

CASTING FOR CONSERVATION: RELIGION, POPULAR CULTURE, AND THE  
POLITICS OF RIVER RESTORATION

By

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To my parents and my wife

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By

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I explore the religious dimensions of American popular culture through activities such as fly fishing. In his work on popular culture, David Chidester has wondered what difference it makes to call any activity religion. In response, I argue that participants in a variety of venues of popular culture, such as fly fishing, often view their sport as religion. In doing so, they situate their “religion” in the larger context of American religious and environmental history. My research begins with in depth analyses of religion, media, and literary history of angling prior to engaging in fieldwork to examine the relations between religious and participation in grassroots environmental politics. By focusing on popular culture, I advocate the use of religion as a necessary category for understanding the construction of human value systems, particularly as they relate to environmental ethics, policy, and conflict. Further, when considering environmental policy and environmental conflict resolution, the question of values, religious or otherwise, is often overlooked. Analyzing environmental policy and environmental conflict, I argue for more serious consideration of the role of religion or religious values. In doing so, I build on the philosophies of environmental pragmatism and classical American pragmatism, which advocate paying attention to the ways in which individuals and communities create ethics and values out of the context of experience. As evidenced through my research, the values of

anglers pragmatically emerge out of local, place-based practices such as fishing. Because these values emerge from the context of practice, I argue in response to Chidester that it makes a difference to call any activity religion when the participants in that activity use the practices and perceptions of religion in the context of popular culture as tools for effectively engaging both the environmental and civic realms of ethics and policy.

CHAPTER 1  
WADING INTO NEW WATERSHEDS OF RELIGION AND NATURE

All winter long, every week or so, I took the fly rods from their metal cocoons, unwrapped them, rubbed them with clean soft rags, rigged them up with line and fly, and cast a line out across the backyard and down toward the hickory trees along the edge of the gorge. And with each cast mountain trout would rise in my imagination, all vital and wrinkling with details of motion and vigor (Middleton 1991: 30-31).

New water is always a lure. . . I knew I would spend dozens of hours exploring them as I made my own discoveries. . . Where ever there is good fishing, [however] there is work to be done (Camuto 2004: 40).

**Journeys, Maps, and Finding Place**

Anglers of varying persuasions often admit that when fishing one is enticed to go around the next river bend eager to see what is in store for them. What structure might the water hold? Which fish might be rising to a bug hatch? How many surprises, we often wonder, might lie ahead? As I will show in the following pages, indeed, for many anglers the journey on a body of water, or to that body of water, provides an essential component of the religious and spiritual worlds of angling. No author, I believe, captures sentiments surrounding angling adventures better than John Gierach. In one short story, he epitomized the cartographic thought processes of anglers by noting how as the season moves on, the maps in his truck tend to pile up. He has maps for every “state or province” he has driven through, hiked, and fished, and many of the “more wrinkled ones [maps] have scribbled notes and cryptic Xs next to beaver pods and bends in rivers” (Gierach 2003: 24-25). Maps mark and guide these journeys, they tell us where we are, but also allow us to search for surprises hidden around the next bend. However, even when following a map, we are often surprised when we get where we are going.

This notion captures the journey I have taken over the course of the past few years researching and writing this work. I started with a proposal, a map if you will, but feel that the end result is much more rewarding than I possibly imagined. In part, this is because as I

researched and I wrote, I uncovered more interests, philosophical quandaries, and potentially rich interdisciplinary dialogues than I originally thought to engage. In the end, I have in mind that my work will not only interest scholars investigating varieties of nature-based religious values, but also contribute to the work of grassroots civic environmentalism or help mediate environmental conflict.

In the midst of this research, writing, and reflecting on the writing, I realized that whether I was talking about native fish restoration or environmental conflict resolution my work was engaging the ways in which people were attempting to become native to their places, even if they did not use those terms. This was and is the work of homemaking, where anglers and ecologists worked to tie or bind themselves to their particular bioregions. If maps help us find places and locate ourselves, as Gierach stated, fishing potentially offers avenues for anglers to root themselves into their places through work on streams, restoration, political lobbying, or a host of other forms of environmental action. All of these things, then, flow together as potential responses to Wes Jackson's continued insistence that "the majority of solutions to both global and local problems must take place at the level of the expanded tribe, what civilization calls community. In effect," he explained, "we will be *required* to become *native* to our little *places* if we are to become native to this *place*, this continent . . ." (Jackson 1994: 2-3). While many anglers do not necessarily know the work of Jackson, I suspect that many who I interviewed in my research for this project would agree with him in many ways. Following these streams, then, my work marks how and why anglers are attempting to become native to the waters and watersheds in which they reside and fish.

## Original Questions

When I joined the graduate program in Religion and Nature at the University of Florida five years ago, I knew that while I wanted to study religion and nature, I wanted to break out of a mold that seemed cast in the form of Religion and Ecology. This was a mold that many trace back to Lynn White's now famous article "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," where he blasted religion out of the Garden of Eden by calling Christianity the most anthropocentric religion the world has ever seen (White 1967). White was hardly the first to connect nature or the environment to religion, however, his approach seemed pertinent and certainly unique enough to gain him status in the pantheon of early pioneers of the field. And, his point that "What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny – that is, by religion" seems to hold significant water (1967: 1203).

Since White's essay, a host of scholarship has emerged, especially in the last five to ten years exploring the ecological potential of the world's religious traditions. By the mid 1980's and early 1990s, scholars both inside and out of religious studies were engaging this conversation. In 1996, the American Academy of Religion formed the Religion and Ecology Group. Harvard University with the help of John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker, professors (at the time) at Bucknell University, hosted the Forum on World Religions and Ecology, and began publishing volumes under this title and espoused the idea that, as Tucker wrote, "Religions, thus, need to be reexamined in light of the current environmental crisis. . . . The world religions in all their complexity and variety remain one of the principle resources for symbolic ideas, spiritual inspiration, and ethical principles" (Tucker 1997: xvii-xix.). In other words, scholars of religion, environmental ethicists, and philosophers in various ways began an arduous quest for "resources of environmental ethics found in the world's religions" (ibid).

Scholars, philosophers, and ethicists, however, were not the only ones to respond to White's call to action. Over the last two decades or so, religious leaders ranging from the Pope to the Dalai Lama have sought to revise or at least recover an ecological message in their own religious traditions. Today, religious responses to the environment are as wide ranging and disparate as the traditions themselves. Hindus and Evangelical Protestants are speaking out and issuing statements of environmental concern. Further, inter-religious documents such as the "Columbia River Pastoral" and the *Earth Charter* are being published, all of which seek to address the ways in which humans relate to and value the natural world.

While most took their quests for religiously based environmental ethics into the realms of traditional religion in search of environmental ethics, however, I have been most captivated by White's statement that that because the roots of our ecological crisis are religious, so must the solution be "religious, whether we call it that or not" (1967: 1207). While studying religion, I have long held the belief that religion, as the work of "lived religion" theorists helps to reveal, often exists outside the confines of traditional religion, institutions, and communities. In looking for religion, "whether we call it that or not," in the realms of American popular culture I was encouraged by professors Anna Peterson and Bron Taylor to take seriously the currents of nature religion I saw so prominently displayed throughout the various streams of angling cultures, particularly fly fishers – among whom I count myself. As I trace in chapter 2, religion and fishing go hand-in-hand and examples of religious belief, material culture, and ritual practice rise in fishing like hungry trout to a spinner fall.

Initially, I simply sought ways in which one might consider activities like fishing to be analogous to religion or actually some form of nature religion or spirituality in and of itself. However, this effort felt anemic and barely scratched the surface of research possibilities. As I

spent a summer in New Mexico chasing trout, trout groups, and trout restoration projects I began to hear similar comments from participants in the various volunteer occasions such as stream clean-ups or stream bank stabilization projects. For example, New Mexico angler, guide, and conservationist Karen Denison explained to me one day how her passion for fly fishing led her to quit her “day job” as a research scientist and devote her life to fly fishing through guiding and instructing. Moreover, she reflected that her passion for angling raised her awareness about the environment. “You see areas that are affected,” she noted, “how they change, yes indeed. My awareness and concern have increased as a result of fly fishing to the degree that I have worked with three different trout fishing and conservation grassroots groups – Trout Unlimited, New Mexico Trout, and Sangre de Christo Fly Fishers” (Denison, interview: 2006 July 23). While most of the people I interviewed that summer were involved in some form of trout conservation, they all traced their actions to environmental values emergent from fly fishing and other nature-based activities, such as hunting or hiking and backpacking. This progression of values out of lived experiences in nature intrigued me, which is why, as you will see, I turn to the philosophical terrain of pragmatism and its most recent incarnation of environmental pragmatism.

I will admit that my turn to pragmatism is late and self-taught. This comes with the surprises of rounding the bend on the stream. (Not to mention that this field of religion and ecology is so new that we are still seeking resources for making sense of our data as we move through our work). First, I began reading about environmental politics, water, and watershed coalitions. This literature led me to discussions surrounding environmental conflict resolution, collaborative conservation, and ecological restoration where a great deal of emphasis is placed on culture, values, and political process. As I engaged this literature, I pondered the role of case studies in the study and development of environmental ethics. What does experience teach us

about philosophy, I wondered. This question led me to the most recent incarnation of pragmatism in “environmental pragmatism,” characterized by Andrew Light, Eric Katz, Bryan Norton, or Anthony Weston, to name a few. I followed these streams and they have led in some exciting directions, bringing me back around to some of my original questions in my own home waters of religious studies and lived religion. Because these streams of research led me to the terrain of pragmatism, I am still evaluating its effectiveness. While I am not yet convinced that it offers complete solutions, I do believe that it provides some necessary questions, correctives, and methodological approaches making environmental ethics more effective on the ground. Further, it has given me some interesting ways to engage my ethnographic material; while my ethnographic research has provided fodder for evaluating pragmatism, all the while searching for ways to understand nature-based experiences and pro-environmental behavior.

Like the theories of lived religion, which seek to understand religion as it is enacted by everyday people, on the street, in homes, in daily life, some forms of pragmatism insist that we should begin our search for philosophical and ethical groundwork by engaging the lived reality of the world, rather than in the quest for ideal forms that might be quite abstract from the world. Both sets of theoretical approaches ponder the relationships between the material worlds of practice, first, to values and ethics, second. For these reasons, then, I decided that in looking for answers to my questions concerning religion, environmental ethics, and ecological restoration, I should start first by engaging the cultures with whom my questions were most concerned. I wanted to see how practices shaped values, which in turn, and somewhat dialectically, shape practices.

### **Mapping Methods**

My research explores how individuals and communities are grappling with ecological issues and becoming native to their places and equally investigates how we as scholars might

become native to the places we study. Taking this as a starting point for exploring fishing, religion, and restoration, I have worked with a combination of research methods ranging from archival work to structured interviews.

On a primary level, all of this research is based on textual analysis and archival work. The textual analysis engages a range of materials from fishing's vast library of literary texts to magazine articles, editorials, internet discussion forums, and internet blogs or web-logs. In books, magazines, and journals I sought words that we, as religion scholars, might categorize as terms of religion and spirituality. In so doing, I explored how such sentiments were often connected with the importance of rivers, watersheds, and their piscine inhabitants. How might religious experiences in these places or spiritual sentiments for such locales translate into some form of environmental action? For example, Trout Unlimited's David Stalling referred to an area in the northeast corner of New Mexico, the Valle Vidal (Valley of Life), as holding spiritual value. This was one reason why he called on concerned citizens to at least write letters to their congressmen and women to keep the oil explorations of El Paso Oil Company out of the area. The enactment of these sentiments was what I hoped to explore. As my home waters for fishing were those very waters which Stalling spoke of in his letter to trout enthusiasts around the country, those waters seemed a fitting place to start my field research.

While I had devised a list of questions to ask those working in issues related to fishing, fish, and their conservation and restoration, I went to New Mexico with general goals of participating in volunteer projects, taking courses offered by the United States Forest Service on stream habitat management, attending trout club (such as New Mexico Trout or the Truchas Chapter of Trout Unlimited) meetings, and observing motivations, group dynamics, and successes of their work.

My interviews do not represent random sampling, I was interviewing people who were engaging in pro-environmental behavior. I was not interviewing anglers who were not doing these things. In part because unless I wanted to stand on streams and interview anglers as they came and left the stream, I would be hard pressed to find the anglers not necessarily involved in conservation efforts. Time and money constraints kept me from doing large surveys. In order to talk to as many anglers as possible I followed suggestions, word of mouth, and the flows of research. Throughout it all I was interested in why people were engaging in pro-environmental behavior, as opposed to why they were not. Because the second half of that question is just as, if not more, important, in future work, I would like to expand the scope of my interview sample and seek out those who do not engage in such activities. Why don't they? What value claims do they make? What barriers exist to pro-environmental behavior? These are all important questions that we must grapple with as scholars concerned with the nexus of culture and environmentalism.

In these contexts I interviewed anglers, fish biologist, fishing guides, and employees of the United States Forest Service. While I gathered revealing data in these interviews, I felt that the richest moments came not in the context of a structured interviews but in the unstructured moments of lifting boulders, building fences, or counting fish with other workers and volunteers.

This process of field work might be most aptly categorized as “participatory ethnography,” “participatory action research,” or “engaged ethnography” (Bernard 2006; Bruner 1990; Denzin and Lincoln 1998; Hale 2006; McTaggart 1991; Thorp 2006). Participatory research, as described by Yvonna Denzin and Norman Lincoln, seeks to engage communities in the experiences of their places by participating in the lives of those places (Denzin and Lincoln 2006: ix – xiv). In doing so, the goal of the scholar is not only to write about the community in

question, but to engage their issues, and perhaps help them sort through, negotiate, or resolve elements of their projects.

I built on these early interviews to formulate more structure interviews used in each case study. The research for each case study took the form of what noted anthropologist Russell Bernard calls “rapid assessment,” where research was done in a few weeks, often in several short visits, in part because I did not have the “luxury of doing long-term participant-observation” (Bernard 2006: 352). Moreover, due to financial constraints, I had to make the most of each research trip within the time available on each research trip. This explains why many of the interviews quoted here are those by leaders and key actors in each community project. While I perhaps talked with or observed others involved in my case studies, under the constraints, I was most successfully able to interview only a few key players. What I heard and saw through participant-observation was echoed not only in structure interviews, but also throughout the larger literary traditions surrounding angling. Moreover, the data gleaned through participant observation was also crucial for the ways I conceived and formulated my arguments and theories. Indeed, sometimes the “juiciest” information came from simply observing what was going on around me, noting small conversations between anglers, community members, or others engaged in the work I was studying.

In other locations, particularly in Tennessee, I had most successful access to the leaders and key participants in the project because of geographic and cultural factors. Although the Coal Creek Watershed is merely forty miles from Knoxville, TN, while up in the watershed one would hardly know one was so close to a major metropolitan area. Many of the people who participated in the Coal Creek Watershed Foundation’s annual events were difficult to reach because many did not have phones and certainly could not have been reached through modern tools of email.

Given these circumstances, I relied heavily upon the stories and information provided by the community leaders I could easily access and find the time to interview for an hour or two. Moreover, in this particular case study, I had the benefit of outstanding archival record keeping by the Watershed Coalition itself. They had posted online (<http://www.coalcreekaml.com/NEWS.htm>) every news article, opinion piece, or media reference to their work, making early textual analysis a researcher's dream.

In the midst of field work, anthropologists, sociologists of religion, or ethnographers often occupy tricky and contested terrain as they grapple with issues of subjectivity, the insider/outsider problem, the question of researcher identity, and issues of power (Spickard, et al. 2002: 5). Contemporary approaches to ethnography remind ethnographers to question the ability for their ability to get the whole picture of the communities they are studying (Bernard 2006; Clifford 1986; Haraway 1991). Engaging these communities I felt that I too occupied such tricky terrain, particularly since I was an angler studying anglers. On one hand, at times, this perspective provided me with insights necessary to pick up on the various nuances of angling culture in both text and material worlds. On the other hand, however, I had to work as much as possible, not to allow my own interpretations of angling-based environmentalism to obscure the articulations of my informants. Most often I strove to offer my interpretations as potential tools for working through issues facing their grassroots initiatives. If I found myself critiquing my case studies, I also sought to open myself up to that same critique. This is essential for overturning old models of ethnography where the scholar assumes to know better than or have more objective knowledge than his/her informants or community of inquiry (Spikard and Landers 2002).

Nowhere was the need for such self-reflexivity more apparent than when studying the restoration debate on Florida's Ocklawaha River. I went into the research with an idea of what I thought was the best course of action for this river. However, after talking to all sides involved and really looking at both the science and the sentiment surrounding the river and reservoir, my own stance began to shift. This was both one of the most frustrating and rewarding moments of my research. My research affected me as much as, probably more than, it affected my informants. I learned that both sides of this debate over river restoration had valid claims on a number of levels about the proper approach to this river. Moreover, beyond science and empirical data, both sides made claims that hinged upon a variety of deep seated values that many traced to their own experiences either on the river or reservoir. This realization brought me back to some of my early questions and concerns about the correlations between nature-based experiences, religious or spiritual values, and environmental practices.

### **Marking Maps, Choosing Cases**

The early stages of my research helped formulate the case study choices I made. For example, one angler who worked for Trout Unlimited (TU) told me to check out what was going on over in Tennessee's Coal Creek Watershed. He said it might pique my interest. Little did I know, this story would become a pivotal chapter of my research where inspiring levels of collaboration are benefiting trout and humans alike. Similarly, I originally went to New Mexico with the goal of writing on the inspiring collaborative work of the Coalition for the Valle Vidal. Here was a group that journalist Rebecca Clarren called the "coalition that could," who through multi-stakeholder collaboration managed to defeat a federal bill that would have allowed oil exploration in New Mexico's Valle Vidal (Clarren 2006). However, as I engaged that project I learned that while anglers were a pivotal component of the fight to protect a spiritually sacred area of New Mexico, they were hardly the only voice in this fight. Therefore, I narrowed my

focus to the work that anglers were doing in the Valle Vidal, namely restoring native populations of Rio Grande cutthroat trout. Even with this narrowed focus, I found collaboration as various groups – anglers, hunters, ranchers, or children – all worked together to restore streams vital to the protection of New Mexico’s state fish. Moreover, following the streams of research and as my writing began to take shape; it seemed this was a more pertinent story to tell. Restoring native fish gets to the heart of a variety of debates within both environmental and social ethics, as well as the bioregionalist insistence on becoming native to place.

Because the first case study traces fish restoration in New Mexico and some of the philosophical, ethical, and religious issues surrounding this controversial topic, I decided for my second case study to expand my gaze toward the restoration of a river. For this chapter I chose to examine a long and controversial battle over the waters of Rodman Reservoir on the Ocklawaha River. This case study allowed me to do several things. First, due to its close proximity, I could engage aspects of the debate over a longer period than my other case studies. Second, my research and argument would only benefit by expanding my discussion beyond the cultures of trout and fly fishing. Bass fishers, too, engage in their own struggles to protect what they see as vital waters, watersheds, and fish. What is interesting in this case, also, is that it muddies the water on dam deconstruction and river restoration, where from the environmentalist point of view the most commonly assumed choice is restoration. Because the waters are not so clear on the Ocklawaha River and therefore this story provided a needed balance. Further, the account of the Ocklawaha River offers interesting ethnographic material for critiquing some assumptions held by environmental philosophies such as bioregionalism or environmental pragmatism.

For the third case study, I followed that lead into the Coal Creek Watershed. If the first case looks at fish and the second concerns itself with a river, Coal Creek provides a way to

engage the entire community of the watershed, fish and humans alike. Here is a story that should be told, because as one informant explained, it shows how conflict can be overcome and multiple groups were able to come together. In Tennessee, he said, it is unique that TU was able to do this sort of work.

This is not Idaho or Montana, fly fishers and trout enthusiasts are a minority . . . By working closely with the folks in Anderson County in a number of different projects, a number of which were not directly related to natural resources conservation (I think this is the key aspect), we have become recognized as a positive entity in the county. We have demonstrated that working within the community on projects and activities that focus on more than improving a fishery can really have a good payoff and put TU in a better position to lobby for and encourage more traditional TU projects (Thurman, email correspondence: 08 August 2008).

At the heart of these stories emerge lessons of how values for watershed and community materialize not necessarily from the realm of philosophy or ethics, but emerge on the ground or in the water, as communities struggle with what it means to be human in their own bioregions. Values surface from a variety of practices (like fishing) often perceived and articulated in ways quite religious. In each case, practices shape values, which, in turn, drive more collaborative and environmentally concerned practices such as river conservation or watershed restoration (in a kind of feedback loop). These cases are just a few of many promising examples of how practices like fishing can give rise to the sorts of ethics in action that environmental scholars and activists have tried to articulate. As I take my research beyond what is contained in these pages, I hope to continue engaging the sometimes collaborative and sometimes conflicting issues around water, watersheds, and the communities dependant upon them.

Many anglers with whom I have discussed my research have inquired as to why I chose to tell stories about New Mexico, Tennessee, and Florida, when talking about fishing and restoration. Why not, they wonder, talk about the impressive work taking place in Montana, Colorado, or Vermont, for example? I chose to explore stories that have not necessarily made

headlines. They do not get the press that the Montana's Big Blackfoot River or Alaska's Bristol Bay, for example, receive; but that does not mean that they are any less important. They too deserve an X on the map.

In part, I have chosen these stories precisely because they do not receive the attention of the larger, more famed waters of American angling. Fly fishing historian Paul Schullery and the editor of *The American Angler*, Kathleen Achor both noted that anglers often tend to place too much emphasis on a handful of archetypal moments in fly fishing culture and history, many of which I survey in Chapter 3. This repetition, they explained, runs the risk of ignoring who we might call the "anonymous fly fishers" (Achor 2002). Similarly, I feel that continued focus on the hallowed and archetypal locations of angling driven environmentalism tend to ignore other "anonymous" but equally inspiring examples of angling history or angling-based conservation (Achor 2002). Moreover, by looking at the less recognized places, I believe these case studies reveal the potentially wide range and effects of religious valuations and related environmental action. The case studies contained here offer but a few streams of a large watershed, this is merely how I have begun to map them.

### **Charting Chapters**

Chapter 2 serves largely as a literature review and outline of my terms for this study; particularly religion and nature. I respond to David Chidester's question "what difference does it make to call any cultural activity religion?" particularly in light of environmental concerns (Chidester 2005: 2). Using the tools of religious studies, Chapter 2 examines the construction of religion as a tool for highlighting meaning in various quests to making sense of the world. In doing so, I note how religion is constructed and deployed in realms not typically considered by traditional approaches to religious studies, such as popular fishing subcultures. Second, I explore how religion is used to create, conserve, and contest sacred spaces such as rivers and watershed.

Finally, I examine the deployment of religious values and constructions of the sacred as lived responses to perceived social, political, and environmental issues, such as the degradation of watersheds or the loss of native species. By highlighting these relations between religious values, environmental activism, and civic engagement, I do not propose that religious values are panaceas but rather argue for their serious consideration as both pathways and barriers to the resolution of environmental conflict, ecological restoration, or collaborative attempts at conservation.

Chapter 3 takes the definitional parameters set forth in Chapter 2 to engage the constructions of religion and the reconstructions of nature in the course of fly fishing history. As anglers often articulate religious and spiritual dimensions of their sports they often connect fishing to their own religions or articulate fishing as a religion or spiritual endeavor in and of itself. This chapter explores both. In order to most efficiently navigate these waters of fishing religiosity, I will focus the bulk of my attention on fly fishing cultures, largely in the context of trout, trout waters, and their restoration. I am doing so in part because fly fishers devote a considerable amount of time to articulating the value – religious or aesthetic – to their sport. By highlighting these efforts, I will also offer critique where necessary, noting in particular how generations of fly fishing writers create and perpetuate their sport's myths (Cameron 2002; Schullery 1987; 1999; 2002). These myths, on one hand, can provide fruitful ground for exploring the contribution that outdoor activities like fishing might offer to engagement of ecological ethics. On the other hand, however, they might at times be counterproductive to the larger ecological and community good. I explore these tensions in this chapter and throughout this research.

Following this foray into the religious worlds of angling, I turn my attention to the case studies. Building on my interests in religion as central to the quests of locating oneself in the world, I return to the aforementioned insistence by Wes Jackson that in order to solve the ecological ills of our time, humans must learn to become native to their places. Jackson's point, I show in Chapter 4, is an intriguing one when placed into the context of native trout restoration initiatives. Although many scholars and practitioners of ecological restoration believe that restoration provides avenues for becoming native, it is a highly contested activity in both philosophy and practice (Dagget 2005; Jackson 1994; Jordan 2003; Light 1994; 2004). In some cases it is more so than others. In this chapter I turn to efforts to restore native Rio Grande cutthroat trout. Here I not only trace the history of the cutthroat, noting how its value in part comes from this history, I also detail its decline, and then attempts to restore the cutthroat. Conflict abounds in the midst of cutthroat restoration, as with any form of native species restoration. The debate range from concerns about poisoning streams to claims of ethnic purity and genocide. In particular, this case study, in the midst of environmental values and practices, allows me to engage the long and heated scholarship surrounding ecological restoration. While the intentions of restoration, which seek to make nature whole again, some scholars and activists have been quite critical of not only the end result but the process itself. I explore these debates while noting the ways in which concepts of religion and ritual might aid the discussion and potentially bring about resolution.

From fish restoration in New Mexico, I move to river restoration in Florida. On the Ocklawaha River, I continue the investigation of ecological restoration by exploring the ways in which cultural choices and values can shape the ways in which science is performed and read. The story of the Ocklawaha, the Cross-Florida Barge Canal, and Rodman Reservoir rightly serve

as “a touchstone in the ongoing dialogue on the interactions of politics, economics, and environmental ethics” (Sloan 2005: 102). Here, two sides want two outcomes. On one side, the Florida Defenders of the Environment (FDE) and Putnam County Environmental Council (PCEC) want a controversial dam torn down and a river restored or “freed.” On the other side, Save Rodman Reservoir (SRR) wants the dam to stay, and the reservoir to remain. FDE and PCEC argue they want to restore nature for nature’s sake; they want to preserve and restore biodiversity. FDE and PCEC claim that SRR only wants to protect their sacred fishing spot. However, SRR claims that it is equally motivated by environmental concerns and is working in the best interest of biodiversity. Both sides want biodiversity and both sides have a point, depending on how you read the science.

Navigating the questions surrounding the relationships between religious values and environmental practices, through fishing, ecological restoration, and civic environmentalism, this debate provides a unique case study for understanding how some Floridians are contesting the very grounds upon which it means to be native to their places. Here, restoration hinges upon particular views of what a healthy ecosystem looks like or how one defines “natural,” let alone “native.” In this chapter, I first trace the history of this reservoir and its contested waters. Second, drawing on field work and interviews, I present both sides of the debate, highlighting the ways each use and interpret science to make their cases, while taking note of the role of value claims about nature, which are often couched in religious, spiritual, or deeply affective language.

If the Ocklawaha River is dammed by environmental conflict, then the waters of Coal Creek symbolize collaboration, this time at the watershed level. From the Coal Creek Watershed emerges a story that began in conflict, but through process, dialogue, and collaboration, became an inspiring success. Initially anglers wanted to restore Coal Creek to improve spawning habitat

for trout. But spawning trout were the last concern of the local community. They lived near a polluted stream that flooded at the slightest rain. Children had no healthcare and most high school students hardly graduated from high school, let alone went to college. In the end, the emergent Coal Creek Watershed Foundation (CCWF) learned to move beyond conflict, found ways to improve the life of the community while helping the watershed and the environment along the way.

While the CCWF still faces various problems and obstacles today, its work offers inspiring insights into the dilemmas and conflicts of my case studies in New Mexico and Florida. In the Chapter 7 I evaluate all three of the case studies. Building on the fields of religious studies, environmental pragmatism, collaborative conservation and environmental dispute resolution, I not only evaluate the realities of these case studies, but simultaneously use the case studies to scrutinize the theories at play in this dissertation. Throughout this work, I continue to highlight the importance of cultural values in the midst of environmental conflict or civic environmentalism. I agree with geographer and conflict mediator Aaron Wolf when he argued that contemporary approaches to environmental dispute resolution and water conservation tend too often to focus on realms of process and rationality. Instead, he insisted, we should be paying attention to the role of religions and spiritual values in the midst of these debates (Wolf 2008). Throughout my research I continue to find that such values often emerge out of experiences in nature, such as through fishing or in the midst of ecological restoration. Therefore, noting the relationships between experiences, values, and practices is imperative in the search for more effective and applicable forms of environmental ethics on both local and global scales.

### **Wading Into the Waters of Home**

Amidst this dialogue between values and practices, religion and civic environmentalism, as I noted I am interested in how individuals and communities are collaborating or contesting

what it means to be native to place. Throughout these quests to become native or restore watersheds, I essentially see what we might call homemaking activities. I am interested in how communities define home, and in so doing, set certain places, species, or ideals apart as sacred and essential for locative quests. Here through cultural history, collaborative practices, and individual experiences various anglers, conservationists, and concerned citizens, are working through their everyday experiences to engage what we might call sacred norms.

According to David Chidester, religion is that dimension of everyday experiences engage with sacred norms (Chidester 1987). Chidester, as I explore more deeply in Chapter 2, has spent a great deal of time tracing out the fluid, flexible, and ever expanding terrain of religious belief and practice (Chidester 2005). Noting these expansions, Rebecca Gould moved beyond the terrain of traditional religion into the homes of homesteaders to explore how meaning is “worked out by those who construct the sacred and the profane, the religious and the spiritual, in particular ways” (Gould 2005: 7). This is done through narrative and practice, belief and emotion, solitude and community. Like Gould, Chidester, and many others who have examined the expanding terrain of religion in the American landscape, I am less concerned with explicit definitions of religion and more about the practices and places of homemaking, which is see as an essentially religious endeavor. Sometimes, in my cases studies, religious pronouncements and claims are quite obviously explicit. Sometimes, they are not. When they are not, they are implicit expressions of what I see as essential religious quests.

Even when the language of religion is not vocalized, I see in angling activities, restoration methods, and collaborative environmentalism elements of what we might consider implicit religion. At times, the language of religion or the explicit claims of the sacred fall to the background, in these moments I still see the workings of religion – the processes and practices,

as Tom Tweed noted, of “mapping, building, and inhabiting” the world where devotees of fish and rivers “map, build, and inhabit worlds,” and in so doing, orient themselves “in space and time, transform the natural environment, and inhabit the worlds they construct” (Tweed 2006: 82). Here in the implicit worlds of religion, the goals entail sorting through the messy details of everyday life in the midst of increasing environmental concerns. Affective realities and emotional claims abound in reference to both place and personhood as citizens through varieties of civic environmentalism negotiate the boundaries of native species, rivers, and watersheds. Let us turn to those waters.

## CHAPTER 2 CONSTRUCTING RELIGION AND (RE)CONSTRUCTING NATURE

### **Introduction**

On July 12, 2007, I sat outside a gas station in Pecos, NM. Just below the Pecos River is running with typical mid-summer clarity, not to mention is in prime mid-summer fishing form, as I spent the morning landing and releasing a few feisty brown trout who were rising to mayflies with impressive vigor typical for the waters of the Pecos valley. This particular afternoon Frank “Pancho” Adelo told me about his family’s long history in this community, his attachment to these waters, and his dedication to the Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout. Throughout our conversation, Pancho expressed his concerns about the Pecos River, and described his work in the valley. In the midst of our conversation, I noticed the colorful Rio Grande Cutthroat tattoo emblazoned on his forearm. This tattoo, this fish, he explained, symbolizes not only his historical connection to this valley and its waters, but also his hope for its future. The Pecos used to hold cutthroat, “I remember my grandfather telling stories about the cutthroat in these waters, you could catch them all the way up to the headwaters.” he mused, “Then the stocking wisdom of the time displaced the cutthroat with rainbow trout. I want to catch them here again, it is important to see them brought back, it means a lot to the future of these waters and potentially the community of Pecos” (Adelo, interview, July 12, 2006). The Rio Grande Cutthroat symbolizes so much in terms of cultural and personal history, not to mention environmental sustainability.

For Pancho, these concerns date back to his youthful days of fishing these waters, where he learned about the fish, their habitat, and their dependence upon a healthy ecosystem. He first got involved in environmental issues back in high school to fight the construction of a road that the state proposed to go up the canyon, through the watershed and into the Pecos wilderness. These days, he continues to do more than wear his concerns on his sleeve, so to speak; he is putting

them into action through involvement with the local chapter of Trout Unlimited (TU), as well as founding the Upper Pecos Watershed Association. Their goals, like those of the local TU Chapter and another non-profit group, New Mexico Trout, are to educate the public about the importance of restoring these watersheds through clean-up initiatives, and reintroduction of native Rio Grande cutthroat trout. I outline some of these initiatives in detail in Chapter 3 and 4, what is important here is the connection between fishing, the values it potentially produces, and the subsequent engagement of environmental issues through restoration ecology and civic environmentalism.

In literature and in life, anglers such as Pancho often argue that fishing has the potential to lead to an expanded, or religious, appreciation of the natural world. For many, activities like fishing provide “gateway activities” into grassroots initiatives of stream conservation, native fish restoration, or watershed preservation. As I will show, anglers of all variety often discuss fishing and ensuing environmental values in religious terms or relate them to their own religious traditions. In these cases, fishing fosters values central to civic environmental activism. Noting how such activities inform environmental values is imperative for understanding the relationships between environmental ethics and lived practices. This is particularly important in a time when nature recreation and other forms of engagement with the natural world are on a decline.<sup>1</sup> At stake here, then, are the connections between religious experiences, environmental values, and conservation practices.

If anglers begin with experiences in nature as the catalyst for engaging community and environmental issues through various forms of multi-stakeholder collaboration, then I begin this

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<sup>1</sup> See Louv (2006). More recently, a number of statistical studies have emerged tracing the decline of nature-based recreation, such as hunting, fishing, camping, or hiking. For many ethicists the decline in personal engagement with nature presents troubling foundations for goals of appreciating or conserving nature. Most notably, see Pergrems and Zardiac (2007).

project with their fishing experiences and end with interdisciplinary collaboration. In order to follow the flows of this watershed that includes angling, religion, and environmentalism it is necessary to begin at the source and set some parameters about what I mean when I am talking about religion, nature, and collaborative conservation.

One might ask what difference it makes to place fishing and anglers in the realm of the religious. As I see it, the varieties of religious rhetoric and practice provide unique and powerful mechanisms for deploying various meanings and values as active tools for responding to particular, social, historical, cultural, and environmental circumstances (Chidester 1986; 2005; McCutcheon 2001; 2003). In the field, anglers frequently use religion's signifying language – i.e. the sacred, holy, or even ascriptions of divinity – to explicitly describe personal and communal understandings of the fishing, fish, or the waters of fishing. Moreover, many of their activities through both fishing and pro-environmental behavior constitute something akin to what Edward Bailey and others have described as “implicit religion,” which encompasses both physical and metaphysical elements of cultures or groups, particularly those in secular culture, engaged in “quests for meaning” or orientation in the world (Bailey 1990:484). As a scholar of religion, therefore, I am inclined to utilize the tools of religious studies to investigate the practical implications of such rhetorical moves.

In these waters, religion constitutes a series of practices that can create community, focus desire and facilitate processes of exchange (Chidester 2005:2). If, through my research I have encountered religion as both a rhetorical and practiced quest for meaning in the context of experience or in response to one's social, political, or environmental context(s), one might ask

what difference it makes to call any activity religion.<sup>2</sup> Pushing this question a step further, however, one needs to consider it in two ways.

First, what difference does it make to anglers to call their own practices religion? Second, what difference does it make for scholars to explore the religious dimensions of these activities? The following chapter answers the first question by tracing both implicit and explicit productions of religion in the long, storied, and contested history of fishing and fly fishing in particular. This chapter, therefore, addresses the latter questions by suggesting that it makes a serious difference to call any cultural activity religion, particularly in light of increasing attention to religion as potentially powerful responses to increasing ecological concerns.

Using the tools of religious studies, then, I am first interested in how religion is constructed and deployed in realms not typically considered by traditional approaches to religious studies, such as popular fishing subcultures. Second, I explore how religion is used to create, conserve, and contest sacred spaces such as rivers and watershed. Finally, I examine the deployment of religious values and constructions of the sacred as lived responses to perceived social, political, and environmental issues, such as the degradation of watersheds or the loss of native species. By highlighting these relations between religious values, environmental activism, and civic engagement, I do not propose that religious values are panacea but rather argue for their serious consideration as both pathways and barriers to the resolution of environmental conflict, ecological restoration, or collaborative attempts as conservation.

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<sup>2</sup> Chidester (2005). In the context of baseball, Coca-Cola, Tupperware, and the various proliferations of “fake” internet religions, David Chidester dives into the realm of popular culture in search of the ways by which popular culture, looks, acts, and functions along the lines of religion. In the midst of these commercialized, plastic parishes, Chidester asked “How does the serious work of religion, which engages the transcendent, the sacred, and the ultimate meaning of human life in the face of death, relate to the comparatively frivolous play of popular culture? . . . What difference does it make to call any cultural activity religion?” (1-2).

## Constructing Religion

Navigating these sometimes messy waters of religion and popular culture, I build on a history of scholarship in religious studies that maintains religion and its terms are constructed tools for responding to particular circumstances. Religion provides tools for the production of meaning and values in the world, while making sense of lived realities for both individuals and communities in the midst of both geographic and cultural spaces.

While practitioners of religion deploy religion on a daily basis, I agree with historian of religion Jonathan Z. Smith that religion is a term equally created by scholars for the scholarly purposes of examining cultural quests for meaning and situatedness. Religion, then, is a “second order, generic concept” that does indeed play a role in establishing particular disciplinary horizons “that a concept such as “language” plays in linguistics or “culture” plays in anthropology” (Smith 1998: 281-82). Historically, for religious studies those horizons have remained relegated to the world’s “great” religious traditions and perhaps a few “new religious movements” here and there. Today, however, these horizons are shifting. In part this shift is occurring because as new religious movements are being explored so are other cultural activities such as surfing, hunting, or homesteading.<sup>3</sup> As new practices come to the fore, scholars are “relocating” religion from fixed definitions and boundaries of former models of study to new realms that make it possible for me to turn my gaze toward streams or watersheds (Gould 2005: 6). As a scholar rethinking these boundaries of religion, I am interested in more creatively and comprehensively highlighting the ways in which problems of meaning are not only constructed

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<sup>3</sup> Recently Taylor (2007) made waves and the front cover of *Surfer* as statement was posed that surfing was finally being taken seriously as a spiritual quest. Elsewhere, for example, Gould (2005) has explored homesteading, gardening and religion.

but sorted out by individuals and groups who construct the sacred or profane, the religious or the spiritual in unique and innovative ways (Gould 2005: 9).

Making this move, I agree that scholars do indeed manufacture religion by creating “zones of significance and value” (McCutcheon 2001:12). In and around these zones, however, what counts as religion for one scholar is hardly that for another. All scholars have distinct research agendas, interests, and questions all of which, more broadly, come home to roost in this classification tool that we call religion. However, by arguing that religion is totally constructed, as scholars such as McCutcheon do, I believe we need to be careful.<sup>4</sup>

While I agree that religion is in many ways a human construction, we need to avoid pushing things so far as to avoid the very real, tangible, and practiced reality of religion by religious people and communities on-the-ground, or in the water. Today, the very idea of religion and its accompanying terms do not belong to solely to scholars and academics.<sup>5</sup> In other words, just as scholars produce and reproduce the terms of religion, so to does popular culture for its own purposes. Robert Orsi was correct by insisting, that “Men and women do not merely inherit religious idioms . . . *People appropriate religious idioms as they need them in response to particular circumstances. All religious ideas and impulses are of the moment, invented, taken, borrowed, and improvised*” (Orsi 1996: 8; emphasis added). In these constructed, improvised moments, keep in mind that these actions build on long histories, stories, narratives and

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<sup>4</sup> McCutcheon argued that religion is only the constructed response to social, political, economic realities. There is nothing inherent, given, or sui generic about religion but instead it is the human construction. He writes, “The study of religion conceived as the description and appreciation of a private, sui generic experience exists precisely by camouflaging and obscuring not only the social, political, and economic origins and implications of so-called religious experiences but also the political interests and implications of the academic discourse on these experiences” (2003: 206).

<sup>5</sup> For a powerful elaboration of this point see Chidester (2005) where he explores the religious worlds of Coca-cola, baseball, or rock n roll.

traditions. While tweaked in the moment, their histories give them particular power for the individual or religious community in question.

Moreover, just because the religious construct or improvise religion does not mean its contents are void of meaning for the practitioners or analytical value for the scholars. On the contrary, tracing and engaging the lived religious realities of individuals and communities fighting for what they believe to be sacred fish, rivers, and watersheds, for example, can reveal the activist power of religion for the religious and its analytic power for the scholar.

Because religion is constructed, engaged, and manipulated over time in varying cultural and geographical contexts, it is often difficult to grasp. However, despite difficulties of defining religion or even describing its parts, which some liken to the process of blindly groping at an elephant, I believe it is necessary at least to describe the boundaries around how I understand religion (Albanese 2001:11). This description, of course, is not only influenced by a variety of scholarly approaches, but equally emerges out of my encounters in the field, on rivers, and in fishing shops talking to anglers, engaging projects of ecological restoration, or exploring environmental conflict.

Religion provides a social, historical, and affective tool-box with which humans attempt to make sense of the world. Religion is very much the realms of human experience engaged in the construction of meaning around potentially sacred norms and ideals (Chidester 1986:7, 2005; Long 2003: 233; McCutcheon 2001, 2003). In this way, religion is very much constructed in an ad hoc fashion as a tool, or set of tools, for responding to situations, consecrating spaces, or negotiating the messy quotidian realities of the world. In my research those realities concern rivers, watersheds, and community. Religion is not only social and cultural, but has inner, affective dimensions. I highlight this point in contrast to scholars like McCutcheon who has

preached that we avoid the “private affair” of religion (McCutcheon 2001). My time in the field has taught me that you cannot avoid the private or deeply affective elements of religion, because these are the ones that are not only responsible for bringing people to the table, but it is these aspects of religion that are put on the table in the midst of environmental conflict or ecological restoration. If religion is constructed, engaged ethnographic fieldwork has taught me that it is constructed around inner and affective “ultimate concerns” in response to external, social, or environmental realities (Tillich 1957).

Throughout the history of religious studies, disciplinary definitions have been constructed and contested along the lines that they are too fixed or dependant upon binary oppositions of sacred and profane, or high and low, particularly as set forth by the lineage of Mircea Eliade. My definition, however, resists those static boundaries, just like it resists the static choices between the public and private affairs of religion. I am interested the ways in which religion is constructed on the ground by those who are seeking meaning, resolution, or a way out of a particular quagmire they find themselves thrown into. Along these lines, individuals and communities create, contest, and reinvent religion on a regular basis by engaging what they see as crucial questions concerning being a human in a human place, or being human in natural spaces (Chidester 2005; Gould 2005; Peterson 2001).

In search of meaning, then, religion is also about actively negotiating boundaries (Albanese 1999:4). These boundaries are personal, communal, cultural, or geographical. Nowhere is this negotiation of boundaries more apparent than in the context of sacred space. As will be shown, the question of sacred space, and its boundaries, is pivotal for understanding the ways in which anglers and restoration ecologists alike construct religion in and around sacred rivers and watersheds, not to mention the species that inhabit them.

## Practicing Pragmatism through Lived Religion

Within and around the boundaries of religious belief and experience, practice emerges as particularly important for negotiating the sacred. By illuminating practice, I do not intend to ignore elements of religion such as narratives and myths, as these are vitally important to religions identity as much as they are to religious practice. Highlighting practice I am indebted to the theoretical lineage of “lived religion” (Hall 1995; Orsi 1996). The moniker “lived religion” might seem strange because all religion is lived to some extent (Gould 2005). However, this form of scholarship traces its roots to European traditions of sociology. The phrase is literally shorthand for an idiom that has a long history in these traditions: *la religion vecue* (Hall 1995). Lived religion is related to the work of German phenomenologists such as Husserl, Heidegger, or Dilthey, whose work sought to understand “being” in the context of everyday reality of religious ritual, community, and practice. The lived religion approach in particular, is rooted in “cultural and ethnographical approaches to the study of religion and American religious history,” where scholars explore religion through material dimensions such as journals, economic records, home decorations, or the engagement of ritual, festival, or religion in daily life (Hall 1995; McDannell 1998; Orsi 1996).

In addition to looking for religion as it is “lived” as the moniker connotes, the lived religion approach says as much about studying religion as it does its practice. If “religion is not only not *sui generis*, distinct from other dimensions of experience and “comes into being in an on-going dynamic relationship with the realities of everyday life” then the scholar, this approach demands, should insert him or herself into those situations (Orsi 1995:7). Religion is situated for both the scholar and the practitioner and therefore understanding that situated knowledge of religion is paramount (Hall 1995; Orsi 1995; see also Haraway 2001). This is quite different from Eliadean models of studying religion, where religion is fixed, distinct, binary, and set apart

form the messy reality of daily living. In this way, focusing on embeddedness in everyday life, lived religion seeks to understand how religion is constructed, contested, and affirmed wherever it may be found while recognizing the fluidity, hybridity, and ambiguity of all these constructive elements of religion.

While this situated approach to religion is old hat for anthropology or sociology, the turn to materiality and practice as sites of analysis is relatively new for religious studies. Previously scholarship highlighted text, teachings, or organizational structures of churches. However, according to David Hall, this approach left scholars knowing “next to nothing about religion as it is practiced and precious little about the everyday thinking and doings of lay men and women” (Hall 1995: vii). Reflecting on practice, then, this methodology engages religion from the pulpit as much as in the parlor of the home or the side of a stream. In so doing, scholarship should seek religion amidst the messy details of everyday life. As Orsi explained,

Workplaces, homes and streets – as well as churches, temples, shrines, class meetings, and other more immediately recognizable sites for religious activity – *the places where humans make something of the worlds they have found themselves thrown into, in turn, it is through these subtle, quotidian, intimate actions in the world that meanings are made known and verified* (Orsi 1995: 8, emphasis added).

By rethinking the spaces of religious construction and practice, lived religion demands paying attention to how the religious manufacture and deploy religion. If the focus is on religion in the streets, I insist that scholars should also pay attention to what people do in nature, on rivers, or amidst watersheds.

The methodological approach to lived religion demands what Orsi has referred to as a “hermeneutics of hybridity,” which recognizes that the “analytical language of religious studies, organized as it still is around a series of fixed, mutually exclusive, and stable polar opposites, must be reconfigured in order to make sense of religion as a lived experience” (11). I agree. We need new approaches that recognize, for example, how anglers or restoration ecologists utilize

the realms of religion in ad hoc ways to respond to native fish, such as cutthroat trout, and their restoration. These are not only reactions to the sacred as they encounter it, but they are equally socialized, politicized, and historicized activities.

Building on lived religion, my approach to these devotions of rivers or fish takes seriously the inner, affective dimensions of these constructions. This is equally indebted to the radical empiricism of philosophical pragmatism. Like Husserl's call to turn back to the things themselves, or the contexts that make perception and belief possible, pragmatism takes practice seriously because it is rooted in those contexts, or messy realities (Husserl 1965; Boisvert 2003: 210).

While William James is the name most commonly associated with pragmatism in the context of religion, for his explorations of the "varieties of religious experience," where he explored the inner, personal, dimensions of religious belief and experience, my approach more dependant on the work of pragmatists such as John Dewey because he so strongly emphasized social engagement and cultural critique. In this line of thought, pragmatism avoids dependence upon epistemological or metaphysical dependencies for notions of truth or value. It looks for knowledge as situated and practiced, emergent not from apriori foundations as Descartes once argued, but out of the methodological test of experience. Some highlight pragmatist as anti-foundationalist, however, the foundations it eschews are those rooted in apriori, epistemological realities. As I understand it, pragmatism is fully foundational, but based on experience and worldly engagement. Therefore, the foundations are more fluid and shifting as experiences test meaning over time in practice throughout history.

As a philosophy of method, liked lived religion, pragmatism potentially teaches that our definitions of religion should be tested and engaged in the midst of the realities of those we

study. As historian James Kloppenberg wrote of pragmatist methodology, “Because human experience is meaningful, understanding not only expression but also behavior requires interpreting the complex and shifting systems of symbols through which individuals encounter the world and with which they try to cope with it” (Kloppenber 1996: 108). Here our definitions of religion might need to be as adaptive for our scholarship as religion is for the religious.

Building on pragmatism in my quests for lived religion in the water, my work embraces pluralism and eschews universal or monistic definitions of religion. Highlighting plurality or seeking religion in the water does indeed risk accusation as potentially reducing the value of religion as an analytic category to and thereby cutting the legs out from under experience, ethics, or religion. However, taking a moderate approach one does not seek deconstruction all the way down, but aims to reconstruct our understandings of reality in ways that validate the effectual reality of religion, experience, or nature while recognizing their elements of sociality (Hamner 2005).

Walking this path, therefore, we can more seriously consider the variety of practices by which humans meaningfully orient themselves to the world. Through pluralism and practice, my approach to religion allows one to comprehend the full variety of ways anglers or restorationists, for example, through both narrative and practice, create and enact values regarding the natural environment in ways that adhere not only to categorical understandings of religion, but more specifically what has been termed nature religion.

### **Engaging Nature Religion**

In contemporary formulations, the concept of nature religion often coheres with many of the theoretical approaches to studying religion that are prominent for those concerned with lived religion, not to mention pragmatism. For example Dewey’s philosophies acknowledged

humanity's reintegration into the fabric of nature, through practice and experience (Dewey 1965; see also Hickman 1996; Rosenbam 2003:4; Thompson and Hilde 2000).<sup>6</sup> More recently, for example, Rebecca Gould examined modern homesteading as a lived religion of nature to underscore the "ways in which problems of meaning and value are worked out by those who construct the sacred and profane, the religious and spiritual in particular ways" through intentional practices of gardening and intentional living (Gould 2005: 9).

