department of Business and Economics at the University of Minnesota-Duluth. Commissioned by NPS in 1964, the Sielaff study found that the park would not cause county tax and other economic losses (Witzig, Voyageurs 49, 131). Based on the Sielaff report, the VNPA argued that private ownership in the region would continue and even increase with development of concessions near the park that would create a new tax base. Not only would the park provide several dozen new jobs, new concessionaires would also contribute to job growth. The VNPA further suggested that tourist spending would double from \$2 million to \$4 million dollars a year within ten years of park establishment (Naddy 6). And, based on the Sielaff report, they asserted that the lost timber revenue from the 81,000 cords cut on the peninsula could be replaced by the available surplus 900,000 cords of timber available for cutting elsewhere in the county each year; in other words, Boise-Cascade could continue its timber operations at the same rate outside the park, where sustainable yield logging was well under capacity (Karlstrand 49). This last was an important argument, given that the corporation

employed 2,000 people in the area – the single biggest employer in the 7,000-person city of International Falls (Heritage 18).

These economic arguments, however, were premised on the idea of unlimited development – just like Horace Kephart’s promise that visitor revenue from the Great Smoky Mountains National Park would “go on forever.” Early on, the VNPA strove to set up the notion of a “demand for recreation” that would continue to grow and could not be quenched. Andersen suggests in his campaign stump speech that the existing 32 National Parks (or 33, or 34, as the campaign went on) were “insufficient to accommodate our burgeoning population and its growing desire to travel and see this great country of ours” (16). E.W. Karlstrand, writing for the *Duluth News-Tribune* in 1966, echoes Andersen’s theme, arguing, “The growing population is swallowing up areas of natural beauty with its demands for living space and is placing increased pressure on overburdened areas of recreation and pleasure” due to the increased popularity of outdoor activities like camping and fishing. Even within Minnesota, “some experts say that only 30 percent of the needed recreation areas are presently available to the population of the Twin Cities, which is expected to grow from 1.7 million to 4 million in 35 years” (Karlstrand 49). Karlstrand also notes that, beyond Minnesota, 50 million Americans live within a day’s drive of the Voyageurs site. He also cites Chester Brown, from the NPS Division of National Park System Studies, saying that “visits to national parks [between 1952 and 1962] increased 87 percent” (49). Marshaling data on growing demand for recreation in the U.S., the VNPA suggested that Minnesota would become, to use Andersen’s words, “a tourist magnet.”

Arguably, the VNPA campaign successfully increased statewide support for the park: by July 1967, data from a *Minneapolis Tribune* poll showed that 78% of all adults statewide believed the state would benefit from the park, and 64% believed that it should be established, with little difference in polling data between northern, southern, and urban parts of the state (“Most State Residents”). Yet the perception persisted among lawmakers and the media that most northern Minnesotans did not support the park because of economic concerns. In an effort to overcome this perception, the VNPA created a grassroots campaign that invited citizen participation with the aim of disseminating accurate information and generating wider recognition of existing public support. In November 1967, the VNPA announced the formation of the Citizens Committee for Voyageurs National Park, which the press release explained as a better vehicle to communicate the “grass roots desire” for a park to Minnesota’s leaders.

The Citizens Committee operated slightly differently from the larger VNPA. While the parent organization focused on obtaining and distributing accurate information about the park proposal, engaging with multiple-use critics, communicating with the media, and lobbying state and national legislators, the Citizens Committee focused on circulating information about the park through small, local organizations. It asked citizens to do the work of disseminating the VNPA’s arguments by talking with others in their communities. The Committee’s “Blueprint for Action” from Spring 1968 indicates that an interested person could select the materials, prepared by the VNPA, that he wished to receive by mail for use with his local group, including: a ten-minute speech one could deliver at an organization or town meeting; a suggested editorial for a local newspaper; a template for writing letters to the editor of a local newspaper; a template for

writing letters to a congressional representative; pamphlets to distribute at a meeting or door-to-door; VNPA membership cards; a layout for a local newspaper advertisement; and a 13-minute full color film about the park site, available to borrow. There was also a template resolution available, and members of the Citizens Committee were asked to obtain the endorsement of their organization, to announce their endorsement in local newspapers, and to share it with the VNPA. Ultimately, the grassroots campaign yielded over 300 endorsements from local chapters of clubs like the Kiwanis, Rotary, Lyons, and Boy Scouts, as well as from unions, political parties, religious organizations, and chambers of commerce (“People Want Voyageurs”).

Like its parent organization, the Citizens’ Committee materials largely rely on an economic discourse, designed to address concerns about taxes, land purchasing, job creation, and private development. As discussed throughout these chapters, economic discourse played a role to varying degrees in previous campaigns. In the Yosemite National Park campaign, railroad companies quietly advocated for a park that would yield better farming production through a healthy watershed. In the Great Smoky Mountains campaign, boosters promised that a park would remedy a perceived economic need in a poor region. Even the scientifically focused Everglades campaign promoted the prospect of increased year-round tourism to entrepreneurs in sunny Florida. In the Boundary Waters, however, economic discourse quickly emerged as the *dominant* discourse, especially in arguments directed to local and state audiences; the debate typically defined a park as an economic resource, and recreation as an economic good. Yet, at times, the VNPA and the Citizens’ Committee materials also demonstrate moments when this discourse is disrupted by value-laden definitional arguments aimed at

convincing local and state publics that the park area was in fact “unique, scenic, and historic,” and that the park provided an essential recreational wilderness experience that had value beyond mere economics.

Promoting the Recreational Wilderness

The Quetico-Superior discourse, epitomized by Sigurd Olson’s *The Singing Wilderness*, is woven throughout the campaign in materials circulated by the Voyageurs National Park Association and the Citizens’ Committee, as well as in the words of other writers who covered the issue of park creation. These materials emphasize the original qualities of the landscape, when they invoke the glaciers, the Precambrian rocks, the voyageurs, the frontier, or the unchanging landscape. At times they invoke the uniqueness of this forested lakeland, especially its uniqueness among other parks already in the federal system, its unique water-based recreational experience, and the unique chance to encounter wilderness “up close.” And, at rare times, they also invoke the threats that impinge on this wilderness, emphasizing the need for controlled road-building and restricted human use to protect it from further damage. In these disruptive moments, the definitional discourse of the Quetico-Superior’s “recreational wilderness” shines through, applied anew to the western reaches of the Boundary Waters.

Of all the materials circulated by the VNPA, the 1967 film for the Citizens’ Committee best showcases the region’s definitional discourse. This short color film, available to borrow by mail, promotes the Kabetogama park site in language that perfectly echoes the appeals to ancientness, uniqueness, and even threat that characterize earlier Quetico-Superior discourse. The film begins with sketches of the voyageurs in

their canoes, and describes this “rugged breed of men,” their contributions to the development of the continent, and their travels on “America’s first transcontinental thruway.” The narrator describes Rainy Lake and the Kabetogama Peninsula as “the funnel through which all traffic inevitably flowed,” making the proposed park site nothing less than central to this origin story of America.

After this historical setup, the remainder of the film focuses on the “superb wilderness scenery” that “has no counterpart in any other of our national parks” – making it quite unique indeed. The narrator promises that “as a National Park, hiking trails would be developed extensively to offer that close-up view of nature” that only outdoor hiking and camping can provide. Throughout this segment, the camera zooms in on individual birds and deer, emulating the experience of close observation that Quetico-Superior writers so valued; again, the emphasis is less about the uniqueness of the animal itself than the uniqueness of the wilderness encounter enabled in this landscape. Similarly, the next segment on fishing shows a struggle between a man and a fish – a story of “the one who got away” that recalls a rhetorical pattern witnessed decades ago in Murie’s family outing. Finally, in an effort to make the cold climate appeal as a unique characteristic, the film shows images of ice fishing and snow mobiles “blazing new trails” in this exciting “theater of seasons.”

Throughout the film, aerial views of the region serve to emphasize the waterscape. Importantly, these aerial views also recreate the sublime vistas associated with the original western parks – imitating, for example, the entrance to Yosemite Valley from “Inspiration Point.” On the ground, though, claims about the beautiful scenery are accompanied by images of groups docking boats, setting up camp, cooking over a

campfire, and standing at the lakeshore. The emphasis is more on *scene* – the scene of camping, the scene of experiencing time together outdoors – than on *scenery* per se. An updated VNPA film, made in 1969, adds to this language of vacation experience for busy middle-class families. The film opens with images of the harried urbanite rushing through traffic on busy city streets, recalling the soul-sick “modern” of *The Singing Wilderness*. The narrator argues, “We need places where we can slow down. More importantly, we need to know that there will be places like this for our children and grandchildren,” places that are “unmarred by traffic, polluted air, business meetings, and the mind-jarring swirl of social commitments.” The end of the 1967 film explains that the creation of a park “would further the protective pattern for the voyageurs’ route,” adding to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area to the east, and though we haven’t heard much about why it needs protection, the argument is one by association: similar landscapes ought to be treated similarly.

In addition to the promotional films, other Citizens’ Committee materials also interrupt their primarily economic discourse to highlight the Quetico-Superior’s definitional discourse. The prepared 10-minute speech, for example, interrupts its argument that the park will create a robust tourist industry with a paragraph that begins “the case for the park at Kabetogama is not totally an economic argument.” The speech indicates the general damage that has been and continues to be wrought on the environment: “In the last 75 years, we have contaminated more air, polluted more rivers, and spoiled more landscapes than all the generations before us.” As a consequence, the speaker argues, “incumbent on us is the obligation to preserve, for future generations, something of what is left of natural beauty and open country.” The speech declares the

Kabetogama Peninsula “truly a magnificent, beautiful area,” and “for the most part, an unspoiled, natural scene.” The park promises to restore its “ecological balance of nature” so that “it will again be covered with beautiful red pine.” These arguments indicate subtly that Kabetogama requires some restoration, and also imply a distant future threat to the area, due to the character of modern civilization itself. The National Park, the speech argues, will restore the area so that “our children and grandchildren will enjoy it as the early voyageurs saw it,” suggesting that, despite superficial changes, its fundamental character remains in tact.

Beyond the rhetoric of the VNPA campaign, the familiar Quetico-Superior discourse filters through in local magazine and newspaper spreads throughout the 1960’s. These expansive spreads allowed room for some statements that were non-economic in their concerns. For example, in January 1968, Ray Naddy lays out several pages under the title “A Study of Conflict: the Pros and Cons of Voyageurs National Park” in a local magazine, *The Duluthian*. Of particular interest are his fact sheets, “Why Kabetogama?” and “Why Not Kabetogama?” which synthesize information from each position along six major criteria. In “Why Kabetogama?”, under the criteria “Historical Significance,” Naddy describes the Kabetogama Peninsula as “virtually in the middle” of the historic Voyageurs Route, making it central to the region (as opposed to tangential, too far west) and thereby heightening its historical value. Under “Meets National Park Criteria,” Naddy states that the peninsula can provide “a wide range of recreational opportunities in a natural setting the year-around.” These simple statements lead the page, as if they are a necessary premise for the ensuing statements about the number of proposed picnic sites, resorts, taxes, and development costs.

Similarly, *Greater Minnesota Magazine* takes a similar pro-con approach in their spread “Voyageurs National Park? Participate in ’68,” a magazine for the state’s business community. Dr. Uel Bank’s article, “Value to Man Offered in Primitive Setting,” argues that the new park will “contribute significantly by reserving an area in which an unusually rich human and natural history could be interpreted” (6). In several routine invocations, Bank gives an account of the fur trade, praises the Precambrian rock formations, and describes these woods and waters using many symbols familiar from Quetico-Superior writing - birch, aspen, beaver, timber wolves, black bear, deer, moose, snowshoe hare, porcupine, and even that great American symbol, the bald eagle. For Bank and for Naddy, this definitional discourse enables all further arguments, because “only if those cultural appeals, sought by an increasing number of the population, are present and present in abundance, can a park contribute to the local economy.”

In the debates over Voyageurs, such definitional arguments encountered as much resistance as any economic argument. In hearings and in articles, speakers rejected campaigners’ claims to the area’s historical significance, even arguing that it was misleading to elevate the Kabetogama Peninsula’s value through a specious connection with the voyageurs’ trade routes. Writing about the park controversy for the *AAA Minnesota Motorist* in 1966, Ron Johnson notes that “some critics say, ‘[the park site] was not really on the route of the voyageurs’.” In response, Johnson invokes the authority of Dr. Julius Wolff Jr., University of Minnesota-Duluth professor, who confirms, “The Kabetogama Peninsula was on the main route of the voyageurs” and in fact “the whole north coast of the peninsula borders along the route of the historic trips of the voyageurs” (Johnson 5). At a hearing in International Falls two years later, a questioner states the

same accusation: “The name Voyageurs is overused and inappropriate for the Park. Kabetogama has no connection with the French Voyageurs” (Proceedings 7). The state commissioner of economic development offers no response to this accusation at the meeting, but the secretary later adds clarification in the public minutes that Kabetogama Lake was not a part of the Voyageurs Route, but Rainy and Namakan Lakes were. Such research consistently confirmed arguments made earlier by the likes of Olson, among many others – yet it remained difficult to create uniform acceptance for a definition that cast the park site as continuous with the historically valued Quetico-Superior to the east.

