

THE MACHINE IN THE FOREST:  
A POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF SNOWMOBILING AND CONFLICT  
IN MAINE'S NORTH WOODS

By

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# ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

## THE MACHINE IN THE FOREST:

### A POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF SNOWMOBILING AND CONFLICT

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In Maine's north woods, a vast expanse of more than 60,000 square kilometers of mostly private, second-growth forestland, sweeping changes in land ownership and consequent large-scale conservation efforts have provoked a layered debate. Many residents of the woods have reacted vociferously against preservationist policies that aim to restrict practices such as hunting, motorized recreation, and timber harvesting on lands where they have lived, worked, and played for generations. The clashes in the forest are multifaceted, involving control over access and appropriate uses, disparate aesthetics and ideologies, and divergent constructions of both the landscape and rural livelihoods. In an effort to tease out and better understand these broader aspects of conflict, I explore the history and culture of snowmobiling, both generally and within Maine. Snowmobiling is one of several practices that north woods

communities are identifying as traditional and attempting to preserve in the face of intensifying natural resource protection efforts and ensuing restrictions. I argue that opponents' framing of snowmobiling simply as a threat to forest ecologies can mask underlying ideological, aesthetic, and socio-cultural objections which also work to shape beliefs and policy regarding the place for humans and their various activities in natural areas. Dominant environmental discourses and expectations of human relations with nature are characterized by dualistic ways of thinking that situate nature/culture, rural/urban, and tradition/technology in separate realms. Thus I aim to establish linkages among these discrete categories and reveal how dichotomous frameworks effectively privilege certain practices and people, while silencing or dismissing local social, economic, and environmental relations and histories. However, this project of deconstruction and redefinition is not just my own. My research demonstrates that local residents of Maine's woods are not merely struggling for the retention of access points; more profoundly, they are advancing alternate discourses of nature, rurality, and tradition in a fight to defend and protect their livelihood(s) and culture(s).

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iv
Table of Contents	vi
List of Figures	vii
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
Field of enquiry	6
<b>CHAPTER 1. Nature, Ecology, and Commons: The context of a conflict</b>	<b>10</b>
Nature: Ideology, aesthetics, ethics and conservation	10
Ecology: History collides with ideology in the north woods	22
Commons: Changing land ownership and threats to community	29
<b>CHAPTER 2. Understanding “the Rural”</b>	<b>37</b>
Discourses of rurality	37
The “other Maine”	42
<b>CHAPTER 3. Sledding through the Snow</b>	<b>47</b>
A history of snowmobiling culture	47
Snowmobiling in Maine	52
Winter solitude versus the engine’s roar	58
<b>CHAPTER 4. Tradition and Machines</b>	<b>73</b>
Beyond subsistence: The technology and tradition of the snowmobile	74
Cars in wilderness	81
<b>CHAPTER 5. Conflicts in the North Woods</b>	<b>85</b>
<i>“Restore Boston: Leave our Maine way of life alone”</i>	85
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>103</b>
<b>WORKS CITED</b>	<b>105</b>

## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure 1.</b> Maine’s north woods (and counties)	3
<b>Figure 2.</b> Carl Eliason of Wisconsin and his “motor toboggan,” patented in 1927	48
<b>Figure 3a.</b> Advertisement for an attachment designed to convert a Model ‘T’ Ford into a “snowmobile;” patented in 1917 by Virgil White	48
<b>Figure 3b.</b> A doctor on his rounds in New Hampshire in a converted Model ‘T’; date unknown	48
<b>Figure 4.</b> Lombard log hauler and crew; Woodland, Maine	53
<b>Figure 5.</b> EPI, Inc.’s land ownership in northern Maine (in red), as of early December 2007	88
<b>Figure 6a.</b> Depiction of the north woods as an undeveloped or “empty” space	89
<b>Figure 6b.</b> Alternate representations of that same “empty” space as one crisscrossed by roads and trails, dotted with access points, sporting camps, campsites, and ranger and customs stations, which stresses its multiple, organized uses by human communities	89

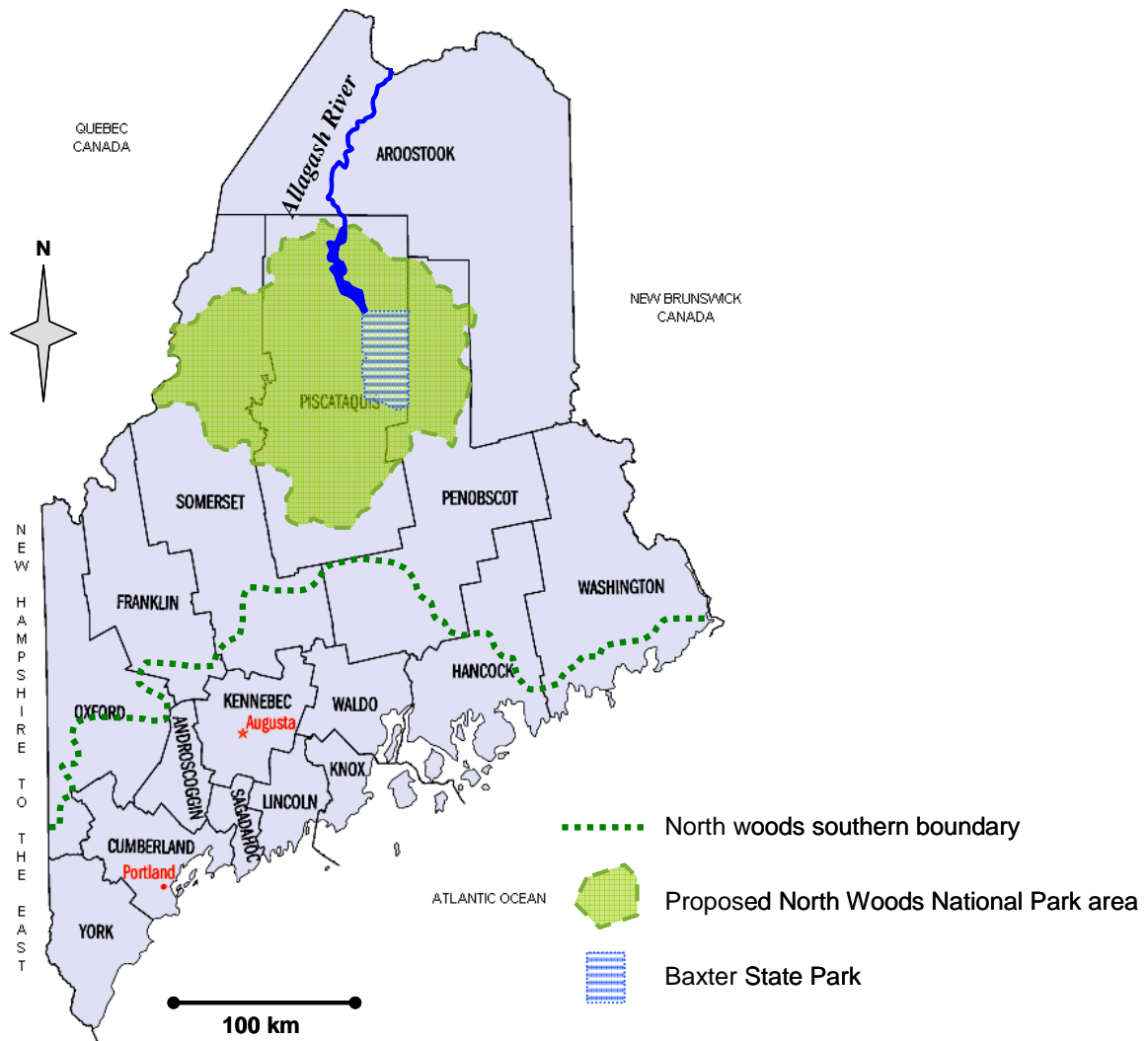
# INTRODUCTION

In Maine's north woods, a vast expanse of more than 60,000 square kilometers of mostly private, second-growth forestland, sweeping changes in land ownership and consequent large-scale conservation efforts have provoked a layered debate (figure 1). Many residents of the woods have reacted vociferously against preservationist policies that aim to restrict practices such as hunting, motorized recreation, and timber harvesting on lands on which they have lived, worked, and played for generations. On one level, partisans describe the conflict as arraying local users against outside environmentalists, where "outside" can refer to Maine's urban or coastal residents as well as those affiliated with nationally-based conservation organizations such as the Sierra Club. At a deeper level, however, the same parties disagree on the very meaning of appropriate use and environmental value. Thus, the story of resource use conflicts in the woods is not simply about "good guys" and "bad guys," or "local communities" and "the conservationists." It is a story about how different actors somehow associated with and connected to the forest—whether they reside and work within it or visit from afar—experience and perceive nature and the place for humans within. For Maine's rural dwellers, deep-rooted feelings and fears surrounding the future of the woods and, more generally, their economic future, are greatly complicating the issue.

The clashes in the forest are multifaceted, involving control over access and appropriate uses, disparate aesthetics and ideologies, and divergent constructions of both the landscape and rural livelihoods. In an effort to tease out and better understand these broader aspects of conflict, I explore the history and culture of snowmobiling, both generally and within Maine. Snowmobiling is one of several practices that north woods communities are



identifying as traditional and attempting to preserve in the face of intensifying natural resource protection efforts and ensuing restrictions. I argue that opponents' framing of snowmobiling simply as a threat to forest ecologies can mask underlying ideological, aesthetic, and socio-cultural objections which also work to shape beliefs and policy regarding the place for humans and their various activities in natural areas. Dominant environmental discourses and expectations of human relations with nature, which derived from Enlightenment traditions and epistemologies and remain ingrained in Western culture, are characterized by dualistic ways of thinking that situate nature/culture, rural/urban, and tradition/technology in separate realms. Thus I aim to establish linkages among these discrete categories and reveal how dichotomous frameworks effectively privilege certain practices and people, while silencing or dismissing local social, economic, and environmental relations and histories. My research demonstrates that local residents of Maine's woods are not merely struggling for the retention of access points; more profoundly, they are advancing alternate discourses of nature, rurality, and tradition in a fight to defend and protect their livelihood(s) and culture(s).



**Figure 1.** Maine's north woods (and counties)

(Source of base county map: Census Finder, <http://www.censusfinder.com/mapmaine.htm>)

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Chapter 1 lays the foundation for the rest of the thesis, beginning with an exploration of dominant ideologies and aesthetics of nature. I interrogate nature's "naturalness" by stressing the constructedness of all nature, especially the highly cherished state of wilderness, and contend that specific experiences in and relations with the natural world shape one's consciousness and perceptions of what exactly "nature" is and represents, how best it should

be used or protected, and ultimately, what (and perhaps who) does and does *not* belong. These differing constructions of the rural landscape and both its human and ecological components are actually different versions of history (Peluso 1996). Peluso (1996) writes that “the telling of ‘natural’ or environmental history is not immune to ideology or moral judgment [and can have significant] political consequences” (136); thus I summarize the ecological history of the north woods, which is closely tied to a human history that is often forgotten or disregarded within conservation discourses. Finally, I contend that the woods can be understood as a private commons that is bound up in human activities stretching back in time. Nature recast as such gives the woods a value that stands in contrast to its primary worth as a wilderness playground, and also reveals the deep significance of the potential loss of access to or use of the woods currently threatening forest communities in view of changing land ownership.

Chapter 2 discusses rural life as similarly constructed in ways that dictate proper relations between humans and nature and simplify or minimize local stories and complexities. The creation of such limiting boundaries and categories of understanding, which often characterize dominant discourses of rurality, can contradict local understandings and experiences and result in conservation and development strategies that ignore or ineffectively address an area’s particular needs. The second half of the chapter focuses on some specificities of rural life in Maine’s north woods and reveals the deep divides among the state’s citizenry. Differences tend to cut sharply along rural and urban or coastal lines, between those who rely on the woods for their daily material existence and those who view

the woods as their rightful wilderness heritage, which helps set the stage for the complexity of resource use struggles in the north woods.

While snowmobiling is touched upon in several places earlier in the thesis, chapter 3 is devoted to better understanding this activity, beginning with an historical account of the invention and development of the snowmobile. Although the machine's general history is quite fascinating and unexpected in some respects, I also take the time to describe the noteworthy place Maine holds in the history of snowmobiling, which helps illustrate the rootedness of the activity in the north woods and the various purposes it serves to this day. Finally, I explore snowmobiling as a recreational activity and discuss the clash between motorized and non-motorized recreationists. Ecological grievances are largely bypassed as I choose to focus on the cultural, ideological, and even spiritual grounds of recreational discord. Snowmobiling and lower impact activities like hiking and snowshoeing draw on completely different experiences of being in nature, and these divergences seem to be compounded by winter conditions. Further, non-mechanized and non-consumptive methods of communing with nature fit within a conservationist valuing of wilderness and consequently enjoy greater privilege and land use acceptability than more consumptive uses.

Chapter 4 deconstructs conventional dichotomous ways of thinking that conceptualize tradition and technology as binary opposites. Like understandings of nature, "tradition" is similarly constructed and often born out of assumptions about the authenticity of people and their cultural practices. Meanwhile, technology is equated with modernity and positioned in opposition to, and considered destructive of, tradition, primitiveness, and nature. Thus I propose alternative discourses of technology and tradition and maintain that

tradition can exist in a technical world and vice versa. The arbitrariness of beliefs about technology's relation to nature, and specifically snowmobiling's assault on the natural environment, is illustrated by the acceptability of cars in wilderness areas. I argue that where (and which) machines are and are not allowed in nature is a cultural construction that affords greater privilege to car users and underscores how subjective and selective Americans are in imagining and defining wilderness.

Lastly, chapter 5 delves into the specifics of struggles around past, current, and future uses of Maine's north woods. I introduce some of the major players in the contemporary movement to preserve and restore large tracts of land previously owned and logged by the forest products industry, an effort that has resulted in the blocking of access to lands previously open to hunting, snowmobiling, fishing, and trapping. This final chapter weaves together the ideas developed in previous chapters to demonstrate how differences in conceptions of nature and people in nature; divisions along geographical, class, and cultural lines; divergent notions of tradition and technology; and conflicts between local use and access, heritage, and differing rights to nature are playing out in the north woods. My research reveals a great deal of animosity between interests, a generous use of rhetoric, and yet very real issues of cultural, economic, and political difference that are essentially inhibiting cooperation.

### *Field of enquiry*

This research fits squarely within a recent body of work called "First World" political ecology, which emerged following the recognition that since its inception in the 1970s, political ecology had focused almost exclusively on natural resource conflicts in developing

countries (see Che 2006; Rikoon 2006; Robbins 2006; Schroeder et al. 2006; McCarthy 2005a; McCarthy 2005b; Wainwright 2005; Schroeder 2005; Emery and Pierce 2005; St. Martin 2005; Walker 2003; Walker and Fortmann 2003; McCarthy 2002). Despite very clear and important differences between First and Third World contexts, researchers producing work as part of this burgeoning sub-field have argued that there is “nothing about the epistemology, methodology, philosophy, or politics of Third World political ecology that bars its deployment in other contexts” (Robbins 2002, 1510). They contend that what largely defines political ecology and unites such disparate cases is a focus on the following themes related to environmental conflicts:

access to and control over resources; marginality; integration of scales of analysis; the effects of integration into international markets; the centrality of livelihood issues; ambiguities in property rights and the importance of informal claims to resource use and access; the importance of local histories, meanings, culture, and ‘micropolitics’ in resource use; the disenfranchisement of legitimate local users and uses; the effects of limited state capacity; and the imbrications of all these with colonial or postcolonial legacies or dynamics<sup>1</sup> (McCarthy 2002, 1283).

However, most of this work has coalesced around public land issues in the American West (Robbins 2006; Walker 2003; Walker and Fortmann 2003; McCarthy 1998, 2002; Wilson 1999). Thus this thesis extends this growing field in its examination of similar issues faced by groups in the Northeastern U.S., as well as through its focus on private lands and the concept of a private commons. Finally, I study the history and culture of the snowbelt—an

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<sup>1</sup> While a colonial legacy may seem less relevant to First World studies, McCarthy (2002) argues that traces of colonialism are evident in patterns of resource use, access, and control in certain areas of the First World, particularly in “settler colonies” such as Maine. He cites a few authors (Cosgrove 1995; Robbins 1994) whose work considers U.S. environmental politics “in light of the expansion of European colonial powers into the region” (McCarthy 2002, 1296).

area largely overlooked within the field—exploring how resource use and recreation conflicts are especially magnified by winter conditions.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps to the consternation of those who have wondered where the ecology is in political ecology (Walker 2005; Vayda and Walters 1999), this thesis fails to fill this void. Many of the arguments and discussions surrounding the appropriateness and acceptability of snowmobiles in treasured natural areas, most prominently within Yellowstone National Park, have focused on the machine's ecological impacts, such as soil erosion, damage to plant life, wildlife disruption, and air and water pollution. Ecological data have been collected and presented as evidence both for and against snowmobile use, and it tends to be the political (including socio-cultural, ideological, and sometimes economic) that is often overlooked, or at least overshadowed, by endless environmental impact studies. Hence, I take another approach, almost entirely disregarding arguments pertaining to environmental degradation. After all, opponents of snowmobiles virtually never base their resistance entirely on forest ecology; rather the machine's impact on (or role played in) non-snowmobilers' *experience* of nature is concomitantly brought forth.

In carrying out the research and analysis for this thesis, I did not conduct field work largely due to geographic restrictions. Rather, I relied on scholarly works published in books and peer-reviewed journals to provide a theoretical and empirical background on a range of issues and debates and to deepen understandings of the various frictions in Maine's north woods. Discussions of pertinent literature are thus interspersed throughout the text, where relevant, rather than confined to a "Literature Review" section near the start of the thesis. I

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<sup>2</sup> Marla Emery's work in northern Michigan (1998 and 2001) represents an exception to the general inattention of political ecologists to the snowbelt region.

also conducted extensive internet research, perusing the websites of organizations and groups concerned with the north woods, and reading web logs (“blogs”) on snowmobiling and tensions in and around Maine’s northern forest. Finally, I pored through newspaper articles, both locally- and nationally-based. Oftentimes these articles included online comments posted by Maine residents, which frequently turned into Internet discussions on which I could essentially eavesdrop. These reader commentaries therefore provided rich, uncensored reactions to various issues and served as a valuable source of ethnographic data.



## CHAPTER 1.

### Nature, Ecology, and Commons: The context of a conflict

#### *Nature: Ideology, aesthetics, ethics and conservation*

Whenever the light of civilization falls upon you with a blighting power... go to the wilderness... Dull business routine, the fierce passions of the market place, the perils of envious cities become but a memory... The wilderness will take hold of you. It will give you good red blood; it will turn you from a weakling into a man... You will soon behold all with a peaceful soul (George S. Evans quoted in Nash 1982, 141).

There is... no asocial (or natural) nature, no unmediated 'pure relation' between the human body and nature, from which unambiguously benign values and appropriate actions to save such nature can be derived (Macnaghten and Urry 2001, 4).

The idea of "nature" is incredibly complicated. Even seemingly straightforward claims regarding the presumed naturalness of particular landscapes necessitate thorough examination and critique, including scrutiny of the roots and contemporary implications of apparently benign meanings and judgments. In his 1976 book, *Keywords*, Raymond Williams famously called nature "perhaps the most complex word in the English language" (quoted in West and Carrier 2004, 219). It has long been perceived as fundamentally opposed to human culture, a dualism that situates nature and society in two discrete and separate realms. This understanding grew out of Enlightenment traditions and epistemologies and has remained ingrained in Western culture to this day, especially within the dominant discourse of nature conservation. Central to such thinking is the idea of "wilderness" or wild nature as something of exceptional value, pristine and pure, and necessarily external to society. Numerous scholars have examined the place of wilderness in American identity and its association with romantic notions of the sublime and the frontier, which shape a very particular and powerful

aesthetic of inherent beauty and good (Nash 1982; Cronon 1995). Up until sometime in the 1700s, the most common connotations of wilderness were “deserted,” “savage,” “desolate,” “barren,” and “waste” (Cronon 1995). By later that same century, some Romantics began to sense in wilderness the sacred or sublime and believed that if God were to show himself, he would likely be found in “vast, powerful landscapes where one could not help feeling insignificant and reminded of one’s own mortality [such as] on the mountaintop, in the chasm, in the waterfall” (Cronon 1995, 72). This concept of wilderness was fashioned by intellectuals in cities far removed from the threatening qualities of wildlands, and who clung to a myth of the vanishing frontier. It was not until “the closing of America’s frontier” in the late 1800s that wilderness could assume this new position of value within popular culture (Wilson 1992). These perceptions of the natural world as a refuge, an “other” to urban industrialism, effectively created the need for its protection. Such sentiments shaped early preservation efforts, which by the 19<sup>th</sup> century were largely driven by those who believed it was their Christian duty to protect God’s creation from humans.<sup>3</sup> Men like John Muir and Henry David Thoreau lobbied consistently for the establishment of parks and human exclusion from “the wild.” Thus, conservation was a distinctly Romantic movement with a nostalgia and enthusiasm for nature and things strange, remote, and mysterious, transforming

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<sup>3</sup> Around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a clear and conflicting distinction between the goals and philosophies of nature preservation and conservation. John Muir is considered the father of preservation, which advocated for the protection of natural areas untouched by humans. Gifford Pinchot, the first Chief of the U.S. Forest Service, was a founder of the conservation movement, which promoted the “wise-use” of natural resources. Today, however, environmental activists and organizations tend to use the words more interchangeably in that both usually signify an aim to protect natural areas from further human impairment. I take my cue from the present-day lexicon, using both words throughout this thesis to express the veneration of wilderness and efforts to minimize human impacts.

previously foreboding aspects of wilderness into desirable qualities capable of invigorating the human spirit.