Exploring nature religion, through both narrative and practice, allows scholars to comprehend what people do, why they do it, and how those actions might function as an expression of their most deeply held values and beliefs about what the world ought to look like. For those anglers and restorationists encountered throughout this research, these actions, emerge as political, social, or environmental statements, while still relating to deeper or affective concerns about fish, watersheds, or communities. Along these lines, David Chidester and Edward Linenthal were correct when they noted that the concept of nature religion, through practice, "has defined an open set of strategies for investing the natural world with sacred significance" (Linenthal and Chidester 1995: 13). Therefore, like religion, the trope of nature religion works in dual fashion. On one hand, it provides scholars with a disciplinary horizon for investigating how individuals and groups invest or contest values regarding nature and community. On the other hand, however, it is also a powerful idea utilized from within grassroots movements, for example, for actually making religious statements or reflecting deeper values in reference to ideas about how humans ought to relate to nature.

Despite contemporary uses, however, the concept of nature religion is not new to the study of religion. As an analytic category, early theorists of religion such as Max Muller or

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<sup>6</sup> For an excellent discussion of Dewey's naturalism in the context of philosophical forms of environmental pragmatism see Hickman (1996).

Ludwig Feuerbach situated the origins of religion in the human response to the natural world (Muller 2000; Feuerbach 1967). Similarly, Edward Tylor and James Frazer described the origins of religion as responses to the natural world. In so doing, they argued that religion emerges from the mind of the adherent in response to the infinite or incomprehensible world of nature. Frazer insisted that the human response to ineffable elements of nature give rise to a coping mechanism of “animism,” by which humans attribute human or supernatural life to the natural world (Frazer 1990). As society progressed through rational development into science, Tylor and Frazer both maintained humans moved away from nature religion. Animism, in other words for Frazer, is a misguided, infantile line of reasoning.

However, following contemporary approaches to nature religion, the belief or perception that a soul or other forces animate natural entities is common, even among anglers of all sorts who often attribute agency and life to the fish they seek to catch or conserve.<sup>7</sup> For both early and more recent articulations of animism, theorists claim that religion emerges as a response to the world, through the construction of the sacred within it. Comparatively, according to Mircea Eliade, nature religion is specifically a response to a sacred reality that has emerged out the natural world. The sacred is not immediately constructed but emanates from nature. Humans, then, respond to those emanations of the sacred by constructing, contesting, or reconstructing spaces around the sacred (Eliade 1957). For Muller, Tylor, or Frazer, the sacred is constructed; for Eliade it is real and the human responds to that reality.

For both sides of the argument, however, the human response to the sacred, as real or perceived, represents deeper, more affective, or “religious” concerns. In my encounters with anglers and restoration ecologists, I have come to believe that this line between the sacred in

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<sup>7</sup> For excellent example of this agency in fish see House (1999) where he argued that “Salmon is a particularly adept teacher,” only if humans open themselves up to the possibility of listen to and learning from salmon (198).

nature as totally constructed or totally encountered is a tricky line to keep absolute. Many believe that nature might have some deeper, inherent sacred reality; hence the reason it should be conserved or restored. For others, however, fishing or restoration ecology provide activities that contribute to the construction of a sacred dimension to rivers or native fish. For both, however, the sacred has value dimensions that are functionally responded to through restoration or civic environmentalism, for example. In other words, even if constructed, the effects of the sacred are quite real and tangible.

More recent formulations of nature religion reflect this dichotomy between the sacred in nature as constructed or encountered. In *Nature Religion in America*, Catherine Albanese wrote that nature religion refers to the positioning of nature as symbolic resource through which humans orient themselves toward the sacred (Albanese 1991: 11). For Albanese, the sacred is also a constructed ideal. In contrast to her work, Bron Taylor identified a common-denominator spirituality that usually involves experiences and perceptions of belonging to a living, sacred earth (Taylor 2001a; 2001b; see also Taylor 1995, 2002, 2005). Here the sacred in nature very well might be inherent or immanent. Observing how radical environmental or other nature oriented subgroups respond to the sacred, Taylor noted how people and groups often turn to nature “for wisdom, strength, for maturation, for spiritual comradeship, and for lessons in devotion and humility” (2001a: 181). As each case study demonstrates anglers or restoration ecologists, among others, seem to fit well in both of these approaches to nature religion, where a mode of spirituality or religious practice emerges in response to an encountered or constructed sacred that is based upon “being-in-nature.” Here nature provides solace, strength, wisdom, and humility, and is often conceived of as sacred and deserving reverence, care, conservation, or restoration.

Similarly, in his various queries into nature-based religions, Stephen Kellert demonstrated how many who do not attend religious services understand nature to be a site where one might encounter the divine, or tap into something “greater,” thereby providing “meaning making” or “world orienting” moments where nature is the holy or sacred space of religious practice (Kellert 1971). Like Kellert’s or Taylor’s research, my fieldwork into fishing related ecological restoration, finds many on-the-ground expressions of what John Dewey termed “natural piety” (Dewey 1960).<sup>8</sup> As an expression of nature religion, natural piety emerges through practiced, engaged, and storied experiences with the natural world.

Anglers and ecological restorationists alike often describe their engagement with rivers or trout in ways that echo these meaning-making or world-orienting aspects of religion, or nature religion. For example, an iconic fly fishing author and early voice of conservation among fly fishers, Roderick Haig-Brown mused that fishing is just such a meaning making activity, which he attributed to his own conservation ethic and practice amongst early anglers of the Pacific Northwest (Haig-Brown 1975b: 222).<sup>9</sup> In the following chapter I survey Haig-Brown’s point more deeply in the context of the broad streams of angling culture, where other anglers and writers make similar claims connecting the experiences of fishing to their involvement in local watershed coalitions.

These sentiments of natural religion or natural piety – or the positioning of nature as a symbolic resource of religious belief, experience, and practice – are crucial for comprehending how human communities position themselves in relation to their bioregions, constructing religion along the way. While scholars like McCutcheon might caution against the use of the notion of

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<sup>8</sup> For an astute treatment of the notion of “natural piety” for Dewey in comparison with that of Ralph Waldo Emerson, see Wilson, P. Eddy (1995).

<sup>9</sup> For a recent exploration of the influence of Roderick Haig-Brown on the fishing and conservation communities of the Pacific Northwest see Berryman (2006).

piety for being dangerously close to the “private affair” of religion, it is a useful term for understanding the deep, affective relations that anglers might have regarding native fish or watersheds. This piety is the inner dimension of an outward concern that might also be tethered to larger social, political, or ecological concerns.

### **Social Construction of Nature**

If religion, the source of the sacred, and nature religion are all constructed categories for referring to inner, affective responses to potentially external concerns – social, political, or ecological – then the question remains: Is nature, the target of these concerns, socially constructed? A controversial question indeed and one to which I come down somewhere on the side of moderate construction, or perhaps what Anna Peterson referred to as “construal” (Peterson 2001: 62). By taking elements of social construction seriously and understanding how human relations to nature are constructed, we can more readily understand social values attached to nature and therefore why natural spaces are often contested as spaces. While some wonder why protect nature if it is constructed, I believe that the constructed nature of nature demands that it be preserved or restored.

The argument that nature is socially constructed emerges from the larger literary and philosophical tradition of postmodern deconstruction. Social constructivists argue, contrary to the claims of modernism, that a variety of cultural media - from language to religion, from literature to art – construct reality. Philosopher Jean Baudrillard noted that while each of these media are products of culture, they in turn, produce culture (Baudrillard 1994). Social constructionism, then, contends that meaning and value “only come in and through particular settings and therefore other dimensions of human experience, not just language, are social constructs” (Peterson 2001: 52). This is, indeed, a contentious claim.

Gary Lease and Michael Soule, both opponents of social constructionism, articulated that the constructivist view

asserts that all we can ever perceive about the world are shadows, and that we can never escape our particular biases and fixed historical-cultural positions. Moreover, some in the deconstructionist movement boldly assert that the natural world as described by scientists and conservationists, if it exists, is a human artifact produced by our economic activities, and as such is grist for further material reshaping (Soule and Lease 1995: xv).<sup>10</sup>

For environmental ethicists and conservationists such as Lease and Soule, extreme forms of social constructionism cut the legs out from under environmental ethics and activism. If nature is socially constructed, they wondered, what is this thing we hasten to defend (Lease and Soule 1995)? Similarly, Katherine Hayles mused “If nature is only a social and discursive construction, why fight so hard to preserve it” (Hayles 1995: 47)? In response, I believe, understanding constructions of nature exposes exactly why we should fight so hard to protect or restore it by particular revealing the crucial role of cultural values and interests at the heart of environmental conflict or collaborative conservation.

Critics of social constructivism argue that the world, “including its living components, really does exist apart from humanity’s perceptions and beliefs about it” (Soule and Lease 1995: xii). Their point here is certainly correct. However, we must also understand that cultural and historical constructs mediate everything we say about the world, including its living components. At the heart of these constructs are cultural legacies, local concerns, or religious values all of which are evident, for example, in the ways in which anglers, conservationists, or ecological restorationists religiously and symbolically value things like nature or biodiversity.

In *Being Human: Ethics, Environment, and Our Place in the World*, Anna Peterson noted that the symbolic construction of nature refers to the ways in which “individuals groups, and

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<sup>10</sup> Ironically, when it comes to religion, Lease sides with the social constructionists.

societies “construct” particular versions of nature when they interpret it through cultural categories and values” (Peterson 2001: 62). Her point highlights the role of religion and culture in mediating the human relationship to the natural world, because these cultural systems provide ways of understanding and valuing nature in particular contexts. Along these lines, I agree with Peterson that the acknowledgement of nature’s construction, in fact, does not deny that what we call nature also exists as a physical reality.

If Kate Soper argued that nature exists as a “pre-discursive reality,” I believe that nature exists as the condition for a discursive reality.<sup>11</sup> In the midst of that reality, then, culture constructs nature through various rhetorical and practical relationships. Culture, in other words, mediates the human relationship to and understandings of nature. Language and culture offer modes of understanding and negotiating various phenomena in nature. Ecologist Tim Ingold is correct, then, to have highlighted how different cultures might variously understand the same natural phenomena. This demonstrates how culture not only shapes our understandings of natural processes, but also mitigates our relationships to those processes. In order to demonstrate this point, Ingold used a wonderful example of differing understandings – between Cree Indians and Western science – of elk behavior in the midst of a hunt (Ingold 2000).

When hunted, elk will routinely stop and stare at their predator. According to the Cree worldview, the gaze of the prey represents the offering of itself to the predator. This is especially true, for the Cree, if they had performed the proper rituals prior to the hunt and respectfully hunt the elk. If they did not do these things, the elk would not stop and gaze at the hunter and thus offer itself to the hunter. In contrast, Western science might explain the elk’s behavior as an evolutionary adaptation to predation, particularly by wolves. By stopping, the elk forces the

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<sup>11</sup> In many ways this claim is a pragmatist claim. Rather than assuming that language is the precursor to experience, Dewey believed that experience was precondition of language (Dewey 1938: 74).

predator to also stop. Because the elk makes the first move to flee, it has a slight head start. With such a head start any healthy elk can generally out run a wolf. However, when pursued by human hunters, this tactic causes the elk to become particularly vulnerable to predation. When the animal turns to face the hunter, it provides the hunter with the perfect occasion to shoot. (Ingold: 48-50). In this case, Ingold argues, the natural occurrence is quite real and uniform, but the cultural modes of understanding - or “construing” nature - differ widely (Ingold 2000; Peterson 2001: 62).

Therefore, like religion, the functions of nature are quite actual, however all understandings or engagements with nature are always cultural (Evernden 1992: xi). Moreover, our cultural understandings of nature always impact the actual physical reality of nature, particularly as human culture now encloaks the planet as Bill McKibben so forcefully argued in *The End of Nature*. Regardless of our definitions, our cultural constructions of nature always reflect particular values of nature; these values justify use or protection. Evernden correctly stated, “What matters here, is not what ecology [or nature] is, but how it functions, how it is perceived, and used – and perhaps *why* we seem compelled to assert such assumptions at all” (Evernden 1992: 15-16). If the “*why*” is important for Evernden, the effects of those values and perceptions are what intrigue me.

If one wants to see the effects of such valuations and constructions perhaps an errand into the wilderness is necessary, for it is the source and space of great debate (Cronon 1995; Callicott and Nelson 1998).<sup>12</sup> Despite common definition, as a place without humans, wilderness is far from that. Wilderness is not separate from humans, but as William Cronon noted, is “quite profoundly a human creation” (Cronon 1995: 69). Throughout the course of Western history,

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Nelson is soon to come out with *The Wilderness Debate Rages On: Continuing the New Wilderness Debate*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008.

wilderness has symbolically shifted from a dangerous, wild abode of the devil that needs taming, controlling, and subduing to a space with equal potential for encountering God, a source of the sacred, and worthy of reverence through preservation.

Throughout this shifting definitional history, as noted, wilderness has long been associated as a space devoid of humans. Howard Zahniser's working definition of wilderness for the Wilderness Act of 1964 exemplifies this point. Zahniser defines wilderness as "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain" (Wilderness Act 1964; McCloskey 1966: 288). This definition is problematic on a number of levels.

Humans, even in remote areas, have never entirely lived separately from nature. However, despite this fact, due to this definition humans have indeed been removed from their native lands as a result of wilderness protection. In addition to Native Americans, scholars and activists concerned with South America or South Asia, for example, heavily criticize this approach to wilderness. Ramachandra Guha called it an obsession of dominant Western societies, who wish to separate humans from the natural spaces in which they reside (Guha 1989).

Moreover, the idea that nature exists as a separate or untrammelled space is not historically accurate; nor is it always a necessary ideal for the preservation of biodiversity. Humans have long lived in relationships with nature and those relations have been both positive and negative. As Peterson rightly explained "not only do our cultural concepts mediate our experiences of nature, but most of what we refer to as nature has been in fact shaped by human actions" (Peterson 2001: 63). In other words, natural spaces, bodies, and landscapes of all sorts are always dually formed, they are shaped through cultural symbols and rhetoric, and they are constructed, reconstructed, or restored through actual physical labor (Soper 1995:312). On the flip side, the

ways in which a culture responds to nature also has as significant of an impact on the culture as it does nature. Therefore, even though culture might construct nature, nature also plays a role in shaping culture.

Making note of this, many scholars have long explore not only how different cultures articulate or perceive “nature,” but also how they might positively manipulate their landscapes through forms of agriculture or modes of hunting and gathering. For example, anthropologists frequently study the groups like the Kayapo of South America for their practices of swidden agriculture that tend to enhance biodiversity rather than decrease it (Callicott 1994; Posey 1988; Peterson 2001). Highlighting the role of religion in mitigating human-to-nature relations, scholars have signaled the ways in which complex cosmologies can support seemingly sustainable relationships between a culture and their bioregion. These cosmologies go both ways. They respond to geographical or environmental realities while simultaneously shaping the cultural response to nature.

It is important to note, however, that not all cultural engagements with nature are positive or benign. As Soper and Evernden have both independently argued, our constructs of nature might lead to competing visions on how to approach, use, or simply value nature. Our representations of nature always carry some effects – political, social, or ecological – all of which should be dually considered in the context of conservation or ecological restoration. This point is evident in each case study of this research. In New Mexico, native species are valued in competition with nonnative species. On Florida’s Ocklawaha River, opponents square off over river restoration largely based on competing cultural conceptions of what a “healthy” ecosystem looks like. And in Tennessee, oppositional values between human and nature are mediated so that both might be constructively and simultaneously engaged.

Among each of these case studies, I take seriously the ways in which culture conceives of nature and its various parts in relation to the ways in which various communities engage those ecosystems. At the heart of this engagement, are the practices of ecological restoration, where both scholars and activists alike often contest not only the accompanying methods, but also the ideal goals of restoration. If nature is constructed, nowhere is this question more pivotal than in cases of ecological restoration where restoration often operates according to human-derived standards. Each case, therefore, provides varying lenses for understanding the relationships between religious values of nature and environmental practices; herein one should not reject social constructionism out of hand. Instead, one should understand the ways in which culture simultaneously responds to and symbolically construes and physically (re)-constructs natural spaces. Moreover, taking seriously the ways in which culture constructs nature illuminates some of the messy details of preservation or restoration, particularly as nature is constructed and contested along the lines of sacred space.

### **Re-Constructing and Contesting Nature as Sacred**

Both nature and religion occupy contested ground as either essential or constructed. My approach through these disputed waters resists choosing one or the other side of the shore, but seeks to navigate a middle course. I advocate this path because I believe that while both nature and religion are indeed constructed, they in turn work against or on each other in very real and tangible ways – often manifest in contestation. Paying attention to the constructed nature of nature, for example, certainly reveals that the source of contest often resides within cultural constructions; or religious valuations, if you will. At the heart of both contests and constructs resides the sacred.

For some, the sacred is an ontological reality that founds the world as we know it; it reveals itself to humans through hierophanies for encounter and interpretation.<sup>13</sup> For others, however, the sacred is a concept and category constructed by humans through cultural efforts to sort through the world in search of meaning. For both, however, whether constructed or encountered, the physical effects of religious claims around the sacred are most tangibly felt in the context of environmental conflict, which often entails competing visions of sacred space.

According to Jonathan Z. Smith, in contemporary philosophy and religious studies, it “has been commonplace to define man [sic] as a world-creating being and human culture or society as a process of world construction” (Smith 1993: 91). However, the work of Mircea Eliade reverses this sentiment. For Eliade, humans encounter the world and the sacred as ontological realities. He wrote that “the world stands displayed in such a manner that, in contemplating it, religious man [sic] discovers the many modalities of the sacred, and hence being” (Eliade 1957: 116). Along these lines, the sacred reveals itself as “an uncanny, awesome, or powerful manifestation of reality, full of ultimate significance” (Chidester and Linenthal 1995: 5). By contrast, sociological approaches to religion, most often traced to Durkheim, have long perceived the sacred as the result of the constructive labor of ritual, narrative, and/or community memory. The sacred, in this context, is at the “nexus of human practices and social projects . . . as a situational term, therefore, the sacred is nothing more nor less than a notional supplement to the ongoing cultural work of sacralizing space, time, persons, and social relations” (Chidester and Linenthal 1995: 6).

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<sup>13</sup> For Eliade, “Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane. To designate the act of manifestation of the sacred we have proposed the term *hierophany*. It is a fitting term, because it does not imply anything further; it expresses no more than is implicit in its etymological content, *i.e., that something sacred shows itself to us*” (Eliade 1957: 11; emphasis his).

Negotiating these opposing positions, I take the stance that recognizes the potential for certain places to contain the sacred, which might erupt out of those places. At the same time, however, I also insist on considering the importance of constructive activities to create, reinforce, and potentially contest the sacred. Throughout the history of religious studies this tension has been a source of heated debate. In response, I not only believe it to be an unresolvable tension, but I am not convinced that it should be resolved. Even if the sacred erupts, as Eliade insisted, then human communities work to protect, fortify, and ritualize those spaces. In doing so, they not only contribute further to the construction of the sacred but also the potential for future encounters with it. There is, you might say, dialectic between encounter and construction, construction and encounter.

At the heart of this dialectic are not only ritual actions, but story and narrative, within which individuals and groups articulate the status of the sacred. Sacred space, whether encountered or constructed, are always storied spaces. As Beldon Lane rightly observed, through stories, sacred spaces tend to carry with them significant “histories of experience that shape the reality of a sacred place” (Lane 2001: 151; see also Basso 1996; Gatta 2004; Peterson 2001). In the context of North American environmental history, the American tradition of “nature writing” has been pivotal for the imaginative construction or reinforcement of nature as sacred (Gatta 2004; Nash 1967).

This tradition, which includes Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, Aldo Leopold or more recent writers such as Terry Tempest Williams, David James Duncan, or Barry Lopez, provides a vast library of accounts that encounter, reinforce, and construct the sacred as emergent in America’s natural landscapes. Noting this tradition, John Gatta opined that the American nature writing tradition has long used religion, spirituality, and the sacred to say something about

“humanity’s perceived relation nonhuman creatures or biopsheric systems” (Gatta 2004: 9). These literary expeditions into the wilds of nature, not only reflect upon encounters with the sacred, but also help to shape the construction of nature as a sacred space where one might encounter God, the divine, or spiritual enlightenment. As I show in the next chapter, this point is quite evident in fly fishing’s celebrated literary tradition.

Because much of my approach in this work highlights the worlds of practice and experience, I tend to underscore the foundational realms of narrative, those are equally important in the work of consecration and in the midst of contestation. One should always keep in mind that various cultural narratives often situate religious practices. Along these lines stories and action work together. As Gatta reminded his readers, “Making nature sacred is a co-creative act that humans can and do perform through ritual and imagination – at least up to a point” (Gatta 2004: 10). Gatta’s final caveat signals his desire, similar to my own, not to disenchant nature, religion, or the sacred as real, powerful and experiential, despite their constructed elements.

American nature writers are hardly the only ones to consecrate nature through words and stories. In religious studies, scholars often stress the relationships between stories, narrative, and sacred space. In North America, for example, Michael Nelson and Keith Basso variously explore the ways in which native storytelling traditions not only create or construct, but respond to sacred natural landscapes. As Basso stated in the Apache context, “With words, a massive physical presence is fashioned into a meaningful human universe” (Basso 1996: 40). For the Apache, and others, place names carry implicit stories which not only sacralize the landscape but also teach lessons and enforce moral behavior. For the Koyukon of the Arctic, stories and narratives extend perceptions and relations with the natural world beyond what “Westerners define as the empirical level, into the realm of the spiritual” or sacred (Nelson 1983: 15). In doing so, stories

do more than sanctify or symbolize the sacred nature of certain places, but they also regulate relationships and enforce moral codes necessary for inhabiting those spaces.

In these contexts, nature can potentially act upon humans as much as humans act upon it. There is a feedback loop, of sorts, where culture is both created by and creator of sacred space. But even when nature works against or upon humans, that action is laden with a former history of human interpretation. Drawing on the work of Merleau-Ponty, David Abram ruminated on how “a particular place is never just a passive or inert setting for the human events that occur there. *It is an active participant in those occurrences*” (Abram 1996: 162, emphasis his). In the landscape, then, there are certain places that thrust themselves into our interpretive horizons and summon human activity through the work of sacralization. In this work, humans operate beyond words through ritual activities and practices that continually reinforce the world as sacred.

Beyond construction and reinforcement of the sacred, stories and rituals also reveal the frequently contested nature of sacred space. If these locales carry certain histories, then these histories often reflect upon or may generate polarities amongst cultural groups (Chidester and Linenthal 1995; Lane 2001). Therefore to experience a place as sacred is to participate “knowingly, or unknowingly, in a whole history of cultural tensions and conflicting claims” (Lane 2001: 4). Chidester and Linenthal were correct to note how sacred spaces are tangible mediums which operate as “sites of struggle over nationality, economic empowerment, and basic civil and human rights to freedom of religion and self-determination” (Chidester and Linenthal 1995: 3; see also Taylor 1995; 2001a; and 2001b). Moreover, in some cases, the perceptions or designations of particular places as sacred has often led some groups to physical defense through military or activist action (Taylor 1995; 2001a; and 2001b). Ecological restoration is another form of action in defense of sacred space.

Within each case study, rivers and watersheds are not only restored because they are perceived to contain sacred dimensions, but they are often contested as a result of competing visions of the landscapes value, sacred or otherwise. In other words, what might be sacred to one group might merely be a utility to another group; or what might be sacred to one coalition might be sacred for other reasons to a different coalition. This reality reveals the tricky nature of the sacred and signals the need not only for attention to the construction and interpretation of sacred space, but also to how it is appropriated, contested and stolen back and forth in struggles for cultural power and positioning (Chidester and Linenthal 1995: 16). Recognizing this shifting and contested nature of the sacred should force one to rethink the Eliadean legacy in religious studies.

For Eliade, sacred space is distinct from ordinary space, it is set apart. Sacred space denotes the center of the community or the world, hence the reason Eliade called it the *axis mundi*. Moreover, for Eliade the sacred is neither created nor contested, but encountered through single, discrete events where hierophany erupts into the profane world of the ordinary; and hence becomes immediately set apart from that world (Eliade 1957). While many places do thrust themselves into the interpretive horizons of humans, to say that this is the primary standard for the sacred removes any human activity, as contemporary scholars such as Smith of Chidester and Linenthal rightly insisted. “All the ritual, interpretive, social, economic, and political behavior that goes into consecrating sacred space is erased by attributing all the action to ‘holy places’ and ‘gods and spirits’ (Chidester and Linenthal 1995: 17). Moreover, the reality of contestation demands the inclusion of human agency in evaluating the sacred nature of sacred space.

Sacred space is created as well as set apart, but not in the absolute ways portrayed by Eliade. Because humans encounter, create and interpret sacred space, it is always inevitably

entangled with entrepreneurial, social, political, and other profane forces. Nowhere is this more evident than in contests over the nature and intent of environmental conservation or ecological restoration, where various visions of nature drive the choices, politics, and practices of those endeavors.

Looking at the history of sacred places reveals that many places are considered sacred to a variety of people for a variety of reasons. Making this point, John Sears built on Eliade to argue that many of America's natural tourist attractions – Yosemite or Niagara Falls, for example – all represent the eruption of the sacred into the landscape and American imagination. Yet, like Lane, Sears amends Eliade by noting how the human response to the eruption of the sacred inevitably leads to (re)-constructive, reinforcing activities. In part, the responses might tend toward commodification as was the case in the creation of America's national parks, or particular rivers, fish, or even some of anglers' "holy forefathers."

Beyond commodities, however, the reification of the sacred through story and ritual often tends toward the reinforcement of certain moral norms. This is certainly true in the context of natural spaces, where sacred status is often central for the encouragement of an environmental ethic as is evident throughout American environmental history (Cohen 1984, Fox 1986; Nash 1967; 1989; Oelschlaeger 1994; Peterson 2001; Taylor 1995; 2001a; 2001b; 2007). Most recently, the demands of the sacred have emerged as a token theme in the larger scholarly and activist turn to religion in search of successful environmental ethics. Along these lines, my research reveals how anglers often state that if rivers, lakes, watersheds, or even oceans are sacred, then anglers must treat them as such. And, many act on these claims.

If culture can consecrate nature through ritual, restoration, or preservation, culture can also profane nature. Contests over natural spaces sacred emerge over competing visions of physical

nature as sacred; or, more importantly in efforts to protect a watershed from the profaning activities of mining, drilling, or the construction of dams. In the context of the watershed coalitions examined here, rivers, streams, and their aquatic inhabitants are all perceived to contain sacred elements which are reinforced through restoration or other forms of pro-environmental behavior. Situations such as this one are occurring all across the American landscape. And as Chidester and Linenthal recognized,

New ritualizations, competing reinterpretations, and contestable reappropriations of its symbolic power all appeared to place the site at risk. Like any production of sacred space, however, these practices also revitalized the site as a place at which important religious concerns and interests could be adjudicated precisely because they were at stake. In similar ways, sacred space has been ritualized, reinterpreted, and contested all over America (5).

In New Mexico concerned citizens fought to keep a sacred space, pure and clean of the profaning activities of oil exploration. In other cases, such as on Tennessee's Coal Creek, locals continue through the Coal Creek Watershed Foundation to re-consecrate a watershed they see as profaned through a long history of coal mining, neglect, and ill use. Examples such as these entail the use of restoration ecology as an activity that seeks to clean up and restore a particular natural space to a perceived "original" or "pristine" condition. As will be discussed in greater detail in later chapters, the goals and approaches of restoration ecology are quite contested.

Beyond making nature sacred, the rituals of restoration, for example, also create or reinforce human communities. As Chidester and Linenthal argued, "sacred spaces anchors more than merely myth or emotion to anchor relations of meaning and power that are at stake in the formation of a larger social reality" (Chidester and Linenthal 1995: 17). In a Durkheimian sense, one might say that if ritual serves as functional glue for the community, it can heal or bind fissures, it can hold a community together, while also being a bit messy. Some have granted the same potential to ecological restoration. Like ritual, restoration can lead to social cooperation in place (Higgs 2003; Jordan 2005; Norton 2004; Thayer 2003). As William Jordan stated,

ecological restoration operates as “classic rituals of initiation, communion, and world renewal, providing a new context for accomplishing the ritual work of community making and world building” (Jordan 2003: 71-72). Combining community and environmental ethics, restoration can forge allegiances extend beyond the demands of the human community to include nature or a bioregion.

### **Conclusion**

If restoration ritually constructs or reinforces the sacred in nature, then we return to the crucial question of this chapter: What difference does it make to call any cultural activity religion (Chidester 2005)? For Chidester religion “can be a useful term for understanding the ways in which the transcendent, the sacred, and the ultimate are inevitably drawn into doing some very important things in popular culture: forming community, focusing desire, and entering humans into relations of exchange” (Chidester 2005: 2). Embracing each of these three criteria, while moving a step beyond, to use religion as a trope for analysis, this research explores how religion is constructed and encountered in fishing, on rivers, and amidst watersheds through conservation, restoration, and civic environmentalism.

Chidester finds the tropes of religion useful term for examining the work of popular culture, particularly rock n roll, coca-cola, Tupperware, or baseball. Beyond kitsch, plastic, and music, however, I believe that it makes a serious difference to call any cultural activity religion, particularly in light of increasing scholarly and activist turns to religion as potentially powerful responses to increasing ecological concerns. In the case studies of my dissertation I find the religious, the spiritual, meaning, values, the sacred, the profane articulated and engaged in unique and innovative ways on the ground or in the water, where practices give rise to unique values and community collaborations. Therefore, I believe that to explore fishing or ecological restoration has the same, if not more, analytical value than popular culture does for Chidester.

Exploring the interplay of nature and religion in the context of rivers and river restoration, reveals and underscores the ways in which individuals form communities, focus desire, or enter into relations of exchange as they attempt too sort out the messy realities of daily life pertaining to water, fish, or other environmental issues. If ethicists have been seeking to find successful forms of ethics, then perhaps popular culture provides new waters we should navigate.

Searching for such successful ethics, I believe we must explore the realms of practice and experience. In the realm of practice, then, I am interested in the arguments put forth by the emergent field of environmental pragmatism. Environmental pragmatism seeks a middle route through which to think about ethics as lived and practiced on the ground by individuals and communities concerned with the state of the environment. As Ben Minteer stated, pragmatism “is an active, constructive (or reconstructive) philosophy, one that arises from practical experience and takes shape as individuals – and communities – confront problems, learn about their (and others) values and beliefs, and adjust and progressively improve their natural and built environments”(Minteer 2005: 6). In this way pragmatism has an instrumentalist character, like lived religion theory, which places an emphasis on the realm of practice, experience, and narrative. Therefore, a pragmatic approach takes values and experiences as real, meaningful, and influential, while granting that they are often in flux or ad hoc, as I argue through lived religion.

Taking this approach, therefore, let us turn to the religious worlds of anglers to explore a few dimensions of how some might historically, ritually, and imaginatively construct their fishing traditions as religious and consecrate their fishing waters as sacred.

CHAPTER 3  
NEW STREAMS: FISHING, RELIGION, AND RESTORATION

The sport of fishing is an important part of life to many thousands of people, perhaps several millions of people, on this continent alone. It needs no more than this to make in an important subject. But it is also something more than a sport. *It is intimate exploration of a part of the world hidden from the eyes and minds of ordinary people. It is a way of thinking and doing, a way of reviving the mind and body, that men have been following with growing intensity for hundreds of years* (Haig-Brown 2000: 7).<sup>1</sup>

**Casting Trough Death**

During the summer of 2005, Doug, a dying cancer patient, who lived on a homestead in the backwoods of Alaska near the Susitna River, asked his Hospice assistant to help him accomplish his final wish in his dying days.<sup>2</sup> He wanted to leave this world with a salmon at the end of his fishing line. Salmon are a way of life for Alaskans; they define their geographic and cultural identity. According to Laura, the Hospice nurse, all he wanted was “one last salmon run.” Therefore, she set out to do her job of making that passage from this world into the next as comfortable as possible, so she went to work exploring ways to fulfill this man’s dying wish. With the help of his family, they proceeded to construct a stable fishing chair on the banks of the river, clear a path through the brush so that they might get Doug’s wheelchair to the river, and devise a plan to transport the patient to the water for his final farewell casts in this life. As the spring sun began to warm these south-central Alaskan waters, the salmon followed their ritual, anadromous path back to their home waters. As the salmon began to run, the patient’s days dwindled.

Finally, the day arrived. After all of the preparation, Laura and Doug’s family transported him to his chair alongside the Susitna, which was now teeming with fish. Each spring, salmon all

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<sup>1</sup> Originally published as *Fisherman’s Spring*. New York: Lyons Press, 1975b, 10-11.

<sup>2</sup> At the request of the hospice nurse, I have changed the names and locations in this story. Nonetheless, its power remains the same.

across the Pacific Ocean and accompanying watersheds swim to their freshwater homes to do two things: reproduce and die. This particular spring, Doug would join them on the latter part of their journey.

With the help of his son, the line was cast into the waters. In time, the line pulled taught and the reel proceeded to scream as the fish pulled line rapidly from the spool. At that moment, the dying man's wish was granted as his line was connected to the great cycle of life by way of a King Salmon. As the salmon took the line, Doug breathed his final breath. With his father's hand no longer able to bring in the fish, the son took over. Upon landing the fish, Doug's son, Doug Jr. released the fish back into its waters and annual ritual swim. With that, the proceeded to catch other fish for a family feast later that day.

The mode of fishing in this story – fly fishing or bait – does not matter. This occurrence aptly depicts the ways in which anglers of varying ilk either explicitly understand their sport through their own particular religious traditions or implicitly tie fishing to religion, religiosity, or nature religion in a variety of ways as a source of meaning and homemaking. In this chapter, I will trace both. In order to most efficiently navigate these waters of fishing religiosity, I will focus the bulk of my attention on fly fishing cultures, largely in the context of trout, trout waters, and their restoration. In part, I am doing this because, as I show, my research reveals that fly fishers devote a considerable amount of time to articulating the value – religious or aesthetic – to their sport. By highlighting these efforts, I will also offer critique where necessary, noting in particular how generations of fly fishing writers create and perpetuate their sport's myths (Cameron 2002; Schullery 1987; 1999; 2002).<sup>3</sup> These myths, on one hand, can provide fruitful

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<sup>3</sup> Schullery writes that much of fly fishing history is really an “idealization of history – a startling blend of fact, myth, and hero worship” (Schullery 1987: 2). This is a point he spends a considerable amount of time and text exploring, critiquing, and exposing. While Schullery is quite critical of it, as a scholar of religious studies I am

ground for exploring the contribution that outdoor activities like fishing might offer to engagement of ecological ethics. On the other hand, however, these myths might at times be counterproductive to the larger ecological and community good. I explore these tensions in this chapter and throughout this research.

### **Blurred Lines and Research Boundaries**

Reflecting on religion and fishing, Tom McGuane believed “humans have suspected” their connection “for thousands of years” (McGuane 1999: xiv). In the book turned Academy Award winning film *A River Runs Through It*, Norman Maclean’s family held that very suspicion, believing there exists “no clear line between fishing and religion” (Maclean 1976: 1). For the Maclean family, fly fishing, in particular, operated in tandem with the teachings of their father, a Presbyterian minister. While the Macleans connected fly fishing to Christianity, other fly fishers often perceive fly fishing itself as a religious or spiritual activity. John Randolph, the long-time editor of *Fly Fisherman*, fly fishing’s premier magazine, has not hesitated to call fly fishing a religion and in doing so, cited a popular statistic that not only is the sport practiced by several million people, but that Sir Izaak Walton’s *The Compleat Angler: Or, the Contemplative Man’s Recreation* since its publication has ranked third as the most printed text in the English Language, behind the *Holy Bible* and *Pilgrim’s Progress* (Paxman 1996; Raines 1996: xii; Randolph 2002: ix, 233).

Beyond statistics, however, anglers of all varieties, around the world frequently use terms such as religious, spiritual, sacred, divine, ritual, meditation, and conversion to describe their personal angling experiences. Drawing upon religious terminology, anglers will refer to rivers, watersheds, or oceans as their church and to fish as sacred. Often these latter pronouncements

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intrigued by the fact that such mythologization exists. What does this idealization of history tell us about the religious worlds of anglers?

drive a concern for the conservation of said sacred spaces as evidenced by participation in local and national conservation organizations.

I understand religion to consist of both rhetorical and practical strategies for negotiating both individual and communal commitments to the worlds in which one finds oneself thrown. Religion is constructed while responding to concerns around concepts of and encounters with the sacred. It provides a set of tools for responding to situations, consecrating spaces, or negotiating the messy quotidian realities of the world that might include rivers, fish, and their ecological fates.

Building on these descriptive parameters of religion, and informed by fieldwork exploring fishing communities and their relationships to sacred space, environmental ethics, and ecological restoration, in this chapter I trace the historical, material, and everyday elements of fly fishers and their subcultures, demonstrating along the way the insights that come by understanding fly fishing as a religious practice and fly fishing subcultures as having a strong, spiritual dimension, which can, at times, drive an ethic of environmental conservation.<sup>4</sup> Those anglers I quote within this particular chapter represent a wide selection of my larger interview sample collected. I chose these particular anglers because I believed they represent an array of skills and devotion to the sport of fly fishing and involvement in conservation. Some are novices and newcomers to the sport while others have fished their entire lives, have children who are members of the United States Fly Fishing Team, served as Director of the American Museum of Fly Fishing, presidents of major fishing organizations, and/or are lifetime guides in their

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<sup>4</sup> Of course, fly fishers and other anglers sometimes precipitate environmental degradation. However, fieldwork indicates that those who are involved in efforts of environmental conservation often maintain religious, spiritual, or at least deeply affective connections to the natural world through their sport. Fly fishing is merely one example of religiously conceived popular culture related to conservation practice. By highlighting fly fishing, I am hardly placing the sport on a pedestal as a panacea for environmental ills. I am instead merely highlighting the value of examining popular culture through the tools of religious studies for understanding important human to nature relationships.

respective states. I maintain that each of these anglers, regardless of experience and “authority,” provide illuminating statements on the religious and spiritual aspects of fly fishing in relation to environmental concerns, ecological restoration, and civic environmentalism.

Following these watersheds, then, this chapter will take the following steps. First, I illuminate the various ways in which fly fishers in particular articulate the religiosity of their sport. In these religious waters, I examine on one hand how anglers build on their own religious backgrounds, such as Christianity, as a means to reflect upon fishing, or use fishing to reflect upon Christianity. In part, this also entails exploring how anglers often utilize a variety of world religious traditions to articulate the religious understandings of their sport. On the other hand, and more importantly, I highlight the ways in which fly fishing through materiality, literature, ritual practice, and conservation emerges as analogous to religion for many anglers. Third, the latter part of this chapter provides an entrée into the ways in which anglers use either explicit religion or implicit angling religiosity to advocate for the conservation, preservation, or restoration of certain waters, their fish, and surrounding communities (both human and non-human).

While I laud the potential of fishing religiosity to potentially drive ecological concern and pro-environmental behavior, I also offer caution and critique by assessing the ways in which values are not totally lived or examining how these values might at times be detrimental to the larger goals of environmental sustainability or ecological restoration. As these cases show, religious, cultural, or deeply affective values might both drive or obstruct civic environmentalism. Nonetheless, I argue that scholars need to more fully consider the relationships between values in fostering or preventing various forms of pro-environmental behavior. Fishing, like other realms of popular culture, provides unique new streams for

exploring the ways in which values and practices impact grassroots responses to ecological concerns such as native species protection, river restoration, or environmental conflict (and its resolution).

### **Biblical Roots and Reflections of Fishing**

If Maclean's words in *A River Runs Through It* are the most cited lines in fly fishing lore, it is worth noting their situation for the MacLean family in the context of their Protestant faith. Following these lines, Christianity has long played a pivotal role in situating all forms fishing to religion. With respect to fly fishing, Maclean's father told him and his brother that Christ's disciples were fishermen, which Maclean and his brother assumed "that all first class fishermen on the Sea of Galilee were fly fishermen" (Maclean 1976: 1). While we know that Christ's disciples were hardly fly fishermen, and probably did not fish with a rod and line, but a net, these stories provide powerful tales for many fishermen and women, regardless of their rod of choice and fishing style.

One can hardly deny the Christian legacy in all religious readings of fishing. Mark Browning noted in particular the Christian ideal of Jesus being fishers of men, who turned five loaves of bread and a few fish into enough food to feed a crowd (Browning 1998: 19; Matthew 14:14 – 21; Mark 6:34 – 44; Luke 9:12 – 17; John 6:1-14). Larry Dossey mused on these same symbolic connections of fishing, fish, and Christianity in an article on fishing and health, such symbolism highlights the variety of ways in both fish and fishing are understood to have healing potential. Dossey not only explores the ways in which fishing can be a healing activity, but might importantly be used as a catalyst for engaging environmental issues (Dossey 1998). What is important here is how Dossey connected the healing potential of fishing to historical symbols of the fish as sacred and nourishing in his own Christian tradition. Anglers often cite Christianity when articulating the power of fishing in their lives. Commonly, anglers explain that they would

rather be on a river thinking about God, then in church thinking about a river or fish. I probably heard this statement from 8 out of 10 anglers throughout my fieldwork.

Connections of fishing to Christianity are hardly recent and date back at least, probably well before, the writings of the famed Sir Izaak Walton and the controversial Dame Juliana Berners. Walton was such a noted devout Christian that he was buried in Winchester Cathedral in Hampshire, England (Raines 1996: xviii). In the *Compleat Angler*, Walton likened anglers to Christians as “quiet men and followers of peace,” who resist distraction by material things and seek serenity, quiet, and contemplation of all things divine (Walton 1653 [1996]: 8). Angling, for Walton, offered a primary mode for the contemplation of divinity.

Despite Walton’s revered status in the world of fishing, he is hardly alone in the English canon of early angling authors. Most commonly he is associated with the mythical Dame Juliana Berners.<sup>5</sup> Some trace Walton to Berners through the *Arte of Angling* (1577) attributed to William Samuel and William Denny’s *Secret’s of Angling* (1613). Others call the work attributed to Berners, *A Treatise on Fishing with an Angle* (c1421) in *The Book of St. Albans*, the “Old Testament of the sport,” although Paul Schullery cautioned against such symbolic elevation (Schullery 1999: 39). Schullery noted, however, that the *Treatise* provides a “handy symbolic point of origin” (35). If this work is a point of origin, for some it justifies the connection between angling and religion, as early histories of Berners relate that she was a nun or abbess. However, Thomas P. Harrison argued that Berners was more likely a regular resident at the priory, or perhaps was a school teacher rather than a nun or prioress (Harrison 1979a: 3; Harrison 1979b: 8-11. Nonetheless, this has not stopped some from linking her to St. Juliana of Liege (Harrison 1979a: 4). Despite historical evidence that suggests otherwise, the continued insistence to link

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<sup>5</sup> Berners’ real last name is Barnes; however, Schullery and Harrison variously point out that by the mid-1500s Barnes’ name had shifted to Berners (Schullery 1999; Harrison 1979a; 1979b).

Berners and Walton to a more esteemed lineage reveals intersecting occasions for understanding the constructions of fly fishing religiosity.

If Berners was not a nun, many call her real attachment to the *Treatise* into question. However, this does not stop others from noting her symbolic importance (Schullery 1999: 39). Holly Morris, for one, celebrated Berners (real or mythic) status in fly fishing history. “There has been spirited debate about her authorship, and some cases her existence,” Morris explained, “Nonetheless Dame Juliana’s standing as an angling heroine endures, and she remains the first and best known female figure in five centuries of angling lore and history” (Morris 1991: 96). Berners’ lore tends to grow as more women join the sport, and is certainly a continued reference point for anglers connecting their ritual practice with a Christian heritage.

If anglers trace their roots through the likes of Berners and Walton, many Christian anglers find fly fishing today as a primary means of reflecting upon their faith. Various forms of Christian fly fishing, bass fishing, or saltwater groups and clubs exist around the country.<sup>6</sup> Recently, Fred Krueger of the Religious Campaign for Forest Conservation began planning to lead a group of Christian fly fishers into Yellowstone in search of trout and spiritual refreshment. This trip, planned for the Fall 2009, will seek to “explore and articulate the spiritual lessons in trout fishing,” aiding Christian anglers who desire encounters with God in the wilds of nature, or the holy book of nature.<sup>7</sup> Their expedition will devote time each day to fishing, readings, journal keeping, and discussion groups on spiritual intuitions linking the day’s readings to the day’s fishing.

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<sup>6</sup> Christian Anglers Association. [www.rockdove.com/caa](http://www.rockdove.com/caa), accessed 3 October 2008. See also [www.christiananglers.net](http://www.christiananglers.net), accessed 3 October 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Quote taken from mailing invitation and registration form, in the author’s possession. For a pithy history of the Book of Nature in Christianity, see Gould (2005).

While Christian references and symbolism are rampant within angling culture, Judaism has considerably fewer explicit explorations. However, this does not mean that “anonymous” Jewish anglers do not use fishing as a means to explore their religion, theological questions, and cultural history.<sup>8</sup> Most recently, with the increasing popularity of blogs, Eric Eisenkramer, a rabbi in the tradition of Reform Judaism, has taken his reflections on Judaism and fly fishing public.

On his blog, Eisenkramer who prefers the name Fly Fishing Rabbi, admitted his turn to angling was a direct result of Maclean’s book turned film.<sup>9</sup> In his years since taking his religion to the streams, Eisenkramer wrote that he has come to see the truth in the notion that there is no clear line between fishing and religion. Fishing, he blogged, teaches us about the elusive nature of God. Fish too are just as elusive. Searching for fish teaches patience, appreciation, and humility in ways that make the river an equally powerful sanctuary to the synagogue. As he mused “I am blessed to have two sanctuaries in my life, the cold-water streams of upstate New York, and the sanctuary in my Temple, where I find inner-peace” (Fly Fishing Rabbi, accessed 29 May 2008). Like other anglers, Eisenkramer highlighted the power of fishing and religion to connect the person or community to nature in ways that foster respect and appreciation. He explored these and other themes ranging from ethics of catch and release to the nature of God. All the while he elucidated that a “fly fishing rabbi”

Is a person who fishes to find peace and sanctuary along with rainbow and brown trout. One who feels awe and humility in the beauty of nature at every bend in the river. A Fly Fishing Rabbi is one who fishes not only to catch fish, but also to find those precious parts

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<sup>8</sup> Achor, Kathleen. 2002. “Who’s Your Daddy?” *American Fly Fisher: Journal for the American Museum of Fly Fishing*. Winter, Volume 28: Number 1. 1. Achor, the editor of *American Fly Fisher*, uses the term “anonymous fly fishers” to refer to the great number of anglers, journal keepers, and fly tiers who were quite skilled in their sport and surrounding activities but never made it into the myths, never publicly published, or outwardly influenced the sport.

<sup>9</sup> <http://theflyfishingrabbi.blogspot.com/2007/02/what-is-fly-fishing-rabbi-authors-note.html>

of himself and the world in which we live. One need not be a rabbi or priest or minister to unlock the spiritual possibilities of casting a dry fly. We must only open our eyes to the beauty, awe and peace that can be found on every cold water stream (ibid).

One blogger responded to Eisenkramer by expressing agreement and appreciation for the Fly Fishing Rabbi, while simultaneously noting how he sees fly fishing itself as religious. His point highlights my insistence that fly fishers both explicitly draw on their own religions, while others see fly fishing (or other forms of angling) as the religion. Another blogger agreed, while explaining how he uses Taoism to reflect on the religious potential of fly fishing. This blogger is not alone.

### **Borrowing Symbols for Streamside Syncretism**

Among anglers in North America it is quite common to find a variety of contexts when anglers borrow from a variety of Native American traditions to articulate their various versions of nature religion and angling spirituality. Although scholars, such as Shepard Krech, have contested the notion of Native Americans as the original environmentalists or “ecological Indian,” native traditions are frequently celebrated in various venues of popular culture for their supposed reverence of nature (Krech 2000). In Native Americans, anglers seek language and lessons of respect and reciprocity for nature.

Along these lines, some seek wisdom in Native American traditions for ritually coping with fishing’s violent aspects. Mark Browning commented on how “one significant area in which Native American attitudes seem to surface among fishing writing is in the attitude toward the prey . . . where Native American traditions emphasize arriving at a connection or sympathy with the fish” (Browning 1998: 43). Browning’s point is most evident in the writing of David James Duncan, where he quite often searches for trout, but simultaneously struggles with the ethical issues of catching and potentially killing a fish.

One short story entitled “God” aptly illuminates Duncan’s double bind. In this story, Duncan related a powerful dream where he taught noted Native American writer and activist Sherman Alexie to fish. In the dream, Alexie caught what grows into a “gargantuan fish” (Duncan 2001: 265). Rather than release this fish, as this goes against Alexie’s cultural attitude, they planned to kill and eat the fish. After all, catch-and-release of fish is “necessitated” as Duncan wrote, “by my country’s vast population and lethal industrial ways” (ibid).<sup>10</sup> At the request of Alexie, Duncan killed the fish, only to have the fish speak to him in the midst of its death. What ensued was a struggle for a quick death with dignity, passion, and reverence for the life of the fish. The fish, in the midst of the struggle, morphed into a human. An Indian. The Indian blessed them, and then disappeared into a crowd. Uncatchable.

This dream led Duncan to reflect upon fishing as his “Faith” (Duncan 2001: 271). Based on this faith, he perpetually struggles with its ethics, while always seeking to protect those fish, waters, and watersheds upon which he utterly depends. Narratives such as this one, which I hardly captured the power of, are common in Duncan’s writings, where he has engaged various religions in source of guidance, ethics, and practical motivation to protect salmon, trout, and their homes.