Other critics rejected the park campaign’s claims to the unique wilderness character of the area, and hence the quality of wilderness experience one could have there. During a September 1967 hearing in Duluth, a citizen named Mr. Caza went so far as to bring a sample of water with him from his “favorite spot” on the peninsula. Holding up the sample, he said: “They call this the Land of the Sky Blue Water but this water is brown...[campers] can’t drink it and it’s unsafe to swim in.” Mr. Caza goes on to attack the recreational value of the park site, claiming that “There is no worthwhile fish in the lake,” and that “it is not even fit for canoeists because it [the water] is too rough” (Transcript of Statements 28-29). Such a rejection of the region’s wilderness character potentially undermined the rampant arguments about economic growth as well, which were premised on the desirability of recreation in this area.

Interestingly, Caza’s testimony also calls attention to the threatened character of the region. But while park proponents argued that these threats were reasons to protect the Kabetogama Peninsula, Caza argues that these threats have ruined its wilderness qualities. He claims that “these lakes are all green” and that insecticide used on the trees

“kills all the worthwhile fish in the lakes” (Transcript of Statements 28-29). A few months later, Caza’s concerns are echoed by State Senator Raymond Higgins at the Governor’s Conference on the Proposed Voyageurs National Park in November 1967. Higgins says, “They [park proponents] say that the people of the future will be looking not for partial or managed wilderness, but for the real thing. How could people of the future or the people of today possibly find this wilderness atmosphere as they arrive at some designated and sometimes badly overused campground, complete with docks, stone fireplaces, picnic tables, cut wood, garbage cans, and latrines?” (Triden 245-46). For Caza and Higgins, the human influence on the forests and lakes was already too harsh, ruining any chance of defining this landscape as a wilderness, and the Park Service’s managed recreation did not promise adequate restoration.

Despite such voices of resistance, the campaigning efforts ensured that support for the park became more widely recognized, evidenced in the hundreds of endorsements from groups around the state and the positive polling results that showed park support in the state remained steady at 80%. A 1968 endorsement from native Minnesotan Charles Lindbergh added “weight and national recognition” to the campaign as well (Treur 122). In 1970, the VNPA made a final push for passage of the park bill, including strong presence at congressional hearings in July and December. One of the prominent speakers at both was Sigurd Olson, who spoke as President of the Wilderness Society, as well as local resident, ecologist and geologist, and author and researcher of the region. Olson’s July 1970 statement begins by defining the proposed park site as “an integral part” of the Quetico-Superior Region, which extends on both sides of the international border from Lake Superior to Rainy Lake. He defines it as an inherently threatened landscape,

“constantly under attack by those who see only material benefits through the use of waterpower, timber, minerals, and unplanned recreational developments.” He calls the area a resource of “spiritual and intangible values...in the face of an escalating population and deteriorating environment.” He praises the region for its “unique qualities and superb beauty.” In short, he fully applies Quetico-Superior discourse to the western border lakes, “the only unprotected section along the route of the voyageurs” and the “wilderness heartland of the area.”

In the struggle for a lasting rhetoric for the Boundary Waters, the Quetico-Superior definitional discourse won. In State Senator Higgins’ 1967 testimony against the park, the senator framed his resistance as an objection to the *language* of the pro-park campaign, saying: “We are getting sick and tired of hearing such high-sounding, vague, all-encompassing words as, wilderness values, unique qualities, protection, etc. What is meant by such terms?” (Triden 245). Yet when the park bill passed in January 1971, Nixon emphasized the historical and recreational qualities of the area. In Nixon’s commemorating words, we hear Olson’s idea that wilderness is a force that links “generation to generation and century to century.” It would not meet the demands of the epideictic moment for Nixon to wax lyrical in the park campaign’s major key: “Here we created a new economic resource that will employ many people in International Falls, Minnesota, and provide a sustainable tax base for St. Louis and Koochiching counties!” Instead, the definitional discourse of place, which was a secondary rhetoric in the actual campaign, became its memorializing language. Indeed it was recorded in the opening blurb in the park pamphlets that the NPS created immediately, inviting park visitors to “become voyageurs” themselves - and it remains the same blurb today. The region’s

definitional discourse imparts a sense of the inherent worth of the landscape because of what it *is*, presumably by nature – though in actuality, because of what it has become through the sermonic nature of language.

The Legacy of the Voyageurs National Park Campaign

The triumphant Voyageurs National Park Association celebrated Sigurd Olson's contributions to the park campaign at their annual meeting and victory celebration in August 1971, held at the historic Kettle Falls Hotel on the new park grounds. Though Olson missed the occasion, the VNPA commemorated him as "the Voyageurs Park hero," along with Elmer Andersen and Representative Blatnik. Three Norway Pines were planted in honor of the victory, with a memorial plaque dedicated to the three heroes – a former governor and leader of the park campaign, the representative who made the legislation possible, and a nationally recognized nature writer and conservationist (Shemesh, Letter to Sigurd Olson). Olson continues to be remembered as the "geologist, ecologist, writer, and moral spokesman for conservation" and "the symbol of the Quetico-Superior movement...the spearhead of border-country protection" (Treur 106). Like Olson's biographer, David Backes, Treur suggests that, though Olson felt he could never do enough for the cause of wilderness, "his stream of books and articles reached and maintained popularity and spoke to a nationwide audience" (111). Olson indeed helped to refine and promote the definition of the Quetico-Superior region as a recreational wilderness, and to extend that definition westward through the Boundary Waters to the site of a new National Park.

But this case study of Sigurd Olson's *The Singing Wilderness* illustrates how definitional discourses are built over decades and circulated by many voices through extensive campaigns before achieving their persuasive ends. While a writer like Olson – or Muir, or Douglas – might become “the” voice of a region who elaborates its definition, he inevitably builds upon the language of those who preceded him and benefits from the familiarity that a public already has with this place, even as he brings new cultural knowledge to bear on the discourse. In *The Singing Wilderness*, Olson brings new cultural knowledge to bear on the concept of wilderness, as he updates the idea from the Quetico-Superior discourse of the “nostalgic frontier” to a more widely inviting and culturally current “recreational wilderness.” Importantly, this definitional discourse was essential in valorizing a landscape that was considered by some to be un-scenic and damaged beyond repair, and it guided park rhetors to productive lines of argument for Voyageurs National Park.

The study of the Voyageurs National Park campaign suggests that some rhetorical strategies had become routine features of National Park campaigns by the mid-20th century. Specifically, two campaign strategies resurface: first, rhetors can extend a well-established regional definition to a nearby area, which was also a productive strategy for Muir in the campaign for Yosemite National Park; and second, a noteworthy regional author can act as a guide and interpreter of place for park officials, which was also a successful practice in the three previous case studies. Further, in the Voyageurs campaign, a primarily economic discourse, once a novel secondary line of argument in the campaign for the Great Smoky Mountains, has become the standard discourse for park campaigns, replacing what began in the 19th century as a primarily aesthetic

discourse. But parks still need an epideictic language of place, too – a way of singing the praises of this landscape in the future, beyond the immediacy of park formation. In the case of Voyageurs, the secondary lines of argument, historical value and recreational value, provide that language. These two topoi reflect the institutional and cultural influences of their era: the historical topos exhibits a trend in the National Park system to add historical sites, promoting education about American history as another purpose for parks; and the recreational topos indicates changing ideas and practices regarding leisure travel in American culture at large.

Contemporary writers continue to celebrate the Boundary Waters in language that recollects the Quetico-Superior writers and the campaign for Voyageurs National Park, while also challenging and extending their discourse. In a recent work of creative nonfiction, *Paddle North: Canoeing the Boundary Waters-Quetico Wilderness* (2011), author Greg Breining uses the familiar language of the Quetico-Superior and reflects openly on the legacy of Sigurd Olson. Breining's book opens with a reflection on the rewards of a canoe trip - the sense of isolation and privacy, the satisfaction of campfire food, the warmth of the campfire, the peacefulness of paddling a canoe, and the memories of his first boyhood trip with his father and brother. He also celebrates the romance of the voyageurs, the timeless landscape, and its ancient geography. His chapters are titled with the symbols of place familiar from other Quetico-Superior writers, like canoes, portages, campfires, wildlife, and the winter landscape. Breining's final chapter gives Olson credit, "more than any other single person," for "etching canoe country in the popular imagination and winning federal restrictions on logging and motor use" (119). He believes that "books such as...*The Singing Wilderness* conveyed the

romance of traveling in the tracks of Indians and voyageurs and provided a compelling philosophical and aesthetic argument for setting aside the area as wilderness” (119).

Yet Breining also critiques Olson’s discourse of the Boundary Waters, which defined the region as a place apart from human life – a wilderness of the type enshrined in the language 1964 Wilderness Act. Breining suggests that Olson understood the Indian history of the place, but conveniently elided it in his writing because it didn’t suit the narrative he wanted to create for the audience he wanted to reach (120). Breining reminds us of a different perspective on wilderness that one can take to the Boundary Waters, one that included humans in the landscape from the beginning: Indians here were “not mere visitors; they had every intention to remain. ‘A forest is not a place to visit,’ said the chief of the nearby Lac La Croix Ojibwe, whose relatives and ancestors lived on these lakes. ‘It’s a place to live’” (123). In keeping with the contemporary environmental movement’s beliefs about the place of humans in “natural” landscapes, Breining suggests that we need a new definition of wilderness, one that takes into account a *changing* landscape and restores the history of *human intervention* in the landscape (129). Indeed, Olson may have been verging on that same perspective as his career lengthened. In his congressional testimony for Voyageurs National Park, he frames this act of preservation against the backdrop of the year 1970, the year that “spawned Earth Day and a nation-wide awareness of the problems of pollution, growing ugliness in our cities, the deteriorating atmosphere, unplanned industrial development and urban expansion, and our shrinking wilderness and open space.” Even as Olson espouses a mid-century conservationist stance devoted to saving wilderness, he simultaneously acknowledges the coming of a

new environmental era, one in which the places that need “saving” are not apart from human life, but all around us.

Fred Witzig, historian of the Voyageurs park campaign, suggests that the creation of a park in the Boundary Waters happened at a kairotic moment in 1971. In an interview archived at the Minnesota Historical Society, Witzig reflects that “things change with philosophical thought patterns” and environmental ideas were changing in the 1970’s. Witzig suggests that as the “environmental decade” progressed, “People [were] still willing to pay for a decent environment. But normally what they [were] thinking of is clean water and clean air, and the larger pollution issues” rather than the creation of parklands or wilderness preservation (28). Witzig’s comment, made in the mid-1980’s, suggests that people were starting to think of “larger pollution issues” because they were realizing that human and wilderness environments are in fact interconnected, and that we are permeable to our environments wherever we are found. Witzig is right, though, in that this shift heralded a new sensibility, one focused on sustainability rather than preservation. In the final chapter, I will grapple with the challenge faced by rhetors on the Great Plains, as their attempts to preserve an ecologically fragile place as wilderness evolve into an effort to make the Plains, not a place set apart, but a sustainable place for human life to continue.

Chapter 5 The Buffalo Commons: Adapting the Language of Preservation

For each geography we have explored so far, from Yosemite Valley to the Boundary Waters, we have seen how writers built definitional discourses over time and defined different geographies in terms of their uniqueness, their original qualities, the threats to their ecosystems, and their essential features. These definitions, combined with the specificities of time and place, enable arguments for new parks based on a region's aesthetic, economic, scientific, historical, or recreational value. While this chronological study of park campaigns may seem to suggest that these lines of argument accumulated over time in a linear fashion, such is not the case. Nor is it true that any single line of argument operated independently within a campaign. Rather, while multiple lines of argument were present in any park campaign, some lines of argument proved more salient and persuasive in a given time and place.

For example, in the campaign for Yosemite National Park, railroad companies subtly made economic arguments to Congress members, but they were downplayed in discourse directed to the reading public in favor of aesthetic praise of the American West. Decades later, in the Great Smoky Mountains, rhetors strove to demonstrate that the region met the aesthetic standards for emparkment, but economic reasons provided compelling secondary arguments that were compatible with the public's understanding of the region as an economically needy area. And though the Everglades campaign overlapped in era with the Great Smoky campaign, the circumstances of geography gave rise to a very different, scientific topos for preservation in a landscape that could only support limited aesthetic and economic arguments. Meanwhile, most of the campaign for Voyageurs was about the economic viability of a park in a remote part of Minnesota, and

yet the lasting arguments that are still used to draw tourists are rooted in the region's history and recreational offerings. The four cases presented so far have demonstrated the characteristics of each line of argument, the complex ways that they work with specificities of place and time, their relationship to definitional discourses, and their functionality in generating persuasive arguments for preservation.

However, as noted by Fred Witzig in his reflections on the campaign for Voyageurs National Park, the types of places that count as endangered and the types of actions we take towards them continue to evolve. In the twenty-first century, federal preserves may no longer be the most likely means of protection for endangered places. Since 2008, fewer public lands have been protected by the federal government than at any other time since 1900; from 2011 to 2013, the 112th Congress was the first Congress in decades to pass no new land protections at all (Foster). In what some see as an effort to overcome budgetary and political limitations, President Obama has used his executive power under the Antiquities Act to designate ten new National Monuments.³¹ However, in March 2014, the House of Representatives voted on a bill (HR 1459) to limit the president's powers to create National Monuments using the Antiquities Act, in favor of ensuring "public participation" in the process of deciding which public lands earn greater protections. The major underlying concern for some Representatives is the use of executive authority to exclude lands from development ("House Votes"). Yet in the past five years, federal lands, including those with some level of preservation status, have increasingly been opened for development with presidential approval; in particular, oil

³¹ Historically, the Antiquities Act, established by Theodore Roosevelt in 1903, has enabled presidents to protect land from development threats very quickly, without extended campaigns and approval from Congress, and the designation of a National Monument often serves as a precursor to other types of preservation status ("Teddy Roosevelt"). See the Glossary of Terms for more information on the Antiquities Act and National Monuments.

and gas extraction is now allowed on 7.3 million acres of public land (Foster). With the recent reluctance to create new preserves, National Park advocates argue that the trend has been away from federal action as a primary means of protecting and restoring places of aesthetic, ecological, and historical significance.