Of course, aesthetics of landscape—the idea that certain features elicit a profound, almost unconscious sense of beauty—are central in the valuing of natural areas. Not surprisingly, America’s first national parks, such as Yellowstone and Yosemite, contain extraordinary and breathtaking natural features, while less sublime landscapes were initially deemed less worthy of protection (Cronon 1995). Some natural environments clearly “feel” more like wilderness than others, and perhaps none more so than America’s forests. To many environmentalists, forests represent some of the last remnants of pristine nature in the United States. Notions of both the sublime and frontier help construct the forest’s powerful aesthetic of beauty and intrinsic good, and are evident in various environmental campaigns to save “ancient” or old-growth forests (Proctor 1995). In fact, prominent wilderness conservation groups, such as the Wilderness Society, were established in direct response to the popularity of the “ancient forest” environmental cause and its powerful ethical, spiritual, and political dimensions (Proctor 1995).

Rolston (1998) views the forest landscape as an exemplary model and prototype for understanding the aesthetic appreciation of nature, “Like the sea or the sky, the forest is a kind of archetype of the foundations of the world. The forest represents—more literally it represents, presents again and again to those who enter it—the elemental forces of nature” (157). He argues that forests, more than other landscapes like the desert, sea, or tundra, stir up feelings of antiquity, complexity, and immense physical *and* historical scales with their

high tree trunk verticals, deep roots, and thick vegetation. Forests also epitomize the timelessness of nature, which is central to one's aesthetic appreciation:

A characteristic element in the aesthetic experience of nature moves us with how the central goods of the biosphere [...] were in place long before humans arrived. Aesthetics is something [...] that goes on in experiences of the human mind, but the dynamics and structures organizing forest biomes do not come out of the mind. Immersed in a nonhuman frame of reference, one knows the elements primordial. Subjective though aesthetic experience may be, here we make contact with the *natural certainties*... the timeless natural givens that support everything else" (Rolston 1998, 159; my emphasis).

In his differentiation between human versus nonhuman aesthetics (e.g., the cultural history of crafted art objects versus the "deep time" of nature), Rolston upholds the nature/culture dualism that separates human society from the environment, "The forest [...] is prehistoric and perennial, especially in contrast with ephemeral civilizations, their histories, politics, and arts (Rolston 1998, 158). This perception of timelessness and antiquity overlooks how centuries of human intervention have shaped the actual physical embodiment of nature, and recognizes only natural interruptions in forest development, such as fires and storms. Interestingly, Rolston believes that even managed or otherwise altered forest landscapes can reflect the sublime and aesthetic appeal of forests because they too can feel limitless in expanse and contain a struggle for life within. Impacted or human-shaped forests thus remain able to "retain the natural element" compared with a field or pasture (163) In accordance with Cronon's discussion of wilderness and the sacred, Rolston quotes Bible passages, poet William Cullen Bryant ("The groves were God's first temples"), and John Muir ("The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness") (164), and likens the forest to a kind of church, trees to cathedral spires, and filtered light through the leaves to stained glass windows, writing that "There is something about being deep in the woods, with

the ground under one's feet and no roof over one's head, that generates religious experience" (164).

However, views that establish or maintain a dualism between nature and humans, such as the "wilderness ethic" that has been foundational to conservation ideologies and activities, have very real socio-political implications and sometimes dire consequences for certain populations. Preservation policies have long been based on a protectionist (i.e., "fortress conservation") model that upholds the wilderness ideal of nature as a retreat from modern civilization (see Brockington 2002). This American invention of creating national parks for the large-scale preservation of wilderness in the "public's interest" has since been exported around the world. Eminent environmental historian Roderick Nash wrote that "The concept of a national park reflects some of the central values and experiences in American culture" (1970, 726), but this begs the fundamental questions of exactly *whose* values, experiences, and culture? In both the global south and north, indigenous peoples have been evicted from lands, and their hunting and other practices prohibited or closely regulated in efforts that allegedly protect biodiversity and valuable wildlife resources or clear the way for agriculture or other uses (Ranger 1999; Spence 1999; Neumann 1998; Catton 1997). More recently, local communities in the global north have reacted vociferously against preservationist policies that aim to restrict practices such as hunting, motorized recreation, and timber harvesting on lands where they have lived, worked, and played for generations. Furthermore, national parks and preserves were once considered primarily from an anthropocentric perspective and initially established for the preservation of scenery or securing a "pleasuring ground" for city folk (Brennan and Miles 2003, 51). More recently,

environmentalists, ecologists, and others have attempted to shift the focus of environmental management policies from those concerned first and foremost with meeting human needs to those protecting the intrinsic interests of the environment in the aim of maintaining biodiversity. If the goals of park and protected area management do shift—from provision of park services and the wilderness experience for visitors to protection of ecological systems and biodiversity—access to and various uses of protected areas will likely be increasingly restricted (Brennan and Miles 2003).

\* \* \*

However, there is a thread of scholarship and activism that rejects the wilderness ethic and the selectively exclusionist policies that can result. The theoretical entry point into this rethinking of human-environment relations and denunciation of the nature/culture dichotomy more specifically, is the concept of the *social construction of nature*. There are two aspects of constructionist thinking that interrogate the “naturalness” of nature. The first has structural underpinnings and a political economic focus, and refers to the physical and material construction of nature by humans through capitalist processes of production. The second represents a post-structural turn with a more cultural focus, and refers to the construction of *concepts* of nature through discourse. Both approaches get at the fact that nature is humanly fabricated at some level *as well as* a tool or effect of power, “for the ability to define nature’s ‘truths’ or to alter it physically can, it is argued, help secure relations of cultural and economic dominance in society (Castree and Macmillan 2001, 209).

The social production of nature is a Marxian concept, most notably outlined by Neil Smith in his 1984 book, *Uneven Development*. Smith argued for a move away from nature as

fetishized and revered (e.g., within the preservationist discourse) or as dominated by humans, and rather focuses on human productive labor and the social relationships producing nature in the pursuit of profits. Nature and human society enter into a dialectical relationship whereby the production of first nature (external or “God-given”) is required in the production of second nature (transformed through social production). The two eventually become indistinguishable with the intensification of capital accumulation, and thus nature and society are inseparable and integral to each other.

Space is considered socially produced, both materially and psychologically, by the practices in which people engage. Human producers physically change nature to make it useful to them, and in the process change their own nature; this is the “consciousness of human practice” (Smith 1984, 36). Expectedly, those who continue to work the land and those who amass the resulting social surplus become divided into separate classes. The ruling class or bourgeoisie, in “emancipating itself from the constraints of nature” (39) abstracts “itself from the immediate material conditions of existence” (42) and forms a different consciousness. Such a relationship with nature enables its romanticization and the creation of a nature/culture dichotomy, which contrasts with a way of knowing that is produced through daily material relations with nature. Thus, this theory allows us to “think about the relationship between how we make ourselves and how we make the world” (West 2006, 29).

The construction of concepts of nature represents a post-structural turn in human-environment studies that examines the politics of environmental knowledge and discourse, exploring why and how particular forms of knowledge are privileged and disseminated. While political ecology has typically focused on conflicts over access to and control of natural

resources, struggles over competing visions of landscape can be sources of conflict and unevenness in and of themselves (Robbins 2004). This attention to conflicts over meanings has produced research concerned not simply with determining the environment's material condition, but also its *imaginary* status (perceptions, ideas, or concerns about the state of nature) (Robbins 2004; see Katz and Smith 2003; Neumann 1998; West 2006). Meaning and knowledge are closely intertwined with all aspects of social life, "Meaning is understood as produced under specific social and intellectual conditions, and knowledge is not a 'true reflection' but a productive and constitutive force" (Gibson-Graham 2000, 97). Different knowledges have different effects, empowering certain subjects, enabling certain practices, and excluding certain people. Thus, there are material consequences to thinking about nature and humans in essentialist and fixed terms, such as prohibiting specific land uses that disrupt a romantic wilderness aesthetic. The argument then follows that representations of things we call "natural" are cultural products that reflect biases, assumptions, and prejudices (Castree and Macmillan 2001). This belief in the environment's construction is a necessarily social, cultural, political, and historical project, and one of its focuses has been the deconstruction and destabilization of dominant truth claims and hegemonic discourses, such as the nature/culture dualism that defines nature in terms of its opposition to human society (Demeritt 2002).

Theories about the production and construction of nature are often closely interrelated in that experiences and relations with the natural world—whether the land directly sustains one's livelihood or is a space for quiet retreat—shape one's consciousness and perceptions of what exactly "nature" is and represents, how best it should be used or



protected, and ultimately, what, and perhaps who, does and does not belong. Those who view nature as constructed reject the wilderness ethic by arguing that

the dream of an unworked natural landscape is very much the fantasy of people who have never themselves had to work the land to make a living—urban folk...Only people whose relationship to the land was already alienated could hold up wilderness as a model for human life in nature” (Cronon 1995, 80).

Inhabitants of rural areas are generally familiar enough with the hard work required by country living to view wilderness, or unworked land, as a less than ideal environment. They tend to possess a “land ethic” (a term coined by Aldo Leopold), perceiving themselves as stewards of their inherited lands, and view nature shaped to human needs (e.g., “improved land” such as fields, farms, pastures, orchards, villages) as decidedly natural, if not the ideal natural landscape. This ethic replaces the concept of wilderness with that of a “working forest,” which suggests a multiple use landscape that supports rural livelihoods. The wilderness conception of nature is thus arguably most appealing to cultures situated away from the rural world, with values based on a rigid division between the human and non-human (Wilson 1992). Cronon writes that “elite urban tourists and wealthy sportsmen projected their leisure-time frontier fantasies onto the American landscape and so created wilderness in their own image” (1995, 77). Situating this within a framework of nature’s construction, we can see how the concept of leisure time and nature as a purely rejuvenating and recreational space arose out of industrial capitalism, which heralded a shift from a pastoral to a consumer approach to nature (Wilson 1992). During this transition, work became defined as distinct sphere of life, separating the time spent in “meaningless” jobs in unhealthy, urban areas from regenerating experiences in natural spaces. Leisure, and specifically nature tourism, became an activity with its own politics and place on the

landscape, effectively constructing the space to which Americans retreated in a search for life's meaning (Wilson 1992, 20).

Neil Smith (1984) accurately predicted that “there will be those who see this analysis... as a sacrilegious effrontery, and a crude violation of the inherent beauty, sanctity and mystery of nature” (64). Indeed, some environmentalists have claimed that such arguments are anthropocentric and undermine the value inherent in nature, negatively impacting the movement (e.g., The Wildlands Project's Winter 1996/97 issue of *Wild Earth*). One such author wrote, “Apparently lacking appreciation for the biological significance of wilderness, Cronon writes about the subject purely in terms of social and cultural values and understanding” (Bill Willers 1996 quoted in Proctor 1998, 357). Smith counters that “through human labour and the production of nature at the global scale, human society has placed itself squarely at the centre of nature. To wish otherwise is nostalgic” (1984, 65).

It becomes clear how wilderness and land ethics result in differing ideas about how best to show respect and care for the environment. In his book, *Common Lands, Common People* (1997), which details the local cultures of resource use in northern New England and the interrelated local and popular roots of conservation thinking, Richard Judd emphasizes the importance of understanding how land is locally perceived. He considers the land ethic to be a central part of the grass-roots cultures of American conservation thought. This ethic was neither uniformly conservationist nor anti-conservationist, but “absorbed a complicated mix of Christian theology, practical wisdom, economic incentive, and secondhand natural history...giving local land-use practices a definably moral cast” (xii). Attitudes rural New

Englanders held toward nature and the landscape in the mid- to late-1800s tended to share three commonalities:

a concern for landscape caught in the throes of change, a moral assumption about the balance of natural and cultural elements in this changing landscape, and a strong pride in place that bonded the people to the land and legitimized their prescriptions for its common stewardship” (Judd 1997, 2).

Moral assumptions also upheld democratic values that stressed one’s fundamental rights to nature and access to the land. Inevitably, tensions arose between rural residents espousing beliefs of stewardship and democratic access and recreationists expecting a particular experience and type of wilderness protection. Writing to the *Maine Farmer* in 1899, a New Hampshire farmer complained of the constrictions he faced resulting from a new body of conservation laws passed at the insistence of urban hunters and anglers, “You are not permitted to kill game on your own land nor catch fish in your town streams...Your forests are ruined by fires set by these roving hunters, and you are blamed for not caring for your woodland” (Judd 1997, 197). Local impressions of the conservation movement at that time, “cast urban, elite champions of preservation against resistant petty resource users” (197). The movement was predicated on privileging spiritual and recreational, rather than utilitarian, concepts of land use, and on romantic notions of wilderness that projected nature as separate from humans. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such contested beliefs about nature resulted in a variety of struggles over land and resources in northern New England. These conflicts would feel strikingly familiar to people wrapped up in current struggles over Maine’s north woods.

Henry Carey’s (2002) more recent work studying rural Hispanic residents fighting for rights to forest resources in New Mexico’s northern mountains supports these historical cases.

He argues that “The concept of environmental quality varies from culture to culture. In fact, the term *environmental protection* may only be relevant in an urban Anglo-American context and not to describe a reverence for the earth and a desire to care for its landscapes, vegetation, and creatures as expressed by rural people and other cultures” (Carey 2002, 219; emphasis in original). While New Mexico’s Hispanic communities support some restrictions on timber harvesting, their “appreciation of natural values [is found] in the context of the working landscape. [Their] environmental sensitivities are rooted in rural culture and are distinct from the values expressed by urban activists in their search for a static state in the forest” (Carey 2002, 219). Similarly, Paige West describes how the Gimi peoples of Papua New Guinea do not view “the environment as a ‘vista,’ ‘backdrop,’ or as biological diversity” (West 2006, 218). The environment exists for them “in their engagement with it. It is valuable and meaningful to them because they have a social relationship with it—one that is incredibly active” (218).

In conclusion, the way people create and separate the categories of nature and culture based on their histories and subjectivities determines their beliefs about nature, and its acceptable use and potential users. There is no singular “nature” per se, but various sometimes contradictory natures produced by and through diverse social practices (Macnaghten and Urry 1998). Thus, we can understand how in the case of Maine’s north woods, the forests that people are fighting to either preserve or maintain public access to are actually different forests, perceived and experienced differently by various individuals and groups. Interactions with nature by people who work and live in rural areas often represent longstanding practices that are sometimes necessary to sustain one’s livelihood. The

preservationist notion of humans as probable threats to the land is foreign and unrelated to such functional experiences. Meanwhile, romantic and dualistic ideologies “are built on conceptualizations of nature in which nature is fetishized and the social relations that have gone into its production (discursive and material) are made invisible” (West 2006, 30). Such ideologies, which underlie conceptions of wilderness as especially cherished land with minimal signs of human impact, can have material consequences for socially or otherwise marginalized populations. Whether romantic beliefs about nature result in the forced evictions of indigenous populations from treasured natural areas or the blocking of longstanding rights of access, the costs of differing constructions of nature are not inconsequential.

### *Ecology: History collides with ideology in the north woods*

[T]o speak of intact ecosystems without factoring in the ways *Homo sapiens* have, for the past ten thousand years or so, intentionally and unintentionally altered things is both bad history and bad ecology (Dizzard 1999, 198).

To place calls for wilderness protection and a “restored” Maine woods in perspective, one must first understand the forest’s ecological history. Preservationists generally consider pristine wilderness the most valuable category of land, and accordingly deem it especially worthy of protection. However, where true wild areas no longer remain (which is often the case), wilderness must be socially constructed. Hence, to embrace impacted landscapes as wilderness, one must effectively erase or downplay the area’s human history. When opponents in the fight over the future of Maine’s woods wrangle over the meaning of nature, wilderness, and humans’ place within, the region’s socio-ecological history becomes important evidence.

In the wilds of Maine's north woods, a long history of human occupation and a variety of land use practices have considerably altered forest composition. Maine's original forest area in the year of 1600 has been estimated at more than 75,650 square kilometers, accounting for roughly 92 percent of the state's total land (Irland 1998). Prior to European settlement in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Maine's largely unbroken old-growth forest contained a wide range of tree species. However, Native Americans—including the Maliseet, Micmac, Penobscot, and Passamaquoddy peoples—had long burned undergrowth to encourage certain seedlings (Acheson 2005; Olwig 2002; Warren 1997). During the 1700s, large white pines were harvested from the northern forest for ship masts. Later that century, following the nation's newfound independence and changes in transportation technology, new markets for saw timber emerged and heavy cutting of the forest's best timber commenced (Northern Forest Alliance 2002). Increasing European-American settlement, which steadily displaced Native populations and their forms of land management, was driven by the new forest products industry as well as a growing demand for farm land (Maine Forest Service 2003). This first wave of settler farmers cleared patches of forest for pasture and cropland. Stumps were pulled and burned or used to build homes and create livestock fences. The surrounding forests subsequently became an important source of building material, fuel, livestock feed, and non-timber forest products, such as potash and hemlock bark, which were utilized by the tanning industry (Northern Forest Alliance 2002).

In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, villages and small towns depended on agriculture for subsistence; up to 80 percent of the land in some areas was devoted to growing crops to feed humans or livestock, with the remaining forests used heavily for firewood and lumber

(Maine Forest Service 2003). By 1832, Bangor was the world's largest log-shipping port, and fifteen years later the state contained 1,500 sawmills (Clark 2008). Agriculture became more limited and the new use of wood pulp in paper-making led to sharp increases in timber harvesting from 1850 to 1880; paper companies began expanding their operations into the north woods by the late 1860s (Maine Forest Service 2003). In the more northern reaches, streams and rivers were extensively dammed and released to drive logs downstream to mills. Farming continued to decline from 1860 to 1940 due to a number of factors such as the rise of modern industry, the Great Depression, and Americans' movement westward in search of better land (Maine Forest Service 2003).

Timber harvesting in these second growth forests targeted white pine (for multiple uses), and spruce and fir (for the paper industry). Harvesting has stabilized over the last decade, at just over 2,024 square kilometers and six million cords of wood per year. Partial harvest methods dominate forest management, while clear-cutting now accounts for less than five percent of harvest land, a significant decline over the last 15 years (Maine Forest Service 2005). Regeneration has continued through the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with forests today once again covering nearly 90 percent of the state's landscape, the highest proportion in the country (Maine Forest Service 2005). At present, Maine has more forest than it did in the mid-1800s, but today's forest ecology contains different species compositions, tree sizes, and quantities of dead wood based on more than two to three centuries of farming and logging (Maine Forest Service 2003). The woods are also filled with thousands of kilometers of roads and trails, sportsman's camps, and other manifestations of human settlement, industry, and recreation.

However, the notion of the natural sublime and the special place deep, forested wildernesses hold in the hearts and minds of Americans is very much alive in Maine. For more than a century, a cultural mystique has surrounded the northern woods and its features, which are central to the state's and nation's wilderness identity. The 3380 kilometer long Appalachian Trail ends in Maine, and its final stretch (known as the "100 mile wilderness") culminates atop Mount Katahdin, New England's second highest peak. In 1913, primitivist Joseph Knowles famously undressed at the edge of a lake in northeastern Maine and strolled naked into the woods, "waving farewell to civilization," and attempting to live off the land for two months (Nash 1982, 141). President Theodore Roosevelt, America's "conservation president," visited the region numerous times, hailing its natural wonders and recounting its life-shaping powers. And most famously, Henry David Thoreau wrote his definitive piece, *The Maine Woods* (1987), about the area, detailing his life-changing mountain-top experience on Katahdin and his other adventures reveling in "unspoiled wilderness" throughout the north woods. Many travelers are inspired by this history and journey to the area to retrace Thoreau's trip down the Allagash River or hike to the peak of Katahdin. This treasured past and "national heritage" is often referenced by environmentalists pushing for permanent protection of Maine's vast, forested interior, but it conflicts with the woods' ecological and social history, which reveals lesser known and illustrious stories.