Like Duncan, other anglers also turn to native traditions as a means to articulate the ways in which fishing generates a respect for nature or avenues for expressing religious connections to the natural world. For example, John Randolph noted how fly fishing can generate something akin to

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<sup>10</sup> Catch and release is an “ethical code” in many angling subcultures, although it tends to be most common in fly fishing. In short, catch and release is what it sounds like. Rather than keeping the fish, you release them back into the water to be caught another day. This approach emerged in response to rapidly dwindling fish stocks in North America.

What Native Americans describe as their religious animus, a feeling that a spiritual landscape lies beneath the physical one, and that it is only at certain little-understood, mystical moments that it is revealed. Sometimes, deep in a river, the fly fisher finds that the stream is like poetry, coherent, transcendent, and with the power to elevate meaning in life. (Randolph 2002: xii).

For the most part, fly fishers tend to refer to Native Americans quite broadly rather than specifying particular traditions, stories, or beliefs. This approach to symbolic borrowing is problematic. With the exception of scholar/writers such as Duncan, most anglers tend to appropriate generalized ideas of Native American religions, without noting any historical context, cultural heritage, or colonial connotations.<sup>11</sup>

However, this is not to say that such borrowing is not without interesting results. In particular, I often think of the ways in which fly fishers create something akin to totems out of their objects of devotion: fish. These totems, then, often lead to the protection of those species. While angling is not his focus, no work comes to mind more frequently when discussing the elevation of fish to totem status as a tool for restoration or preservation than does the work of Freeman House. In *Totem Salmon: Life Lessons from another Species*, House recounted the efforts of the Matolle Watershed Salmon Support Group in the Mattole River Watershed of Northwest California.

According to House, salmon are a species, among many, that can potentially talk to humans; if humans will listen. Drawing on local indigenous knowledge from the Matolle peoples of his bioregion, House explored how “Somewhere beyond our modern notions of religion and regulation but partaking of both, human engagement with salmon has been marked by behavior that is respectful, participatory, and ceremonial” (House 1999:13). For House, salmon are

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<sup>11</sup> For responses to the ways in which American popular culture borrows from Native cultures see Andy Smith, “For those who were Indian in a former life.” In this article, she admonishes Anglos for appropriating, or stealing, symbols that are not their own. Instead, she insists that Americans look to their own cultural traditions and histories for insights on more benign or beneficial relationships to nature, such as European pagan or druid traditions. Also see Mulcock (2005) and Deloria (1998).

sacred. And by listening to them, he explained, humans can learn what it means to be human in cooperation with the natural world. In part, for House and others discussed in the following chapters, such respectful cooperation entails restoration of native species and their home waters.

But anglers of all varieties employ religious traditions other than their own to explore more practical elements of their sport beyond human to fish relationships. Concepts from Eastern Religious traditions, such as Buddhism or Daoism, are frequently utilized as resources for articulating the meditative potential of fly fishing.

One fly fisher who has been intimately involved in the cultural production of the sport since the 1970s, John Randolph, drew upon Buddhism and Daoism to trace what he sees as the evolution of an angler. For Randolph, angling consists of multiple levels of maturation where one begins on the base level of wanting to catch fish, slowly learning various practices, knowledges, and philosophies. All the while, according to Randolph, the angler should seek “the tenth level,” where the goal is to meld meditatively into “oneness” with nature. The tenth level is a Zen-like state of consciousness for Randolph. “In the end,” he explained, “the tenth level is a state of mind, emotional tranquility in the knowledge and skills of the art and the ability to enter the stream spiritually. At this level the fly fisher’s shadow has merged with the stream.” This is the state of “nirvana” (Randolph 2002: 212). Interestingly, while Randolph included all forms of angling at the root of this spiritual evolution, he insisted that only the fly fisher can truly reach this state of meditative perfection. Randolph is hardly the only one in the realm of angling to make these claims, nor is he the only fly fisher to problematically assert spiritual superiority for fly fishing above all other forms of angling.

It is important to note here how many fly fishers utilize language of meditation, nirvana, or Zen-like states. Moreover, anglers I have encountered in literature, through field work and

interviews, and casual conversations on stream-sides, barstools, or fishing shops most commonly describe the religious or meditative elements of fishing in the context of the individual. One fly fisher, Benjamin Casarez explained, “Even when fishing twenty feet from your best buddy, the experience of fishing, catching, and landing fish is always individual.” Casarez also noted, however, that “knowing and seeing your buddy there certainly adds to the entire experience, without him or her there it would not be quite the same” (Casarez, interview: 23 July 2006). On the subject of the fishing buddy, David James Duncan mused the “best give a fly fisher can offer his partner” is to head in opposite directions of each other with the anticipation of sharing stories at the end of the day (Duncan 2005). In other contexts, both of these anglers utilize a variety of language form religious traditions.

### **Believing Communities of Spring Creek Converts**

Even though fly fishing’s religious experiences are individual they are always reflected upon in the company, language, history, and literary legacy of a community of believers often associated with “an ancient religious order” (Browning 1998: 55). Fly fishing, then, like religion for Durkheim, entails experiences of the individual variety verified in the contexts of a “conscious collective” (Durkheim 1972:146). Only in this community of believers do fly fishers believe they can retrace moments on religious waters, seeking to make sense of the experiences and activities of piscatorial meaning making. Sounding as if he were echoing Taylor’s discussions of nature religion traced in Chapter 2, Duncan reflected on how he sought communal connections that extend beyond the self and fishing buddy to the natural world, to the very “wind, rivers, rocks, trees, birds, and of course fish” with whom the fly fisher hopes to merge through the practice. By communing with nature through fly fishing, Duncan continued, fly fishers hope to “catch a ride our souls can keep riding forever” (Duncan 2005).

The metaphor of “ride” there is telling. Fly fishers often describe the early moments of connecting to nature via angling in terms of conversion experiences in which their souls, as Duncan ruminates, catch an eternal “ride.” In an article on steelhead fishing, Lani Waller described catching his first rainbow trout on a fly rod as an “‘amorphous gestalt,’ a mysterious blend of vague yet powerful signals, which came from an unknown and distant source.” This moment “of revelation” in 1949, Waller maintained, thoroughly immersed him into a life devoted to fly fishing (Waller 2006: 53).

Anglers often describe their conversions to a new fly casting religion of nature as if they were baptized and born again. Fly fishers frequently insist that fishing provides more than the occasion to catch fish, but opportunities to “approach to a web of relations that give shape and coherence to the natural world” (Leeson 1994: 3). One New Mexico fly fisher recounted that learning about bugs and aquatic life, more than catching fish, caused him to “sell all my spin fishing gear and switch addictively to fly fishing.” “Fly fishing forces you to understand bugs, fish habitat, and life cycles,” he reflected, and “therefore connect more deeply with nature and God.” “You know,” he explicated,

I saw the cycles of life. Looking at insects and becoming an amateur entomologist, looking at life cycles. I felt so close to God. *You cannot fly fish and not believe in a higher power, I truly believe that. You would be a fool to think that this was some random act of events that makes all that process take place. To see a mayfly as a nymph, turn into a fly, mate and die to feed trout. That trout can take advantage of this wonder, and acts of God. That is about where I get it* (Franchell, interview: 21 June 2006).

When making such proclamations on the power of fly fishing to connect the angler to nature, fly fishers, like other religious devotees, draw upon a lengthy literary tradition for support, inspiration, and credence.

## Literary Legacy

Fly fishers in life and literature like to brag that theirs is the most literary of outdoor sports. According to Mark Browning, “although outdoor sports have generated a considerable literature, far more than half of that writing is centered not on the land, but on the aquatic hunt, fishing” (Browning 1998: 20). Fishing, Leonard Wright, an angling author himself, boasted, “has produced a library that dwarfs any other sport, and the fly fishing sections of these shelves contain the vast majority of quality books” (Wright 1990: 11). For Browning, fly fishing’s esteemed literary tradition creates a space for fishing to act as “at least an active metaphor for religion and spiritual life” (12). One cannot stress enough the profound influence this creative literature has had on fly fishing culture. Izaak Walton, Ernest Hemingway, his daughter Lorian, Aldo Leopold, David James Duncan, and Norman Maclean are but a few of the iconic figures in an increasingly long list of fishing literati.<sup>12</sup> Quoting, and adding to, famed author Sparse Grey Hackle, Arnold Gingrich, a fly fishing writer himself, stated, “Some of the best fishing around is to be found not in water but in print. It follows that some of the best fishing partners are to be found not in life but in literature” (Gingrich 1974:1). If these authors are skilled with the fly rod, some are even more skilled with the pen.

Fly fishing’s literary tradition certainly builds on the larger canon of American nature writing, which according to the scholar of English literature John Gatta provides an archetypal path for reflecting on “pursuits of self-transcendence” in nature’s forests, fields, river valleys, and mountains (Gatta 2004: 1). If Taylor and Albanese highlight the role of nature as a source of the sacred in nature religions, Gatta emphasized a primary mode of reflection on sacred nature

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<sup>12</sup> While it is not in the scope of this paper, it is worth noting the debates surrounding the fly fisher’s tendency to celebrate and claim many authors of this tradition as their own. As historian Paul Schullery noted, Hemingway and Walton all fished in other manners than just fly fishing. For a thorough treatment of this debate, see Paul Schullery (1999; 2000; 2006a; 2006b).

that emerges through the romantic writings of Muir and Thoreau or the more contemporary engagements of Aldo Leopold, Anne Dillard, or Gary Snyder. Writers and readers of fly fishing literature often draw upon and identify, with this larger tradition of American nature writing, which, Gatta rightly noted, is pivotal for understanding how Americans in particular have reflected upon the sacred potential of nature.

Norman Maclean is one of the most faithfully recited authors in the realm of fly fishing. However, no fishing text is more historically celebrated by all anglers than Sir Izaak Walton's *The Compleat Angler: Or The Contemplative Man's Recreation*. While many contemporary fly fishing authors do not embrace Christianity, none can deny the Christian legacy in fishing's literary tradition, noting in particular the Christian ideal of Jesus being "fishers of men." (Browning 1998: 17). Gatta's emphasis on the ways Christianity "has most deeply affected" the language and expression of American nature writing therefore, is equally applicable to fishing literature as it is to the whole of American nature writing (Gatta 2004: 7).

I already noted some of the controversy surrounding Walton and Berners. Adding fodder to the fire, Schullery reminded readers that Walton was hardly a fly fisher, and instead fished in any means possible necessary for catching fish (Schullery 1987; 1999; see also Schullery, interview: 5 July 2007). Moreover, the fly fishing portions of the *Compleat Angler* were added later by Charles Cotton to the 1676 edition of Walton's text; yet, fly fishers celebrate Walton as if his success were somehow directly related to fly fishing (ibid). Tracing this historical lineage surrounding both Walton and Berners, reveals how historical debates provide powerful mythological foundations among the most faithful practitioners, while keeping open the possibility of even earlier texts of literary origins, "leading hopeful antlers on fantasy

explorations” of archives, in search of some undiscovered text, just as fly fishers seek the undiscovered stream (Schullery 1999: 40).

Fly fishing’s literary tradition has produced two primary, yet highly overlapping and mutually supporting, genres: instructional and inspirational. Inspiration, of course, also provides a basis for instruction. Instructional texts operate as ritual manuals that explain approaches, techniques for casting or tying flies, secrets of certain locations, rivers, and regions known for quality angling opportunities. Inspirational texts, on the other hand, offer opportunities for anglers to reminisce and relive moments on waters in search of trout and in commune with nature.

As a primary *modus operandi* of fly fishing nature religion, the storytelling tradition goes beyond the simple telling of exploits to the singing of praises of nature, fish, and sport, not unlike the American nature writing tradition, while teaching lessons, ethics, and reflecting on the divine potential of nature (Hammond 1992: 225). Sociologist Bryn Hammond likened the storytelling tradition in fly fishing to the power of storytelling and narrative in the world’s religious traditions. In the end, he compared the writing and telling of fish stories to that of catechism (Hammond 1992: 226) or as Browning commented, in reference to Hammond, “all those involved come to the words fully aware that nothing new is forthcoming, yet remain faithfully attendant to their repetition and variation” (Browning 1998: 201). Stories, like fishing, work through repetition; this aids the angler in, as Orsi said of religion, making something of the worlds they have found themselves thrown into. No one expressed this more clearly than David James Duncan,

When the trout are happening, I can kneel on merciless stones *happily*, for hours and hours; I can stare into blinding glare, withstand heat or cold, be chased by bears, cow moose with calves, or redder necks than my own, and still rush gratefully back for more. I don’t understand the *why* of all this. I don’t try to understand. I just pull on my waders

and merge via a spirituality so thrashing, splashing, cursing, casting, and Earth-engaged it doesn't feel spiritual at all: it just feeds the spirit (Duncan 2002: 303, italics his).

Fishing writing, done well, takes the angling reader into the magical moments of fishing and into a world of connections and wholeness, where more than fish are caught; where meaning is created, and a bit of world orientation is gained

Further, fishing stories, both written and read, provide the common thread through which fly fishers understand and identify themselves, connecting them to a broad community and shared historical heritage. As environmental ethicist Anna Peterson noted the social life of religious communities are always bound up in narrative and stories. "Only in light of stories," according to Peterson, "can people come to understand themselves, the multiple roles they play, and the origins and trajectories of their communities" (Peterson 2001: 18). Therefore, even when re-telling tales of individual experience or reading a book in solitude, the fly fisher is always participating in an ongoing story of that community's collective conscious. Further, stories offer equally powerful vehicles for understanding and reflecting on a community's relationship to the natural world, hence the reason stories, myths, and cultural narratives are celebrated as a necessary components of successful environmental ethicists.

### **Holy Water**

In "Nature and Sacrament," Paul Tillich urged Christians to revitalize natural elements as sacramental realities. "The power and meaning of nature," he insisted "must be sought within and through its objective physical structures." (Tillich 1957: 101). Water is just such a physical structure, into which baptism not only offers opportunities for purification, but also a more embodied connection to the physical reality of the divine. As if they were reading Tillich, anglers elevate water as the most holy symbol next to the fish itself, equating wading into rivers as a self-induced equivalent to baptism. By stating "Good streams are alive, rare, frail, ephemeral,

pure, and honest. They are spiritual places, rich select envelopes of aquatic glory that diffuse evenly throughout the entire being” John Randolph summed Tillich’s point from a fly fishers perspective (Randolph 2002: 14).

Through its heightened perceptions of water, fly fishing shares a great deal in common with the history of the world’s religions through their celebration of rivers, streams, and water. Just as Christians pilgrimage to the holy springs of Lourdes, France and Hindus pilgrimage to bathe in the waters of the Ganges, fly fishers make “ceremonial journeys” to gain the opportunity to cast a line, wet their feet, and touch the fish of famed rivers including Utah’s Green, Montana’s Big Blackfoot, and Argentina’s Rio Grande de la Tierra del Fuego (McGuane 1999: xii).

Despite the celebration of certain rivers around the world, anglers just as frequently turn to the small streams and waters in their own bioregions. In many ways, some feel the small unknown, local streams, devoid of pilgrims, provide the greatest opportunities for connective, spiritual, and religious moments. For example, John Gierach has made clear throughout his many publications that the most sacred stream to him is the St. Vrain, a stream in his backyard that spans no more than thirty feet across.

Most fishermen I know – even those who think of themselves as Sportsmen with a capital S – have a creek like this somewhere in their lives. It’s not big, it’s not great, it’s not famous, certainly it’s not fashionable, and therein lies the charm. It’s an ordinary, run-of-the-mill trout stream where fly fishing can be a casual affair rather than having to be balls-to-the-wall adventure all the time. It’s the place where, for once, you are *not* the tourist (Gierach 2005: 184).

Gierach has often mused, as these words demonstrate, that for many anglers it is not the gear, the river, nor the size of the trout that matter, but rather, it is the opportunities to commune

with nature in solitude that constitute the bedrock for the religious and spiritual perceptions that can come with fishing.<sup>13</sup>

### **More than Materiality, More than Fish**

As Gierach indicated, beyond history and materiality, anglers perpetually assert that they primarily seek an opportunity to stand in a river, meditatively cast a line, and commune with nature. Anglers take delight in noting how Herbert Hoover exclaimed that, “next to prayer, fishing is the most personal relationship of man.” Anglers around the world agree with Hoover that fishing is a chance to “wash one’s soul with pure air, with the rush of the brook, or with the shimmer of the sun on the blue water,” who also insisted that with this practice, “is not so much getting fish as it is a state of mind and a lure for the human soul into refreshment” (Hoover 1963: 76, 11, 30).

Gus, a New Mexico angler, recounted similar sentiments. For Gus fly fishing is meditative, spiritual, and refreshing. Fly fishing, he remarked, “re-creates the soul,” and for him, this is what makes it religious: “Fly fishing provides a release of stress and things. It’s spiritual; it is a lot of different things. When I am fly fishing it is not about fish, it is about where I am and what I am doing. It allows me to step outside myself. That is refreshing! (Gustafson, interview: 21 July 2006).”

As Gus noted and many echo, fly fishing represents more than catching fish. After all, a common line among anglers states “Piscator non solum piscatur” or “There is more to fishing than catching fish.” According to Harry Middleton in *The Earth is Enough: Growing Up in a*

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<sup>13</sup> Gierach’s celebration of solitude and small streams is evident throughout his writing but perhaps most evident in *Fly Fishing Small Streams* (1989), in which he called small stream fishing “pure fly fishing” (27). On gear, Gierach noted in *At the Grave of the Unknown Fisherman* (2003) that “there’s probably way too much of it” (71). If he loves gear, however, that love is professed in books such as *Fishing Bamboo: One Man’s Love Affair with Bamboo Fly Rods* (2001). The sentiments noted are manifest throughout his textual corpus and are far too many to list here. Moreover, Gierach has been known to wax poetic on bass fishing as much as he has trout fishing, demonstrating how it is not necessarily the fish that matters, but the opportunity to go fishing that matters most.

*World of Fly Fishing, Trout, and Old Men*, fly fishing creates situations and opportunities for anglers to bind themselves to something greater, primarily nature (Middleton 1989: 57). These sentiments recall what some speculate reflect the etymological root of the term religion, “religio” or “religare” – “to tie or bind” (Chidester 2005: 75; Esposito 2006: 6; Smith 1998: 269).

According to Browning, fly fishers might insist they fish to make contact with the ineffable, to reach into the “unseen and draw out life,” and in turn, perceive “angling as a means toward the divine” (Browning 1998: 20). Ted Leeson, in *Habit of Rivers*, passionately reflected that “Trout streams tug at the mind with an insistent, contradictory pull, presenting both a plain and perfect simplicity and a subtle link to sources of *hidden significance*” (Leeson 1994:1-2). David James Duncan unabashedly pushed the borders of religious mysticism, in agreement with Leeson and Browning, by stating, “When I fish, I fish to hook into an *entirety*. I fish to trade self-consciousness for creek consciousness and self-awareness for rise-awareness” (Duncan 2001: 203).<sup>14</sup> Although these words are those of famous angling authors, stream-side conversations, bar-stool babblings, and fly shop stories reveal wholehearted agreement with such sentiments. Anglers, then, in literature and life, often seek experiences which represent essential quests for meaning in the lives of all humans; anglers simply perform these quests on streams, rivers, and lakes while ritually waving a wand in the air; and it is the “wand” or fly rod that is essential for defining fly fishers and mediating practice.

### **Rods and Ritual**

The material relics, fly rods, reels, and clothing, more than literature, as Colleen McDannell said of material Christianity, “signal visually who is in the group and who is not”

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<sup>14</sup> Some readers have taken this to mean “eternity.” However, reading the term as “entirety,” as it is printed, I have assumed Duncan referred to the powers of fly fishing to connect, or “hook,” into the entire cosmos. In other words, this term reflects a holistic mysticism which Duncan often describes when contemplating the human relationship to nature.

(McDannell 1995: 45). The material goods of fly fishing not only bind individuals to the sacred, but also bind them to each other operating as evidence and indicators of commitment to a particular religious community.

Contemporary theories of religious studies demonstrate the importance of close attention to material signals of devotion and community involvement for comprehending the myriad of ways that religious devotees negotiate the boundaries of religious worlds. Material elements of culture permit one to “decipher the meanings of religious life” (McDannell 1995: 2). Studying material objects, McDannell opined, allows the scholar to understand “how the faithful perpetuate their religion day in and day out” in ways that demonstrate the complicated relationships between the sacred and profane (2-3). McDannell, like Gould, used material elements of religion to “relocate religion” from the static hierophanies of Eliade. Further, as much as she wanted to demonstrate how humans create the sacred, she took a rather anti-Durkheimian approach by insisting “that American Christians experience a radical separation of the sacred from the profane. If we look at what Christians do rather than at what they think, we cannot help but notice the continual “*scrambling of the sacred and the profane*” (4). In fly fishing culture, through magazines, media, film, and material practice one finds an equal amount of “scrambling.”

Therefore, like other forms of religious and spiritual practice, the “gear” matters in fly fishing, opening up interesting doors for an examination of fly fishing and religion along the lines of consumption. One receives magazines, newsletters, emails, and pamphlets on a weekly basis encouraging the angler to purchase the newest tool for “reaching nirvana” (Orvis 2005:1).

These accoutrements visibly signal group membership and participation. As one angler stated in reference to a hat on my head, “Oh, you belong to the church of Sage.”<sup>15</sup>

Beyond capital consumption, however, the tools of fly fishing always affect the angler sensually. Flies, reels, waders, vests, and ideally, an old, worn oil cloth rain coat stir the imagination by titillating multiple senses. In doing so, they become more than simple tools of the art, with the power to affect the angler away from the water as much as on the water. The sensuality of fly fishing experience rises with the aroma wafting upward upon the opening of the storage tube to a bamboo cane rod or the unpacking of the oil cloth coat. These smells spark the angler’s memory in ways similar to fishing’s inspirational literature, where the angler imagines past and future moments on the river through the printed words on the page.

Of all ritual and material aspects, the fly casting process provides fly fishing its distinctive nature and appeal. As Paul Schullery commented, “Fly fishing has over several centuries gathered around itself a mystique, an aroma of almost magical sophistication, that causes it to attract or repel prospective participants more intensely than other types of fishing” (1).<sup>16</sup> Much of this aura, Schullery and others have noted, is inherently tied to the process of fly casting itself. In my various interviews for fieldwork, when I asked why fly fishing had such a mystique, many anglers promptly related that it all has to do with the process of fly casting itself, particularly “after Brad Pitt’s character made fly casting seem so elegant in ‘that movie’”

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<sup>15</sup> Sage is a popular brand of fly fishing rod. Ironically, although I have a hat manufactured by Sage, I do not own any rods made by that company. I wear it for two reasons: it is comfortable and its well-worn nature signals my long involvement in the fishing community.

<sup>16</sup> When asked in a phone interview why fly fishing has a mystique, he laughed stating that it only has mystique to those who do it. Bait fishing has a mystique for a bait fisher. But he agrees that for fly fishing, the answer is the same as the answer to “why do we fish?” He also says that it provides a path to engage nature, learn more, and explore beauty. “You are never going to get to the bottom of beauty.” For fly fishers, fly fishing is a path to that and it is endless.

(Frangos, interview: 23 June 2006).<sup>17</sup> Schullery agreed that in the book itself Maclean “managed to so perfectly capture the elegant symbolism of the whole idea of being out on rivers” (Schullery 2008: interview). As noted earlier, even the Fly Fishing Rabbi traced his fishing faith to Maclean.

In *A River Runs Through It*, Norman Maclean’s father taught him and his brother that fly casting is an art performed in a four-count rhythm between ten and two o’clock. His point here was that like any other form of mediation, fly casting requires time, focus, and repetition. The view of rod, line, and motion of casting as vehicle of meditation permeates the cannon of fly fishing literature and culture. Like meditation fly casting operates as the ritual practice allowing the angler to transcend into the sacred, or pass from the realm of the ordinary into the extraordinary. As Christopher Camuto remarked, “In all of its variants, the backward-seeming effort of casting a fly line, is an attempt to reach into the natural world and confirm its sustaining presence in the lives of men” (Camuto: 234). Building on these perceptions, many anglers view the process of fly casting as a primary mode of connecting to nature in search of opportunities for the creation of meaning, orientation, and confirmation of the “sustaining presence” on rivers and in life.

If fly casting is the ritual process, then the fly rod is the essential ritual tool. Regarding the fly rod, David James Duncan mused in the film *TroutGrass*,

On a river without a fly rod I am a tourist; with rod in hand I become something else. A rod extends a fly fisher’s being as surely do imagination, empathy, and prayer. Within the eighty or so feet of our cast we gain this crazy ability to pierce the river’s power of

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<sup>17</sup> Fly fishers often refer to the film version of *A River Runs Through It* as “that movie” or “that damn movie,” particularly in response to the profound impact it had on the sport’s popularity over the past 20 years. Most fly fishers, who fished before the release of the film, resent the explosion of popularity, causing streams to become more crowded with inexperienced and uneducated fly fishers who only want to fish because it was in a Hollywood film. It is important to point out that Brad Pitt was not the one actually casting the fly line in the film, but world champion fly caster John Dietsch.

concealment, bringing life that would otherwise remain hidden right up to our hands (Duncan 2005).

Angling author Harry Middleton similarly reflected, “whatever the angler’s skill, the fly rod is an outstanding companion, a welcome conversationalist, because it speaks not in words but in motion and energy” (Middleton 1989: 68). Middleton thought so highly of the fly rod as a young boy that he perceived the purchase of his first fly rod to be the purchase of his “ticket to heaven” (91). Throughout their writings, Duncan, Middleton, and many others have expressed sentiments common within Earth- and nature- based religions through their own celebrations of the mystical powers of the fly rod as teacher of patience, connector to nature, and “ticket to heaven.”

Like the history of angling literature, fly fishers celebrate the historical elements of bamboo fly rods which they conceive connects them to the larger historical community of angling. Because all bamboo for these majestic rods comes from a single location, the southern forests of China, those who fish with bamboo perceive links to that very history. In *A River Runs Through It*, Maclean ruminated that in the end “all things merge into one and a river runs through it” (Maclean 1976: 104). According to Duncan in the film *TroutGrass*, the river running through the entire tradition of fly fishing is China’s Sui, down which all bamboo shoots must drift on their way toward exportation and transformation into split cane rods (Duncan 2005).

Bamboo rod builder Glenn Brackett believed this historical tradition, then, embeds every rod with the spirits of fly fishing’s forefathers, not to mention the spirits of China’s forests (ibid). The miles each shoot of bamboo has traveled, combined with the multitude of hands touching the bamboo from harvest to rod completion, not to mention the “unseen hands” growing the bamboo in the forests of China, as Brackett noted, all infuse the bamboo with multiple spirits and combine to tell a story of many lives perpetually involved in its history. Comments such as these

are quite common in fly fishing culture and echo the theoretical lineage of religious studies from Tylor's discussions of animism to contemporary scholar of religion Stewart Guthrie, who insisted that the essence of religion is to be found in the anthropomorphizing of the non-human world (Guthrie 1993). Anglers anthropomorphize everything from rods, to flies, to fish. If Guthrie's definition of religion is correct, then, fly fishing fits the mold.

Regardless of rod choice, anglers often speak of the fly rod as the very means for the perpetuation of their faith. The religious elements surrounding the fly rod include its perception as a primary tool in meditative, patience-teaching casting. Without the fly rod, anglers doubt they could ever connect to the natural world in such life sustaining, world orienting ways. With regard to the bamboo rod, many anglers believe its natural qualities, in comparison to synthetic graphite, create the most authentic and pure means of mystically connecting to nature.

### **Imitation and Elitism**

A primary mode of angling-related anthropomorphizing emerges in the form of tiny fake flies, from which the tradition of fly fishing derives its name. With these fake flies, anglers seek to reach into the natural world by imitative attempts to mimic the processes of nature by drifting flies down the river. In Duncan's film Thomas McGuane likened this process to a ritual dance of puppets (Duncan 2005). If properly performed, fish will rise to the fly and close the connective gap between anglers, fish, and nature

The most devoted of anglers tie their own flies, believing that such an activity brings them one step closer to the natural processes they seek to imitate in their search for fish. As the renowned fly tier and author of *Guide to Aquatic Foods* Dave Whitlock insisted, "There are no higher pleasures in outdoor sport than the challenge and reward of catching beautiful wild trout on flies you have made to match specific trout foods" (Whitlock 1992: 1). If fly fishing has

saints, Browning argued, those who have devised the patterns most successful at matching nature are some to which sainthood is bestowed.

When casting flies, fly fishers aspire to present the perfect offering to the fish, in ways similar to a devotee of a particular deity, in hopes that the deity or fish will respond to the offering. Anglers often speak of the joy of seeing the fish's eye peak out of the water as it rises to the fly. Again, anglers rarely shy from animistic perceptions of fish, which they understand to contain the agency and action from whom the angler feels blessed to receive communal contact.

While all flies aim to lure in fish, the dry fly is the one most celebrated. According to Randall Kauffman, in his instructional book *Tying Dry Flies*, "the *dry fly* is a general term that denotes a fly that is fished on top of the water or more in the air than in the water" (Kauffman 2001: 10). In order to lure fish, the angler uses a dry fly with the hopes of imitating adult forms of caddisflies, mayflies, stoneflies, beetles, grasshoppers, and other winged creatures who make their homes along the water's edge. In comparison to other flies, which might be fished submerged below the water's surface, anglers celebrate the dry fly because they can visually watch the fish rise out of the water to snatch the bug.

Typically anglers perceive dry fly fishing to be more technical and difficult, which leads them to position those who primarily fish in this manner amongst the top of an angling hierarchy.

In his insightful history of American fly fishing, Paul Schullery noted, significant snobbery has been attached to the dry fly by its practitioners, as if these particular anglers perceived themselves to be the Brahmin of the angling world (Schullery 1999: 109). Anglers who espouse such perceptions sound eerily like religious fundamentalists insisting upon religious purity, tradition, and going "by the book."

Even for less fundamentalist fly fishers, fly fishing culture still defines itself in relation to other forms of fishing, enveloping itself in images of purity and tradition. Even the most open minded anglers speak of “having converted,” or “passed through an important phase” as a “worm drowner” or “hardware flinger” (Schullery 1999: 247). A recent interview in Albuquerque, New Mexico provides this statement on such conversion.

I had bait dragged pretty much my whole life and my dad was a bait dragger and spin fisher. A buddy showed up when I was 15, he was 16 and had a car. We went up to the Jemez [River]. I took my spinning rod with worms and he took his fly rod and started turning over rocks and looking for bugs. I was drowning worms, he was catching fish and I was not so I borrowed his rod and caught my first trout on a stonefly. We were up on the Guadalupe River during the famous stonefly hatch. That was it, man. I took my spin fishing gear. . . I sold all my equipment, bought fly gear and never turned back (Franchell, interview: 20 June 2006).

As these comments demonstrate, fly fishers, even the recently converted, perceive themselves atop an angling hierarchy.

For many fly fishers, the perceived cultural superiority comes from a belief that the necessary knowledge of bug life, fish behavior, casting methods, tools and cost of fly fishing, accompanying literary tradition, or natural elements of imitation that more “authentically” allow the fly fisher to pierce the natural world and connect to nature (Browning 1998: 138; Schullery 1999: 248). The angler quoted above certainly saw his conversion in part due to a newly discovered knowledge of sub-aquatic life, through his friend’s turning over of rocks. Fly fishing, he and others believe, fosters or encourages this knowledge better than other forms of fishing.

Further, because a fly fisher must, as many anglers I interviewed explain, have “at least rudimentary knowledge of streamside biology,” fly fishers reason fly fishing is more likely to foster a concern for the natural environment. This point is certainly debatable, as other forms of fishing and outdoor engagement might have the same potential to foster nature observation. However, many fly fishers tout this is a primary reason they not only fly fish, but also engage

local conservation projects. Luca Adelfio, an employee of Trout Unlimited, fly fishing's largest conservation group, agreed that fly fishing provides opportunities for understanding the complexities of nature. This "knowledge and understanding naturally should lead to greater concern for and action toward conservation efforts" (Adelfio, interview: 21 May 2006). Therefore, based on at least the perception of greater concern and contribution to conservation, fly fishers might also situate themselves atop a hierarchy based on ethics or conservation.

While these sorts of hierarchal attitudes permeate fly fishing culture they are also criticized from within. Taylor Streit, a renowned Taos, New Mexico fly fishing guide and author, for example, chastised such elitist perceptions as "shameful displays of egos" which give fly fishing a "black eye" (Streit, interview: 9 July 2006). Tom McGuane asserted similarly, "we really ought to get together;" expressing his perception that conservation efforts would be much more effective without the divisions and hierarchies (McGuane 1999: xv). Streit continued that the sport should not foster egos particularly if we are concerned about conservation and preservation of trout, streams, and watersheds. While many anglers agree that ego and elitism should be avoided, they nonetheless exist. In order to move beyond them, we need to understand how and why they exist.

### **Notes on History and Myth**

The issue of elitism and egos are a prominent problem in fly fishing history, particularly as fly fishing situates itself in relation to the whole world of angling. Sid Dobrin, a salt-water fisherman who dabbles with a fly rod, wrote of his own struggles to want to join the ranks of the fly fishing elite, while always wanting to catch fish. He wanted to move up the "mythical ladder of anglers where trout fishermen sit supreme" (Dobrin 2000: 151). In the end, it seems, he saw beyond the façade of fly fishing superiority and embraced his own salt water and fresh water approaches of fishing without a fly line. For Dobrin, these practices provide all of the same

benefits of aesthetics, nature connection, and potential for conservation that fly fishing does. Nonetheless, as I have shown, fly fishers tend to celebrate their sport above others, in part because they believe it offers greater access to those aesthetic or religious wonders. This is not necessarily true, as my engagements with bass fishers has revealed similar sentiments.<sup>18</sup>

In part, this elitism has been perpetuated through fly fishing's vast library of literature. Paul Schullery argued in a variety of places that fly fishers tend to repeat what previous authors wrote, without actually researching the story. Similarly, Ken Cameron claimed that this is more myth-making or myth-reification, rather than history. The critiques of Schullery or Cameron are like those that scholars, such as Russell McCutcheon, make concerning the academic study of religion. For both, the goal is in part to study the construction of a discipline. For McCutcheon, his work places him "within a tradition of scholarship that problematizes the field's enduring preoccupation with issues of interpretation and meaning." (McCutcheon 2003: x). Schullery and Cameron, among others, do much of the same thing with fly fishing history, as they all seek to understand the mythmaking activities of cultures. For McCutcheon, scholars of religion are the data for investigation. Similarly, Schullery and Cameron turn their gaze on the fly fishing writers themselves, all with the aim of understanding how rhetoric shapes material, political, and social dimensions of angling culture.

For example, Schullery's *American Fly Fishing: A History* aims to sort the myth from the history of fly fishing. Schullery has devoted considerable time attending to the myths that surround Walton or Berners and other elements of fly fishing, such as fly fishing's elitism. Elsewhere he wondered why fly fishers are so quick to celebrate Walton, Thoreau, or even Hemingway as their own, as fly fishing writers. Schullery reminded the reader that Walton never

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<sup>18</sup> I am not aware of any quantitative data on this point, but it would be an interesting and vital project to initiate.

fly fished and certainly fished with bait (Schullery, interview: 5 July 2007). Thoreau or Hemingway were never really fly fishers either, although they note the sport in their writings. While in some cases fly fishers claim fly fishing status for more general anglers, other times they attribute celebrated legacies to fly fishers who may or may not deserve them

One particular angler is Theodore Gordon, upon whom fly fishers bequeath sainthood as the “father of American angling” (Francis 1983: 46).<sup>19</sup> Along with this title, writers have given him credit for the dry fly in America, produced a “code” of fishing, or instill conservation concerns in the culture of fly fishing. While Gordon was certainly an eloquent writer and no doubt has had an amazing influence on the sport of fly fishing to say that he was the father of all of these things, Schullery argued, is irresponsible scholarship that simply repeats what previous writers have written, rather than going back to the original sources. “We owe it,” Schullery implored, “to our history to think about it more carefully” (Schullery 2002: 10). The goal here for fly fishing historians is not necessarily to debunk the myths of fly fishing (although that is an unintended consequence), but to better understand the heritage of a rich cultural tradition.

This sort of elevation of anglers and writers to “messianic stature” is common among fly fishing history, so much so that it tends to ignore those that Kathleen Achor aptly referred to as “anonymous fly fishers” (Achor 2002: 1). It ignores what everyday anglers were doing in their own ways, on their own streams; making connections between fishing and conservation, or rethinking flies, building rods, and so forth. By only talking about those who have been written about, some fly fishing writers and historians have fallen into the same trap that Orsi and Hall criticized religious studies for having done. By Schullery’s reading, fly fishing writers have as

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<sup>19</sup>Others, such as Ernest Schwiebert, have dubbed Thaddeus Norris the title of “father of American fly fishing,” see Schweibert, Ernest. *The Henryville Flyfishers: A Chronicle of American Fly Fishing*. Far Hills, N.J.: Meadow Run Press. 8. For extended treatment on this issue of paternity of American fly fishing, see Schullery (1998, 1999, 2002).

Hall said of religion, “left us knowing next to nothing about the everyday doings of lay men and women” (Hall 1995: vii). Those everyday lay men and women are the “anonymous fly fishers” that Achor, Schullery, Cameron, and others are talking about. More than understanding the anonymous fly fishers, however, understanding the construction of fly fishing history reveals a great deal about insider cultural perceptions that might tend toward elitism, class, or even gender. The elevation of the dry fly to the top of some mythical hierarchy is one such problematic example.

Fly fishers often argue that dry fly fishing is not only the most challenging, but is the “best” for the fish. There exists the belief that in comparison to catching fish on a lure, or even with bait, dry fly fishing harms the fish less and is therefore not only the most challenging method of fishing, but the most ethical. Where scholars like Schullery devote their energies to debunking the myths surrounding the evolution of the dry fly, scientific studies have begun demonstrate that a dry fly is no better for the trout than a single hook lure. Research by fish biologists Julie Meka, Stephen McCormick, or Steven Cooke, revealed that the perception that dry flies are somehow better for the fish is untrue (Meka and McCormick 2005; Meka 2004; Cooke and Phillip 2001; see also Arlinghaus et. al 2007). In a phone interview with Meka she explained the difficulties of releasing or publishing this information, as many ardent “catch and release” fly fishers resisted the potential debunking of a powerful cultural myth of superiority over other types of angling (Meka, interview: 29 August 2006).

This question of cultural superiority creates rifts in a potentially strong cadre of communities to work on issues of water and fish conservation, in streams or the ocean. In conversations with Schullery, he and I have noted that Trout Unlimited, although it is a trout conservation group first and foremost, presents itself as a fly fishing club. This is problematic if

there are countless anglers out there who love trout and trout waters, but do not necessarily use fly fishing methods. By putting fly fishing forward, a trout group is limiting its potential membership (Schullery: interview 5 July 2007).

Fly fishing's myth's of cultural superiority, however, extends well beyond angling methods. This history is one that is fraught with issues of classist elitism, where only the wealthy men can participate. This image is not necessarily true today, nor is it true historically. Despite this image, with recent advancements in technology, fly fishing has become increasingly accessible to a variety of groups young and old, hoping to catch a ride on the rivers of fly fishing. Breaking all of these stereotypes are the women who ever more join the ranks of fishing.

### **Female Fly Casting and Healing Histories**

Holly Morris in her own writing and edited volumes has worked hard to celebrate how “women have been fishing in growing numbers and have begun to define their own terms for enjoying the sport (Morris 1991: xi). Women are not just fishing with increasing regularity, but some have made quite an impact on the sport. If Berners is a mythical icon for female anglers, Joan Wulff might be considered by many to be the first lady of fly fishing in America.

While she learned to fly fish from her father, Wulff traced her lineage back to Berners. Acknowledging the controversy around Berners, Wulff embraced her as the historical author of *A Treatise on Fishing with an Angle* and implored other female anglers to “join me in believing, and let Dame Juliana's spirit be with you always” (Wulff 1991: 6). Beginning with Berners, Wulff sketched the female heritage in fly fishing through a variety of female fly tiers, such as Mary Orvis Marbury, who “standardized many of today's fly patterns,” guides, and writers such as Lorian Hemingway, the daughter of Ernest Hemingway and author of such books as *Walk on Water*, in which she explores her own relationship with her father through the world of saltwater fishing (Wulff 1991: 7).

One source of inspiration from the feminine front in fly fishing is in the recently created Casting for Recovery program. Founded in 1996, Casting for Recovery, according to its website, “provides an opportunity for women whose lives have been profoundly affected by the disease [cancer] to gather in a beautiful, natural setting and learn fly-fishing, "a sport for life." The program builds on the heritage of fly fishing which sees in fly casting a meditative practice, in fishing, the opportunity to commune with nature, all of which provide healing opportunities for the fly caster. One volunteer at a Casting for Recovery program shed a few tears as he described his experience helping women cope with illness through this program. “Programs like this one,” he said, “reveal the healing potential of sports like fly fishing. Amazing” (Brown, interview: 17 July 2007). One participant in the program professed on the website, "My body is tired but my spirit is renewed. I leave with memories of strong, beautiful women and a new experience to build on. I leave with the information that will help me to continue on as a survivor..." (<http://www.castingforrecovery.org/voices.html>, accessed May 30, 2008).

Programs such as these often seek ways to move beyond issues of class and elitism in the sport, by committing themselves to “committed to socioeconomic and cultural diversity,” and providing opportunities to access the sport of fishing for all who want to participate ([www.castingforrecovery.org](http://www.castingforrecovery.org)). Throughout my research, I participated in several programs for children, particularly those of underprivileged communities. I cannot describe the delight these kids exhibited for learning how to cast, catching a fish, and most importantly simply getting out into nature, on rivers, or ponds. A central part of the mission of the Coal Creek Watershed Foundation, detailed in Chapter 6, uses fishing as a means to educate underprivileged communities and children about both community health and ecosystem health. Elsewhere, TU and the Federation of Fly Fishers are working with indigenous communities using fly fishing as a

means to teach indigenous children about their heritage, local ecological knowledge, and sustainability (Zink 2005).

Therefore, while historians such as Schullery or Cameron critique issues of elitism and mythology, they also, when necessary, have taken the time to celebrate the more aesthetic, religious or spiritual values and opportunities that emerge from fishing and accompanying cultural milieus. Even if the myths are problematic at times, they are important for both scholarly and activist inquiry because they do reflect as Cameron noted, the idealized visions that fly fishers (or other anglers) have of themselves (Cameron 2002: 19). These idealized visions are worth exploring, not only for what they have done to shape the subcultures of fishing, but also for revealing how rethinking them might help to contribute to broader concerns of community and conservation (or restoration).

If there are occasions to critically evaluate fly fishing, its culture, and history (or mythology), these movements of critique offer occasions for construction, or re-construction, if you will. While I understand the critique and engage it myself, as a scholar of religion I am also interested in investigating how such myths might be utilized for goals of river restoration or native species preservation, as well as moments of human healing. Such a move would not be unlike Max's Oelschlaeger's quest for ecological ethics in the myths and narratives of Christianity (Oelschlaeger 1994). If he insisted that "religious discourse is perhaps the most promising way to expand our cultural conversation" toward proper ecological ethics and practices, then perhaps rethinking the religious discourses in angling subcultures might also provide new avenues for expanding environmental ethics and practices of anglers (ibid: 12).

### **Casting for Conservation**

While some of fly fishing's myths might be problematic, one can hardly deny the power for fishing to connect individuals and communities to nature in unique ways, even Schullery

admitted this (Schullery, interview: 5 July 2008). Fishing in general can take the angler into natural spaces, onto waters – fresh or salt, rivers, lakes or oceans, and encourages observation of fish, bugs, and habitat. For all these reasons, fishing is celebrated not only for the ways it connects one to nature, but also how those connections might give rise to broader environmental concerns. According to Taylor in his explorations of surfing, radical environmentalism, or other forms of nature religion, these religious feelings of orientation, meaning, and connection to nature are central for the formation of a practiced environmental ethic of conservation. By highlighting these aspects of a tradition to connect to the natural world, Taylor has been one of many scholars to turn toward religious milieus as potential sources for ethics of conservation. Because religion has increasingly become a target of inquiry by those interested in environmental ethics, conservation, and sustainability over roughly the last 40 years, I suggest we take fly fishing's religious realms seriously.

Understanding how humans perceive and negotiate relationships to the environment is pivotal for projects pertaining to environmental ethics, conservation, and sustainability. In search of solutions to the troubled human-to-nature relations, Max Oelschlaeger turned to religion after failing to find solutions elsewhere in his career as an environmental philosopher and conservationist. He insisted that “religious discourse is perhaps the most promising way to expand our cultural conversation” toward proper ecological ethics and ways of living with the land (Oelschlaeger 1994: 12).

In *LifePlace: Bioregional Thought and Practice*, Robert Thayer played with the term recreation as “re-creation.” For him, recreation, or re-creation, provides a positively potent path for individuals and groups to enact, negotiate, and renew meaningful relationships with the natural spaces of their residence. “Our engagement with the land,” he mused, “depends a great

deal on how we *play* with it, or within it. . . not in search of food, but of meaning and belonging” (Thayer 2004: 83, italics his). Templeton Award winning environmental ethicist Holmes Rolston and wildlife ecologist Stephen Kellert independently emphasized this point by noting how not only are religious sentiments necessary in securing a functioning environmental ethic, but that those religious sentiments are just as, if not more, likely to be generated by participating in activities of outdoor recreation where nature becomes church (Rolston 1988: 24; Kellert 1971).

Therefore, Oelschlaeger and others have increasingly challenged people of faith (of any sort) to reconsider the role of their religion in this time of ecocrisis. In light of these scholarly moves and inquiries, then I wonder what happens or what is happening, when fly fishers take their claims of fly fishing religiosity seriously and consider Oelschlaeger’s challenge?

### **Ritually Restoring Watersheds**

Because many fly fishers praise their tradition for the occasions it provides for them to connect to nature, they will contend these connections often lead them to be concerned about environmental degradation. In interviews, when asked if fly fishing leads one to pay attention to the “health” or “state” of the environment, one angler emotionally replied, “Well of course. Being out there on a stream over the years, you notice changes from stream degradation to water loss” (Franchell, interview: 21 June 2006). Another angler responded more broadly, “If you enjoy the environment in any way, you cannot help but support organizations and take care of it when you are out there” (Gustafson, interview: 21 June 2006). These responses were common in my fieldwork, as fly fishers agreed that they must sustain the rivers that sustain them through conservation practices.

More pointedly, one often finds the fly fishing conservation ethic and practice rooted in religious or spiritual concepts. Browning stated, “Just as a religious devotee, having accepted certain doctrine will be expected to behave in an appropriate manner,” the fly angler should be

expected to embrace certain values and qualities (Browning 1989: 190). David James Duncan demanded in *My Story as Told by Water*, “We must revere the resource,” and Paul Schullery argued that “we fisherman need to be on better behavior” (Duncan 2001: 13; Schullery 1999: 198). Or, because fly fishing is at “root a nature-based spirituality,” Tom McGuane likened environmental protection to a “holy war” (McGuane 1999: xii). All of these sentiments find on-the-ground realization in many grassroots and national fly fishing organizations devoted to the conservation of nature, waters, and piscatorial species.

While conservation organizations such as Federation of Fly Fishers or Trout Unlimited did not emerge until 1965 and 1959 respectively, the language of conservation began to surface at least in print in the late 1800s, if not well before. In 1876, George Dawson argued in *The Pleasures of Angling*, that participation in such a “gentile art” should lead anglers to recognize the depletion of fish stocks in America’s rivers and therefore act to reverse that trend. Based on such statements, many (myself included) suspect Dawson was one of the first American fly fishers to address the issue of conservation. Regardless of the origins of the conservation conversation, its strength and focus has certainly grown in the past one hundred plus years. Within this conversation the reasons for conservation have likewise shifted, in particular from very anthropocentric concerns of having enough fish to catch to concerns for the inherent value and integrity of native fish, such as the brook trout or the variety of cutthroat trout species.

The former rationale for conservation has largely dominated fly fishing for much of this time. Most famously, Herbert Hoover gave an address entitled “A Remedy for Disappearing Game Fishes” to the Izaak Walton League in Chicago on April 9, 1927. The remedy, he professed in this speech, consists of an increased emphasis on stocking America’s rivers with fishes, so that “there is less time between bites” (Hoover 1927: 25). While it is no secret that

Hoover certainly espoused religious perceptions of angling, however, his most religious experiences, it seems, came from catching fish, not necessarily the “time between bites.”

Today, however, the conservation language has expanded well beyond the simple stocking of rivers to satiate anglers’ spiritual desires. As noted earlier, fly fishers often celebrate fly fishing because they believe it leads to a greater awareness of bugs, insects, aquatic habitats, and watersheds upon which the fish depends. From this expanded awareness, conservation today hardly refers to the former goal of stocking rivers with hatchery raised trout. If anything, hatchery trout are looked down upon, while “wild” or “native” trout are celebrated.<sup>20</sup> To put in religious terms, the quest for wild and native trout, according to Gierach, represents the “purest form of fly fishing” (Gierach 1989: 27). Conservation efforts today, therefore, represent this quest to return fish, fish habitats, and fishing to the more pure forms.

Groups like Trout Unlimited are funding programs such as “Back the Brookie,” or “Bring Back the Natives.” Similarly, the Federation of Fly Fishers in 2001 issued “native fish policy” which seeks to restore native fish species, and their habitats as essential for the continuation of “fly fishing heritage and tradition” as well as the betterment of ecosystems. In one grassroots example, the by-laws of New Mexico Trout state that the trout streams of New Mexico must be protected, not only because “Trout waters and their pristine surroundings offer nourishment, solitude, and comfort to the human spirit,” but also because, “trout waters are a gift of nature to be understood, preserved, and protected” ([www.newmexicotrout.org/values.htm](http://www.newmexicotrout.org/values.htm): accessed 26 July 2006). This is but one example of increasing efforts of organizations to preserve and protect fisheries and watersheds based on beliefs in the value of nature, as well as for their importance as for their cultural, religious, and spiritual value.