The tensions between preservation and development are hardly new, as we have seen them play out in numerous park campaigns within this project, and these tensions have been fundamental to the development of new language for talking about environmental actions. The discourse of preservation that was so powerful throughout the 20th century has increasingly transformed over the past two decades into a discourse of sustainability. The common definition of sustainability was established in 1987, when the United National World Commission on Environment and Development issued a report titled *Our Common Future*. The report defines sustainability as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs” (Dresner 1). In its early versions, the term sounded much like traditional definitions of conservation, such as those pioneered by Gifford Pinchot for “scientifically managed” forestry, which allow for human use of the land if resources are replenished. For some environmentalists, this early use of “sustainability” still enabled too much development, without accounting for the intrinsic value of the natural environment and its implications in all areas of human life (Dresner 71).

As the term developed on the world stage, however, its meaning deepened, especially through debates about the “needs” of present and future generations. In contemporary theorizing about sustainability, these needs are not just for basic resources, like air, water, food, and fuel, but also include such needs as healthcare, safe and

meaningful work, and cultural survival. In the 21st century, these principles of sustainability increasingly guide decisions about development and land use, and sustainability theorist Ulrich Grober suggests that they will continue to. Grober believes that the concept of sustainability has evolved a “necessary flexibility” that can guide decision-making about the myriad ways that any environment – e.g. rural, urban, industrial - shapes human life (Grober 1995). Environmental rhetoricians must ask, in light of the principles of sustainability, what new actions might rhetors advocate for endangered places? And, what new language do they need to make these arguments?

In my final case study, I explore the shift from a discourse of preservation to a discourse of sustainability through the case of the Buffalo Commons. In December 1987, the same year that *Our Common Future* established the definition of sustainability, Frank Popper and Deborah Epstein Popper, two academics from New Jersey, published an article in *Planning Magazine* called “The Great Plains: From Dust to Dust.” In their article, they recommend the creation of a vast, federally managed preserve on the Great Plains – essentially, a scenic National Park they call “the Buffalo Commons.” The Poppers argue that this federal intervention is an appropriate and proportional response to what they see as the persistent economic and ecological troubles faced by Great Plains residents. While the Poppers intended their article as an academic “thought piece,” residents on the Great Plains perceived their article as a real proposal for a National Park, one that would halt the productive use of land and forcibly remove citizens – which, as we have seen, are frequent concerns in the formation of National Parks. The proposal attracted extensive media attention, and the Poppers began to travel the region in an effort to persuade Great Plains’ residents that their landscape was, in fact, endangered, and that

a federal preservation could save it. The Poppers' travels are chronicled in *Where the Buffalo Roam*, a book-length work of literary journalism by Anne Matthews. Nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in nonfiction in 1993, Matthews' text provides a window into the Buffalo Commons controversy as it unfolded from 1987 to 1993. It specifically allows readers to examine the challenges that the Poppers faced in arguing for a large-scale, federal intervention on the Great Plains, and how they adapted their proposal and their rhetoric to meet the demands of a new ethic of sustainability.

In this chapter, I analyze the Buffalo Commons controversy through a reading of Anne Matthews' *Where the Buffalo Roam*. I consider the Poppers' response to the Great Plains' definitional discourse, their early failed attempts to win adherents for their proposal, and the gradual evolution of both their rhetorical strategies *and* their proposed intervention itself. It is important to note at the outset that this chapter presents a different kind of case study than those in previous chapters, with a different purpose in mind. First, the Buffalo Commons case presents a different type of core text; *Where the Buffalo Roam* draws readers' attention less to the landscape itself – as with other works of literary nonfiction studied here – and more to the *argumentative discourse* about that landscape. Thus this case provides further consideration of how literary nonfiction can display and critique our current debates and rhetorical productions. Second, the Buffalo Commons case demonstrates arguments about an endangered place that embody the 21st century environmental ethic of sustainability. It is not an example of a classic National Park campaign, or even an example of a “failed” National Park campaign. Rather, it is an example of a persuasive effort that began with the vague intention of traditional park-based preservation, but eventually shifted its focus to new types of actions rooted in the

principles of sustainability. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the Buffalo Commons case establishes the continued viability of the five lines of argument, used historically in campaigns for National Parks, in advocating for environmental actions other than traditional preservation. Following my analysis of the Buffalo Commons, I will conclude my exploration of the role of literary nonfiction in the National Park movement, by synthesizing the observations and lessons offered by the five case studies and considering their implications for scholars of Nature writing, rhetoric, and environmental communication.

The Great Plains: Creating a Buffalo Commons

The Poppers' argument for the "Buffalo Commons" participates in the larger discourse of the Great Plains, which, like other regional discourses, has its roots in the natural and human geography of the region. The Great Plains occupy about one fifth of the continental United States, beginning at the 98th meridian and extending west to the Rocky Mountains. Their political boundaries cross the borders of ten states: Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. Because the region is so vast, there is considerable geographic diversity within its boundaries. The typical Great Plains landscape is the flat grassland of the High Plains, a plateau that extends across Nebraska and Kansas, and as far south as the Texas panhandle. Yet, like the ecological variety found with the Everglades region, there are also unique topographies that indicate subregions within the Plains, such as the rolling dune grasses of the Sand Hills in Nebraska; the buttes and spires of the Black

Hills in South Dakota; the rocky foothills of the Colorado Piedmont; and the limestone hills and caves of the Edwards Plateau in Texas (Callenbach 19-24).

The Great Plains is defined as a unified region because of its persistent semi-arid climate. All areas of the Great Plains receive, on average, less than twenty inches of rainfall per year, and the climate tends towards extremes of heat and cold, sudden storms of snow and hail, and constant wind. Because of limited rainfall, the natural landscape throughout the Plains is nearly treeless, and the primary vegetation is a mix of grasses that form a shortgrass prairie ecosystem. These grasses have deep roots, creating tangled masses sometimes five to ten feet underground. In the natural shortgrass prairie ecosystem, routine fires play an important role in removing dead grasses and making the nutrient-rich soils deep below the surface more accessible to plants (Callenbach 19-24). In a healthy state, this ecosystem supports a great variety of wildlife, including prairie dogs, ferrets, antelope, elk, and bison. Historically, larger species like bison, traveling in herds, migrated over the prairie, staying short periods in one location, so that the land was able to recover from the impact of grazing and stampeding (28).

The ecosystem of the Great Plains was heavily affected by white settlement because the patterns of permanent settlement, ranching, and agriculture defied the natural patterns of migration that alleviated effects on the landscape. One major human impact on the Great Plains was the decimation of the bison, which numbered about 28 million before 1800, to near extinction by 1870 (Flores 58). The causes of the bison's decline were numerous. First, drought in the late 1840's limited water supply, a natural stress on the animal population. Then, the introduction of cattle ranching by white Americans brought bovine diseases that infected bison and created competition among horses, cattle,

and bison for food. Most devastating was rampant hunting by Indian tribes participating in the “buffalo robe” trade and by white game shooters seeking furs, leather, and trophies. The bison were also further hunted by the American military as a means of disrupting and relocating Indian cultures (Flores 66-70). A second major human impact on the Plains came from the changing migration patterns of persecuted Indian tribes and white Americans, especially the tens of thousands of settlers who traversed predictable routes to California and Oregon; these travelers used trees and water, left waste, and created wagon ruts that are still visible in some places today (Sherow 62-63). A third major human impact resulted from the growth of the cattle industry, as grazing and herding extended into the Plains (68-69). And finally, human influence on the Plains rapidly accelerated with the Homestead Act of 1862, which incentivized agricultural development and permanent white settlement in the region by offering 160-acre plots to willing homesteaders; such relatively small plots were typical of successful family farms in the lush Midwestern states east of the Plains (73).

The rise of agriculture on the Plains was arguably the greatest change to the natural landscape and in many ways an unbelievable feat of human ingenuity. Author and environmental advocate Ernest Callenbach writes that “the process of settling the Plains was almost inconceivably arduous” given that the prevailing natural conditions did not lend themselves to farming practices that had been successful in the Eastern and Midwestern states (40). Working their relatively small 160-acre plots, early Plains farmers needed to break the thick, tangled roots of the prairie grasses and develop means for irrigating from the scarce water supply (41). During the early 1900’s, new technologies helped to make agriculture possible on the Plains; with new types of plows,

farmers were able to plant larger acreages of wheat in less time, and with a wartime decline in European production, these farmers benefitted from higher prices on commodities (Sherow 110). Yet farming practices that disrupted the naturally dense prairie grass exposed the soil to constant wind and rare but torrential rains, causing deep erosion. When drought set in during the late 1920's, exposed soils dried and deteriorated. Gathered by the wind, the loosed soil created widespread dust storms, rendering the Plains region an uninhabitable "Dust Bowl." From 1933 until 1938, these extreme conditions made farming impossible, caused illness to humans and animals, and prompted mass migration (112).

The devastating Dust Bowl led to a new era of federal intervention on the Great Plains, this one focused on resettling displaced migrants; regulating water, grazing, and pest management; and re-incentivizing agricultural development. With these supports and the increased demand for food after World War II, agriculture on the Plains burgeoned into modern, federally-subsidized agribusiness (Sherow 113-117). As a result, over the mid-century, more Plains' land was cultivated but managed by fewer people. Some Plains people moved from farming into extractive industries, during booms in mineral mining and oil production, especially during the 1970's. These industries, however, were short lived (213). Others moved into larger cities, like Denver, Omaha, and Wichita. Indeed during the 1980's, the Plains' population rapidly urbanized, leaving swaths of rural land with population density of less than 6 people per square mile, and in some places, less than 2 people per square mile. By some measures, this dramatic population decline represented a return to frontier conditions (Callenbach 209).

It was at this historical moment in the 1980's that Frank Popper and Deborah Epstein Popper entered into conversations about the future of the Great Plains with their article, "The Great Plains: From Dust to Dust," which investigates the trend of depopulation and the economic and ecological circumstances underlying it. In the next sections, I explore the definitional language of the Poppers' famous article and contextualize it within the larger discourse that has historically defined the Great Plains as either a *desert* or a *garden*. I argue that the Poppers escape this definitional rupture by redefining the Great Plains in strictly ecological terms as a *shortgrass prairie*. However, their ecologically grounded definition brings them into conflict with their Great Plains' audiences and limits their access to the five lines of argument that might otherwise support the creation of the Buffalo Commons. Then, I analyze Anne Matthews' *Where the Buffalo Roam*, which displays the Poppers' interactions with Plains' residents and with the landscape itself. I suggest that their encounters with place help the Buffalo Commons discourse evolve, from a traditional rhetoric of preservation to a contemporary rhetoric of sustainability.

The Poppers: "From Dust to Dust"

In their 1987 landmark article, "The Great Plains: From Dust to Dust," Frank Popper and Deborah Epstein Popper argue that, economically, the Great Plains has suffered from continuous boom-and-bust cycles since settlement began. The rapid settlement following the Homestead Act in 1862 was followed by the economic hardships of the late 1880's and 1890's; the prosperity of the early 1900's gave way to the bank failures of the mid-20's and the Dust Bowl of the 30's. In the 1980's, and for more than a

decade to follow, the Great Plains were once again in a period of economic decline, with hundreds of bank failures in the Plains states and rapid depopulation. Based on Deborah Popper's demographic analyses, the Poppers conclude that "many small towns are emptying and aging at an all-time high rate, and some are dying" (13). They trace the "ripple effect" of these repeated economic downturns, from collapsed banks, to fewer loans, to closed businesses, to lower tax bases, to fewer public services like schools, roads, and law enforcement (15). These cutbacks are hardest on the poor and marginalized, especially Indians living on reservations, migrant farm laborers, immigrants, and those suffering from the increase in family violence, suicide, and mental illness that follows economic downturns (14, 15).

The Poppers attribute the economic boom-and-bust cycle to the realities of the Plains ecosystem. They argue that, scientifically speaking, the semi-arid climate of the Plains, with its cyclical droughts, make it completely unsuitable for agriculture as it has been practiced elsewhere in the country. They argue that a "too-assertive agriculture" has once again, as with the 1930's Dust Bowl, "destroyed" the Plains' land with "an excess of cattle and sheep grazing [and] the cultivation of corn, wheat, and cotton" (12). In particular, during the agricultural boom after World War II, this type of destructive farming was conducted on a scale much greater than previous small family farms, damaging tens of thousands of acres at a time (14). Such intensive "sodbusting" agriculture requires an insatiable water supply, and consequently the seemingly bountiful underground Oglala Aquifer, the vast but shallow water table that supplies water to the Plains, is rapidly draining far beyond the ecosystem's ability to replenish it (14). Interestingly, the Poppers also argue that climate trends for the Plains "do not look

favorable” in light of a long term “greenhouse effect,” a prescient acknowledgement of the impending effects of climate change, though the debate over this reality still raged in the scientific community in 1987 (14, 16). In addition to damaging agricultural practices, energy and mining booms on the Plains, such as the oil boom experienced in the late 1970’s, led to the rapid harvesting of non-renewable resources in destructive ways, leaving collapsed boomtowns and ecological damage when the resources ran out (14-15).