In addition to the forest landscape, the north woods' water features, and one river in particular, have similarly interesting pasts that remain relevant considering present day struggles. The Allagash Wilderness Waterway, a 148 kilometer-long stretch of rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds running through northern Maine's commercial forests, has been the



center of much recent and especially intense debate. But once again, the river's socio-ecological history provides much needed context for these disputes.

Maine granted the Allagash its special wilderness designation in 1966 and it became the first state-administered river under the federal Wild and Scenic Rivers Act in 1970. Interestingly, its use as a recreational haven for canoeists, fishermen, and others, is very much tied to the role it played in Maine's formative years as a timber giant. In the mid-1800s, lumber interests began to venture deep into the state's northern forest in search of virgin timber.<sup>4</sup> The Allagash region boasted such old growth spoils, but the river flowed northward toward Canada rather than in the direction of Bangor's mills and shippers. Thus, engineers at the behest of lumber barons reversed the natural course of segments of the river through the use of dams that raised lake levels and shifted currents southward (Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands 2004).

Many of today's recreationists continue to rely on the facilities initially built to serve the timber industry, whether they drive down old logging roads to access favorite fishing holes or use an old company farm as a safe haven or canoeing resupply point. Most significantly, the Churchill Dam, built in 1846 and originally called Heron Lake Dam, is now owned and operated by the Parks and Recreation Commission to maintain an adequate flow of water throughout the summer for canoeing (Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands 2004). However, this history, like the general ecological history of the northern forest, is often overlooked in favor of a wilderness ideal and assumption that galvanizes environmental activism and protection efforts.

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<sup>4</sup> The Allagash region's earliest human settlement dates back between 4,000 and 10,000 years ago when the area was inhabited by small groups of nomadic Native American populations, which were pushed out during increasing white settlement in the early 1800s.

With its designation as a wilderness waterway and popularity with avid recreationists from near and far, the Allagash has become a combat zone where local residents seeking access clash with environmentalists working to preserve or restore the river's wilderness character. Something as seemingly simple as rebuilding a failing bridge (crossed by logging trucks carrying an estimated 150,000 tons of timber annually, as well as 20,000 recreational visitors) must contend with outspoken critics. Jym St. Pierre, a member of Citizens to Protect the Allagash and the Maine director of RESTORE: The North Woods, argued the bridge could "[impale] one of the most important wild rivers in the country," adding that the state ought to work towards entirely phasing out the bridge in keeping "with the original mission to 'develop the maximum wilderness character'" of the waterway (Bangor Daily News 2007a).

On the other side of the divide stands the controversial head of the Sportsman's Alliance of Maine (SAM), George Smith. He wrote a January 2007 op-ed piece to the Kennebec Journal that generated widespread response. It began,

Wilderness is in the eye of the beholder. And that, my friends, is the problem. Mainers have fought pitched battles to establish their respective wilderness visions in the Allagash [Wilderness Waterway area] and elsewhere. But it is simply not possible to reach consensus on the issue because the concept of wilderness is so specific to each individual's experiences and desires (Smith 2007).

He references the Webster dictionary, which defines wilderness as an essentially undisturbed area, uncultivated and uninhabited by humans, though federal law under the 1964 Wilderness Act recognizes it similarly, "as an area [of at least 5,000 acres] where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain... [and which retains] its primeval character and influence" (U.S. Wilderness Act 1964). While the state has large tracts of undeveloped land, most of it is relatively easy to access via the kilometers of logging roads crisscrossing throughout. Thus Smith claims that

Maine sportsmen “find our wilderness in vast areas of Alaska and Canada. It doesn’t exist in Maine.” He asserts that

wilderness advocates don’t seem to recognize that the services they enjoy in the Allagash [such as river guides and other support staff, dam operators] simply would not be available in a real wilderness.[...] What some are trying to do is turn a recreational river into a faux wilderness, and that’s the principal reason we’re having so many disagreements. We can’t agree on what is appropriate in a faux wilderness (Smith 2007).

Interestingly, it may be the people more than the bridges, dams, and logged forests that are impinging on the river’s wild character. Thoreau wrote about his adventures paddling the Allagash River in 1857 as part of his last and longest trip to Maine. Just as he was greeted by two loggers from across the lake at the Chamberlain Farm lumbering depot who spotted his dinner fire, visitors today are not alone in their travels down the river. Although most Allagash recreationists are seeking solitude, wildness, and solace from the travails of daily life, the large number of visitors can diminish the natural character and remoteness that is expected (Daigle 2004). One writer detailed his experience canoeing the river, lamenting

On this weekend, 371 people in 101 boats—most of them canoes—enter the waterway at Chamberlain Bridge. Eighty-seven of those people will spend a week paddling the length of the Allagash, vying for available campsites with dozens of other people who already have begun the trip (Shanahan 1997).

A fellow traveler he met along the way explained, “Wilderness is where you don’t see people and where you don’t expect to. This ain’t bad, but it ain’t true wilderness—not the kind of wilderness Thoreau was talking about, anyway” (Shanahan 1997).

### ***Commons: Changing land ownership and threats to community***

In addition to clashing ideologies and ecologies, understanding historical patterns of land ownership and management and more recent shifts in land tenure help contextualize current conflicts in and around the Maine woods and the serious implications of these changes for local communities. There exists a long and complex history of common land ownership in Maine dating back to colonial times. By the year 1820, when the state split from Massachusetts and achieved independent status, more than half of the state's land (roughly 40,470 square kilometers) had been sold or granted; by 1878 the remaining land had been sold (North Maine Woods 1998). Oftentimes, two or three people would jointly purchase townships as common, undivided areas (i.e., an individual may have owned 15 percent of a township's every tree, road, and so forth). Starting around the turn of the century, families increasingly began to sell their holdings to industrial landowners, while each succeeding generation of heirs divided remaining ownerships into even smaller shares (North Maine Woods 1998). Consequently, the current ownership of much of the state's forestland represents a diverse combination of private individual, private industrial, and public ownership and interests (North Maine Woods 1998). Today, 95 percent of the state's forests are privately owned, though approximately 132,000 individuals own less than ten acres of forest land, while another 57,000 own between ten and 49 acres (Jin and Sader 2006; Maine Forest Service 2005). This complex tenure configuration resulted in a tradition of collective management by settler communities who have consequently enjoyed relatively open access to the forest for centuries. Even with the majority of the forest under commercial ownership by paper and pulp companies, the woods have remained a *de facto*

commons governed by common property regimes that regulate its shared use and multiple-use management and also guarantee that no individual will be excluded from the use or benefit of the woods.<sup>5</sup>

As with other commons, north woods communities have helped create and enforce rules regarding the use of the lands despite, and perhaps because of, their lack of formal legal rights (see McKean 2000; Ostrom 1987). They have entered into agreements with the private property owners that grant use rights, or *usufruct*, permitting hunting, fishing, motorized recreation, and other activities as long as they steer clear of actively harvested timber areas and respect the landowners' wishes. These agreements range from informal understandings between users and owners (e.g., "timber trucks always have the right of way"), to a systematic dispersal of public funds to local clubs whose members work to maintain infrastructure such as trails and bridges, to arrangements formalized through the establishment of management organizations. One such group is a forest recreation management company called North Maine Woods, which is comprised of landowners, corporations, state agencies, families, and individuals.<sup>6</sup> This group originated in the 1960s as a landowner committee formed to resolve conflicts between logging contractors, and eventually developed into an association, partnership, and finally a non-profit corporation in 1981. As land was added to the now 14,164 square kilometer managed area encompassing 155 townships, interior gates were removed and access became controlled by a uniform set of fees and regulations for all users of the management area. Thus, agreements among landowners, agencies, and users have

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<sup>5</sup> See Macpherson (1978) for more on this basic understanding of common property.

<sup>6</sup> North Maine Woods' website, <http://www.northmainewoods.org/>

enabled consistently regulated use and moderately restricted travel throughout the entire area, unhampered by private gates.

Understanding the northern forest as a commons reveals practices, social relationships, and formal, as well as informal, institutional arrangements that effectively govern the use of these multifunctional and productive spaces. While one might assume that the forestlands are currently open to unregulated and destructive uses—a representation that buttresses conservationists' calls for the proper management and protection of an ecologically valuable area—characterizing the woods as a commons can insert responsible, conscientious, even conservation-minded humans into the picture. The close working relationships community members have built with the private industrial landowners and state natural resource agencies over the past few decades brings this to light. Further, some theorists perceive commons and community as co-constitutive (Ratner and Rivera-Gutiérrez, 2004; Gudeman and Rivera-Gutiérrez, 2002). Rather than viewing commons as separate from human communities, or autonomous and objective units that require clearly stated rights of access for proper management, one can understand commons as formed by a shared valuing of something and interest in its maintenance. This depends upon the existence of social relationships and also supports the continuation of those relations. Gudeman and Rivera-Gutiérrez (2002) write,

[T]he commons is the material thing or knowledge a people have in common, what they share, so that what happens to a commons is not a physical incident, but a social event. Taking away the commons destroys community, and destroying a complex set of relationships demolishes a community. Likewise, denying others access to the commons denies community with them [...] (165).

Thus, in their struggles to defend common property, people are participating with other community members to protect their social interactions or a “form of life in which [they]

achieve ‘well-being,’” and continually making, changing, and reinforcing communities (Gudeman and Rivera-Gutiérrez 2002, 171). The time and effort expended on managing the commons is considered an investment in the community since it reinforces social, political, and economic ties with other community members. However, when spaces for social interaction are reduced or eliminated, as is the case in the north woods, collective practices can disappear, eroding social networks and weakening community (Ratner and Rivera-Gutiérrez 2004).

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Starting in the late 1980s, significant changes in land ownership have swept the state and greater region, with more than 40,000 square kilometers bought and sold in the past decade alone. According to a study funded by the Brookings Institution, only the state of Virginia sold a higher percentage of its rural land than Maine in the 1990s (Morning Sentinel 2007). Most of Maine’s large industrial forest landowners—primarily pulp and paper companies—have exited the scene, largely replaced by “investor-owners” who now control at least 15,000 square kilometers of forest (Maine Forest Service 2005). Previous land sales had maintained a “working forest” which could continue to support mill and timber harvest jobs as well as traditional public recreation access to the private forest (Phillips 1993). However, both local land users and environmental interests have grown increasingly concerned about the woods’ future as entities focused on land development have purchased large and ecologically valuable pieces of land (Jin and Sader 2006). Individual and incorporated environmental interests are subsequently taking advantage of these land sales and are fighting to protect and preserve the woods piece by piece. This new pattern of ownership threatens to

break up and even eliminate the *de facto* commons that emerged more than a century ago. Jym St. Pierre, director of RESTORE: The North Woods, a conservation organization discussed in further detail in chapter 5, describes the current state of affairs,

For a long time we had this big place, over 10 million acres, as big as the whole rest of New England, that people just forgot about. It was a big blank spot on the map, and now everybody's scrapping for it.[...] It's the last big place. Look around the country. I don't know of any other place that's in play like this.[...] we're all trying to figure out what the brave new world will be up there (Clark 2008, 126).

These are uncertain times and public concern is growing regarding the future of these considerable blocks of forest: Will they remain as large, unbroken swaths of land held by relatively few owners? Will they stay undeveloped? And will they continue to be available for the public to access and practice traditional uses (Maine Forest Service 2005)?

Such fears are clearly founded as evidenced by the words and actions of Roxanne Quimby, an avid environmentalist who has acquired and preserved thousands of square kilometers of woods over the last few years. She explains,

What has happened over the years is that there were very few landowners and they had a very permissive policy toward land use as long as you stayed out of the way of logging operation. So people had this unrestricted access. So now that the ownership is changing, it's becoming quite clear that this is private property. And as a private property owner I don't have to let anybody on it. [That] is becoming the alternative to public land (Barringer 2006).

Thus, facing a lack of public park lands, which are generally perceived as offering greater resource protection and stricter management policies, conservation interests are purchasing lots and creating a *new kind* of private ownership, one that restricts high impact uses and “open, unregulated” access to the woods. Environmental interests are not necessarily advancing a “tragedy of the commons” representation, whereby the woods would be seriously endangered if open access were to continue with such uses permitted. But operating according to eco-centric principles, there is an effort underway to effectively “take back” the



woods and implement management strategies that will enable the forest to “recover” from decades, if not centuries, of large-scale commercial activities. In addition to these private conservation purchases, the state is expanding public park lands and efforts are underway by environmentalists to establish a Maine Woods National Park. Quimby believes, “A park takes away the whole issue of ownership. It’s off the table; we all own it and we all share it. It’s so democratic” (Clark 2008, 128). However, the notion of “public” is viewed by many locals as problematic and restrictive, potentially privileging some users over others.<sup>7</sup> In Maine’s north woods, there is a widespread belief that by designating the lands as public, local access will actually become constrained since many longtime uses will likely be prohibited.

However, in their fight to retain usufruct, local users of the woods have attempted to gain traction by emphasizing the history of humans on the landscape and the close connections between the woods and communities. Conservationist discourses normalize a particular way of seeing nature, either as a space necessarily empty of people, *or* one inhabited by destructive or backward people, each of which authorizes certain actors and actions while prohibiting others. The production of new narratives of local stewardship help redefine the state’s forested region as a space “laboriously constructed through the daily cultural and economic practices of the communities” (Escobar 2001, 161). This construction of nature gives weight to local interests attempting to problematize conservationist discourses of national wilderness heritage through assertions of tradition and community subsistence. These claims stem from a local utilitarian land ethic that brings to light the long history of humans shaping and working the land, highlighting multiple and specific practices, activities,

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<sup>7</sup> Neumann (1998) and Ranger (1999) have advanced similar arguments regarding the designation of public national parks in Tanzania and Zimbabwe, respectively.

and relations. Stories such as these then disrupt the notion of wilderness as “original state” and the nature/culture dualism that positions nature apart from everyday social practices (Mackenzie 2006a, 389). In her work studying recent land tenure shifts in rural Scotland, Fiona Mackenzie explores the constitutive processes of community, land or territory, and nature (2006a, 385; 2006b). Locating her argument within post-structural political ecology and social construction of nature theory, Mackenzie asserts that community resistance is not simply a reaction to (past and potential future) land dispossession, but is rather about reclaiming the locality and place-based identities based on alternative ways of imagining human history and relations with nature—community and land are actually co-produced through these principles and practices (2006b, 580).

Thus, specific local practices in the Maine woods, such as timber harvesting, snowmobiling, and hunting, signify a reconstitution of nature. By constructing a history of such activities, the forests are revealed as bound up in human activities that stretch back in time (Mackenzie 2006a). Nature thus recast suggests the “co-creation, or co-performance, of land and nature, bound together in complicated ways” rather than a primitive wilderness (Mackenzie 2006a, 391). It also gives the land a value that stands in contrast to its sole worth as a wilderness playground. Within a conservationist discourse, certain uses are deemed unacceptable and practices are restricted, which serves to create a wilderness the discourse claims has always existed. Thus preserving access and the right to particular uses works to actively define nature as worked and lived on land—it constitutes a making of place.

Operating as a commons, the woods are “a shared base of material, social, and spiritual sustenance for communities” (Gibson-Graham 2006, 167). Despite the recent downsizing of

the forest products industry, the woods continue to provide in other crucial ways. Not only did they help build and sustain the local economy by generating timber jobs for many area residents, they are also utilized for subsistence hunting, fishing, small-scale timber harvesting, and recreation. They contribute to the local economy by drawing people north to snowmobile, hunt, and engage in other nature-based tourism. But even more daunting, based on critical understandings of community and commons, we can begin to imagine how a loss of the forest commons can potentially weaken the social relations and networks that constitute community. Thus, the loss of land is culturally and politically complex and understandably connected to other fears of loss and change that can deeply impact ways of life (Rikoon 2006).

## CHAPTER 2.

### Understanding “the Rural”

#### *Discourses of rurality*

In addition to constructions of wilderness, the rural landscape (as a worked-on and lived-in space) and its inhabitants are also subject to social constructions and imaginings that impose simplistic cultural frameworks on them and erase local histories and complexities. To a large extent, environmental activism and rural development programs are based on dualisms or concepts of separation—of city from country, improved land from wilderness, human activity from natural processes (DuPuis and Vandergeest 1996, 1). The creation of these boundaries and categories of understanding, which often characterize dominant discourses of rurality, can contradict local understandings and experiences and result in certain conservation and development strategies that ignore or ineffectively address an area’s particular needs. Whether idolizing the rural as a virtuous landscape and lifestyle or deriding rural people’s ignorance or crudeness, most Americans form their opinions of rural communities from a distance, not direct experience. Ultimately, “the true nature of rurality—the worldviews of rural people and the conditions of their lives—is often at variance with the typical perception of most Americans” (Brown and Swanson 2003, 2). Even the term “rural,” which is often defined by simple population size and density statistics, erases the cultural, demographic, economic, and ecological diversity contained within rural America. One must therefore remember that within “the rural,” including rural Maine, is

found enormous multi-dimensionality and multiplicity that will complicate any attempts to analyze and summarize the rural experience.

Rural life is commonly depicted and understood within dominant discourses in terms of its closeness to nature and opposition to urban life. Paradoxically, while discourses of nature exclude people from the natural environment, discourses of rurality locate country inhabitants close to nature—thus, rural people are stuck in a contradictory state that expects harmonious living, but within a set space and through set relations that somehow preserve the sanctity of human-free nature (e.g., separating the garden from wilderness) (DuPuis and Vandergeest 1996). This construction and Euro-American understanding also separates activities. For example, many people regard work—the relatively unenjoyable thing we do to earn a living—and play—the fun, extracurricular pursuits our work affords us—as distinctly separate activities. When one is in the field, one is working; when one is in the wilderness, one is playing. On the other hand, Hasselstrom (1996) quotes Wendell Berry as noting that “farmers do not *go* to work; a good farmer is *at* work even when at rest” (72; emphasis in original). In many rural livelihoods, jobs are part of a daily process that leaves little space between work and play. Vitek (1996) elaborates on this, further dissolving boundaries in his explanation of the connection between people and place, rural communities and the rural landscape,

Here one can be certain that the land is not mere scenery and hiking trail, or resources in need of extraction. Here the land becomes part of people’s lives, intermingled with buying and selling, working and playing, living and dying. It is both history and future. In rural communities is an opportunity for the land’s rhythms to become part of everyday life, an immediate linkage between the land’s fertility and the community’s prosperity. Those who work directly on the land know it in ways that are simply unavailable to those who wish to keep their hands clean and their preconceptions unchallenged. In rural communities one learns that it is possible to love the forest one cuts; to honor the bull calf on his way to the slaughterhouse; and to respect the land one clears, plants, and harvests. To the farmer or

rancher these are not logical contradictions to be avoided for the sake of some artificial consistency, but immediate and natural paradoxes one accepts up front and lives by (3).

The understanding of rural spaces and people as close to nature is also tied to specific landscapes and uses, such as the idyllic country town or family farm. England and Brown (2003) refer to this as the agricultural landscape, envisaged by people as one of peaceful, calmly and structured family and work lives—"it is the way individual, family, and community life is 'supposed to be'" (England and Brown 2003, 317). The agricultural lifestyle is perceived as harmonious with nature's rhythms, based on the seasons, reliant on the weather and changes to the land, and managed through environmental stewardship. Many recent surveys have confirmed that an image persists to this day of "rural America as the storehouse of traditional values that built the nation—self-reliance, resourcefulness, civic pride, family strength, concern for neighbors and community, honesty, and friendliness" (Garkovich et al. 1995, 9, quoted in England and Brown 2003).

However, there is another type of rural America, which generates a vastly different set of images and values. Extractive rural landscapes and the communities within are generally perceived as uncontrollable, individualistic, centered around the company town or logging camp, and in conflict with nature—a stark contrast to the bucolic New England village. England and Brown (2003) argue that "the extraction landscape has never been considered central to the national character or a paragon of values. It is a symbol of moral disorder, and is metaphorically associated with the rough growing pains of the country" (318). Such prejudices exist even within rural scholarship. In the collection, *Rooted in the Land: Essays on Community and Place* (Vitek and Jackson 1996), many of the essayists' visions of rural life uphold a schism between industry and agriculture. Rural dwellers are often

depicted as “good farmers” (reminiscent of the “noble savage” discourse) who are deeply connected to the land, toiling in the fields alongside their families and working with their hands. While urban residents or environmentalists may be able to idealize this type of rural figure and deem his or her seemingly harmonious lifestyle as an acceptable human presence on the landscape, the tree cutter or mill worker buzzing through the forest on a snowmobile and shooting moose exists outside of and even contradicts more romantic characterizations.

In the end, meanings are constructed to serve specific purposes. McCarthy (2002) found that in advancing their own interests, some environmentalists “eagerly participate in the construction of rural primary production as marginal, backward, and inefficient” (1285). The drawing of strict boundaries between multiple categories of people and space—city and country, private and public property, improved or wild land—paves the way for various interests with political or economic power to restructure the landscape to conform to these exclusionary categories. DuPuis and Vandergeest (1996) explain,

They do so by setting boundaries in ways that fit their own understanding of the landscape and by specifying which kinds of activities will be permitted in the resultant land use zone. The result is the marginalization of many rural people who do not fit into the categories, who are deemed inefficient in their use of rural resources or destructive toward nature (4).