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<sup>20</sup> For an outstanding essay on the difficult definitions and values of “wild” and “native” versus hatchery trout see Schullery “Trout Family Values”(Schullery 1999: 186-200).

Regarding watersheds themselves, fly fishers increasingly engage projects aimed at restoring areas previously degraded or polluted to a perceived “original” or “pristine” state. Ecologist Robert Thayer equated the activities of restoration to that of religious ritual which have the power to lead to “social cooperation in place” (Thayer 2003: 55). Activities of ecological restoration, according to William Jordan III, a restoration ecologist and founding member of the Society for Ecological Restoration, operate as “classic rituals of initiation, communion, and world renewal, providing a new context for accomplishing the ritual work of community making and world building” (Jordan 2003: 71 – 73). Thayer, Jordan, and many others believe restoration practices have a religious dimension and provide as much community healing as they do environmental. In the fishing world, Thayer’s and Jordan’s points hold equally true.

Moreover, one finds that fly fishers explain their concern or involvement in conservation and restoration efforts as driven by values and attitudes that embrace the various religious and spiritual qualities fostered by fly fishing’s various traditions, of which this project only treats a few. In tracing fly fishing’s religious motivations and initiatives for conservation, one could create quite the family tree, so to speak. While conservation groups, such as Trout Unlimited and the Federation of Fly Fishers at one point represented, and still do, the primary groups for fishing conservation, in the sixty years since their creation, the angling world has seen an explosion of regional, state, and localized conservation groups, watershed projects, and species focused endeavors- many of which attribute their activities to the world orienting, nature connecting religious potential of fly fishing.

In the chapters to follow, I will more closely explore some a few of those initiatives. Scanning the headlines of the angling world, one is not hard pressed to come upon a variety of angling driven conservation, restoration, and community-based environmental initiatives. Many

of the headlines point to projects on the famous waters of American angling heritage. For example, fly fishers, trout enthusiasts, and water protection groups continue to fight for Norman Maclean's Big Blackfoot River where mining companies sought to mine for gold by way of what is known as cyanide heap-leach gold mining. Their collaborative efforts paid off in the late 1990s as the state voted by a narrow margin to ban this practice. Currently, Montana is the only state to ban this practice. Elsewhere anglers are fighting to protect other rivers from these same fates, such as in Alaska at the headwaters to the Bristol Bay, one of the greatest Salmon fisheries in the world.

Elsewhere in the United States and in the world, anglers are uniting to fight other forms of pollution, encroaching urbanization, and other threats to trout, salmon, and their waters. For example, Alaska's Kenai River, which fish biologist Gay Muhlberg said is a "good poster child for two things: rivers that badly need attention and rivers that get attention" (Rinella 2004: 10). In the Northeast, anglers are working to restore and preserve Vermont's legendary Battenkill River, which runs near the Orvis headquarters and the American Museum of Fly Fishing in Manchester. Anglers continue to respond to a variety of environmental issues from habitat protection or restoration, cleaning streams from pollution due to mining, ranching, or responding to issues such as whirling disease, which can be fatal to fish in a stream. For years magazines, journals, and now websites have devoted sections are articles to environmental issues as evidenced by the regular "Stream Watch" column in *Fly Fisherman*. Surveying the literature, news reports, and conversations with anglers reveals how these implicit religious sentiments and values drive a good bit of the energy to protect and restore these waters for both people and trout, alike.

If these initiatives are born out of what one might call implicit religion, or lived religion of angling, then some angling based conservation initiatives explicitly tap into religious groups of Christians or Native Americans. For example, a variety of groups are concerned about decreasing salmon runs in the Pacific Northwest, as evidenced by the publication of “The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good” by the Bishops Council of the Pacific Northwest. While this was not necessarily written by anglers, they were certainly involved. Moreover, the anglers and the fish are included in this expression of Christian stewardship ethics for the historic salmon waters. This document expresses a vision where

fish populations are abundant, responding to human ingenuity and mutual cooperation. Commercial, recreational, and private fishers continue to enjoy opportunities for providing a family meal, family livelihood or a family outing. People recognize the interconnectedness of rivers and ocean, and understand their individual and community responsibilities to exercise proper stewardship for both (Bishops 2000: 15).

Making this statement, the pastoral document notes the spiritual benefits of recreations such as fishing, while highlighting the ways ethics of stewardship might emerge from recreationally engaging the Columbia River watershed (ibid: 21). Likewise, as other Christians use fishing to reflect upon God, then they make the move from enjoyment of nature to protection of nature as a Christian ideal of stewardship.

One pastor, Reverend Owen Owens, who went on the trip to Yellowstone with the Religious Campaign for Forest Conservation, published a book entitled *Living Waters: How to Save your Local Stream*. This book, for the most part, documents the history and projects of the Valley Forge Trout Unlimited Chapter. Telling this story, Owen reflects upon everything from the processes of restoring a stream to maintaining group cohesion and momentum in times when volunteer hours are hard to come by. Throughout the text, you get a sense of his work being driven by his Christian ethics and perceived responsibility to protect God’s creation. He

explained that he is “increasingly confident that one way God is speaking to us today is through the streams. . . Experiencing a living stream calls forth a sense of awe” (Owens 1993: xiii). Encountering God in nature, has provided Owens with a sense of wonder and reverence for life. This reverence necessitates not only the protection of rivers and watersheds but the restoration of those streams previously degraded. If the waters are dead and degraded, he urges all nature lovers, Christians and non-Christians, to make those waters living again. Keep his goal of living waters in mind, as I will note in Chapter 5 how those same words are spoken on the banks of Florida’s Ocklawaha River in a ritual event aimed at restoring the Ocklawaha to an undammed, flowing state.

If anglers often draw upon native traditions to articulate their angling religiosity, groups such as Trout Unlimited are now working with a variety of Native American groups in projects that join concern for native people with concern for native fish. Trout magazine, the journal for TU, lists recent efforts to protect pacific salmon as dependant upon multi-stakeholder collaboration with tribal leaders of the area. According to Tim Zink, Native Americans are increasingly leading efforts on coldwater conservation. “Thanks to their efforts,” he wrote, “reservation lands are critically important strongholds for certain native fish species” (Zink 2005b: 28). For example, White Mountain Apache have protected at least half of the habitat for native Apache trout and the Goshute have protected critical habitat for the threatened Bonneville cutthroat trout. According to Lavern Broncho, a Shoshone-Bannock elder, native fish protection is integral to the protection and “reinvigoration of Native American culture on the reservation” (ibid 30). Such projects are taking place in Main, Nevada, Oregon, California, Arizona, and New Mexico.

Therefore, whether one is talking about connecting explicit religions, such as Christianity or Native American traditions, to fishing and fish related conservation or one explores the implicit religiosity of angling subcultures, one can find in many cases how groups articulate a vision that connects religious values to various forms of civic environmentalism. The following three chapters will trace a few examples in greater detail and in so doing, will explore in the role of religious values and nature-based practices within the context of place-based grassroots environmental activism, through initiatives like ecological restoration. Along these lines, then, I will continue to ask what difference it makes to call any cultural activity, such as fishing, religion.

## CHAPTER 4 RESTORING NATIVES IN NEW MEXICO

If the philosophical, theoretical, and practical values associated with cutthroat trout were better understood, insensitivity and opposition to their restoration and protection would greatly diminish (R. Behnke 2002: 148).

As we have introduced non-native fish [brown trout] not only to fishless waters but to waters containing native fish, we have lowered a kind of ecological eggbeater into some glorious native ecosystems, resulting in changes that, though they may have been wonderful for fishermen, were disastrous for these beautiful little worlds that had been cranking along just fine without our help since the last ice age (Schullery 1999: 189).

### Introduction

In July of 2007, my cousins and I rode in a van through New Mexico's Valles Calderas National Preserve toward the Rio San Antonio, a small meandering stream dividing a nearly 90,000 acre volcanic valley, or "caldera." Upon arrival to our beat<sup>1</sup> on the stream, we hoped to sneak up on and catch as many small German brown trout (*Salmo Trutta*) as possible in the time and space provided. Several other anglers accompanied my cousins and me on this van ride to the Rio San Antonio, who we could only assume had similar goals for their own day. About half-way to the stream the passenger in the front seat of the van asked the driver what kinds of fish he could expect to catch. "I know they are trout," he inquired, "but what kind of trout?"

The van driver, acting as tour guide, replied that we would be catching German brown trout. With a confused look on his face, the fellow in the front seat replied with another question.

"Are those native fish?" he asked.

To this question I replied, "No, they are from Germany!"

The van-driving tour guide concurred, "No, the brown trout is originally from Germany.

The fish native to this area are Rio Grande cutthroat trout (*Salmo Clarki Virginalis*), of which

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<sup>1</sup> A "beat" is a section of water, usually about a mile in length, which is designated for you to fish. You are not allowed to fish on either side of this beat. In this case, each beat was about a mile and a half of stream.

there are not many left in the Valles Caldera. “However,” she continued, “one could argue that the German brown trout have gone “wild” for they have not been stocked in many years. Ahh, look, here we are at the river. . .”

Perhaps, the passenger in the front of the van spent the day pondering the difference between “wild” and “native” trout. My cousins and I, in turn, laughed about the exchange, remarking on how a German (of any sort) could be native to New Mexico.

However, some months later, I have found myself musing over the definitional criteria of “native,” particularly in the context of fishing and environmental ethics. These brown trout will never be, according to ecological standards, native or “endemic” to New Mexico.<sup>2</sup> They can only go “wild,” never “native.” However, if it is questionable that a fish can become native, what about humans?

I have suggested that religion provides tools for the production of meaning and values in the world, while making sense of lived realities for both individuals and communities in the midst of both geographic and cultural spaces. According to Thomas Tweed, religion is cultural, geographic, and therefore locative. For Tweed, religion fosters dwelling. “It is homemaking” he said. It “orients individuals and groups in time and space, transform[s] the natural environment, and allow[s] devotees to inhabit the worlds they construct” (Tweed 2006: 82). In other words, religion helps people become native to place.

Certain approaches to environmental ethics, namely bioregionalism, have emphasized the importance of place, staying in place, or the development of sense of place values (Norton and Hannon 2003). Biologist, plant geneticist, and bioregional philosopher Wes Jackson has argued

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<sup>2</sup> Groom, et al. (2006) defined endemism as “any localized process or pattern, but usually applied to a highly localized or restrictive geographic distribution of a species” (703). Elsewhere, they noted that “a species that is found in a particular region but nowhere else is said to be endemic to that region. However, what is an appropriate spatial scale for assessing endemism varies greatly” (43).

that in face of contemporary ecological issues, humans must strive “to become native to place” (Jackson 1994). Therefore, like religion, the philosophies of bioregionalism advocate homemaking. Moreover, much of bioregionalism, in its quest for native-ness, draws upon explicit religions while often articulating religious sentiments through its philosophies (McGinnis 1999; Sale 2000; Taylor 2000). However, unlike religion according to Tweed, bioregionalism insists upon becoming native, and staying native, to particular places. Tweed’s take on religion, on the other hand, depends upon movement and flows as much as stasis and situation. Religion is as much about crossing, as it is dwelling (Tweed 2006). In contrast to religion, movement troubles some environmental philosophers when it comes to articulating ideas of bioregionalism (Taylor 2000; Norton and Hannon 2003). After all, sense of place values emerge from long-term interaction with a region, its flora, fauna, and human communities. Therefore, how might one develop these values so vital for being native to place in a world of “extraordinary mobility” (Norton and Hannon 2003: 502)?

These varying perspectives on place, religion, and native-ness converge in unique ways in the desert southwest, where I researched how New Mexicans were reintroducing their state fish: the Rio Grande cutthroat trout. Here is a bioregion where cultures have crossed for millennia and continue to strive and struggle to dwell here. Part of this crossing and quest for dwelling, I will show, has depended upon various encounters between natives and non-natives (both human and non-human). Today, some of those encounters are of historically non-native humans attempting to restore native species, such as the cutthroat trout. In cases like these, however, if religion is about crossing and dwelling, both can lead to conflict.

Despite the increased attention to ecological restoration and scholars having noted that restoration practices can operate as tools for dwelling or as Andrew Light insisted, becoming

better “ecological citizens,” restoration ecology is a field fraught with debate (Light 2002; see also; Light and Higgs 1996; Higgs 2003; Jordan 2005; Thayer 2005; Thorp 2000; for oppositional voices see Elliot 1997; Katz 1992; 1997).<sup>3</sup> This chapter engages these issues. In my explorations of religion, environmental ethics, and civic engagement, I believe that native species restoration illuminates some of the values, often religious, that anglers and other coldwater conservationists place on species such as the Rio Grande Cutthroat trout. Moreover, as I note, these practices are highly contested, but their contestation makes them particularly illuminating for exploring the watersheds of religion, ethics, and various place-based approaches to environmental ethics. Therefore it is to these contested waters that we must turn.

### **“When Jesus Came the Cutthroat Went Away”**

The European encounter with American indigenous peoples has been told many times (Cabeza de Vaca 1983; Deloria 1981; Gutierrez 1991: 1; Sale 1991; 2000). In the Southwest, most frequently “visions of the victors” have dominated stories of Spanish conquest, which portrayed the local indigenous peoples as silent recipients of colonial expansion (Gutierrez 1991: 2). Ramon Gutierrez responded to this lopsided story in *When Jesus Came the Corn Mothers Went Away*, where he gave voice to the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico, who are a voice not often heard amongst “stuff from which legends were spun” (Gutierrez 1991: 1). Here I trace a story of another group, with even less voice or scholarly treatment, also severely impacted by the arrival of Europeans. This time, however, the story is about a fish – the Rio Grande cutthroat trout.

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Light explained that “The goal of an ecological citizenship is to bring together the interests of a human community to be fair and open and conducive to allowing each member of a community to pursue his or her own private interests while also tempering these pursuits with attention to the environment. A strengthened relationship with nature is to be found in forming an open-ended organizational bonds that entail specific moral, and possibly legal, responsibilities to create for the nature around one’s community and respect the environmental connections between communities” (Light 2002: 159).

As the expedition of Francisco Vasquez de Coronado moved north in search of the mythical gold of the “Seven Cities of Cibola,” they traveled into what is present-day Santa Fe, New Mexico. While camping near the waters of the Pecos River, which flows south from the Sangre de Christo Mountains into the Rio Grande, Pedro de Castaneda de Najera reflected that, “Cicuye is located in a small valley between snowy mountain ranges and mountains covered with big pines. There is a little stream which abounds in excellent trout and otters” (Trotter 1987: 2; Hammond and Ray 1940). Not only is Castaneda de Najera’s journal entry, as far as we know, the first written record of trout in North America, there is little doubt that the “excellent trout” to which he referred were Rio Grande cutthroat - the only “truly native” trout to this geographical region (Trotter 1987: 5).

While the trout that Coronado’s men encountered were “excellent” and vast in number, the impact of colonialism in North America on cutthroat trout, among other species, was rapid and devastating. In less than 100 years the cutthroat trout vanished from most of its historic range (Behnke 2002). Therefore, there is a twofold tale here: European colonialism decimated centuries of cultural evolution of native peoples of the Americas, while simultaneously altering the course of millions of years of biological evolution, and the cutthroat trout is but one example.

### **Becoming Native to Waters: The 100 Million Year Journey of Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout**

Although early colonial expeditions, like those of Coronado produced the earliest written recordings of cutthroat, we know their story well predates European arrival (Behnke 2002, Gresswell 1988, Trotter 1987). The Rio Grande cutthroat trout, one of fourteen subspecies of cutthroat, is endemic to the upper Rio Grande River basin of Colorado and northern New Mexico and the Pecos River in New Mexico. It arrived in these waters by way of a 100 million year ecological and evolutionary journey which dispersed the cutthroat trout into greater geographical distribution than any other salmonid species (Behnke 2002: 1; Trotter 1987: 21). In other

words, it took approximately 100 million years for the cutthroat trout to become native to the waters in which we might find them today.

In the geological development of North America the continent experienced one major uplift roughly ten million years ago. Noted trout biologist Robert Behnke said this shift was just what the “trout ancestors were waiting for” because the uprising elevated the Rocky Mountain range to its present area while opening river ways for the eventual passage of trout (Behnke 2002: 1). During this period, the largest river to empty into the Pacific Ocean, the Columbia River - “that magnificent gateway” - was born (Allen 1979; Trotter 1987: 26).<sup>4</sup> The story of the Columbia River is important because it provided the only northwest valley and passage into the interior of the continent creating the lone route in or out for these pre-cutthroat salmonid fish (Trotter 1987: 26).

The gradual freezing and melting of rivers and lakes of this magnificent gateway during the Pleistocene created ideal cold mountain streams which “the anadromous fishes of the subgenus *Parasalmo* found to their liking and began to move inland with no major barriers obstructing their path” (Trotter 1987: 23). While the cutthroat ancestors were able to gradually work into the continent, similar glacial shifts also created barriers isolating groups, and thereby creating the conditions conducive to the evolutionary formation of the fourteen sub-species of cutthroat trout recognized today (Behnke 2002; Trotter 1987). The length of this story is important when one considers the rate at which cutthroat have disappeared. Despite a 100 million year evolution, within 100 years of their fateful encounter with Europeans, many species of cutthroat became seriously endangered, in peril, or already extinct (Stefferdud 1988: 90).

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<sup>4</sup> The Columbia River and its tributaries drain an area of more than a quarter million square miles, encompassing parts of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, and British Columbia. The main Columbia is 1,200 miles long, and the Snake River, its largest tributary, is over 1,000 miles long.

The Rio Grande cutthroat evolved from the Colorado River cutthroat by nature of its journey “via headwater stream transfer from the Gunnison River or somewhere in the San Juan River drainage. . .bringing it into its native range of the Rio Grande” (Trotter 1987: 171). In prehistoric times, during cooler and wetter climates, some speculate the waters of the Rio Grande may have carried the cutthroat southward into Mexico and perhaps Texas (Behnke 2002: 146; Trotter 1987: 171). Today, however, its native range stops short in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains of the Southern Rockies of New Mexico.

Many biologists suspect that there were greater numbers and subspecies of cutthroat trout in these waters at one point in history. As the New Mexico climate shifted to an arid, high alpine desert, the present-day Rio Grande Cutthroat was the species most suited to fit in these waters. Due to its adaptation to such unique climates, like other subspecies of cutthroat, the Rio Grande cutthroat is particularly sensitive to environmental changes and extremely vulnerable to replacement by non-native trout (Behnke 2002: 147, 209).

#### **Non-Natives Stocking Non-Natives: The Decline and Present Status of Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout**

Although the Rio Grande cutthroat is the state fish of New Mexico, it currently occupies roughly 39 streams, or 7 % of its historic New Mexico range. According to a recent report by the United States Forest Service (USFS), approximately 200 self-reproducing populations of Rio Grande cutthroat are known to exist in the Rio Grande, Canadian, and Pecos River drainages (Pritchard and Cowley 2006: 3). These populations are spatially restricted, highly fragmented, and primarily confined to headwater streams, which in some cases may represent marginal trout habitat (Stefferdud 1988: 91).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Marginal trout habitat refers to waters that might run low during the arid season or where water temperatures might at times exceed 70 degrees at which point survival is difficult for the cutthroat.

In their present distribution disturbances related to activities such as grazing, logging, mining, road construction, and water extraction threaten cutthroat habitat. Due to increased habitat and population fragmentation, the small size and isolation of many populations leaves them at an increasingly greater risk to the negative effects of habitat disturbance, disease transmission, and the deleterious effects of non-native species (Behnke 1987; Behnke 2002; Pritchard and Cowley 2006; and Trotter 1987).

In recent years, numerous grassroots initiatives have emerged with the goal of protecting, preserving, and/or restoring native trout to their endemic waters around North America. Following this trend, state and federal agencies in Colorado and New Mexico have initiated efforts to protect and augment current populations of Rio Grande cutthroat through habitat improvement, fence enhancements (to exclude livestock and elk from grazing on stream banks), and the construction of barriers in certain streams to prevent upstream migrations by non-native trout. As a result of many of these activities, according to a 2006 report, the population numbers of Rio Grande cutthroat “appear to be stable” (Pritchard and Cowley 2006: 3).

Despite apparent stability, Rio Grande cutthroat trout continue to be at risk. Maintaining stability requires ongoing and active management. In addition to environmental and habitat disturbance, most experts agree that “the greatest threat to the stability of Rio Grande cutthroat is the presence of non-native trout” (Behnke 2002; Pritchard and Cowley 2006: 3; Trotter 1987).<sup>6</sup> According to Behnke, “The most significant aspect of the cutthroat life history, ecology, and biology that can be offered to explain their great decline in distribution and abundance concerns

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<sup>6</sup> Conversations with wildlife managers confirm this point. Moreover, fisheries specialists such as Sean Farrell and Chuck Dentino of the USFS, expressed frustration with continued stocking of non-native fish, such as Brown Trout, into waters designated as native Rio Grande Cutthroat habitat.

the cutthroat trout's susceptibility to hybridization with rainbow trout and replacement by brown trout and brook trout in streams and lake trout in large lakes" (Behnke 2002: 140).

If habitat loss and over-fishing were not enough, by the late 1800s the U.S. Fish Commission began introducing non-native trout into environments that historically supported cutthroat trout as the only salmonid species. As one report stated, "Conventional wisdom [in the late 1800s] focused on the introductions of many different non-native trout to fill the voids created from overexploitation and habitat degradation" (Kimball 2000: 1).<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the U.S. Fish Commission established hatchery facilities with the goal of supplementing dwindling sport fish populations of the West with hatchery raised and produced non-native brown, rainbow, and brook trout.

Further, that same "conventional wisdom" held that anglers more widely embraced brown and rainbow trout as "sporting" fish. Trotter explained that since the early days of the American West, "it [the cutthroat] has been much maligned by sportsmen for its gullibility and lack of sophistication, and much neglected by fishery managers" (Trotter 1987: xii). And while these perceptions are changing, preferences for brown trout and prejudices against various cutthroat still hinder projects which to secure their future existence (Behnke 1987; 2002; 2007; Trotter 1987).<sup>8</sup> Many anglers, and quite a few who I encountered in my fieldwork, still favor catching brown trout over cutthroat. Many anglers see them as smarter, faster, and harder to catch than cutthroat.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For more background on this see the end of chapter two where I discuss early approaches to trout "conservation."

<sup>8</sup> In a recent interview with Sean Farrell director of the Southwest Region of the USFS, he stated that this perception, while it exists, is increasingly less influential on native cutthroat restoration.

<sup>9</sup> Schullery (1999) noted that "standards and values" of trout anglers are changing, "our understanding of wild ecosystems has evolved so that we have higher expectations when we insist on wild trout in our streams." However, he notes confusion and controversy when he states, "We just don't agree on those expectations," in part because

In addition to the goals of filling “voids” of game fish, early fisheries management programs of the early to mid 1900s operated on misconceived notions that native and non-native fish species were hardly different, and that the introduction of non-native stocks would prove “beneficial” to old populations which risked negative effects of “interbreeding” (Gable 1912: 33). Today we know this cannot be further from the truth as is evident in continued efforts to restore and preserve distinct species and subspecies to promote biological diversity.<sup>10</sup>

Recognizing a flaw in this line of thought, Aldo Leopold responded to these prevailing attitudes by criticizing USFS programs for causing a decline in diverse animal species; in this case native cutthroat trout. According to Behnke, Leopold lamented “the fact that although the streams in New Mexico once teemed with a beautiful native trout, state and federal agencies seemed determined to eradicate it with their policy of stocking great numbers of non-native trout” (Behnke 2002: 210).<sup>11</sup> Despite the preference for catching brown and rainbow trout, however, anglers today are gradually joining the ranks of conservation biologists and forestry officials by professing the need to protect and restore populations of native Rio Grande cutthroat. In one interview an angler explained, “While I prefer to catch brown trout because they are more challenging and sporty, I recognize the necessity to restore and preserve native Rio Grande

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there is confusion about the difference between “wild” and “native.” But, native is becoming a more important word (189).

<sup>10</sup> For further research on the deleterious effects on cutthroat from interbreeding with rainbow trout see Allendorf and Leary (1988); Allendorf, et al. (2005) and Campton and Keading (2005), Allendorf and Campton debate some of the political implications of trout interbreeding, particularly when attempting to protect trout under the Endangered Species Act. Quist and Hubert (2004) traced the effects of non-native species on the preservation of cutthroat trout.

<sup>11</sup> For two histories of trout stocking in Western rivers see Knapp, Corn, and Schindler (2001) and Pister (2001). Both show that while many trout stocking programs were administered with good intentions, they have historically had disastrous unintended consequences. As Knapp, et al noted, “these stocking programs have dramatically transformed the aquatic ecosystems of western North America” (275). These effects have ranged from altering formerly fishless systems to impacting the native species of other watersheds.

cutthroat” (Gustafson, interview: 20 June 2006). These comments, however, beg the question: If many anglers still prefer non-native trout, why all the fuss about “native” cutthroat?

### **Why Native? Values of Biodiversity:**

As I noted in the Chapter 3, there are an increasing number of fly fishers who believe fundamental religious experiences potentially emerges out of quiet quests for native fish in their isolated, native waters. Anglers often compare these experiences to more ‘profane’ excursions of catching non-native, hatchery reared trout on a crowded stream. In an interview, one TU employee explained that while he got into trout conservation because of his desire to catch trout on a fly rod, today he rarely fishes for trout unless they are pure native trout in isolated areas. He refuses to fish for hatchery trout (Stalling, interview, 23 June 2006). Similarly, David James Duncan elevated native fish above hatchery reared trout when he explained that he opposite of native is hatchery (Duncan 2001: 100). John Gierach argued that by valuing native fish, one is immediately making a statement against non-native, hatchery trout. “I don’t care much for hatchery trout,” he ranted.

They’re better than no trout at all, but otherwise they’re inferior in every way to their wild relatives. . . . hatchery fish are, well. . . they’re from a *hatchery*; they don’t seem to belong in the stream, they’re often the wrong species (rainbows where cutthroats should live, for example), most are pale and sickly looking when compared to wild fish and, having been raised on Purina Trout Chow, they aren’t very good to eat (Gierach 1989: 20; italics his).

Beyond the trout itself, however, such fetishization of native trout says as much about the aquatic homes of the Rio Grande cutthroat as it does about the actual fish in question. Gierach, celebrated by anglers for his rants, ramblings, and religious reflections on everything fly fishing, argued in *Fly Fishing Small Streams* that fishing for native fish in small streams “probably is pure fly fishing” in part because the small streams are the ones that contain wild, native trout (Gierach 1989: 27). These streams and their native inhabitants are so highly sought by the “purist” crowd because they offer seclusion, privacy, and a chance to engage nature one-on-one.

Also important to these anglers is the knowledge that what is good for native trout is often good for other native species of the same areas; or, the idea that what is good for native species might be good for people a position I explore further in Chapter 6.

Concern for the native cutthroat has a tendency to extend outward toward whole native ecosystems. As argued in the previous chapter, fly fishers often tell stories of how fly fishing can lead to increased awareness of whole ecosystems. They start with fishing, then learn about the bugs or “flies” of fly fishing, which leads to “rudimentary stream side ecology.” This, anglers often reflect, provides a picture of the whole upon which native trout depend. According to John Randolph, editor of *Fly Fisherman*, one’s knowledge and awareness should expand to the point that catching fish recedes as the primary goal of fishing. At this point, according to Randolph, the angler should reach “the tenth level,” as he calls it. This is when an angler can sit on the side of a stream and watch fish rather than catch them (Randolph 2002). These expressions mirror valuations of biological diversity prominent in “ecocentric” forms of environmental ethics, which often draw upon various natural sciences, conservation biology, or even the practices of restoration ecology. In these moments, anglers value the native cutthroat not because it is something they want to catch, but because they know it is there; or, because they learn to see the cutthroat in the context of the entire biotic system of life, rather than merely as a game species.

In his famous articulation of the “land ethic,” Aldo Leopold described the “trend of evolution” as the elaboration and diversification of biota of the ecological community (Leopold 1949: 216). Like Leopold, what conservation biologists and fly fishers alike appreciate about native cutthroat, among other species, is the cutthroat’s contribution to an evolutionarily and biologically diverse ecosystem community. Understanding the entire biotic community, according to conservation biologist Michael Soule, should lead humans to realize that native

species, or individual members of the ecosystem community, are often on the brink of extinction (Soule 1983: 115).

Because some species are balancing on the edge of extinction, Soule has repeatedly maintained that humans are reversing evolution's trend and causing the sixth great extinction (Soule 1983: 116; see also Foreman 2004: 7). Humans are accomplishing what were, in the initial five extinction phases, caused by extreme physical forces such as asteroid strikes, geological events, and ice ages (Foreman 2004: 3). Like an asteroid in slow motion humans have gradually caused the sixth extinction phase through the extirpation of native species, loss of ecosystem protection, fragmentation of habitat, encouraged invasion by disruptive exotic or non-native species and diseases, pollution, and climate change. In light of this history, Soule and Bruce Wilcox, both conservation biologists, insisted that "the reduction of the biological diversity of the planet is the most basic issue of our time to which we must respond" through the protection and preservation of all remaining members of the biotic community (Soule and Wilcox 1980; ix).

The concept of biodiversity in itself demands consideration of both the individual components of the ecosystem, such as cutthroat, and their relation to the entire system. Being tied to the system, then, the health of individual species often operates as an indicator of the health of the entire system.<sup>12</sup> For example, in *The Idea of Biodiversity: Philosophies of Paradise* David Takacs interviewed the world's leading conservation biologists about the values attributed to biological diversity. His book revealed how scientists consider diverse species to be valuable, among other reasons, because they "provide early warning systems that alert us when it [the natural world] – and therefore humanity – may be in peril" (Takacs 1996: 201) Biodiversity in

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<sup>12</sup> According to Groom et al. (2006) indicator species are species used as a gauge for the condition of a particular habitat, community, or ecosystem" (705).

this sense operates as a “barometer of environmental health.” Or, as Paul Ehrlich framed the issue to Takacs: individual members of the biotic community are important because “they act as the canary in the coal mine.” They provide an index “to the stability and healthiness of the world” (202).

The idea that native trout, for example, are analogous to a “canary in the coal mine,” is pervasive among those concerned with their restoration and preservation. In the foreword to Pat Trotter’s *Cutthroat: Native Trout of the West*, Robert Behnke passionately pleads for the future preservation of the cutthroat not only because he has an “affection for rooting for the underdog,” but because “the cutthroat trout is like the canary in the coal mine: it is the first species to succumb to environmental degradation” (Behnke 1987: foreword). Behnke’s point permeates much of the angling and fisheries community. Throughout my research, through interviews, or casual conversations with anglers I continue to encounter the “coal mine” analogy.

Anglers, scientists, and foresters agree that the cutthroat trout, unlike other fish species, say bass or hatchery reared rainbow trout, cannot live in a variety of conditions. They require conditions of clean, clear, and uncontaminated waters; i.e. those most associated with healthy ecosystems. Moreover, as a result of their evolutionary journey and their dependence upon such pristine waters, the cutthroat developed a uniquely high sensitivity to environmental changes (Behnke 2002: 147). Therefore, as Mike Maurer the president of New Mexico Trout explained, “not only are they the canary in the coal mine, but they live in the most pristine places in the world. If they cannot exist in those places anymore, that means there is something wrong with those places” (Maurer, interview 22 July 2006). Therefore, according to Maurer, initiatives aimed at restoring or preserving cutthroat trout should reflect a holistic concern for the places and ecosystems where cutthroat are native. From an ecosystem management perspective, Santa

Fe National Forest fisheries biologist Chuck Dentino explicated that restoration projects often build on the charisma of species such as the cutthroat. In other words, the restoration of a watershed for the benefit of the charismatic cutthroat can in the long run be equally beneficial to other “less charismatic” species, such as the dace, sucker, or chub, which make their homes in the same ecosystems (Dentino, interview: 12 February 2007). I explore this point again in Chapter Five.

According to Takacs, conservation biologists increasingly tout components of biodiversity as gateways for holistic responsibility and action toward nature. It is not enough to recognize the value of biodiversity or native species, but some maintain that such a conviction of value carries a conviction not only to preserve, but restore native species. Responding to this issue, Reed Noss, a former editor of the journal *Conservation Biology*, insisted that fighting for the Earth and its diverse species is not merely desirable, but is mandatory, a “moral duty” (Takacs 1996: 133). This moral mandate, is often couched in terms and values associated with religious ethics and morals. This moral fight and duty is a pivotal component of homemaking or the development of sense of place values in an environmental age.

For many, ecological restoration facilitates the outward enactment of the inner sentiments of such environmentally centered moral mandates emergent from scientific knowledge. For those engaged in ecological restoration, traditional single species preservation (as advocated by the Endangered Species Act) approaches tend to fall short of goals. For example, in *Gardeners of Eden: Rediscovering Our Importance to Nature*, Dan Dagget criticized preservation, or what he calls “the leave-it-alone approach,” while advocating ecological restoration and adaptive management as essential processes for humans to help support native species and ecosystem diversity (Dagget 2005: 21). Dagget, through on-the-ground experience, believes that

ecosystems will not necessarily naturally return to previous, “native” states if merely left alone. Humans must engage and guide the system back to the desired state. Restoration, unlike preservation, depends upon human engagement with ecosystems (Dagget 2005; Light 2003; Norton 2003; Weston 2003). Recognizing the importance of ecological restoration, Soule insisted that “it is apparent that the emphasis in conservation biology will shift from the protection of habitat fragments to the opportunistic construction of artificially diverse landscapes” (Soule 1989: 300). His point regarding the construction of “artificially diverse landscapes,” however, raises an important question related to the question of “native.”

Environmental philosophers such as Robert Elliot and Eric Katz have been critical of restoration. By calling restoration a “lie” that “fakes nature” they maintain that restored landscapes can never have the same value as the original system (Elliot 1997; 2003; Katz 1992; 1997; 2003). If Katz, Elliot and others caution against viewing these newly restored landscapes as natural, original, native, or valuable in any sense, this begs the question of whether the restored Rio Grande cutthroat is truly native. Moreover, if it is native, what defines native? Is it defined by geography? Genetics? Human involvement? These questions have implications far beyond defining a fish as native or non-native. In some cases, such definitions can affect conservation projects for an entire river or watershed.

For example, in the summer of 2006 while researching these questions in New Mexico, I attended a meeting between representatives of New Mexico Trout, the Truchas Chapter of Trout Unlimited, and the Audubon Society. The three groups met over lunch to discuss a potential project which would restore and protect a stream in the Jemez Mountains of New Mexico. This stream was important because it contained native Rio Grande cutthroat trout. However, one party at the table argued that they would not contribute to the project if it was proven that the fish in

the stream were not 99% genetically pure Rio Grande cutthroat. The other parties, while recognizing the importance of genetic purity for conserving Rio Grande Cutthroat argued that even if the trout was 90% genetically pure, the project was still valuable because they wanted to restore a stream damaged by years of cattle grazing in the area. In other words, they viewed the entire system, not just the species, as valuable.

At the table, that day, not only was the definition and value of a native species open for debate, but so was the value of restoration for the larger good of the surrounding ecosystem. One area not discussed was the potential for restoration projects to benefit humans as much as native species or ecosystems. As I engage the debates surrounding the value of restored species throughout the next several chapters, I also want to highlight the work restoration does for human communities. As William Jordan, Andrew Light, or Bryan Norton have variously argued, restoring ecosystems, not only allows humans to repair damage already done, but has substantial personal and social benefits. Namely restoration can help humans to restore the human connection to nature by “restoring the part of culture that has historically contained a connection to nature” (Light 2003: 407). In other words, restoration might offer a way for humans to become native to place. However, restoration is not without controversy.

### **Bringing Back the Natives**

Since 1998, the United States Forest Service (USFS) has petitioned three times – in 1998, 2002, and 2005 - to have the Rio Grande cutthroat listed as an endangered species according to the guidelines of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Despite the fact that the Rio Grande cutthroat occupies no more than 10% of its native waters, requests for endangered species status have been declared “not warranted.”<sup>13</sup> Instead, in New Mexico, the Rio Grande cutthroat is

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<sup>13</sup> One of the guidelines for listing a species under the guidelines of the ESA are that it occupy less than 10% of its historic range.

designated as a “species of special management concern” and a 2003 United States Fish and Wildlife Service conservation agreement mandated the “preservation and expansion of existing populations is a priority” (Pritchard and Cowley 2006: 9).

In order to “expand” populations of Rio Grande Cutthroat, and other imperiled species of aquatic life, in 1994 TU initiated “Bring Back the Natives” with the goal of “watershed-scale conservation efforts for native species.”<sup>14</sup> Similarly, the Federation of Fly Fishers (FFF) 2001 “native fish policy” supported policies and practices that “recognize the value of native species, including their native habitats.”<sup>15</sup> These are but two of many local, state, and national programs aimed at the restoration and preservation of native fish species such as the Rio Grande cutthroat.

Although the prescriptions sound simple enough, they are far from easy as the restoration of one species often entails the removal of another. The USFS argued the fate of Rio Grande cutthroat trout will be secured by “*eliminating co-existing, non-native trout*; expanding the quantity and quality of habitat available habitat available to existing populations; and creating new, self-sustaining populations within the historic range” (Pritchard and Cowley 2006: 3 emphasis added). The USFS’s course of action, however, has created controversy.

Beyond philosophical debates amongst environmental ethicists over the value of restored species, the greatest controversy swirls around the methods for removing non-native species; which in the case of trout, is most effectively achieved by using piscicides (pesticides designed to target fish). The USFS, EPA, and all trout conservation organizations unanimously maintain that piscicides are the most benign and effective way available for achieving goals of restoration. Opponents, such as Dr. Ann McCampbell of the Multiple Chemical Sensitivities Task Force of

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<sup>14</sup> [www. http://www.tu.org/site/pp.asp?c=7dJEKTNuFmG&b=356133](http://www.tu.org/site/pp.asp?c=7dJEKTNuFmG&b=356133). accessed January 29, 2007.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.fedflyfishers.org/conDocuments/FFFNativeFishPolicy.pdf>. Accessed January 29, 2007.

New Mexico, however, have claimed that the use of piscicides is an understudied and unnecessary “poisoning” of public waters (Williams 2004; 2005).

According to Sean Ferrell, the director of Fisheries for the southwest region of the USFS, however, the process is not understudied. Rather, he noted, “misinformation” has caused misunderstanding (Farrell, interview 15 February 2007).<sup>16</sup> Farrell has taught that no other methods have proven themselves as successful for native trout restoration as two chemicals: Rotenone and Antimycin A (also known as Fintrol). The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) lists the most used of the two, Antimycin A - a naturally occurring bacteria initially developed as a combative to human foot fungus - as a pesticide.<sup>17</sup> Rotenone is naturally derived from the root of the derris plant. The EPA reported that at the concentrations used for the removal of fish, a person of roughly 154 pounds must consume more than 40,000 gallons of antimycin-treated water in a 24 hour period to have potentially fatal reactions. As for Rotenone, the same study demonstrated that a person of the same weight would have to consume more than 20,000 gallons of rotenone treated water in a 24 hour period to receive potentially lethal doses (EPA 2005; see also Young and Steeger 2007).<sup>18</sup>

Although extremely high doses are necessary to pose any threat to humans, these chemicals are quite effective in small doses at killing fish. Antimycin is absorbed through the gill tissues of a fish, inhibiting the fish’s ability to breathe. Beyond effectiveness, potassium permanganate easily neutralizes both chemicals, while they both break down quickly in an aquatic environment. According to conservationist and editor of *Field and Stream Magazine* Ted Williams (not to be confused with the famous Boston Red Sox baseball player) “one of

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<sup>16</sup> See also Behnke; Williams 2005a; Pritchard and Cowley 2006

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.epa.gov/fedrgstr/EPA-PEST/2007/January/Day-17/p411.htm>; accessed February 5, 2007.

<sup>18</sup> See also Young and Steeger (2007) and Ott (2007).

Antimycin's few drawbacks is that it sometimes breaks down too fast; under some conditions its half life is less than an hour" (Williams 2005). Despite the relatively benign nature of these chemicals to species other than fish, however, their use has caused uproar of public debate.

Their use for the removal of one species for the restoration of another species raises crucial questions concerning the role and nature of native species restoration. One particularly intriguing question given the geographical and cultural context of these restoration projects pertains to historically troubled relations between Anglo-Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Native Americans. The suggestion to forcibly remove non-natives in quest of genetically pure populations of cutthroat has led some to ask if we should consider such a position for dealing with humans?

For example, one participant on a *Fly Rod & Reel Magazine* internet forum likened the "poisoning" of non-native trout to "ethnic cleansing" (Fly Rod and Reel Forum, accessed 17 February 2007). In a New Mexico Game Commission meeting Peter Pino, a game commissioner and member of the Zia Pueblo Tribe, declared: "What if we came up with a poison that killed all the white people and left all the native people here? Would we like that? I think that is what we're talking about" (Williams 2005: 21; video copy of meeting in author's possession). For opponents such as Pino, native species restoration goes well beyond fish, and speaks to our conceptions of what it means to be native humans while laying claim to space, place, resources, and citizenship, particularly in light of the shared heritage of New Mexico's native fish and peoples.

In order to get at the heart of debates such as these we must understand that the value of 'native' always exists in juxtaposition to 'non-native' or 'exotic.' Paul Gobster, a social science researcher for the USFS, stated that despite scant attention by social scientists to questions

concerning native and nonnative species, their examination provides important insights into “understanding how people perceive, value, and act toward nature,” and what these imply for programs and policies (Gobster 2005: 261). For Gobster, these values and perceptions extend well beyond the realm of non-human animals.

In contexts of both global politics and environmental concerns, the concepts of nonnative, exotic, and invasive have become pervasive ways of “portraying a world gone awry, as cherished places across the world succumb to the onslaughts of alien invaders” (Gobster 2005: 262). Communications concerning nonnative and invasive species utilize fear tactics and language, not too different from current political language choices concerning terrorism. This language is tricky because it risks critique through accusations of xenophobia leaving restorationists and biologists to refute claims that their work is “part of a Nazi connection and an extension of human ethnic cleansing” (263).<sup>19</sup> In a recent conversation with the Eric Eisenkramer, “the Fly Fishing Rabbi,” he reiterated this point. While he sees the need to protect such biologically diverse species such as the cutthroat, he fears that these projects can be too easily connected with historical events such as the Holocaust (Eisenkramer, interview: 17 June 2008).

In order to facilitate said “ethnic cleansing” scientists and managers, Gobster observed, spend their time removing living things from ecosystems while making use of “fearsome instruments of death” such as Rotenone and Antimycin (264). Gobster’s point recalls Ferrell’s admission that the debate over cutthroat restoration emerges more from public misconceptions than scientific evidence (Ferrell interview: 14 February 2007). According to Williams, much of

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<sup>19</sup> In an interview with geographer David Harvey, Donna Haraway (1995) stated that her “own suspicious hackles are raised by restoration ecology’s potential’s for deepening nativism and xenophobia in what is still a white supremacist country. And I think it’s working that way ideologically” (524).

the opposition to native species restoration, utilizes the very “fear” language Gobster cautioned against, by accusing restorationists of “killing everything in the river” (Williams 2005: 18).

It is interesting to note, however, that Williams fell victim to the same language fallacies Gobster warned against. Williams called the non-native rainbow and brown trout that inhabit most of the waters of New Mexico today “mongrels” or “Frankenstein fish – pigment impoverished mutants and weird hybrids that keep the hatchery bureaucracy in business. . .” (Williams 2005: 18; see also Williams 2004). Therefore, both sides of the debate are guilty of clouding the issue with loaded language instead of taking the advice of Farrell, Behnke, Soule, and others to answer questions with sound science on the importance of biological diversity. These language choices demonstrate how important cultural values and perceptions are as motivators and barriers to environmentally responsible behavior, restoration, or environmental conflict resolution.

The debate over the restoration of native fish species raises a series of issues more frequently grappled with by environmental ethicists, particularly in light of increasing interest in restoration ecology. Is it right, some wonder, to kill one species in order to restore another? On what grounds and for what reasons is native species restoration justified? Beyond cutthroat trout, these questions have proven central in environmental ethics within the context of debates over removing feral cats, goats, or other introduced species from ecosystems.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, like Katz and Elliot who argued that restoration amounts to little more than cleverly disguised anthropocentrism, opponents to native trout restoration believe that anglers

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<sup>20</sup> Barcott (2007) explores the issue surrounding killing feral cats because they kill native and potentially endangered song-birds. In this article published in the *New York Times Magazine*, he cited Callicott as stating that “From an animal-welfare perspective, confining cats and shooting the cat, in the Galveston example, is wrong. . . from an environmental-ethics perspective it’s right, because a whole species is at stake.” In “Eradicating the Aliens: Restoration and Exotic Species,” William Throop (2000b) traces a history of these debates surrounding the removal of non-native species, which can range from zebra mussels in Lake Michigan to air potatoes in Florida or exotic goats in Olympic National Park in Washington.

only want to restore natives for their own angling enjoyment. For example, the environmental advocacy group Wilderness Watch warned that restorations are all about sport, not a concern for biodiversity. “The purpose” they maintained, “is to remove stocked trout and replace them with the [ESA] listed trout, in an effort to boost the population to a level that will allow delisting and resumed sport fishing of the species” (Williams 2004). However, closer examination of the issue reveals the matter is much more complicated.

While some anglers, such as John Gierach and many of his readers, do enjoy catching native trout in their isolated locations, they also maintain that this is not why we should restore them. Williams advocated that anglers should defend “native fish not because they are fun to catch or good to eat or beautiful, not because they are anything, but because they *are*” (Williams 26; italics his). Anglers in writing, internet forums, and personal conversation echo Williams when they argue that their forays into fishing have led to an increased awareness of streamside ecology, biodiversity, and in many cases a decreased desire to continually catch fish. Instead, they take satisfaction from watching a trout rise to hatching mayflies and knowing that they are in the stream.

Despite more holistic reasons for restoration, the fly fishing community remains largely divided on the issue. A great deal of the opposition from other anglers has little to do with notions of “poisoning” streams. Instead, some anglers fear that restoration projects will hinder the fishing in their favorite streams. As one participant on a *Fly Rod and Reel Magazine* internet forum explained regarding California’s Silver King Creek, “If they poison the stream and only the threatened native species is there, you won’t ever be able to fish for it.”<sup>21</sup> This is a sentiment I encountered when asking anglers for their opinions on native species restoration. Mike Maurer,

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<sup>21</sup> bbs.flyrodreel.com

the president of New Mexico Trout, explained that after an informal email poll of the group, which has roughly 300 members, the group is evenly split on the issue of removing non-native trout to restore native Rio Grande cutthroat trout based on reasons of angling preferences (Maurer interview: 21 July 2006). As far as I know there is no official, quantitative tracking data on these concerns in New Mexico, or elsewhere. However, it is a quantitative study that would be worth engaging.

This debate around native fish restoration, as restoration ecologist Eric Higgs traced, is hardly endemic to New Mexico. In response to the restoration of bull trout in Banff, Alberta, Canada, Craig Ritchie, editor of *Real Fishing* magazine laments, “You’re removing trout and putting in trout. You end up with the same thing – trout in a lake.” Higgs replied, “This is not true. Yes, one species of trout replaces another, but the entire aquatic ecosystem in Morain Lake changes in response to the characteristics of predator species” (Higgs 2003: 117).<sup>22</sup> Bill Schudlich while Chairman of the New Mexico Council of Trout Unlimited insisted that although anglers enjoy catching them, we should not seek to conserve cutthroat as a target for angling. Instead, cutthroat trout need restoration because “the native fish of New Mexico are as much a part of our natural heritage as the Carlsbad Caverns and the Rio Grande. If we don’t restore these fish, something unique and special about New Mexico will be lost” (Schudlich 2006:1).<sup>23</sup>

Highlighting heritage, Schudlich’s point recalls potential relationships between cultural and

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<sup>22</sup> For further studies on the effects of introduced brown or lake trout into native cutthroat waters see for example Knapp (2005). In this article he describes the effects of nonnative trout on the probability of four native amphibians and two native reptiles in Yosemite National Park. After a multivariable study taking elevation, water quality and depth, and fauna populations, Knapp concludes that the “results of the current study provide strong evidence that in Yosemite National Park, introduced trout have profoundly altered the distribution of two of four native aquatic-breeding amphibians and both of the widely distributed garter snake species” (Knapp 275).

<sup>23</sup> This point was also reiterated in an interview on July 16, 2006.

biological diversity.<sup>24</sup> Here the diversity of biota are as important to New Mexico as are the diversity of cultural histories. Moreover, some scholars argue that cultural and biological diversity can at times be mutually reinforcing (Jackson 1994; Nazarea 1998; Peterson 2001).

Building on this very argument, the Jicarrilla Apache Nation, as well as both Nambe and Santa Clara Pueblos of New Mexico initiated a variety of projects with the USFS to restore Rio Grande cutthroat to waters on their reservations, some of which are original native cutthroat habitat (Begel 2001). On one hand, they recognize the economic benefits of bringing cutthroat back into these lakes and streams. On the other hand, these projects highlight the necessity restoring and preserving cultural and biological diversity. Elsewhere, in other TU projects in the Pacific Northwest, tribal peoples are using native fish restoration as a tool for teaching their children traditional ecological knowledge (Zink 2005).<sup>25</sup> If Native Americans are restoring native trout, they have a heritage to build upon. For non Native Americans, the search for heritage is the goal in becoming native to place and the restoration of native species might offer some potential resources for that quest.

### **Becoming Native to Place: Restoration Ecology and the Search for “Historical Fidelity”**

According to Jackson, “we will be *required* to become native to our places” if we ever hope to achieve “solutions to both global and local” environmental problems. “We are unlikely to achieve any thing close to sustainability,” he continued “in any area unless we work for the broader goal of becoming native in the modern world, and that means becoming native to our places in a coherent community that is in turn *embedded* in the ecological realities of its

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<sup>24</sup> For an astute exploration of the connections between biological and cultural diversity see Nazarea (1998), where she documented the effects of lost cultural diversity upon ecological knowledge systems (12).