For the Poppers, then, settlement of the Great Plains is “the largest, longest-running agricultural and environmental miscalculation in American history,” and in light of these economic and ecosystemic trends, they argue that the Great Plains should be deprivatized (12). Likening the destruction of the Plains to the classic “tragedy of the commons” on a large scale, the Poppers argue that the only solution is to recreate the commons through a federal buy-back of land in areas where agriculture, energy harvesting, mining, and tourism have failed. In place of failing and destructive farms, the Poppers imagine a vast, 139,000-square-mile “commons,” nicknamed the “Buffalo Commons,” which would be “the world’s largest historic preservation project, the ultimate national park” (18). This area includes much of the western Dakotas, western Nebraska and eastern Montana; portions of Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas, and selected counties in Colorado, New Mexico and Wyoming. The Poppers indicate that this park would be formed from over 100 “distressed counties” that are rapidly depopulating due to economic forces; the federal government would buy land that residents were already leaving (17).

To critics who would call such large-scale federal intervention just another case of government land-grabbing, the Poppers remind readers that Plains farming and Plains life

are already heavily subsidized – indeed, only possible at all because of federal investment (17). Importantly, the National Park Service and its institutional history and infrastructure are never mentioned. Instead, they compare their imagined “Buffalo Commons” proposal to an existing national grasslands program managed by the United States Forest Service, under which farmers and ranchers are paid not to cultivate their land (18). They also compare this federal intervention to the 1930’s Resettlement Administration, through which the federal government helped families to relocate when farming life on the Plains was no longer viable (18). Rather than making a formal proposal for a scenic National Park, as in other cases studied here, the Poppers use the term “national park” to invoke the familiar practice of federal preservation as a culturally-sanctioned means for salvaging endangered places.

The idea of the Buffalo Commons, and the critique of Plains’ culture behind it, sparked unusual media attention for the Poppers, beginning in 1988, when the *Omaha World Herald* covered Frank Popper’s remarks to a meeting of regional planners in North Dakota in an article titled “Prophet of Doom for Great Plains States Case to Dubious Dakotans.” Rhetorician Mary Umberger observes that this article and other early articles established the stock characters and plots that typified coverage of the “Buffalo Commons” idea for the next five years (120). Criticism came from many audiences: residents of the Great Plains feared that the Poppers intended to remove them from ancestral homes; the National Park Service was concerned about the Poppers’ use of the term “national park”; and Plains lawmakers questioned the severity of the demographic and ecological trends that the Poppers argued were irreparable. The Poppers’ argument in “The Great Plains: From Dust to Dust” triggered immediate controversy and a

conversation about the future of the Great Plains that is still going on twenty-five years later.

Several writers argue that the vehement reaction stemmed, in part, from the perception that the Poppers were unlikely spokespeople for the Plains: they were outsiders with an eastern, urban, and academic ethos that did not impress many stakeholders on the Plains (Callenbach 203; Matthews, *The Poppers* A24; Umberger 122). At the time of their writing in 1987, Frank, a native of Chicago, was the chair of the Urban Studies Department at Rutgers University, where Deborah, originally from New York City, was a graduate student and lecturer in Geography. The couple lived near the university in the semi-urban, post-industrial landscape of northeastern New Jersey. During their early careers in planning, they lived in New York City, Chicago, and Washington, D.C., and traveled in the Western states on business. For the Poppers, their article was merely an academic thought-piece, a place to play with an idea that they had talked about on cross-country trips. Given that *Planning Magazine* was one of only two major planning journals, they did not expect many people outside of their field to attend to their idea, and they certainly did not expect to become the center of widespread media attention (Matthews, *The Poppers* A24). This media attention only ramified the public's perception of the Poppers as disconnected from the realities of people and culture on the Great Plains (Umberger 121). In addition to the Poppers' struggle with ethos, I suggest that the vehement reaction from people on the Plains also stemmed from disagreement about the definition of place underlying their proposal.

Defining the Great Plains: The Desert and the Garden

To better understand why the Poppers' definition challenged so many people on the Plains, it is first important to understand the competing definitions of the region. The rhetorical ecology of the Plains is so vast – considering its geographic scope and historical significance – that its regional discourse has been well studied by historians. These historians describe a region caught in continuous definitional rupture: the meaning of the Great Plains has been up for debate since white American explorers encountered the landscape in the early 1800's. Historian Henry Nash Smith, in his landmark study *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (1950), articulates this debate as a struggle between two myths, the "Great American Desert" and the "Garden of the World" (175). While Smith uses the word "myth" to indicate "an intellectual construction that fuses concept and emotion into an image" (xi), I would suggest that these two guiding images are also value-laden definitions underlying debates about actions that should be taken towards the Great Plains. For the people of the region, the definition of the Great Plains as a desert that halted the expansion of the nation was, over time, largely supplanted by the definition of the Great Plains as a bountiful agricultural landscape that could feed the nation. As we will soon see, the Poppers depart from these traditional definitions of the Plains and offer an alternative definition to guide future action.

The Great Plains was perhaps easy for early American travelers to define as a desert because of its general aridity and nearly treeless landscape. Smith suggests that early accounts of the Plains "did full justice to, if indeed [they] did not grossly exaggerate, the aridity which settlers encountered there" (Smith 175). He traces the development of the "Great American Desert" through the journals of Zebulon Pike,

Henry Brackenridge, Stephen Long, Thomas Farnham, and others. These writers assert that “the vast treeless plains were a sterile waste like the sandy deserts of Africa,” and that crossing their 400-mile expanse on the way to the promised land of the west was “dreary and monotonous” (175, 176). For these early explorers and migrants, the Plains were an uncivilized landscape, where civilization was equated with agriculture; the region was initially perceived as unsuitable for cultivation because of its lack of water and trees (176). Walter Prescott Webb adds in his history, *The Great Plains: A Study in Institutions and Environment* (1931), that this “desert” provided a natural limit on the expansion of the American nation (Webb, *Great Plains* 156). Webb’s analysis of maps from the early and mid-19th century show this definition of the region at its height from 1820 to 1858, when he finds “Great American Desert” scrawled across official maps of the United States in the expanse between the 98th meridian and the Rocky Mountains (153). In the early republic, then, the definition of the Plains as a desert was “founded by the first explorers, was confirmed by scientific investigators and military reports, and was popularized by travelers and newspapers” (153).

Between the 1850’s and 1870’s, however, the Plains were quickly redefined by boosters and politicians who promoted homesteading as a method of economic development and national expansion. In her study “Encountering the Buffalo Commons,” Mary Umberger traces the contributions of William Gilpin, a political figure from Colorado and propagandist for settlement of the Great Plains. Gilpin blatantly proclaimed that “these Plains are not deserts, but opposite, and are the cardinal basis of the future empire of commerce and industry now erecting itself upon the North American continent. They...form the Pastoral Garden of the World” (Gilpin 120). Gilpin then addresses

primary concerns about the “desert” nature of the Plains in tones that recast its native characteristics as not only survivable but even desirable: availability of fuel in buffalo chips and sod; the lush “vernal rains”; the benefits of frequently clear skies for the activities of farming; the plethora of rivers; and the availability of naturally dried “hay” for livestock. He even compares the region to the Nile River Valley, a center of ancient civilization, and suggests that the sunshine and healthy atmosphere would be beneficial to all who settled there (Umberger 64-65). Other boosters even went so far as to argue that the “civilizing influence” of agriculture would actually cause greater rainfall on the Plains, with the creation of irrigation systems and the planting of trees (Smith 182). Boosters’ efforts resulted in the passage of the first Homestead Acts and the settlement of some 370,000 tracts of privatized land (190).

Umberger notes that unlike Gilpin’s predecessors, who often begin their proclamations about the Plains with direct observations of the landscape, Gilpin begins his arguments with a focus on settlement, and the benefits that cultivating the Plains will have on social refinement (Umberger 60). For other writers the Plains were also intimately tied to American character and social life. Frederick Jackson Turner, for example, acknowledges the challenges of agrarian life on the Great Plains, from storms to droughts to fires, but he then reframes these disheartening circumstances in light of the character of the people who live on the Plains. He calls them “survivors,” who show the characteristics of American pioneers and frontiersmen:

coarseness and strength, combined with acuteness and
inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of the mind, quick to
find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacing in

the artistic, but powerful to effect great ends; that restless nervous energy; that dominant individualism...that buoyancy and exuberance that come with freedom – these are the traits of the frontier. (Turner 38)

For Gilpin, for Turner, and for other promoters of the Great Plains as a “garden of the world,” the Plains are defined in large part by their role in culture and economics; as with Horace Kephart’s definition of Southern Appalachia, the people are inseparable from the meaning of their landscape. This positive, agrarian definition of the Great Plains often resonates with people living on the Great Plains today, especially those who trace their roots to the early days of white settlement. For them, the Plains *are* an agricultural landscape belonging to the descendants of white pioneers. This definition captures what many who love the Plains see as its essential character: an agricultural land and breadbasket to the world, with deep historical significance to the narrative of America’s national development. They might argue that the harsh climate, complete with long winters and droughts, lends a toughness to life there that makes it a unique place to farm; there is pride in this sense of endurance and uniqueness. For these stakeholders, the Plains’ original qualities begin with the Homestead Act of 1862, the American frontier, and the origin stories of their family farms. Their Plains are inherently threatened by an absence of technology or money, by outsiders, and by government ownership.

The Great Plains as “garden of the world,” however, has never fully supplanted the definitional discourse of the “Great American Desert.” When the conditions on the Plains have proved harshest, such as during the Dust Bowl, this alternative definition has re-asserted itself and prompted a critique of the prevailing definition of the Great Plains

as a bountiful agricultural landscape. At these moments of definitional rupture, we find arguments that cast the Plains as a deficient landscape - aesthetically, economically, ecologically, and historically. For many living outside of the Great Plains, it remains a poorly valued “flyover country,” and consequently few people outside of the Plains are invested in shaping a course of action towards the region.

Historian Dan Flores, in *The Natural West*, suggests that the Plains are often perceived as aesthetically deficient. Flores acknowledges the aesthetic sensibility that was celebrated in campaigns for western parks like Yosemite: he argues that our American aesthetic of the natural has been “powerfully shaped both by ecological preparation in Northern Europe and on the Eastern Seaboard and by popular Romantic Age painters of mountain landscapes” (170). And during the 19th century - as demonstrated in Chapter One by the discourse of the Yosemite Valley - the country’s sense of its own “cultural worth” actually “came to depend on the discovery of monumental and vertical scenery across the continent” (170). In response to these preferences, “the serene, sunlit savannas of the Plains seemed the antipode of what was grand and sublime” (170). While other deserts, such as those of the Southwest, were characterized as unique and pleasing in their aesthetics, Flores suspects that the Plains’ perceived aesthetic deficiencies were heightened by the radical disruption of its natural ecosystem - for without their “wild diversity” of plant and animal life, “the Great Plains lost almost all appeal to our deep-seated biophilic impulses and came to be seen in our own time as a precariously dry and boringly flat version of the Midwestern farm belt” (Flores 171). The Plains’ aesthetic deficiencies derive from the definition of the area as

desert, and they are invoked in its regional discourse whenever it is described as flat, monotonous, austere, or empty.

Other writers suggest that the Great Plains is an *economically* deficient region, and that its inability to sustain a thriving economy is the result of a deficient *ecology*. This view is voiced as early as 1879, in John Wesley Powell's *Report on the Lands of the Arid Regions of the United States*. Powell understood that the "sub-humid" and "semi-arid" climate of the region would lead to frequent "disastrous droughts" (Powell 14). Powell did not declare the region uninhabitable, but he did assert that it could only support limited settlement; he believed that farms would need to be at least 2560 acres to sustain a family – vastly more than the 160 acres prescribed by the 1862 Homestead Act – and that some areas were not suited to farming at all (35). Decades later, on the verge of the Dust Bowl, Webb likewise painted the Great Plains as economically defunct due to its ecological shortcomings. In *The Great Plains* (1931), he argues that Americans are continuously searching for technologies that will enable them to overcome the region's fundamental deficiencies. In his later 1957 article in *Harper's Magazine*, "The American West, Perpetual Mirage," Webb argues that the Great Plains, like the American West as a whole, "is a desert, unqualified and absolute," and suggests that because Americans have failed to realize the true nature of the Plains, they will always be chasing technological fixes to fundamentally environmental problems (Webb, American 26). Both Powell and Webb feared the wrongful application of the nation's agricultural ideal to a region that could not sustain it: they believed that its ecological deficiencies would inevitably yield economic hardships.

To these arguments about the Plains' aesthetic, economic, and ecological deficiencies, Webb also suggests that the Plains are *historically* deficient. He argues that, in the Great Plains, as in the West at large, "everything that happened there occurred yesterday - almost within the long life of one man. Historically, the West has no depth, no long background of slow development" (Webb, *American* 30). I would add that, in the definitional rupture between the "Great American Desert" and the "Garden of the World," it is possible to critique the history of white settlement on the Plains – or the history of the creation of the garden - as an era fraught with racism, greed, and the consequent exploitation of animals, land, migrants, tenant farmers, and native peoples. Webb expresses a similar sentiment when he suggests that the Great Plains have been used as a place to "discard what is unwanted elsewhere" – from Indians to Mormons (30). Indeed a critique of the Great Plains' settlement history infuses contemporary academic treatises of the Plains' environment, such as Callenbach's, Flores's, and Sherow's.