Meanwhile, “because the policies often fail to come to terms with the real complexities of rural life, rural people frequently try to undermine these efforts either by ignoring restrictions and/or constructing alternative meanings and narratives that challenge exclusive dualisms” (DuPuis and Vandergeest 1996, 4). Environmentalists often locate rural people on the wrong side of the nature/culture dichotomy. For example, rural employees of an extractive industry, such as logging, become automatic enemies of wilderness protection (and

activists fighting to save the forest from such destructive practices become threats to one's livelihood).

There is also a temporal and spatial ordering of common understandings of rural versus urban, and nature versus culture (DuPuis and Vandergeest 1996). Rural living and nature are imagined as in the past and something far away, undeveloped, and exotic, while urbanity and culture are the present and the future, nearby, connected, modern, and familiar (DuPuis and Vandergeest 1996, 3). In depicting the rural as a strange, primitive lifestyle—"the way things were"—rural inhabitants become placed in a development trajectory that will either usher in progress and improve lives and/or threaten traditional ways that must therefore be preserved. Rural economic restructuring (e.g., dying extractive industries, declining manufacturing industries) becomes an unstoppable force and an accepted fact. For example, in his photographic collection titled *Rural Maine*, published in 1972, Mark Silber opens with a few words,

In this book is the social face of Maine. Over the past five years the population of Maine has started to change noticeably. The state is becoming a refuge for many artists and professional people who seek the security and beauty of the country, people who wish to free themselves from the pressures of urban life. [...] Soon, and without any qualifying evaluations, Maine will lose much of its old charm of rural peasantry and subsistence farmers. It will become populated with people who are more urbane and well-educated. This is a basic change in any population flow. People who come to escape eventually transform the land—to what degree we can only speculate. [...] I see myself as one who is recording the images of the past in the present.

This rather ominous forecast exemplifies the constructed separation between the urban and rural, the future and the past. It also illustrates the broader view, professed by a relative newcomer to the state, of an archaic, traditional, simple-minded rural people facing inevitable modern changes. Such declarations are part of a popular narrative of widespread rural restructuring, severe economic downturns, and sweeping transformations, and a



traditional people on the edge of modernity. However, such understandings are often misleading and limiting. For example, while rural employment in agricultural and natural resource sectors has declined, these industries continue to dominate economic life in many of the nation's rural regions, including Maine's north woods (Brown and Swanson 2003). Manufacturing jobs have similarly dropped; but again, this still accounts for nearly one-fifth of rural employment nationwide. Finally, natural-amenity-based growth and development, which primarily produces jobs in the service industry, are sometimes considered a panacea for struggling rural economies. However, rural services are more likely to involve low-skill, low-wage, seasonal, and forced part-time employment, and they currently represent a much lower proportion of rural work than in urban areas (Brown and Swanson 2003). Again, there are material consequences to such misunderstandings. Exaggerated constructions of downwardly spiraling rural economies depict helpless and desperate communities and may prescribe specific development and conservation interventions that might not suit local needs and circumstances.

### ***The “other Maine”***

Maine is a divided state. Its populace is geographically separated between those living in the rural towns and unorganized territory of the northern woods versus those in the coastal, urban counties of the south. However, there are also critical cultural and socioeconomic differences. Wide economic inequalities exist between the two areas and the gulf continues to grow, intensified by cultural disparities. Maine is a fairly progressive state teeming with environmentally-minded citizens, but it is also home to a large rural population that generally possesses a traditional land ethic and utilitarian environmental values.

Residents of the more populated coastal and southern counties often refer to the state's forested interior and its communities as the "other Maine." Meanwhile, many people native to the northern region (comprising Aroostook, Penobscot, and Piscataquis counties) refer to the southern part of the state as "Northern Massachusetts" due to the area's high influx of out-of-staters, urban/suburban character, and more liberal politics and values (Hampson 2006) (see figure 1). Finally, parts of the interior are experiencing a period of gradual economic transition, which appears to be increasing anxieties and feelings of "us vs. them" that currently dominate characterizations of resource conflicts.

Over the last several decades, Maine has experienced a steady decline in manufacturing and natural resource-based industries—losing 62,000 jobs from 1970 to 2004—that hit its rural areas the hardest (Brookings Institution 2006). The forest products industry, a significant part of northern Maine's economy, has lost 9,000 jobs since 1990. While the lumber and wood products sector gained jobs between 1969 and 1999 in Maine's neighboring states, Maine experienced a two percent decline. And during the same 30 year period, employment connected to paper and allied products declined by 24 percent (Northern Forest Alliance 2002). These losses totaled over one third of the state's traditional employment and have resulted in even greater disparities between the interior and urban/coastal regions, as well as increasing uncertainties about north woods communities' economic futures (Brookings Institution 2006). However, it is important to note that despite these declines, Maine's forest products industry maintains a strong presence on the landscape. For example, the state is the second highest paper producer in the U.S., and lumber production from its more than 200 sawmills has more than doubled over the last three decades (Maine Forest

Service 2005). Forest products represent 36 percent of the state's total manufacturing output, directly contributing \$6.2 billion to Maine's economy. And despite job losses, as of 2002, more than 18,000 people remained employed by the industry (Maine Forest Service 2005). The woods thus continue to be a working forest; longstanding uses and practices of rural Mainers—hunting, fishing, trapping, the collection of timber and nontimber forest products, and even snowmobiling—contribute to people's subsistence and cultural livelihoods. Describing the region solely in terms of precipitous drops and a dying economy insinuates desperation and the need for intervention, rather than self-determining individuals and families that continue to be connected to and reliant on the land in numerous ways.

Wide economic disparities exist between the coastal and rural “rim” or central county regions<sup>8</sup> as evidenced by differences in poverty levels, household and per capita incomes, employment rates, and benefit levels (Acheson 2005). There is also a widening gap in income between rural and coastal/urban regions. In 1970, the average per capita income for individual residents of rim counties was \$2,403 less than coastal counties. By 2000, the difference in real dollars had grown to \$6,220 (Cervone 2005). In 2004, Piscataquis and Aroostook counties registered the first and third lowest annual wages of Maine's counties, \$24,000 and \$26,300 respectively, which is several thousand dollars below the state average of \$31,900. Finally, outmigration, a common problem across rural America, is a serious and ongoing concern. Northern Maine's population is quickly growing older as the number of young adults in northern Maine decreased by nearly 14,000 in the 1990s, representing a *33 percent* decline (Brookings Institution 2006).

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<sup>8</sup> The four counties over which Maine's north woods extend are Aroostook, Piscataquis, and Somerset (all rim counties), plus Penobscot (considered a part of the central region) (see figure 1).

The persistent socioeconomic distress found in rural Maine and the growing inequality between rural and urban areas is comparable to nationwide trends. The nation's poor continue to be concentrated in rural areas despite more than forty years of targeted rural poverty policies (Glasmeier 2006); in 2006, over 70 percent of rural counties had poverty rates of 20 percent (Economic Research Service 2006). The primary reason for the persistence of rural poverty is the lack of economic opportunity (Glasmeier 2006). Rural areas are also experiencing significant population loss. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, just over 20 percent of the nation's population lived in rural areas in the year 2000 (though more recent federal measures place that number at 17 percent) versus 36 percent in 1950. Following precipitous drops in farm populations across America, the Census Bureau has since stopped counting the number of people living on farms (Berry 1996). McCarthy (2002) points out that the number of urban environmentalists who value rural, natural areas as spaces of touristic consumption outnumbers the number of households that produce commodities from federal lands, and "many rural primary commodity producers in the United States believe themselves to be marginal" (McCarthy 2002, 1285). Although residents of rural areas, including those in and around the north woods, are not necessarily politically marginal and are far from powerless, "they are genuinely, steadily losing access to and control over federal [and private] lands, contributing to [the] sense of marginalization" (McCarthy 2002, 1286).

The evidence suggests that in coping with persistent economic struggles, many north woods community members appear to be connecting their powerlessness and inability to sustain their livelihoods with environmentalists' efforts to turn the north woods into their own nature reserve through the establishment and enlargement of protected areas and

creation of new environmental regulations. In explaining, for example, why the Maine Woods Coalition (a group of local citizens that incorporated as a non-profit in 2001) formed, the members write,

For several years, a group of dedicated environmentalists from outside the State of Maine and from outside of this four-county region have sought to convince the Federal Government to create a National Park on the 3.2 million acres of land known as the North Maine Woods. In recent meetings with major proponents of this proposal, it appears that those working for the creation of this Park (1) do not understand what would happen to the lives and livelihoods of the residents and property owners of the region, (2) do not want to consider these concerns in their on-going efforts, and (3) do not appear to feel that the residents here should have a say about the future of this large tract of land. The residents of this four-county region believe strongly that we have a right to have a say in what happens to the Maine Woods.

Thus, divides among the state's citizenry cut sharply along rural and urban or coastal lines, between those who rely on the woods for their daily material existence and those who view the woods as their rightful wilderness heritage. The concept of environmental (in)justice typically refers to the disproportionate siting of environmental burdens in non-white and/or poor communities. However, it can also refer to the uneven access to and enjoyment of environmental *goods* as well as a community's lack of say in its environmental future. In determining who can legitimately make claims to environmental injustices, Getches and Pellow (2002) define such marginalized communities as those who "suffer inequity in the allocation of benefits and burdens of environmental policy [that] intensifies the social or economic disadvantages they already suffer" (26). While this may not be the case yet, there is a real fear and possibility that large-scale conservation efforts might result in north woods communities fulfilling such criteria.

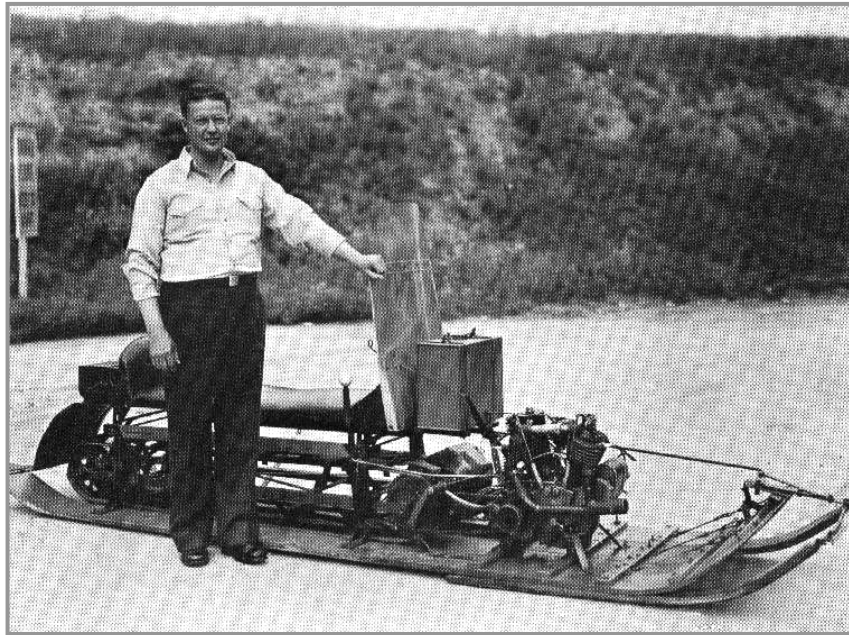
## CHAPTER 3.

### Sledding through the Snow

#### *A history of snowmobiling culture*

Leonard S. Reich compiled a comprehensive account of the snowmobile's emergence and ascendance in North America (1999), from which much of the following history is drawn. The early days of the snowmobile are widely contested, as there appears to be little agreement on precisely when and by whom the first snowmobile was invented. Most likely, there were a number of "firsts" as handy garage inventors across the snowbelt pieced together old engines, wooden ski runners, and crude bodies to create vehicles that could carry them across the snow. Early models were principally utilitarian in purpose, and can be traced to the needs of the logging industry, trappers, mail carriers, and rural dwellers for dependable over-the-snow transportation. The most basic machines are known to date back to the late 1800s, but as time and technology advanced, the machines eventually became the basis for a new type of recreation. Steve Pierce of the Antique Snowmobile Club of America contends that the first patent for a "power sled" was awarded to the Runnoe family in Colorado in 1896 (Pierce 2005). Other originators of various snow vehicles sprung up throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as Frank and Howard Sawyer's "snomo-cycle" built in 1914 and Carl Eliason's "motor toboggan" built in 1924 (figure 2). Another notable figure is Virgil White, a car dealer and garage owner in southern New Hampshire who designed an attachment that would convert and adapt the Model 'T' Ford for snow travel and also patented the name

“snowmobile” (figures 3a and 3b). He first put it on the market in 1922 and sold approximately 25,000 snowmobiles over the course of ten years, primarily to doctors, farmers, mail carriers, loggers, grocers, and utility companies (Reich 1999).<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 2.** Carl Eliason of Wisconsin and his “motor toboggan,” patented in 1927 (photographed in 1932).  
(Source: Tuite 1969)



**Figure 3a.** Advertisement for an attachment designed to convert a Model “T” Ford into a “snowmobile,” patented in 1917 by Virgil White.  
(Source: <http://www.modeltfordsnowmobile.com/index.htm>)



**Figure 3b.** A doctor on his rounds in New Hampshire in a converted Model “T”; date unknown.  
(Source: <http://www.modeltfordsnowmobile.com/index.htm>)

<sup>9</sup> Additional information on the Model “T” Ford snowmobile was found at <http://www.modeltfordsnowmobile.com/index.htm>

Despite an abundance of early inventors, there is wide agreement that Joseph Armand-Bombardier is the father of the modern snowmobile. Allegedly motivated by the death of a child who could not be transported through deep snow, he built his first snow machine in 1922. He then formed a small company in the late 1930s that built and sold large “troop-carrying” snow vehicles used for mail delivery, busing school children, and military transport (Gilsdorf 2007; Reich 1999; Tuite 1969). In 1959, his Canadian company started mass-producing smaller snowmobiles that were lighter and more maneuverable at the behest of religious missionaries seeking an “economical and reliable means of winter travel” (Reich 1999, 484). He first named it the “Ski-Dog,” since it would replace traditional sled dogs, but it later became renamed the “Ski-Doo.” Polaris Industries, an agricultural machinery company, began producing snowmobiles in 1954, focusing their marketing on similar groups: farmers, trappers, forestry workers, and backcountry inhabitants (Reich 1999, 487). But Bombardier was the first to recognize that big sales lay in the recreational and winter sports market, advertising its “thrilling glides” while continuing to target the original customer base seeking more practical uses (Reich 1999, 491).

Remarking on the snowmobile’s meteoric rise in popularity, one observer at the time declared that “Except for those places where no one ever lives or goes, the great white silence is broken forever” (Edwin Hall quoted in Reich 1999, 485). This shattering of peaceful northern winters and the sacred space of nature lies at the crux of much resistance to the machines. However, for many residents of winter communities, the “great white silence” was often stifling and snowmobiles were a welcome means of liberation. While snowmobiles were originally developed to provide faster and easier travel for snow country residents, they



quickly became a form of recreation and social networking. Snowmobiles, or “sleds” as they have come to be known, enhanced communication between remote villages and towns, providing some arctic inhabitants with even greater mobility than enjoyed during the summer months. Snowmobiles opened up new polar frontiers, taking people “where they had never been before in winter and where machines had never been at all” (Reich 1999, 485). One early sledder spoke of an “almost animal sense of freedom when you realize that the thing can go practically anywhere—shooting up snowbanks...across frozen lakes,” wherein “the machine becomes an extension of your body and your senses” (Ross 1978, 158-9 quoted in Pacey 1983, 86). It offered a “new dimension of mobility” similar to the bicycle, train, or airplane, and the excitement was intensified by a rider’s direct contact with the outdoor elements of wind and snow (Pacey 1983).

Within ten years of Bombardier’s Ski-Doo, 650,000 snowmobiles were in use across North America (Tuite 1969). “Mass-produced snow mobility rapidly developed a cadre of devoted enthusiasts” and an industry of manufacturers, distributors, and dealers sprung up in response to growing demand (Reich 1999, 486). They were relatively affordable and available during a time when manufacturing and other such jobs that largely buttressed rural economies remained strong. This enabled their expansive penetration of “geographic areas of marginal prosperity” (486). For devotees, snowmobiling was “a sport, a business, recreation... a means of identity, confirmation of mastery—a matter of ‘satisfaction, meaning, and self’” (Robert Post quoted in Reich 1999, 486).

Challenges to mobility were an obstacle to be overcome by residents in these areas who were craving more connectedness with others during the long, lonely winter months.

They not only assisted with winter hunting and ice fishing, but the new machines brought people together, encouraging them to enjoy the outdoors together and tightening the social fabric of communities that were previously more isolated during the long winter months. Snowmobiling is largely a social activity, connecting people and communities through clubs and, more basically, facilitating a physical linkage between one another across vast, sometimes harsh landscapes. In 1971, a Senate Subcommittee on Parks and Recreation held a hearing on the effects of all-terrain vehicles on public lands. Susie Scholwin, who launched *Sno Goer*, the first magazine devoted to snowmobiling, testified that, “[Before snowmobiles] winters were something just ‘to be lived through.’ Nights were long and lonely. As were the weekends as a whole. Ice fishing on the lake was good, but the best spot was over a mile away...” Her family bought a snowmobile in 1964, which is when

winter took on a different tone... [It] was not the gloomy thing it had been—but each day was an adventure of its own... The little snowmobile had become a funmobile—one that made winter something to look forward to! Everyone in the area looked forward to weekends with their picnics, trail-riding, exploring, scavenger hunts, and social gatherings (Reich 1999, 493).

Riders organized locally-based clubs that coordinated activities and social gatherings such as festivals and group outings, creating a subculture that “espoused independence, egalitarianism, camaraderie, and a sense of exploration” (Reich 1999, 496).

Finally, not only did the machines provide rural residents with a welcomed respite from long, cold winters, but they transformed previously depressed winter economies that “gained substantially from revenues derived from registration fees, property taxes, [and] gasoline and oil sales” (Tuite 1969, 54). Summer accommodations became “four season” destinations, adding groomed trail systems, snowmobile rentals, and special winter packages, and restaurants and grocery stores also benefited from the new industry. Snowmobile

manufacturing was similarly concentrated in rural areas and small-towns, and hundreds of millions of retail dollars gave these communities an additional and significant boost (Reich 1999).

### *Snowmobiling in Maine*

The state of Maine has earned a noteworthy place in the history of snowmobiling, gaining recognition as one of the machine's birthplaces and a key center of growth and development. Charles Young of Norway, Maine received one of the earliest patents for his motor-driven sled back in 1925 (Pierce 2005). But Stephen Campbell, the director of the Antique Snowmobile Museum in the north woods town of Millinocket, Maine claims that even earlier, before the time of the "power sled" and "snomo cycle," the very first vehicle built for snow travel was the "Lombard log hauler," designed and produced in Waterville, Maine (figure 4). Around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the types of harvested wood began to vary and the needs of the lumbering industry were shifting. Timber companies needed a way to transport logs across the land in snow, through mud, or over dry ground (Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands 2004). Engineer and inventor Alvin Lombard learned of this during a train ride home to Waterville, and he designed a track-driven locomotive that required no rails and was thus free to range Maine's forested expanses (Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands 2004). Lombard log haulers featured the first-ever useable patent on a track-driven vehicle. Every track-driven vehicle in the world today, including snowmobiles and army tanks, all stem from Lombard's original design and invention. This includes Caterpillar trucks and machinery, which in 1903 paid Lombard \$60,000 for the rights to produce vehicles under his patent (Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands 2004). Though the original hauler was powered by

steam, Lombard continued to adapt it to the times and eventually produced a gasoline-powered hauler. The subsequent arrival of gas-powered lumber trucks finally rendered the log hauler obsolete.



**Figure 4.** Lombard log hauler and crew; Woodland, Maine.  
 (Source: Lombard Steam Log Hauler Restoration,  
<http://www.umit.maine.edu/~herbert.crosby/lombard2/Vintage%20photos.htm>)

In addition to the state's role in early inventions, Maine continued to influence the machine's development. In 1957, a few years after its foray into the industry, Polaris decided to set up a dealer network and selected Bob Morrill of Yarmouth, Maine to be its eastern distributor (Campbell 2006). He hooked up with Earl B. Campbell of Millinocket, who became the nation's first seller of Polaris Sno-Travelers (Campbell 2006). Campbell complained incessantly to the Polaris manufacturers, based in Minnesota, that the machines were not equipped to handle his state's rugged terrain and variable snow conditions, finally convincing a Polaris engineer to visit and test their product. Upon discovery that he was

indeed right, the company added him to their design and testing team where he helped Polaris improve subsequent models and work out other bugs (Boston Globe 2005). Many consider him to be one of the fathers of the industry, and in November 2005 he became the first Mainer to be inducted (posthumously) into the national Snowmobile Hall of Fame and Museum in St. Germain, Wisconsin.