<sup>25</sup> Berkes (1999) defined traditional ecological knowledge as a “cumulative body of knowledge, practice, and belief, evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings with one another and their environment” (8).

surrounding landscape” (Jackson 1994: 3; emphasis added). Such proclamations pose the question of what exactly “becoming native to place” entails. In light of the goals of restoration, how is it that humans can “become native” while plants and animals cannot? If humans can, then how do the practices of restoration provide avenues for humans to become native?

Understanding what Jackson has meant when he deployed the term “native” is imperative. Historically, regarding human communities, the term “native” has been used to signify first peoples, for example, indigenous populations of the United States. Are native and “indigenous” synonymous for Jackson? No, to be native to place has little to do with living in a land of origination, or notions of indigenesness, although a community might very well fit such descriptors.

Native, Jackson explained, is a combination of land and cultural artifact. In other words, native-ness emerges out of interactions between nature and culture. A native culture does not live beyond its naturally constrained means. A native culture fits in its landscape. It is, as he said, “embedded in the ecological realities” of its bioregion. In other words, being native demands “an acceptable use of nature” (Jackson, 13). While in the following passage Wendell Berry did not use the word native, he aptly described Jackson’s ideal “native” relationship between humans and nature:

How you act should be determined, and the consequences of your acts are determined, by where you are. To know where you are is at least as important as to know what you are doing, because in the moral (the ecological) sense you cannot know what until you have learned *where*. Not knowing where you are, you can make mistakes of the utmost seriousness: you can lose your soul or your soil, your life or your way home.” (Berry 1983: 117).

This emphasis on connecting and knowing is crucial for Berry’s or Jackson’s endeavors to become native to place. One potential method for gaining this knowledge, learning how to act, or embed oneself into place is through the various practices of ecological restoration.

In recent years ecological restoration has received increasing attention as an alternative option for environmental conservation. Within this growing field, however, there are certainly debates about what it is and how it should function. Here I want to highlight a couple of simple definitions upon which to build the discussion of ecological restoration in terms of native fish and becoming native to place. According to Eric Higgs, whose *Nature by Design: People, Natural Places, and Ecological Restoration* provides the most comprehensive view of the field, ecological restoration is about “making damaged ecosystems whole again” (Higgs 2003: 1). Similarly, William Jordan III asserted that “restoration is the attempt, sometimes breathtakingly successful, sometimes less so, to make nature whole . . . to heal the scars and erase the signs of disturbance or disruption” (Jordan 2003: 11). Making nature whole or healing wounds, therefore, depends upon knowing where you are and what you are doing.

Despite such a simple definition, Higgs admitted that “there is a remarkable amount of conceptual drift in the way restoration is understood: everything from land banking to re-vegetation to exotic species control can be crammed into what appears an oversized genus” (Higgs 2003: 106). Beyond simply putting things back the way they were, ecological restorationists, particularly Jordan, Norton, Light, or Dagget, have championed the practice because it creates avenues for participation with nature, to enter into “profound relationships with it” (Jordan 2003: 12; see also Light 2002; Norton 2004; Dagget 2005). By entering into “profound relationships” with nature through restoration, one might argue that one can indeed become “native to place,” or what Light called an “ecological citizen.”

Despite lofty goals, however, ecological restoration is highly contested, it is an increasingly complex and sensitive social phenomenon we are only beginning to understand particularly as we grapple with the choices of not only how to restore nature, but deciding which

nature we ought to restore (Hull and Robertson 2000: 305). Where do we draw the line in a historical context to determine what constitutes native species (Callicott 2002; Higgs 2003; Hull and Robertson 2000)? Moreover, how does the knowledge necessary for restoration, as well as the restoration activities themselves, aid individuals and communities in the formation of “sense of place values” (Norton and Hannon 2002).

Depending upon how far one goes back in history certainly changes what one considers “native” species. For example, “if we go back far enough in time, when climatic changes and regional ecological processes and structure were quite different, justification could be found for a wide range of possibilities” (Higgs 2003: 204). Higgs’s point is crucially important when attempting to tease out the values New Mexicans, for example, place on native species such as Rio Grande cutthroat. Moreover, this issue explains the bewilderment of my van co-passenger in the Valles Caldera struggling to understand how a fish can “go wild” but not “become native.” Some of those German brown trout have been in waters much longer than most immigrant European Americans of the area, but yet they cannot achieve native-ness in a way that Jackson insists humans should.

The difficulty here hinges on the difficulty of defining native or original. Restoring ecosystems is hardly like restoring the Sistine Chapel. Contemporary ecosystem science tells us that ecosystems are hardly static. They are always in motion, therefore, “restoring an ecosystem involves an arbitrary choice of historical conditions, to the extent that history is of interest in the restoration process” (Higgs 2003: 120). However, Higgs argued, we should in fact take the question of native, in terms of historicity, seriously for three primary reasons.

First, he highlights nostalgia and the knowledge this brings of a better past (Higgs 2003: 143). Implicit in restoration is the notion that a time in the past was better than the present.

Restoration, one could argue, is the enactment of that nostalgia, or a “bittersweet longing for something lost” (ibid). Without stressing normative evaluation for determining if the past was truly better, Higgs touted the concept of ecological integrity, or cohesion, as a central component measuring the historical integrity of restoration. Understanding the nature of ecological integrity allows one to more fully know the places one is in the present, while trying to restore ecosystems or bioregions to some resemblance of how they once might have been (145). For Higgs, then, nostalgia ideally leads the restorationists into a quest for ecological integrity, from which we might begin to develop akin to what E.O. Wilson and Stephen Kellert called “biophilia” (Wilson 1984; Kellert and Wilson 1994).

I say, something “akin,” because I want to differentially use the term “biophilia.” For Wilson and Kellert, biophilia is an innate, genetic disposition to “love nature” or “love of life.” Biophilia is an affective bond with nature encoded in the human gene through evolution. Here I use the term biophilia in a way that embraces the love for nature, while not insisting on genetic predisposition. Therefore, biophilia can be learned as much, if not more, than genetic. Biophilia in these contexts is tethered to knowledge and interaction with nature, from which flows an affective or emotional appeal. Out of this emotional appeal, then, emerges an ecological ethic enacted in ecological restoration. Conversely engagement in activities like fishing or ecological restoration can indeed foster biophilic sentiments.

Second, Higgs stressed the influence of restoration on our capacity to create and relate to continuous stories that inform our understanding of place. These stories are vital for human quests for religious homemaking. On one hand, dwelling and restoration depend upon understanding the histories of the species and places of restoration. Our degree of native-ness depends to a great deal upon our knowledge of that place and our ability to tell honest stories

about it (Jackson 1994). History, then, is useful for not only identifying the need for restoration, but also judging its success. On the other hand, the process of restoration potentially creates opportunities for the creation of new stories of interaction between humans and nature (Dagget 2005; Gobster 2005; Thayer 2003; Jordan 2005) Therefore, these new stories based on experiences of restoration can add more forcibly to one's ability to become native to place.

Third, such narrative continuity between past, present, and future of the ecosystem or species in question is a part of what Higgs called "time depth." Depth of time is tied to rarity. Rarity, it follows, gives rise to value. "The older and ecosystem is, judging by the length of time without major human simplification of processes and patterns, typically the rarer it is. . . . Rarity is the condition of scarcity, where something develops an additional value because it is unusual" (Higgs 2003: 155). This third point is a crucial reason for valuing Rio Grande Cutthroat trout and working toward their restoration. The cutthroat's evolutionary story highlights its depth of time. Further, this depth becomes more crucial when placed into the context that in 2008 the cutthroat only occupies roughly 7% of its historical range. Therefore, the rarity of the species in the context of stories of evolution contributes to the nostalgic and ecological importance of these species and their ecosystems, which in turn, demands responsibility to those places. Restoration provides one mechanism for honoring that responsibility.

All three of these points not only highlight the importance of restoring places to "native" conditions, but also illuminate how restoration might aid humans in becoming native to their own places. However, this is not to say that restoration is an easy or painless process. Restoration requires difficult choices, particularly when seeking historical fidelity. No example makes this more clear than the debate over the use of piscicides in cutthroat restoration.

## Violence and the Sacred

As evident in these New Mexican waters, restoration demands a great deal more than simply putting fish back into bodies of water. In simple ecosystems, the competing non-native fish can be easily removed by netting or electro-shocking. The problem, however, is that trout streams are hardly 'simple.' Water flows change, hydrology differs throughout a stream, structures and bank depth vary, all of which complicate the process of removing fish from streams. Those concerned with native fish restoration, then, agree with long time angler, fly fishing guide, and conservationist in Taos, NM Taylor Streit, when he said "There's no way you can electroshock and fish a stream clear of non-natives. You cannot do a project without piscicides and be 100 percent effective" (Matlock 2005). Various anglers, conservationists, or officials who work for the USFS on native fish related issues have reiterated Streit's point; particularly Sean Ferrell the head of Fish and Wildlife for the Santa Fe National Forest as well as Julie Meka, the native trout coordinator for the Arizona Game and Fish Department.

Due to the complexity of rivers, the use of piscicides to remove non-native fish is inevitable and therefore so is violence. However, Meka, Ferrell and others have reminded restoration opponents that the original acts introducing non-native rainbow and brown trout to these waters were equally violent. The rainbow trout cross-breed with the cutthroat while the brown trout prey on the fry of cutthroat and out compete with adult cutthroat for other food. Highlighting this disturbance, Behnke noted the decline of cutthroat on the Rio Chiquito, near Taos, NM. When Behnke surveyed this river in 1966 he found the stream to contain 420 Rio Grande cutthroat and 37 brown trout. When he surveyed the stream three years later it contained 137 brown trout and 37 cutthroat (Behnke 2007: 106). Therefore, repairing the damage from one form of violence, in this case, seems to necessitate another form of violence.

As a means to cope with the inherent violence of restoration, Jordan likened the goals of restoration to the repayment of debt for much larger and historic violence against these ecosystems. “Everything we take from nature,” he reflected, “sometimes by persuasion or collaboration, sometimes by outright theft. Either way, the debt we incur is, or ought to be, a constant concern. For many, restoration is an attractive idea because it offers a way of repaying that debt” (Jordan 2003: 96). Repayment entails painful, but necessary, decisions. “In fact, far from healing, restoration may in certain instances, involve injuring an ecosystem or even killing it” (Jordan 2003: 23). However, this killing should not be seen in a negative light, but rather we should consider the role that killing one species to re-introduce another species might play in “intensifying awareness, appreciation, and understanding” of the ecosystem in question (Jordan 2003: 76). In some ways, then, the violence of restoration could not only enhance ecosystem knowledge, but could accentuate the value of the native species in question.

The connection of violence to sacred values is not new in the study of religion. Rene Girard argued that violence is an inherent aspect of the sacred. Violence gives the sacred its sacred quality (Girard 1972). Therefore, recognizing the role of restoration as a method for increasing not only knowledge, but value, of the ecological system is a powerful method for coping with restoration’s inherent violence. As Ferrell explained, “There is nothing worse than killing a stream and watching it go belly up,” he reflected. “However, you cope with this pain by realizing that in several months this stream, through proper attention to restoration, should be healthier than it was without those native species” (Ferrell, interview: 15 February 2007). Along these lines, then, restoration provides an outlet for world renewal that entails making an ecosystem whole again (Jordan 2003: 172; see also Rolston 2000).

If some, such as Girard, have argued that violence is an inherent part of religion and the value of the sacred, then ecological knowledge demands that one recognize the violent reality of an ecosystem (Callicott 2002; Sideris 2003). The problem with the current state of New Mexico's waters is that the non-native trout in those waters push the natural levels of violence beyond natural thresholds. This places not only native cutthroat, but other fish such as the Rio Grande chub or the long nose dace, at risk. Restoration not only works to realign the balance between the species (trout) and the ecosystem (other fish, macro-invertebrates, and aquatic life), but also humans and the ecosystem. As humans learn, through restoration, which species fit or are historically embedded into an ecosystem, they too learn how to more ethically relate to those systems as both anglers, restorationists, or citizens. In other words, there are lessons on becoming native in the work of restoring native species.

### **Conclusion on Collaborative Restoration**

In his aptly titled article "Native" David James Duncan, like Jackson, explained that humans must find the ability to become natives to our places, "we'll have to, in order to remain alive" (Duncan 2001: 101). Further, he passionately argued that "industrial man has [messed] up so bad that a lot of the native work to be done over the next few centuries is going to be repair work" (Duncan 2001: 108). This repair work is certainly restoration work and restoration work is native work. Native work will have as much to do with seeking mutualism and embeddedness in human to human relationships as it will in human to nature relationships. Human communities, like ecosystem communities, must be restored in a variety of ways.

Beyond ethics and values of biodiversity, other concerns reside at the heart of this and other similar stories, two of which I tell in the following chapters. Those concerns revolve around working together as human communities to restore, preserve, or conserve elements of systems of nature (Weber 2005). As evident in some of the issues surrounding native fish

restoration, human values vary widely when it comes to the rivers, fish, or whole ecosystems. Where science might clearly demonstrate the benign nature of piscicides or the necessity of restoring native species, cultural values and misconceptions lead to decisions that may or may not be in line with the best available science. In these cases, values and perceptions, in turn, often slow or hinder as much as they might motivate collaborative projects of conservation or restoration.

Therefore, in the following chapters, I build on the materials of this chapter to not only trace the difficulties of restoration, but demonstrate the important gains and successes of restoration. In so doing, I highlight the ways in which some communities come together with former adversaries forming “coalitions of the unlike” in search of collaborative conservation (Weber 2005). Because restoration depends upon collaboration, perhaps a more apt metaphor would be collaborative restoration, where native species are restored and a bit of native-ness is sought by humans.

For Duncan, the word native is a lofty word that everyone must earn. Despite all his efforts through writing and on-the-ground activism to restore, protect, and preserve the various natives of his own bioregion, Duncan doubted that he would ever consider himself native to Montana. To call his own life, which has the trappings of a T.V., electricity, a car, and a “garden that sucks,” a native life, he insisted, “just diminishes the word” (Duncan 2001: 100). The word native, whether we are talking about non-human animals or human animals, according to Duncan, “is an honor that we must earn afresh, every day. Our individual words, actions, and purchases either do or do not contribute to the health of what Aldo Leopold called the biotic community.” To become native, it is those words, actions, and purchases which hold the keys (ibid).

As noted here and in the following chapters, pinning down native with temporal or spatial fidelity is an onerous task, not to be taken lightly. Just as concepts native and non-native are at stake in New Mexico, they are also negotiated on Florida's Ocklawaha River, and in Tennessee's Coal Creek Watershed. In these cases, native-ness is worked and contested as much as land, water, and fish are contested and restored. In each case study, I show that becoming native is as much about restoring community as it is restoring native species, rivers, and watersheds. In these initiatives, practices in nature, such as fishing or restoration potentially offer innovative outlets or entryway activities for individuals and groups to rethink what it might mean to religiously value both nature and community. They can guide in the quest for crossing, dwelling, and homemaking. Becoming native, then, is about connecting practices and values, or at least recognizing their importance in both the causes of and solutions to restoration, environmental conflict, and civic environmentalism.

Duncan is correct; native is a serious word that we should not take lightly. Seen in the proper light and done for the right reasons, perhaps native fish restoration offers a few tools for improving our generational odds of becoming native to place. Through restoration humans must learn about the entire ecosystem and its history, not just the species in question. This means learning a great deal about the biological and cultural history of places, such as New Mexico. Pushing things beyond the watershed, becoming native also demands understanding how what is happening in New Mexico might shed light on issues elsewhere, such as Tennessee or Florida, or countless other places around the United States and the world, where water, fish, and human communities are at stake.

CHAPTER 5  
DAM DEBATES: CONTESTING SCIENCE AND RELIGION ON THE OCKLAWAHA  
RIVER

Is the dam still serving its purpose? Do the benefits justify the destruction of fish runs and drying up of rivers? Can't we find a better balance between our needs and the needs of the river? In some places the case for removing a dam is so easy to make that one wonders why it took so long (Babbitt 1999).

The two main stakeholder groups hold mutually exclusive visions for the ecosystem. Both visions embody individual preferences for interaction with the river and reservoir. As the groups perceive their interests to be mutually exclusive, potential for negotiation towards conflict resolution is limited, despite extensive studies to resolve issues of ecologic and economic uncertainty (Sloan 2005: 105).

**Introduction: Blessing Contested Waters**

On February 17, 2008, over fifty people gathered for the 5<sup>th</sup> annual "People's Restoration of the Ocklawaha River," the final event of "The Rally for the River," a three day long workshop and celebration of the Ocklawaha River. Putnam County Environmental Council (PCEC) organized the rally with activities ranging from conference-style meetings on the first day, music, tours and information on day two, with the third day doubling as celebration and workday, which was attended by a variety of concerned citizens, many of whom work with the Florida Defenders of the Environment (FDE). On this third day, I arrived at Kirkpatrick Dam before most participants did. I watched the sun rise over the reservoir and its misty surface. As participants arrived, I watched a few begin to prepare a ritual space alongside the reservoir, the locus of the restoration work for that day. First the area was blessed by the ceremonial burning of sage, meant to sanctify a sacred space consisting of blankets, old baskets, bottles, buckets, and other containers which symbolized the act of harnessing the waters of the reservoir and freeing them into the river. When the ritual space was ready, participants gathered in a circle to begin the day with a blessing service of prayers, offerings, and songs to the river they sought to restore and the communities they hoped to reclaim. The rituals blended Christian and New Age elements

with traditional prayers from members of the Muskogee Nation, whose historic home is in this area, and along some of the Ocklawaha River. Following the blessing service, those involved spent the day planting 1250 trees – cypress, ash, and magnolia – along the banks of the river. The goal of the “people’s restoration” was to begin restoring a river while simultaneously healing the community tethered to those waters. Restoring these waters means getting rid of Kirkpatrick Dam (formerly known as Rodman Dam), which has held back the Ocklawaha River since 1968. Restoring the river, however, as conversations reveal, depends upon a great deal more than removing a dam and planting some trees. At root, all restorative activities for those involved, hinged upon making “these waters sacred once again,” as singer/songwriter Amy Carol Webb sang that February morning.

Two months later, on April 19, 2008, another group, Save Rodman Reservoir, Inc (SRR), gathered on the opposite side of the reservoir for their own ritual aimed at catalyzing community concern over the fate of these waters that they feel are already sacred. Their ritual consisted not of prayers and planting, but of powerboats, bass lures, and individualized competition all with the goal of raising funds for SRR. These funds, SRR leaders Bob and Kae Andry or Ed Taylor explained, are crucial for continuing “the grassroots fight against major environmental lobby groups” (such as the FDE, PCEC, or the Sierra Club) to protect a place that they believe to be valuable for its quality fishing, bird habitat, and scenic views. With 152 boats (and 300 contestants) pushing into the water as the sun rose, the anglers not only wanted to win a prize for biggest fish, but wanted to make sure that Rodman Reservoir remains what they consider one of the finest bass fishing “lakes” in Florida, if not America.

Hanging around these two events, talking with major actors involved in each grassroots group, and surveying the history of the Ocklawaha, Rodman Reservoir, and Kirkpatrick Dam

reveals how these two groups have strong and diametrically opposed views over the future of these waters. Here, a relatively small and unknown reservoir incited forty years worth of political debate and grassroots action in the middle of Florida. This continued debate certainly serves, as Melini Sloan rightly noted, “as a touchstone in the ongoing dialogue on the interactions of politics, economics, and environmental ethics” (Sloan 2005: 102). As both groups continually negotiate their relationships to these waters and fight for its future their arguments extend well beyond science or economics, they depend ultimately upon the explicit and implicit work of religious homemaking and the interests and values tethered their crossing and dwelling within this particular bioregion.<sup>1</sup>

Continuing my examination of questions surrounding the relationships between religious practices, values, and civic environmentalism, through fishing and ecological restoration, this debate provides a unique case study for understanding how some Floridians are contesting the very grounds upon which it means to be native to their places. Here, restoration hinges upon particular views of what a healthy ecosystem looks like or how one defines “natural,” “native,” or “sacred.” In this chapter, I first trace the history of this reservoir and its contested waters. Second, drawing on field work and interviews,<sup>1</sup> I present both sides of the debate, highlighting the ways each use and interpret science to make their cases, while taking note of the role of value claims about nature, which are often couched in religious, spiritual, or deeply affective language. “The essence of this debate is one of values,” as Dan Canfield, a limnologist at the University of Florida, insisted (Canfield 1993: xvi; Canfield, interview: 8 May 2008).

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<sup>1</sup> In an interview Dave Bowman (21 May 2008), with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, stated that the longstanding debate certainly extends to the realm of philosophy and religion. “Today,” he said, “science does not matter in this debate. It is too deep.”

The values at work here are tethered to community identities and social constructions of nature. The two sides are so committed to their visions of nature and “healthy ecosystems,” this forty-year battle has become irreparably entrenched. So much so, that Ed Taylor insisted that there is “no compromise, the reservoir is either there or gone” (E. Taylor 2007: 3). These claims illuminate my points in Chapter 2 on the constructed nature of nature. Here it is evident that the environment is a social construction: a product of cultural responses to specific historical circumstances which give rise to shared sets of imagined landscapes” (Lynch 1993: 109; see also Proctor 1995: 287). This case reveals how particular constructions of nature are conceived to promote particular political visions in ways that potentially lead to conflict, particularly when the various constructions have sacred auras attached to them (Chidester and Linenthal 1995; see also Taylor, Bron 2001).

Because I am interested in the ways in which values play a pivotal role in either causing or mediating environmental conflict, I will survey those issues. As I will show, even when pivotal actors on either side of the reservoir are not operating within organized religious traditions, their language and actions both explicitly articulate and implicitly reveal religious values and concerns. Further, engaging these waters reveals how ecological restoration functions well beyond the realm of science and economics. This particular debate highlights and complicates some important arguments within ecological restoration, particularly as it applies to questions of democracy, civic environmentalism, and philosophies of bioregionalism. The latter half of this chapter, then, will explore those issues while offering caution against some of these assumptions, primarily that ecological restoration not only depends upon but can lead to improved democratic processes and bioregionalism’s assumptions that those who live in place always know what is best for their places.

## Amongst Dam Debates

In America, the battle over damming Yosemite's Hetch Hetchy Valley in 1913 still serves as a symbolic beginning to organized environmental activism in America (Nash 1967; McCulley 2001; Grossman 2002).<sup>2</sup> More contemporary battles loom internationally, such as the battle of the Three Gorges Dam (McCulley 2001). All of these battles are fraught with religious responses, as Robert Underwood Johnson called Hetch Hetchy "a veritable temple of the living god" and warned that "again the money changers are in the temple" (Nash 1967: 170). Internationally, the battle over the Three Gorges Dam in China or the Indian fight against the construction of dams on the Narmada River have evoked the response of a variety of religious groups bent on protecting what they perceive as sacred waters (Leslie 2005).<sup>3</sup> While centered around a much smaller dam, the debate over the fate of the Ocklawaha River sits in the middle of this continuing history of dam construction, dam destruction, and river restoration; so much so that those writing on dam conflicts around the United States reference the Ocklawaha as uniquely contentious (Babbitt 1999; Grossman 2002; Joseph 1998).

Over the past 100 years, the United States has led the world in dam construction. Dams have been built for irrigation, hydropower, flood control, water shortage, and ship passage (NRC 1992: 26; McCulley 2001: 4; see also American Rivers 1999: vii). On the category of large dams, those measuring more than 15 meters, the United States claims 5,500. Its total number of dams exceeds 100,000 (McCulley 2001: 4-5). As former United States Secretary of Interior Bruce Babbitt explained, this "means we have been building, on average, one dam a day,

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<sup>2</sup> Although the Hetch Hetchy Valley was protected when the United States government created Yosemite national park in 1890, the government allowed the valley to be dammed in 1913 to create a reservoir with the purpose of providing San Francisco, CA with water.

<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive look at the sacred quality of rivers in Hindu culture and history, as well as grassroots responses to contemporary damming projects see Haberman (2006). For an in depth look at "the epic struggle over dams, displaced people, and the environment" in India, see also Leslie (2005).

every single day, since the Declaration of Independence” (Babbitt 1998). Of twenty three North American rivers longer than 1,000 kilometers, only the Yellowstone River remains free flowing (McCulley 2001: 6).

Since 1912, various agencies have removed 465 dams with at least 5 times that number decommissioned, and a good number of them contested. Of those dams removed, deconstruction commenced for one or more of the following reasons: environmental health (which includes loss of habitat, native species decline or extinction, or other forms of environmental degradation), human safety and public health issues, and economics. If dams are removed, as the authors of *Dam Removal Success Stories* argued, those restorations occur and are successful because they have high levels of public support and involvement (American Rivers: 1999). Although there are occasional success stories concerning dams, their removal, and the restoration of ecosystems, there are many stories that serve as examples of the myriad conflict that accompanies dam construction or dam removal. Rodman Reservoir on the Ocklawaha River is just such an example.

### **Dangerous Waters and Damming Rivers in Florida**

The Ocklawaha River is a primary waterway of Florida. It consists of river channel and a string of lakes that flow northeast into the St. Johns River, a few miles below Lake George. As it passes through and along the Ocala National Forest, the river is dotted with springs that release clean fresh water into the river, which then feeds the St. Johns. The Ocklawaha is celebrated for its rich biodiversity, meandering waters, and recreational opportunities – one Florida eco-tourism website claimed that the Ocklawaha is the number one “paddling” or river in Florida (<http://www.canoe-suwannee.com/ocklawah.htm>: accessed 20 June 2008).<sup>4</sup> The rich beauty and

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<sup>4</sup> “Paddling” is a generic term for activities such as kayaking or canoeing, which require the use of a “paddle” as the primary source of motion.

ecological lure of the Ocklawaha add to the currents of debate. However, as far as Florida waterways go, it is one of several hot topics, along with the Kissimmee or the Everglades, to name a few.

Since Europeans ventured into Florida, its waters have been both a source of delight and debate. In his travel writings, Quaker naturalist William Bartram rejoiced for the St. Johns River. “How happily situated is this retired spot of earth! What an elisium [sic] it is!” (Bartram 1958: 69). He similarly described the Suwannee as “the purest of any river” (ibid: 141-2). In 1825, Governor William P. Duvall proclaimed that “the bold and navigable rivers which run through our territory will be of more value than mines of gold” (Blake 1980: 10). Therefore, travelers and early settlers saw beauty and economic promise in north central Florida, with fertile soil and clean, navigable rivers.

If the waters in the state were navigable and alluring, the waters around the state were another story. Historian Nelson Blake noted that in the decade preceding annexation at least 70 ships wrecked off Florida’s coast and at least 35 suffered the same fate in the first decade under American rule (Blake 1980: 13). Pirates, reefs, the Florida Keys, or the shallow waters of the Gulf of Mexico, not to mention storms and hurricanes, made these waters along Florida’s coast “the most dangerous in the world” (ibid; see also Dasman 1971). Seeking safer passage from the Atlantic to the Gulf of Mexico, early Florida politicians championed the notion of creating a waterway across the peninsula (ibid: 21). Early waters targeted for a cross-Florida canal most often included the St. Johns River, Florida’s largest river. Although Governor Duval was one of the first politicians to have introduced the idea of a canal, economics, political jockeying, and increased attention on the everglades, caused the canal idea to lose momentum and fade out of focus for a good while.

While interest on the canal seemed to ebb and flow, Blake noted that it remained a perennial discussion in Florida politics for over one hundred years (Blake 1980: 151). In the midst of the early 1930s, riding the wave of the Hoover's post-Depression public spending efforts, canal boosters revitalized the idea of the project as necessary to both the state of Florida and the future of the United States. By 1935, Franklin D. Roosevelt developed a lively interest in the canal. Blake noted that Roosevelt's interest in the canal was unique. Although local governments had championed the idea for years, it rarely drew federal attention (ibid: 155). As Blake explained, this attention changed things. "Suddenly the situation was completely different, and it seemed probably that the great ditch would actually be built" (ibid). But the attention caused responsive alarm in Florida and within the year the state was clearly divided on the issue. Northern cities – Jacksonville, Palatka, Ocala, and Gainesville – supported the proposal because not only did the project mean jobs, but the canal would ease shipping and create port towns, which meant more business. Southern cities of the state – Tampa, Sarasota, Miami, and West Palm Beach – opposed the plan, in part because they believed the canal might create competition that would prove fatal to their own local economies dependant upon existing forms of transportation (Blake 1980: 155 - 156; Sloan 2005: 100).

By this time, decisions were in the hands of the federal government as they debated the feasibility of federal appropriations for such a project that was estimated to cost at least \$200 million (Blake 1980: 160). It was not until Kennedy that substantial funds began to flow into the canal. Still, even for Kennedy, the canal remained a political chess piece as he promised Florida congressman Charles Bennett of Jacksonville:

If I am elected president I will be glad to cooperate with you in making this project a reality. I regard it not only as important to Florida, but the economy of our entire country, which must fully utilize all natural resources if we are to achieve necessary economic expansion (Blake 1980: 201).

Campaign ads in Ocala, FL proclaimed “A VOTE for KENNEDY is a VOTE for the CROSS-FLORIDA Barge CANAL!” (Ibry 2003: 184). Following his predecessor’s lead, Lyndon Johnson saw the groundbreaking of the canal project in 1964, while noting the “challenge to modern society is to make the resources of nature useful and beneficial” (ibid; see also Sloan 2005: 100). Statements by Kennedy and Johnson reveal a still prevalent utilitarian approach to nature. Carrying out federal labor of utilizing nature to improve the nation, the Army Corps of Engineers completed Buckman Lock and Rodman Dam on the Ocklawaha River in 1968. As the newly built reservoir filled, the waters of the Ocklawaha River backed up into approximately 9,000 acres of floodplain forest.

However, just because the first reservoir was filled and the project at long last seemed underway, it was not without continued controversy. As canal work continued, local Floridians concerned with the environment began to respond. By 1963, Marjorie Carr and David Anthony, two scientists at the University of Florida, organized a campaign aimed at preventing the construction of the canal and preserving the integrity of the Ocklawaha river system and surrounding bioregion and had founded FDE by 1969 to facilitate those goals.<sup>5</sup>

The year 1969 was the same that the federal government passed the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), mandating environmental impact statements on all projects. FDE, however, was already conducting its own environmental impact statement for the canal. Drawing on research conducted by both FDE and the Federal Council on Environmental Quality, FDE and the Environmental Defense Fund pressured federal courts into issuing an injunction to halt the project. Following this injunction, President Nixon demanded the complete stoppage of

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<sup>5</sup> Today, FDE works on a number of issues. One might say that their circle of concern has expanded beyond the Ocklawaha River to include other Florida Rivers such as the Withlacoochee River, Rainbow Springs, or the Santa Fe. Their work today includes water quality monitoring, habitat protection, as well as resistance to development projects that may affect the future of Florida’s rivers.

the canal project because “the canal could endanger the unique wildlife of the area and destroy this region of unusual and unique natural beauty” (Blake 1980: 209-212). This presidential order, as historian Elizabeth Grossman explained, “was unprecedented. Never before had a congressionally authorized project to which federal funds were already committed been canceled” (Grossman 2003: 55). Moreover, beyond science or economics, Nixon’s actions represent a unique presidential move to protect the environment based on aesthetics as compared to more utilitarian or anthropocentric issues.<sup>6</sup>

In 1976, following Nixon’s orders, Florida Governor Reuben Askew requested that the United States Congress de-authorize the dam and return all lands involved in the project back to the state of Florida. Despite stoppage of work for over a decade, the Florida Legislature de-authorized Rodman Dam in 1990. In 1991, President George H. W. Bush signed the necessary de-authorization paperwork, finishing the project and returning the land and waters back to the state (Blake 1980: 211; Sloan 2005: 101). It is important to note here, that deauthorization does not necessitate deconstruction. President Bush returned the lands to the state. Therefore, the state is responsible for allocating the necessary funds for deconstruction of the reservoir and restoration of the river.

In their efforts to determine the best course of action for the future of the Ocklawaha the state formed the Canal Lands Advisory Committee (CLAC). By 1994, the CLAC along with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) and the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD), compiled a 20 volume study assessing the costs, benefits, and options on four possible management plans for the river: full retention of the reservoir, partial

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<sup>6</sup> Certainly aesthetics played a role in the protection and preservation of many of America’s wild lands, as is evident in the work of John Muir, the protection of Yosemite or Yellowstone for example, but for a president to express such sentiments, I believe, is a rare occasion. The Adirondack national park, formed in 1887 was created not for the protection of natural beauty, but instead was protected because it could ensure water quality for the state and city of New York (Nash 1968: 108).

retention of the reservoir, partial restoration of the river system, and full restoration of the river system (Galantowicz and Shuman 1994).<sup>7</sup> In the end, the CLAC recommended completing additional studies before a final ““retain or restore” decision is made” (ibid: 2). Conversely, the Governor and Cabinet recommended to the Legislature to “restore the Ocklawaha River with an immediate drawdown” (2).<sup>8</sup> Following the 1994 release of this report, in 1995 Governor Lawton Chiles directed FDEP to begin applying for restoration permits and to begin systematically drawing down Rodman Reservoir (Sloan 2005: 101). By 1996, however, at the urging of Senator George Kirkpatrick, the Florida legislature continued to deny funding the FDEP proposal to restore the Ocklawaha. This move by Kirkpatrick was one of many political chess moves back and forth over restoration or retention.<sup>9</sup> As of today the most recent study remains the 1994 CLAC study, and because this study offers no definitive statement in either direction, both sides of the debate – FDE and PCEC favoring restoration of the river and SRR fighting to retain the reservoir - use the 20 volume study to support their own arguments.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The four alternatives are defined as follows: “Complete Restoration” restores river hydrology and floodplain function to pre-construction conditions, removing all structures, and returning to topography to pre-construction conditions. “Total Retention” retains the reservoir as it is at current depth, size, and management of fish and wildlife. “Partial Restoration” refers to the restoration of river hydrology and floodplain functions to reconstruction conditions through breaching of the dam, with limited removal and/or alteration of structures and geography. Finally, “Partial Retention” of the reservoir reduces the size of the reservoir to the extent that a part of the river can be restored and a part of the reservoir can be retained. This alternative will involve active management for fish and/or wildlife in that part of the reservoir to be maintained and would involve restoration of river hydrology and floodplain function in that part of the river to be restored. There will be limited removal and/or alteration of structures and geography (Galantowicz and Shuman 1994: 6).

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, Meleni Sloan cited the Executive Summary of the study as stating “the executive summary states “that no further studies are necessary to answer the question . . . efforts should be directed instead at restoration of the Ocklawaha River.” This is a direct misquote of the executive summary, which as I will show, only adds to the debate over river restoration versus retention of the reservoir.

<sup>9</sup> Because of Senator Kirkpatrick’s advocacy for the reservoir, the Rodman Dam was renamed Kirkpatrick Dam in August 1999.

<sup>10</sup> According to Dave Bowman, an ecologist long involved in these studies and who currently works for FDEP, these reports tend to come at 10 year intervals. So, in 2008, we are due for another one (Bowman 2008).

Despite both federal orders and varying state recommendations, Rodman Dam still holds back the waters of the Ocklawaha River in Rodman Reservoir. This reality is largely the result of lobbying efforts by members of both Putnam and Marion Counties and local stakeholder resolutions, led by SRR's opposition. Since the mid 1990s, lobby groups, the local county commissions, and the state legislature have battled over decommissioning and restoration versus maintenance of the reservoir.

### **Florida Defenders and Environmental Councils**

*Why fight for the Ocklawaha River? The first time I went up the Ocklawaha, I thought it was dreamlike. It was a canopy river. It was spring-fed and swift. I was concerned about the environment worldwide. What could I do about the African plains? What could I do about India? How could I affect things in Alaska or the Grand Canyon? But here, by God, was a piece of Florida. A lovely natural area, right in my backyard, that was being threatened for no good reason* (Carr, ([www.fladefenders.org](http://www.fladefenders.org)). Accessed 20 May 2008).

While the future of this waterway is the central focus of this debate, both sides agree that what happened to these waters in the construction of the reservoir and canal project was a huge environmental mistake. Many recall the personal anguish they or their families felt upon seeing the crusher-crawlers move into the Ocklawaha floodplain, crush the ancient Cypress stands, and make way for the new canal.

One participant in the People's Restoration, "Willie," described his father's emotions and tears at seeing the destruction. He also voiced his own sentiments in distinctly religious terms by stating that "destruction of ancient, old growth cypress trees was as sin for sure" (Willie, interview: 17 February 2008). Similarly, Karen Ahlers, director of PCEC, articulated the distress her family felt upon seeing their local swimming holes and Sunday picnic spots flooded under the reservoir (Ahlers, interview: 11 March 2008). Remembering them "driving heavy equipment that drove the trees in the ground," she described how

You could almost feel it thumping on your chest in a way (getting emotional here). It just felt so wrong to me. I was hearing from my older brothers at home, what was going on. I

knew how very sick they were, because they fished and hunted in the area. . . . It seemed wrong to me. I was raised a southern Baptist but was taught a principle of stewardship, of taking care of the environment. This was the first occasion I remembered thinking about what that really meant to me (Ahlers, interview: 11 March 2008).

These voices represent contemporary actors reflecting on this event, but no one expressed their sentiments more passionately or religiously than Marjorie Harris Carr. According to Aldo Leopold “there are some who cannot live without wild things” (Leopold 1974: xvii). Marjorie Carr was one of those people (Irby 2003: 177). Her attachment to wild places is apparent in the fight she battled during last half of her life to prevent the destruction of the Ocklawaha River or “her unwavering dedication to restoring the Ocklawaha to its ‘natural condition’” through her work with FDE (ibid). As a nature advocate, Carr always taught that scientific facts were crucial for any successful conservation effort. First, get the facts. Then, act (Carr 1971:4; see also Irby 2003: 185). This was why she and David Anthony formed FDE: to serve “as a coordinating body for the collection and dissemination of information pertaining to the environment” (FDE 1969).<sup>11</sup> Emphasizing data, Carr feared the infiltration of opinion into the facts of science. She could not know how appropriate her fears were. While the appeal to science for authority is paramount for both sides, as I will show, in the daily workings of this debate the scientific facts hold little water.

Using science to make practical and anthropocentric arguments, Carr made early claims against the canal because she feared it would have negative effects on the Florida water supply. For Carr, “a threat to a water supply is one of the quickest ways you can get a human being upset” (Irby 2003: 186). According to Carr, because Florida’s water table was so shallow, the creation of the canal could negatively impact the Florida aquifer and jeopardize the drinking water of the state.

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<sup>11</sup> Florida Defenders of the Environment, “Articles of Incorporation,” May 31, 1969. See also (Carver 1973: 111).

Interestingly, approaching the Ocklawaha debate by way of waters supply issues is still common. The front page of *The Gainesville Sun* on 16 February 2008 asked “Where will our water come from?” This question is increasingly on the mind of Floridians as the state finds itself mired in increasing drought. In a letter to the public, Kirby Green the Director of the St. Johns River Water Management District (SJRWMD) noted that the public water demand in Florida is expected to double by 2025 and the SJRWMD is exploring all options for mitigating this demand. Pumping water from the St. Johns River and the Ocklawaha River are two primary options. According to the SJRWMD, initial studies reveal that these two rivers can potentially provide up to 155 million gallons and 107 million gallons a day respectively without causing ecological harm (Crabbe 2008: 8A; see also <http://sjr.state.fl.us/surfacewaterwithdrawals/index.html>; accessed 20 May 2008). Today, the questions surround not only the source of the water, but storage. Proponents of restoration insist the water should be taken directly from the river. SRR, on the other hand, has argued that Rodman Reservoir provides a perfect source and storage facility for fresh water. I explore these points in greater detail shortly.

Beyond protecting water for Floridians, like Carr, FDE and PCEC continue to insist that the canal and reservoir destroyed one of the more biodiverse and structurally complex of all the Florida ecosystems. According to Katherine Ewel, a wetlands ecologist and professor emeritus at the University of Florida, “Its size, density, and diversity of species, combined with the presence of many rare and endangered species, make the Ocklawaha one of the most unique river systems in the Southeast” (Ewel 1993). Restoration advocates continue to insist that the dam and reservoir are detrimental to the biodiversity of the Ocklawaha River Basin; the reservoir is an

abhorrence, a “weed-choked, declining ecosystem smack in the middle of a beautiful river” (Joseph 1998: 51). SRR has contested this idea.

If the spotted owl is the archetypal symbol of environmental conflict in the Pacific Northwest, restoration advocates have utilized the manatee’s endangered status to fight Rodman Reservoir. In 1973, the manatee was listed as endangered according to the Endangered Species Act (ESA), and is further protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972.<sup>12</sup> FDE and PCEC have insisted the lock system of Kirkpatrick Dam continually places the manatee at great risk of being crushed or drowned. However, restoration opponents note that since 1974 only 10 manatees have died in the locks, with none dying in the last 10 years. According to Kristina Jackson, formerly with FDE and now working for the Sierra Club, any risk of harm directly violates the ESA (Jackson, interview: 12 April 2005). While the manatee has been a potent symbol of biodiversity at risk in this debate, little leverage for dam removal has come in their name.<sup>13</sup>

Highlighting ecological complexity, proponents of restoration have maintained that diversity – particularly migrations of piscine and avian species – have experienced considerable decline. Ewel explained that the negative effects of the reservoir result from the loss of 15% of floodplain forest (Ewel 1993). With the damming of a river, FDE and PCEC have explained that migratory species (such as shad, black bass, or striped bass) once native to these waters have steadily declined or disappeared. The status of fish in the river has been a source of considerable debate between both parties.

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<sup>12</sup> USFWS. 2008. Manatee Fact Sheet: <http://ecos.fws.gov/speciesProfile/SpeciesReport.do?scode=A007>, accessed 16 September 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, while the state has attempted to dedicate funds to improve the lock with devices for improving safety for manatees, FDE and PCEC have largely rejected these initiatives as they feel that improvements to the dam, in the long run, prohibit the restoration of the Ocklawaha River.

Proponents of restoration highlighted three major fish kills in the reservoir. The kills took place in 1985, 1988, and 2000; with 8.5 million, 2.4 million and 1.9 million fish dying in each fish kill, respectively. Fish kills can result from the dissolved oxygen in the water dropping below 1 part per million. Dissolved oxygen in the water typically drops because as a result of excess organic matter from the surrounding landscape, as well as the growth of invasive species such as water cabbage or hydrilla, which University of Florida aquatic biologist Kenneth Langeland called the “perfect aquatic weed” for its notorious invasive abilities (Langland 1996). The CLAC study stated that “if the reservoir is maintained in its preset state (full retention), future fish kills are likely” and hence would require ongoing management and maintenance (Galantowicz and Shuman 1994: 41). One method for preventing fish kills is the use of occasional (every two years) draw downs of the reservoir, the most recent of which occurred in February 2008. In short, as the water is drawn down, organic matter and plant life that out compete fish for oxygen, dry out and therefore die off.

Restoration proponents insisted that these biannual draw downs are indicative of an unhealthy ecosystem and should signal the need to restore the Ocklawaha River to its original state. Ahlers explained “I don’t buy the argument that Rodman is a complex and healthy ecosystem! These draw down events are representative of intense human management. If the system was “healthy” then these actions would not be necessary” (Ahlers, interview: 11 March 2008). Ahlers point gets to the heart of one of the key questions in this issue. While both sides debate the status of the Ocklawaha River or Rodman Reservoir as “healthy ecosystems,” Ahler’s statement reveals another contentious point regarding the role of humans in “managing nature.” Restoration, she and others admitted, also necessitates management. However, these forms of management, as I will show, differ greatly. Ahler’s sees current management practices as simply

supporting a fishery for anthropocentric values; restoration necessitates management for “nature’s sake.”

Fighting for “nature’s sake,” PCEC and FDE question the current health of the reservoir as a quality fishery. The CLAC study demonstrates that fish diversity, particularly of smaller fish species, such as snail bullhead, dusky and bluenose shiners, and tessellated darters would be expected to increase upon restoration (Galantowicz and Shuman 1994: 41, 49). However, total biomass of fish might decline, which concerns anglers who want larger game fish and have little concern for the smaller and potentially threatened species such as the tessellated darter.

The wide array of potential biodiversity provides a central arguing point for FDE and PCEC. However, the CLAC study reveals that much of the diversity will shift upon restoration. Some species might decline, while others would continue or increase. For example, while wetlands birds such as limpkins, herons, ospreys, or egrets might decline because of restoration, forest dwelling species such as wrens, warblers, and owls would certainly increase (Galantowicz and Shuman 1994: 52-53). Biodiversity is important for those in favor of restoration, therefore, much of their argument hinges around the idea that the construction of the dam and canal disrupted nature’s processes.

Most commonly, proponents of restoration argue that beyond potential biodiversity, the canal construction disrupted and destroyed a thriving floodplain forest. Early legal resistance to the canal reveals a great deal of litigation around the legal standing of trees and the forest (US App 1974). A suit filed by FDE and local environmentalists sought an injunction on canal construction “because it was killing all of the trees along its former banks” (ibid 1). This argument made in Florida is reminiscent of Christopher Stone’s landmark article “Should Trees Have Legal Standing?” that was published in the *Southern California Law Review* (Stone

1971).<sup>14</sup> While I cannot find any scholarly comparison between this Florida legal injunction and Stone's California-based article, their comparison seems apt and leaves one to wonder if Stone's argument in 1971 influenced this 1974 court case. In both, injury is no longer defined in human terms, but also with regard to nature (U.S. App. 1974; Stone 1971; Nash 1989; 129). In both cases, environmental damage is articulated as being so severe as to be considered "irreparable" and legal standing should be determined along these lines.

While the argument did not hold water and in the end the courts ordered that the water levels of the reservoir return to 18 feet, a serious court debate on "injury" to trees is remarkable. Karen Ahlers has continued to discuss the irreparable damage of the former forests of this floodplain, while others such as Willie lamented the loss of historically rare old growth stands of cypress and hardwood forests, calling their destruction "surely a sin" (Ahlers, interview: 11 March 2008; Willie, interview: 17 February 2008).

If, in the end, the trees along the banks of the Ocklawaha River did not have legal standing, proponents of restoration have also argued for the entire ecosystem. Noting, in particular, Rodman Reservoir has altered an ecosystem that is the result of centuries of ecological "succession," and "destroyed the climax community in 16 miles of the Ocklawaha Valley, substituting instead a highly disturbed, artificially maintained habitat" (Ewel, et. al. 1993). Interestingly, much of the emphasis on the "climax communities," is dependant upon an out-of-date concept.

In the early 1900s, Frederic Clements coined the concept of "climax community," to describe how he saw, in grasslands, the progression of ecosystems from unbalanced plant and animal assemblages toward a complex, ecosystem in "relatively permanent equilibrium . . .

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<sup>14</sup> A year later this article was expanded into a book by the same title.

capable of perpetuating itself forever” (Worster 1994: 210). According to Clements “The unit of vegetation, the climax formation, is an organic entity. As an organism, the formation arises, grows, matures, and dies . . . The climax formation is the adult organism, the fully developed community, of which all initial and medial states are but stages of development” (Clements quoted in Worster 1994: 211). On the Ocklawaha, then, restoration advocates assume the floodplain forests represent that equilibrium, adult state of development, where a canopy of maple, ash, and cypress trees dominate the landscape. If Clements’s approach to ecology explained that nature follows a course toward stability, in the form of a climax community, then FDE and PCEC have maintained that Rodman Dam brought that progression to a halt.

According to Ahlers, nothing represents the disruption of nature’s equilibrium more than the need to regulate water and invasive aquatic weeds through biannual reservoir draw downs. As she repeated throughout our discussion, “There are so many problems with the system. Without daily manipulation, the whole thing could blow up in your face. Fish kills . . . draw downs . . . If this is an ecosystem,” she wondered “why must it be managed so tightly?” (Ahlers interview: 11 March 2008). While critiquing management in the form of manipulation, however, Ahlers and other restoration advocates realize that restoration demands some degree of human management. As Ahlers reflected, human involvement in restoration is involvement that makes amends for a wrong done. “I don’t know. I was raised in a big family. My parents were big on personal responsibility. If you messed it up, you should clean it up. That moral that I was raised with is the foundation for what I do here” (ibid). This sort of mentality is the source of their annual People’s Restoration project and is reflected in the wide array of scholarly literature of

ecological restoration that sees restoration as a means of making things right, atonement, or restitution (Jordan 2005; Rolston 2000).<sup>15</sup>

The difference here is management for human's sake versus management for "nature's sake." The goal of the people's restoration, according to Ahlers, is to "take matters into the hands of the citizens," to create opportunities for "nature to heal herself" (Ahlers, interview 11: March 2008). Ahlers's sentiments reflect those often articulated by ecological restorationists, such as William Jordan or Freeman House, who not only celebrate the mechanisms of restoration as tools for fixing nature, but also for creating new platforms upon which to understand and promote community. While FDE and PCEC might claim that the restoration is for "nature's sake," they widely recognize the potential for restoration projects and events like the Rally for the Rivers to catalyze the community and educate the public around these issues. After all, the title of "People's Restoration" of the Ocklawaha seems to signal community restoration as much as it does ecological restoration. The latter of which can hardly be successful without the former (Jordan 2003; Norton 2004; Thayer 2003). For all those involved in these activities, from Carr's original visionary activism to the recent leadership of Karen Ahlers and PCEC, they share a common vision for the river: to restore the river to its original, flowing state. This vision is diametrically opposed to those who want to "save a reservoir."