Overall, then, the Great Plains' unsettled definitional discourse, traditionally divided between desert and garden, has not lent itself to arguments for preservation. Environmental historian James Sherow suggests that, while many National Historical Sites have been established on the Great Plains, it has been difficult to establish a scenic National Park in the region that specifically celebrates grasslands, because of the conflicting depictions of such landscapes (Sherow 126).³² Sherow bases his argument on Alfred Runte's observation that parklands have often been characterized as

³² There are, in fact, four scenic National Parks in Great Plains states: Badlands National Park, South Dakota; Theodore Roosevelt National Park, North Dakota; Carlsbad Caverns National Park, New Mexico; and Wind Cave National Park, South Dakota. However, these four National Parks, combined with the 26 other units of the National Park System on the Great Plains (e.g. National Historic Sites), still totaled only 0.6% of the total land area overseen by the National Park Service at of 1995 (Zinser). That is to say, the Great Plains, which represent 20% of the continental United States, represent less than 1% of the U.S. National Park System. Notably, all of these four scenic park areas celebrate special geographic features in subregions of the Plains, rather than its native shortgrass prairie.

“economically useless,” but the definition of the Plains as “garden of the world” suggests that the region has a clear use-value and does not require additional industry through tourism (127). Meanwhile, as we have seen throughout these chapters, an endangered landscape can also be argued to possess some superior aesthetic value in its natural state, at least as the supreme expression of its type - but the Plains as desert wasteland desperately lacks aesthetic appeal, while the Plains as garden lacks any novelty. A park might be argued for on the basis of its scientific value as a place to study a unique ecosystem in its natural state, but the Plains’ garden is far too transformed, while the Plains’ desert offers little to see. While the definition of Plains-as-garden supports arguments for a Great Plains national park as a place to educate the public about a critical era of American history, the conflicting definition of Plains-as-desert that should never have been cultivated critiques the value of celebrating that history at all. And, without any of these other arguments in play, there is no case for the recreational value of touring the Plains. Thus, neither traditional definition of the Plains provides extensive fodder for any lines of argument that have typically supported campaigns for preservation. In making their argument for “the ultimate national park,” then, the Poppers needed to break free from a century of debate over the meaning of the Great Plains and reshape its definition for a new era.

Redefining the Great Plains: The Shortgrass Prairie

Early in their “Dust to Dust” article, the Poppers acknowledge the definition of the Great Plains as a productive garden, but they gesture to it only briefly: “The Plains are the land of the Big Sky and the Dust Bowl, one-room schoolhouses and settler

homesteads, straight-line interstates and custom combines” (12). They quickly recast this definition as one problematically steeped in the history and culture of white settlement. For the Poppers, the definition of the Plains as a “characteristically American place” does not adequately compensate for the degradation of the land, the displacement of Indian tribes, and the decimation of the buffalo. It is no longer a usable definition and “will go the way of the buffalo that once roamed it in herds of millions” (17). In contrast to the definition espoused by the many Plains residents they will encounter, the Poppers suggest that the nation needs to adopt a new definition, an ecologically grounded definition that reimagines the Plains in its pre-settlement state. They argue that we *ought* to see the Great Plains not as agricultural breadbasket and home of white pioneer descendants, but rather as a shortgrass prairie with a rich ecosystem.

For the Poppers, the Great Plains are unique because of their potential to host animals, like buffalo, and plants, like shortgrasses, that are not found anywhere else in the world. For them, the Great Plains are original beyond the American frontier story; they were formed millennia ago and were thriving before white settlement. Their Plains are threatened by human actions, like agricultural practices that deepen drought and cause erosion. This essentially ecological definition manifests throughout their “Dust to Dust” article, which begins with an extensive geographic description:

At the center of the United States, between the Rockies and the tallgrass prairies of the Midwest and South, lies the shortgrass expanse of the Great Plains. [...] The Plains are endlessly windswept and nearly treeless; the climate is semiarid, with typically less than 20 inches of rain a year. The country is rolling

in parts in the north, dead flat in the south. [...] As we define the region, its eastern border is the 98th meridian. [...] [The Great Plains] have the nation's hottest summers and coldest winters, greatest temperature swings, worst hail and locusts and range fires, fiercest droughts and blizzards, and therefore its shortest growing season. (12)

These opening passages, replete with the being verbs of definitional language, highlight the ecological features of the landscape. In this way, the Poppers are much like Powell and Webb, who advocated for an approach to the Plains that acknowledged its ecological specificity. It is this ecological definition that drives the Poppers' argument, as they describe an "agricultural crisis" that can best be remedied by returning to a landscape "emptied" of human settlement (15, 18). They argue that their approach would "for the first time in U.S. history treat the Plains as a distinct region and recognize its unsuitability for agriculture" (17). In other words, in the Poppers' view, the creation of a national shortgrass prairie preserve would be an appropriate course of action rooted in what they see as the "true" regional definition.

The Poppers' argument from definition is similar to those used in the campaigns for the Everglades and Voyageurs National Parks. In the Everglades, park proponents argued that the tropical and semi-tropical ecosystem was fundamentally unchanged from ancient times to the present day, despite encroaching damage from fires and drainage. They argued that damage to the landscape could be held at bay if preservation were allowed and that the uniqueness of the area demanded saving it for scientific study. Likewise, in the case of Voyageurs, the pro-park campaign argued that the Boundary

Waters area was, essentially, still the same wilderness from ancient, Indian, and voyageur times, in spite of the marks of modern civilization currently damaging it. Campaigners argued that changes to the landscape from road building, logging, pesticide use, or resort development were only temporary threats and these effects could be undone. Likewise, in the case of the Great Plains, adopting a pre-settlement definition invites new actions, like preservation and restoration of the native shortgrass prairie.

The Poppers were aware that their proposal, if carried out, would have consequences for Plains people, who would become “refugees” removed by the government. These former residents would “feel aggrieved and impoverished, penalized for staying too long in a place they loved and pursuing occupations the nation supposedly respected but evidently did not” (18). Of course, “From Dust to Dust” is a far cry from a formal park proposal – being written in the wrong genre and to the wrong audience, for starters – and the Poppers did not expect their proposal to be taken seriously (Matthews, *The Poppers* A24). Indeed, ten years later they would insist that they never envisioned a literal park at all, and, as mentioned above, they use the term only loosely, often referring instead to a “federal management area” or “preserve.” Yet the problems they raised and the solution they proposed struck a nerve with the very people that they imagined as future “refugees,” and the couple was soon promoting their vision and its underlying definition in controversial talks around the Plains states. In 1989, Anne Matthews, journalist and Director of Nonfiction Writing at Princeton, saw an article about the Poppers’ travels in a Chicago newspaper and contacted them. For one year, Matthews followed the Poppers as they traversed the Plains, meeting with residents and talking about the idea of the Buffalo Commons. She first wrote about the Poppers for the *New*

York Times Magazine in June 1990, before undertaking a long-term study of their work and its evolution. Three years later, she published *Where the Buffalo Roam: Restoring America's Great Plains*. In this Pulitzer Prize-nominated work of literary nonfiction, Matthews captures the Great Plains regional discourse in the midst of a transformation, as the Poppers' idea moves from the model of federal preservation to a multifaceted vision of a sustainable "commons."

Promoting the Buffalo Commons: From Preservation to Sustainability

Where the Buffalo Roam was first published by the University of Chicago press, which may seem like an unusually academic press for a text that is primarily a work of literary journalism. In many ways, though, the text addresses concerns relevant to academic researchers: Matthews chronicles the journey of two academics as they attempt to move a scholarly idea out of its limited disciplinary sphere and to give it shape, depth, and practical application in the public realm. Matthews' text contrasts with other literary nonfiction works that have called attention to the *nature and value* of the Great Plains as a threatened landscape, such as Ian Frazier's *Great Plains* (1989) or Kathleen Norris's *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography* (1993). Instead, Matthews' text exhibits the *debate about* a threatened landscape. In the typical style of literary journalism, the text mingles its character study of the Poppers with Matthews' personal journey as she revisits the Plains of her childhood. Importantly, Matthews grew up in South Dakota, where her family traces its roots back seven generations – though she and nearly all of her siblings and cousins have fled in the trend towards depopulation that the Poppers observe (Matthews, *Where* 6). While *Where the Buffalo Roam* was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in 1993,

over twenty years ago, it endures as a snapshot of an ongoing conversation about how to “save” the Great Plains.

Where the Buffalo Roam is composed in four sections. The first section, “The Great Plains,” introduces the geography and history of the region as well as the Poppers and their work. The next two sections chart the Poppers’ travels in the central Plains (Nebraska, Kansas, and Colorado) and the southern Plains (Oklahoma and Texas). The final section describes their visits to the northern Plains (Wyoming and Montana), while also relating the author’s continued research and reflection on the Plains’ controversy. The text demonstrates how the discourse of the Buffalo Commons evolves from the Poppers’ first economic and ecological arguments for creating a federal preserve. As the Poppers’ travels unfold over a year, their contact with the landscape and residents of the Great Plains prompts them to incorporate new understanding of the Plains and its diversity into their definition, and opens new lines of argument for creating the Buffalo Commons. Gradually, they formulate a new vision for a Buffalo Commons that is a blend of public and private approaches to sustainable development on the Plains.

Through the first three sections, Matthews characterizes Frank and Deborah Popper as data-driven academics who are unfamiliar with the people and culture of the Plains. In addition to painting a portrait of the Poppers as academics – at work in their offices, meeting with students, managing departmental business – Matthews demonstrates that their persuasive discourse is distinctly academic. When they speak in McCook, Nebraska, for example, their talk is “received with absolute and unsmiling attention,” like a school lecture, as Frank relates the Plains’ history in an elaborated version of the “Dust to Dust” article (48-50). Frank is followed onstage by Deborah, who

uses several maps to show the “distressed counties” on the Plains that have lost more than 50% of their population between 1930 and 1988 (50). Then Frank concludes that much of this land will depopulate under the current ecological and economic pressures, allowing for the federal government to assume control and establish free-ranging buffalo herds again. While many in the audience react with strong emotions, including angry shouting, shocked expressions, and tears, the Poppers express excitement about their data and strike their audience as “terrifyingly logical” and focused on “documenting their thesis” (54).

Based on Matthews’ account of the Poppers’ talks on the central and southern Plains, it is easy to see why Plains’ audiences initially reviled them. The Poppers remained entrenched in their ecological definition of the Plains, without accounting for their audience’s prevalent definition, which values agriculture, pioneer history, and white settlement culture on the Plains. And although the Poppers will later insist that they never meant the Buffalo Commons as a literal national park, their talks in McCook, Nebraska, in May 1990, and Oklahoma City in November 1990, strongly assert that the land must be deprivatized and that the government will take control. This attitude bears out in the transcript of a speech that Frank gave to residents of Montana and the Dakotas in September 1990.³³ In this speech, Frank is distant from the concerns of his audience, and he focuses instead on the work that “we,” meaning he and Deborah, have done to diagnose the Plains. He calls Plains’ history “a very hard history,” and even calls it a “too-much mistake.” The current “pressures” on the Plains, Frank suggests, are “ominous,” and his language for articulating its economic trends sounds very ominous

³³ The transcript for this speech closely aligns with Matthews’ summary of the Poppers’ speech in McCook in May 1990, and likely represents the basic script of the Poppers’ initial talks on the Plains. The transcript was prepared by Mary Umberger based on recordings of the talk and with permission of the authors. It appears in Appendix B of her dissertation, *Encountering the Buffalo Commons* (University of Maryland, 1999).

indeed: threats “loom,” conditions are “near Dust Bowl,” national and international policies are “against the Plains,” the area is “hit very hard,” its people will “inevitably suffer,” the rural Plains will see “near total desertion,” and many areas are likely to “collapse” in light of ever-increasing threats from climate and economics. In some sense, the Poppers’ argument might be likened to that of Kephart’s argument for a National Park in the Great Smokies: a federal intervention to alleviate a distressed economy.

Yet the Poppers do not meet with Kephart’s persuasive success. In Matthews’ account the Poppers fail to harness the potential power of their rhetorical position in two significant ways. First, they stringently limit their definition of the Plains. With definitional blinders on, they misunderstand the full economic and geographic diversity of the Plains and fail to account for their audience’s emotional ties to the landscape and their powerful experience of its human history. In other words, the Poppers do not allow the Plains to be a complex and fundamentally changed place that cannot simply be returned to a pre-settlement ecology or culture. Second, the Poppers misunderstand the non-expert nature of their audience. While they take joy in data and insist that they are “doing scholarship, not advocacy,” they do not account for the fact that many people in their audiences are not scholars (17). Consequently, they misunderstand their purpose as accommodators in front of large non-specialist audiences and neglect the epideictic rhetoric that is first necessary to bring these audiences’ definition of the Plains into closer alignment with their own. With these misunderstandings in definition, audience, and genre, they pursue only limited arguments based on ecological and economic rationales for the creation of the Buffalo Commons. In short, they are rhetorical failures.

In addition to capturing the Poppers' early inept efforts at persuasion, Matthews also maps a larger Plains' discourse in which they participate. The Poppers' initial Buffalo Commons proposal quickly takes its place along a spectrum of approaches to aiding the Plains. At the far end of the spectrum are the ideas of Dr. Mark Lapping, another Rutgers Planning professor, who advocates a "triage" approach: the withdrawal of federal and state resources from those areas that are "clearly failing, in order to concentrate already-scarce funds on rural locales that have a chance" (80). The Poppers' idea, which emphasizes inevitable depopulation as a result of ecological and market forces, is nearest to Lapping's. Other approaches along the spectrum include: developing sustainable agricultural practices, led by the Land Institute in Salina, Kansas; efforts at alternative industries and "economic adaptation," championed by the Center for the New West in Denver, Colorado; and various unaffiliated private groups that provide "self-help" to small businesses and town leaders (80-81). This mapping demonstrates that the Poppers are joining a conversation already in full swing, although Matthews suggests that much of this exchange is happening among academics, like Lapping and the leaders of the New West Institute. Meanwhile, "regular" Plains people are confused and alienated by all camps. Even a local politician invited to respond to the Poppers in an Oklahoma City debate fails to directly address causes, effects, or alternative actions, while railing against federal intervention (96). As one frustrated onlooker laments, Plains residents "don't have the language" to respond to "what they're trying to tell us" (98). Essentially, the discourse about issues affecting the Plains has so far failed to include the majority of stakeholders – Plains' residents themselves.

