

MANAGING WITH LAND: EMBRACING BLACKFOOT SYSTEMS
OF BELIEF AS A CATALYST FOR POST-COLONIAL
CONSERVATION IN GLACIER NATIONAL PARK

by

AUSTIN NUNIS

A THESIS

Presented to the Department of Environmental Studies
and the Robert D. Clark Honors College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Science

June 2023

Acknowledgements

This project would not be possible without support from people in every corner of my life. From the academic corner, I first would like to thank my advisors Shaul Cohen, Kyle Keeler, and Catalina de Onís. Shaul, thank you for your expert guidance throughout this process and most importantly in helping me set (and hold) realistic deadlines. Kyle, thank you immensely for your depth of knowledge and your passion on this subject. I was motivated and inspired by your support and grateful for our last-minute meetings, your valuable sources, and your overall engagement and encouragement. Professor de Onís, thank you for your time and institutional assistance. I appreciate you checking in, keeping me calm, and being supportive all the way. From my familial corner I would like to thank my parents. Mom, thank you for your excitement and encouragement while I found my voice in this project. Thank you for answering my calls when I was stressed and consistently reminding me that I am capable. Dad, thank you for your support and commitment to my success, I really wouldn't be here in this room if it wasn't for your initial persistence and excitement for my involvement in the CHC. I would also like to thank my Uncle Jeff, who helped me brainstorm my title. To my Eugene corner, my home away from home- your collective interest in my work kept me going. Thank you to Juliana and Vaughn who read my draft, to those who asked me about my progress, and to Emma, who sat with me in coffee shops weekly while I wrote. Thank you to every one of my roommates and friends who reasoned with me while I was stressed, talked with me through ideas, and were there to celebrate the little wins. I am proud to share this with all of you and I am so thankful for your continued interest in my passions. Lastly, thank you to the CHC, my institutional corner. I am grateful for the opportunity to write a paper like this and recognize the technical support and guidelines that ultimately molded this project.

Table of Contents

Complicating Conservation Ideology to Foster Inclusivity: An Introduction	6
Shaping Relation to Land: Theoretical and Cultural Influences on the National Park Service and the Blackfeet	10
Defining key terms in settler colonial theory	10
Natural Laws: Understanding Blackfeet Creation Stories as Foundations of Relation to Land	12
The Wilderness Ethos: A Catalyst for American Character, National Parks, and Blackfeet Exclusion	20
Recognizing the Settler Colonial Idea of Wilderness and its Agency in Establishing Glacier National Park	20
Destroying to Replace: The Start of Glacier National Park	25
The Effects of Glacier National Park on the Blackfeet: A Change of Ownership, a Change of Identity	30
Moving Forward: Evaluating Contemporary Blackfoot Conservation Efforts and Identifying Future Possibilities	34
Contemporary initiatives: Blackfoot conservation efforts in an age of exclusion	34
Managing Complications: A Fine Line Between Appropriation and Proper Communication	43
Managing With the Land: Towards a More Inclusive Conservation Framework	45
Bibliography	48

List of Figures

Figure 1: Map of significant areas (Glacier Two-Medicine Alliance)	8
Figure 2: Map of the Blackfoot Watershed (Blackfoot Challenge Stewardship Guide)	38

Complicating Conservation Ideology to Foster Inclusivity: An Introduction

For my thesis I intend to investigate the ways in which settler colonialism influences western conservation philosophy, both historically and in our contemporary moment. Specifically, I will discuss how settler colonialism molds the definition of land management in Glacier National Park and how conversely, the Blackfoot Confederacy ¹ manages *with* land. Presumably, these two entities interpret and interact with the earth ² very differently and within these two realms of understanding land I aim to identify how different perspectives and connections inform different conservation theories. This research will be driven by my curiosity of linking what is commonly viewed as a “positive” ³ movement, such as conservation and the establishment of National Parks, to settler colonial roots and how this link then permeates into present and future conceptions of land management and further into connections with the land itself. I have previously learned about the correlation between settler colonialism and climate change in the U.S. in a broad sense, and I intend to shift the conversation to what this relationship and influence looks like in conservation work, a field I am interested in pursuing. Glacier National Park acts as a representative for common narratives of National Park establishment and the western conservation movement’s dominating thought process with a battle between government agencies, conservationists, and Indigenous people that mirrors the origin stories of other National parks.

¹ The Blackfoot Confederacy is comprised of four Tribal Nations: the Piikani Nation (Peigan), the Kainai Nation (Blood Tribe), the Siksika Nation (Blackfoot), and the Aamskapi Pikuni (Blackfeet Nation). Also known as the Siksikaitstapi or the Niitsitapi, the Blackfoot Confederacy was formed on May 25th, 2000, to unify the different Blackfoot Nations against common issues (*Siksikaitstapi*).

² Throughout this paper I will use words interchangeably for land such as earth and non-human natural world.

³ The word “positive” is put in scare-quotes to challenge the truly positive nature of these movements. Throughout this paper I try to complicate the idea of labeling a movement solely positive by introducing links to its settler colonial roots and working through the potential effects of this distinction on land and on Indigenous communities.

Though National Parks commonly share histories with Indigenous tribes and many reservations are near National Parks, Glacier is unique in that the Blackfoot Indian Reservation directly borders the east side of the park. On a map it looks as if these two parcels of land sit peacefully side by side, touching but not overlapping in any way. But a deeper dive into their relationship reveals the violent theft of land since the early 1800s. In examining the details of this history I hope to introduce the idea that National Parks and outdoor spaces need not be glorified and romanticized in order to enjoy them, and we can recognize their history while using it as a catalyst to envision more intentional conservation work in the future.



Figure 1: Map of significant areas (Glacier Two-Medicine Alliance)

This map shows the physical relation between Glacier National Park, Blackfeet Indian Reservation, and the Badger-Two Medicine area.

Ultimately, I want to complicate notions of conservation ideology and popular views of these systems to work toward a more inclusive conservation and land management framework. My analysis will be two-fold, achieved through analyzing a combination of history, settler colonial theory, Indigenous studies, and environmentally focused literature. After laying the framework for settler colonial theory and introducing the theoretical discourses popular in Indigenous studies, I will evaluate how Creation stories shape relations to land for the Blackfeet people and how the wilderness ethos does the same for American conservationists and

recreationists. I will then link these influences to land management philosophies within Glacier National Park and Tribal land to understand how these perspectives inform different conservation methods. From there I will bring in conversations of contemporary efforts to uphold Tribal sovereignty through conservation initiatives by the Blackfoot Confederacy. These efforts include co-managing parkland, reintroducing Blackfoot cultural names and histories to the narrative of the landscape, uplifting current and future Indigenous conservation groups, and reframing the goal of conservation from land management to managing *with* the land.

Shaping Relation to Land: Theoretical and Cultural Influences on the National Park Service and the Blackfeet

Defining key terms in settler colonial theory

For the purpose of this paper, I will draw on a definition of settler colonialism popularized by historian Patrick Wolfe in his article “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native.” Wolfe states that settler colonialism’s ultimate goal is land theft, achieved by what he calls “destroying to replace,” a concept characterized by land theft via Euro-American settlers and their intentional dissolution of Indigenous lifestyles, culture, and systems of civilization to replace them with settler ways of life, which they viewed as “superior” (400). This theft of land, scholar J.M. Bacon argues, inevitably leads to “colonial ecological violence,” a term that allows for a broad analysis of the many ways settler colonialism disrupts Indigenous eco-social relations and their reciprocal relations with the land to generate specific risks and harms for Native peoples and communities. This colonial ecological violence happens by means of “eco-social disruption,”⁴ a relationship between settlers and Indigenous people characterized by mechanisms where “land is redistributed, privatized, polluted, and renamed” often with little to no consideration of the will of the inhabitants (5). In the case of Glacier National Park, these mechanisms separated Blackfeet people from the land, redefining the values of places and beings by the culture of the colonizers.

Literature from Citizen Potawatomi scholar Kyle Powys Whyte is also helpful in constructing a definition of settler colonialism and its impact on Native populations. Whyte uses

⁴ It is important to note that colonial ecological violence can also be understood in a more circular way. Though I reference it here as land theft setting up the structure for colonial ecological violence to take place, colonial ecological violence is also a tool to acquire land in the first place. Its circular nature exemplifies how pervasive it is.

the term “reciprocal relations” to define a system of responsibilities outlining how plants, other/more-than-human animals, ecosystems, and humans are interconnected in a way that thrives on the cultural value of reciprocity central to most Indigenous tribes (“Indigenous Climate Change Studies” 157). In his book *Red Skin, White Masks* Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Sean Coulthard elaborates on this theory of Indigenous place-based thought with his concept of “grounded normativity,” an ethical framework informed by “what the land as a mode of reciprocal *relationship* ought to teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and our surroundings in a respectful, non-dominating and nonexploitative way” (60 Coulthard, emphasis in original). Coulthard argues that this frame of reference expands the idea of reciprocal relations past objects and beings that are culturally important to Indigenous people to reiterate how place-based thought drives relationships since “place is a way of knowing, experiencing, and relating to the world and with others” (61). These relationships are so deep and so central to Native ways of existing that the strength of these “relational practices and forms of knowledge guide forms of resistance against other rationalizations of the world that threaten to erase or destroy our senses of place” (61). The threat, in this case, is the difference in the meaning of time and place as defined by settler colonial culture and Indigenous people. Utilizing a theory from Standing Rock Sioux philosopher Vine Deloria Jr.’s work, Coulthard illuminates this difference:

When ‘ideology is divided according to American Indian and Western European [traditions],’ writes Deloria, this ‘fundamental difference is one of great philosophical importance. American Indians hold their lands—*places*—as having the highest possible meaning, and all their statements are made with this reference point in mind.’ Most western societies, by contrast, tend to derive meaning from the world in historical/developmental terms, thereby placing *time* as the narrative of central importance. (60)

This gap between what dictates progress and what dictates a successful relationship creates a fundamental misunderstanding of the purposes and goals of settler colonialism and Indigenous

lifeways, and consequently how both groups interact with land to define its progress. Coulthard's theory of grounded normativity illuminates the importance of place-based thought in the realm of land management. The importance of place-based thought in Indigenous culture fuels resistance movements since protecting these relationships equates to protecting lifeways. This theory and its implications will serve as a central theme of Indigenous perspective to guide the foundation of conservation based on Indigenous values, led by regional Indigenous Nations.