### **Saving a Reservoir**

Members of FDE, PCEC, and all those on who want to "free the Ocklawaha," not only believe that the canal was a bad idea from the beginning because it destroyed a complex and diverse ecosystem. On the opposite side of the reservoir, supporters of SRR might agree that the

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<sup>15</sup> Holmes Rolston III (2000) insisted that ecological restoration is restitution, "a moral word. We make restitution where we ought not to have destroyed values. This includes natural values as surely as cultural ones. Restoration as restitution, moreover, is going to increase our sense of identity with nature; we are going to appreciate the biotic community we have studied and helped to restore (131).

canal and reservoir were a bad idea. However, today they feel that the reservoir is not a sick and dying body of water, but “is a complex ecosystem that supports a wide variety of native plants and wildlife, including many species that are currently threatened in Florida” (Rodman 2006). Therefore, SRR has maintained that restoration would be an even greater mistake than the original error of canal construction. Their position hinges upon fundamentally differing values and interests in nature that impact their perceptions of what “nature” should look like. If nature is constructed, much of this debate hinges around questions of what “natural” is, or what a “healthy ecosystem” looks like, or to what degree should humans be involved in managing natural spaces. However, before getting into the currents of that debate, it is necessary to step back and look at the historical support for the canal, as that dialogue sheds considerable light on today’s voices supporting the reservoir.

If early opposition to the canal by Carr and her supporters was decidedly biocentric, support for the canal was anthropocentric, economic, and utilitarian. Many saw the canal as an economic boom to the economies of Florida and the United States. And, after all, “Whatever ‘developed’ the state was good; whatever hindered development was bad” (Blake 1980: 196). Presidents Kennedy and Johnson furthered the project for personal political gain as much as national economic benefits, as they both thought it was necessary to improve upon nature or make “nature’s resources useful and beneficial” for the nation (Irby 2003: 184).

Economics and politics, however, were only half of the story. If canal opponents wanted to preserve “pristine nature,” then canal supporters argued that the canal and ensuing reservoir would be improvements upon nature. Florida Governor Hayden Burns saw the canal as an improvement of potential recreational possibilities on the river. Responding in a 1965 letter to Carr’s opposition, Burns explained that “The Canal project admittedly, will change the present

conditions along that part of the Ocklawaha . . . This stretch will be turned into two long lakes, safe for even the amateur boater, fisherman, and wildlife observer” (Burns 1965; see also Blake 1980: 209; Irby 2003: 186).<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Florida Congressman Charles Bennett countered Carr, before a House Public Works Appropriations Subcommittee, that he was a “Florida man” and that “a lot of the Cross-Florida Barge Canal goes through what we call scrub oak and pine flats. This is not exactly even a deer’s idea of the first Eden and so it is not all quite as glorious as some people would have us think” (Bennett 1970; see also Blake 1980: 209).<sup>17</sup> If improving upon nature is important, both put their belief in distinctly religious terms. As Irby noted of Burns, and the same holds true for Bennett, they were merely “echo[ing] the common sentiment of the time, which posited in mankind superiority over all, including God, who created an imperfect world in need of remedy” (Irby 2003: 186). These improvements were most commonly expressed in the context of recreational opportunities which continue to be both source and focus of many debates, even today.

Canal advocates argued that the newly created lakes of the canal would create nearly 300 miles of shoreline, for boating, fishing, and sightseeing. Although hunting would decline with a flooded forest, Congressman Bennett touted the increase in fishing opportunities by calculating a “net gain of 78,200 man-days of sports fishing” (Blake 1980: 206). Today, for SRR and other dam supporters fishing remains a primary platform. As Irby rightly noted, a canal designed to ease shipping, aid defense, and create jobs, had shifted from an economic opportunity to “a sacred fishing hole” (Irby 2003: 191). Along these lines, the debate over fishing quality has remained central to the entire debate.

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<sup>16</sup> Burns to Carr, July 20, 1965, correspondence file, Carr Papers.

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Congress, House, *Public Works Appropriations for 1971, Hearings before a Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations*, 91<sup>st</sup> Congress, Second Session, 1970, Part 5, pp 567, 581. Cited in Blake 1980: 209.

By citing a statistic of an increase in reservoir visitors to 400,000 a year, many have argued Rodman has become a national bass fishing attraction (Irby 2003: 191). FDE and PCEC continue to counter these claims by insisting that the fishing had always been quality and that the best fishing was found in the river. Even if the fishing was exceptional early on, Carr doubted that it would remain so long term. Highlighting the growth of invasive weeds and influence of agricultural run-off, she maintained that over time the quality of fishing would decline.

Today, thirty years later, reservoir proponents maintain that the fishing is just as good, if not better than it has been historically. A report by University of Florida limnologist, Dan Canfield suggested that the number of “angler-fishing hours” exceeds 430,000 hours annually. This number, he says, compared to the 124,000 angler-fishing hours on the river sections above and below the reservoir demonstrates that anglers value the reservoir more than they do the river (Canfield 1993).<sup>18</sup> A FDEP study estimated that Rodman Reservoir supported 307,217 visitor days in 1993, more visits than all but 10 of Florida’s 129 State Parks. Moreover, Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission documented that the total recreation use of Rodman was 343,840 person-hours, which is 3 times greater than the use of the Ocklawaha River at 113,859 person-hours. Of those recreating on Rodman, FDEP estimated that roughly 60% of anglers fish for largemouth bass.<sup>19</sup> One must wonder, however, if these numbers increased because of access created by the reservoir. Bowman and Canfield agree. However, this is the allure of the reservoir;

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<sup>18</sup> Based on conversations with Dave Bowman of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Office of Greenways and Trails, visitor numbers and visitor-hours of fishing are calculated through the assessment of regular counts at primary boat ramps, parks, and access points along the river and reservoir. Visitor-hours of fishing are calculated based on an estimated, average 4 hours of fishing per visit. This number is then multiplied by average number of visitors.

<sup>19</sup> FDEP Socio-Economic Study, 1993. Volume 1: 40, Vol 3: 37, Vol. 3: 41. FGFC Recreational Use and Fisheries Report. 1993: 5, 9, 15.

it provides multiple access points to more water where there previously might not have been such access.

Proponents of restoration have maintained that regardless of fishing hours, the quality and quantity of fish has declined. And while the overall biomass of fish has not declined, Canfield's study demonstrated that the quality of "largemouth bass fishing is declining on the Reservoir," but could be improved with "proper water management" (Canfield 1993: 23 – 24, see also Galantowicz and Shuman 1994: 38). Even if the quality of bass fishing on Rodman Reservoir has declined to some degree, those who fish here do so devotedly and argue that the fishing is as good as it always has been.

Like trout anglers in fly fishing circles, some bass fishers also celebrate their sport with pious religiosity. The gear differs, with power boats, spinning rods, and bass lures as the common tools of the trade. Bass fishing culture is ripe for an in depth cultural study in similar ways to those by which I approach fly fishing, trout culture in Chapter 3 and elsewhere (Snyder 2005; 2007). Here, however, it must be sufficient enough to note that bass fishers take their sacred sport as seriously as do anglers of other ilk, where angling passion blurs the line between addiction and religious fanaticism.

If fly fishers chase native trout into small, clean, and clear headwater streams of the mountains, bass fishers are most at home on a lake or reservoir; for it is in warmer waters that bass thrive. Ask bass anglers at Kenwood Landing on Rodman Reservoir, or around the country, they will tell you that Rodman Reservoir is "one of the best, most majestic places" to catch bass in the country.<sup>20</sup> Conversations I had with anglers at the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Save Rodman Reservoir

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<sup>20</sup> Kenwood Landing is one of several boat ramps on Rodman Reservoir. It is also the primary location for the annual Save Rodman Reservoir Bass Tournament. A simple Google search of bass and Rodman Reservoir reveals a list of websites claiming that Rodman is one of the best bass fisheries in the country. Bass Anglers Sportsman

Bass Tournament revealed that many not only speak passionately about the sport, but many descriptions of fishing on the reservoir were tinged with religious language and inflection as some called “Rodman a sacred space.” One woman working at the tournament passionately outlined the power of fishing in her life as evidenced by her involvement with SRR and also a local group called “Bass and Babes.” She ardently painted the reservoir as a wonderful place to reflect upon the beauty of God, particularly as she has found herself increasingly dismayed with the status of churches and clergy of all denominations. For her, thinking of fishing and all it entails brought tears to her eyes, which is why she volunteers at this annual event. She finds it harder to fish as she ages, therefore, she sees serving soda at the tournament as an opportunity to give to give back to the sport and the community (Cheryl, interview: 19 April 2008).

However, although this debate is one often depicted one of bass anglers versus environmentalists, fishing is hardly the sole focus of contention on Rodman’s waters.<sup>21</sup> Those involved in “saving Rodman Reservoir” explained that while they came to the fight with fishing on their minds, the issues go well beyond 10 pound bass. Ed Taylor, the current president of SRR, insisted that fishing and his active engagement with the reservoir through groups like Lake Watch, not only led to a greater awareness of environmental issues of biodiversity, but also have provided the catalysts for civic, political engagement. Taylor is also the commissioner for District Four of Putnam County, Florida. He explained that fishing and his work with SRR have taught him the power of grassroots political action to make “positive changes for community and environment” (Taylor, Ed 2008). Similarly, Kae Andry, Bob’s wife and membership chair of SRR, claimed that her involvement in this reservoir has led her to consider herself an

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Society and the National Bass Anglers Association consistently list Rodman Reservoir as one of the top bass fishing destinations in America.

<sup>21</sup> Grossman (2002) characterized the debate as one between bass anglers and environmentalists.

“environmentalist” and the debate here was over differing visions of the “environment” (Andry, Kae, interview: 19 April 2008; 21 May 2008). In a follow-up discussion both Kae and her husband Bob clarified this point by stating that they always considered themselves environmentally or sustainability minded. As they made these claims they pointed out when and where they grew their own food, which at one time included goats and chickens, as well as a variety of vegetables. Always being self sufficient and knowing how to connect to your local region has long been important to the Andrys, this is in large part why they got involved in the fight to Save Rodman Reservoir. They believed that the health of this river and reservoir was paramount to a healthy community. Their position not only highlights the fuzzy definitions surrounding the term environmentalist, but also demonstrates that this particular case is not a simple binary feud between anglers and environmentalists.

Again, many involved in the SRR campaign explained that they agree that the Cross-Florida Barge Canal was an ill conceived project; however, they feel that restoring the river would be an even greater mistake. Glenn Lau, an awarding winning nature photographer and filmmaker, described this point in seemingly religious terms equating restoration to abortion, when he wrote

If Rodman is destroyed, it will go down in history as one of the biggest environmental mistakes of our lifetime. And the people behind that foul deed *will be marked forever*. Rodman Reservoir was conceived from an ill-fated canal project. Now that the child is born (and it is a beautiful child) and we know what we know now about this child, it is too late to abort. Now many living things depend on this child for survival (Lau, [www.questforadventure.com](http://www.questforadventure.com): accessed 8 May 2008).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> His comparison to the construction of the canal to “rape” is not new. In 1970, James Nathan Miller published an article entitled “Rape on the Oklawaha” in *Reader’s Digest*.

Lau, like others, explained that “While I am a fisherman by nature, it is mainly the bird life and critters that live around Rodman that keep bringing me back” (ibid).<sup>23</sup> Bob Andry, a founding member of SRR articulated the same point while describing his involvement in the local Lake Watch program.<sup>24</sup> Surveying the lake on a monthly basis, he said, provides him with an opportunity to engage all stages of the reservoir throughout the year. Through these occasions he says he sees more than anyone else the diversity of life that this “unique ecosystem” supports. “It would be a shame to see all that destroyed!” (Andry, Bob, interview: 19 April 2008).

If biodiversity is an expressed concern for SRR, they also have also argued that the reservoir provides a necessary service of cleaning the river of unwanted nitrogen and phosphorous coming from upstream agricultural runoff. By absorbing or trapping these loads, SRR noted that Rodman acts as a sort of filter keeping the rest of the river healthy. Measurements taken in 2000 through 2003 by Florida Lake Watch and the FDEP Office of Greenways and Trails indicated some truth to these claims. Nitrogen and phosphorous measurements were taken several sites including where the Ocklawaha flows into Rodman Reservoir and where Rodman Reservoir empties into the Ocklawaha at Kirkpatrick Dam. These studies indicated that total nitrogen and phosphorous declined by up to fifty percent by the time the water reached Kirkpatrick Dam (see Table 1 and 2).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> I have attempted contact with Glen on several occasions to do an interview, however, I have not had any luck. I have, however, exchanged emails with his wife.

<sup>24</sup> Florida Lake Watch is a volunteer citizen lake monitoring program that facilitates "hands-on" citizen participation in the management of Florida lakes through monthly monitoring activities. Coordinated through the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences/Department of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences, the program has been in existence since 1986. In 1991 the Florida Legislature recognized the importance of the program and established Florida LAKEWATCH in the state statutes (Florida Statute 1004.49). LAKEWATCH is now one of the largest lake monitoring programs in the nation with over 1800 trained citizens monitoring 600+ lakes, in more than 40 counties. <http://lakewatch.ifas.ufl.edu/>, accessed 20 June 2008.

<sup>25</sup> These numbers have been collected as a part of FDEP and Florida Lakewatch studies.

Those who support Rodman Reservoir also insisted that because the Ocklawaha is the largest tributary to the St. Johns, then Rodman also helps to clean the St. Johns River. Proponents of SRR made special note of this at the 12<sup>th</sup> annual bass tournament, because the morning news announced that the non-profit group American Rivers has just listed the St. Johns as one of the top ten most endangered rivers (Littlepage 2008; see also [http://www.americanrivers.org/site/PageServer?pagename=AR7\\_MER2008](http://www.americanrivers.org/site/PageServer?pagename=AR7_MER2008), accessed 20 April 2008).<sup>26</sup>

If water quality is an issue for SRR, so is water availability. As water shortages increasingly become a concern on both global and local scales, north central Florida has its own water concerns. Florida is both growing in population, with annual increases of up to 400,000 new residents, and suffering from one of its most prolonged droughts in state history, forcing water management officials to search for solutions.<sup>27</sup> One source of water listed as a potential solution is the Ocklawaha River. While discussions swirl about the need for water sources and more effective water storage, SRR argued that Rodman Reservoir provides this source of water and storage. As noted, according to the SJRWMD, initial studies reveal that the rivers can provide up to 155 million gallons and 107 million gallons a day respectively without causing ecological harm (Crabbe 2008: 8A; see also <http://sjr.state.fl.us/surfacewaterwithdrawals/index.html>; accessed 20 May 2008).

As the state searches for sources of water, many have asked if it would be better to create water storage facilities or make use of ones already in existence. SRR has maintained to

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<sup>26</sup> Littlepage, John. "Endangered River 'honor' is a serious warning sign" *Jacksonville Times Union*, April 18, 2008. [http://www.jacksonville.com/tu-online/stories/041808/opl\\_269404251.shtml](http://www.jacksonville.com/tu-online/stories/041808/opl_269404251.shtml) , accessed May 8, 2008. As I drove to the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Save Rodman Reservoir Bass Tournament, I heard this announcement on the local morning edition of National Public Radio, FM 89.9.

<sup>27</sup> <http://news.ufl.edu/2008/03/27/florida-population-2/>

SJRWMD that Rodman Reservoir can provide optimal water storage and would save the state money for building new water storage (Taylor 2007). In numerous conversations with both sides of this debate I have been told that Kirby Green, director of SJRWMD has stated that even if Rodman Reservoir could provide optimal water storage, SJRWMD will not consider Rodman as a source of water storage because it is too loaded with political controversy (Bowman, interview: 21 May 2008).<sup>28</sup>

Green's statement regarding the politically entrenched history of Rodman Reservoir demonstrates that often in this case the best decisions regarding watershed and surrounding community are not necessarily dependant upon best available scientific evidence. Politics, values, and social constructions of nature reside at the heart of this conflict, particularly around questions of what constitutes a "healthy ecosystem." Because the starting points for evaluation and end points for action differ so widely, scientific evidence and data are used, interpreted, and portrayed in different ways. So much so, that Dave Bowman stated that in this debate "science does not matter!" (Bowman, interview: 21 May 2008).

Dave Bowman, who now works for FDEP has been at the center of this controversy since construction on the canal began in the late 1960s when he worked as a construction assistant for the Army Corps of Engineers earning money to put himself through college with a degree in wildlife ecology at the University of Florida. Bowman later worked as a ranger on the reservoir for FDEP and has continued to work for state agencies on issues surrounding the Ocklawaha and Rodman Reservoir. No one has been working in and around these controversial waters more than Bowman. Moreover, it is arguable that no one has spent more time on the waters of both reservoir and river than has Bowman. Today, he notes that both sides – FDE and SRR –

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<sup>28</sup> I have attempted to contact Kirby Green on several occasions but have not received responses to phone calls or emails.

continually call him for information, support, and various inquiries regarding their interests in the reservoir. Both sides want to appeal to the authority of science, but both sides want the science to justify their ends. Therefore, while the actual science might not matter, the authority of science carries considerable weight here. This is why Bowman joked that they all call him for help, but will not “invite him to their cocktail parties!” (Bowman interview, 21 May 2008).

### **Science Does Not Matter**

Throughout the history of the Rodman controversy, both sides have sought the authority of science to make appeals based on their own particular positions. Analysis of those positions reveals how they read the science through the lenses of their own values and perceived interests. This reality highlights the importance of considering the implications of social construction of nature arguments, particularly when evaluated the means and ends of ecological restoration.

Marjorie Carr’s activism revealed her dedication to “a sanctuary of wildlife” (Irby 2003:188). Early canal supporters, such as Congressman Bennett, thought the canal would enhance the environment of Florida by creating a wildlife and fishing sanctuary. More recently, Karen Ahlers has led her efforts in PCEC with the sole purpose of restoring a “sacred” watershed to its “original conditions,” so that it might “flow freely again” (Ahlers, interview: 11 March 2008). SRR is fighting to protect a “sacred fishing spot” and the environment by preventing a potential environmental disaster from occurring again. Throughout these various articulations of environmental advocacy, similar claims are staked in differing directions. Exploring those reveals that that indeed, science might not matter here. Here values trump scientific data and affect the ways in which each party reads the science. At the heart of this debate are the various understandings, constructions, and contestations of nature, environment, or healthy ecosystem.

Early in the battle against the canal project, Carr and FDE began raising the issue of forest health. The argument remains over whether the reservoir has destroyed, drowned, or killed 9000

acres of floodplain forest. This was a central claim in the 1974 court case seeking an injunction on construction of the reservoir because “it was killing all of the trees along its former banks” (US App 1974).<sup>29</sup> Canfield et al. confirmed that a 1973 restudy of the Cross Florida Barge Canal seemed to support “the contentions of those opposed to Rodman Reservoir” (Canfield et al.1993: 37). However, some have insisted that the “the design of the study was biased” (ibid.).

Responding to this bias, Canfield et al. agreed that the reservoir did indeed flood and destroy roughly 9,000 acres of floodplain forest. However, they also note that this has not been nearly as detrimental to the ecosystem as some have maintained. While some terrestrial species have been reduced as a result of the reservoir, some aquatic species have dramatically increased in abundance (Canfield et al. 1993; Galantowics and Shuman 1994; Harms, et. al 1980).

Take birds, for example, studies have demonstrated differing perspectives. Studies by FDE, PCEC, and restoration advocates claimed that a restored river would not only support swallow-tailed kites, prothonotary warblers, Cooper's hawks, and wild turkeys, it would also be beneficial to aquatic bird life. However, other studies have noted that bird populations, such as limpkins, herons, egrets, ibis, and bald eagles (all of whom prey on fish and other aquatic life) are greater in the reservoir (Canfield 1993; Galantowicz and Shuman 1994: 49). The increased wetlands created by the reservoir provides optimal habitat for aquatic birds, therefore, restoration might be detrimental to these aquatic bird species. (Canfield et al 1993: 30-31; Galantowicz and Shuman 1994: 49; see also Bowman, interview: 21 May 2008). Pro-Rodman Reservoir advocates utilized these statistics to argue that restoration would do more ecological harm than good. Moreover, Bowman explained that Rodman, might in fact offer new and valuable habitat for aquatic bird life; particularly as wetlands around the state are being or have been drained for

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<sup>29</sup> United States Court of Appeals. 1974. See also Stone (1974).

development or lost in draught conditions (Bowman, interview: 21 May 2008). Moreover, these claims indicate that Rodman advocates see themselves as equally concerned with environmental issues as those typically labeled as “environmentalists”: FDE and PCEC.

Other terrestrial species, such as black bears are a common source of debate. According to the CLAC study “it is clear that restoration would facilitate more direct black bear movements from the Ocala National Forest, through a restored floodplain swamp to northern black bear population areas” (Galantowicz and Shuman 1994: 49). FDE and PCEC have long made arguments in favor of restoration based on the loss of habitat and corridor space for black bears or panthers. Alternately, however, Canfield et al. noted that a female black bear requires an average home range of 28 km squared, a male bear has an average home range of 99km squared, and a restored floodplain of 9000 acres is equivalent to 36 km squared. This, Canfield et al. wrote, would only support 1.3 female bears and .37 male bears. Therefore, the impact of restoration would pertain more to the creation of migratory corridors than potential habitat (Canfield et al 1993: 37-38). Here, Canfield’s argument can go, and is used, both ways. Those seeking restoration noted that the increase in migratory corridor is exactly what the bears and panthers require. However, those against restoration have tended to put forward an argument based on habitat, not corridor, and argue that restoration will have little impact on habitat. Both sides have a point depending on how the question is framed.

While bird and mammal wellbeing are utilized on both sides of the debate, fish and fishing provide the crux of the debate. Even Carr explained that the river provided “fine fishing” (Irby 2003: 187). Canal boosters boasted, however, that the fishing would improve with increased fishing space, access, and boating opportunities. Advocates of the reservoir continue to boast the quality fishing of the reservoir, touting the annual tournament as proof of this. However,

attending the tournament, I learned that a good number of anglers left the reservoir in their speed boats and headed up the St. Johns River in search of the “big ones.” Exploring the tournament records over the years revealed that indeed bigger fish were caught in the riverine sections of the reservoir, or the river itself ([http://www.rodmanreservoir.com/all\\_yr\\_totals.htm](http://www.rodmanreservoir.com/all_yr_totals.htm), accessed May 15, 2008).<sup>30</sup> However, both the CLAC study and the research of Canfield et al. demonstrated the pool areas of the reservoir boast greater densities of sport fish, particularly bass and other game fish, such as bream and sunfish. Canfield’s study found bass numbers in the reservoir to be “33 times greater than that found in the Ocklawaha River and the standing crop of bream in Rodman Reservoir was over 131 times greater than the standing crop of bream in the river” (Canfield et al. 1993: 23).

In interviews, Canfield and Bowman both expressed frustration with many of the existing studies on the Ocklawaha and Rodman Reservoir because they do not take a systems approach, particularly as advocated by C.S. Holling, H.T. and Eugene Odum, but divided the reservoir up piecemeal. As Canfield wrote, “Rodman Reservoir is not a simple ecosystem. It includes a floodplain forest, riverine habitat, a major transition zone, and a large area of aquatic habitat. Rodman . . . therefore should be thought of as a mosaic of interdependent terrestrial and aquatic habitats, not just another lake” (Canfield et al 1993: 1). Exploring differing research parameters reveals the ways in which science is often laden with the values of its scientists. If you want restoration, the research will show that. If you want the reservoir, your data can say that too. Therefore, they both reminded me; this debate is about values, not necessarily science (Bowman, interview: 21 May 2008; Canfield, interview: 8 May 2008).

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<sup>30</sup> The “riverine” sections of the reservoir are those where the original river flows through the river. This area of the river, although surrounded by the reservoir, still maintain similar flows and characteristics to the Ocklawaha River itself.

## Values of Restoration

As comparisons reveal and Sloan rightly highlighted, this debate, as do most ecological restoration initiatives, hinges around mutually exclusive visions for the ecosystem (Sloan 2005: 105; see also Davis and Slobodkin 2004; Proctor 1995; Throop 2000). Moreover, the debate is not only about what to do with the ecosystem, but “this battle centers around the definition of ecosystem” (Irby 2003: 188). Depending on the definition of ecosystem, one can reach opposite prescriptions for these waters.

Of all the case studies contained within this work, none demonstrates the truly constructed nature of nature as prominently as does this debate. The two sides are so committed to their visions of nature and “healthy ecosystems,” that this forty-year battle has become irreparably entrenched. So much so, that Ed Taylor insisted that there is “no compromise, the reservoir is either there or gone” (E. Taylor 2007: 3; see also Andry 2008). These claims illuminate not only the constructed nature of nature, but also the ways in which nature is conceived to promote particular political visions in ways that potentially lead to conflict, particularly when the various constructions have sacred auras attached to them (Chidester and Linenthal 1995; Peterson 2001; Soper 1995; see also B. Taylor 2001).

According to reservoir advocates, Rodman is a healthy and complex set of ecosystems that are as sacred for their wildlife as much (maybe) as for their bass fishing. If diversity is the goal, they make the argument for keeping the reservoir. As various studies indicate, the flooding of the forest created multiple ecosystems whereas prior to the construction of the reservoir, two primary forest communities existed (CLAC 1994: 54; Canfield et al. 1993). Various volumes of the CLAC study revealed that the reservoir includes an increased variety of ecosystem habitats – shallow marsh, mixed marsh, open water, several swamp habitats, open water, riverine, and floodplain forest. Moreover, as Dave Bowman explained, each of these systems interacts along

edge effects creating zones of higher diversity and productivity (Bowman 2008a; Bowman 2008b; see also Canfield, et al. 1993; Groom, et al. 2006).<sup>31</sup>

On the opposite side, restoration supporters argued that even if there are multiple ecosystems, these ecosystems are not original or “native” to the system. For them, a free flowing river, along the lines of original condition is a more valuable system. As Canfield wrote, “The Rodman Reservoir debate is primarily a philosophical debate between those who believe a free-flowing river and its associated floodplain forest are a more valuable ecosystem and those who believe a well-managed reservoir best meets the needs of not only fish and wildlife, but also the human community” (Canfield et al. 1993: 1). Canfield’s point brings up a crucial question for defining nature and within the field of ecological restoration: management.

Typically ecological restoration is directed at the “amelioration of human impact on ecosystems” (Light and Higgs 1996: 227). What is interesting about this case is that depending upon one’s definitional parameters - diversity or native (which are not always mutually exclusive) - the system might not be considered degraded. If diversity is the goal, perhaps the reservoir could be said to be a better option. If original or native state is one’s goal, then restoration is the clear choice. At the heart of this debate is the question of “ecosystem health.”

The effects of differential vantage points, combined with critiques of Clementsian climax ecology, have led many to question the scientific validity of the notion of “ecosystem health”

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<sup>31</sup> Edge effects can be both promoters of diversity and species density, or they can in some cases create situations, called traps, where species are at higher risk of predation. According to Groom et al. (2006), “edge effects” are defined as “the negative influence of a habitat edge on interior conditions of a habitat, or on species that use interior habitat. Also, the effect of adjoining habitat types on populations in the edge ecotone, often resulting in more species in the edge than in either habitat alone” (228-230; 703). The latter portion of the definition applies to the Ocklawaha River. Although there have been relatively few studies on the effects of edges in Rodman reservoir, it is a unique situation because there are so many smaller systems in one space. Further, as Bowman explains, the flows of nutrients from upstream tend to create a steady flow of fertilizer, which also contributes to high plant growth and diversity, which in turn feeds greater numbers of aquatic species, which in the end contributes to greater diversity along the edges of each ecotone.

(Davis and Slobodkin 2004: 1; see also Katz and Light 1996; Callicott 2002). Proponents of restoration on the Ocklawaha insisted that management, the fish kills, and images of stumps sticking out (image 3) of the reservoir during draw downs are indicative of an unhealthy ecosystem. Inversely, reservoir advocates stated that management will be required for restoration; therefore a restored system will be no more “healthy” than the current one. Moreover, again, they have pointed to the variety and diversity of flora and fauna currently in the reservoir as indicators of a healthy system.

Ecological restoration is fundamentally a “value-based social enterprise” (Davis and Slobodkin 2004: 1; see also Jordan 2005; Light 2003; 2004; Light and Higgs 1999). Its goal is not “itself a self-evident mandate. It is a choice based on values, and it is only one of many possible choices” (Diamond 1987: 336). No case makes this more clear than the Rodman debate. In many situations, restoration emerges as a clear option to restore an obviously degraded landscape; for example where it might have been previously degraded by coal or timber extraction example, or where that degradation might also adversely affect human communities such as on Tennessee’s Coal Creek. However, on the Ocklawaha River the answer is far from clear-cut, in part because different visions of nature are held up as healthy.

For the restorationists, the goal is to restore the river back to its original state for “nature’s sake.” However, what is interesting here is that “original state” is defined as the state prior to 1968. More often, as is the case for Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout in New Mexico, “original state” refers to a time prior to European encounter. While many have questioned 1492 (the general date associated with European encounter) as the standard restoration deadline, one must wonder why in this case 1968 constitutes “the original state” of this particular river. In response, reservoir advocates have argued that restoration would not restore the river to its

original state. In part, they have made this point because there is another dam, Inglis Lock, on the Ocklawaha on the west coast of the state, near Yankeetown, Florida. Therefore, as I heard from members of SRR, why aren't FDE, PCEC, and other restoration advocates asking for the removal of this dam as well?

Often, restoration projects make sense because they are attempting to restore crucial habitat for native species as is the case in projects related to Rio Grande cutthroat trout. However, the Ocklawaha River is not vital or endemic habitat for any native species. Along these lines, many restoration projects, in a variety of contexts, tout restoration as central tool for maintaining biological diversity. If "ecosystem health" is a problematic term for many, biodiversity provides a quantifiable benchmark for which to gauge restoration (Soule 1989; 2002; Takacs 1996). On Rodman Reservoir, however, it is arguable that diversity is higher than in its original state and restoration could have detrimental impacts on this diversity. If necessary habitat is a key concern in restorations, SRR noted that Rodman provides necessary habitat for many species whose habitat is degraded elsewhere, such as the Everglades. Dave Bowman explained that most of the freshwater marshes and wetlands of North Florida no longer exist. With Rodman, species from those wetlands have a new home, so to speak (Bowman 2008a; 2008b). Using this line of thought, the reservoir functions like a wetland remediation, where one area is restored or created to counterbalance the loss of another.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, if restoration occurs, both sides have wondered how long it will take the "original ecosystem" to return. If it does return, will it be as valuable as the original? Their questions illuminate the already mentioned rampant debate in ecological restoration between

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<sup>32</sup> Katz called this form of restoration "malicious restoration," see my discussion in chapter six. However, Rodman was not created intentionally to counterbalance the loss of other spaces. Instead, the increase in bird diversity is an unintended consequence of the reservoir.

Eric Katz and Robert Elliot versus William Jordan, Andrew Light, and Bryan Norton, to name a few. As noted in the previous chapter and treated extensively in Chapter 7, Elliot and Katz argue that restoration is a “big lie” that “fakes nature” (Elliot 1997; 2003; Katz 1992). Even if the restored system looks just like the original, is it as much a fake as a Louis Vuitton bag sold by a street vendor? Either way, one can consider both systems created or constructed. Therefore, as SRR inquired, if the debate is over two constructed ecosystems, why substitute one for the other and risk other unintended environmental consequences that might flow from a removed dam? (Andry, interviews: 21 May 2008).

Amidst the restoration rancor on the Ocklawaha two competing visions of what nature should look like are at stake. Do you want diversity? Do you want originality? A host of social and environmental concerns shape these visions. For example, reservoir advocates celebrate the fishing for pleasure as much as for the economic advantages they feel that it brings to the community. Keeping the reservoir, SRR insisted, impacts local human communities as much as it does the ecological communities they feel are supported in the complex of ecosystems known as Rodman Reservoir.

Inversely, however, those in favor of restoration argue economics as well. They advocate increased canoeing potential, camping or hiking in the newly restored forests, as well as equally, if not improved, quality fishing. FDE and PCEC recognized, however, that some of these benefits might not emerge for sometime down the road as restoration will take time. If human concerns are part of the equation for restoration advocates, they have argued, however that what they are valuing above all is “nature, for nature’s sake” (Ahlers, interview: 11 March 2008). Regardless of human concerns, members of FDE and PCEC, believe that natural values should

trump. Such claims however, are as normative and value-driven as those of the more anthropocentric variety.

Like each case of my research, this one highlights central concerns in the field of ecological restoration and environmental conflict. The story of Rodman Reservoir illuminates the complications over questions concerning which nature we ought to restore. It also raises interesting questions about issues of native-ness, this time pertaining to the ways that humans relate to the environment through management or to the watershed through a variety of concerns for place-based environmental ethics, such as bioregionalism.

### **Restoration, Bioregionalism, and Civic Engagement**

One of the more contentious issues on the Ocklawaha River revolves around the degree to which human involvement in the river is a marker of a healthy ecosystem. As noted, FDE, PCEC, and other advocates of restoration have most commonly highlighted the biannual draw downs as indicators that the ecosystem needs restoration. While the draw downs are symbolic of some “illness,” the continued management of the system also disturbs some who feel that nature should be able to function on “her” own (Ahlers 2008; Jackson 2005). Advocates of the reservoir have countered these claims by noting that the watershed would not be back to its “original” or “native” state for at least 50 years, and many studies confirm this point. The CLAC study noted that within 40 years, “the area will begin to resemble a floodplain forest” (Galantowicz and Shuman 1994: 55). Further, all studies indicate that the forest, for example, will not begin to resemble its former state without considerable human engagement – tree planting, grass seeding, and other restoration driven activities.

Human engagement is not always negative. On one hand, some celebrate mutual engagement as a marker of success, rather than failure, of restoration projects (Light and Higgs 1996; Jordan 2003; Norton 2004; Thayer 2001). On the other hand, detractors of ecological

restoration not only argue that restorations fake nature, but they question human involvement and issues of management (Elliott 1997; Katz 1992). Katz, in particular, has been most critical of restoration as arrogant, anthropocentric hubris to think that we can “restore” nature to some “original” state (Katz 1992). This philosophical debate very much mirrors what is going on in the waters of the Ocklawaha. Both sides see the other as exhibiting some degree of human hubris, for thinking that the system can either be “properly managed” or “faithfully restored.”

But advocates of ecological restoration insist that this is hardly hubris. Involvement should encourage mutualism in ways that fosters “restorative relationships” and “ecological citizens” (Light 2004; Light and Higgs 1996; Norton 2004). For example, Mark Cowell feared potential hubris in restoration, but insists on approaching restoration under the notion of a “lasting participatory-gardener relationship” (Cowell 1993: 32). Such an approach not only allows humans to learn from nature as they restore, but restoration along these lines can positively teach lessons in community building where humans learn from the restoration and become better “ecological citizens.” Light and Higgs, among others, have noted that a successful restoration is one that not only seeks to restore the ecosystem in question, but also the human community surrounding that system. For Light, Higgs, Norton, and others, ecological restoration is an appealing and potentially powerful option because it has the power to build democratic engagement, foster community identity, and heal community bonds. However, the story of the Ocklawaha raises serious questions concerning some of these arguments.

In many cases, including those explored in this work, restoration provides an alluring process through which humans might create ethics and engage those ethics while giving back to both human and natural communities (Jordan 2003). On the benefits of restoration for human communities, Light and Higgs built on the legacies of Habermas and Gramsci to explore the

democratic potential of restoration projects (Light and Higgs 1996). There is certainly some truth, as exhibited by the story of Coal Creek, to their theses that participation in ecological restoration can have the ability to bring various stakeholders together, link them in a common project, and create new and innovative grounds for pluralistic democratic social arrangements at the bioregional level. However, the Ocklawaha case shows that restoration can be as divisive as it is potentially healing and collaborative.

Along these lines, Light and Higgs might call the Rodman debate a bad restoration. Bad restorations are characterized by “lack of community participation in the act” that produces a “value that is marked by this loss of the egalitarian potential of restoration for the community; this loss in value is uniquely felt at the local level where the special character of a community’s relationship with the land is intimately tied to the practice of ecological restoration” (Light and Higgs 1996: 236). The problems of bad restoration emerge if all stakeholders are not engaged, the land is overly commodified, and democracy is not encouraged. Each of these has weight in the Ocklawaha debate.

Not only can we not assume that restoration will foster democracy, but we also cannot assume that pluralism and democracy will always lead to a successful restoration. In this case, democracy has in many ways been the downfall of this particular case on the Ocklawaha. Federal and state leaders historically argue for restoration. However, local democratic processes have transformed the Ocklawaha into a political pawn. Norton reminded his readers that democracy is about debate and discussion. He is correct; however, the state of affairs on the Ocklawaha today reveals that debate or discussions are hardly even an option. Ed Taylor, of SRR, admitted he really sees no sense in sitting at a table because there is no compromise here. “When this fight first began,” he explained, “we were on opposite sides of the room from each other, today we are

on opposite sides of the world” (E. Taylor 2003: 3). Without dialogue, there is no democratic process here. Democracy demands willingness to risk one’s own position in debate with another’s position (Norton 2004; 2005). These sentiments do not exist on the Ocklawaha, each side is too entrenched to risk anything.

Many advocates of restoration also advocate the ideals of bioregionalism, namely that those who live in place and engage place know what’s best for place (Jackson 1994; Lipschutz 1999; McGinnis 1999, Sale 2000, Peterson 2001; Thayer 2003; Thomashow 2002). Like Jackson says of becoming native to place, Robert Thayer argued that “The evolutionary survival of humanity, has, and continues, to depend largely upon social cooperation in place” (Thayer 2003: 55). If social cooperation in place is a defining marker or end goal of bioregionalism, then the Ocklawaha is hardly bioregional.

Bioregionalists contend that those most actively engaged in the ecology, human and nonhuman will ideally act in the best interest of the overall health of the place. “The home place” according to Mitchell Thomashow, “is where you observe things closely, where you’re most likely to develop significant affiliations.” From these “significant affiliations,” “biospheric perception” should arise (Thomashow 2002: 5). Or, as Thayer stated, “people who stay in place come to know a place more deeply” (Thayer 2003: 5). From this knowledge, ideally, right living follows.<sup>33</sup>

Complicating matters, bioregionalism depends upon direct experience and participation in a place. Many have noted that a central mode of participation in local place arises in outdoor recreation, or *re-creation*. “My quests into my own life-place,” Thayer wrote, “have been excursions in search not of food or shelter but of meaning and belonging. For it is when I am

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<sup>33</sup> However, environmental ethicists such as David Orr have argued that knowledge does not always lead to right action. I will also complicate this issue in the final chapter.

paddling a stream, pedaling the back-roads or paddling down some trail that I feel most capable of paying attention to the place” (Thayer 2001: 82). Activities such as fishing, therefore, could provide opportunities for fruitful bonding with place. Based on such a pivotal feature, the bass fishers of SSR might argue to be more in touch “*re-creationally*” with the life of the area. Thayer and others celebrate restoration as an enactment of bioregional ideas through participation in place. Ironically, however, in this case those most frequently engaged in the life of the river are those most vocally opposed to restoration.

When addressing issues of governance, bioregionalists, while not wholly rejecting large government structures, contend that governing decisions should begin at the smallest scale possible—the local. Theoretically speaking, therefore, place-based environmental ethics would applaud the case of the federal government passing legislative and acting power to the local and state levels in the debate over Rodman Dam. In this case, however, as the decision and negotiating power become more localized, the issues became more polarized. Therefore, the Rodman debate not only highlights the contested realms of ecological restoration, but also critiques place-based philosophies such as bioregionalism.

In this debate, there exist two distinct and polarized groups, both of whom claim to be fighting for the well-being of the local community – human and non-human. Their claims appear to be more dependant upon social histories, cultural values, and various nature constructs than on science. The SSR website stated, “Rodman must be saved from the small but highly vocal minority that want it destroyed. The ecosystem supports many endangered plants and animals and has become a fisherman's paradise.”<sup>34</sup> On the opposite side of the table Marjorie Carr wrote,

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<sup>34</sup> [http://www.rodmanreservoir.com/see\\_beaut\\_rod/see\\_rodman.htm](http://www.rodmanreservoir.com/see_beaut_rod/see_rodman.htm)

Peterson (2009) referred to such misguided care for a local ecosystem as “perverse bioregionalism.”

“The Ocklawaha River is a glorious part of Florida's natural heritage. Floridians should be aware that if they can't save the Ocklawaha they have little chance of saving any of the remaining lovely wild places in Florida. The 25 year delay in the restoration of the Ocklawaha River is indeed a major scandal. *The Ocklawaha must now run free*” (Carr, <http://www.fladefenders.org/ocklawahariver.php>: accessed 20 June 2008). How then do the theories and practices of ecological restoration and various forms of place-based environmental ethics (bioregionalism or collaborative conservation) deal with a situation where two local parties truly believe they are doing the best thing for a community and in so doing fighting a long term battle against each other?

### **Conclusion**

The previous chapter traced some of the difficulties that accompany the restoration of native fish species. This chapter complicates those debates on a larger watershed scale. In both cases, anglers and engaged environmentalists articulate visions of nature, fish, and watersheds based on a variety of cultural contexts and histories. On the Ocklawaha these cultural values lead each group to faithfully articulate a vision they believe is best suited for the overall health and well-being of both human and natural communities in the watershed.

In distinctly religious terms, Marjorie Harris Carr argued that restoration of the Ocklawaha River provides a path to “redemption;” in short, it is the eradication of a sin against nature, a way of “cleansing the soul an egregious wrong.” (Irby 2003: 191). On the opposite side of the river, Glen Lau and others such as Bob Andry or Ed Taylor of SRR argued in a variety of contexts that while damming the Ocklawaha might have been a sinful act, one sin should not be followed by another sin: restoration of the river.

Surveying these visions provides insights into the role of deep cultural values at play within river restoration and environmental conflict. While all of the stakeholders believe that

they are acting in the best interest of the community and watershed, their visions for this river/reservoir are entirely different. Many have characterized this debate as one of environmentalists versus bass fishers, but my research reveals this is hardly the case. Both sides have deep, symbolic attachments to these waters and those values shape their assessments of what is the best course of action. The question remains, how does one sort through those symbolic attachments, values, and interests?

At one point I believed that this conflict was an archetypal example of what ethicist Anthony Weston called a false dilemma – a conflict based upon two, dichotomous, either/or options. Here the dilemma is either to retain the reservoir or restore the river. However, my fieldwork on this conflict reveals that some conflicts may well be intractable, no matter how dichotomous. As this case shows, while cultural values of nature – religious or otherwise – might prove useful in many cases for resolving conflict, achieving collaboration, and restoring watersheds, those very same cultural values might also provide the ultimate barrier to achieving all of those goals.

In some cases, however, such dichotomous dilemmas are false and there are solutions to them. Chapter 6 turns to the Coal Creek watershed, north of Knoxville, TN to explore how a community has sought ways to restore fish, a river, and entire watershed. As noted in the introductory chapters, the case studies of this work begin with fish, then expand to consider the river, and end by taking a view of an entire watershed. Therefore, if the first case study of this work explored issues of native trout restoration in New Mexico and this chapter delineated a conflict around river restoration in Florida, the following case expands the view to include an entire watershed. In Tennessee, cultural values related to fishing, community, and regional

history are equally colored with affective dimensions and pivotal for the religious work of crossing, dwelling, and homemaking.

## Tables

Table 4-1: Total nitrogen per year [Site 6 is where the river meets the upstream portion of reservoir. Site 1 is the outflow of the reservoir at Rodman Dam] (Andry 2006: 13).

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Site 6	1022	1023	1203	1067	1088
Site 1	578	823	919	923	471

Table 4-2: Total phosphorous per year

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Site 6	42	55.4	54	55	45
Site 1	24	43.4	44	62	22

CHAPTER 7  
CLEANING RIVERS AND CLEANING TEETH IN COAL CREEK WATERSHED: A  
COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION

The tireless efforts of this chapter's volunteers have made their tiny Appalachian streams better places for trout to live and reproduce and helped to improve the watersheds for the people living there. Their work embodies the principle that "What's good for trout is good for the people in every way. Charles Gauvin, President of Trout Unlimited

**Introduction**

On Saturday July 14, 2007 fifteen to twenty residents of Briceville and Lake City, Tennessee, met to clean up what locals call the "blue hole" on Coal Creek, a feeder stream of Tennessee's Clinch River. These community members, led by town fixture Tammy Bolinger, spent the day pushing around wheel-barrows full of rocks, picking up trash, and cleaning up this section of the river for the performance of baptisms the following Sunday. Having a clean river is imperative, they noted, for a good, focused baptism.

At the same moment, several miles downstream another group of similar size, consisting of members of the local Clinch River Chapter of Trout Unlimited (TU) and overlapping members of the Coal Creek Watershed Foundation (CCWF), was embarking upon their own baptismal initiative in the form of the Coal Creek Summer 2007 Bug Hunt. This event sought to assess the health of the stream as part of an ongoing project to clean the creek for the health of both the human and fish community dependant upon these waters. These anglers and community members, led by Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) scientists John Thurman and Charlie Saylor, waded through Coal Creek finding bugs such as caddis flies, stoneflies, and mayflies, a few crawfish, and fish such as smallmouth bass, shiners, dace, and suckers. At the end of the day, using an assessment tool developed by the Izaak Walton League,<sup>1</sup> Thurman and Saylor

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<sup>1</sup> "The Izaak Walton League was formed in 1922 to save outdoor America for future generations. The League's founders, who were avid anglers, chose to name the organization after Izaak Walton, the 17th century author of *The Compleat Angler*, one of the most famous books on fishing. We are one of the earliest conservation organizations to set an aggressive course to defend wild America by changing public policy." [www.iwla.org](http://www.iwla.org). Accessed 20 July 2007.

declared that Coal Creek's health was not quite excellent but certainly improving, particularly compared to seven years ago when the CCWF began its work in these waters.

The story of the CCWF continues and enriches my analysis of anglers, their values (often religious) of fish and watersheds, and their engagement in community conservation initiatives. The first two cases, which trace more controversy around fish and river restoration, grapple with questions of religious values, lived practices in local, place-based environmental initiatives. Where controversy and conflict loom large in New Mexico and Florida, those in this story have found ways to move beyond the conflict into collaboration. Exploring this progress into collaboration, I believe this seven year initiative most closely approaches many of the ideals of Jackson's insistence on "becoming native to place." Highlighting place-based collaboration and conflict resolution, the CCWF embodies the ideals of what some refer to as "collaborative conservation." As Donald Snow wrote, these movements

Represent the new face of American conservation as we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Although no single strategy, process, or institutional arrangement characterizes this movement, collaborative conservation emphasizes the importance of local participation, sustainable natural and human communities, inclusion of disempowered voices, and voluntary consent and compliance rather than enforcement by legal and regulatory coercion. In short, collaborative conservation reaches across the great divide connecting preservation advocates and developers, commodity producers and conservation biologists, local residents and national interest groups to find working solutions to intractable problems that will surely languish unresolved for decades in the existing policy system (Snow 2001: 2).

Drawing from archival materials and ethnographic research I present the case of the CCWF and its community involvement as an example of successful, practice-driven, bioregional collaborative conservation. Because the CCWF, like all collaborative watershed projects, has faced and continues to face many struggles, we cannot see the work of the CCWF as perfect or total panacea. However, by highlighting both its struggles and its successes, the story of the CCWF not only offers potential lessons for understanding the conflicts within native species restoration in New Mexico or river restoration in Florida, but also illuminates the importance of

understanding the role of both nature-based practices and human values of nature in shaping the effectiveness of watershed and community activism.

### **Where the Trout Spawn: The Birth of the Coal Creek Watershed Foundation**

According to Barry Thacker, founding member and president of the CCWF, the story of began on February 5, 2000, when a group of trout fishers and college students spent their day picking up trash on the banks of Tennessee's Clear Creek, one of several tributaries of the Clinch River. During this spring clean-up, these anglers lamented the paucity of adequate spawning areas for both brown and rainbow trout, which have made their home in these waters since the construction of Norris Dam, the first dam build by TVA in 1935.

In response to the query for potential restoration projects of trout spawning grounds Thacker suggested a trip to his lifelong favorite stream: Coal Creek. As Thacker told me, he grew up fishing these waters and had a special attachment to them (Thacker, interview: 16 July 2007). And although Coal Creek only supports trout in its lower, colder reaches, it nonetheless, he explained, provides a potentially important space for rainbow trout populations to successfully spawn and reproduce without the aid of hatchery intervention.

Although both brown and rainbow trout are not native to the waters of this region, they are growing in importance to the watershed in a variety of ways. Moreover, while stocking of fish does take place, many anglers and scientists, including John Thurman and Charlie Saylor of TVA have noticed an increase in successful reproduction of these fish in recent years. This is a particularly important point, according to river guide and conservationist Chris Scalley, who primarily works on Georgia's Chattahoochee River, one quite similar to the Clinch River

(Scalley, interview: 22 June 2007).<sup>2</sup> Scalley noted that the ability to prove successful reproduction of trout in a river, even if they are not historically native fish, is a powerful resource for improving state and federal conservation and water quality mandates. If trout are reproducing in a river, Scalley explained, the standards of conservation are immediately elevated to protect the river from development, pollution, or water use. Recognizing the implications of trout reproduction, Thacker and the CCWF have and continue to seek ways to improve the Clinch River. However, as I show, while improved spawning areas for trout were the impetus for the CCWF, the circle of concern has certainly expanded beyond trout to include the entire watershed.

However, the question of spawning potential for trout is merely one of many issues facing this watershed. Coal Creek is the largest tributary to the Norris tail water of the Clinch River and therefore influences water quality for the entire watershed. Situated in the middle of Tennessee coal regions, Coal Creek has a history where “copious coal laden silt washed down, resulting from more than a century’s mining upstream and sewage runoff and excess sedimentation,” impacted the water of the entire watershed (Oats 2007). As Carol Moore, the CCWF secretary and volunteer, explained “what happens in Coal Creek does not stay in Coal Creek. Coal Creek, like Clear Creek and other streams of the region, flow into the Clinch River” (Moore 2007).<sup>3</sup> The Clinch River, then, flows into the Tennessee, and depending on how far you take things, the watershed grows exponentially; echoing John Muir’s dictum that “when we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else” (Muir 1911: 100). Therefore, Thacker

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<sup>2</sup> In June 2007, Scalley was voted by Field and Stream Magazine as one of 10 conservation heroes of 2007 for his work restoring and protecting the waters of the Southeast, namely Georgia’s Chattahoochee river, which faces many problems similar to Tennessee’s Clinch.