As the Poppers travel, they encounter the Plains in new ways, and Matthews' text suggests that their vision of the Buffalo Commons evolves as they witness reactions from Plains' residents, interact with advocates along the spectrum, and encounter the varying geographies of the Plains itself. The Poppers must eventually acknowledge the aesthetic, economic, and ecological diversity of the Plains and recognize the difficulty of responding to such a vast area as a coherent region with only one plan for action. While still maintaining their view that the Plains ought to be defined by its native shortgrass prairie, they are better able to draw on new lines of argument for the Buffalo Commons that more fully account for the value of human history, human presence, and human uses of the land.

As Matthews and the Poppers traverse the Plains, they express increasing appreciation for its uniquely American aesthetic – one that is often pleasing, or if not pleasing, then at least compelling and moving in its own way. One of their first stops is a field in Hayes County, a rapidly depopulating county in “flat Nebraska,” where Frank and Deborah pose for a *New York Times Magazine* photographer. Matthews calls this “deep Plains, a minimalist landscape of sun, wind, and grass,” with “almost too much light, distance and air” (57-58). The Poppers' reaction is an ecstatic response to the freedom of open space. Matthews notes that “before this clear, warm morning, Hayes County was only a set of data entries on a Rutgers computer screen to the Poppers” (58). Later, the trio travels across a part of the Plains that has a noticeably different aesthetic, the Oklahoma-Texas panhandle, a “no man's land” that is “punctuated by low rocky buttes” (117). Here there are some tangled, wind-shaped trees and a different color palette of gray-green (117, 121). The travelers have a different but equally powerful

reaction to their eight hour journey through this landscape: while Deborah is swept by a “wave of despair,” Matthews herself finds the solitude deeply soothing. These experiences of the Plains’ varying landscapes, each with its own aesthetics, begin to thread their way through the Poppers’ speeches, as when Deborah quotes Walt Whitman to her Oklahoma City audience:

Our vision of the Plains is that of one of the greatest American poets, Walt Whitman, who wrote [...], ‘The Plains, while less stunning at first sight, last longer, fill the esthetic sense fuller, precede all the rest and make North America’s characteristic landscape.’ (95)

Here, briefly, the Poppers begin to articulate the Plains to Plains people in a way that recognizes and celebrates the land they love, in terms that even escalate it to the sublime and monumental stature of a Yosemite. Later, Frank suggests that “there has never been a John Muir of the grass,” but he also believes that the Plains “badly need that” kind of lasting bard and advocate; this admittance is Frank’s initial recognition of how important this kind of epideictic rhetoric can be (104). Indeed by the end of the book, Matthews ventures into a re-created prairieland rich with flowers, aromas, and colors, and writes, “If cultivated prairie land is a factory, this is a festival,” adding her own epideictic celebration of the Plains’ aesthetics to the Poppers’ (166).

The Poppers also begin to acknowledge the economic diversity of the Plains. Frank and Deborah always explain that the Buffalo Commons would be formed in counties that were naturally depopulated, while it would not encompass counties where other forms of industry were clearly working. Many audiences misunderstand this point,

seeing only the vast, multi-state area of the Commons. As the Poppers develop relationships with others who are working for Plains restoration, they are better able to articulate their view that “the Plains are not homogenous” in their economy; they are able to emphasize the beneficial trend towards urbanization on the Plains, and to discuss locations where forms of extraction, farming, tourism, or restoration will work differently (94). By understanding this economic diversity, the Poppers are gradually able to generate arguments that the Plains can provide a wider variety of viable recreational opportunities – through eco-tourism, hunting, and exploration of American history. For example, they envision that some parts of the Commons would allow for many types of ecotourism: “bison spotting expeditions; wildlife photo safaris; ghost town tours; tribal buffalo dances and historic parks; buffalo hunts (as the herds grow...)” (154). As their economic arguments become more nuanced, the Poppers suggest that “the Commons is really one giant conservation easement. But not a uniform one” (103). In a major shift, they begin to argue that the Commons is an idea fundamentally intended to generate economic diversity.

Perhaps most importantly, Matthews chronicles the Poppers as they encounter the ecological diversity of the Plains and begin to understand the scientific challenges of its restoration. While the Poppers continue to define the Plains as a shortgrass prairie, they also begin to articulate a greater complexity within this definition. On their long drive across Texas, for example, they talk about the “quintessential plains,” a conversation in which they discuss the differences in the areas they have traveled or read about. Their descriptions highlight varying geology, plant life, and climate across the northern, central, and southern Plains (138). Later in their travels, Frank attends a conference for

restoration ecologists, where he learns extensively about the practicalities of prairie restoration. The ecologists have many questions and critiques of their plan: one asks, “On a Commons, who will eat whom?” while another points out that “buffalo are not fools. They dislike degraded land as much as the next ungulate, and would probably try to migrate onto good range still under private ownership” (154, 155). While these ecologists share the Poppers’ basic definition, they teach the Poppers about the tremendous challenges in bringing the prairie back to life, because “the prairie cannot come back by itself, not anymore. The original biospheric net was too intricate; the damage is too great” (163). The labor for this restoration effort will be great: it is slow, small-scale work, “not a project for well-intentioned civic groups with trowels” (170). Furthermore, scientific knowledge of the original ecosystem is critically limited; one restoration ecologist points out to Matthews that “there is . . . much we need to know, much we have forgotten, much we never knew” (168). Learning from the insights of ecologists, the Poppers are able to make arguments about the need for further scientific study of shortgrass prairies – an argument that saved another seemingly monotonous, grassy place in south Florida.

Finally, as the Poppers travel the Plains, they become immersed in the Plains’ settlement history that is integral to the residents’ understanding of place. In a significant shift, they begin to speak of this history not as a *deficient* history, but as a worthy one. Much like Sigurd Olson as he paddles the paths of the voyageurs, the Poppers and Matthews are constantly reconnecting with the past on the Plains. In some places, this past becomes present to them through elderly residents, old technologies, and past cultural habits still in evidence in Plains, from old cars to shopkeepers who wrap packages in brown paper and string. They encounter, for example, the “rainwatcher” in

Mayfield, Oklahoma, a man who has kept scrupulous rain records in a U.S. Meteorological Service chart book for forty years; he has faithfully reported his data each week, but now the program is about to be cut because it is too “low-tech” (120-121). In some places, though, the Plains are already becoming museumized: the town of Quitaque, Texas, has abandoned its storefronts, leaving each window neatly arranged with artifacts from Great Plains life circa 1870-1960; the group feels like “tourists at an archeological site” as they study tin pie plates, mule harnesses, and 1920’s wedding albums (128-129). Such encounters prompt the Poppers to consider the idea of a tourism that could honor the Plains’ settlement history, “even living museums where visitors inspect, Colonial Williamsburg-style, re-creations of a western Kansas wheat farm circa 1990, a North Texas ranch circa 1920, a Lakota village circa 1870” (154). Further, the Poppers begin to think about ways that the Buffalo Commons could honor American Indian history and culture. They meet Vine Deloria Jr., a Lakota Sioux activist, who expresses unbridled enthusiasm for the Commons. He sees political ramifications for tribal land claims, as well as spiritual renewal through the ecological rebirth of ancestral lands. For Deloria, ecological restoration is a form of spiritual restoration that honors the diversity of the Plains and potentially restores it to the ancient landscape in which his culture is rooted (158-159). With these encounters, the Poppers begin to re-craft their arguments: rather than arguments about a deficient Plains history, they start to speak about an important American history, one that includes the experiences of both white settlers and Native Americans.

Based on Matthews’ narrative, one can surmise that the Poppers’ interactions on the Plains help them to develop a better sense of deep local *inhabitanace* – that intimate

knowledge of place that keeps residents, white and Indian alike, rooted to the Plains' land despite its hardships. In this emerging discourse, the Poppers finally access lines of argument – aesthetic, economic, scientific, historical, recreational – that work with their ecologically grounded definition of place. In short, they discern the appeals that have been used for a century to argue for federal protection for unique landscapes. With these new topoi at hand, they are able to argue for the Buffalo Commons on grounds that speak more fully to their Plains' stakeholders.

Ultimately, the Poppers' argument shifts from its initial focus on a park or preservation to a focus on multiple types of restoration and multiple paths to new economic viability, a plan for honoring land while also honoring human presence and human need. The shift bears out in Frank and Deborah's arguments at the end of Matthews' book, and beyond. They argue, for example, that the 21st century frontier "will be a place where preservation and extraction co-exist...it will be the world's first sustainable development frontier" (180). Importantly, they begin to acknowledge other Plains' initiatives in their speeches: they cite the "Big Open" private game preserve in Montana, the efforts of the Nature Conservancy, and Canada's creation of a new grasslands national park, among others, as efforts that are all in keeping with the idea of the Buffalo Commons. Deborah begins to speak about the Buffalo Commons as a metaphor, "a new way of reading the land," that is open to many different approaches to Plains' restoration, beyond traditional park-based preservation (187).

After the publication of Matthews' book, in a 1993 speech at Nebraska Wesleyan University in Lincoln, the Poppers' multiple lines of argument come into full view.³⁴ Frank's introduction affirms the aesthetics of the prairie at length, and he calls it "an important place in the national psyche, a very important place." His historical account of Plains history is also closely tailored to his audience, including details of Nebraska history to illustrate larger economic trends on the Plains, and he emphasizes the successes of boom eras in terms of serving the world's need for food. When he speaks about depopulation, he admits the reluctance with which people leave, acknowledging the historical connections that inform "their immense love of the land." He speaks more distinctly about the differences among the rural Plains, areas where extractive economies are working, and the growth in Plains cities. Deborah's additions focus less on data displays and more on advancing initiatives that fit the spirit of the Buffalo Commons, which is no longer about deprivatizing, but about "balance" and "partnership." She emphasizes that these initiatives - from private hunting preserves to the creation of National Grasslands to American Indian tribes' restoration of buffalo herds - diversify economic opportunities while also accounting for the native ecology of the landscape. Finally, Deborah identifies the current challenges that many restoration initiatives face, which stem from a lack of knowledge among scientists, banks, and government about the land itself and the complexity of its natural ecosystem. She argues the importance of keeping data in order to help the many citizen-driven initiatives to coordinate and gain ground. In the Poppers' assessment of audience and genre, their use of multiple lines of argument, as well as the fundamental shift in the meaning of the Buffalo Commons itself,

³⁴ The transcript of Frank Popper's 1993 speech at Nebraska Wesleyan University was prepared by Mary Umberger based on recordings of the talk and with permission of the authors. It appears in Appendix B of her dissertation, *Encountering the Buffalo Commons* (University of Maryland, 1999).

the discourse could not be more different from the earlier versions displayed in Matthews' text.

This shift in the Buffalo Commons discourse reflects the larger shift in American environmental language in the late 1980's and early 1990's. The Poppers' efforts to reform land use on the Great Plains coincided with the emergence of the term "sustainability" as a significant cultural term. While Sigurd Olson once defined the wilderness as a place apart from the human environment, the contemporary concept of sustainability insists that no such separate place exists. In *Where the Buffalo Roam*, the evolution of the Buffalo Commons discourse suggests that, in keeping with the demands of sustainability, environmental actions must account for people living with the land. Indeed, the Poppers' move towards a discourse of sustainability is captured in the changing idea of a Buffalo Commons itself. While it begins as a discourse of preservation, focused on the creation of *the* Buffalo Commons as a single, large, federally managed means to safeguard the Plains, it becomes a discourse about the ongoing quality of human life on the Plains. That is, the Poppers embrace the idea of *a* Buffalo Commons through the propagation of myriad private projects and private-public partnerships that account for the needs of the present residents – including food, water, air, and land, but also extending to meaningful work, historical preservation, and cultural rehabilitation.

Interestingly, the Poppers' choice of the term "commons" is a provocative one, suggesting a type of action that exceeds preservation and restoration as it has been practiced through emparkment. An ancient concept that gained cultural currency in 1968 with Garrett Hardin's famous essay, "The Tragedy of the Commons," the *commons* is a space that serves as a resource for all, managed through communal agreement and

providing communal benefits. Though the Poppers do not go into detail about how the Buffalo Commons will act as a national resource, one can conclude, based on their ecological arguments, that such a vast land preserve would be a resource that would improve the health of the nation's land, climate, and waterways. The commons also, importantly, escapes a major criticism of preservation: that parks appear to safeguard special places while condoning and even directly enabling continued exploitation of land outside its boundaries. Arguably, the Poppers "campaign" proved an even greater catalyst than they might have hoped for, as the Buffalo Commons evolved from a federal preservation plan to its own small movement, with greater direction by Plains people themselves.

While charting the development of the Buffalo Commons discourse, Anne Matthews' book also makes a contribution to building that discourse. In *Where the Buffalo Roam*, we find the display function of literary nonfiction at work: Matthews shows us a region in conflict, the tension between differing definitions, and the importance of the land itself in forming the discourse. She witnesses the experiences that shape their language, while also, like Douglas before her, formulating a critique of the speakers. Through a close reading of Matthews' text, as well as some of the Poppers' primary texts, we encounter the continued viability and flexibility of the five lines of argument that have been invoked in previous persuasive campaigns for National Parks: aesthetic, economic, scientific, historical, and recreational. As demonstrated by the Poppers' renewed persuasive efforts on the Plains, these lines of argument persist as usable sources of invention in debates about threatened places and even support

arguments for environmental interventions that move beyond efforts to establish new parks.