Today, Maine has approximately 96,000 registered snowmobiles, or roughly one snowmobile registration for every fifteen residents, supposedly the highest per capita of any other state (Vail and Heldt 2004; Vail 2002). Sportsmen's organizations (e.g., hunting, fishing, and all-terrain vehicle clubs) hold considerable political clout in Maine, and the Maine Snowmobile Association (MSA) is the state's largest. Founded in 1968, the MSA has approximately 32,000 individual members, 2,200 business members, and more than 300 affiliated local clubs.

Many people consider Maine's continuous, well-marked, and well-maintained trail networks to be the best in the nation. Its nearly 22,000 kilometers of trails, including the 4,025 kilometer Interconnected Trail System (ITS), crisscross a total of 86,027 square kilometers of land, much like a road system.<sup>10</sup> One can literally hop on a snowmobile and spend days, even weeks, riding trails uninterrupted throughout the state. Extensive trail networks translates to more revenue as riders take longer trips, buying more gas, meals at restaurants, supplies at service stations, and staying overnight in local motels. These networks also serve as "community connectors" that link people in non-economic ways. While many people's perceptions of snowmobiling may include unregulated riders tearing

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<sup>10</sup> From Mainetoday.com, Outdoors, Snowmobiling <http://outdoors.mainetoday.com/snowmobiling/>

through the forest at top speeds indifferent to those around them, in Maine and other parts of the country and world, it is something quite different. There are small armies of volunteers throughout the state who work to maintain and promote the trails on their own time. MSA president Bob Meyers describes how “the infrastructure of the snowmobile industry is built on the backs of its volunteers” (Sherwood 2005). The state gives the MSA snowmobile registration fees (\$30 for Maine residents and \$65 for non-residents) and a portion of the gas tax, part of which goes into the Snowmobile Trail Fund, a grant program for local clubs. The typical grant covers 50 to 60 percent of a club’s project expenses, and the rest is raised locally. Most time and money goes toward snowmobile trail maintenance, which entails regular grooming, bridge building, signing, and trail clearing. One club member, Kevin Ward, explained, “Most people don’t realize this whole thing is a volunteer game. I work full-time at the paper mill. I gave up hunting season this year. All my days off I spent maintaining trail [sic], and now grooming” (Sherwood 2005). The social networking and community-building component of snowmobiling is often centered on one’s membership in local clubs. Groups like the Northern Timber Cruisers of Millinocket or the Bethel Snow Twisters organize trips, festivals, safety clinics, barbeques, and community events such as charity rides (Vail 2002). Many are well organized with websites and self-published newsletters and newspapers. Ward contends that, “Snowmobilers as a rule are very generous people. Every weekend there’s something going on—pig roasts, pancake breakfasts, craft fairs. If we can stop somewhere and support the community, and local clubs, we will” (Sherwood 2005).

Another chief responsibility of local clubs is to obtain landowner permission for access to their lands and to maintain good relations.<sup>11</sup> The MSA and its member clubs work closely with landowners, with whom they have built a close working relationship through the years. Roughly 95 percent of Maine's snowmobile trails are on private property, almost all of which once was or still is commercial timberland and mostly owned by large landowners including timber companies, land investors, and developers. However, as discussed earlier, landowners have historically granted "permissive access" rights to sledders, hunters, and others; something local communities have grown to rely on and almost expect (Vail and Heldt 2004). While landowners could have legally prohibited public access, recreational use has generally been compatible with timber management, and providing local communities with relatively open access has helped companies maintain goodwill. The MSA website offers a contact number for landowners to call with problems or concerns, and also includes a special page of thanks on which they encourage clubs to "maintain contact with the landowners who allow access, show respect for their property, carry in/carry out, and abide by any and all private landowners wishes and special needs."<sup>12</sup>

There is broad consensus that sledding has "improved the quality of winter life for tens of thousands of individuals and families [in Maine], dispelling cabin fever and enabling them to enjoy the outdoors year-round" (Vail 2002, 131). A middle-aged couple from Maine explained to a New York Times reporter in 1972 that "Before we had snowmobiles we used to just die each winter. Sometimes we'd go to Florida. Usually we did nothing. Now we go out and ride together every weekend. It's a whole new way of life" (from Rice 1972, quoted in

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<sup>11</sup> From the MSA's website, <http://www.mesnow.com/>

<sup>12</sup> From the MSA's website, <http://www.mesnow.com/MaineLandowners.html>

Reich 1999, 496). Also, a University of Maine study conducted by Whittaker and Wentworth (1972) found that wintertime television watching decreased by 64 percent among Mainers who picked up sledding.

Finally, there is the economic contribution. With a season that usually runs from early December through mid-April, snowmobiling significantly boosts the state's winter economy and brings jobs to the northern regions where winter unemployment far exceeds the statewide rate (Vail 2002). According to a study conducted on behalf of the MSA by an economist with the University of Maine, snowmobiling accounted for over \$261 million in direct and indirect expenditures during the 1997-98 season (Reiling 1998), though a more recent article placed the number even higher at \$350 million (Sherwood 2005). This represents a 500 percent increase from 1988 (Vail and Heldt 2004). The associated economic activity also provides the equivalent of 3,100 full-time jobs for Mainers (Reiling 1998).

Owners of a family-run motel in Houlton, Maine (east of Baxter State Park and close to the western border of New Brunswick, Canada) a decade ago believed this economic impact could not be overestimated, explaining that it was previously the case that "once December and January came around, we would do nothing. We would have only two or three rooms occupied on Saturday and Sunday nights," while today those rooms are often booked from January through March (Associated Press 1996). Restaurant businesses also benefit greatly from the snowmobile clientele, who plan their days around which eatery they will visit for lunch. A perusal of snowmobile online chat rooms at the start of the winter season finds anxious riders discussing their favorite mid-day lunch spots and local restaurant owners announcing their readiness for business. One journalist wrote, "Snowmobiling is to



Maine what golf is to Florida, revving up the local economy and turning summer vacation towns into year-round tourist attractions” (Associated Press 1996). But of course it is far from strictly a tourist activity. When asked how many of a small town’s 956 residents snowmobile, the town manager laughed with a response of “probably 900 of them” (Associated Press 1996).

However, it is important to note the noticeable downturn the industry has been experiencing over the past few years. The previous article was written over a decade ago, when snowmobile manufacturing and sales were in the midst of a record boom following declines through much of the 1970s and 1980s. Those dips were considered a result of the gasoline crisis and recession, while today’s lack of snow appears to be a key reason for more recent drops. The snow season has been shrinking—the first big snow of the 2006-2007 season came in mid-February, months later than usual. Anxiety and fear has set in as people try to imagine what this might mean for a region that has grown to depend on snowmobiling as a critical source of regional revenue.

### *Winter solitude versus the engine’s roar*

There’s a perception that snowmobilers disrupt wildlife and tear up the woods, but it’s the opposite. People respect their surroundings and have an admiration for them. It’s odd, but being on a motor vehicle puts you in touch with nature (Sean Sheridan quoted in Zezima 2008).

How great are the advantages of solitude! – How sublime is the silence of nature’s ever-active energies! There is something in the very name of wilderness, which charms the ear, and soothes the spirit of man. There is religion in it (Estwick Evans quoted in Nash 1982, 44).

Hikers and other non-mechanized users of natural areas typically dislike sharing trails and forestlands with snowmobiles and other off-road vehicles (ORVs). This clash between motorized and non-motorized recreationists has taken place on various grounds—ecological,

cultural, ideological, and even spiritual. However, I am less concerned with ecological objections to snowmobiles, such as soil erosion, damage to plant life, wildlife disruption, and air and water pollution, though this is where much of the debate has focused. Rather, of particular interest here is the clash of environmental aesthetics and ideologies, which are often just as central in arguments against ORVs as are concerns surrounding environmental degradation. Based on common assumptions about various recreational experiences, lower impact activities like hiking and snowshoeing fit within a conservationist valuing of wilderness and consequently enjoy greater privilege and land use acceptability than more consumptive uses.

After its surge in recreational popularity, the snowmobile made sincere and swift enemies with environmental groups. Early detractors expressed concern over their questionable safety, misuse, disruptive noise levels, interference with other outdoor activities, and of course, environmental impacts such as air and noise pollution and wildlife and habitat disturbances—concerns that continue today. Interestingly, the steep increase in snowmobiling coincided with the rise of the modern day environmental movement. Environmental research programs studied potential negative ecological impacts and pressed for stronger snowmobile regulation. To counter claims by environmental groups, such as the Conservation Foundation which released an influential 1970 report on the topic, the International Snowmobile Industry Association (ISIA<sup>13</sup>) funded their own environmental research projects (Reich 1999). Their 1976 position paper, titled “Snowmobiles and Our Environment: Facts and Fantasies,” concluded that snowmobiling caused little to no

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<sup>13</sup> The ISIA formed in 1965, but in 1995 became the International Snowmobiles Manufacturers Association, or ISMA.

environmental damage and “ended with an attack on environmentalists, calling them elitists whose real values could be decoded as ‘Let’s keep those other people out!’” (Reich 1999, 508).

In his history of snowmobiling, Reich (1999) concludes that by the 1980s the two groups, environmentalists and snowmobilers, eventually “learned to tolerate each other and to recognize the others’ needs and concerns as legitimate” (510). He adds that “through more than two decades of experience with snowmobiles and snowmobiling, the North American snowbelt had adapted to and then adopted a new conception of traditional winter activity—one that included, even embraced, motorized delights” (516). Other researchers seem to agree that perhaps these longtime adversaries have managed to make peace. In two recent articles on the topic (Vail and Heldt 2004; Vail 2002), David Vail details the five types of conflicts that represent the downside of snowmobiling. He presents a typology that charts the groups affected and the resulting impact for each type, including snowmobiles in conflict with:

1. landowners (e.g., vandalism),
2. other snowmobiles (e.g., congestion),
3. other recreationists (e.g., trail damage),
4. host communities (e.g., noise pollution)<sup>14</sup>, and
5. environmentalists (e.g., wilderness disruption).

Two-directional arrows are used to indicate when effects are detrimental to both parties, which is the case with types 2 and 3. Interestingly, there is only a one-directional arrow for type 5: snowmobile/environmentalist conflicts, suggesting that snowmobilers

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<sup>14</sup> Host community conflicts are omitted from Vail and Heldt (2004).

antagonize environmentalists but not vice versa. Vail contends that contrary to environmental opposition found elsewhere in the country and at the federal level, Maine's conservation groups have been largely tolerant of snowmobiling and its potential adverse environmental impacts. The MSA has even joined with conservation groups, such as the Natural Resources Council, in support of the purchase of public lands and easements. He admits that one exception is the ongoing "engines in the wilderness" controversy over motorized recreation on public lands, but downplays its importance since it also involves ATVs, jet skis, and other motorized vehicles.

This may be true on the surface, as it does appear that Maine-based conservation groups do not take major issue with snowmobilers compared to other environmental concerns such as large-scale development projects. However, it seems that as north woods conservation efforts increase in importance and visibility at both the state and national level, the type 5 conflict has been growing as well, and the animosity is definitely reciprocal. In the face of extensive shifts in land ownership and escalating demands for greater wilderness protection, local users are feeling compelled to defend their uses and interests against "elitist outsiders."

On the national scale, Yellowstone National Park can be considered the frontline in the battle between snowmobilers and their opponents. Much to the delight of the snowmobile lobby and despite vociferous appeals by numerous environmental groups, George W. Bush's administration reversed a Clinton era ban against the machines, allowing regulated

access to national forests and parks.<sup>15</sup> There has been consistent back and forth since the change was implemented in 2003, consisting of appeals issued by environmental groups, public comment periods, impact studies, and policy modifications. Supporters of the ban repeal stressed the unparalleled access to parks that snowmobiles provide, as well as the economic boost for surrounding communities that rent the machines, offer guided tours, and provide winter lodging. A spokesman for the U.S. Forest Service concurred, arguing that in many cases the use of snowmobiles and other ORVs is “the only way people can realistically enjoy their public lands” (Braile 1999). However, numerous New York Times readers lashed out in response to a 2004 article on proposed changes to snowmobile legislation concerning Yellowstone. In her letter to the editor, one woman wrote,

Allowing noisy snowmobiles in [the park] is similar to what would occur if Jet Skis were allowed in Biscayne National Park here in South Florida. Some of the attraction of these parks include the quiet beauty of nature and the animals residing there, which can live unmolested by humans and the noise they produce (Coppola 2004).

Many consider motorized recreation to be not only ecologically destructive, but an aesthetic menace that undermines one’s wilderness experience. The words “appropriate” and “proper” are used to describe those activities that fall in line with how nature is supposed to be experienced, and snowmobiling is usually situated outside of this characterization. The

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<sup>15</sup> The National Park Service (NPS) remained sympathetic to the snowmobile lobby, unveiling a new Final Rule on snowmobile use in Yellowstone and nearby Grand Teton National Park in December 2007, just in time for the start of the 2007-2008 winter season. Citing their *Winter Use Plans Final Environmental Impact Statement*, the NPS opted to continue to allow up to 720 commercially guided snowmobiles in the park each day. The decision was based on “desired conditions or goals” derived from NPS mandates that were outlined in contrast to the “historic conditions” of supposedly unmanaged snowmobile use in the parks prior to 2003. Historic conditions regarding visitor access dictated that “Snowmobile use is inconsistent with winter park landscapes that uniquely embody solitude, quiet, undisturbed wildlife, clean air vistas and the enjoyment of these resources by those engaged in non-motorized activities,” while the desired conditions reflected by new management policy prescribed that “Appropriate winter recreation is that which does not cause unacceptable impacts on unique characteristics of winter settings within the parks, while permitting their enjoyment and protection” ([http://www.nps.gov/yell/planyourvisit/upload/summary\\_updated9-12-07.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/yell/planyourvisit/upload/summary_updated9-12-07.pdf)).

machines can disrupt the wilderness experience in numerous ways. Opponents often object to the use of snowcats (tracked vehicles broader than snowmobiles) to groom trails because it results in the widening and flattening of trails and tree cutting, making paths feel “less wild.” The executive director of a local nonprofit fighting to protect New York’s Adirondack mountains explains, “The foot trail experience is greatly diminished when you’re walking on a dirt road in the sun as opposed to walking on a trail under a canopy” (Foderaro 2007). The smell of exhaust is another concern. The increasing popularity of snowmobiling as a sport has led to the development of faster, more powerful machines that environmentalists say, “dominate the trail network. When you have a number of sleds, the stench is such that the backcountry atmosphere is lost” (Foderaro 2007). While opponents, including environmental interests and other recreationists, are not necessarily completely against the use of ORVs, including snowmobiles, their efforts are often focused on restricting access to more remote and treasured wilderness areas and confining them to trails specifically designed for their use (Braile 1999).

Interestingly, winter conditions can serve to magnify conflicts between those who perceive, value, and experience wilderness differently. This is due both to the biophysical aspects of snow and winter landscapes, as well as one’s social and spiritual goals of winter experiences. People traveling from urban areas are often seeking a quiet getaway that enables them to retreat inward and connect with self. Natural landscapes in the winter tend to feel more elemental or primitive, peaceful, vast, foreign or unfamiliar, and even sacred. The difficulty of movement in the snow only deepens these spiritual experiences. Both the cold temperatures and the snow serve to slow things down, forcing one to walk less hurriedly and

more deliberately, allowing more time to thoughtfully take in surroundings. The silence becomes central to the experience. It is not simply about hearing *nothing* as much as the little things the stillness and quiet enable one to notice and focus on—sounds like the satisfying crunch of snow underfoot, the flutter of a single bird’s wings, the creaking and knocking together of trees, or the sound (and sight) of one’s own breath. A retreat into a winter wilderness can be a deeply spiritual and individual experience, as it creates the perfect conditions for a meditative, cleansing moment during which one becomes deeply conscious of self.

However, there is a biophysical explanation for the acute sense of quiet and calmness felt when there is snow on the ground, especially following a fresh snowfall. As acoustic waves move horizontally above the snowy ground, the increased pressure of the wave momentarily pushes some air into the snow’s pores. The air then returns to the atmosphere after the wave passes, but it loses energy as a result of friction and cooling. This process can significantly reduce the acoustic wave’s sound energy (in contrast to noise propagation over acoustically hard surfaces, like concrete) and create an increased sense of winter quiet (SNOW Interest Group 2006). It is thus comprehensible why a snowshoer might take exceptional offense to a snowmobiler roaring by on a secluded trail, shattering the extreme silence and accompanying experience.

Predictably, some of the loudest protests against the use of snowmobiles are concerning the machine’s noise. Quiet and solitude are central to the wilderness experience—what can be more offensive to one’s attempt to escape the ills of modernity than

an engine's annoying whine? For example, an article on the growing popularity of snowshoeing places the utmost value on the profound silence and stillness of the sport,

Quiet is a word snowshoers use over and over. Snowshoeing offers a meditative alternative to the noise of the snowmobile. Even cross-country skiing makes a certain audible swish, and it tends to be a more aerobic activity, causing the body to make an internal racket of pulsing and panting that can drown the silence of the woods. But snowshoers can stop and hear that silence, taking in the gentlest call of a far-off black-capped chickadee (Samuels 2007).

Such accounts of recreational and sensory experience harkens back to earlier discussions of wilderness, where journeys into nature are equated with journeys into one's soul. Self is rediscovered and the human spirit is renewed, bringing "the individual in touch with that *primal* self that has been lost in humanity's 'descent' into modernity" (Braun 2003, 194). Rolston (1998) writes that "the forest is where one touches the primordial elements raw and pure," quoting a familiar passage from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1995), "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately." He argues that the "appropriate aesthetic enjoyment" of forests requires a multisensory, immersive experience, dissimilar to viewing art in a gallery for example, that engages one's sight, hearing, smell, and "most of all, there is the kinesthetic sense of bodily presence, being incarnate in place" (162). He, like others, suggests that there is an appropriate or adequate means of knowing the forest, much of which rests on a certain physical encounter with the landscape. Forests cannot be thought of as scenery that is viewed—they must be entered on foot because viewing the landscape through a car window "prevents the reality" (162).

Much of snowmobile opponents' displeasure is similarly based on the machines' distasteful aesthetics and disruption of nature's sanctity. Unsurprisingly, such assertions of appropriate (and inappropriate) experiences of the natural environment can become a means of creating different classes of recreationists and users of nature, some more refined and



privileged than others. Braun (2003) has examined “risk culture” as a site of cultural politics, exploring how environmental discourses and practices not only reflect cultural difference but work to constitute it. He concludes that the adventure travel industry presents a specific way of encountering nature, which is very different from gardening, work, and other routine interactions. Braun conducts a discourse analysis of articles and advertisements inside adventure magazines such as *Outside* and *National Geographic Adventure*, which portray encounters with a rugged nature that are often individualized and primal, demanding daring physical exertion, and in a location that is sufficiently wild, remote, and unleashing unpredictable and untamed natural forces. “It is a moment where one’s mettle is tested; it is about character, about stepping off the beaten path in order to struggle against, experience, and overcome nature’s raw forces” (186). Wilderness and wildness are central to this adventure discourse, as well as Frederick Jackson Turner-like understandings of frontier, which contend that the moral character of American culture grew out of our immersion in nature and foray into the nation’s frontier wilds. Braun explains:

Adventure turns on crossing a great divide between culture and wild nature; it is about physical and moral tests that the encounter with *unmediated* nature provides (hence, adventure travel’s emphasis on self-propelled transportation is not only a nostalgia for earlier modes of travel, it is also about stripping away the most obvious source of alienation from nature—modern technology) (194).

The modern technology is deemed an affront to humans’ primitive relations with nature. Thus, while snowmobiling is clearly an adventurous recreation largely targeted to thrill-seekers, it is a very different type of encounter with nature that offends this established model of adventure.

This cultural and ideological distinction and privileging of certain experiences over others has not been lost on snowmobilers. In fact, it fits perfectly within the discourse of the

wealthy, snobby environmentalist who tries to impose allegedly superior standards on other users. For example, New York State has recently attempted to revamp its snowmobile trails, striving to balance the needs of multiple users and minimize conflict between “those who prefer the quiet, albeit rigorous, contemplation of nature, and those who like to tackle the outdoors with more fossil-fueled gusto” (Foderaro 2007). Jim McCully, the head of a local snowmobile club, thinks the opposition is “all about green bigotry. You have a group of people who look upon the working class who ride snowmobiles as people who are not capable of enjoying the forest preserve in the proper manner” (Foderaro 2007). Environmentalism is often equated with urban elitism, while snowmobiling and other mechanized or higher impact uses of the forest, such as hunting, are associated with the rural or blue-collar worker. It is thus hard to ignore the role class, or at least impressions of class, plays in these debates. However, with these associations come stereotypes and misconceptions of people in both groups that can obscure shared values, experiences, and a potential space for coming together despite the differences.