Additionally, Whyte claims that Native populations are successful because they are adaptable, because their lifestyles permit them to move around the land. This mobility and adaptability ensures them new resources via changing locations throughout their land and has a cyclical impact on the earth itself, allowing resources like plants and animals to thrive undisturbed by humans until the Tribes return, some moving in seasonal patterns. This adaptable lifestyle is also defined as "collective continuance," or a "society's self-determined adaptive capacity that avoids reasonably preventable harms" ("Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Justice" 131). By the logic of grounded normativity and collective continuance, Blackfeet removal by settlers and the implementation of new land management plans disrupted the tribes' ability to carry out cultural values with sacred land and beings in what is now known as Glacier National Park.

Natural Laws: Understanding Blackfeet Creation Stories as Foundations of Relation to Land

Before I share Blackfeet Creation stories and their implications it is important to note that this project as a whole does not aim to historicize events of dispossession, rather, it exists to bring these issues into the present. Events of Indigenous removal and dispossession are often framed as historical events whose beginning and end lies in the past. This framing does not

consider the ways in which historical dispossession and removal are both ongoing as well as have repercussions in our contemporary moment as well. Bringing these stories and discourses into present conversation about these issues is especially important when settler colonial dispossession is an ongoing process. Dina Gilio-Whitaker, a scholar from the Colville Confederated Tribes, addresses a “legacy of loss” that Indigenous populations continually experience as a result of a history that never truly disappears. She writes that this legacy “cannot be overstated, and a growing awareness of intergenerational and historical trauma recognizes the social and psychological implications that histories of genocide and colonialism have had on American Indigenous populations” (49). This legacy continues today, and its causes are not to be forgotten in the pages of textbooks or condemned to the past tense.

Indigenous Creation stories are oral tools used to illustrate a group’s physical origin, belief system, and invite them to connect with the land they inhabit. Anishinaabe and Métis scholar and activist Melissa Nelson, from the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, imparts that Creation stories “provide the literal and metaphorical instructions, passed on orally from generation to generation, for how to be a good human being living in reciprocal relation with all of our seen and unseen relatives. They are natural laws that, when ignored, have natural consequences” (3). Though the Creation stories I am about to share happened long ago, the cultural implications, ways of relating to the land, and practices they express built a foundation that is still being lived today and will continue to be cultural and individual way finders for generations to come.

Before it was America’s playground, Glacier National Park was known to the Blackfeet people as the “backbone of the world.” Ancestors resided in the area for over 10,000 years. The Blackfeet people knew the land to be a gift from their creator, Creator Sun. Blackfoot author and

artist Percy Bullchild documented Creation in his book, *The Sun Came Down*. Bullchild shares the oral stories passed down through ancestors that have come to dictate many generations of Blackfeet interaction with and perspective on this land. Among these creation stories exist simple commandments such as “be honest to life and to all life” (45), and “take care of things” as “being aware of the many things of our lives and well aware of all of our surroundings makes it easier to live” (49). Though they seem universal, when these commandments are put in the context of the specific land that the Blackfeet reside on and with, they tell of truthfulness and loyalty that Creator Sun asks be displayed toward all life he creates. There is a moral code instilled in these simple phrases that requests reciprocity and respect in the relationship, that requests the honesty to recognize that other beings and “resources” are also life, including land.

Bullchild also shares more complex anecdotes that illustrate the familial relationship Blackfeet have with the nonhuman natural world. With Mother Earth as their matriarch and Creator Sun as their father, the Blackfeet exemplify the personal responsibility intertwined with reciprocal relations.

The food we eat, the air we breathe are the works of the Sun. It is his elements that come forth from his powers of light, powers of life, for all life to exist... When our turn for the heat from his power comes to our side of Mother Earth, fresh food comes out from the body of Mother Earth. We, the many forms of life, readily take our suck from her body to make us grow, to get fat for the next coming cold as our Creator Sun goes to take care of the other side of Mother Earth. There isn't a place that our Creator Sun doesn't or cannot provide for. He takes good care of all of his creations. It is up to us to take and use that life-giving food they both put out for us all. (46)

This display of gratitude for Creator Sun and Mother Earth's gifts further iterate how the Blackfeet believe that all life comes from Creator Sun and that he dutifully maintains their health and abundance of food. Their existence represents a partnership with the land wherein both parties act for the survival of one another. Relation to the land therefore represents more than just a place or a home but the root of the earth's and the people's life and health.

In a section titled “Our Human Beginning,” Bullchild shares the story of how and why Creator Sun fashioned the first human, Mudman. While this story focuses on the Creation of the Blackfeet, the way that Mudman was “molded” by Creator Sun is of most importance to my project. Handcrafted out of clay at the “water’s edge”, Mudman was molded to resemble Creator Sun’s “own shape, his own image” (39). To bring the mud figure to life Creator sun “blew into his face and at the same time said, ‘Have the same kind of life [I] have and live to roam this land’” (39). This declaration of will for Mudman’s existence exemplifies the way that Creator Sun intended people to live from and for the land. Deeming this new human his son, Bullchild writes that Creator Sun took Mudman out into the world “and began to teach him everything he knew of their own life and others” (39). The specifics of this story, from the material used to make Mudman to the way that Creator Sun brought him to life with his own breath, further represent the way Native existence is inextricably connected with the land. In later creations stories Creator Sun crafts game animals for Mudman using the same technique of molding figures out of mud from the water’s edge. This method of creation reinforces that life exists because of its partnership to the earth and that humans and other-/more-than-human animals are not so different since their origin stories are incredibly similar. Mohawk and Anishinaabe Bear Clan scholar Vanessa Watts articulates that Creation Stories show how Native people “are made from the land”, their “flesh literally an extension of the soil” (8) and this dictates “an obligation [for people] to maintain communication with [the earth]” (4). Just as humans are an extension of the land, there is a circular relationship in which the land also finds agency in humanity. Watts describes this as “place-thought” and writes that it is “based upon the premise that land is alive and thinking and that humans and non-humans derive agency through the extension of these thoughts” (21), meaning that the land thinks through humans. This cycle of agency combined

with the obligation to maintain connection with land represent how people see themselves as part of the land, and through such understanding they see their laws and guideposts of governance echoed in nature.

These Creation stories act as a directive for Indigenous ways of life and relation to the land. Deloria reiterates this idea with the statement that “aboriginal peoples modeled their societies after the natural processes of the universe. In their oral traditions they carried forward faithfully the original perceptions of reality by repeating exactly the incidents and experiences that had impressed them” (132). The teachings and anecdotes presented in these stories serve as life-sustaining advice. These stories act as a framing device for how Blackfeet people see themselves and the rest of the world. In a story about Creator Sun’s gift of food to his people Bullchild shares what Creator Sun told Mudman while crafting game animals for him out of mud by the river. When giving the gift of meat, Creator Sun emphasized the importance of only killing “enough for all those with you to use,” advising his son that if he wasted food, “food will become scarce for you” (61). He advocated against food waste and for respectful use so that his children “would have enough food to last forever” (59). This story ultimately created a definition of preservation⁵ for the Blackfeet, characterizing the act as form of life, a form of respect for Creator Sun’s gifts.

These practices are still being lived in the present. Though they make take slightly different forms in the face of modern struggles, the Blackfeet, like many other tribes, continue to use the commandments in their creation as a means of survival. In his 1998 documentary *Backbone of the World: The Blackfeet*, a film about Blackfoot sacred land being threatened by

⁵ Though conservation and preservation have inherently different definitions I use the terms somewhat interchangeably for this purpose of this paper. This is to encapsulate a more robust conception of the broader conservation and preservation movements.

the governments' quest for oil, Blackfeet member George Burdeau interviews many Blackfeet people whose sentiments echo tenets of the Creation story. Advocating to preserve the Badger Two Medicine⁶, a plot of land in northwestern Montana that is over a hundred and thirty thousand acres, Blackfeet tribal member Carol Murray references Creation stories:

This is the land the Creator gave us. He gave us Badger Canyon to be a part of us. It could never be that for anyone else because they don't understand that it was ours from the beginning, the very beginning of time. If we let it stay natural, the Creator will recognize it. But if we ruin it He's going to look at it and say 'is that the land I gave to the Blackfeet people? To live on? To get all their medicines from? To get those things that I gave them to carry on their way of life?
(00:40:46-00:41:21)

In this statement, Murray shares aspects of eco-social disruption, grounded normativity, and reciprocal relations. Lived experience across generations makes her point instead of theoretical musing.