Learning from Literary Nonfiction and the National Parks

In his interview for the Minnesota Historical Society Environmental Issues Oral History Project, conservationist Fred Witzig reminds us that creating new land preserves is no easy task. Reflecting on the campaign for Voyageurs National Park, he says, “Putting together parcels of land for new parks is pretty hard to do. It takes a long time and a lot of convincing.” Such has been the premise of this dissertation, which offers some insights into the challenging and perpetual work of arguing about the fate of endangered places. In the remaining pages, I will synthesize some of the learning from this project in response to its main questions about the nature of definitional discourses, the role of literary nonfiction texts in arguing for new parks, and the rhetorical characteristics of park campaigns.

First, *what have we learned about the role of definitions in saving threatened places?* I have argued throughout this dissertation that definitions are fundamental in saving threatened places: rhetors must craft a compelling definition of place that supports further arguments about the value of that place and the actions that should be taken towards it. Though what is visible in public debate may appear to be about values and actions, these debates are always supported by a definition of place. An endangered place is often in a state of definitional rupture, when rhetors challenge a definition that has been authoritative for decades, like the Everglades as a “mysterious godforsaken swamp” or the Great Plains as a “garden of the world”; they suggest that this definition is not

accurate or no longer serves the needs of the place or the people who live there. These rhetors formulate a new definition of place, derived from a predictable set of value loci: the unique, the original, the threatened, and the essential. By seeking features that demonstrate these qualities in a landscape, rhetors can create a new definition that is based on characteristics of the landscape itself. One of the loci may be more significant in a particular landscape than another: the Everglades, for example, was defined primarily by its unique features and the threats to its ecosystem, while the Boundary Waters, which lacked dramatic uniqueness, was defined primarily by its origin stories. Importantly, the loci provide a set of criteria that help us to read description *as* argumentative. That is, definitions that rely on the loci manifest through descriptive discourses that are built over time and circulate through diffuse rhetorical ecologies. They are articulated by many voices that collectively create sets of routine definitional motifs, symbols, and stories. These definitions can form in conversation among academics, as in the case of the Everglades scientists, or among small cohorts, like the Quetico-Superior writers, before achieving wider circulation.

Next, *what have we learned about the role of literary nonfiction, Lawrence Buell's "oxymoronic multigenre," especially in creating and promoting definitional discourses?* The type of literary nonfiction known as Nature writing is already well known for its power to help readers visualize and experience a place through language. I have suggested that this type of literary nonfiction functions as epideictic rhetoric, serving to praise and valorize the landscape it describes. Further, I have argued that literary nonfiction about the environment provides new definitions of places; through its descriptive language, these texts critically function to help people see places anew and

name them in new terms. As a “multigenre,” literary nonfiction is actually an umbrella term that encompasses many other genres, and each genre, from Horace Kephart’s ethnogeography of the Great Smokies, to Marjory Douglas’s environmental history of South Florida, to Sigurd Olson’s classic personal narrative of time in the wilderness, is a response to the needs of a recurring local situation.

A literary nonfiction text can have a complex relationship to the larger definitional discourse of place that it belongs to: it can extend a discourse that has been limited in scope and apply it to a larger region, as Muir’s *Picturesque California* did; it can critique a discourse that is arguably inadequate and causing harm to a region, as Kephart’s *Our Southern Highlanders* attempted to do; it can be the capstone of a discourse that has already taken shape through many other voices, like Douglas’s *The Everglades: River of Grass*; it can epitomize a regional discourse, showing off the typical moves that other writers within the discourse have made, like Olson’s *The Singing Wilderness*; and it can record and display a definitional discourse in formation, as in Matthews’ *Where the Buffalo Roam*. The literary nonfiction text is never the site of origin for a definitional discourse, which rarely has a specific moment of birth. Rather, it is always one building block among many in a larger rhetorical ecology.

Significantly, the definitional discourses that we encounter in literary nonfiction texts can circulate through campaigns within social movements. Previous scholars of Nature writing have argued that literary nonfiction is especially effective because it builds the author’s ethos and allows him or her to become a more recognized spokesperson. I suggest that, because of this improved ethos, authors of Nature writing are specifically invited to become the interpreters of the landscapes they have praised.

Thus we see John Muir camping with Robert Underwood Johnson in the Sierras; Horace Kephart leading the park publicity campaign in North Carolina; David Fairchild interpreting the “mysterious” Everglades for NPS officials from a blimp overhead; and Sigurd Olson leading the governor of Minnesota over the paths of the voyageurs. It is in these moments – as tour guides for government officials, as writers of park campaign materials, as speakers before Congress – that writers of literary nonfiction are able to circulate their definitions in new rhetorical situations, reaching ever-wider audiences. But the author is just one of many rhetors who channels the definition elaborated in a work of literary nonfiction through the persuasive efforts of a park campaign. Ideally, the text creates others with the same vision and equips them with the same arguments.

Finally, *what have we learned about the rhetorical characteristics of these persuasive efforts to create new parks?* First, persuasive efforts to create new parks rely on the means provided by the landscape itself. Rhetors are challenged to see the landscape’s features in a new light, and let the qualities of place offer the means of persuasion. While there are, at times, similarities in cases – the flat and watery landscapes of the Everglades and the Boundary Waters, for example – many characteristics like climate, wildlife, industrial uses, or the presence of people in the landscape may suggest potential persuasive approaches that are most compatible with the scene. Indeed many prominent park rhetors, including Muir, Kephart, the Everglades scientists, Douglas, and Olson, lived in the regions they championed; the case of the Poppers, who were outsiders to the Plains and therefore struggled to speak effectively about it, demonstrates that expansive contact with the physical and cultural characteristics of place is essential for developing a robust rhetorical strategy.

Second, persuasive efforts to create new parks emphasize one or more of five major lines of argument: the aesthetic, economic, scientific, historical, and recreational. Each *topos* provides multiple arguments for park creation but has to be adapted to the unique circumstances of a potential park. These lines of argument did not accumulate over time, starting with Yosemite's arguments to preserve the aesthetics of the West and ending with Voyageurs' arguments to preserve the history and recreational opportunities of the Boundary Waters. Rather, they are all present with more or less emphasis within each park campaign. Which line of argument to emphasize depends on the definition of place that rhetors have crafted, which in turn depends on the qualities of place itself; one or two of the lines of argument will be most compatible with that definition. These lines of argument have continuing adaptability and can generate arguments across geographies. Further, as we have seen in the case of the Buffalo Commons, the five lines of argument are not only productive in debates for preservation, but also function usefully in debates about any type of new action towards the land, such as contemporary debates about sustainable actions that account for human persistence with the land.

To elaborate on this key concept, *what are the typical claims made within each of the lines of argument?* When arguing from aesthetics, rhetors are likely to invoke impressive geology, sweeping vistas, horizons, peaks, valleys, and sunsets. They are likely to define the landscape using the *loci* of uniqueness and essence: it is a landscape unlike any other in the world, and it is the best landscape of its type, epitomizing the qualities one would expect to find in such scenery. These superior sights prompt the speaker to express sublime feelings and describe scenes as picturesque in order to contain this overwhelming sense of sublimity; the aesthetic landscape might be, as it was

for John Muir and Sigurd Olson, a place to connect with God's creation. Aesthetic arguments are foundational in any park campaign; they are always present, even when other lines of argument dominate public debate. Rhetors must attempt to overcome any perceived aesthetic deficiencies in a landscape that does not have a traditionally valued geography. Thus, for example, the Everglades scientists focused on the beauty of the landscape's orchids and birds, while the Poppers focused on the beauty of the Plains' open spaces and wide horizons. Overall, aesthetic arguments emphasize the landscape's value to American national identity and the need to preserve the nation's superior scenery as cultural capital.

The economic line of argument may seem to focus on the extrinsic and practical value of a place, completely apart from the aesthetic argument's focus on intrinsic value, but the two *topoi* can work together: because of the aesthetic qualities of a landscape, it can be argued that it will draw more tourists, and that these tourists will create a viable economy where one was lacking or unsustainable; rhetors productively drew on such arguments in the Great Smoky Mountains. Economic arguments are likely to work well with definitions based on the locus of threat: this landscape is threatened with destruction from industrial development, as rhetors argued against logging in the Great Smoky Mountains and the Boundary Waters; or it is threatened by agricultural development, as rhetors argued against farming practices in the Everglades and the Great Plains. These arguments might frame a region as disconnected from other industries and having no viable alternatives to the destructive economy that is currently in place. Thus such arguments speak *about* and *in response to* industry and they suggest that preservation is necessary to create a truly sustainable regional economy. In the past, economic arguments

were also used to claim that a park would preserve the watershed for the benefit of agricultural or industrial growth outside of park boundaries, as in the case of Yosemite and the Great Smoky Mountains, but as demonstrated in the case of the Buffalo Commons, this argument is unlikely to fit with today's environmental ethos of sustainability. Overall, economic arguments emphasize the landscape's proximity to centers of population, the potential for unlimited economic growth based on tourism, and the monetary benefits of parks to local and state communities.

Scientific arguments for park creation pay special attention to a region's native ecology, even if this ecology is dramatically changed and no longer clearly in evidence - as was arguably true in the Everglades, the Boundary Waters, and the Great Plains. Scientific arguments for park creation arise from regional definitions serving the loci of uniqueness, originality, and threat: the uniqueness of the ecosystem in the country or even in the world, its ancient and therefore "true" character, and the threats posed to the ecosystem's integrity by human, industrial, and agricultural developments. When using a scientific rationale for park creation, rhetors attend to the geology, water, climate, flora, and fauna of the region, uncovering the interactions among these elements and explaining them to the public. Rhetors pursuing scientific arguments for a park may invoke the need for watershed preservation; the idea of the watershed explains the interconnectedness of all parts of the ecosystem, and it suggests that an area is whole based on its geographic boundaries, rather than its political boundaries. John Muir was adamant in pursuing this early "ecosystem" argument to protect the watershed that fed Yosemite Valley. Ironically, in the Everglades campaign, where scientific appeals predominated, rhetors' lack of knowledge about the full hydrology of the Everglades watershed somewhat

hindered their ability to argue for bigger park boundaries and a cessation to the project of “reclamation.”

When making scientific arguments for preservation, rhetors may also argue that the landscape is unstudied or understudied, and that important scientific knowledge can be gained if the region is preserved in its current state. This particular argument was very compelling in the case of the Everglades, where scientists were eager to glean greater knowledge of unusual plant and animal life; later, in the case of the Buffalo Commons, the Poppers found it useful to argue that little was known about the original shortgrass prairie, and thus areas of the Plains should be set aside for such discovery. The scientific landscape must be interpreted by the expert guide – like John Muir leading readers through geology lessons about the Yosemite, or David Fairchild taking the NPS Director on a carefully planned trip through the Everglades. Without these expert guides, the landscape can remain opaque to the uninitiated observer, and the unique relationships among its parts will be misunderstood. The scientific topos suggests that parks have a function other than to marvel at beautiful scenery: overall, scientific arguments emphasize the value of parks for continued scientific study and for public education about a unique ecosystem.

Rhetors who employ arguments from history may speak about the ancient geology of the landscape, highlighting the earth’s history, or they may focus instead on the significant role of a place in human and particularly national history. The historical line of argument works especially well with definitions derived from the locus of originality: the place carries markers of ecological and cultural origins that can be preserved for future generations through emparkment. Olson and the Quetico-Superior

writers constantly indicated these landscape markers for their readers, such that they became a routine set of symbols in the regional discourse. Rhetors who argue from human history especially emphasize frontier and pioneer history, the role that a place has played in the American master narrative of Manifest Destiny, and its fundamentally unchanged nature since that time. In the case of the Great Smoky Mountains, the people themselves were argued to be unchanged since the days of the early republic.

Like the ecologically unique landscape, the historical landscape must be interpreted by an expert guide or its historical codes will be overlooked and misinterpreted by the casual visitor; thus Sigurd Olson was so often called upon to lead officials over the historic “Voyageurs Highway.” Rhetors even go so far as to suggest that, when truly understood, the landscape deeply reconnects visitors with the past in a way that can be transporting, such that the past is still living and present in this place. Indeed, when the Poppers encounter powerful signs of frontier history in their travels, they are reminded that past traditions, technologies, and cultural habits are not “past” at all for many residents on the Plains. Overall, historical arguments emphasize the importance of parks as a means of preserving cultural heritage, and much like aesthetic arguments, these arguments emphasize the need for all citizens to experience such historical places for fuller development of the national identity.

Finally, recreational arguments highlight a landscape’s many opportunities for outdoor activities, as well as the spiritual importance of leisure time in nature. Rhetors employing recreational arguments may focus on practical points, like a region’s proximity to centers of population, the affordability of taking a vacation there, the potential for building new access roads and campsites, and the opportunities for activities

like canoeing, hiking, and sightseeing; such arguments were paramount in the campaign for Voyageurs National Park, and they were also noticeably present in the Great Smokies campaign for a park on the populated East coast. Rhetors may also focus on the spiritual and healthful benefits of outdoor recreation to the visitor, especially that recreation is an antidote to the stresses of modern living, an argument that featured prominently in the campaign materials from the Voyageurs National Park Association.