Snowmobilers are often portrayed by environmental organizations, snowmobile manufacturers, and the popular media as thrill-seekers who primarily value natural areas as playgrounds on which to showcase their speed and skills (Davenport and Borrie 2005). Due to the mechanical character or even disruptiveness of their activities, motorized recreationists are presumed to value the “naturalness” of the natural world less than non-motorized recreationists such as hikers. In an article about clashes between recreational users in wilderness areas, Watson and Kajala (1995) conclude that the conflicts are not over the different uses per se, but between different social groups with dissimilar understandings and

experiences of the resource and their place in nature—in other words, between the users more than the uses. One reader responded to a newspaper article supporting the Bush administration's lift of the ban against snowmobiles, writing

The problem with snowmobiles in Yellowstone is only partly their noise and pollution. There should be a few places in America where the wildlife is more important than a person's pleasure. Snowmobilers often go off roads or trails; they often damage the habitat or chase or otherwise harass the wildlife. This needs to stop. After all, which are endangered, wildlife or human beings? I predict, with a little effort and time, [snowmobilers] would be pleased with a quieter and healthier experience than snowmobiles can give you (Vant Hull 2004).

However, snowmobilers do not simply defend their activities; they also direct criticism toward what they perceive as self-righteous environmentalists. While many condemn snowmobiling based on its ecological destruction, Jim McCully from New York has posted videotapes online of springtime trails turned into streams of mud from packs of hikers in an effort to highlight the damage caused by hikers and cross-country skiers (Foderaro 2007). Some snowmobilers believe that environmentalists label them as destructive and ecologically indifferent as part of their efforts to create more wilderness areas, the most protected federal classification of forestland from which motor vehicles are prohibited. Christine Jourdain, the executive director of the American Council of Snowmobile Associations, has stated that “very often these wilderness groups are just looking for more wilderness... [but] there's plenty of wilderness already” considering that only two percent of forest recreationists visit wilderness areas (Jourdain 2007). Sledders also portray environmental interests as an irrational, obstinate force that refuses to budge and see the other side of things. Following failures to work together and create a multiple-use plan for New York's trail system, Jim Jennings, executive director of the New York State Snowmobile Association lamented, “Right from the start we

knew it was all about compromise, and they threw compromise right out the window” (Foderaro 2007).

Snowmobilers advance alternate understandings of the activity, arguing that it is not necessarily about detachment from and domination over nature, and that in fact, sledders often forge a connection with nature in very real ways. Jourdain writes,

Non-snowmobilers do not realize that we enjoy the peace and quiet we find in the middle of nowhere, when all you hear is the sounds of nature. We are often painted to be speed demons, snowmobiling anywhere and everywhere. It is sometimes shocking when they realize some of the reasons we snowmobiling are for the beauty, the serenity, and for quality time with our families (Jourdain 2007).

Davenport and Borrie (2005) cite a number of studies that revealed the primary motivations of snowmobilers visiting national park lands. Reasons include experiencing and being close to nature, enjoying scenery, participating in recreational activities, having fun, escaping the demands of life, spending time with friends and family, and viewing diverse wildlife species in their natural habitats. Their own research focused on the meanings snowmobilers attach to the experience, explaining that “the process of meaning-making, like learning, is driven by the experiences an individual has with particular phenomena.” Their study found that snowmobilers in Yellowstone National Park viewed the snowmobiles as a form of transportation that could provide them with the kinds of experiences mentioned above, “Snowmobiling gave them the *freedom*, *access*, and certain *closeness to* or *intimacy with nature* that many believed they would not have had otherwise” (Davenport and Borrie 2005; emphasis in original). Thus, snowmobiling can be considered a “mode of experience rather than the experience in and of itself,” suggesting that motorized recreationists value nature more than one might suspect. In addition to communing with nature, much of the wonderment of the snowmobiling experience stems from the unparalleled access it provides.

One Maine sledder described, “Last weekend we rode from North Anson to Coburn Gore—it’s incredible. You get to see places you just couldn’t get to otherwise—snowmobiles are a wonderful way to access it” (Sherwood 2005). His friend concurred, “You can drive past these beautiful places in your car all summer and not even know they’re there. But in the winter, on snowmobiles, we can get out and experience it. There’s nothing like it” (Sherwood 2005).

On their website, the International Snowmobile Manufacturers Association (ISMA)<sup>16</sup> lists the five main reasons people snowmobile, according to a Montana State University Study, which concurs with Davenport and Borrie. They are to 1) view the scenery, 2) be with friends, 3) get away from the usual demands of life, 4) do something with family, and 5) be close with nature. Surveys also show that around 95 percent of snowmobilers consider it a family activity. They generally ride close to home, though interest in tours that span several days and nights is growing. Eighty percent of snowmobilers ride primarily for recreational purposes, and the remaining 20 percent use them for work, transportation, or things like ice fishing and hunting. Thus, although it is mostly a recreational activity, snowmobiles remain some people’s primary sources of winter transportation in more remote parts of the U.S. and Canada.

Interestingly, snowmobilers in Maine and elsewhere have worked to separate themselves from other off-road vehicles, specifically all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), suggesting that there are different classes of motorized recreation, the former considered more acceptable and less destructive than the other. ISMA notes on its website that snowmobiles

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<sup>16</sup> ISMA’s website, <http://www.snowmobile.org/>

are not even classified as ORVs in many jurisdictions due to these differences. It quotes the U.S. Department of the Interior, which concluded that

A major distinction is warranted between snowmobiles and other types of off-road vehicles. Snowmobiles operated on adequate snow cover have little effect on soils—and hence cause less severe indirect impacts on air and water quality, and on soil-dependent biotic communities, than other ORV's do.

Further, under the Alaska National Interest Land Conservation Act (ANILCA), while the general public is allowed to use snowmobiles and motorboats in Alaska's wilderness, they may *not* use ATVs (though rural Alaskan residents are permitted to do so when engaging in traditional activities). But more significantly, a great deal of conflict exists between snowmobilers and ATVers in Maine's woods. The latter are viewed as displaying "rogue" behavior as they tear up trails, vandalize signs, bridges and other infrastructure, and disrespect private landowner rights (Vail 2002). These actions sometimes result in a loss of access to all users—hikers, sledders, hunters, as well as the culpable ATV riders. Thus, the snowmobile is considered a more acceptable use not simply because it causes less ecological damage, but also because there is a community of sledders with strong social relationships who practice self-regulation and are more respectful of the land and its owners.

Although snowmobiling provides riders with a means of communing with nature, it draws on a completely different experience of being in nature, beginning with its utilitarian roots and the need to overcome isolation and achieve mobility through the sometimes harsh and restraining winter landscape. It thus grew out of an oppositional relationship between snow and humans living in fairly remote areas—the arctic landscape needed to be overcome more than communed with, and the snowmobile provided a means of doing so. People at the time spoke of their newfound movement and travel to places they had previously been unable

to reach in the winter, such as far off ice fishing and hunting grounds. In that sense, the snowmobile enabled people to conquer a frozen frontier that had previously felt oppressive. Snowmobilers were seeking utility and adventure, not necessarily a serene winter retreat. Moreover, the recreational experience is less aural, unlike other winter forest experiences such as hiking, because the noise of the snowmobile can smother the small sounds of winter. Instead, snowmobiling is primarily about the visual, in that one can see things in different ways and cover great distances at high speeds.

Thus, the conflict that exists between motorized and non-motorized recreationists, or those who hold different wilderness values, appears to be compounded by winter conditions and the associated social and spiritual goals of specific experiences. People traveling from busy urban areas are often seeking a quiet getaway that facilitates soul searching journeys inward and connecting with self. Meanwhile, challenges to mobility were an obstacle to be overcome by residents in these areas who were craving more connectedness with others during the long, isolating winter months. Snowmobiling is largely a social activity, bringing people and communities together through clubs and, more basically, facilitating a physical linkage between one another across vast, sometimes harsh landscapes. Community is forged in the context of extreme weather and landscapes through the use of the machines. Hence it is easy to see how the snowmobile can be seen as an abomination of all that is sacred in the arctic wilderness experience for hikers, snowshoers, cross-country skiers, and other non-motorized winter recreationists, especially in forested environments.

## CHAPTER 4.

### Tradition and Machines

Technology is the totality of artifacts and methods humankind has created to shape our relations to the world that surrounds us [...]. The world changes as we learn to see it in new ways. And the way we see the world depends on how we use it. We know no definition of the world outside our definite, practical engagement with it (Rothenberg 1995, xii).

As previously discussed, interconnected with one's imaginings of nature are beliefs about people and their belonging (or lack thereof) in the natural environment. A romanticized vision of nature, and especially pristine wilderness, imagines all human impact as unnatural and damaging, unless the humans and/or their practices are considered sufficiently traditional and are thus situated on the "nature" side of the binary. However, like understandings of nature, "tradition" is similarly constructed and often borne out of assumptions about the authenticity of people and their cultural practices. The word "traditional" and analogous notions of local customs and heritage hold a lot of power. Conservationists sometimes romanticize traditional land use practices (e.g., perceiving indigenous societies as "closer to the land"), decreasing the likelihood that such activities will be deemed an environmental threat; conversely, the lack of these practices has been used to justify the stripping of access to or control of land (West 2006; Ranger 1999). Thus local and indigenous populations the world over, including white rural communities in the United States, have strategically employed this discourse in an effort to gain leverage and secure access and rights to land (McCarthy 2002). Such claims of ties to a relatively ancient past can serve to validate and authenticate even seemingly contemporary practices. In Maine's north



woods, sportsmen and recreational vehicle users refer to hunting, angling (fishing with a hook and line), and snowmobiling as “traditional uses” that thereby deserve protection. While the hunters and fishermen are usually given the benefit of the doubt, many skeptics have understandably reacted to the notion of “traditional snowmobiling” as farcical, asking such questions as *How can a machine that is no more than sixty years old be traditional?* After all, conventional dichotomous ways of thinking conceptualize tradition and technology as binary opposites. We tend to think of a “traditional people” as necessarily rural and simple, upholding primitive, age-old ways that connect them to the land and locate them closer to nature. Meanwhile technology is a dominating force used to overcome natural limitations, and is primarily associated with an urban milieu and modern lifestyle. However, the dominant discourses of both tradition and technology are misleading and shed light on why the notion of traditional snowmobiling is so jarring. By deeming snowmobiling a traditional use, one is not only shattering common understandings of technology, but also tradition. Perhaps machines can be traditional, and tradition can incorporate technological advancements. Perhaps rural people can recreate on motorized vehicles, yet remain connected to the land.

### ***Beyond subsistence: The technology and tradition of the snowmobile***

In his book, *The Culture of Technology* (1983), Arnold Pacey argues that technology is often discussed in restrictive terms that are culturally, morally, and politically neutral. In other words, descriptions of technology often focus solely on its technical aspects while cultural values and other non-technical factors are considered external. As such, the *users* of technological equipment and their patterns of organization are largely forgotten, ignoring the

ways in which the use and maintenance of a particular technology, such as the snowmobile, varies across cultures and communities. Pacey counters that technology must be viewed as a human activity and a part of life; thus “the snowmobile must fit into a pattern of activity which belongs to a particular lifestyle and set of values” (3). He coins the term “technology-practice” (similar to medical practice) to stress the organizational, technical, and cultural aspects of technology, defining it as “the application of scientific and other knowledge to practical tasks by ordered systems that involve people and organizations, living things and machines” (6). So while the meaning of technology may at first seem simple—technology is machine, computer, automobile, and so forth—it is actually conceptually complex. Technology is interwoven with human activity and thus entirely integrated with the economic, political, and cultural (Custer 1995).

This conceptualization of technology works to dissolve dualisms such as primitive/technological, nature/culture, rural/urban, and compels us to ask where the use of technology to meet basic needs fits within a paradigm that divides modern societies between high technology and more simple, rural ways of life. When natural areas are deemed the proper venue for one’s expression of environmental consciousness and concerns for conservation, and modernity is accepted and integrated into the urban environment, then the expectation follows that a traditional lifestyle must reject modern technology. Thus, there is an assumed tension among the values associated with protecting the natural world, working the land as part of a rural lifestyle, and those of technology or the industrial. Pacey identifies the former as “nature-conserving values” held by those wishing to preserve the natural landscape’s unspoiled beauty. Next are “need-oriented values,” which may be those of local

communities who view the land as a source of identity and subsistence and are concerned with the meeting of basic needs (144). Lastly are “virtuosity values,” possessed by those who find intrinsic merit in technological endeavors, are attracted to the aesthetic of machines, enjoy the elemental mobility associated with technology, and perhaps even seek mastery over nature (120).

However, Pacey argues that what is essential is a “tolerance of a wide range of values, and a determination to make creative use of the tensions between need-oriented, nature-conserving and virtuosity-related goals” (126). This therefore opens up the possibility that technology can simultaneously serve both sets of values, and people can use technology and/or machines to connect with nature rather than necessarily despoiling it. In his book *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (2000), Leo Marx draws attention to the ambiguity between Thomas Jefferson’s devotion to the rural, pastoral American ideal of a land of farmers whose goal was “sufficiency, not economic growth” alongside his deep devotion to scientific advancement and technical progress. While this might seem like a cultural contradiction within a binary framework, the rural or traditional and technical are able to coexist and continually redefine each other when understood as dialectical, not oppositional.

The snowmobile provides an interesting case study through which to examine the interplay between technology and tradition and various efforts to maintain or break the intervening friction. One area we have seen these tensions play out is in Minnesota’s wilderness, where the collision of Native American treaty rights and wilderness protection laws clearly illustrate the contentiousness of the motor issue. In Minnesota’s 4,450 square

kilometer Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW), indigenous Native Americans fought to secure or maintain motorized access rights to protected lands based on claims of tradition (Freedman 2002). Under an 1854 treaty, The Bois Forte Band of Chippewa ceded the entire BWCAW to the federal government, but retained usufructuary rights that would enable them to subsist and make a modest living off of the ceded territory. In 1998, four members of the Band were cited for violating federal regulations that barred the use of motors and motorized vehicles in the “off-reservation” wilderness area. The defendants argued that “in exercising treaty hunting and fishing rights, tribal members are not confined to the technology and harvest methods utilized at the time of the treaty signing” (Brief and Addendum of Defendants-Appellants 1999, quoted in Freedman 2002, 383). They lost their case at every level, on up to the Supreme Court which refused to hear it. However, in one of their appeals, the defendants drew from a 1999 ruling that upheld the Mille Lacs Band of Chippewa’s usufructuary rights in Minnesota under an 1837 treaty. They quoted the trial judge in that case, who ruled that,

The Chippewa incorporated rifles and other Euro-American technology into their hunting, fishing and gathering before the 1837 treaty and continued to use the new technology after the treaty. Neither the treaty journal nor the language in the treaty indicates that the Band should be confined to techniques, methods, devices and gear existing in 1837 (Brief and Addendum of Defendants-Appellants 1999, quoted in Freedman 2002, 383).

The Bois Forte Chippewa argued that restrictions against motors in the wilderness area effectively render their treaty rights meaningless by preventing access to subsistence harvesting in large parts of the BWCAW. A defense lawyer in the case stated that “The importance is the tribe’s view of their right to continue to hunt and gather for subsistence. They don’t believe they should be limited in how essentially they get to the grocery store, whether they walk or can drive to the grocery store” (384). As Pacey (1983) asserts,

sometimes the adoption of such technologies is “one of the most important means by which [people] continue to maintain their traditional way of life. These items...have become *part of the life* that native people value” (144; emphasis in original). While some argue that snowmobiles and other motorized transport disrupt or clash with traditional lifestyles, it is sometimes the case that without modern technological innovations like the snowmobile, people would find it difficult if not “virtually impossible to continue their traditional land-based subsistence activities” (Pacey 1983, 144). However, the appellate judges agreed with the prosecution that the Chippewa who signed the treaty in the mid-1800s “would not have reasonably contemplated the use of modern transportation methods to reach their hunting and fishing areas” (Freedman 2002, 383). They deemed the no-motor restrictions essential in the attempt to minimize human intrusion and ensure that the area be enjoyed as true wilderness by all visitors.

There are clear and critical differences between claims of tradition based on indigenous treaty-based or tribal rights and those of descendants of white settler populations in the Maine woods. However, both populations wield discourses of tradition and subsistence rights in opposing or seeking exemptions from protective wilderness designations, and property rights are a shared focal point. Most environmental litigation or disputes involve the challenging of the U.S. Forest Service or other land management agency by timber, mining, or industry interests seeking fewer restrictions, or conversely by environmental groups seeking greater protections. However, Freedman stressed the significance of this type

of case which is more accurately described as a conflict between preexisting property rights or claims and the designation or enforcement of wilderness areas and regulations.<sup>17</sup>

Another case that shares some similarities with the efforts of Minnesota's Chippewa and Maine woods residents is that involving rural Alaskan residents. In this case, their right to the "use of snowmachines, motorboats, and other means of surface transportation (such as allterrain [sic] vehicles) that have been traditionally employed for such purposes by local residents is permitted, but only by rural residents for subsistence uses" (USDA Forest Service 2005, 8). In 1980, Congress set aside large conservation areas in Alaska through the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), and included provisions in ANILCA to "protect the Alaskan lifestyle" by making certain exceptions to the Wilderness Act of 1964. Section 4(c) of the Wilderness Act prohibits the "use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment or motorboats, no landing of aircraft, [and] no other form of mechanical transport." But ANILCA exempts certain designated wilderness areas from these prohibitions by permitting the "appropriate use for subsistence purposes of snowmobiles" and "the use of snowmachines [...] for traditional activities and for travel to and from villages and homesites" by rural Alaska residents (not just indigenous Inuit populations) (USDA Forest Service 2005). Thus, it "allows snowmachine use for access to certain purposes related to a utilitarian Alaskan

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<sup>17</sup> While north woods residents and others have contested the dominant discourse of conservation and environmentalism that perceives pristine wilderness as a right to be enjoyed by all (and in the process, sometimes strips local activities and claims), the example of the Chippewa reveals a similar divergence that splits Native Americans and environmentalists who are often allies in environmental causes. Peter Manus (1996) describes the philosophical differences between Native American and Eurocentric American environmentalisms, writing "As part of the dominant culture and a sometimes adversary of Indian cultures, mainstream environmentalism has shared in the diminishing sensitivity to the complexity and historical primacy of tribal sovereignty" (Manus 1996, 257, quoted in Freedman 2002).

lifestyle. Snowmachining as an activity in itself, is not guaranteed” (National Parks Conservation Association 2002).

According to this designation, which conservation groups like the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) find acceptable, the use of snowmobiles by rural Mainers would qualify as traditional as long as such use is “essential to continuing a rural way of life” including for “harvest, sustenance, and getting home,” but *not* for recreational purposes. The group writes, “Common sense dictates that Wilderness, the most protected land in a National Forest, was never meant to include the use of recreational snowmachining [sic]” (National Parks Conservation Association 2003). The NPCA recommends a definition of a traditional activity as one that “involves the consumptive use of one or more natural resources such as hunting, trapping, fishing, berry picking or similar activities. Recreational use of snowmachines was not a traditional activity.” Thus, to be considered suitably traditional, snowmobiling must be tied to “need-oriented” values, such as subsistence activities. It appears to lose this privileged designation as soon as recreation (or “virtuosity values”) enters the picture.

The question then becomes, what exactly counts as “essential to continuing a rural way of life” and who determines this appropriate rural lifestyle? Are there no traditions of recreation? Machines designed for snow travel were invented more than a century ago to fulfill the practical needs of winter residents, including mail delivery, the provision of medical services, lumber hauling, and later, as manufacturing shifted to individual use, travel to winter fishing and hunting grounds. The machines served these primarily utilitarian purposes for decades and only took off as a recreational activity in the mid-1960s when

Bombardier shifted its marketing focus. But even as a form of recreation, they have helped build and strengthen rural social networks during long, winter months, becoming vital to the social lives, culture, and local economies of northern Mainers and others. The technology may have moved beyond utility in a direct sense, but many Mainers claim that snowmobiles have become essential to continuing a rural way of life, at least how *they* define and experience rural living. This notion of tradition is not determined by the technology itself—the snowmobile in this case—but rather the customary activities or conventions that continue to be practiced and developed with the help of the snowmobile. However, to determine what activities or purposes are customary, one must think outside the restrictive bounds of rural life as rustic, arduous, and holistically interconnected with the rhythms of nature, to one that allows residents traditions of work and livelihood that include *play*.

### ***Cars in wilderness***

The wild is its own quiet engine ... waiting for each of us to take a few steps away from the road. And hear it (Condon 2006).