Bordering Glacier National Park, the Badger Two Medicine serves as a "traditional source of knowledge" for Blackfeet people and is origin to stories of Mudman's creation from the earth, Napi the Creator, Morning star giver of the Sundance, and Scarface the savior, making the area "one of the last places our people can go to practice" ancient traditions or "do the kinds of things our ancestors used to do", says Earl Old Person, a Blackfeet tribal chairman (00:03:29-00:06:50). In the quote above, Murray also refers to the landmark idea that she is "a part of" Badger Canyon and Badger Canyon is conversely "a part of" her. She is not speaking on behalf of the land but as a piece of it, one that we can understand and empathize with on a personal level. By this logic, "ruining" the land essentially ruins the self-image and cultural identity of individuals. Watts' work echoes this sentiment, furthering the idea that not only is this separation or alteration of the land morally uncomfortable for Native people but also against their laws. She

⁶ See Figure 1 for a map referencing the location of the Badger Two Medicine

writes that “if we begin from the premise that we are in fact made of soil, then our principles of governance are reflected in nature” (8). Watts also shares Anishinaabe Elder Fred Kelly’s implications of his own tribe’s Creation story to further this point.⁷ Kelly utilizes Sacred Law and Great Law to say that it is “against the law” to sell the Earth as “to sell her is tantamount to selling yourself.” He continues to say that “it is not possible to sell any part of Grandmother Earth, because we have a sacred relationship to her” and that it would be both “illegal” and “unconstitutional” to “sell your Grandmother” (Kelly 11 qtd. in Watts 27). In a similar vein, the strong ties that Murray expresses to Badger Canyon are ones that sustain her and her peoples’ physical and spiritual livelihoods, therefore making this specific place impossible to sell or to alter without compromising their individual and collective identities. The reverence for these places can be attributed to the idea of grounded normativity, that relation to a place cultivates a deep respect for its management.

Language also serves as a catalyst for this relationship, as the Pigeon Institute’s Darrell Kipp elucidates in Burdeau’s documentary. This Indigenous worldview is uniquely different from the Western perspective because of the way these Indigenous languages animate life around them and places the world as “part and parcel” of the people, “not as something separate from [Native people]” but “that they were interwoven into the fabric of their land through their language” (00:38:01-00:38:07) Embedded into their language is a connection to the land and therefore proof that just as language was never separate from the land neither was Blackfeet culture, guiding law, or people. The Creation stories, the theory of grounded normativity, and the idea of place-thought are helpful factors in understanding the way that Indigenous people form

⁷ In using this example from Anishinaabe culture I do not aim to flatten Native people and spirituality into a homogenous group but rather make connections across Indigenous ways of thinking to illuminate a deep, spiritual, and physical connection to the land.

relations to the land. Conversely, the logics and influences that shape settler colonial relation to land are inherently different. This settler colonial relationship to land is shaped by distinct theories and beliefs that do not give the same agency to the land, as I will explore in the following section.

The Wilderness Ethos: A Catalyst for American Character, National Parks, and Blackfeet Exclusion

Recognizing the Settler Colonial Idea of Wilderness and its Agency in Establishing Glacier National Park

The western preservation movement and conception of wilderness will argue that humans are separate from the land and that true preservation only exists in areas vacant of humanity. Conversely, it can be argued that Indigenous people have not ever situated themselves as separate from the earth. They still do not see themselves as separate from the earth, as explored above in the theory of Indigenous place-thought and the inherent permanence of their language in the earth. Gilio-Whitaker reiterates this eternal connection, writing that land and living beings, in the eyes of Native people, all have “agency by virtue of their very life energy” and that this link classifies humans as “only part of the natural world, neither central to nor separate from it” (140). This equality in agency of all living beings creates an egalitarian worldview that dissolves the idea of “nature” or “wilderness,” and creates only a place to be and exist within for all lifeforms. Historian William Cronon writes that wilderness is a “human creation”, its birth a product of cultural ideals such as Christianity, romanticism, and primitivism (7).

The Puritan religion initially laid the groundwork for nature as being a place of fear and evil. The Bible depicted the “wilderness” as the background for Satan’s temptations to Christ, a trap, and the unforgiving landscape that Adam and Eve endured after being driven out of the Garden of Eden (Cronon 9). In addition to the landscape being “a place to which one came only against one’s will, and always in fear and trembling” (9) it was also home to Native people, who Puritans saw as nonhuman, agents of Satan with savage intentions (Jennings 15). An important shift in settler perspective of the land came from the euro-centric “winning of ‘the Land’ from

alien, and indeed evil, forces” (Akenson 73-74). This holy acquisition of land serves as an example of destroying to replace as it allowed early Puritan settlers to establish their own structures of civilization and cleanse the earth of a sinful and untamable land teeming with “evil” Native Americans.

As soon as the threat of wilderness and its original inhabitants had been made comfortable to settlers, fear gave way to reverence and nature became “sacred,” a place to be admired as the “boundaries between human and nonhuman, between natural and supernatural, had always seemed less certain than elsewhere” (Cronon 10). The religious ideals ascribed with the natural world also paved the path for Manifest Destiny, a settler held spiritual belief that the earth was theirs to inhabit, alter, and extract from by divine right. Pushing settlers westward toward the frontier, Manifest Destiny permitted settlers dominion over the land, to steward it according to their needs and ideals. In a burgeoning society where settlers’ ideas of survival required a permanent location and a fountain of natural resources to commodify, Americans transitioned away from fearing nature’s unknown forces to romanticize and domesticate its bounty. Paradoxically, as this wilderness built their homes, fed their families, and fueled their economy it also began to define the frontier as rugged and primitive. Cronon cites this as the “romantic attraction of primitivism,” a belief “that the best antidote to the ills of an overly refined and civilized modern world was a return to simpler, more primitive living” (13). Moving to “wild unsettled lands” in the west, settlers “shed the trappings of civilization, rediscovered their primitive racial energies, reinvented direct democratic institutions, and thereby reinfused themselves with a vigor, an independence, and a creativity that were the source of the American democracy and national character” (13). This mindset that Cronon outlines illuminates how early Americans saw nature, and how they saw themselves in relation to it. Whether consciously or

not, settlers defined nature as wild and put themselves outside of its realm so that they could eventually find personal worth and character in taming it. A combination of awe-inspiring, holy, freeing, and a symbol of independence, “the wild country became a place not just of religious redemption but of national renewal, the quintessential location for experiencing what it meant to be an American” (13). As a result, settlers continued to shed the constraints of a civilization they created only to find solace in a land they willingly lived outside of. This pattern extended beyond the collective into the creation of the individual, contributing simultaneously to a national and personal identity.

This perceived wilderness continued to shape facets of individualism as early American authors and artists turned to the wilderness for inspiration, neglecting the “civilized” life they were apart of to be baptized by the natural world (Spence 11). American essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson, for example, urged others to look to the “wilderness” for “something more dear and connate than in streets or villages,” utilizing the landscape as a way of connecting to the individual to the divine via the natural “organ through which the universal spirit speaks to the individual, and strives to lead back the individual to it” (qtd. in Spence 11). The primitive landscape and power of the wild was supposed to reinvigorate the tired American, instilling a new version of self into settlers struggling to establish a national character. The wilderness was co-opted and commodified throughout the nineteenth century to support settlers through the early transitions of American life, from a religious symbol to a mine of resources to a defining factor in individual and collective character.

Settlers’ relation to the land extended beyond this romanticization of the primitive into the romanticization of the pristine. This pristine landscape was characterized by a wilderness that featured “noble Indians” roaming “unspoiled” lands, a true departure from the “oppressive

conditions that interminably plagued civilized societies” (12). Just like with the wilderness, Native people became romanticized by settlers as soon as they were not an obstacle to the construction of a new world. As industrial infrastructure continued to grow, American author Washington Irving rushed to the “Indian Territory” to write about a “distinctly American subject” (17). For Irving and American writers of this period, the American Indian was no longer a Satanic, backwards savage. Instead, he was a romanticized subject, part of a bygone era that symbolized man’s connection to his noble, primitive past, unspoiled by the technology of the present. In a letter to his brother, Irving expressed excitement over the “opportunity to see the remnants of those great Indian tribes” in the “fine countries of the ‘far west,’ while still in the state of pristine wilderness” with “herds of buffaloes scouring their native prairies.” Historian Mark David Spence writes that Irving “recognized the opportunity to write on a subject that would celebrate a uniquely American condition” and ultimately “saw an opportunity to record a way of life and scenery that seemed fated to ‘vanish’” (qtd. in Spence 17). This creation of the “myth of the vanishing Indian” is a key catalyst to the fields of conservation and preservation. Through a perceived definition of wilderness and a physical separation from the land, prominent American thinkers and writers came to equate Native people with the wild landscape, turning them into symbols of American nationality. Consequently, the “vanishing Indian” became the vanishing wilderness.

Though the conservation movement was ultimately propelled by reasons I will discuss later, American historical figures like Washington Irving, adventurer, author, and artist George Catlin, and artist and naturalist John James Audubon originally pushed for preservation as a means of saving both the natural landscape and the Native people within it. Whether it be art, an attachment to the Native people as part of the wilderness, or a genuine humanitarian interest

these three wanted the preservation of the natural landscape to include the preservation of Native populations in some form or the other. Still being steeped in the dominating hegemony of settler colonialism, however, they accepted the idea of removal and reservations as a steppingstone to preserving these lands. Catlin is credited with the first expression of the national park idea. He hoped for portions of land he encountered to be saved from development to inspire future generations' artists and wanderers, proposing "'some great protecting policy of government' to preserve a large expanse of land in all 'its pristine beauty and wildness... where the world could see for ages to come, the native Indian in his classic attire, galloping his horse...amid the fleeting herds of elks and buffaloes.' Such a 'magnificent' area, he exclaimed, would be a '*nation's Park* containing man and beast, in all the wild and freshness of their nature's beauty!'" (qtd. in Spence 10). Though Catlin, Irving, and Audubon's sentimentality towards the Indigenous population was a factor in their advocacy of preservation, an uninhabited wilderness preserved for the benefit and recreation of Americans was eventually what pushed the budding ideas of the conservation movement into legitimate action. Cronon interprets this budding desire for national parks as an irony, arguing that:

The movement to set aside national parks and wilderness areas followed hard on the heels of the final Indian wars, in which the prior human inhabitants of these areas were rounded up and moved onto reservations. The myth of the wilderness as 'virgin,' uninhabited land had always been especially cruel when seen from the perspective of the Indians who had once called that land home. Now they were forced to move elsewhere, with the result that tourists could safely enjoy the illusion that they were seeing their nation in its pristine, original state, in the new morning of God's own creation" (15).