<sup>3</sup> Moore, Carol. <http://www.crctu.com/BugHuntCoalCreekRESULTS.htm>. Accessed 24 July 2007.

insisted, if Coal Creek is unhealthy, so is the entire watershed (Thacker, interview: 16 July 2007).

With these concerns in mind, Thacker and a few others presented their plan to clean up Coal Creek to their local, Knoxville TU chapter. Despite considerable enthusiasm, this particular TU group rejected Thacker's plan, not so much because it was not viewed as a valuable project, but because this particular chapter saw itself as a fishing club more than a conservation group.<sup>4</sup> Thacker's experience is common in the fishing conservation world, and highlights issues related to gaps between values of nature, practices of conservation, and sustainability goals, which I address in the following two chapters. Despite this discouraging outcome, Thacker was encouraged by other TU activists to take this same proposal to the neighboring TU chapter, upon which he was met with immediate zeal for a promising project.

### **People Versus Fish: False Dilemmas and Environmental Conflict Resolution**

In *A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Ethical Tool Box*, ethicist Anthony Weston noted that environmental disputes are often misconstrued and contested, because they get framed as what he calls "false dilemmas." False dilemmas emerge groups assume that moral or value decisions have only two possible outcomes (Weston 2001: 179 - 181). The situation is portrayed as an either/or set of options. In this case, the false dilemma emerges in the form of people versus fish. Further, false dilemmas often emerge because the individuals involved are "set" in their own perspectives creating a situation where one cannot see beyond their own viewpoint, needs, habits, or issues. The challenge, then, is to creatively "break set" by taking other routes toward the problem (ibid). Moreover, both scholars of and mediators in conflict resolution explain that while disputes may have simple beginnings, they have a tendency to explode into serious environmental conflict

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<sup>4</sup> For a brief discussion of this controversy between fishing club and conservation organization see chapter 2.

(Crowfoot and Wondolleck 1990: 13-15). Nowhere are these points more evident than in the watershed of Coal Creek, TN.

In the initial proposals to restore spawning beds in Coal Creek, Thacker and the assisting TU chapter formed what they called the Coal Creek Clean Stream Initiative (CCCSI) whose “original goal was simply to make Coal Creek and its tributaries suitable trout habitat for spawning trout. CCCSI was established to perform the work required to apply for a grant from the Office of Surface Mining to ameliorate mine runoff into Coal Creek and reclaim abandoned coal mine lands in the Coal Creek watershed” (CCWF, “Master Plan” 2000). Despite noble intentions and efforts to include other local groups in their project, Thacker and the CCCSI met a “false dilemma” head on.

In the midst of our conversation Thacker laughed about those early days where locals greeted him with picket signs, angry banners, and finger pointing (Thacker, interview: 16 July 2007). As he recounted elsewhere, “Folks told me in no uncertain terms that they had far bigger problems than trout” (Zink 2004: 44). It is not that the community did not want a clean creek; in fact, that is exactly what they wanted, they just did not see how cleaning a stream for fish could help the larger area. This locale and the town of Briceville, in particular, had long suffered from flooding problems and contaminated streams which resulted from poor infrastructure and the region’s long, rich history in coal mining. In recent years, flooding had become so prevalent that Thacker said community members “used to sit up every time it rained, hoping the creek would not rise into their homes” (Thacker, interview: 16 July 2007). Or, according to an article in the 18 April 2000 issue of a local paper, *The Oak Ridger*, people who lived near Coal Creek “feared for their lives and homes” (D. Smith 2000). As articles such as this one, and there are many

more, indicate local residents were more than open to rehabilitating Coal Creek. However, it was the perceived method and goal of Thacker's plan anybody else until we have the ts.

Some local people protested Thacker's meetings by arguing that their needs should have priority over those of fish. One celebrated citizen of Coal Creek, the late Reverend Roy Daugherty, advocated clean-up, but did not want funds to go to the CCCSI. "I am opposed to trout fishing taking precedence over the safety of citizens," he explained to journalist Bob Fowler of the *Knoxville News Sentinel*. "I don't think one penny should be given toink one penny should be given to safety we deserve. We are in an emergency situation up there. We need relief yesterday" (Fowler 2000a: AC 1 -2).<sup>5</sup> Despite criticism, however, Thacker was determined not to let the protest run him out of Coal Creek.

Thacker wasted no time in "breaking set" and brainstorming ways out of the problem. He realized that there were ways to resolve the problem perceived as people versus trout. He started by sitting down with Daugherty and the other community members to hear their side of the story. Thacker insisted he was resolute to make this work, and the way to do this was to listen to the concerns of the perceived opposition. In doing so, Thacker's approach not only offers living examples of Weston's points, but his approaches highlight central theories and practices of collaborative conservation or environmental conflict resolution.

Rosemary O'Leary, a leading theorist in the field of environmental conflict resolution from the Syracuse University Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, has argued that grassroots environmental initiatives, particularly in light of perceived conflict, are impossible to resolve if one does not take a primary step of "reconnecting with the stakeholders" (O'Leary

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<sup>5</sup> Zink (2004) explained that "Although most Briceville citizens now consider Thacker a friend, it wasn't always that way. Protest signs and angry finger-pointing prevailed the first time he approached the townspeople to enlist their help cleaning up abandoned mine damage to Coal Creek" (44).

2004). This is exactly what Thacker and the CCCSI did when he asked them to sit down over the course of a few meetings and tell him what issues they thought the community needed to address and how he could help them. Whenever asked about these early days of the project Thacker replied that he “agreed to help them to the degree that [he] could, if they would eventually help [him]” (Thacker, interview: 16 July 2007). But still, he needed outside help to get it all started and the Clinch River TU chapter was crucial for that as Thacker recalled, “their support was the critical component in making all this happen” (Zink 2004: 44).<sup>6</sup>

Although Thacker is an engineer, not a specialist in ECR or collaborative conservation, he embodied many of their ideals and teachings. He recognized early on that “building partnerships has been a key to the organizations success. . . . By building partnerships and involving community residents the organization has instilled a sense of activism and stewardship in the watershed that will provide the fuel and human capital” (Comp 2001: 7). Where the original goal of the CCCSI was conceived as a plan to improve spawning opportunities for trout, Thacker admitted, he learned quite quickly that the issues these community members faced extended well beyond fish, to the lack of proper health care (particularly for the children), educational issues, and the periodic flooding of Coal Creek. Thacker learned that for any project to work, “you gotta do what people care about,” and these were the issues the community was facing (Thacker, interview 16 July 2007). Once he began listening to the needs of the community – from adequate dental care, aid with education, as well as the conditions of the creek – he quickly found that he had a new set of goals and more importantly “a groundswell of support” (ibid). With growing community involvement, Thacker dropped the name CCCSI to re-form the Coal Creek

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<sup>6</sup> Also, Thacker has made the same point in a variety of press releases, as well as out 16 July 2007 interview.

Watershed Foundation with other community members such as local community leader Rev. Roy Daugherty.

The impetus behind the name shift demonstrates that “What started as an attempt to make the creek suitable as a trout-spawning waterway has evolved from water quality issues to improving the quality of life in the Coal Creek Watershed” (Fowler 2000b). Despite this new holistic vision, Thacker argued the trout fishing angle still provided a “good story” to set it apart from other funding applicants (Smith 2000b).

In his office he insisted, as many trout fishers do, that trout are special, that they are unique, and exist in unique places. These are reasons, therefore, they should be valued, and provide gateway foci for larger watershed projects. Recognizing the volunteer potential of TU for on-the-ground conservation work, and using trout as a “good story,” the CCWF successfully approached funding agencies such as the Office of Surface Mines and the Abandoned Mine Trust and regional organizations such as Project Impact (which seek to mitigate disaster risk through local, regional, private and public partnerships), for funding opportunities to carry out their watershed work.

According to Thacker, since 1977 mining companies have been annually putting \$200 to \$250 million into the federal Abandoned Mine Land Trust. This money is designated to restore and clean up land and waters near abandoned mines. As an environmental engineer who works on similar projects around the state of Tennessee, he knew that Coal Creek needed a unique story to make it stand out and improve the odds of funding. Recognizing that the Coal Creek watershed covers an area of 39 square miles and holds more than 30 miles of potential trout spawning area, Thacker told an audience of county commissioners, “I am a trout fisherman, I fish the Clinch River, but the Clinch River is limited and Coal Creek has the potential to fish like

other streams in the Smoky Mountains” (Zink 2004: 44). While he did not use this literature to support his point, many fly fishing authors, most notably Christopher Camuto and Harry Middleton have espoused the power, wonder, and value of Smoky Mountain trout streams.

While many anglers tend to celebrate the archetypal fishing locations – Alaska, Colorado, Montana, or Patagonia and New Zealand – for some the Appalachian, Smoky, and the Blue Ridge mountains that “stretch west into Tennessee” and spill into South Carolina and Georgia” hold equally “sublime” power over anglers of the Southeast United States (Camuto 2001:7). These mountains and watersheds, like those of famed rivers elsewhere, affect the angler in unique and stirring ways. As Camuto, a lover of these mountains, mused, “Fishermen, it has often been noted, are a product of their home water, and a fly fisherman, in particular is shaped by the character of the country toward which he or she is drawn” (ibid). Responding to the pull of the landscape and effect of the water, fly fishers often move beyond their desires to cast at and catch fish, to engage the life of the entire watershed. In these moments, as Middleton explained, stories (and actions) become more than about “mountain creeks and streams,” but “of mountain trout, of mountains and mountain people;” about “life” (Middleton 1991: 18). The story of Coal Creek is one of mountain fish, mountains, and mountain people.

Like Camuto wrote of his home waters, the North Fork of the Moormans in Virginia, or Middleton mused of the entire Smoky Mountains, Barry Thacker and many of the anglers involved with the CCWF are products of these Southern streams, trout, and people. They feel their pull. Each desires to see and potentially catch wild fish in these waters. However, through those dreams, Thacker and company recognize that aquatic life relates to the life of the larger watershed. This is why Thacker targeted trout as a means to restore an entire community. If you can bring back trout, Thacker explained, “think about the life that could be brought back in the

human population” (ASFE 2000).<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Thacker reminded me that “what is good for trout, is in turn good for the community: a healthy watershed” (Thacker, interview: 16 July 2007). Therefore, if trout were the way into this project, Thacker the future of a healthy watershed depends upon a healthy community.

### **Healthy Rivers and Healthy Kids**

The CCWF’s first major event, “Deadwood Removal Day” held on June 24, 2000, was bigger than anyone imagined. Merely a few months prior, local community members were more than skeptical of Thacker and his friends from TU. However, as the more Thacker talked about his plans and the more he did about them, the more people became interested. The first work day on Coal Creek drew more than 130 volunteers, some of which came from Maine to participate in the efforts (a college professor and students).

Revealing that Thacker and the CCWF had listened to local residents; they addressed the area’s most pressing problem: flooding. By clearing waste, debris, and dead wood from the pilings of thirteen old railroad bridges, the CCWF hoped their efforts would allow the creek to more effectively absorb the heavy rains the community feared so much. Building on this initial clean-up, CCWF engineered several bank stabilization projects which not only help maintain stream bank structure and prevent flooding, but as Thacker and others will remind you, make for great trout habitat.

After this first initiative, time would dictate the success of their efforts in fortifying both community and its stream. In terms of stream stability, it was not long before the area faced what locals described as a “100 year storm.” Just as hoped, the water remained within the stream banks for the first time in the recent memory, leading one thankful resident to proclaim, “Look

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<sup>7</sup> ASFE Newslog – June 2000.

Up! O Briceville, Fraterville, and Beech Grove. See how faith and fellowship can move mountains or even change a creek” (Daugherty 2000). If trout fishermen and women fished for tires and trash in Coal Creek, the “ladies from Laurel Branch Church, Briceville First Baptist Church, Briceville Church of God, Briceville Community Church and others provided a magnificent feast at noon. Afterwards, we were entertained by several gospel groups. It was a good day” (ibid). Whether we are speaking of trout-based religiosity or local Church groups, both were involved and pivotal in early steps to heal this long troubled watershed.

Based on the early success of the first Deadwood Removal Day, as one article explains, the CCWF was off to an auspicious start. According to local journalist Bob Fowler, “Thacker has managed to help unite two apparently disparate groups into the Coal Creek Watershed Foundation through a coordinated attempt to address and ultimately resolve several thorny quality of life issues involving Coal Creek” (Fowler 2000c). While the early vision of the CCWF survived the first major storm, the work was hardly beginning. The creek showed signs of improvement, therefore, next on the list for Thacker were the residents of the watershed themselves, particularly the children.

After the 2000 Deadwood Removal Day, Thacker, Carol Moore, and Reverend Roy Daugherty began planning the next event: Coal Creek Health Day. On October 26, 2001, they converted the gymnasium of the Briceville School into an impromptu dentist office. Clean teeth are hard to come by in this mountain town, as was basic medical options. Therefore, they also worked to reopen the Briceville People’s Clinic; Coal Creek Health Day provided the perfect inaugural moment. Adding to the successes of Deadwood Removal Day, the first annual Coal Creek Health Day raised and delivered a more than \$17,000 in health services donated to the

community, as TU members volunteered a good portion of the medical services (Moore, interview: 16 July 2007).

The way Dr. Hirosho Toyahara, a retired heart surgeon, fly fisher, and TU volunteer, explained things, Thacker urged the TU group, telling them “Boys, you can’t fish everyday!” However, Thacker admitted the group hardly needed much prodding. As he elucidated in an article to TU journalist Tim Zink, “For many children, it was the first time they had seen a doctor or dentist. It was very rewarding to be able to help them . . . and to begin teaching them basic things they could do to improve their health” (Zink 2004: 45-46). Some of these basic points on community health, however, extend well beyond the healthy teeth, eyes, and hearts.

As Dr. Toyohara performed medical check-ups, TVA scientists and TU volunteers Charlie Saylor and John Thurman were outside giving Coal Creek a medical examination of its own kind. While using the Izaak Walton League stream health assessment tool, they simultaneously taught local students about the importance of connecting water health to public health. In an interview Thurman and Saylor chuckled when recalling the impression Health Day had on some of these kids, particularly one child, Paul Long, they lovingly referred to as “Bug-Boy.” After the first health day, Paul returned the second year with names of bugs and fish memorized to the point that Saylor and Thurman handed the lesson over to him. Seeing the kids embrace their stream as an indicator of health, Thurman explained “is gratifying in so many ways” (Thurman, interview: 15 July 2007).<sup>8</sup> Paul’s excitement for bug and fish names, including their Latin names, is not unusual in this group of kids.

Volunteering and participating in several of the CCWF, including the 2007 Health Day, I was lucky to see some of this enthusiasm first hand. Children crowded around tables with water

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<sup>8</sup> See also his comments in Zink, 46.

tanks, pointing out different bugs such as mayflies, stoneflies, and caddis larvae, or admiring the various fish like shiners, darters, chubs, and even a few bass. Some were equally enthusiastic to demonstrate their fly casting skills on the lawn.

Teachers lauded these events not only because they provided opportunities to get out of the classroom, but so that they could connect classroom discussions with outside realities. Moreover, they praised the CCWF for inspiring and motivating the students. While watching the students chase bugs and point out fish, the teachers explained repeatedly how Health Day was something that students of all ages looked forward to all year long. These days sustained and motivated the youth of Briceville in a variety of ways. The CCWF recognizes the possibility for individual days such as Health Day or the Bug Hunt to leave long-lasting impressions and potentially motivate the youth of the area to remain engaged in the life of the watershed. Seeing the carryover, they decided it might be worthwhile to reward those who really carried on such work.

Therefore, in 2001, CCWF initiated the Coal Creek Scholars Program aimed at aiding and increasing the number of Briceville students attending college. By sending a few young adults to college each year, the CCWF hoped to reverse the statistic that demonstrates Briceville students historically stand a better chance of going to jail than college. According to a 1990 U.S. Census, 66 percent of adults in Tennessee had graduated from high school, compared to 17 percent of adults in Briceville.<sup>9</sup> In response, between 2002 and 2007 CCWF has awarded fifteen separate college scholarship funds of up to \$10,000. Through these donations, the CCWF is making a true investment into the long-term viability of this watershed. The children, he insisted, are the future of this region. Moreover, they provide the benchmark for measuring the success of the work of

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<sup>9</sup> Moore and Thacker, interview 16 July 2007.

the CCWF. The parents, Thacker chuckled, are hard to change; the kids however are the key to revitalizing this area.

### **Engaging Community: Civic Conservation, Youth, and Education**

Today, there is no shortage of literature noting the increasing disconnection between humans and the natural world. As technology's grip on society widens, adults spend more time on their computers, Blackberries, and cell phones. When one needs directions, map-reading skills are no longer required, as one can use Map Quest or a portable GPS unit. Adults are not the only ones "plugged in" and tethered to technology. The youth of today spend more time in front of televisions and video games than venturing outdoors in search of frogs, bugs, or fish.

Most recently among the works highlighting increased alienation and "deficit" of nature, Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods*, lamented the "rapidly advancing technologies" that are creating a cultural milieu where "students spend less and less of their lives in natural surroundings" causing their "senses to narrow, physiologically and psychologically," which then "reduces the richness of human experience (Louv 2005: 3). Louv and others noted how this alienation from nature is not only detrimental to the human psyche, but also to society and therefore to nature. TU, the CCWF, or other groups like the Federation of Fly Fishers, are no strangers to these issues, as they each advocate ways to enrich the human experience of nature, through fishing.

In the Coal Creek watershed, the supporting TU chapter supports ecological education through events like "Kids Fish Free Days," which not only teaches kids how to fly fish, but use fly fishing as a tool for teaching about bugs and streamside ecology. As a national organization, TU has initiated programs such as Trout in The Classroom (TIC). According to program coordinator Rochelle Gandour TIC seeks to offer solutions to what Louv termed "nature deficit disorder." According to Gandour, "Today, more than 80 percent of our children spend their

formative years in cities and suburbs, and they are largely disconnected from the natural world. TU youth education initiatives seek to address this problem” (TU 2007). Further, Barbara Rothman, TIC benefactor explained that “When kids are taught to take care of something else, it will teach them to take care of people. Hopefully, it won’t just stop at trout; they will learn to care for each other” (TU 2007).<sup>10</sup> The CCWF strives to embody these ideals in every way.

If recreation and fishing potentially provide avenues to place-based environmental engagement, some have explored the importance of, yet problems within, contemporary education. In *Ecological Literacy*, David Orr expressed his belief that education increasingly tends to disengage students from nature rather than bridge the gap. However, just because classrooms and teaching styles are not fostering “ecological literacy,” does not mean that they cannot be rethought and retooled to fundamentally create opportunities to connect students to nature and foster what one might call a “sense of place” where students, even urban ones, “can see, touch, and experience nature in a variety of ways” (Orr 1992: 89). Similarly, in his most recent work *The Landscape of Reform: Civic Pragmatism and Environmental Thought in America*, Ben A. Minteer explored the pragmatism of John Dewey and Liberty Hyde Bailey in search of an educational approaches which might equip young citizens with tools “to solve all manner of social ills” (Minteer 2006: 27). In Briceville, the CCWF has emphasized experiential, hands-on education that teaches students the “value of participation in and service to the life of the community” (ibid: 31). The work of the CCWF, in trout restoration and community engagement, provides a number of realms to explore the ways hands-on, nature-based education might potentially solve society’s ills by encouraging a lasting and engaged sense of place.

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<sup>10</sup> Both quotes taken from Trout Unlimited Annual Calendar, July Page, which highlights youth fishing. See also – [www.troutintheclassroom.org](http://www.troutintheclassroom.org) accessed 24 August 2008.

By encouraging recurring civic engagement in the life of the entire watershed, the Coal Creek Scholars Program requires its scholarship recipients to return to the area, give presentations about their educational paths, and teach the younger generations about the importance of education for both individual and community well being. According to Moore, only about .5 percent of Briceville students graduate from college. Returning scholars, therefore, are crucial for inspiring younger students to believe that they too might attend college and break out of the historical patterns of the area (Moore, interview: 16 July 2007). If the Health Days encourage hands-on learning, the scholars program does not dole out scholarships for inspiring ideas and good grades alone. No, Coal Creek Scholars must demonstrate citizenship and leadership in the community by initiating their ideas into action.

In 2000, inaugurating their efforts to improve the life of the Coal Creek watershed the CCWF hosted its Dream Contest, which encouraged the youth of Briceville to articulate their dreams and visions for their community. By encouraging students to envision hopeful futures for Briceville, the CCWF enacted what Orr or Minter advocated in scholarship – the belief that the welfare of children is integral to the health of the community. The two must be mutually reinforcing. According to Dewey

If the school is related as a whole to life as a whole, its various aims and ideals – culture, discipline, information, utility – cease to be variants, for one of which we must select one study and for another. The growth of the child in the direction of social capacity and service, his larger and more vital union with life, becomes the unifying aim; and discipline, culture, and information fall into place as phases of this growth (Dewey 1976: 55).

The CCWF's Dream Contest exemplifies the power of linking education to the life of the entire community. The visions students expressed in the contest stand out for their encouraging and hopeful goals, which vary from community safety to recycling and environmental concerns. The latter Thacker insisted are impossible to address without proper educational opportunities.

While many of the student's dreams are noteworthy, three stand out in particular not so much for the dream but for the initiative of the students. In 2000, as fifth graders at Briceville Elementary School Jacob Phillips, April Byrge, and April Golden used words and images to depict their dreams for the Coal Creek watershed. In 2007, these three students became the latest recipients of the Coal Creek Scholars Program, not because they had dreams, but because they made steps to actively engage those dreams.

Two years ago April Byrge, the most recent recipient of the Rev. Roy Daugherty Scholarship, named for the late community leader Rev. Daugherty, sought to rid her neighborhood of litter and trash. She wrote, "There is not one square foot of unpolluted ground from Anderson County High School all the way to my house. I have to look at this every day on my way home from school. I have to say, it hurts to see a place so dear to me being destroyed by its inhabitants" ([http://www.coalcreekaml.com/dream\\_contest.htm](http://www.coalcreekaml.com/dream_contest.htm), accessed 25 August 2008). In response, with the aid of CCWF, Ms. Byrge initiated an annual clean-up event as well as donated her energies to the Coal Creek Health Days, rolled boulders with the TU members on bank stabilization projects, and even engaged in a bit of trout fishing with the Clinch River TU volunteers.

Each year the Coal Creek Scholars are required to return to Briceville elementary school Scholars Day. At this event they speak to the children about the importance of getting an education and using that education to give back to society. The first recipient, Amy Duggar, recently graduated from college at Lincoln Memorial University and has since enrolled in graduate school at the University of Tennessee. On Scholars Day, Duggar reminded students to be proud of who they are and where they come from. By being proud and connected to place, she insisted, any of these children can beat the odds and get a college degree. Thacker, Moore and

the CCWF agreed upon the importance for these kids to be proud of their home so that they might get out and change the world. If civic engagement is crucial for developing a sense of place, the CCWF and some of its scholars such as Ashely Weaver, Andy Harnes, Casey Prorise, Ashley Sharpe, and Jacob Philips all maintained that understanding community history is equally crucial, particularly in a region so rich in Welsh culture and coal mining history filled with wars and disasters.

### **Knowing About Place: The Role of History in Bioregional Place Based Action**

A common theme with various manifestations of place-based environmental ethics stresses the notion that one cannot care about a place or act to protect a place unless one knows about the place. For many, such knowledge relates to bioregional flora and fauna. As shown, the CCWF embodies these ideals through their Discovery Days, Health Days, and Bug Hunts. However, ecological knowledge is only half of the equation; historical knowledge is equally vital for caring constructive civic engagement.

In *Life and Labor in the Old South* author Ulrich Phillips insisted that “race defined the South more than environment, and many other historians have followed that lead in focusing on matters of race over place, even ignoring the land and responses to it as central to southern identity and dynamics” (Phillips 1929: 196). However, historians, such as Elizabeth Marshall, increasingly highlight the ways in which social movements have “begun to reclaim the land as a vital factor in making and unmaking the South” (Marshall 2002: xi). By retrieving the land in a physical sense, many of these communities are also rescuing the land in a historical sense. Beyond environmental conservation or restoration, community members are repossessing and retelling the histories of communities, families, and cultures of these regions. This work of Embracing history is essential for securing a sense of pride for these places. Without that pride, successful community restoration will struggle to find solid footing on land or in the water.

In her treatment of southern environmental activism, Marshall argued that while the post-Bellum era of the South was in many ways quite successful for regions that were ripe for agricultural or mining development, these successes came with a cost. Progress also left “mountains gouged, forests denuded, and land and water polluted and brought little economic benefit to the localities affected” (Marshall 2002: xi). The communities in the Coal Creek watershed were just such places gouged and left in the past. However, as Marshall explained, today there are movements afoot to reclaim those places, histories, while restoring the ecologies. Here is a new history of the responses of those who lived on the land and watched “progress” take its toll. “It is only now being written” she highlighted “by a new generation of scholars who are attuned to the ways people and the environment interact and can respect such people’s desire to save their “habitat” from a progress that brings few jobs but much destruction” (Marshall 2002: xi). This is just such a story.

Amidst this emergent Appalachian environmental activism, communities are recreating their relationships with the land, while rethinking the importance of those connections between land, history, and southern identity. This is certainly the case in the watershed of Coal Creek and evident in the work of the CCWF, as they articulate goals and ideals that utilize historical understanding as pivotal for rethinking what it means to be “native” to Coal Creek.

In doing so, they are drawing from a treasure trove of inspiring history that dates at least back to the influx of Welsh miners to the region. According to Harvard historian of Celtic languages Eirug Davies, early miners in this region were significant contributors to the preservation of the Welsh language in their record keeping, journals, diaries, and music (Davies 2007). However, contribution these miners made not only to this region, but the history of mining in the United States extends well beyond language. The Coal Creek watershed was a

fulcrum for what historian Karin A. Shapiro called a “new south rebellion,” more formally referred to as the Coal Creek Convict Wars of 1891-1892.

After the Civil War, coal powered the industrial evolution as America sought to regain its feet as a united nation. According Shapiro, “the physical accessibility of southern coal attracted numerous investors” and burgeoning coal companies. The state of Tennessee, and Anderson County in particular, “beckoned along with the rest of the previously unexploited Appalachian coalfields” (Shapiro 1998: 16).<sup>11</sup> In addition to a booming coal mining industry, farming and agriculture were particularly productive in these regions of Tennessee. The success of these industries led to the growth of community institutions that served to “cement a camaraderie and civic consciousness that would undergird” what would become pivotal for the success of the Coal Creek rebellions (ibid: 30). Those in Anderson County formed social organizations, churches, schools, literary and music societies, and unions, “which were usually created and nurtured by miners and their families” (ibid: 30). The strongest of these communities emerged between the town of Coal Creek (now Lake City) and Briceville. However, despite the prosperous and socially organized nature of these locales the coal companies maintained a grip on the life of the community through employment.

In the decades following the Civil War, the majority of southern states adopted a convict-lease system. This system allowed state governments to lease prisoners to private mine companies as cheap and abundant labor. As a result, mine owners could pay both convict and free miners lower wages while the government to made a profit on convicts. Prisoners were put to work building railroads, mining coal, constructing dams, logging timber, and growing tobacco, corn, or cotton (Shapiro 1998: 47). While convicts entered Tennessee’s coal mines in

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<sup>11</sup> Anderson County is the county of Coal Creek, Briceville, and Lake City.

1871, they did not move into Coal Creek area until 1877 when the Knoxville Iron Company began leasing up to 160 inmates a year for the next decade and a half (ibid: 48). In addition to cheap labor, the mining companies received state tax breaks because they “relieved the state of all business risk and expenses, and paying a surplus into the treasury” (Ibid: 53). Convicts not only provided cheap labor, but the lease system gave mine owners increased leverage to prevent free miners from striking as the mine owners lowered salaries.

Despite this increased leverage, however, in 1877 and 1889 Anderson County miners reacted to lower wages and lost jobs by threatening to eject convicts from the Coal Creek mines. While their initial threat was limited in effect, their efforts catalyzed community organization. By 1890, Briceville’s Tennessee Coal Mining Company went into a lockout with their free-miners over wages. Utilizing previously established community bonds Anderson County miners took matters into their own hands to “protect their families from economic deprivation and regain what they considered their most fundamental rights – as coal miners, Tennesseans, and Americans” (Shapiro 1998: 77). By July 14, 1891 their resistance efforts culminated when the free miners marched on the mines to free the convicts and reclaim what they believed were their rightful jobs. This move, then, set off a series of small battles, skirmishes, and military standoffs that constitute the Coal Creek Wars of 1891-1892. With Anderson County miners on one side and the state of Tennessee on the other, these wars amounted to Shapiro called “one of the great labor battles between the Civil War and the turn of the century,” that eventually resulted in nationwide reforms had been put into place abolishing the practice of leasing convict labor to private mining companies (Shapiro 1998: 10).

Because this history is not the focus of my research, I will not dwell on the details and instead direct the reader to a thorough treatment of the Coal Creek Wars in Shapiro’s book. What

is important, however, is the power of this history for the current work of the CCWF and the people of Briceville and the Coal Creek Watershed Foundation. On the Coal Creek Wars Shapiro reflected that

This episode exposes both a profound sense of new possibilities in the American South and the often cruel legacies of that region's embittered past. It also demonstrates that in the postbellum South, as in so many other historical contexts, the actions of men and women could unleash a very different future from the one they expected or for which they hoped (Shapiro 1998: 13).

Shapiro's point, particularly that final sentence, is relevant today in the context of the CCWF where community citizens are working to "unleash a very different future from the one they expected or for which they hoped for." Such a comparison has not gone unnoticed by people of the region. Thacker ruminated that "like their ancestors, the current residents of Coal Creek are banding together. This time however, their mission is to improve the health of the Coal Creek Watershed" (Thacker 2001). Or, as written in *Hope and Hard Work: Making A Difference in the Eastern Coal Region*, "The organization [CCWF] has adopted the same spirit of the miners who banded together and drafted a plan for the abolishment of convict mine labor practices. They are forming a restoration plan and have begun the important work of restoring Coal Creek themselves" (Comp 2001). As if this event is not inspiration for community action, the CCWF teaches the community to be proud of two of the largest mining disasters in American coal mining history.

On May 14, 1902, 216 miners, many of whom fought in the Coal Creek Wars, died in the Fraterville Mine when an explosion trapped all miners inside. Besides being one of the largest disasters in coal mining history, the Fraterville mine disaster was the first where miners left farewell messages. Like the Coal Creek War a decade earlier, the Fraterville Mine explosion of 1902 hugely impacted the community. However, showing the same resilience as in years past, the miners and their families rebuilt from the ashes of explosion. Moreover, new mining

families moved to the area while the community got back on its feet.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, on December 9, 1911, nine years after the Fraterville disaster, the region faced a second mining disaster in the collapse of the Cross Mountain Mine. This time 84 miners died, while five miners were rescued fifty-eight hours later. This event marked the first rescue of miners from any sort of disaster in U.S. mining history.

These two disasters led to countless reforms in mine management and safety. More importantly, these events while devastating in many ways, inspired a resurgence of community cohesion and support. On the Coal Creek Wars Shapiro explained, “A collective sense of possibility and belonging was an indispensable catalyst to the coal mining rebellions;” the same holds true for these two mining disasters which are remembered and honored by the community today (Shapiro 1998: 4).

It is this collective sense of possibility and belonging that the CCWF encourages through their various projects in the watershed. Tom Braden, the principal and graduate of Briceville Elementary School, praised the CCWF and highlights the importance of celebrating these historical moments because they teach “the kids about the past and point them toward the future” (Zink 60). While the younger members of the community are the focus of these initiatives, much of the community – young and old – have been inspired to get involved, participating in clean-ups, health-days, bug hunts, the creation of a new park, the restoration of 120 year old church, or restoration of native fish. Reflecting on all of this work, Revered Daugherty noted

What happened here was wonderful and uplifting. We stepped back in time in order to help a community move ahead. We used a practice of our forefathers, neighbor helping neighbor to help themselves . . . building something more precious than a historical trail. We built fellowship and a belief in ourselves and others (Daugherty 2001).

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.coalcreekaml.com/Legacy5.htm>, accessed 31 July 2007.

Many involved in CCWF agree that such fellowship is crucial for the future success and sustainability of their projects and community. The engaged and practiced work taking place in this mountains, on these waters, and amongst this community gets to the heart of my understandings of religion, where religion provides a social, historical, and affective tool-box with which humans attempt to make sense of the world. Religion is very much the realms of human experience engaged in the construction of meaning around potentially sacred norms and ideals (Chidester 1986:7, 2005; Long 2003: 233; McCutcheon 2001, 2003). Here history and community provide the tool-box out of which the labor of construction and restoration are manifest.

In religion, as well as collaborative approaches to restoration or conservation, sources of mutual or communal support are paramount and all practices and values should encourage their development. In her recent work on the sustainability of intentional communities such as the Amish, Anna Peterson aptly highlighted history along-side practice as pivotal for fostering and maintaining social capital within the community. Communities like the Amish, she argued, draw upon a long line of history and theology to continually reinforce and emphasize practices of “mutual aid” (Peterson 2005: 37). Without mutual aid achieving community or environmental sustainability would be impossible.

### **Future Projects, Initiatives, and Native Fish**

Because the CCWF has brought the community together through faith, hope, and hard work, they have received the recognition of a variety of groups, garnering more awards than they humbly care to advertise. In 2000, Thacker was voted the Water Conservationist of the Year by the Tennessee Conservation League. In 2002, he won the ASFE Founders award for engineers who put their work to on-the-ground use for the betterment of communities and environment. Also in 2002, the Tennessee Conservationist also awarded a Stewardship Award to the CCWF.

Again in 2002, the supporting Clinch River TU Chapter received a TU Silver Trout award for their work on Coal Creek and the Clinch River. To top it off, in 2004, Carol Moore won the TU Conservationist Volunteer of the Year Award for her tireless work in coordinating CCWF and Clinch River TU activities. The irony here is that she does not even fish. However, she agreed with TU President Charles Gauvin, “What’s good for trout is good for the people in every way” (Moore, interview: 16 July 2007).

These awards are only a few that the CCWF have received over the years. They have also received crucial grants and financial awards from both private and federal sources, without which little of this work would be possible. Regardless of the awards, Thacker, Moore and all the volunteers argue that the greatest reward is the success of these projects, particularly those that help the children. As Thacker reminded me on a number of occasions, “The children are the biggest treasure” (Thacker, interview: 16 July 2007). In other words, they are the key to the future sustainability of this community.

Despite the successes, awards, and inspiring work to date, Thacker and friends all agree that there is a great deal of work to go. Scholars in these areas often remind activists that one must never get caught up in placing too much emphasis on finish lines and completion dates. Collaborative community building efforts must always be perceived as ongoing processes with milestones, but no finish lines (O’Leary & Bingham 2003; Schuman 2006; Weber 2003). Noting and celebrating the milestones is important, so that folks feel the reward of success. However, when celebrating the milestones, groups and activists should remain cognizant of future work.

Thinking about the future the CCWF has larger goals and projects in mind. While visiting Coal Creek and Briceville during the summer of 2007, Thacker and Moore took me on a tour of the area’s historical sites, including the sites of the Coal Creek War and the mining disasters.

They want to continue to continue revitalizing the area's historical landmarks and treasures; not only for pride, but for economic infrastructure. Historical tourism is popular in this area of the South, so why not celebrate an area with unique history. The CCWF also plans on restoring regional wetlands around the creek to help filter out pollution from abandoned mines. This, in turn, will help maintain Coal Creek as a clean body of water. Clean water brings us back to the fish.

On January 11, 2007 the CCWF and the Clinch River TU outlined a new plan entitled "Coal Creek Recovery Project," in which a variety of native fish species are being restored to these waters they once called home before being killed off by early mining activity in the area. If trout and fly fishing were the impetus to the behind the CCWF, a focus on trout has opened the door for the reintroduction and protection of as many as 27 fish species native to this region. These include the Telescope Shiner, Warpaint Shiner, Rainbow Darter, and the Tennessee Shiner. If Gauvin believes that what is good for trout can be good for people, these projects reveal that what is good for trout can potentially be good for other native fish species. And, although the early vision of this project was founded upon potentially anthropocentric interests in trout, it has give rise to a multitude of projects that holistically benefit an entire watershed.

This move from fishing to trout to multiple fish and human communities provides an on the ground example of philosopher Ben Minteer's called "third way environmentalism," where goals aim to "pragmatically reconcile human needs, ideals, and ambitions with maintaining the health of the environment" (Minteer 2006: 187). In their work, the CCWF are exploring possibilities for a more "humanistic, pluralistic, and civic-minded agenda for environmentalism and land-use reform, an integrative social and political agenda" that is as concerned about

humans and children as it is about fish, and further, that the two can be mutually beneficial (ibid).

### **Future Hurdles: Sustaining Initiative and Energy**

While the volunteer efforts of the CCWF have largely provided the leadership initiative for Briceville and the Coal Creek watershed, the community lost a person central in sustaining community involvement with the passing of Reverend Roy Daugherty on February 16, 2006. His loss raises a few issues that all community-based collaborative conservation projects face in sustaining the effort, energy and leadership. As conflict mediators John Bryson and Barbara Crosby explained in “Leadership for the Common Good,” sustaining powerful grassroots initiatives is utterly dependent upon strong, visionary, trusted, and internal leadership (Bryson & Crosby 2006). And while the CCWF has provided necessary leadership and facilitation efforts for Briceville, Thacker and Moore both maintain that the long term goal is a community that takes these steps on its own; and that is the biggest hurdle.

Despite early community enthusiasm for the work of the CCWF, heavy volunteer turnout has been difficult to sustain over time. In part, this can be attributed to the lack of immediately obvious threats to the community, such as flooding or health care, now that the bridges are clear, the river is getting cleaner, and community has reopened the Briceville People’s Health Clinic. Noting the prevalence of decreasing involvement in collaborative projects or sustainable initiatives, environmental sociologies James Blake and Paul Selman find that motivation tends to be highest, when the issues obviously, directly, and immediately affect those concerned (Blake 1999; Selman 2001). This phenomenon is similar to what Thomas Princen has described as a “distancing effect,” where issues are not perceived as directly relevant or individuals perceive their actions to have little effect on the overall situation (Princen 2002). The CCWF must increasingly address these obstacles. As projects succeed the less pressing issues, such as

flooding, become; and therefore seem less relevant. This, in turn, potentially leads to decreases in community involvement. Therefore, keeping the community captivated and involved is a difficult task.

By engaging multiple projects the CCWF aims to promote varied interest in the life of the watershed. The CCWF feels that by focusing on children, as future leaders in the watershed, they can promote the greatest amount of involvement and change. This youth-based focus illuminates the idea that children should be “taught the value of participation in and service of the community” and that “the growing of the child and the health of the community should thus be mutually reinforcing” (Minteer 2006: 31). By teaching children the history of the area and encouraging them to help clean and monitor the health of the creek, among other things, the CCWF encourages the potential emergence of leaders who know how to work together. The CCWF, therefore, is building a what Minteer called a “training ground for democracy,” by fostering an environment in which children’s activities allow them to participate in the life of the community (ibid: 35). And while both the children, particularly the Coal Creek Scholars, and Thacker agree, time will be the indicator. In the meantime all those involved in the CCWF will keep working toward civic and environmental sustainability on Coal Creek and the larger Clinch River Watershed.

### **Concluding with Pragmatism and Collaborative Watershed Conservation**

As I have argued throughout this work, environmental values and ethics often emerge out of the context of daily, practiced experience. As I detail in the following chapter, this is a position most often advocated by what has become more formally referred to as environmental pragmatism. This approach, by highlighting lived experience, seeks a “third way” approach to environmentalism that allows for attention to both human and non-human commitments (Minteer 2005: 7). By working from the ground of experience, starting with limited focus on elements of

nature and moving outward toward more holistic concerns that includes humans, trout, and the entire watershed, the CCWF embodies many of the philosophical ideals of environmental pragmatism. On this process, Thacker admitted that when he began this project, all he cared about was trout. “I started working in Coal Creek for purely selfish reasons,” he noted, “I wanted wild trout. . .” (Thacker, interview: 16 July 2007). His desire to restore the stream was motivated by his passion for fly fishing and his love of wild trout.

According to some environmentalists, this approach might be a problem. First, Thacker’s concerns for wild trout were, in part, tethered to an anthropocentric desire to catch them. However, this initial interest, Thacker and others in the CCWF explained, broadened beyond a desire to simply catch fish, a point which I also explore in chapters two and three. Moreover, Minter and Weston remind readers that conservation projects will always, in part, be driven by human values and interests (Minter 2006: 7; Weston 2003). Even holistic valuations of nature, they argue, are tethered to human value systems. These values emerge from our experiences with nature; “they are the products of transactions between humans and nature in particularly social situations and ecophysical contexts,” such as fly fishing (Minter 2006: 7). In these cases, I believe that what is important is not necessarily the starting point for values, but the end result, which might emerge in the form of more holistic, participatory forms of community-based conservation. The CCWF, for example, went from trout, to the entire watershed.

Making this move, therefore, has been central to the successes of their work. The primary actors were able to step back and listen to the needs and values of the community members. In doing so, they mitigated opposition and conflict and instead created a collaborative culture where input was welcome and community members contributed to the project. In the end,

if trout and fly fishing provided the motivation for action, in the end the whole community, human and non-human, has benefit in a variety of ways; including other native fish species.

Where this project could have ended abruptly before it began, the multiple stakeholders of the community found ways, through particular valuations of nature and community, to move beyond their false dilemmas. Noting this success, the stalemated activists of the Rodman standoff could learn a lesson or two from the work of the CCWF. Those in Florida are equally trapped in a false dilemma, each sticking to their own personal concerns, while claiming to speak for the good of the community. Following the lead of the CCWF, one wonders if potential steps exist that might lead all stakeholders concerned with the Ocklawaha and its waters to the table to work for the betterment of the entire watershed. Or, is that case as I suggested in the previous chapter, really stuck in dualistic opposition?

Drawing on the fields of religious studies, environmental pragmatism, collaborative conservation, and environmental dispute resolution, the following chapter analyzes the successes and struggles of these initiatives in New Mexico, Tennessee, and Florida. In doing so, I want to continue to highlight the importance of cultural values as pivotal in the midst of environmental conflict or civic environmentalism. I agree with geographer and conflict mediator Aaron Wolf when he argued that contemporary approaches to environmental dispute resolution and water conservation tend too often to focus on approaches dependent upon rationality. Instead, he insists, we should be paying attention to the role of religious and spiritual values in these debates (Wolf 2008). Throughout my research, I continue to find that these values often emerge from particular experiences in nature such as fishing or ecological restoration. Noting the relationships between practices, experiences, and values in the midst of grassroots environmentalism is imperative.

Therefore, in Chapter 7, I will step back to religion and fishing. In doing so, the chapter follows the flows of this dissertation. It begins with fishing, moves into ecological restoration, and concludes with an in depth look at the claims and arguments of environmental pragmatists. In doing so, I use the engaged field work of my research to evaluate the philosophical and practical efficacy of environmental pragmatism and its position that ethics and values should ideal emerge from real-world experience.

Finally, I conclude by reflecting on the practical and philosophical importance of using religion as an analytical tool for understanding the relationships between popular culture and grassroots environmentalism. This is pertinent in the face of increased scholarly evaluation an apparent gap between expressed environmental values and lived practices (Peterson 2007). Therefore, I will conclude by asking what does fishing teach us about religion, and what does religious studies teach us about fly fishing. In other words, to borrow again from Chidester: “what difference does it make to call any cultural activity religion” particularly in light of increasing questions surrounding sustainability, ecological restoration, and civic environmentalism? Following these questions, I will return to the question posed in the introduction to this work: How do fishing and religion help us to work toward Wes Jackson’s insistence that in order for humans to achieve social and environmental sustainability, we must learn to become native to place?

CHAPTER 7  
RELIGION AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRAGMATISM: NAVIGATING EXPERIENCE AND  
VALUES IN COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITIES

We cannot think our way back to the Earth. We can only *work* our way more thoroughly into and around the Earth, from the particular place within it that we already find ourselves: practically, mindfully, open-mindedly. But then what we do *not* need are more commandments or Indian Gospel or calls to arms. We need a different kind of environmentalism (Weston 1994: 7).

**Introduction**

Throughout fishing's storied literary tradition, angling authors often muse on searching for the sources, or headwaters, of rivers. Nick Lyons noted that quite a few "people have been tracking rivers to their sources lately." He believes anglers are acting on "a desire to find further meaning in all this sloshing around in streams. People seem to be saying, 'There must be more to it than the catching of fish – and perhaps those meanings are to be found in the headwaters'" (Lyons 1992: 139). Fly fishing rabbi Eric Eisenkramer called the headwaters pilgrimage a religious quest. "The fly fisher seeks sources and meanings in his fishing;" he explained, "the devout religious seek God. Both headwaters and God are sources of life. Either way, the quest for the source is a religious quest" (Eisenkramer, interview: 17 June 2008). However, the quest does not end at the source.

Exploring these religious quests, Eisenkramer, like other anglers, described an inherent pursuit of knowledge, which he believes entails moral and ethical action. "Judaism," he elucidated, "requires acting morally in relation to God's creation, following God's commandments." The knowledge acquired through fishing, he continued, "also demands moral action, only this time for the environment – fish and their watery homes" (ibid). Combining his religious faith and concern for the environment, Eisenkramer stated directly that conservation of fish, rivers, and watershed is a moral issue rooted in both his Jewish faith and fly fishing religiosity. They are inseparable as Eisenkramer has noted on his blog, taught to the congregation

at his synagogue in Ridgefield, Connecticut, or engaged in other aspects of his life. These points move beyond words for Eisenkramer and many other anglers. Actions emerge from ethically bound knowledge by engaging restoration projects or facilitating sustainable communities in a variety of ways, on or off the water.

In a more secular setting, Tom McGuane has insisted that because fly fishing is at root a nature-based spirituality, the protection and restoration of watersheds, rivers, and fish are akin to “holy war” (McGuane 1999: xii). Taking up such a holy war, in the spring of 2005, David Stalling, fly fisher, and Western Coordinator for Trout Unlimited, called for the protection of what he believes is one of the most spiritually sacred areas in the southwest – New Mexico’s Valle Vidal (“Valley of Life”). The collaborative and successful story of New Mexico’s Valle Vidal is one emerging elsewhere around the country. The story of the Coal Creek Watershed Foundation is another apt example of “coalitions of the unlike,” which are emerging across the American landscape to forge unique manifestations of grassroots, place-based democratic alliances in defense of community and the environment (Weber 2003: 3). At the heart of collaborative initiatives, one can find that deeply affective, religious, and/or spiritual values of nature motivate environmental concern, civic engagement, and collaborative conservation. While Stalling initially saw the Valle Vidal as a sacred space as a result of his fishing these native trout waters, his call for its protection emerged from an expansion of his ethic well beyond his desire to simply catch fish.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, as the progression of this study demonstrates, fishing, or similar activities, can in the long run give rise to something more. In other words, and as Eisenkramer and other

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<sup>1</sup> Stalling stated in a phone interview that he rarely fishes in the Vidal or elsewhere anymore. As his ethic expanded, he noted, so waned his desire to catch-and-release fish. Now, he only fishes where native fish swim in their native waters and only if he needs dinner.

anglers have explained to me, the experiences of fishing can lead in many ways to an expanded knowledge of fish, rivers, and watersheds, as well as their potential destruction. This knowledge, then, ideally manifests in actions that might take many forms. Here values and actions combine on the ground or in the water, where environmental and civic policy, management, and ecological restoration are at stake. However, the connections between knowledge, ethics, and action are not simple. Many issues emerge as pathways or barriers to engaged action. However, what I find interesting is how anglers I have met and continue to meet in my research often argue that their fishing has indeed increased their knowledge of the environment, and raised awareness around ecological issues of stream degradation or species extinction. They then connect this knowledge to their engagement in a variety of projects, for example, with their local trout or river conservation group. In other words, fishing can lead to knowledge and values, which can lead to action.

Using this line of thought from fishing into conservation or restoration in this chapter, I first return to fishing as a potential “gateway activity” for the formation of an ethic of respect for nature, or “ecological citizenship” (Light 2002; 2004). From this position, I will explore the ideals, ethics, and practices of ecological restoration, which many anglers argue should logically progress from fishing-related watershed concern. The practices of ecological restoration not only allow humans to restore nature, but also potentially heal human community. Restoration necessitates community collaboration, which in turn, fosters foundations that are fruitful for the development of ecological citizenship. Those working within the philosophies of environmental pragmatism often explore the relationships between collaboration and citizenship, particularly democratic forms of community-based environmentalism.

In the context of this discussion surrounding fishing, values, restoration, and community I will, in the end, evaluate the emergence of environmental pragmatism as a set of philosophical approaches to creating a more applied and holistic environmental ethic that engages human and non-human communities through experience and practice. My evaluation of pragmatism begins on the ground, from whence environmental pragmatists insist our values should emerge. From this position, while applauding their philosophical approach, my main critique of environmental pragmatism is that they do not necessarily take their own advice and evaluate the applicability of their work on the ground, through ethnography or other forms of empirical research.

### **Fishing and Respect for Nature**

In *With Respect for Nature: Living as a Part of the Natural World*, philosopher J. Claude Evans explored the potential for fishing and hunting to foster a respectful relationship with the natural world. Out of fishing and hunting, Evans articulated an ethical practice and participatory relationship with nature – one which does not distance humans from nature, but recognizes larger chains of interdependence and interaction between all species, not merely humans and non-human nature (Evans 2005). Fishing and hunting, he explained, “Beyond the fact that we are part of and therefore engaged in the natural world, our engagement takes the form of actions and practices that are meaningful for us” (Evans 2005: 153). In other words, fishing and hunting potentially provide pathways for humans to become respectful participants in the streams and flows of life, rivers, and watersheds.