Furthermore, recreational arguments may attempt to open the experience of outdoor leisure to greater numbers of people than currently enjoy such travel or wild space; Olmstead, for example, in his 1865 “treatise on preservation,” advocated the need for more places like Yosemite where women, children, and the ailing could have greater access to healthful outdoor spaces. Interestingly, recreational arguments seem to occur in tandem with historic, economic, ecological, or aesthetic arguments. They argue for the joy of recreation in a historically significant or abundantly beautiful place; or, as in the case of the Buffalo Commons plans for “ecotourism,” they argue for the delights of sightseeing in a unique natural environment; or, as in the case of the Great Smoky Mountains, they argue that the bountiful recreational opportunities of a place ensure its economic viability as a park. Unlike the economic topos, though, recreational arguments suggest that parks are necessary because they provide valuable spaces for leisure, not because they provide economic opportunities, and overall they emphasize the healthful benefits of parks for individuals and for the culture at large.

The development of these five lines of argument, combined with the close study of definitional discourses of place and the epideictic rhetoric of literary nonfiction, form the core learning of this project. Research into these areas continues to be relevant and

necessary, because of the continued threats to places that are already preserved, and the persistence of endangered places that require new ways of thinking and acting. We might consider, for example, the case of the Louisiana Bayou. In a September 2010 National Public Radio report by Debbie Elliott, several wetlands activists argued that major, immediate environmental protection is necessary for Louisiana's "fragile coast." Their arguments are not new: Louisianans and wetlands scientists have known that the Louisiana coastline has been losing land at an accelerating rate since the 1960's, due to the development of industry throughout the region and the continued efforts of the Army Corps of Engineers to control the Mississippi watershed. Given the scientific consensus that wetlands are valuable ecosystems that provide essential flood protection for coastline communities, why hasn't more dramatic action been taken by the state and federal governments to preserve Louisiana's coastal wetlands? In Elliott's report, this pressing question is addressed by Mark Schleifstein, environmental reporter for the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, who points to the public perception of the Gulf Coast as "a working coast," one "cut up by navigation channels" and used for the oil, shipping, and fishing industries. After all, Schleifstein says, this coast is "not a pristine area like the Everglades" and "it doesn't look like something that most of the nation [understands at all]" as a place worth saving.

After studying the case of the Everglades, readers can fully appreciate the irony of Schleifstein's statement. The comparison of Louisiana's coast to the Everglades invokes a startling assumption about the Nature of South Florida, as it contrasts one wetland with another: it suggests that the Everglades has a durable purity, an *essential* value – a definition adopted by the public naturally, rather than one fought for. And yet, of course

it was fought for. Louisiana today, like the South Florida of the 1920's, is defined as a "working landscape," a place that is valued only for its economic products – but it could be defined much differently. Indeed many nonfiction writers, from John McPhee to Mike Tidwell, have attempted to craft new definitions for Louisiana's coast. Perhaps the region requires a larger campaign structure to open this definitional rupture more widely; or perhaps the region needs a sustainability-based campaign that reimagines a useful and yet healthy landscape. We see in the Louisiana bayou another case of a place in crisis, one that falls outside our current paradigm of a place worth saving. But it is important to remember that every place now preserved in our country once fell outside the existing paradigm of land preservation, too. Each new campaign on behalf of an endangered place has changed the criteria for preservation, and with a storehouse of flexible rhetorical tactics that respond to place and time, they can continue to do so.

Appendix A: National Park System Chronology

As of 2014, there were 59 official scenic National Parks in the United States and U.S. territories. The table below shows the name, location, year of establishment, and area of each park. The year of establishment indicates the year that the park was fully formed – that is, when all of the land was purchased, donated to the federal government, dedicated, and opened to the public. This date may differ significantly from the date that the park was authorized by Congress; when parks were formed in more densely populated areas, beginning in the 20th century, it sometimes took several years to orchestrate the purchase and donation of land from private holders.

These parks, overseen by the National Park Service of the Department of Interior, form only a portion of the 401 designated National Park areas, which include National Monuments, National Historic Sites, National Memorials, and National Seashores, among other designations (see the Glossary for definitions of these and other terms related to the National Park system).

The case studies for this project are highlighted in green, demonstrating their dispersal over the first century of the development of the National Park system.

Name	Location	Year	Area ^[1]
Yellowstone National Park	Idaho, Montana, Wyoming	1872	2,219,790.71 acres (8,983.1743 km ²)
Sequoia National Park	California	1890	404,062.63 acres (1,635.1834 km ²)
Yosemite National Park	California	1890	761,267.5 acres (3,080.740 km ²)
Mount Rainier National Park	Washington	1899	236,381.49 acres (956.6020 km ²)
Crater Lake National Park	Oregon	1902	183,224.05 acres (741.4814 km ²)
Wind Cave National Park	South Dakota	1903	33,847.08 acres (136.9743 km ²)
Mesa Verde National Park	Colorado	1906	52,485.17 acres (212.3999 km ²)
Glacier National Park	Montana	1910	1,013,322.17 acres (4,100.7693 km ²)
Rocky Mountain National Park	Colorado	1915	265,795.2 acres (1,075.635 km ²)
Haleakala National Park	Hawaii	1916	33,264.62 acres (134.6171 km ²)
Hawaii Volcanoes National	Hawaii	1916	323,431.38 acres (1,308.8804 km ²)

Name	Location	Year	Area ^[1]
Park			
Lassen Volcanic National Park	California	1916	106,452.33 acres (430.7973 km ²)
Denali National Park and Preserve	Alaska	1917	4,740,911.16 acres (19,185.7868 km ²)
Acadia National Park	Maine	1919	48,876.58 acres (197.7965 km ²)
Grand Canyon National Park	Arizona	1919	1,217,191.35 acres (4,925.7986 km ²)
Zion National Park	Utah	1919	147,237.02 acres (595.8471 km ²)
Hot Springs National Park	Arkansas	1921	5,549.26 acres (22.4571 km ²)
Bryce Canyon National Park	Utah	1928	35,835.08 acres (145.0194 km ²)
Grand Teton National Park	Wyoming	1929	310,044.22 acres (1,254.7044 km ²)
Carlsbad Caverns National Park	New Mexico	1930	46,766.45 acres (189.2571 km ²)
Great Smoky Mountains National Park	North Carolina, Tennessee	1934	522,426.88 acres (2,114.1866 km ²)
Shenandoah National Park	Virginia	1935	199,116.92 acres (805.7976 km ²)
Olympic National Park	Washington	1938	922,650.1 acres (3,733.832 km ²)
Isle Royale National Park	Michigan	1940	571,790.11 acres (2,313.9525 km ²)
Kings Canyon National Park	California	1940	461,901.2 acres (1,869.248 km ²)
Mammoth Cave National Park	Kentucky	1941	52,830.19 acres (213.7962 km ²)
Big Bend National Park	Texas	1944	801,163.21 acres (3,242.1925 km ²)
Everglades National Park	Florida	1947	1,400,539.3 acres (5,667.781 km ²)

Name	Location	Year	Area ^[1]
Virgin Islands National Park	U.S. Virgin Islands	1956	14,944.84 acres (60.4796 km ²)
Petrified Forest National Park	Arizona	1962	221,414.59 acres (896.0331 km ²)
Canyonlands National Park	Utah	1964	337,597.83 acres (1,366.2099 km ²)
Guadalupe Mountains National Park	Texas	1966	86,367.1 acres (349.515 km ²)
North Cascades National Park	Washington	1968	504,780.94 acres (2,042.7760 km ²)
Redwood National and State Parks	California	1968	138,885.46 acres (562.0495 km ²)
Arches National Park	Utah	1971	76,678.98 acres (310.3088 km ²)
Capitol Reef National Park	Utah	1971	241,904.26 acres (978.9518 km ²)
Voyageurs National Park	Minnesota	1975	218,200.15 acres (883.0247 km ²)
Badlands National Park	South Dakota	1978	242,755.94 acres (982.3984 km ²)
Theodore Roosevelt National Park	North Dakota	1978	70,446.89 acres (285.0884 km ²)
Biscayne National Park	Florida	1980	172,971.11 acres (699.9892 km ²)
Channel Islands National Park	California	1980	249,561 acres (1,009.94 km ²)
Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve	Alaska	1980	7,523,897.45 acres (30,448.1327 km ²)
Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve	Alaska	1980	3,223,383.43 acres (13,044.5699 km ²)
Katmai National Park and Preserve	Alaska	1980	3,674,368.02 acres (14,869.6398 km ²)
Kenai Fjords National Park	Alaska	1980	669,983.65 acres (2,711.3276 km ²)

Name	Location	Year	Area ^[1]
Kobuk Valley National Park	Alaska	1980	1,750,716.16 acres (7,084.8969 km ²)
Lake Clark National Park and Preserve	Alaska	1980	2,619,712.56 acres (10,601.6006 km ²)
Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve	Alaska	1980	8,323,146.5 acres (33,682.579 km ²)
Great Basin National Park	Nevada	1986	77,180 acres (312.3 km ²)
National Park of American Samoa	American Samoa	1988	8,256.67 acres (33.4136 km ²)
Dry Tortugas National Park	Florida	1992	64,701.22 acres (261.8365 km ²)
Death Valley National Park	California, Nevada	1994	3,373,062.74 acres (13,650.3006 km ²)
Joshua Tree National Park	California	1994	790,635.74 acres (3,199.5893 km ²)
Saguaro National Park	Arizona	1994	91,442.42 acres (370.0543 km ²)
Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park	Colorado	1999	30,750.03 acres (124.4410 km ²)
Cuyahoga Valley National Park	Ohio	2000	32,831.18 acres (132.8631 km ²)
Congaree National Park	South Carolina	2003	26,275.82 acres (106.3345 km ²)
Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve	Colorado	2004	94,687.84 acres (383.1881 km ²)
Pinnacles National Park	California	2013	26,605.73 acres (107.6696 km ²)

Source: “List of National Parks of the United States.” *Wikipedia*. Viewed 27 Apr 2014. <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_national_parks_of_the_United_States>.

Glossary of Terms Related to the National Park Movement

Antiquities Act of 1906

Law enabling the President of the United States to create National Monuments from “historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest” on public lands. The Antiquities Act has historically provided an immediate means for protecting unique landscapes. Theodore Roosevelt most notably used it to protect the Grand Canyon in 1908, eleven years before that landscape became a National Park in 1919.

Forest Reserve Act of 1891

Law enabling the President of the United States to create forest reserves on public lands, signed into law by President Benjamin Harrison. The creators of the Forest Reserve Act intended for forest reserves to be harvested according to the principles of conservation; to help maintain the health of watersheds; and to provide outdoor spaces for recreation. President Harrison immediately set aside 13 million acres of forested land for these purposes.

National Forest (NF)

A forest set aside from public lands and primarily intended for sustainable yield forestry. In recent years, mining and extraction of fossil fuels has also been allowed in National Forests. National Forests also include some recreational areas, and for this reason they were often confused with National Parks for many decades. Shoshone National Forest was the first National Forest, created in 1891. Today there are 155 National Forests in the United States, covering about 190 million acres, and they are overseen by the United States Forest Service.

National Historic Park (NHP)

A designation of the National Park Service applied to larger areas preserved for their value to the nation’s history. The first such park was Colonial National Historic Park at Jamestown and Yorktown, in Virginia. As of 2012, there were 46 National Historic Parks in the National Park system.

National Historic Site (NHS)

A designation of the National Park Service applied to specific buildings or properties preserved for their value to the nation’s history. The first National Historic Site was Ford’s Theater, in Washington, D.C. created in 1932. The creation of historic sites gained great popularity in the mid-20th century, and as of 2012, there were 78 National Historic Sites in the National Park system.

National Monument (NM)

An area of special historical or scientific interest set aside by the President of the United States for special protection. The President can create National Monuments under the Antiquities Act of 1906. Often the creation of a National Monument is a safeguard against an immediate threat. These sites are frequently re-designated as National Parks or other types of sites within the National Park system.

National Park

A designation of the National Park Service to protect lands that have special aesthetic, ecological and historical value. Many people use the term loosely to refer to any of the 401 areas overseen by the National Park Service. It is technically used to designate just the 59 “scenic” parks in the system. The first scenic National Park created was Yellowstone National Park in 1872, and the most recent was Pinnacles National Park, which opened to the public in 2013. See Appendix A for a complete list of the scenic parks, their locations, and dates of their establishment.

National Park Service (NPS)

The branch of the Department of Interior that oversees the National Park system. President Woodrow Wilson created the National Park Service in 1916 under the Organic Act, with Stephen Mather as the first director. Today the National Park Service manages 401 designated park areas that include scenic National Parks, National Monuments, National Historic Sites, and several other designations.

National Park System

The collection of 401 preserved areas overseen by the National Park Service. The National Park System began with the preservation of Yellowstone National Park in 1872, and expanded rapidly after the creation of the National Park Service in 1916. Today it covers over 84 million acres in all U.S. states and territories, and it welcomes over 278 million visitors each year across all its sites.

Organic Act of 1916

Law that created the National Park Service. The language of the law states that the Park Service exists to “promote and regulate” the National Parks, which “conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and wildlife therein.” Importantly, NPS must “provide for the enjoyment” of this scenery and wildlife “in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.” The Organic Act established the balance between recreational use and natural preservation that defines NPS management practices today.

United States Forest Service (USFS)

The branch of United States Department of Agriculture that oversees National Forests. Created in 1905, the bureau was first headed by the well-known forester, writer, and conservationist Gifford Pinchot. Today USFS manages 155 National Forests and 20 National Grasslands, covering 193 million acres.

Yosemite Act of 1864

Law that granted Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Big Tree Grove to the state of California for “public use resort and recreation...inalienable for all time.” Signed by President Abraham Lincoln, the Yosemite Act is typically recognized by park scholars as the precedent for the creation of Yellowstone National Park and hence the entire National Park system.

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