The formation of land management ideals within the conservation movement would not be possible without the ideas, advocacy, and moral complications that encapsulated John Muir. Muir was an American naturalist, author, environmental philosopher, botanist, zoologist, and glaciologist whose ideas around preservation flourished in the early 1900s. Now credited as the

father of the American conservation movement or the “Father of the National Parks,” Muir was influential in shaping sentimentalities and initiatives of admiring, protecting, and connecting with wild spaces. In his quest to establish preservation as part of American ideology, Muir founded the Sierra Club, advocated for the preservation of Yosemite and Sequoia National Parks, and “championed the revolutionary ideas that wild spaces should be set aside for people to enjoy” (Peaco). While those represent positives in the conservation movement, they are also only one side of Muir. Muir’s romantic view of nature often led him to place the worth of animals and nonhuman lifeforms above Indigenous people, referring to them in an essay as “dead or uncivilized into useless innocence” (Muir). He managed to embody each previous phase of the colonial ideas of Native people, seeing them as a combination of savage, romantic, and vanishing. Furthermore, Muir participated in the line of thinking that put the outdoors on a pedestal as “a pristine refuge from the city” (Purdy). Because he is simultaneously revered and questioned in the modern-day environmental movement, Muir’s complexities make him the perfect example of how the conjunction of ideas on Native people and preservation framework are simultaneously harmful and incredibly formative in shaping the U.S. perception of outdoor spaces. Much like within Muir, there exists a dichotomy within the conservation and preservation movements: though they are positive movements with an artillery of beneficial work, they stem from histories and intentions so complicated and wrong it can be difficult to appreciate.

Destroying to Replace: The Start of Glacier National Park

While the western conservation movement was being heavily shaped by the dominant wilderness ethos, colonial ecological violence and settler colonialism were simultaneously at play in defining the movement. This is explicitly demonstrated in the history of Glacier National

Park and the Blackfeet people. For settlers to reinvent the land they had to remove Blackfoot societies, an example of destroying to replace. The buffalo, animals which were revered and respectfully hunted by the Blackfeet, were settlers' first target. What is known as the "buffalo days", the period when buffalo roamed the plains in abundance and were integral to Blackfeet survival, gave way to the "buffalo war", the intentional eradication of these animals with the knowledge that, according to Major General Dodge... "every buffalo dead is an Indian gone" (General Dodge qtd. in Phippen). Knowing that the tribes would not exist without the sustenance the buffalo provided the U.S. Army, in conjunction with hired hunters, killed over 40 million buffalo between 1830 and 1865, driving the country's buffalo populations to near extinction (Smith). Tribes across America, including the Blackfeet, suffered from starvation as their primary source of food was gone.

Scrambling to preserve their livelihood, the Blackfeet entered their first formal treaty with the government: the 1855 Judith River, or Lame Bull Treaty. Negotiated at the mouth of the Judith River by American military officer and politician Isaac Stevens, the Treaty was between the Blackfeet, Nez Perce, Salish, and Pend d'Oreille tribes. The agreement designated the tribes' territory a common hunting ground for 99 years while also identifying a separate patch of land exclusively reserved for the Blackfeet (Indian Education for All Unit). Comprised of a section of Montana east of the Northern Rocky Mountains, this new land became their formal reservation. The Blackfeet saw the Treaty as a 99-year lease of their land while the government saw it as a means to eventual land theft. Though advertised as a peace Treaty between the government and local tribes, Blackfoot member Lea Whitford explains how the Treaty was ultimately a way for the government to peacefully gain access to Blackfoot land to survey for a potential railroad (MT OPI Indian Education Division ,00:01:24-00:01:58). Whitford elaborates to share that the Lame

Bull Treaty was a pivotal change for the Blackfeet as they were now responsible for relations with a government agent and an annual monetary compensation with the expectation that the Blackfeet would reform their education and agricultural practices to mirror western methods. Since the Treaty stipulated that Blackfeet rights to “hunt, fish, and gather as they always had would now be exercised ‘in common’ with the citizens of the territory” (Farr 148), the Blackfeet were not protected as miners and “cattle men”, looking for minerals and grazing areas, began to settle in their tribal land (MT OPI Indian Education Division, 00:04:50-00:05:36). Keeping in mind that this Treaty existed during the buffalo war, historian William E. Farr illustrates how the Treaty was also a tactic to continue the eradication of buffalo: “if the buffalo and Indians should somehow unexpectedly survive in the common hunting ground, then the ninety-nine-year lease would run out. In fact, the federal common hunting ground was negotiated out of existence within ten years and the buffalo were all but gone in thirty” (150). By the late 1880s, the Blackfeet were forced to find solace in their new reservation as a series of land cessions “eroded the tribe’s [original] land base” and “disease, war, famine, and the near extinction of the bison” reduced their population “to some two thousand individuals” (Spence 75). Though the foothills of the Rockies were not their culturally significant land, the Blackfeet did all they could to make this new place home. The Lamme Bull Treaty did nothing to ameliorate the changing conditions of the Blackfeet but instead pushed their population further into decline, established a reservation outside of tribally significant land, and ceded their ancestral homeland to white settlers in the name of American progress.

Facets of colonial ecological violence and eco-social disruption are present in the exchanges directed by this Treaty. After their physical livelihood was put in peril by the intentional decimation of the buffalo, the Blackfeet were forced from their land and struggled to

establish culturally significant ties in a new area, as their previous relations to their homeland were disrupted. We see the Blackfoot's homeland be both "redistributed" and "polluted" through this agreement, and by the recipe of eco-social disruption it was also "renamed" (Bacon 5). As it is understood that Indigenous people come from and think through the earth, it follows that this loss of land also served as a loss of cultural and individual identity.

This theft, and the path toward renaming, was furthered when George B. Grinnell, a prominent American naturalist and conservationist, in conjunction with American author J.W. Schultz, convinced the Blackfeet to sell their land to the government in 1895. An avid outdoorsman, Grinnell was "a leading voice for the preservation of wilderness landscapes and a respected advocate of Indian policy reform" (Spence 76). His desire to create national parks in the name of preservation and his respect for the Blackfoot guides he encountered deemed Grinnell, like Muir, a quintessential representative of Americans' thought process at the time:

Like many Americans, Grinnell lamented the rapid exploitation of the western wilderness as he bemoaned the destruction of native societies, and his efforts to preserve some remnant of each epitomized late-nineteenth century thinking about wilderness as uninhabited and Indian culture as vanishing. Not surprisingly, his efforts to preserve Blackfeet culture and some portion of the tribe's homeland took very separate courses: the Blackfeet would live on in books and museum collections, but the mountain wilderness would persist within the boundaries of a national park (78).

In the early 1890s rumors of mineral wealth in the Montana wilderness began circulating. With his plans to establish a nature preserve threatened by this potential industrialization and development, Grinnell agreed to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs' request and helped negotiate a land cession agreement with the Blackfeet. His intention was not to aid the mining industry, but he instead saw the "cession of Indian lands as an important first step in the creation of a great national park" (79). The Blackfeet, seeing no other way to maintain agency on the land in the face of the government and industrial encroachment, offered to sell their land for 3 million

dollars. In the end, they settled for 1.5 million dollars and sold 800,000 acres of land on the western border of their reservation. The Blackfeet agreed to this sale on the condition that they “would retain the right to hunt, fish, and gather wood on this land so long as it remained publicly owned.” This sale opened the door for development and preservation as government and industry officials saw fit, and it effectively excluded the Blackfeet from their home. Glacier National Park was officially created in 1911 by an act of Congress and shortly after absorbed the “portion of the former Blackfeet Reservation sold to the Federal government in 1895” (“New IACB Film: ‘The Blackfeet, The Great Northern Railway, and Glacier National Park’”). With all the land they once knew officially renamed and designated as Federal property, Blackfeet were separated from their ancestral homeland.

With the loss of their land, the Blackfeet identity was defined by the Parks Service by their marketing value to America’s newest national treasure. They became the backbone of the tourism industry in what used to be the backbone of their world; they were depicted on postcards in inaccurate regalia, flown out to large cities like Chicago to entice tourists back to Montana, and brought to greet visitors at the park’s entrance. These activities and advertisements all played into the “myth of the vanishing Indian” as well as cultivated the ideal “wilderness experience” for tourists that romanticized cultural livelihoods soon-to-be-gone (Spence 83) while back at the Blackfeet reservation people were “starving and in terrible economic condition” (“The Blackfeet, The Great Northern Railway, and Glacier National Park”, 00:03:40-00:04:14). They were no longer able to perform culturally significant ceremonies or hunting practices on their land. They were no longer able to cultivate a connection with their ancestors. They were no longer able to maintain their relationship with the land or with themselves. They were no longer permitted into land that their ancestor Napi, or Old Man, gave to them in their Creation stories.

As Chief White Calf remarked on the cession of their land, “Chief Mountain is my head. Now my head is cut off. The mountains have been my last refuge” (Spence 80).