The cultural construction of nature and the arbitrariness of what consequently is and is *not* allowed is perfectly illustrated by the relation between roads, cars, and the American experience of nature. Historically, one of the primary objectives of those fighting to protect wilderness was to prevent the building of roads and the incursion of automobiles (Sutter 2002); indeed, roadlessness is one of the key conditions for wilderness, according to the legal definition as stated by the 1964 Wilderness Act. But car-based tourism began to steadily grow starting in the 1920s, and in their efforts to promote and expose parks to the American



public, the National Park Service actually supported the building of roads into natural areas (Louter 2006). In his book, *Windshield Wilderness* (2006), David Louter writes that

Parks were not only reservoirs of wilderness, characterized by uninhabited, pristine nature, to which Americans retreated to escape their urban-industrial lives. They were also landscapes in which people could engage wilderness in a new way, in which automobiles and highways seemed to be mutually beneficial (5).

Wilderness was considered a scenic experience that was viewed from a road, through a windshield. This created a specific way of seeing the landscape and understanding our relation to it.

After World War II, the car enabled large numbers of Americans seeking natural recreation experiences to leave the city in ever-increasing numbers (Wilson 1992). Tourism grew by around 10 percent each year during the 1950s and 1960s, and much of this was organized around the car and the nation's expanding highway and road system (Wilson 1992). This created an ideal and American legacy of "knowing nature through machines [whereby] roads, in a sense, could be natural; machines and nature could coexist" (Louter 2006, 5). Though roads passed through seemingly pristine natural areas, in reality they were carefully designed to shape the passengers' experience and appreciation of scenery. National park roads and nature parkways, such as the Blue Ridge Parkway through the Southern Appalachians, were created as "environment[s] of instruction" that constructed landscapes to be aesthetically pleasing for motorists (Wilson 1992, 32). For example, in the case of the Blue Ridge, poor, southern "hillbillies" and their shacks and dilapidated farms were cleared out, the people moved away under F.D. Roosevelt's Resettlement Act. Their empty homesteads were planted over with native species and turned into parks, and land uses were restricted to those deemed compatible with the new aesthetic (e.g., grazing cows and split-rail fences were

acceptable, abandoned cars and weeds were not) (Wilson 1992). The result in this case and others was a road that “seems to belong to the landscape. It frames our view. It is how we see the park. It is how we know nature in this place. [...] We are willing to suspend disbelief that a park road intrudes on, or is harmful to, the environment because it appears to fit the scene so well and presents the scenery to us” (Louter 2006, 3). The road helped Americans achieve the ideal of what Leo Marx (2000) refers to as the “middle landscape,” whereby we are able to mediate conflicting values of material progress and peaceful, pastoral living. Roads through the wilderness help us reconcile this complicated relationship with nature by viewing ourselves as part of, but yet somehow not disturbing, the natural world.

This history of roads in our national parks and other valued natural areas serves as a reminder of the constructedness of wilderness and the basing of aesthetic notions of appropriateness on romantic visions of nature. The natural areas themselves did not develop detached from the modern world, but were rather safeguarded and ultimately designed in an effort to accommodate long-term tourism and recreation needs. They largely came to be known and appreciated through the technology of the car, which has come to feel completely familiar and acceptable in an otherwise primitive and wild landscape, eluding the nature/culture contradiction that has befallen snowmobiles. Thus where (and which) machines are and are not allowed in nature is a cultural construction that appears to afford greater privilege to car users. Americans are incredibly selective in how we imagine and define wilderness, choosing to see a pure, untouched landscape despite the crumbling rock wall running through the woods or the paved road and parking lot leading to the back country trailhead. Dominant discourse may present wilderness as a roadless, pristine, remote

area. However, many Americans actually accept the less restrictive notion of a “windshield wilderness” because this is how most have tended to connect with nature, through an experience that enables them to believe that their vehicular presence is not an artificial, harmful intrusion (Louter 2006, 10). This helps explain why people may object to snowmobiles while accepting the kilometers of roads that deliver them to their wilderness destination.

Proponents of snowmobiles and alternative discourses of wilderness have exploited this contradiction. In his aforementioned editorial regarding the Allagash Wilderness Waterway, George Smith of the Sportsman’s Alliance of Maine referred to a book of essays (Petersen 2006) illustrating the disruptive nature of roads in wild places. Smith points out the reliance most outdoor recreationists—from hikers to hunters—have on roads and motors to quickly and conveniently access the Maine forest and their favorite places within (Smith 2007). Also, in response to an editorial blasting the Bush administration’s decision to lift the ban on snowmobiles (New York Times 2004), Gail Norton, then U.S. Secretary of the Interior, countered,

Since you are so enthusiastic about banning the 720 snowmobiles a day allowed under Yellowstone’s winter use plan, one wonders if you would be even more enthusiastic in banning the thousands of cars, motorcycles, buses and recreational vehicles that are, at this moment, streaming through the park on the very same roads. Unlike snowmobile traffic, those vehicles are involved in collisions that, on average, cause the death of at least one large animal per day. Thoughts about outlawing family cars from national parks may seem absurd, but the arguments you make against snowmobiles also apply to automobiles (Norton 2004).

Another concurred, “Most families who use snowmobiles have a deep respect for the environment.[...] Compared with the vacationers coming by car and RV, snowmobilers leave a pretty small footprint” (Nahgang 2004).

## CHAPTER 5.

### Conflicts in the North Woods

#### *“Restore Boston: Leave our Maine way of life alone”*

Discussions surrounding the future of the woods have grown increasingly contentious through the years and have tended to coalesce around concerns surrounding access and consumptive versus non-consumptive uses. As thousands of square kilometers of previously open lands are on put the auction block, conservation interests are rushing to take advantage of this newfound opportunity to purchase and preserve large swaths of land, while longtime users are alleging backroom land deals and watching restrictive gates and signs crop up throughout the woods. Specific issues that have sparked debate include the addition of Katahdin Lake lands to Baxter State Park, the Allagash Wilderness Waterway, and the state’s attempt to establish a Backcountry Project. At the core of each of these lies the clash between local rights to access and use and environmental organizations and individuals leveraging a discourse of national interest and rights to “public” enjoyment.

Numerous prominent environmental organizations have identified the protection of Maine’s north woods as a major priority, including the Sierra Club, Nature Conservancy, Wilderness Society, and Open Space Institute. The Sierra Club has pinpointed protection of the woods as part of their “America’s Great Outdoors” program, stating “The goal of the Maine Woods Campaign is to secure wilderness protection of a large area of ecologically significant forestland...[This is] an unprecedented opportunity to forward our vision of large-

scale protection of [the] Woods.”<sup>18</sup> However, the most contentious group involved in preservation efforts is almost certainly RESTORE: The North Woods, which was established in 1992.<sup>19</sup> RESTORE seeks “to re-ignite a wilderness movement in New England by inspiring a cultural commitment to wild forests in this region,” with a primary aim of “realizing Thoreau’s vision” by creating a 13,000 square kilometer Maine Woods National Park that would return the forest to its “magnificent, primeval” state. With two offices, one outside Augusta and the other in Massachusetts, this group and its Maine director, Jym St. Pierre, have been ever-present in the movement to restore wild nature and have “people once again living in harmony with nature.”

The other infamous face of Maine woods conservation is multi-millionaire Roxanne Quimby, recently dubbed “the most controversial woman in Maine” (Clark 2008). Quimby is the co-founder of Burt’s Bees skin care products, a company originally established and based in the north woods town of Guilford, later relocated to North Carolina, and recently sold to Clorox for \$913 million (Quimby held 20 percent ownership at the time of sale).<sup>20</sup> Over the last five years she has been buying choice parcels of the woods through her non-profit foundation, Elliotsville Plantation, Inc., and restricting access for consumptive and mechanized uses such as hunting and snowmobiling.<sup>21</sup> In a quest to promote her vision of vast tracts of preserved contiguous wildlands, Quimby has spent \$50 million purchasing just under 400 square kilometers of forestland, primarily around Baxter State Park and within the

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<sup>18</sup> From the Sierra Club’s website, <http://www.sierraclub.org/greatoutdoors/maine/index.asp>

<sup>19</sup> RESTORE’S website, <http://www.restore.org/>

<sup>20</sup> This fact alone has inspired resentment among locals since her move south spelled the end of a number of good jobs, and the company became enormously successful shortly thereafter: “To many residents, she’s still a turncoat—an outsider who became an insider then abandoned her adopted community” (Adamson 2003).

<sup>21</sup> EPI’s website, <http://www.keepmebeautiful.org/>

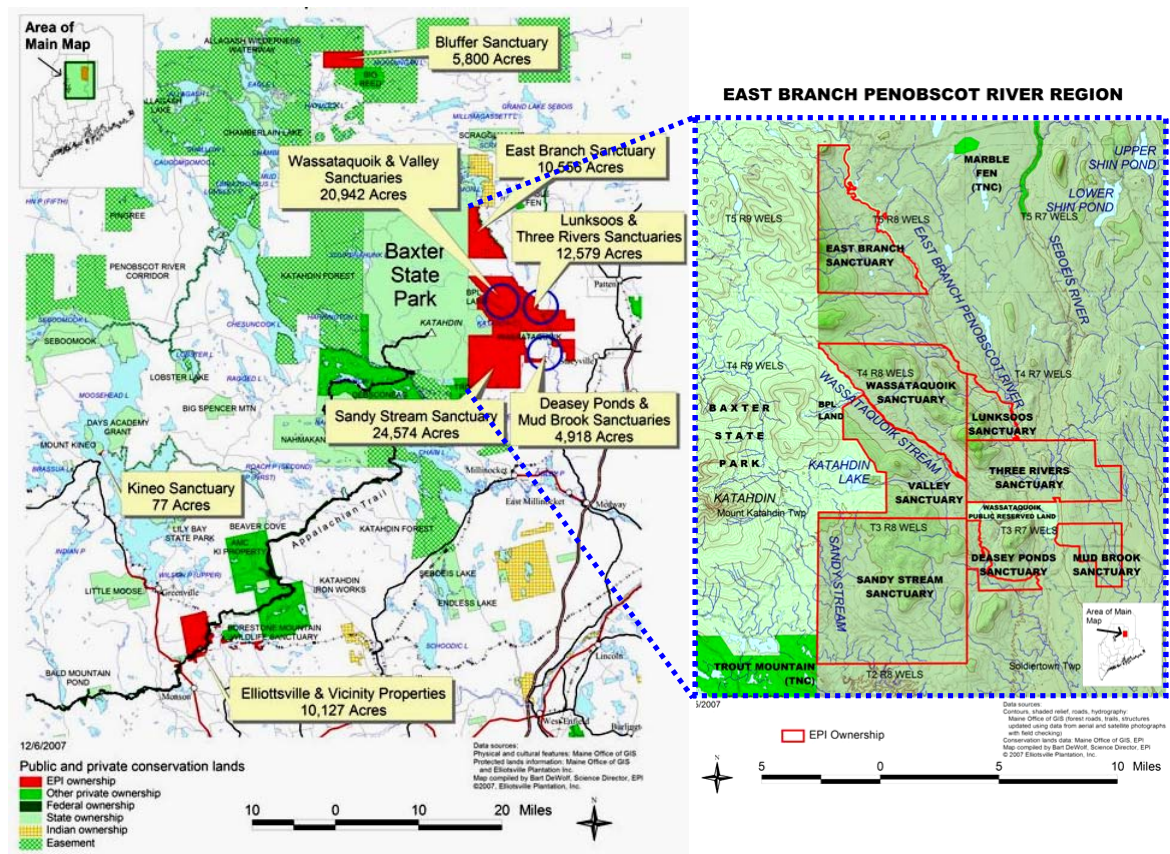
proposed national park area in efforts to “buffer [these lands] from incompatible uses”<sup>22</sup> (figure 5). She also chairs the group, Americans for a Maine Woods National Park, a national advisory committee made up of “distinguished Americans who will advise in the creation of the proposed [park]. Many...are widely known national or international figures. All others are well known in their respective circles of influence.”<sup>23</sup> She explains, “We have attempted to take the question out of Maine, certainly out of northern Maine, where there is an enormous backlash but very few people. This is a national park, it should be on the national agenda...National parks are owned by every American, every single American” (Carpenter 2004).

The visions of RESTORE, Quimby, and others are reflective of a dominant environmental discourse that believes conservation endeavors are for the common good of all humanity: West (2006) explains, “They see what they do as a moral imperative that perhaps transcends local rights” (179). There is clear scaling up in many public discussions, such as when staff from the Natural Resources Council of Maine display a nighttime satellite photo of the Eastern seaboard, highlighting the large patch of total darkness that makes up the north woods to illustrate why “this is a national issue. It’s the largest undeveloped block of land east of the Mississippi, and it has national significance” (Harkavy 2005) (figure 6a). But the production of the global scale in environmental discourse and practice often results in the silencing of other scales, like the local, and the voices and practices of certain social groups that would show up on maps depicting the forest as a cultural landscape and perhaps drawn

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<sup>22</sup> Although many consider Baxter State Park to be Maine’s “premier forever wild” preserve, most of its lands were also subject to extensive commercial timber harvesting prior to the start of its establishment in 1931.

<sup>23</sup> See [http://www.restore.org/Maine/News/Americans\\_release.html](http://www.restore.org/Maine/News/Americans_release.html)

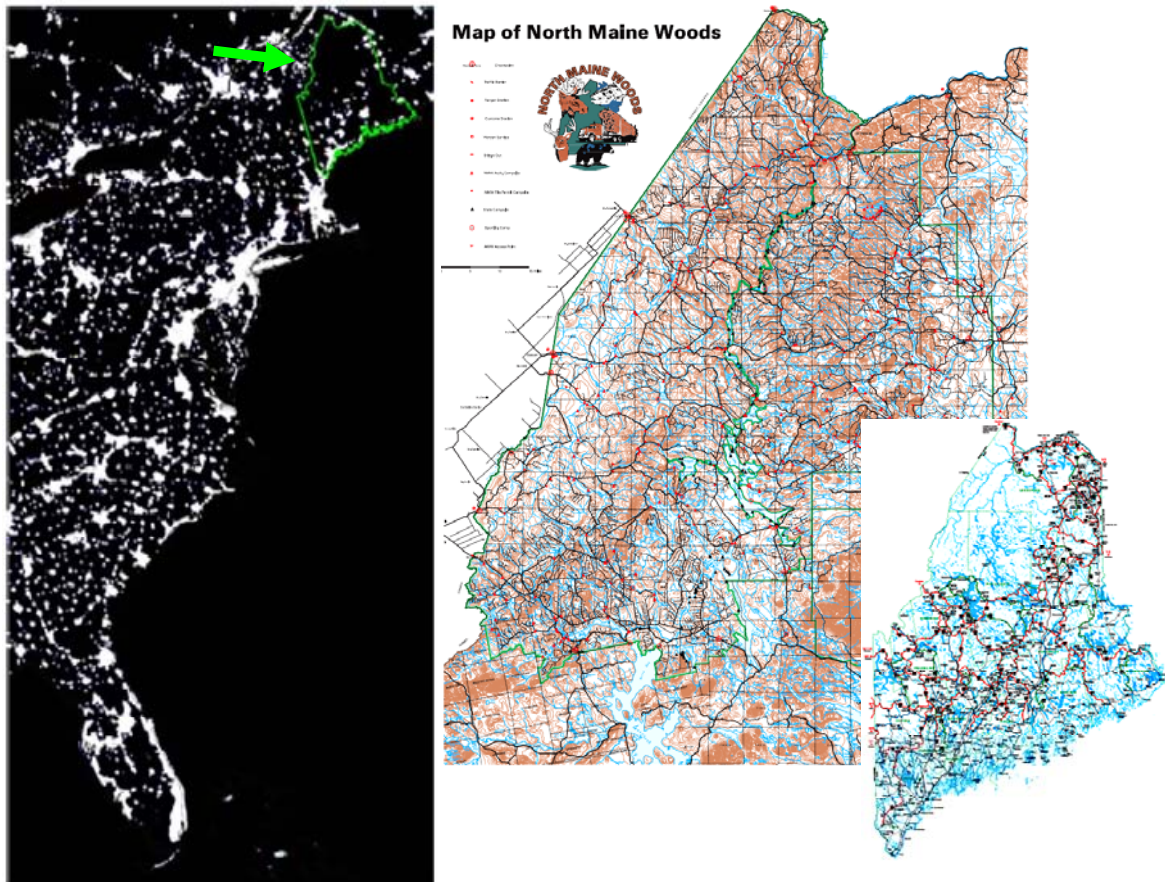


**Figure 5.** EPI, Inc.'s land ownership in northern Maine (in red), as of early December 2007. (Source: <http://www.keepmebeautiful.org/>)

to a smaller scale to illustrate specific activities (figure 6b). This has remained true even in the midst of contemporary popular “local people and community participation” rhetoric. West argues that “the urgency of the global environmental crisis has given conservation activists and practitioners a sort of moral high ground to stand on when making decisions about local peoples and the global environment” (2006, 32). Substantiating such justifications, a reader responding to an article about a recent Quimby land purchase rallied behind her, declaring: “We live in a global age where the planet and the environment must be protected and conserved... There is no honor in stalking and killing and needlessly



destroying things. The people of Maine should be grateful to Roxanne” (Bangor Daily News 2006).



**Figure 6a.** Depiction of the north woods as an undeveloped or “empty” space.  
(Source: <http://www.nrcm.org/>)

**Figure 6b.** Alternate representations of that same “empty” space as one crisscrossed by roads and trails, dotted with access points, sporting camps, campsites, and ranger and customs stations, which stresses its multiple, organized uses by human communities.  
(Sources: <http://www.northmainewoods.org/> and <http://www.mesnow.com/Map.html>)

However, beyond conflicting ideologies of nature and related preservation imperatives, the character of contemporary struggles in and around the north woods appears to represent, “the articulation of persistent colonial conceptions of rights and access” (Robbins 2006). Fights for access and against exclusion are ultimately about the retention of rights to nature as a collective good and a long held common property resource. In studying the



relationship between environmental knowledge, policy, and power in questions of land management in Northern Yellowstone, Robbins (2006) explains that local hunters have

deeply held notion[s] of wilderness *equity*, expressed in the constant call for ‘access’, which links hunting and nature (if not ‘wilderness’ per se) to democracy. Hunters see coalitions formed against access not simply as assaults on instrumental interests (‘our’ resources) but more profoundly as attacks on populist democratic values and an abuse of economic power: class war (197; emphasis in original).

This helps explain why, in the case of both Yellowstone and in Maine’s woods, despite a shared affinity for nature and its conservation on some level, environmentalists and local users focus much attention (and animosity) on the people and groups involved. In particular, local users exhibit class-based distrust, perceiving themselves as an economically marginal contingent up against more powerful, privileged interests.

Needless to say, Roxanne Quimby and RESTORE are not very popular in northern Maine. Two bumper stickers common in the area read, “Ban Roxanne” and “Restore Boston, leave our Maine way of life alone,” referring to the organization’s chief headquarters in Massachusetts (Carpenter 2004). North woods residents accuse Quimby and others of harming rural Maine by closing off the land to traditional uses. An article detailing one of her more recent land deals describes how to local users of the woods, “Quimby is the devil, for reasons that are both philosophical and expedient. Her support of a Maine Woods National Park makes her a reliable symbol of all of the ills and injustices allegedly visited on rural Mainers by elitists from away” (Portland Press Herald 2006a). A reader respondent supported this assertion by accusing “elitist naturist users” of brokering a backroom land deal. He claimed to be

tired of elitist snobs from away who don’t know the first thing about Maine or the people who live here, pushing their way in and telling us how we should be doing things... If they get what they want, you won’t even be allowed in the woods in northern Maine, for any reason.

If you go, you'll be wearing a loincloth and have to stop and stand the blades of grass back up behind you wherever you go (Portland Press Herald 2006a; Leon Gray's comments).

The most controversial land deal in recent years was the addition of 24 square kilometers, including Katahdin Lake, to Baxter State Park. Two thirds of the previously open-access lands now face use restrictions in accordance with state park regulations, while one third is managed by the Maine Department of Conservation (MDOC) and supposedly remains open to hunting and motorized vehicles. In a local editorial, SAM president George Smith asked:

What would Governor Baxter think about the fact that the Park has become an out-of-staters' playground? That many of the people who live in Mt. Katahdin's shadow don't go because it's not worth the hassle of dealing with people who don't even live here but think they know so much more than you" (Smith 2006)?