The Effects of Glacier National Park on the Blackfeet: A Change of Ownership, a Change of Identity

Three years after the park was officially established, the Blackfeet were forced to declare bankruptcy. The funds they were ostensibly to receive for their land were not paid in a lump sum but held in trust to be paid out in yearly increments. This money, however, was “passed through the hands of corrupt bureaucrats and Indian Agents who embezzled ungodly amounts,” leaving the tribe with little more than subsistence rights to hunt and fish, which were eventually destroyed via legal reinterpretation, a continuation of destroying to replace (Smith).

In addition to preserving the area for its “scenic beauty and recreational potential,” the legislation that created Glacier National Park also highlighted the area’s “importance as a game preserve and an arena of scientific inquiry” (Spence 88). The initial land management philosophy at the time of the park’s creation centered around “resource *protection* – protecting park resources from various types of exploitation prohibited by law or regulations” (Catton et al. 2). The 1916 Organic Act continued to define land management for early park officials as it formally established the National Park Service to “regulate the use of the Federal areas known as national parks, monuments, and reservations” with the purpose of “conserve[ing] the scenery, the natural and historic objects, and the wildlife” to ultimately “provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations” (“Organic Act of 1916”). These pieces of legislation infer that the park was to be managed for the benefit of settlers present and future. The land’s value was defined in its type of hunting game, the knowledge it could produce for settlers and recreationists, and the

profit it generated for the park service. Preservation efforts were predicated on how long the park would be able to provide the same type of extractive enjoyment for American tourists, scientists, and hunters. Local species were manipulated, first via predator reduction programs to increase the presence of game animals like elk and deer, and then via efforts to stock park waters with trout. Park administration efforts to bolster “preferred species” included enlisting rangers and licensed hunters to poison or kill hundreds of coyotes and dozens of eagles, mountain lions, and wolves; importing dozens of elk from Yellowstone in 1912; and sowing hayseed in frequently visited areas of the park to “improve the chance that tourists might see [elk] on a regular basis” (Spence 88). Sportfishing became a heavily promoted tourist act when the park service “enthusiastically sanctioned not only the regulated taking of fish but also the introduction of numerous nonnative species.” In 1926 park officials stocked about 3.3 million trout fry from Glacier’s resident fish hatchery into the park’s lakes and rivers (Sellars 80). These examples illustrate how the conception of land management revolved around managing for the most productive tourist experience and related economy. Early park officials only put into the land what they would later encourage people to take out of it, ensuring the park was a perpetual attraction for a wide range of visitors. Just like with the initial removal of the Blackfeet and early settlers’ conception of the “wilderness”, a dichotomy exists here in which they manipulated the ecosystems of the park in order to curate an experience they defined as “pristine” and “original.”

As the challenges that park service employees encountered evolved with social and environmental changes to the park, an emphasis on “a more active, science-based form of resource *management*” instead of “protection” emerged. This updated framework aimed to “maintain natural processes, preserve ecosystem resilience, conserve biodiversity, and protect

and manage cultural resources” (Catton et al. 2). On the Glacier’s Guiding Principles section of the National Park Service website the park’s purpose is to:

- Preserve and protect natural and cultural resources unimpaired for future generations (1910 legislation establishing Glacier National Park; 1916 Organic Act).
- Provide opportunities to experience, understand, appreciate, and enjoy Glacier National Park consistent with the preservation of resources “in a state of nature” (1910 legislation establishing Glacier National Park; 1916 Organic Act).
- Celebrate the ongoing peace, friendship, and goodwill among nations, recognize the need for cooperation in a world of shared resources (1932 international peace park legislation).

Similarly, the park’s Foundation Document defines the purpose as such:

The purpose of Glacier National Park, part of the world’s first international peace park, is to preserve the scenic glacially carved landscape, wildlife, natural processes, and cultural heritage at the heart of the Crown of the Continent for the benefit, enjoyment, and understanding of the public (4).

Though these two purposes built upon the foundation that the original legislature depicted, they incorporate more aspects of environmental health and resilience. The management documents governing conservation work in the park have evolved from a thirteen paragraph operations manual a century ago to a collection of fourteen separate management plans focusing on the specifics of various resources (Catton et al. 1). However, they still have largely anthropocentric goals. Every point in the purpose statements above lays out a framework for conservation only to conclude with a remark about public enjoyment of the park’s visitors and recreationists. Land management, though evolved, is still predicated on how we benefit from and manipulate our experience of the earth.

The Glacier Foundation Document houses extensive management plans and tactics for projects regarding the water, air, and wildlife habitats, yet their Tribal Connections section lacks any contemporary initiative and instead focuses on how best to share Blackfoot history. Though

they do make note of the spiritual and cultural significance this land represents to the Blackfeet, the park service claims no agency in Blackfoot removal and many of the current conditions, trends, and opportunities focus on archeological and ethnographic research and historical opportunities. They also mention improving museum space to cultivate “improved visitor understanding of human history in the park” again prioritizing the preservation of history and not the opportunity to bring the history into present conversation of management techniques. Though they do propose a “continued and expanded collaboration and consolation with tribes on park management issues” (“Foundation Document: Glacier National Park” 28), their emphasis on the historical and cultural significance the land holds to the tribes is greater. In the section below proposed collaboration, the document states potential “changes in visitor expectations could conflict with traditional tribal uses of land” as a threat, reinforcing the idea that tourists’ perception of the land and visitor experience is their utmost priority. This statement also falls in line with the notion that the park is managed for white American recreationists, not the Native populations who originally lived and stewarded with the land.

Glacier National Park’s creation and cultivation is fraught with settler colonial ideals. Blackfeet homeland, personhood, and cultural identity was co-opted to further settler colonial ideology in the form of the conservation movement. Previous accounts of Indigenous displacement and the history of their land management practices trace ideas of the wilderness myth, Manifest Destiny, and destroying to replace. These concepts set up a framework that paints land management as a job done to maintain a resource, not to manage the land in partnership with its needs as contemporary Blackfeet conservation strategies aim to do.

Moving Forward: Evaluating Contemporary Blackfoot Conservation Efforts and Identifying Future Possibilities

Contemporary initiatives: Blackfoot conservation efforts in an age of exclusion

Contemporary Blackfoot conservation efforts can be characterized by the values of persistence, collectivism, reciprocity, and cultivating an understanding of the land. Popular Blackfoot conservation groups have emerged as their land is continually threatened by fracking companies and biodiversity challenges. Some of these organizations include the Blackfeet Headwaters Alliance, the Blackfeet Anti-Fracking Coalition, the Glacier-Two Medicine Alliance, the Sacred Land Film Project, and the Blackfoot Challenge to name a few. A few of these organizations work with the Badger-Two Medicine area while others work with the Blackfoot Watershed further South.⁸ An over 130,000-acre plot of undeveloped land, the Badger Two Medicine sits just under the Southern borders of the of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation and Glacier National Park. Though not formally protected by any regulations or wilderness designations, the Badger-Two Medicine is an active Traditional Cultural District as well as the “largest unprotected roadless tract adjacent to the Bob Marshall Wilderness in Montana.” Its significance lies in its symbolism and its function. Because it was excluded from any neighboring federal park or legal designation, it was never subject to the same bureaucratic changes and conditions that shaped Glacier National Park, leaving it close to the way Blackfoot ancestors left it. Nowadays, local Blackfoot people utilize Badger-Two Medicine to hunt, fish, hike, horse pack, gather herbs, perform culturally significant ceremonies, and connect with the earth. Its size and roadless feature also designate it as one of Montana’s more important wildlife

⁸ See Figure 2 for a map outlining the location of the Blackfoot Watershed.

corridors. Despite its cultural and environmental significance, the Badger-Two Medicine continually faces threats of oil and gas development, timber harvest, and road-building. The Glacier-Two Medicine Alliance works in tireless opposition to these detrimental changes and via a collective effort between local conservationists, the Blackfeet Tribal Council, tribal members, and community members who aim to “create a shared vision for the area’s future” as they believe it “imperative that the Badger-Two Medicine be considered” for “permanent protection” (Glacier Two-Medicine Alliance).

Some, like the Blackfoot Challenge and the Glacier-Two Medicine Alliance, mirror activist groups that Gilio-Whitaker refers to as “increasingly radical partnerships with local communities to form private land trusts and conservation easements.” Others, like the Anti-Fracking Coalition, Sacred Land Film Project, and the Blackfeet Headwaters Alliance exist as “ephemeral” groups, “forming as the need arises and disbanding as campaigns for environmental justice are won and lost” (Gilio-Whitaker 151). These latter groups specifically are responses to corporations’ interest in oil and gas drilling in the sacred area. Not so different from the park service, these organizations highlight mission statements focused on preserving these lands for future generations, yet their intention is different. The Glacier-Two Medicine Alliance, for example, aims to conserve the landscape so that “a child of future generations will recognize and can experience the same cultural richness that we find in the wild lands of the Badger-Two Medicine today” (Glacier-Two Medicine Alliance). They aim to cultivate not a spectacle or an artificial “state of nature” (“Management”) but an opportunity to enter into cultural relationship with the land.

Within the park, there are efforts to control the narrative of the land and recenter Blackfoot spirituality and presence in their homeland. Sun Tours, for example, is the first

company to offer a Native American interpretation of Glacier National Park. Started in 1992 as a response to Glacier's "vacant and minimal" interpretation of and connection to Blackfoot culture, Sun Tours aims to "explore the inclusion of Native Blackfoot history and cultural aspects to [the Blackfoot's] original ancestral territory." To this day, Sun Tours is the only tour service centered around Blackfoot history and spirituality. Blackfoot guides share with visitors their perspective on "park history, animal species, common plants and roots used for nutrition and medicine; and the spiritual and philosophical perspectives/stories of the Blackfoot people" (Sun Tours). Though not considered direct conservation work, Sun Tours is an example of the work that is necessary to instill a sustained interest of the land within the greater public. By familiarizing non-Native people with the specific names and histories of a land that has been greatly reinterpreted, Sun Tours is essentially embedding ideas of grounded normativity into the National Park recreational experience. The efforts of Sun Tours ultimately work towards a resurgence of Blackfoot conservation strategies. Coulthard's aforementioned theory of grounded normativity as an emphasis on place-based relations helps us understand a key driving factor in Indigenous conservation framework. If "place is a way of knowing, experiencing, and relating to the world and with others" it follows, then, that Sun Tours' intention to connect Native and non-native people with the significance and personhood of the land aims to cultivate the "relational practices and forms of knowledge" that eventually "guide forms of resistance against other rationalizations of the world that threaten to erase or destroy our senses of place" (61).

The threats in this case, are multitudinous, encompassing western conservation ideology, oil and fracking corporations' interests, policy changes dictating what land is protected and how it is regulated, and Glacier National Park's longstanding misinterpretation of Blackfoot presence.

The result is an introduction to an alternative land management framework and the notion of managing *with* the land as opposed to managing the land.

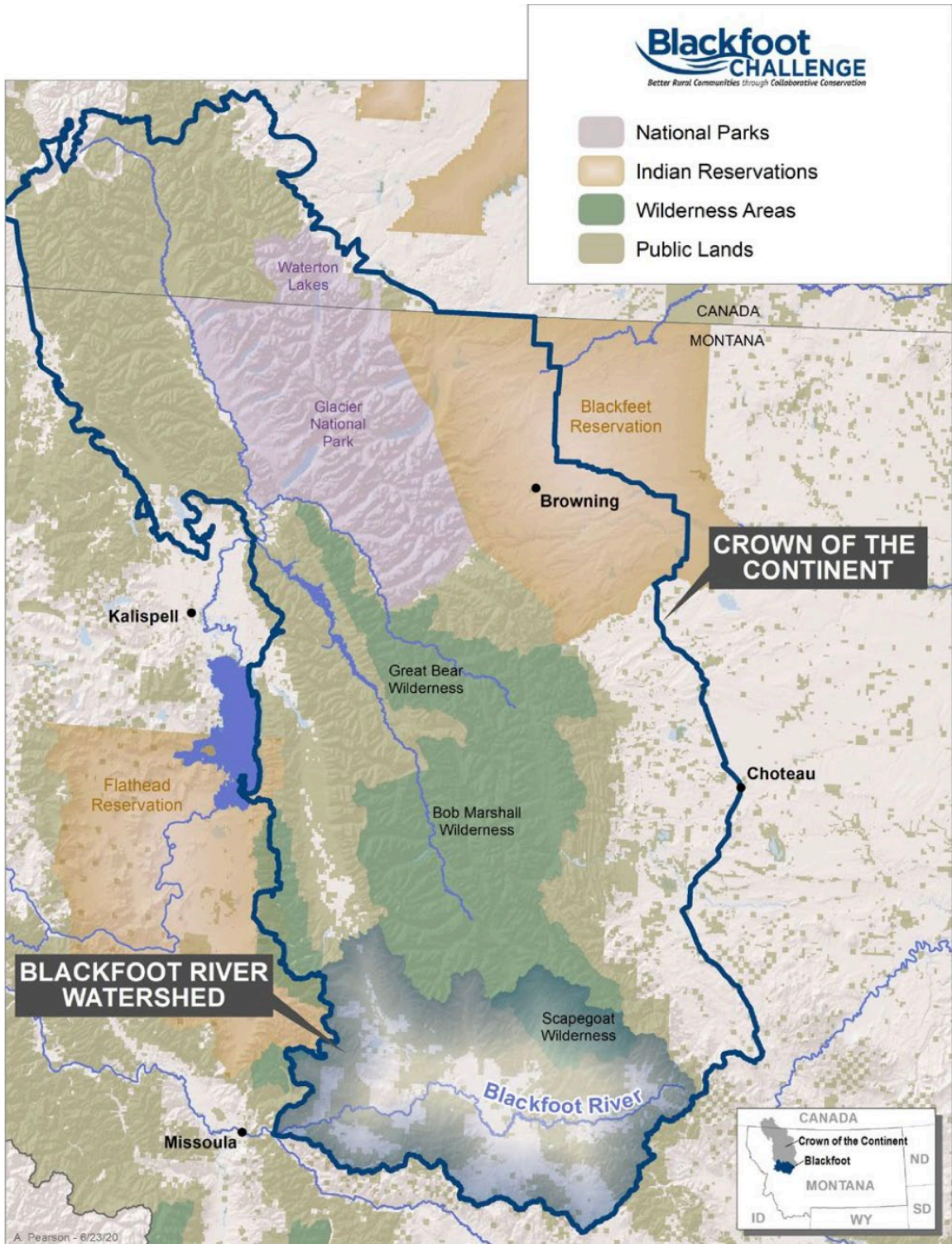


Figure 2: Map of the Blackfoot Watershed (Blackfoot Challenge Stewardship Guide)

This map makes clear the position of the Blackfoot Watershed in its physical relation to Glacier National Park and the Blackfeet Indian Reservation.

The Blackfoot Challenge’s work and philosophy is a foray into what more inclusive conservation framework could look like in the case of Glacier National Park, though it does not operate directly within or around the park but further south in the Blackfoot Watershed. The organization is built on partnerships between landowners along the Blackfoot River and public agencies. The Blackfoot Challenge serves as an exemplar for the partnerships that Glacier National Park could cultivate with neighboring tribal members and organizations, as evidenced in their guiding principles:

We have never thought of ourselves as the true ‘owners’ of this land. Instead, we are stewards of the soil, streams, grass, timber, and wildlife that belong to this ecosystem. The land is the lifeblood of our community, and we strive to be worthy caretakers of those resources that fall under our management (qtd. in Blackfoot Watershed Stewardship Guide 1).

The Blackfoot Challenge has a wide variety of conservation projects in the works, most notably the maintenance of a 41,100-acre mixed publicly and privately owned land tract called the Blackfoot Community Conservation Area. They also maintain initiatives around developing conservation strategies, forestry work, land stewardship, aquatic health, wildlife preservation, education, and a Trumpeter Swan population restoration project. In these projects, the Blackfoot Challenge centers “respect and collaboration among neighbors” to help them all be “better stewards of the landscape.” They recognize that “working together” enables them to “pool the knowledge that comes from decades of living on the land with a focus on the latest research and information”, ultimately producing “a way for [them] to share [their] collective knowledge and understanding, for [their] own good and for this place [they] all call home” (Blackfoot Watershed Stewardship Guide).

The Blackfoot Challenge directly challenges the common NPS structure of scale and intention, two of the biggest key differences I have identified between federal and local-Indigenous land management frameworks. The NPS (stick w/abbreviation if you’re going to use

it above) operates on a large scale, one that even when focused on one specific park, has the tendency to eclipse pertinent considerations of land health as the entire system does not curate a relationship to the land. When the scale of operation is so large and there are a multitude of people with different intentions, it is possible for the character and minutia of the land to get lost in translation. In order to sustain a large system that operates smoothly across Glacier's one million acres of parkland, a compromise exists in which cultural and metaphysical significance is sacrificed for the streamlined goal of managing a unilateral perception of the park and not a relationship with the varying specificity of land. The issue of scale goes hand in hand with a difference in intention; managing the land for a tourists' experience and an economic profit translates into actions very differently than those rooted in the intention of community and reciprocity with the earth and its ecosystems. These missing links were arguably constructed by the settler colonial wilderness ethos that figures like Muir so ardently promoted and thinkers like Cronon actively denounce. The settler systems of belief that structure the foundation of the NPS dictate that land must be managed to maintain its "natural" perception of being "untouched wilderness", reducing it to a controllable space. There is no agency in the land and its lifeforms when their function is pre-prescribed by a large-scale bureaucratic institution. There is no time or effort to get to know the land in the same way common in Indigenous relations to the earth when the intention lies in economic and historical success. This line of thinking only permits land management and makes the idea of managing *with* land nearly impossible as there is no consideration for listening the land if you never believed that it had a voice in the first place.

Managing with land does not only have implications for Glacier National Park, though. In fact, the philosophy could be instituted globally with the United Nations' Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) following

recommendations. IPBES, “the global leader on assessing policy pertaining to biodiversity and the environment”, corroborates the theory of managing with land and outlines its potential in reimagining conservation. The group released a report in 2019 stating that “local communities can more effectively manage and co-manage lands than local or federal governments.” They “urged governments to seriously consider Indigenous knowledges bases” since “sustainability and biodiversity underpin Indigenous belief structures” and recommended that “conserved spaces should work with Indigenous communities towards common goals” (Smith). This idea of co-management, however, would only work if managers are willing to share power. Instead of simply being asked to respond to agency proposals, tribes should be involved in more meaningful ways like crafting management proposals (Craig et al. 240). Scholar and professor at the University of Montana Martin Nie writes that co-management is characterized by “the sharing of resource management goals and responsibilities between tribes and federal agencies” (602) and includes actions such as “collaboratively setting and implementing goals and objectives, regular meetings with tribal and agency officials, special processes for consideration of tribal proposals, and tribal inclusion on agency interdisciplinary planning teams” (Craig et al. 240). Additionally, it has been suggested that a more inclusive land management framework in Glacier National Park includes reinstating traditional practices like hunting, fishing, gathering, and allowing access to sacred and traditional sites. Another proposed alteration to park management is a voluntary ban of visitor use of certain peaks and spiritual sites during culturally significant months of the year so that the Blackfeet could restore some notions of collective continuance and reinstate traditional spiritual practices. In conducting interviews with several tribal members, it was found that most Blackfeet wanted “greater inclusion and influence in park management and decision making.” They stated that their interviewees expressed how on-site

practices simultaneously nourished their connection to the mountains and enhanced the well-being of the mountains themselves. One Blackfoot woman claimed that “the park misses the people”:

There’s a belief in being a part of the land that if you, well, it’s like this: when I go picking sweetgrass- and it’s difficult because they don’t grow in a big bunch, you can’t just pick a bunch of grass and walk off, it’s like here and there and there- one of them, when you’re looking, will call you. It will shine a certain way, and you have a responsibility to pick that. If you don’t, you’re turning away the gift of the Creator, and so it may not grow again. The same way with what happens in the park. The land is getting to the place it doesn’t know us anymore, because it’s like people are turning away their gifts. And the things that need to be harvested are not being harvested. So the park misses us as much as we miss the park (Craig et al. 237).