Additionally, many north woods residents believe that since most of her purchased tracts also border the park, Quimby was involved in secret negotiations with MDOC that would eventually result in more land closures than initially promised under the new deal. Of course these cynics felt validated when Quimby erected gates on land she owns that effectively blocks several main access points to the eight square kilometers that were supposed to remain open for consumptive uses.<sup>24</sup>

In his study of conflicts surrounding the removal of wild horses in the Missouri Ozarks, Rikoon (2006) concluded that local communities "explain rural disempowerment through the construction of a discourse in which ecology and environmental protection

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<sup>24</sup> Tom Remington, a north woods resident, writes several blogs about the Maine outdoors and often details conflicts between local users and environmentalists (he is a self-identified "local user" and unabashedly anti-environmentalist). On his hunting blog in November 2007, he posted photos of newly obstructed roads submitted by a reader who wrote: "Well.....its [sic] official. Roxanne Quimby has blocked access to her land in the Katahdin Region. Here are the photos I took today when I tried to take my daughter to some of our traditional hunting spots" (<http://mainehuntingtoday.com/bbb/2007/11/12/roxanne-quimby-continues-to-block-land-access-in-maine/>).

advocates comprise a malevolent force that has managed to corrupt centers of social, cultural, economic, and political power” (209). These feelings strongly resonate in the northern woods. A reader responding to another article about Quimby’s land deals and planned exclusion of hunters and snowmobilers wrote that Quimby does not care about “what she is doing to Maine’s heritage.” Sarcastically impersonating Quimby, he continues, “Whether there were years of cultural history is not a factor... Traditional use does not and should not matter... If I take away the economies and family histories and dreams of people—it does not matter... I have my convictions” (Bangor Daily News 2006).

Locals also point out that outsider environmentalists are working hard to control the future of a landscape they hardly visit, effectively dismissing the rights or interests of people who call the forest their home. Questioned about the regional divide among Maine’s populace on the north woods issue, Green Party state legislator John Eder of Portland admitted that his constituents want to preserve the “woodsy north” because “We like to think we’ll drive north and see this vast, untouched wilderness. This is the soul and spirit of Maine” (Hampson 2006). Meanwhile, Millinocket’s town manager counters that “We should have more say about how we live than someone who’s from away. But people who live on top of each other feel that land here should be left for their use, when they come up here once every ten years” (Hampson 2006). The Allagash Wilderness Waterway has been at the center of numerous such disputes surrounding issues of wilderness protection and retention of access. Referring to people in an uproar over a State Senator’s bulldozing of a blocked road in the waterway, a reader commented that conservationists are depicting the incident,

as some sort of global-warming scale clearcutting [sic] catastrophe. My guess is the limousine-liberals who are carping about this ‘transgression’ haven’t even ever SEEN the allagash [sic],

and clearly care more about some ‘eco-trophy’ than they do about PUBLIC ACCESS to the waterway for the people that actually LIVE up there (Hickey 2006; Bjorn’s comments).

Other battles have been taken to the courts. In 2000, the Natural Resources Council of Maine unsuccessfully sued the state over its plans to build a bridge and parking lot between two lakes along the waterway. More recently, two residents of Bar Harbor, a coastal town on Mount Desert Island, filed a federal lawsuit challenging a new Maine law that requires the maintenance of eleven motor vehicle access points along the waterway and makes permanent six temporary bridges. The bill was passed following persistent lobbying by residents of Aroostook County’s St. John Valley who were fighting to retain access rights for uses such as fishing and hunting. The suit claims that the U.S. Department of the Interior recommended only two access points and temporary bridges to serve short-term logging purposes. The complaint alleges that the new law “creates areas of disruptive activity, congestion, noise and other problems” that conflict with the waterway’s protected status as wild and scenic and thus fails to maintain the Allagash “in its wild condition to provide a wilderness canoe experience” (Bangor Daily News 2007b). One fiery reader respondent from northeastern Maine cut to the chase, commenting, “This is not the first time the envirozealots, yup-yups and ivory tower idealists have sought to burn taxpayers’ dollars in pursuit of a fantasy” (Associated Press 2007; Pete’s comments). Another man from the same town put it more succinctly,

It’s time for the state of Maine to get the Wild and Scenic designation and the word Wilderness removed from the Allagash Waterway. Environmentalists are going to put an end to the logging industry in northern Maine if [this] isn’t done.[...] There is no way the logging industry can survive without bridges across the waterway, which is what the people filing the lawsuit want. The Allagash is turning into Maine’s version of the Spotted Owl!! (Bangor Daily News 2007b; Billy B’s comments).

The spotted owl has come to represent a brand of environmental radicalism and elitism that appears to value the life and survival of a bird over those of forest workers and their families (see Proctor 1995). Such feelings and strategies resemble those employed by members of the Wise Use movement in the rural American West. McCarthy (2002) argues that “by asserting indissoluble links between particular uses of federal lands and local economies and cultures, its participants attempted to shift the terrain of debate onto grounds where most of their critics’ arguments would be moot” (1293). These remarks by north woods residents elucidate deep-rooted feelings and fears that greatly complicate the issue—such fights are not simply about preserving access points, but more profoundly, preserving one’s livelihood and culture.

Clearly, tensions run high and discord can arise out of seemingly innocuous propositions. The sensitivity of residents to perceived attacks on their user rights is illustrated by the reaction of snowmobilers and ATV riders to MDOC’s establishment of the Backcountry Project. The plan’s purpose was “to identify, enhance, and showcase backcountry/long-distance human powered recreational opportunities throughout Maine” (Maine Department of Conservation 2004). However, following an uproar from those who felt pushed aside and who claimed that the state was “abetting environmentalists in a public-private, rural-cleansing conspiracy,” the project was quickly scrapped (Portland Press Herald 2007). One editorialist reminded the “warring parties” that there is more than enough room for disparate interests to coexist peacefully, they have more in common than they tend to see or admit, and that the stakes are too high for close-mindedness, rhetoric, and disrespect to be the weapons of choice (Portland Press Herald 2007). However, passionate reader comments

and online exchanges in response to this request prove the enormous undertaking at hand.

Leon Richard of Farmington, a small town in the northern woods, wrote,

There's more than enough room? Hey, as an ATVer and snowmobiler, I have always respected the rights of non-motorized users. [...] Now I have had the experience of having my ATV vandalized... by someone who felt they didn't want to 'share' what wasn't theirs to 'share' in the first place. I have stood by and been derided and villified [sic] by 'non-motorized users.' [...] So, don't talk to me about there being 'enough room'... nobody from this side of the aisle has told anyone they shouldn't be walking around wherever they please. Nobody from this side of the aisle has declared open war on people going hiking, or pledged to stop them. Nobody from this side of the aisle has grabbed what wasn't theirs, screaming, 'MINE! MINE! MINE! MINE!' like a bunch of babies. I'll share, responsibly... if there is an area where it is not environmentally sound for me to ride, I'll keep out of it, as I always have. But if it's just so Roxanne Quimby can sit wherever she sits and smile, having closed off another section of the Maine woods to motorized vehicles and hunters? I'll holler the entire time, and do whatever I can to combat it (Portland Press Herald 2007; Leon Richard's comments).

A man from Wiscasset, a small coastal village just north of Portland, replied to Leon's tirade,

The 'I need 100% motorized access to 100% of the state' crowd is out of control.[...] I see nothing wrong with having areas set aside for motorized recreation while also having areas for non-motorized recreation. Balance is the key. Unfortunately, some people won't be happy until they are able to blast through my backyard on an ATV because it's 'tradition'(Portland Press Herald 2007; Kev's comments).

Eventually, a third reader stepped in to mediate between the two, explaining that he can see both sides and clarifying that Leon is not requesting total access to all public lands, but rather is frustrated that the new land deals, such as the Baxter State Park addition, prevent riders from accessing other lands that are currently open to motorized recreation.

Most north woods residents are proponents of retaining multiple-use and permissive access, and tell stories of the woods that effectively insert people and practices back onto the "empty" landscape (see Mackenzie 2006a; 2006b). In defending the rootedness and necessity of their own practices, local users actively deconstruct the wilderness myth and critique the elitist, exclusionist conservation approaches that follow. Residents and local organizations purposefully employ language that depicts the woods as a multiple-use, lived-on landscape

supporting working families, and therefore an inauthentic and a suboptimal setting for conservation initiatives. North Maine Woods, the coalition of landowners discussed earlier, writes on their website that the woods are a “spirit,” explaining,

Past and present; people and nature meet here. Men and women who make their living from the woods and those who relax here love this area. And through North Maine Woods, they work together to see that while they take forest products, fish, wildlife, and pleasure from this great region, they take nothing that will make it any less in the future than it is today.<sup>25</sup>

But under the header, “WHAT NMW IS NOT” they write,

The region is not a wilderness. There are over 3,000 miles of permanently maintained roads and several thousand kilometers of temporary, unmaintained roads. In most areas two generations of timber have been cut and the current harvesting operations you may see mark the third time the trees in this giant tree farm have been cropped.

This is in line with Walker and Fortmann’s (2003) research, which argued that “in-migrants brought with them a particular ‘aesthetic’ or ‘consumption’ views of landscape that longtime residents with continuing ties to the ‘old’ production landscape viewed as political threats” (469). Clearly, one way to respond is by employing language that shatters the wilderness aesthetic and discourse and draws attention to the historical and existing human presence on the land.

However, the communities’ position is not merely centered on retaining the ability to practice traditional uses. Many residents are also understandably fearful of losing the forest industry, which would “devastate the sawdust-and-lumberjack lifeblood of the economy” (MacQuarrie 2003). Most believe that a tourist-based “park economy” promoted by environmental organizations would fail to provide the quality of jobs offered by the timber industry. North woods community members actively work to dispel wilderness myths; focus on the relationship between rural culture, connectedness to land, and working families; and

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<sup>25</sup> North Maine Woods website, <http://www.northmainewoods.org/>

portray their opponents as heartless, elitist outsiders threatening to destroy a disappearing way of life.

Of course, there is plenty of support among Maine's populace for broad conservation measures that place limits on hunting and motorized access, and many reader writers have lambasted the use of the term "traditional." Responding to an article announcing the compromise that enabled "snowmobilers, hunters and others who enjoy 'traditional uses'" to retain access to some of Quimby's land, a reader wrote,

This story hopelessly muddles the facts. Considering that snowmobiles have only been around since the 1970s and ATVs since the mid 1980s, it takes an astounding sweep of illogic to call these 'traditional uses.' How can something like an ATV, which has only been in use in the Maine woods for less than two decades be called 'traditional'? Under this definition, what would be untraditional? [...] By posting your land against ATVs or Monster Trucks, you certainly are not restricting 'public access.' You are restricting motor vehicle use (Portland Press Herald 2006b; Doug Watts' comments).

This same reader wrote in at a later date, directly addressing motorized vehicle users by instructing them to "Get off your soft butt and walk. Does your body and the land a world of good. You can actually hear the birds singing" (Stein 2006; Doug Watts' comments). Another reader and self-proclaimed "avid outdoorsman for most of my life" retorted that such comments and beliefs are "just plain stupid." He wonders how Watts reached such a conclusion, asking "is it because you don't like ATV's or snowmobiles? That's fine, you don't need to. Don't do it. I commonly mix hiking and ATVing, and snowshoeing and snowmobiling" (Stein 2006; Leon's comments).

These struggles surrounding the north woods are not confined to locally-based skirmishes. In addition to the involvement of national environmental organizations, nationwide coalitions representing "the other side" have begun to weigh in on the north woods and natural resource issues. These regional and national coalitions seem to intensify



bad feelings between conflicting interests at the local and state scales. For example, in the fall of 2005, a conference was hosted by the Associated Industries of Vermont and the American Land Rights Association in response to a land control measure called the Northern Forest Stewardship Act, proposed by U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont. The Act, which eventually failed to pass the Senate, aimed to place 105,000 square kilometers of forest in Vermont, Maine, New Hampshire, and upstate New York under federal protection. The Executive Director of the Blue Ribbon Coalition, a “Wise Use” organization based in Idaho, viewed the conference as “an excellent opportunity for national Wise Use leaders to strengthen their ties with New England activists who are realizing that the green advocacy groups [GAGs] have plans for their areas too” (Blue Ribbon Coalition 1998). The unnamed author of this article described how a town councilman from New Hampshire, once affiliated with the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) but now a converted “Wise User” confirmed “what many in the Wise Use movement already know, that groups like the AMC, the Sierra Club and others in the environmental conflict industry really have evolved into nothing more than hate groups” (Blue Ribbon Coalition 1998). The president of the Alliance for America,<sup>26</sup> an umbrella organization for national Wise Use and property rights groups, also addressed the conference participants on the topic,

It's no wonder that so-called environmentalists want to save areas in your states and mine, these are the 'last great places.' The problem is that the 'last great people' live there, and it seems to many that we in the rural, resource-based economy are simply in the way. We must get beyond the command and control environmental regulation mentality that places man outside of nature.

The article concluded,

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<sup>26</sup> The Alliance for America is a non-profit, grassroots organization of conservationists dedicated to bringing human concerns into environmental decision-making (<http://prfamerica.org/Stats-AllianceForAmerica.html>).

Whether it be Wilderness proposals for federal lands in the west, or land grabs that threaten recreationist/landowner relations in the east, the environmental conflict industry is up to mischief everywhere. Their agenda is different, but their objective is always the same. PREVENT ANY HUMAN USE OR ENJOYMENT OF OUR NATURAL RESOURCES. Recreationists must stand with our natural resource industries and private property rights interests to defend our mutual objective of 'Preserving our natural resources FOR the public instead of FROM the public' (Blue Ribbon Coalition 1998).

These passages reveal a great deal of animosity between interests, a generous use of rhetoric, and yet they also expose very real issues of cultural, economic, and political difference. However, it remains important to address Reich (1999) and Vail's (2002) assessment that snowmobiling and other traditional uses of the woods are largely accepted by environmental organizations. I found that this *does* appear to be the case with several Maine-based organizations that appear more apt to understand and value local needs and interests. RESTORE's project coordinator for the proposed park recently stated,

I find it pretty ironic, or humorous, that people make a national park out to be such a radical idea. American people love their national parks. The opposition is very much a minority. It is clear that the Maine public, statewide, overwhelmingly supports the acquisition of more public land for conservation (Barringer 2006).

However, an appraisal of state-wide environmental groups and recent initiatives suggests otherwise. For example, the Natural Resources Council of Maine prefers to focus its conservation efforts elsewhere, such as a large-scale development project proposed on Moosehead Lake. Similarly, the AMC, which in 2003 purchased 150 square kilometers of land from International Paper in the northern forests' famed "100 mile Wilderness," adopted a strategy that integrates "habitat protection, recreation, education and sustainable forestry, [keeping] part of the land in timber production to support the local forest products economy," protecting local rights to snowmobile, hunt, trap, and harvest timber (Austin 2003). This approach was likely inspired by their work with the Northern Forest Alliance, a coalition of

conservation, recreation and forestry organizations in the Northeast that “work together to protect and enhance the ecological and economic sustainability of natural and human communities in the Northern Forest.”<sup>27</sup> There is some dissention in the ranks, with certain AMC members questioning whether allowing some development will “compromise the wild character and natural features of the land” (Austin 2003). However, there is clearly in-state support for recognizing traditional practices and continuing to allow local access and multiple-uses of the forest.

These strategies are also in keeping with Governor John Baldacci’s “Maine Woods Legacy” vision that aims to “coordinate the many significant economic development and resource conservation projects underway” in the woods.<sup>28</sup> In the fall of 2004, Baldacci created a Task Force on Traditional Uses and Public Access to Land in Maine that was charged with determining how to address new land restrictions stemming from the recent dramatic changes in land ownership. And in February 2007, Governor Baldacci created *another* group (the Governor’s Task Force Regarding the Management of Public Lands and Publicly Held Easements) to tackle increasingly common land access conflicts on the State’s 3,035 square kilometers of public lands. An article on the new panel explains that “during the past year, hunters, snowmobilers and other so-called ‘traditional users’ clashed with wilderness advocates and proponents of nonmechanized [sic] recreation” (Bangor Daily News 2007c). The 16 member team has been charged with inventorying and examining available recreational opportunities, reviewing state regulations on land management, and devising ways to “damper down the frequent flare-ups over access and use.” While private lands are

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<sup>27</sup> Northern Forest Alliance, <http://www.northernforestalliance.org/>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.maine.gov/governor/baldacci/news/speeches/mainewoodslegacyhtml.htm>

not a focus of the task force, it will likely touch upon the issue of private land access, especially in the north woods where land ownership changes are radically altering recreational dynamics.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, it is telling that Roxanne Quimby has begun to work towards compromise on potential uses of her more recent land acquisitions. Answering a reporter's questions in September 2006, just after one of her deals was made public, Quimby reiterated that she intended to manage her land as a "nature sanctuary," signifying no hunting, trapping, timber harvesting, or snowmobiles (Austin 2006). But shortly thereafter, Quimby agreed to explore conservation alternatives and sat down with her opponents, namely groups like the MSA and Sportsman's Alliance (Austin 2006; Barringer 2006). They eventually struck a deal allowing snowmobilers and hunters to continue using the land for at least one year, and Quimby made special note of how easy it was to work with the MSA who respect the rights of private property owners, unlike "chaotic, wild, untamed groups" (Austin 2006). As part of her most recent land deal in December 2007, Quimby opened additional land in the Millinocket region to hunters, snowmobilers and other sportsmen through a working forest easement that will guarantee public access. A senior policy adviser to Governor Baldacci stated, "What is wonderful here in the town of Millinocket, the state ... Roxanne and local groups have all sat down and figured out what makes sense" for everybody. And Quimby added,

What kept us all at the table was a shared commitment to this landscape. In the past, while we argued about whose vision was best, the land was changing hands and opportunities were

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<sup>29</sup> Despite my cautious optimism, cynics abound. Internet blogger and north woods resident Tom Remington recently wrote, "Please give me reason to believe that this task force made up of all the same players who can't accomplish anything now, will accomplish anything tomorrow? I wish they could. What's sad is that we need this task force at all. We have evolved into a society of special interest groups all fighting for our own interests while trampling on those of others" (<http://www.maineoutdoorstoday.com/blog/?p=553>).

passing us by. The reality of an unpredictable future brought us together to try and bring some predictability to a region in transition (Associated Press 2007b).

Similarly, the owners of a wilderness resort whose lands adjoin Quimby's holdings, were initially outraged by her audacious purchases and ensuing regulations. However, following a year of meetings, they believe she's listening better to area residents and established interests. They now express hope mixed with the expected uncertainty, "We don't know what the future of the Maine Woods will be—none of us do. But we do know that we all love the woods, we love our land, and maybe, in the long run, we all want the same thing" (Clark 2008, 130). It remains to be seen whether the Maine woods of the future, as is being defined by conservation and development interests, reserves a place for local people and their practices.

## CONCLUSION

One might imagine that within a space as vast as Maine's north woods—an area two thirds that of the entire state—conflicting parties that essentially agree on the tremendous value of the forest should be able to work together to create a landscape that meets everyone's needs. However, it is never that simple. A Maine woods that honors local communities' democratic rights of access and thereby remains open to snowmobiling, hunting, and other mechanized or consumptive uses, offends a wilderness aesthetic that requires “untrammelled” and “undisturbed” nature. Meanwhile, a woods that honors one's rights to eternally enjoy this nation's common natural heritage requires the establishment of a nature sanctuary to protect wilderness from potential ruin. Humans are a central part of the first nature, and are destructive of the second. Of course, not all people and their activities are equally damaging—those that “tread lightly” and thus respect nature's purity and ecological fragility are afforded more privilege within discourses of conservation and aesthetics of nature. As evidenced by environmental protection efforts the world over, such constructions can be used to justify the exclusion of marginalized or less privileged groups from accessing or using natural resources in ways that are deemed harmful or otherwise inappropriate. But these determinations are rarely, if ever, made on a purely ecological basis. Rather, decisions are rooted in entangled understandings of nature, rural life, and tradition. Thus, the “rights to nature” that both local users and environmental interests lay claim to are fundamentally opposed due to divergent beliefs about what nature was, is, and should be, and the place for humans within these constructions.

Snowmobiling offers a unique and instructive window onto resource use conflicts in Maine's woods because it, like nature, represents dissimilar things to different people: it is both a local pastime cherished by Maine woods communities as well as a despised machine that shatters the peace of the forest; a means of either connecting with or destroying nature; a traditional practice that sustains rural communities or a modern technology that alienates one from nature. My first aim in exploring the history and culture of snowmobiling was to inform popular notions of the activity, because environmental discourses and common (mis)conceptions that frame snowmobiling simply as a threat to forest ecologies can conceal underlying ideological, aesthetic, and socio-cultural objections that influence beliefs and policy regarding the place for humans and their various practices in natural areas. However, connected to perceptions of nature are constructions of people and rural livelihoods that also dictate proper relations between humans and nature and hide rural complexities, relations, and particularities. Finally, an examination of snowmobiling in Maine's north woods helps emphasize the arbitrariness of technology's antagonistic relation to nature and produces an understanding of tradition and technology that creates a positive space for the machine in the forest. In reworking the meanings of nature, rurality, and tradition by linking constructions of the north woods to local histories, everyday practices, and social relationships, this research works alongside resident communities to counter and perhaps prevent the erasure of certain rural activities from the land, thereby securing a place for practices of work *and* play in the future of the north woods.

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