This idea that the land needs the people to manage it is central to Blackfoot conservation philosophy. This woman’s statement highlights notions of the Creation stories by referencing the Creator Sun’s gift to his people, reciprocal relations via the responsibility to pick culturally significant plants, and Indigenous place-thought with the idea that the sweetgrass will “call” people to pick it and that the park “misses the people.” Combined, these philosophies give personhood to the land and outline a conservation philosophy characterized by reciprocity and partnership in managing with the land.

The introduction of co-management strategies could reinterpret how land is experienced and respected. There is so much to learn from the exchange of knowledge and community. The idea of a joint management strategy provides opportunity for “mutual learning and cross-cultural capacity building for both indigenous groups and government agencies” (240-241). A successful approach to managing with land might come from emulating groups like the Blackfoot Challenge to rely on an egalitarian based consultation approach that includes a variety of communities.

Managing Complications: A Fine Line Between Appropriation and Proper Communication

The balance of preservation for all while respecting the sovereignty of certain groups is precarious, just as the conservation movement as a whole is fraught with complications. Many Blackfeet interviewed by Craig et al. expressed feelings of being “traumatized, degraded, and alienated” due to their lack of access to the mountains and loss of relationship with the landscape (237). Because of the long and turbulent history the Blackfeet have with Glacier National Park and the National Park Service many are unwilling to align with the federal government, believing that “they would ‘never get a shot with them’ and that [you] would ‘not be a part of that organization if you’re a Blackfeet.’” For those that did land a position withing the park, many believed that “employment with the [National Park Service] was restricted to ‘servant jobs’ as ‘toilet rangers’” (237). These perspectives serve as barriers to effective relationship building between park officials and tribal members.

Yet we also cannot shirk conservation work and the health of Glacier National Park entirely onto the Blackfeet, as this shifts conservational burden onto a community that has been historically depressed and devalued by colonialism. Gilio-Whitaker elaborates on this dichotomy in describing anthropologist Shepard Krech III’s “ecological Indian,” calling the theory a “revamped version of the noble savage who became the stand-in for an environmental ethic the US should aspire to,” the new stereotype ultimately setting “an impossibly high standard to which white environmentalists would hold Native people for decades” (103). In working towards a more inclusive land management framework, we must be cautious of perpetuating the essentializing myth that all Indigenous people are in harmony with nature and therefore can handle undue burdens and ecological problems that they did not cause.

Gilio-Whitaker continues her analysis of Indigenous people in the western environmental movement to critique the counterculture hippie's environmental ethic. Though just an example, the relationship between hippies and Indigenous groups is representative of the way many modern conservationists are approaching the idea of co-management. She argues that "as settlers [hippies] unconsciously brought with them worldviews and behavior patterns that were inconsistent with Indigenous paradigms and tried to fit Indigenous worldviews and practices into their own cognitive frameworks" (104). Gilio-Whitaker outlines how Indigenous systems of thinking have been co-opted and appropriated by non-native groups in the past, her point serving as a reminder for the deference necessary in collaboration around Native conservation initiatives.

As such, there are limitations to this study, and I recognize that my work is by no means comprehensive. This project could be extended into an analysis of technical environmental practices to evaluate the physical result that land management and managing with land have on the earth. Further research on the similarities and differences of specific land management practices used in Glacier and in areas like the Badger-Two Medicine or the Blackfoot Watershed could better illuminate whether different management entities are actively cultivating a relationship with the physical earth. This type of analysis would bring a level of science and hard data that this paper is currently missing. Additionally, this level of analysis would better inform recommendations of what more inclusive or beneficial conservation framework could be moving forward, especially because it incorporates the perspective of the earth itself, to a degree. Catton et al.'s article "Protecting the Crown: A Century of Resource Management in Glacier National Park", for example, expands the scope of this project since it tracks conservation initiatives in the park over time. If someone else or I were to continue this work, I would recommend extending

the current discussion beyond what land management *means* into what land management *is* in order to evaluate practices from a place of data and results rather than just theory.

Managing With the Land: Towards a More Inclusive Conservation Framework

Despite the pervasive influence of settler colonialism and its withstanding legacy in conservation work, there is hope for collaboration. There is hope in part because collaboration has happened before and in part because there is potential in preservation for change. In the 2017 case of the Keystone XL pipeline, for example, the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska and white American landowners united over the same goal: to protect the land from the development of a new oil pipeline. A Des Moines Register article tells the story of this collaboration, describing a “landless” Ponca Tribe “lined up to protect the pastures and crop fields of white farmers and ranchers who worry about the possible environmental threat of TransCanada’s Keystone XL” (Hardy, “Removed from the land before”). Even though the Ponca had been displaced from this land, they still felt an obligation to protect it for its personal and cultural significance. A member from the Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma expressed why they chose to participate in this demonstration even though they would not gain any more access to the land: “I still belong to this land. This land sustained life for my people for thousands of generations. And although they may have removed us from this land, they could never take it away from us, because it lives in our hearts,” (qtd. in Hardy). This protest exemplifies the attitude that Indigenous people, the Blackfeet included, tend to have towards co-management. The Blackfeet, and the Ponca Tribe in this case, believe that though co-management it is possible to maintain connection with their ancestral lands, whether they live within them or not. This philosophy can be carried over into goals of co-management with the National Park Service in Glacier and beyond. In this case, co-management does not explicitly mean a relationship between the NPS and tribes, but it opens the door for a

multitude of small-scale community partners and tribal organizations to collaborate for the health of the land and the participation of tribes.

Though the means to creating Glacier were radically unjust and detrimental to the Blackfoot Confederacy past and present, some overarching goals of preservation hold potential for positive change. Craig et al. recount “bittersweet” interviews with Blackfeet tribal members who feel “ripped off” in terms of their involvement and autonomy in the park. A dichotomy also exists, however, in which Blackfeet “supported the park’s mission to preserve nature, valued its conservation achievements, and believed that the park should be managed with these goals as a priority” as facets of the National Park Service philosophy to aim to “protect the trees, the fish, the wildlife, [and] the water” as well as save the land from commercial or residential development. Some Blackfeet recognize that in preserving the landscape there is potential to revive past cultural connections to the mountains:

As one man explained, ‘It’s about what we had once. It’s about keeping that area just as good as we’ve known it to be from the past, to today, into the future.’ In protecting the landscape both ecologically and aesthetically, the park has preserved the possibility of what many Blackfeet feel are authentic cultural relationships through appropriate on-site practices. The potential role of the park is even more important in the context of historical Blackfeet dispossession of land and culture. Many Blackfeet see Glacier National Park as the ‘last refuge’, both practically and symbolically. As this elder remarked, ‘The buffalo are gone. Our way of life is gone. But maybe there’s hope because those mountains are still there’” (238).

Though these cultural connections may currently be stifled by contemporary philosophy of land ownership and subsequent management techniques, many Indigenous conservation groups are expanding the notion of what co-management and collaboration can look like. Preservation for the sake of cultural renewal and maintaining a reciprocal relationship with the earth is gaining popularity in Montana as groups like the Blackfoot Challenge, the Glacier Two-Medicine Alliance, and Sun Tours continue to find success and support.

Though there are still mountains of autonomy and sovereignty to regain, these groups are currently shaping the contemporary conservation movement to include Blackfoot conservation philosophy and more inclusive management framework in partnership with land.

Bibliography

- “About Glacier-Two Medicine Alliance - Glacier-Two Medicine Alliance.” *Glacier*, www.glaciertwomedicine.org/about-us. Accessed 4 May 2023.
- Akenson, Donald Harman. *God's Peoples: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel, and Ulster*. Cornell Univ. Press, 1992.
- “American Indian Tribes.” *National Parks Service*, 17 Dec. 2020, www.nps.gov/glac/learn/historyculture/tribes.htm.
- Bacon, J. M. “Settler Colonialism as Eco-Social Structure and the Production of Colonial Ecological Violence.” *Environmental Sociology*, vol. 5, no. 1, Jan. 2019, pp. 59–69. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23251042.2018.1474725>.
- “Blackfoot Challenge - Better Rural Communities Through Collaborative Conservation.” *Blackfoot Challenge*, <https://blkftstaging.wpengine.com/>. Accessed 10 May 2023.
- Blackfeet Nation*. <https://blackfeetnation.com/>. Accessed 15 Nov. 2022.
- “Blackfoot Watershed Stewardship Guide: Resources for Conserving Community Values through Land and Water Stewardship.” *Blackfoot Challenge*, 27 May 2022, blackfootchallenge.org/stewardship-guide/.
- Bullchild, Percy. *The Sun Came down: The History of the World as My Blackfeet Elders Told It*. University of Nebraska Press, 2005.
- Burdeau, George, and Pamela Roberts. *Backbone of the World: The Blackfeet*. Rattlesnake Productions, 1998, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iL83_7lGyIQ&t=2263s. Accessed 19 May 2023.
- Catton, Theodore, et al. “‘Protecting the Crown’: A Century of Resource Management in Glacier National Park.” *National Park Service History eLibrary*, June 2011, www.npshistory.com/publications/glac/protecting-the-crown.pdf.
- Craig, David R, et al. “‘Blackfeet Belong to the Mountains’: Hope, Loss, and Blackfeet Claims to Glacier National Park, Montana.” *Conservation and Society*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2012, p. 232, <https://doi.org/10.4103/0972-4923.101836>.
- Cronon, William. *The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature*. W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1995.
- Deloria Jr., Vine. *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*. Fulcrum Publishing, 1972.
- Deloria Jr., Vine. *The Metaphysics of Modern Existence*. Fulcrum, 2012.

- Dunbar Ortiz, Roxanne. *An Indigenous People's History of the United States*. Beacon Press, 2015.
- Hardy, Kevin. "Removed from the Land before, Ponca Nation Vows to Protect the Earth from Keystone XL." *The Des Moines Register*, <https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/money/business/2017/05/25/removed-land-before-ponca-nation-vows-protect-earth-keystone-xl/315018001/>. Accessed 8 June 2023.
- Purdy, Jedediah. "Environmentalism's Racist History." *The New Yorker*, 13 Aug. 2015, www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/environmentalisms-racist-history.
- Farr, William E. "'When We Were First Paid': The Blackfoot Treaty, The Western Tribes, and The Creation of the Common Hunting Ground, 1855." *Great Plains Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2001, pp. 131–154.
- "Foundation Document: Glacier National Park." *National Parks Service*, Oct. 2016, www.nps.gov/glac/learn/management/upload/GLAC_FD_SP.pdf.
- Glacier-Two Medicine Alliance*, <https://www.glaciertwomedicine.org/tour-the-landscape/forgotten-montana-wildlands>. Accessed 10 May 2023.
- Gilio-Whitaker, Dina. *As Long as Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, from Colonization to Standing Rock*. Beacon Press, 2019.
- "Glacier's Guiding Principles." *National Parks Service*, 13 Aug. 2019, www.nps.gov/glac/learn/education/glacier_principles.htm.
- "Glacier NP: Throught the Years in Glacier National Park: An Administrative History (Chapter 2)." *National Parks Service*, www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/glac/chap2.htm#:~:text=By%20an%20Act%20of%20February,the%20boundaries%20of%20the%20park. Accessed 21 May 2023.
- Glen Sean Coulthard. *Red Skin, White Masks*. University of Montana Press, 2014.
- Indian Education for All Unit. *Blackfeet Reservation Timeline; Blackfeet Tribe*. "PDF." Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2017.
- Jennings, Francis. "The Indian's Revolution." In *The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism*. Edited by Alfred F. Young. De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976.
- Jr., Quinn Smith. "A Stolen History, Future Claims: The Blackfeet Nation and Glacier National Park." *The Wellian Magazine*, 14 Oct. 2020, sites.duke.edu/thewellianmag/2020/10/14/a-stolen-history-future-claims/.

- Keeler, Kyle. "Colonial Theft and Indigenous Resistance in the Kleptocene." *Edge Effects*, 8 Sept. 2020, <https://edgeeffects.net/kleptocene/>.
- Kelly, Fred. (2005). *Anishnaabe leadership*. Unpublished manuscript.
- "Management." *National Parks Service*, 23 Nov. 2018, www.nps.gov/glac/learn/management/index.htm.
- MT OPI Indian Education Division. *1855 Lame Bull Treaty and the Blackfeet - Lea Whitford*. YouTube, YouTube, 18 Feb. 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TFkHoDF9s3U>. Accessed 21 May 2023.
- Muir, John. *The Wild Parks and Forest Reservations of the West*, Atlantic Monthly Co., Boston, MA, 1898.
- National Park Service History: NPS Archives, Records, and Research*. <https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/hisnps/NPSArchives.htm>. Accessed 15 Nov. 2022.
- Nelson, Melissa K. *Original Instructions: Indigenous Teachings for a Sustainable Future*. Bear & Company, 2008.
- "New IACB Film: 'The Blackfeet, the Great Northern Railway, and Glacier National Park.'" *U.S. Department of the Interior*, 25 Jan. 2022, www.doi.gov/iacb/new-iacb-film-blackfeet-great-northern-railway-and-glacier-national-park-0.
- Nie, Martin. "The Use of Co-Management and Protected Land-Use Designations to Protect Tribal Cultural Resources and Reserved Treaty Rights on Federal Lands." *Natural Resources Journal*, vol. 48, no. 3, 2008, pp. 585–647.
- "Organic Act of 1916." *National Parks Service*, 22 Apr. 2021, www.nps.gov/grba/learn/management/organic-act-of-1916.htm.
- Peaco, Jim. "The Importance of John Muir." *National Parks Service*, <https://www.nps.gov/jomu/learn/education/upload/The-Importance-of-John-Muir.pdf>
- Phippen, J. Weston. "'Kill Every Buffalo You Can! Every Buffalo Dead Is an Indian Gone.'" *The Atlantic*, 7 June 2021, www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2016/05/the-buffalo-killers/482349/.
- Whyte, Kyle Powys. "Indigenous Climate Change Studies: Indigenizing Futures, Decolonizing the Anthropocene." *English Language Notes*, vol. 55, no. 1–2, Fall 2017.
- Whyte, Kyle Powys. "Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice." *Environment and Society: Advances in Research*, vol. 9, Sept. 2018.

- Rosier, Paul C. “‘Modern America Desperately Needs to Listen’: The Emerging Indian in an Age of Environmental Crisis.” *The Journal of American History*, vol. 100, no. 3, 2013, pp. 711–35.
- Sellars, Richard West. *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History*. Yale University Press, 2009.
- Siksikaititapi – Blackfoot Confederacy Tribal Council*. <https://blackfootconfederacy.ca/>. Accessed 17 May 2023.
- Smith Jr., Quinn. “A Stolen History, Future Claims: The Blackfeet Nation and Glacier National Park.” *The Wellian Magazine*, 14 Oct. 2020.
- Spence, Mark David. *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks*. Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Sun Tours*, <https://www.suntours.co/about-us/>. Accessed 10 May 2023.
- Taylor, Dorceta E. *The Rise of the American Conservation Movement: Power, Privilege, and Environmental Protection*. Duke University Press, 2016.
- Thomas, Orla, et al. *One of the USA’s Most Powerful Landscapes, Glacier National Park Has Long Been Held Sacred by the Area’s Native American Peoples. Explore This Part of Montana to Learn the Stories of the Tribal Relationship with the Land – and What Lessons It Offers for the Future*. 2020.
- Watts, Vanessa. “Indigenous Place-Thought and Agency Amongst Humans and Non Humans (First Woman and Sky Woman Go On a European World Tour!).” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1, May 2013. jps.library.utoronto.ca, <https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/19145>.
- Wolfe, Patrick. “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native.” *Journal of Genocide Research*, vol. 8, no. 4, Dec. 2006, pp. 387–409. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240>.
- Young, Alfred F. “The Indian’s Revolution.” *Dissent: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism*, Northern Illinois University Press, DeKalb, 1980.

Really great work utilizing settler colonial and Indigenous theory to close-read a variety of forms (literature, creation story, history, advertisements, conservation policy, digital repositories, etc.).

This is a really great model for the way that interdisciplinary environmental humanities work should be done.

Very impressive.

And also, I have to say, The Blackfoot people “became the backbone of the tourism industry in what used to be the backbone of their world” is an EXCELLENT SENTENCE. Grabs my attention every time I read it.

That said, my questions are really just about thinking through some statements you made throughout/picking your brain—I want to think through this stuff with you rather than “quiz” you.

Questions:

1. In a lot of your statements about interactions between the human and other-than-human natural, it seems like you move between “people” and “human” as a synonym. Is this purposeful (do you do it for a specific reason)? Regardless, I’d just like you to think through for a moment or explain how you see the difference or the similarities between “humanity” and “personhood” in general and in your sources. (Humanity/humans is/are a scientific category, “personhood” is the philosophical and moral idea of what constitutes a “person” with the ability to think, feel, etc. I’d say that, esp. based on your sources, the Tribal Nations that make up the Blackfoot Confederacy would grant personhood to many other-than-human entities, and I think you might say that as well given the way that you discuss land, esp. in respect to grounded normativity and Indigenous place-thought...)
2. You mention many times that conservation is seen as a “positive” movement. What do you mean by positive, and how might you explain it? It first appears in “scare quotes,”

and I think a brief explanation, either in-text or in a footnote would be helpful to clarify this.

3. At one point you argue that Blackfoot people “aim to cultivate not a spectacle or an artificial ‘state of nature’ (‘Management’) but an opportunity to enter into cultural relationship with the land.” I think that’s true, absolutely! BUT, might the NPS and its employees also argue that this is what they’re doing? I think I know the differences here, and I have my own ideas about it, but I’d like to hear *you* specify these differences a bit more, if you could...

4. A TON of ideas, evidence, and arguments here to support ongoing arguments that conservation is a tool of settler colonial theft and the way to combat that theft and environmental damage is placing regional Tribal Nations in leadership roles in conservation. That also strengthens Native sovereignty, beginning with what some people call “conservation sovereignty.” If you wanted to move this work further, you could, I think, engage with this Indigenous conservation literature further to continue to provide evidence for this developing argument.

Notes on presentation:

- “Positive” notion of conservation movement mentioned again—but what does this mean?