Moreover, various trajectories of sociological research, contained here or documented by other scholars, have explored the possible spiritual worldviews of hunters that might give rise to successful and applied environmental ethics (Kellert 1971; Karasote 1993 Shepard 1973; Stange 1997). The goal for the angler or hunter, in these cases, is not always to catch fish or kill an

animal, but to find ways to “participate actively and consciously in the processes of life” (Evans 2005: 168). As iconographic fly fishing author Roderick Haig-Brown explained

I can lie for hours at a time and watch the flow of a little stream . . . the secret vagaries of current are clearly revealed here. . . A fold or break of current, a burst of bubbles or the ripple of a stone . . . releases in me a flood of satisfaction that must, I think, be akin to that which a philosopher feels as his mind is opened to a profound truth. I feel larger and better and stronger for it . . . (Haig-Brown 1946: 79-80).

Similarly, Harry Middleton mystically reflected

I have mingled with fish and water and light and I have felt the press of time, the great power of the present, the energy that fashions both the past and the future. It is not many experiences we pile up in our lifetime, but what we make of them, how they mix with blood and memory, how they enrich our lives. Mountains and trout streams sustain me, are the handles through which I have glimpsed the slight and the immeasurable, the vast and the small. Being among them is never disappointing, even when there are no fish. For there is always the sensation, so deeply satisfying, of belonging, of being genuinely connected (Middleton 1991: 94).

Reflecting on the writings of those like Haig-Brown or Middleton, Joseph Sax mused in *Mountains without Handrails*, fishing is most satisfying “not when it results in accomplishment of a set task, but in refining us” (Sax 1980: 28). In other words, fishing is most fulfilling when it refines the human relationship to nature.

Anticipating critique, one must point out that not everyone needs to hunt or fish to come to these realizations, particularly in today’s globalized world where eating meat is hardly necessary. Other activities like gardening, birding, or hiking might similarly result in varying forms of engaged environmental ethics, as some scholars have already traced.<sup>2</sup> However, one of the things

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<sup>2</sup> Laurie Thorpe (2005) traced how school gardens helped young, urban students not only reconnect nature, but learn how to work in teams or communities, while appreciating and respecting nature. Or, Taylor (2007) provides an astute analysis of the religious dimensions of surfing subcultures, which can at times, lead to influential environmental engagement such as those represented by groups like the Surf Rider Foundation, whose mission includes protecting the biodiversity of the seas. According to Taylor, “the spirituality or religion of soul surfing involves a sense of connection and belonging to nature in general and the sea in particular and produces concomitant reverence toward nature and a corresponding environmentalist ethics” (Taylor 2007: 945). Studies such as these,

makes activities like fishing or hunting interesting, yet ethically tricky, are the levels of violence inherent in their practice – a feature they share with some forms of restoration ecology. While I am not stating that the violence in each instance – fishing, hunting, or restoration – is always the same, it can indeed be. If ecological restoration entails removing non-native fish or other non-human animals, it then, occupies the same levels of violence as does hunting. In light of this violence, if one chooses to hunt or fish, Evans noted that “in our cultural values we need to acknowledge and affirm the place of respectful hunting [or fishing] as one aspect of the way we take our place in the broader world” in which we live and are a part (Evans 2005:163). Seeking options for “respectful hunting” and fishing, Evans briefly investigated Native American hunting traditions for potential insights. In these, he highlights, as have other scholars such as Richard Nelson or Tim Ingold to name a few, the role of prayer and ritual as methods for giving thanks to one’s prey.

Perhaps giving thanks, however, is not sufficient to maintain a truly reciprocal relationship between hunters and hunted, if such reciprocity is at all possible. After all, due to technology or weapons, there is certainly a power imbalance between hunted and hunter. This does not mean, however, that reciprocity and respect are unattainable, particularly if one considers the work of ecological restoration.

Many anglers celebrate fishing because it has the potential to take them to wild and natural spaces, where native trout swim. However, when and where those native trout no longer swim, some anglers argue that they should do everything that they can to ensure their restoration to those waters. Although he is not an angler, William Jordan III agreed by insisting that restoration is the necessary step that arises from appreciating what is no longer there (Jordan 2003).

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and within which I situate my own work, are increasingly common and might reflect and emergent gaze toward alternative pathways of religion in search of environmental ethics.

Restoration, by restoring what is no longer there, provides opportunities to repay nature for what nature has given to humans. In other words, if fishing provides so much more than catching fish, as so many of fly fishing's authors and practical devotees have exclaimed, giving back for that gift of fishing would seem a small price to pay.

### **Respect, Ritual, and Restoration**

As shown in my case studies, anglers have been making this move from recreation to restoration in a variety of cases and locations. Their efforts range from habitat restoration and stream bank improvement to the restoration of native species such as cutthroat or brook trout, to name a few. Despite lofty goals and good intentions, however, restoration is a highly controversial activity. Sometimes concerned citizens protest piscicides necessary for restoring native fish or the loss of their preferred prey of brown trout, for example, in restored waters. Meanwhile, environmental ethicists, philosophers, and practitioners of ecological restoration have been debating restoration for a variety of other reasons. In his lengthy treatment of ecological restoration, Eric Higgs explained that “ecological restoration has stirred more debate among environmental philosophers than any other single issue” (Higgs 2003: 121). I trace many of these debates in the contexts of my case studies.

Aldo Leopold wrote that an ecological education inevitably leads one to realize that we live in a “world of wounds” (Leopold 1949: 17). Restoration, then, which might emerge as a response to an ecological education, seeks to heal those wounds and in so doing not only native species, but also aid humans in becoming native to their own spaces. However, simply putting species back is not sufficient for successful restoration. After all, restorations should work with the land; they should, as Callicott reminded readers, correspond to ecologically spatial and temporal scales (Callicott 2002). Not only is this adaptive approach which responds to changes in the landscape in the midst of restoration, but is an approach to restoration that only restores a

species if it still makes sense in light of ecological changes to the system over time. Here attention is given to ecological processes such as disturbance regimes and spatially elements of ecological units such as landscapes, ecosystems, and biological provinces (Callicott 2002). Jackson noted that his idea of native is utterly dependant upon the notion of fitting into the landscape. Callicott's approach to restoration likewise highlights ecological fit. In other words, a species should be considered a "native" in need of restoration only if it still fits spatially and temporally into the ecosystem in question.

As I note elsewhere, scholars Erick Katz and Robert Elliott criticized ecological restoration by calling it a "big lie" which amounts to little more than a faked replica of nature. On one hand, Elliot believes that even if the species still fits into the ecosystem, because the species is reintroduced or restored by humans it can no longer be considered truly natural. On the other hand, and more importantly, Elliot has worried that certain groups or agencies might use the promise of restoration as a means to disturb a landscape. Restoration becomes an exchangeable good, if you will. Andrew Light has referred to Elliott's fear as "malicious restoration," where restoration is an after thought to previous degradation for economic gains, for example (Light 2003: 401). Malicious restoration is opposed to "benign restoration" which seeks to restore already degraded ecosystems – the kind explored in my case studies. Elliott's objection to malicious restoration is quite justified. However, most involved in ecological restoration are not using restoration as a bartering chip so that they might first degrade the area.

Some, however, have wondered if a restored ecosystem more preferable to a degraded one, or if a restored system has as much value as the original. Katz and Elliot, for example, have opposed restoration because they believe the end result is not really nature. For Katz, restored natural spaces amount to little more than "an artifact created to meet human satisfactions and

interests” (Katz 1992: 232). In other words, groups are restoring native cutthroat trout because they want to see them there, or they want to fish for them, not because the trout actually belong there. In addition to this critique, Elliot has written that a restored landscape has about the same value as a fake Picasso painting (Elliot 1992; 1997). According to restorationists, however, a restored Rio Grande cutthroat trout is just as valuable to the Pecos River as those early cutthroat encountered by Coronado’s men. Its value, even if restored, is tethered to its overall fit and place in that ecosystem.

Beyond fakes and lies however, at one point Katz rejected restoration as equivalent to anthropocentric human hubris. “The practice of ecological restoration,” he believed “can only represent a misguided faith in the hegemony and infallibility of the human power to control the natural world” (Katz 1996: 222). Although, restoration might in some cases represent or lead to anthropocentric control over nature, research shows that in many cases degraded landscapes do not restore themselves (Dagget 2005; Higgs 2003; Jordan 2005). Dan Dagget, in *Gardeners of Eden* has described traditional approaches of preservation as the “leave-it-alone approach,” which in some cases might work. However, he argued that not only do we need to realize that various humans have for centuries worked with nature, but also in some cases leaving a degraded alone will only leave a degraded landscape. Restoration, however, can help guide it back to a more healthy and diverse state. He gave the example of the Drake Exclosure outside of Phoenix, Arizona. The exclosure was set aside in 1946 as an experiment to study the progress of nature healing itself without human involvement. After almost sixty years, Dagget explained, the Drake still looks “much like a parking lot” (Dagget 2005: 61). Outside the exclosure is a healthier ecosystem where, through restoration, humans have involved themselves in the system by mimicking disturbance regimes (such as fires) or the reseeded of crucial grasses and native

plants. In the restored area next to the Drake, “the distance between live perennial plants could be measured in inches rather than yards” (64). While preservation is a noble goal, in many cases, leaving it alone does not repair previous damage done.

Moreover, advocates of ecological restoration claim the opposite: that restoration does not lead to anthropocentrism and hubris, but might instead create opportunities for ecological education and in doing so could give rise to ecological citizenship – a claim similar to those made about recreational activities such as fishing and hunting. Combining fishing with restoration in this line of thought, one might say that recreation (fishing) through ecological awareness can encourage activities of re-creation (restoration).

If the issue is control, New Mexico ecological restorationist Bill Zeedyk has taught a method of stream restoration he calls “induced meandering,” which requires, for example, humans to build some small barriers into a stream while allowing nature or the water to take its course and reshape the stream over time. Induced meandering provides a nice model for avoiding hubris in any restoration project because it takes the focus off humans and places it onto the processes of nature. Along these lines, restoration should not create replicas, but should guide places back to their natural states; hence as Rolston says the “comparison with artwork is somewhat misleading” (Rolston 2000: 129). Restoration, then, should not be seen as faking nature, but instead facilitating its recovery.

In light of guiding principles such as these, and despite rejecting restoration on the grounds of anthropocentrism, Katz has gradually revised his position, stating “the remediation of damaged ecosystems is a better policy than letting a blighted landscape remain as is” (Katz 2002: 142). Such an approach to restoration represents Light’s idea of benign restoration (Light 2003; see also 2002, 2004). Here, the goal is process more than product. Highlighting process, then,

restoration potentially provides opportunities for humans to engage the landscape, through processes akin to adaptive management.

Moreover, by stressing process, restoration can potentially provide a set of ritual practices that place humans and nature into mutually beneficial relationships with each other (Jordan 2005; Higgs 2003; Mills 2002). For some, thinking about restoration in the context of ritual is important because it provides benefits that range from coping with restoration's inherent violence to fostering democratic ideals. I want to address the latter benefits here.

Because restorations require ongoing maintenance and engagement, such as annual prairie burns, these annual events can serve as rituals for not only recommitting the self to nature, but to the community as a whole. Light believes that these rituals help "to keep a community of restorationists together as well as bringing new people into such communities in the form of a joyous event" (Light 2002: 163). In the context of each of the case studies addressed here, annual rituals abound. In New Mexico, trout fishers with New Mexico Trout and Trout Unlimited all congregate in the Valle Vidal or on the waters of the Pecos or the Jemez Rivers for annual 4<sup>th</sup> of July trash pick ups or Memorial Day fence building projects. In Florida, after a weekend conference on water policy and sustainability, Karen Ahlers, The Putnam County Environmental Council, and the Florida Defenders of the Environment gathered on the banks of the Ocklawaha for the annual "Rally for the River" and "People's Restoration." In Tennessee, the Coal Creek Bug Hunt, Health Days, or even Scholars Day all offer anticipated annual rituals for students and community members alike. Despite celebrating restoration as a potential avenue toward ecological citizenship, however, the question of ritual is a contested issue amongst both philosophers and practitioners of restoration. A good part of the debate hinges around the way one understands the ritual.

Ritual in restoration can take two forms. On one hand, restoration itself can be the ritual. On the other hand, one can amend restoration by adding various ritual activities to restoration events. For example, those attending the Putnam County Environmental Council's "People's Restoration" said prayers to bless each other, the river, and the trees prior to their planting. This is an example of more religiously oriented ritual that blends elements from various religious traditions. In moments such as this one, participants offer blessings to the earth or apologize to plants (or fish) they are removing, or meditate on the process in order to feel a connection to the stones, soil, or water around them. For some, these powerful activities help mediate the inherent violence of restoration - such as killing Brown Trout. Despite being a staunch supporter of ecological restoration, Light is suspicious of this kind of overt ritual because it potentially alienates participants who have no ties to the rituals in question. At the Rally for the River, on the Ocklawaha, I saw the truth of Light's point. I watched several participants pace nervously around the ritual awaiting the "real action" of planting trees.

Although Light recommended removing ritual from restoration, one should not see the issue as an either/or debate. Instead, one should ask who is doing the ritual or the restoration. Is it a local church group? If so, perhaps saying a prayer before or after a restoration project would make sense. If the group is a conglomeration of community members with varying backgrounds and motivations for doing restoration, perhaps the work of restoration might be the ritual, where the explicit rituals might be omitted. Insights from religious studies demonstrate that ritual could take many forms; it might or might not need prayers, priests, or priestesses. Beyond this debate, however, the question of ritual in restoration demonstrates the functional role of restoration, beyond the goals of restoration itself.

What is important here is not the nature of the ritual, but the idea that the process of restoration has the ability to tie or bind individuals to their community and to the ecosystems in question. If restoration can connect the community to the watershed, ideally this connection might lead to increased care and concern for the watershed. Giving community members a chance to help restore a stream opens up opportunities to become intimately connected to the nature around them. For example, talking about the restoration of the Ocklawaha, Karen Ahlers states that communities cannot love what they do not know, and restoration provides an outlet for getting to know the river (Ahlers, interview: 11 March 2008). The processes and practices of restoration, then, can potentially ground people to their bioregions, creating support networks, and common care for the local ecosystem.

Beyond the ecosystem or watershed, proponents of restoration often celebrate the work that it does for human communities alone. According to Light, “one of the more interesting things about ecological restorations are that they are amenable to public participation” (Light 2007: 97; see also Light 2000; 2002; 2003). Public participation is crucial for a strong community, which is vital for the long-term protection of an entire watershed. Restoration provides one of many outlets for getting to know and celebrate one’s local bioregion while potentially building sustainable communities. This includes getting to know the local cultures, history, art or food as much as it does the local biodiversity.

Combining the emergent concern for both nature and community as resultant from restoration, these practices are potentially powerful avenues for creating “ecological citizenship.”

As Light explained

The goal of an ecological citizenship is to bring together the interests of a human community to be fair and open and conducive to allowing each member of a community to pursue his or her own private interests while also tempering these pursuits with attention to the environment. A strengthened relationship with nature is to be found in forming open-

ended organizational bonds that entail specific moral, and possibly legal, responsibilities to create for the nature around one's community and respect the environmental connections between communities. (Light 2002: 159)

A direct participatory relationship between local human communities and their bioregions, he continued, "is at least a necessary condition for encouraging people to protect natural systems and landscapes around them rather than trade off these environments for short term monetary interests from development" (Light 2002: 157). Light's point is poignant in light of recent research that demonstrates a steady decline in recreational or other forms of participation in natural spaces (Pergams and Zaradic 2008; see also Louv 2006). Therefore, restoration, like recreation, provides an outlet for engaging natural spaces. Moreover, as my research reveals, recreation can provide a gateway into restoration.

Here both recreation and restoration can ideally lead to a normative relationship with both community and watershed. In the end, restoration can potentially give rise to more democratic moments where local communities engage each other in mutual restoration and defense of nature. Examples of these democracies of ecological citizenship are cropping up all over the United States in a variety of collaborative initiatives to restore and protect watersheds, rivers, or local bioregions.<sup>3</sup>

### **Restoring Community through Collaborative Conservation**

The reasons for getting involved in restoration projects may vary quite widely. For many in this research, fishing provides the "entryway" or "gateway" activity. However, anglers are

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<sup>3</sup> For examples, see Brick, Snow, and Van De Wetering (2000) or Weber (2005) where he traces such initiatives as the Applegate Partners in Southwestern Oregon, the Henry's Fork Watershed Council in Idaho, or Washington's Willapa Alliance. Blatter and Ingram (2001) similarly explore collaborative conservation initiatives around issues of water in an international context. Here they pay close attention to the important role of water as a symbolic resource in religious and cultural life. These are but two examples of emerging texts that explore the important, yet difficult, workings of community-based environmentalism where multiple stakeholders engage a variety of issues in the midst of conflict and cooperation.

hardly the only ones devoting their time, energies, and values to watershed restoration.

Individuals come to these projects from a variety of communities for a variety of reasons. What is important in these stories, at this point, is not where the participants came from, but why they are there, and the democratic results of those collaborative restoration efforts. These stories reveal a potentially “new vanguard for the environment” that typify on-the-ground examples of what environmental pragmatists are calling for philosophically (Weber 2000: 238; see also Light and Katz 1996). They are coalitions of the unlike, collaborating in restorative activities. Often their goals include the resolution of environmental disputes and management issues through bottom-up processes rather than top-down legislation.

This new paradigm for environmentalism is a direct response to an old one that “was heavily bureaucratic, prescriptive, fragmented in purpose, and adversarial in nature” (Durant, et al 2004: 2). As Snow wrote, environmental “collaboration was born largely of failure, the growing recognition that lawsuits, lobbying campaigns, administrative appeals, and other straight-line approaches to hard environmental issues are often narrow, usually expensive, and almost always divisive in ways that reverberate beyond the immediate issue in dispute” (Snow 2001: 4). If old approaches were divisive, these new movements aim to heal these fissures.

These movements, which each case study typifies to some degree, entail the cooperation of individuals and groups who have historically been at odds with each other. In some cases, projects might fail because those involved still see each other as totally at odds, as is the case with the Ocklawaha. In successful examples, however, conflict moves toward democratic cooperation and collaboration. They succeed by moving beyond old divides into new discussions and initiatives. In these collaborative moments, all voices and views are integral. This ideal builds not only on the theories and on goals of conflict resolution, but also environmental

pragmatism, where pluralism is an operational necessity (Meadowcraft 2004: 212). By engaging pluralism collaboration based environmentalism might simultaneously restore ecosystems and community ideals. Working together on ecosystem restoration can build social capital necessary for successful forms of democratic collaboration.

In order to “reconnect with stakeholders” successful collaborations must understand and account for a wide range of values and concerns, which proponents argue that current top-down regulatory approaches to environmental governance fail to consider (Durant et al. 2004: 12). The goal of reconnecting with stakeholders builds on the idea that effective environmental governance depends upon valuing, promoting, nurturing and extending deliberative democracy to the greatest extent possible. This involves paying attention to rational means such as employment, local economics, as much as it does understanding cultural or religious value systems of stakeholders.

Some, such as geographer and conflict mediator Aaron Wolf, have insisted that the non-rational, affective, or religious aspects play a larger role than traditionally granted in the realms of environmental conflict resolution (Wolf 2007; see also Gillroy 2005).<sup>4</sup> However, as Gillroy demonstrated, the realms of value claims based on morals, ethics, or religion are hardly considered when assessing policy options. Perhaps they should be, as values and religion are often at the center of environmental action or collaboration.

In many ways, these movements represent bioregionalism-in-action, where place-based engagement is necessary for the creation of sustainable communities. Like bioregional philosophies, collaboration of this sort relies heavily on local or folk knowledge - “the individual

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<sup>4</sup> Wolf, Aaron. 2008. “Healing the Enlightenment Rift: Rationality, Spirituality, and Shared Waters.” *The Journal of International Affairs*, forthcoming. After extensive conversations on this topic, while Wolf was in Gainesville, Florida, he shared a draft of this article.

and collective expertise of those community members most familiar” with the particular ecosystems in question (Weber 2000: 252). Further, community entails those who reside in or have a stake in a particular place, such as an ecologically defined space, watershed or region. As Daniel Kemmis noted, “place” becomes the catalyst of governance, where “meetings are open to all (even those who live outside the place),<sup>5</sup> decisions are made collectively, consensus is emphasized, and leadership and responsibility is shared” by those concerned with the fate of place (Kemmis 1990: 78). Despite these ideals, however, the emphasis on decentralized, place-based governance has drawn the ire of some critics.

One of the more vocal opponents of collaborative initiatives is former Sierra Club chair Mike McCloskey. First, he has doubted that despite best intentions these projects are ever fully pluralistic and not all stakeholders are involved. If this is the case, he explained, consensus is a hollow term (McCloskey 1999; see also Coglianesi 1999). George Coggins expressed similar doubt, calling true consensus a “pipe dream” because

In the West today may be found people who insist that federal land ownership is unconstitutional as well as immoral; who shoot, shovel, and shut up; who exploit to get theirs before the Second Coming; who spike trees, who bomb federal offices; who threaten and kill federal employees; who routinely commit perjury; who monkey wrench; who steal government property; who blame NAFTA on Jewish bankers; who are routinely dependant on forms of federal welfare; who are New Age hippie mystics; and who cordially despise each other (Coggins: 166).

Echoing Garrett Hardin’s “tragedy of the commons,” Coggins argued that collaboration is a noble but near impossible goal because no one will truly step outside of their own interests or give up their historical preferences. Moreover, McCloskey has expressed fears that even if a group reaches consensus, these processes take too long and therefore lead to more problems

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<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting that I am on the email list for a project of collaborative governance for a region of New Mexico called the Valles Caldera. I can at any time, go to NM and sit in on meetings offer my perspective. However, in that particular case, although my voice might be heard, I am not sure my voice would be counted. I have thought about studying that project as one in which the collaborative process is failing because the initiative has been “hijacked” by cattle interest groups appointed by President Bush.

down the road. Not to mention, he has explained that the goal of consensus can run the risk of reaching a compromise on environmental goals by settling on the “lowest common denominator” (McCloskey 1999: 429).

However, I think evidence in many cases suggests that individuals and groups are increasingly finding ways to move beyond old battles toward collaboration. In their work, Brick and Weber have argued that diversity and pluralism, rather than encouraging watered-down compromise, encourages mutual support and mutual coercion.<sup>6</sup> In part, I believe this move is dependant upon the recognition of similar values, particularly those affective, non-rational, or religious values of nature derived through particular experiences in nature. While the root of the values might differ, the values themselves overlap. In these cases, consensus constructs accountability.

Beyond settling for the less than sustainable middle-ground, critics claim that because collaborations depend upon local decision making, they tend to reduce “the influence and effectiveness of the national environmental organizations in the policy arena” (Kenney 2001: 189). Sometimes, while local citizens might have good intentions, they need the leadership or guidelines of larger government agencies. These critics indeed have a point when questioning the ability of local citizens to make the best decisions for their places. No case makes their point more clear than that on the Ocklawaha River, where decision processes have been in the hands of local residents for more than 30 years with no sign of resolution, while the federal government continually supports river restoration.

Despite such legitimate fears, however, there are reasons to explore the potential power of local input. As Brick explained, “In international conservation efforts, the need to work with

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<sup>6</sup> However, this seems to go against recent research by Robert Putnam. In a recent study he argued that increased diversity tends not toward community cooperation, but greater separation, isolation, and xenophobia.

local communities and indigenous peoples is axiomatic. But in this country, the environmental movement often ignores this wisdom, preferring instead the hammer of national environmental legislation to accomplish its goals” (Brick 2001: 175). Ignoring local input runs the risk of negating potentially useful knowledge and experiences within an ecosystem that only local citizens can have. Therefore, finding the right balance, then, between the proper application of science, knowledge, and research amongst a variety of stakeholders at all levels is essential for maintaining accountability and avoiding poor choices by some based on historical stigma or lobby interests.

No scholar denies the difficulty of achieving collaborative balance, particularly when weighing the relationships between local, regional, and federal agencies. Most of the key multi-stakeholder projects deemed successful are so because collaboration functionally includes local, regional, state, and federal representatives. Inversely, federal initiatives often fail because they did not consider local contexts and concerns (Getches 2000: 180; Kenny 2001: 191). The successful stories, therefore, balance local leadership and federal support. Finding this equilibrium, then, is essential; and more than a few groups have achieved such a balance. The Coal Creek Watershed Foundation or the Coalition for the Valle Vidal provide two of many inspiring examples.

It is important to note that like restoration, collaboration should not be seen as a one size fits all solution, but rather a process where values and goals are negotiated for the betterment of both the community and the ecosystems within which it resides. Like restoration, collaborative efforts have the potential to create social capital and promote accountability, while creating multiple spaces for restoring community and nature. These processes depend upon participation in the development and enactment of environmental goals. This requires attention to a balance of

scientific insight, contextual concerns, and a plurality of values. It is in these moments and contexts, that I believe one can find useful case studies for evaluating the theories of environmental pragmatism.

### **Environmental Pragmatism: Pluralism and Applied Ethics**

Some environmental philosophers, such as Light, Katz, Manning, Minter, and others, believe that environmental ethics and philosophy face a serious problem. “The intramural debates of environmental philosophers” Light and Katz wrote “although interesting, provocative and complex, seem to have no real impact on the deliberations of environmental scientists, activists, and policy-makers” (Light and Katz 1996: 1; see also Minter 2005; Minter and Taylor 2002). Although, she might not count herself among pragmatists, Anna Peterson similarly explained that while “decades of work in environmental philosophy, ecotheology, [religion and ecology], and related fields have provided us with many good ideas. The problem is how to live by them” (Peterson 2006: 386). The question, then, is how to relate our theories to practice, context, and experience. Alternatively, our projects should explore how practice, context, and experience can shape our values, theories, and ethics.

Responding to this disconnection between philosophies, values, and applied practices, various scholars have turned to classical philosophies of pragmatism in search more applied and contextual environmental ethics. Environmental pragmatists maintain that the failure of environmental ethics results from “methodological and theoretical dogmatism” (Light and Katz 1996: 2; see also Light 2003; Minter 2005; Minter, Corley, and Manning: 2004; Minter and Manning 1999; Weston 2003). This perceived dogmatism, pragmatists have argued, is the outcome of continued focus on the divide between anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism. One can relate this divide to the distinction between the conservationism of Gifford Pinchot, which sought to maximize forest yields over time for the good of humans, to the preservationist

ethics of John Muir, which sought to preserve forests or wilderness for the sake of wilderness, not because it is any use to humans.

According to new environmental pragmatists, the legacy of environmental philosophy - by placing heavy emphasis on non-anthropocentrism, biocentrism, or intrinsic value - has emerged as an abstract field that is largely incomprehensible to those on the ground. On one hand, pragmatists have insisted that too much effort has been devoted to articulating monistic forms of ethics that reside within too narrow of a moral framework. In short, anthropocentric ethics are less acceptable. On the other hand, ethical variety aside, Katz and Light noted that much of environmental ethics has emerged in the form of abstract philosophical and linguistic exercises that are difficult to translate into the ordinary reality of “specific real-life problems of humanities relationship with the environment” (Light and Katz 1996: 2). Through abstraction, environmental philosophy has fallen short in providing workable approaches to solving issues or conflicts regarding the environment through a variety of means of conservation, restoration, preservation, and related policy.

Historically, environmental ethics has long sought to articulate the ways in which nature should be valued, and articulating environmental values is an important exercise. Through biocentrism, ecocentrism, or theories of intrinsic value, for example, ethicists such as Callicott or Paul Taylor have argued for ethical foundations upon which to construct one’s relationship with nature. The assumption throughout the majority of environmental ethics is right practices will naturally follow proper values. This move is not always a natural one to make, however, as Orr noted, the transition from “I know” (about environmental problems) to “I care” to “I will do something” is neither automatic nor straightforward (Orr 1992: 147). Unfortunately, he is right

and the empirical evidence does not support this goal. While many espouse environmental values, much fewer actually put them into daily action.

The disjuncture between the expressed environmental values and environmental practices in the United States and around the world, is well documented with increasing attention. While around 80% of Americans regularly express strong environmental concern, a much smaller proportion translate their environmental concern into concrete changes in their everyday practices. Fewer than 20% of Americans regularly participate in environmentally responsible behavior, e.g., recycling, reducing consumption, or activism. Political behavior also remains largely unaffected by expressed environmental values. In an October 2005 poll, 79% of respondents favored stronger environmental standards but only 22% said environmental issues play a major role in determining their votes (Duke Poll 2005, see also Kempton, Boster, and Hartley 1995). To date, a solid body of research has examined the reasons that people act environmentally and the barriers to pro-environmental behavior (Blake 1999; Wall 1995; Kollmus and Aageyman 2003; Orr 1992). Scholars in a few fields – predominantly environmental psychology, environmental education, and environmental policy, have produced most of this literature. While environmental ethics has devoted its energies to the values side of the equation, they have not spent a great deal of energy engaging the causes or solutions to this gap between values and practices.

According to Weston, environmental ethics has painted itself in a corner by searching for absolute value positions and assuming that those values will alter practices. Instead, for Weston, and I agree, ethics should avoid fixed fundamentals and seek process (Weston 1996; see also Weston 2001). Along these lines, ethics is an endeavor more akin to navigating the streams of a watershed than constructing the boat on which to stand or navigate. Through process,

pragmatism maintains, a variety of ethics can emerge from a diverse array of contexts, all equally valuable for conservation, restoration, or sustainability.

The rejection of absolute ethical foundations prevalent in environmental pragmatism draws heavily on the epistemological anti-foundationalism of classical American pragmatism. Although many trace antifoundationalism to Charles Sanders Peirce, Cornell West dated it back to Thoreau and Emerson, whom he sees as precursors to classical pragmatism (West 1989). Early pragmatists such as Dewey and Peirce questioned the Cartesian dualism so prevalent in early classical philosophy. Unlike Descartes, who articulated a two-tier theory of knowledge that rested upon the existence of a priori truths that were separate from the realm of human creation, Dewey, Peirce, and other pragmatists believed that our ideas of truth should not come from abstract epistemological heavens, but out of the ground of being and the world of experience. In order to work through the world of experience Dewey in particularly touted the test of the scientific method. Similarly, stemming from his critique of Cartesian dualism, Peirce insisted that philosophy and ethics must begin with doubt and work through processes toward better understandings of the world. In “How to Make Our Ideas Clear,” Peirce articulated an approach to philosophical ethics that rejected essential truth assumptions while working toward positions that might be seen, through trial and error, as more or less true (Peirce 1878). Along these lines, William James built on Peirce to argue that philosophy should explore problems by rooting itself in the lived experience of the daily world.

The pragmatist rejection of epistemological foundationalism, or what Cornell West called an “evasion” of epistemology-centered philosophy, inevitably led toward Dewey’s ardent embrace of pluralism or a “variety of knowledges” (West 1989: 98; see also Dewey 1929). Contemporary environmental pragmatists share a penchant for pluralism as a necessary stance

for understanding the various ways that environmental issues, conflict, and ethics play out on the ground. Building on pluralism, then, Light and Katz, have sought new strategies “for approaching environmental philosophy and environmental issues – [which] more accurately refer to a cluster of related and overlapping concepts, rather than to a single view” (Light and Katz 1996: 5). Taking a wide-view approach, environmental pragmatists believe in the possibility of a methodological pluralism that invokes openness to the plausibility of divergent ethical theories working together toward common goals. In other words, Utilitarians, ecofeminists, and ecological holists, for example, can potentially work toward the preservation of the same natural habitats, based on different foundational claims supporting their actions.

Through pluralistic anti-foundationalism, pragmatism and its environmentally concerned offspring do not seek to remove the foundation to stand for determining ethics or values; they just admit there is more than one place to stand. They argue that there are multiple grounds to stand upon to work toward the same goal.<sup>7</sup> With this argument, pragmatists contend that values and ethics do not descend from the a priori heavens, but instead emerge out of experience - through context, encounter, and even conflict.

Although some philosophers, such as Richard Rorty, take pragmatist antifoundationalism to extremes that potentially slip into relativism, environmental pragmatists tend toward more moderate approaches. A restrained, classical approach to pragmatism, while seeking plural values and ethics in context, maintains that experiences can expose some beliefs, values, and

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<sup>7</sup>In his groundbreaking essay “Should Trees Have Legal Standing,” Christopher Stone (1974) noted how natural objects might be permitted legal rights through multiple perspectives. Different uses and approaches to the environment, such as recreation, ranching, farming, logging, or preservation, for example do not make it impossible to pass legal positions on the environment, but certainly highlight the need for a common law to guide multiple relationships. Moreover, he later argued against monism by stating that we have to account for the variety of things whose considerateness commands some intuitive appeal: normal persons in common moral community, persons remote in time and space, embryos and fetuses, nations and nightingales, beautiful things and sacred things. . . . Trying to force all these diverse entities into a single mold . . . imposes strictures on thought that stifle the emergence of more valid approaches to moral reasoning.” (2003: 197)

ethics as more or less true. The writings of William James referred to empiricist positions as “middle-of-the-roadism” (James 1975: 13; for contemporary elaborations of James see Katz and Light 1996; Parker 1996). Environmental philosopher Kelly Parker explored James’s point by noting that our experiences of the world “can at any time expose our settled beliefs as false, or reveal an unsatisfactory vagueness or confusion in our concepts” (Parker 1996: 22).<sup>8</sup> The empiricist emphasis on experience is evident in Norton’s continued criticisms of Callicott who Norton sees as a moral monist guilty of tossing theories out of the ivory tower to the activists on the ground. These theories, he noted, often fail because they are not emergent from daily experience, nor are they tested over time in the context of either conflict or collaboration. (Norton 1996; 2002; 2005).

To Callicott’s credit, he has devoted a great deal of time to exploring how one might find a workable ethic within a variety of contexts. *Earth’s Insights* is a great example of this quest, where he worked through a variety of religious and cultural traditions in search of potentially useful cultural tools and ethical moorings for the development of cross cultural ethics. Throughout this journey, however, for Callicott evaluates these cultural systems against his ethical guide of Leopold’s land ethic. In this context, therefore, Callicott has a single ethical system he hopes to make work in various cultures, rather than exploring various cultures for varying ethics toward common ends. While recognizing cultural diversity, Callicott has strongly defended himself against ethical pluralism of pragmatism largely on the grounds that pluralism to easily slips into a relativism that would allow a range of things from “witch hunts to book

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<sup>8</sup> In their article “Environmental Ethics as Environmental Etiquette: Toward and Ethic-Based Epistemology” (1999), Jim Cheney and Anthony Weston similarly argue that environmental ethics should not proceed from extensions of value, but should instead emerge out of our experience with the world. Ethical positions, value judgments, and the like all must rise out of engagement with a pluralistic, and sometimes dissonant world (118). Because the world is pluralistic, our ethics can at times be falsified or therefore proven unsatisfactory. The goal then of ethics, they note, is not to articulate “the nature of things,” but to “explore and enrich the world” (ibid).

burnings,” where the philosopher is merely playing a game of “metaphysical musical chairs” (Callicott 2003: 210 – 211). Responding, however, by using the tools of method and science, or conservation biology, pragmatists have insisted that pluralism does not mean relativism, but simply recognizes the need for adaptation in context while being aware that some approaches are more true or workable than others. It also recognizes that science is equally influenced by cultural contexts, values, and interpretive frameworks.

One primary target of environmental pragmatist antifoundationism tends to be biocentric theories of intrinsic value. According to Weston, on one hand, value itself is a human construct that is difficult to assume without a human valuer (Weston 1996). Therefore, claims of inherent value independent of human valuation seem self-contradictory. On the other hand, and more importantly, because pragmatism touts process and context, the values and characteristics of any organism emerge from chains of relationships between that organism and its context. If an organism derives value from context, then again, the organism does not necessarily have value on its own terms. The Rio Grande cutthroat trout, for example, is valuable in part because of its evolutionary journey into the waters of New Mexico. In part, its value emerges from its fit in a very particular context.

The pragmatists resistance to intrinsic value theory stems from its larger critique of what some have labeled monistic approaches to environmental ethics. Monism, pragmatists have argued, immediately discounts a variety of value positions that might be useful in affecting real change. As Minter elaborated,

In rejecting “pragmatic considerations” they and other like-minded environmental philosophers [Callicott] turn their backs on the arguments that have proven historically successful in safeguarding environmental health and integrity – from hunters [and anglers] support for protective wetland legislation, to recreationists’ efforts to defend roadless areas in national forests to citizens for the environmental inheritance of their children and grandchildren. *An environmental ethics that seeks to de-privilege these and other*

*pragmatic reasons for supporting the environmental agenda is one committed to staying on the policy sidelines.* (Minteer 2002: 46, emphasis added).

Most pragmatists are fully aware that plural, contextual ethics can and do lead to conflict. They have also insisted, however, that intrinsic value claims offer no real resolution, particularly in a context where one or more stakeholder group does not speak that language.

Decisions must be made, and any adequate theory of valuation must recognize that valuation always entails multiple perspectives. This does not protect pragmatists from critique, but instead opens the door to more successful and effective deliberation and evaluation. Moreover, one could embrace conflict because only through conflict and conversation can more effective and applicable ethics emerge. Again, as opposed to absolute positions, the goal of ethics should be the creative mediation of issues in order to make life better for all involved (Weston 1985; 1996).

Nowhere is this pragmatist insistence on process and pluralism more evident than in the context of collaborative conservation, particularly where pluralism might tend toward greater accountability and mutual support. The case studies contained within this dissertation demonstrate on one hand how pluralism can potentially lead to innovative approaches to both community and ecosystem conservation. On the other hand, however, as other case studies demonstrate, particularly that of Florida's Ocklawaha River, pluralism can promote a functional stalemate on the question of restoration. Time will tell if conflict in that case will result in innovation, creative adaptation, and greater accountability. Thus far, however, time has not been kind to the processes of restoring the Ocklawaha.

Drawing upon the phenomenological approaches of Edmund Husserl or Maurice Merleau-Ponty, pragmatism seeks philosophy as emergent from being-in-the-world. Therefore, values and ethics rely upon the "situated knowledge" of the organism-in-the-environment (Parker 1996: 23;

see also Abram 1996; Haraway 1991; West 1989). Truth and value, according to William James, are impenetrably bound up in experiences which can range from cultural context to evolution (James 1975: 98). This applies to humans as much as Rio Grande cutthroat trout. Situated in history, or evolution, relations have the potential for more compelling and forceful stories and ethics. Understood along these lines, the evolutionary story of any species becomes important because it relates the vast chain of relationships to the identity and value of a species, for example the cutthroat (Parker 1996; West 1989).

If context provides the space for emergent ethics, then pragmatists have long sought a philosophy based upon lived experience, where human struggles for meaning and community become the source of values and moral guides. Environmental pragmatists have built on this pursuit of situated knowledge, by arguing for the multiple ways in which humans might value nature. If the environment provides the experiential framework, then valuation potentially turns toward the source of experience, i.e. the natural environment or bioregion. Following this logic, then, a variety of experiences can potentially give rise to value claims necessary for successful environmental ethics-in-practice. Weston and Evans have separately noted how these experiences might include, but are hardly limited to, fishing or hunting (Evans 2005; Weston 1996: 300 – 302; see also Hickman 1996; Kellert 1971). The case study evidence contained within this research attests to this reality. While the motives behind the activities might vary, it is important to note that the experiences and subsequent values can emerge as starting points for the pragmatic defense of environmental values (Weston 1996: 314).

Along these lines, Sandra Rosenthal and Rogene Buchholz drew upon Dewey's claims that experiences can have strong aesthetic or religious effects upon a person, which can then affect values, ethics, and morals. Nowhere is this clearer, they note, than in

Dewey's understanding of experiencing the world religiously as a way of relating oneself with the universe as the totality of conditions with which the self is connected. This unity can be neither apprehended in knowledge nor in reflection, for it involves such totality not as a literal content of the intellect, but as an imaginative extension of the self, not an intellectual grasp but a deepened attunement (Rosenthal and Buchholz 1996: 43, emphasis added).

It is important to note here, that religious experience does not necessarily connote theism, but instead emphasizes the power of the experience upon the individual. Further, it is worth reminding the reader that if the experience has religious effects upon the angler or restorationist, for example, the context of the surrounding culture plays a pivotal role in mediating those experiences.

Whether the sacred is constructed, encountered, or both, one can experience the world religiously in ways that broaden the view of the self into a larger context of the experience. An angler, for example, might start with the fish, then the bugs, then an expansive streamside ecology, which might move toward ecological concern. Such an approach not only follows Dewey and other classical pragmatists, but also finds elaboration in Norton's more contemporary concept of the "convergence hypothesis" which demonstrates that there are a variety of reasons and ways for engaging and valuing nature. According to Norton, varying foundations can potentially converge into a common and mutually agreed upon policy outcome or decision (Norton 1991; 1996; 1997, see also Minter and Manning 1999).

This move is important for environmental pragmatism and my argument here. While experiences of religion or nature are socially, politically, environmentally, or contextually mediated, the effects of those experiences upon the individual or group can be quite powerful. This point brings us back to earlier discussions of lived religion. If Orsi or Hall investigated religion where meaning is rhetorically and actively negotiated as humans attempt to make sense of their thrown-ness in the world, pragmatists have long sought philosophies situated in "the

midst of quotidian human struggles for meaning” (West 1989: 73). In both contexts, then, meaning, values, ethics, and religion, emerge from and in response to the plurality of daily experience.

Larry Hickman built on Deweyan pragmatism to argue that experiences in nature potentially affect the subject at the non-cognitive or religious level (Hickman 1996: 59 - 65). Hunting, fishing, or hiking, for example, are occasions for immense delight or something deeper. Affective or religious moments, he noted, potentially lead to something akin to Leopold’s concept of thinking like a mountain; a concept that some have attributed to a supposed religious conversion that Leopold experience upon seeing the “green fire” die in the eyes of a dying wolf (Hickman 1996: 65; Leopold 1949: 130; see also Callicott and Shaner 1989; Nash 1982; B. Taylor 1996; 2001; 2005). These experiences, therefore, highlight the importance of taking seriously the role of the human as an active participant in the world.

Exploring the participatory and experiential nature of democratic social ethics, Dewey likened them to gardening. If ethics is akin to gardening, then the connection to ecological restoration is more than apt, as it too requires attention, process, and ongoing engagement. Moreover, as noted, some view ecological restoration as a potentially powerful process for fostering democratic ideals and ecological citizenship. The engagement of civic society, through method and practice, is essential for contemporary environmental pragmatists and their classical predecessors. If procedure and pluralism are indispensable, so is the value of community. Varieties of pragmatism celebrate community as a space capable of engaging and solving complex problems. Ecological restoration, like democracy, provides one prospective avenue into adaptive management and engaged civic environmentalism in ways that extend beyond the watershed in question.

Democracy is not only the goal of pragmatism, it “is the precondition for the full application of intelligence to the solution of social problems” (Putnam 1992:180). However, highlighting the democratic process or methods of philosophy, pragmatists have been criticized for an overemphasis on methodology. Robin Eekersly rightly cautioned environmental pragmatists against an overemphasis on instrumentalism, while failing to consider the host of deep seated issues, values, or beliefs that might either bring people to the table of democracy or lead to the conflict itself (Eekersly 2002). While I see many valuable tools in both classical pragmatism and its environmental progeny, I agree with Eekersly’s caution against overemphasizing process.

Moreover, even if considering the multiple values, beliefs, experiences and “baggage that real people carry with them in particular contexts” as Eekersly reminded readers, some pragmatists like Norton have cautioned against the consideration of religious, spiritual, or deeply affective values in the democratic process (Eekersly 2002: 53; Norton 2005). Not only does Norton believe those values should be left out of the democratic process, but he does not believe that they are decisive in the processes of environmental decision making (Norton 2005). For Norton, it is not that religious values are unimportant; instead, they can be too divisive at the table.

While I agree that such deep seated or religious values might be divisive, we should not overlook their centrality in fishing, restoration, or civic environmentalism. Religious studies demonstrates that religious, cultural, and affective values are intertwined with a host of social, cultural, or political circumstances and therefore cannot be separated so neatly. Considering religious values or understanding how those values relate to decisions or motivations is vital for furthering the processes of civic environmentalism or conflict resolution. We need to consider

religious, spiritual, and affective values for evaluating processes of democracy or environmental conflict resolution. More importantly, we need to attend to values because they are often the catalyst for bringing people to the table - or what keeps them from coming to the table.

(Eckersley 2002: Wolf 2008).

While James Proctor highlighted the importance of public involvement and process, he rightly explains that “with public involvement,” he explained “almost without exception comes conflict.” (Proctor 1998: 347). Moreover, as Eckersley noted, “at the heart of these conflicts reside experiences, beliefs, values, and cultural histories that real people carry with them in particular contexts” (Eckersley 2002: 53). The qualitative research contained here, along with an increasing number of empirical studies, supports this thesis (Manning, Minter and Valliere 1999; Proctor 1998; see also Kempton, et al. 1999). Moreover, taking a religious studies approach through lived religion reveals that it is not enough to note the existence of these values, but to explore and understand where they come from. In these case studies, the interests and values are rooted in community, forms of engagement with nature (fishing), or a host of other cultural and historical narratives. Sometimes, then, values that might contribute to positive environmental decision making can have roots in more anthropocentric realms.

Along these lines, pragmatists are correct to criticize the heavy debate over anthropocentric/biocentric ethics. Moreover, Proctor noted that quantitative data demonstrates that this distinction does not accurately characterize differing public attitudes over management (Proctor 1998: 348; see also Shindler, et al. 1993: 37). However, pragmatists might fall short by focusing too much on process, while discounting the various avenues to the process.

Environmental ethicists – pragmatist or other - need to understand the wide array of values of nature, as well as the crucial sources of those values. Moreover, we need to evaluate the

relationship between those values and the potential environmental action or sustainable practices they might inspire. Only by doing so, can we better understand the range of perspectives among stakeholders while identifying the potentially unrecognized, yet shared values necessary for building ecological citizenship.

### **Conclusion**

Despite a strong emphasis upon content, context, and experience, environmental pragmatists in many ways fall short of their own advice to other ethicists. If they advocate context and experience, few actually test their theories in context and on the ground. It is interesting to note that those who do, however, find that religious, spiritual, and deeply affective value positions play a pivotal role in determining choices or actions regarding nature. For example, a 1999 study by Manning, Minter, and Valliere revealed that “nonmaterial values” of forests in Vermont played a pivotal role in shaping policy and conservation choices. Under the category of these “non-material values” were religiously driven stewardship ethics, mysticism, or spiritual understandings of nature, as well as deep aesthetic appreciation for nature (Manning et al. 1999; see also Minter and Manning 1999). Similarly, research by Aaron Wolf in the realms of water conflict resolution insisted, “part of the answer lies not in the world of rationality, but rather in the spiritual, ethical, and moral dimensions” (Wolf 2008). Incorporating these components, he continued, “may offer not only new understanding of current disputes, but also models, tools, and strategies for more effective conflict management,” or I might add conservation and restoration (Wolf 2008: 2). Just as pragmatists need to be careful about too much focus on process, Wolf makes the same point to those working in conflict resolution. I agree with him; and in so doing, however, I believe that we need to take note of the social realities and experiences behind those values – such as fishing or ecological restoration.

As noted in my introduction, there are two meta-goals of this dissertation: to understand how communities, through religion experience and values, engage the processes and practices of civic environmentalism; and 2) to make our work as scholars more applicable and engaged to those very practices themselves. The goals are as much about how communities encounter and construct religion as they are about how scholars construct and engage religion in the name of engaged scholarship. Exploring these two questions, we should not omit religious values because they are messy and difficult, as Norton insisted, but should include them in the processes and practices of engaged environmentalism. In agreement with Wolf, I believe it is imperative that we recognize the power and potential of affective, non-rational, or religious values of nature derived through particular experiences in nature. While the root of the values might differ, the values themselves often overlap.

As I have highlighted, despite a few decades of important work, environmental ethics and philosophy continue to fall short. Empirical evidence demonstrates that despite increased awareness and valuations of nature there remains a vast gap between environmental values and lived practices. In part, I believe, this gap exists because the theorists have failed to truly engaged the situations at hand and understand the vast diversity of value systems at play in environmental conflict, sustainability, or conservation initiatives.

In the conclusion to follow, noting this gap, I will emphasize the necessary inclusion of religious experiences and values in the creation of communities of mutual concern – or social capital. Today's is a world where scholars like Robert Putnam have argued that social capital is declining and individualism is on a rise. Additionally, in the face of the failure of traditional environmental ethics, fishing or restoration ecology offer experiential moments that can create new spaces of social capital useful for closing the gap between expressed environmental values

and lived environmental practices. Seeking experientially based environmental social capital, I will again ask what it means and what it will take to fully become native to place, through the engagement and restoration of both natural and human communities.

## CHAPTER 8

### FINAL CASTS: FROM RELIGIOUS RECREATION TO RITUALS OF RESTORATION

Format “I don’t know exactly what fly fishing teaches us, but I think its something we should know” (Gierach 1990: 20).

“Nature introduces children [and adults] to the idea – to the *knowing* – that they are no longer alone in this world, and that realities and dimensions exist alongside their own” (Louv 2005: 297).

“Whenever I visit a trout stream, fly fishing empowers the process. Fly fishing positions us so superbly to feel and wonder – abstractly, reverently, analytically, poetically, whimsically, or in any other way within our capabilities – that it would be a tragic loss of intellectual and emotional opportunity if the sport had never arisen as a human pursuit” (Schullery 2008: vii).

#### **Casting Education**

As fishing guide Karen Dennison explained her approach to guiding anglers on the waters of New Mexico, she noted how she made a concerted effort to educate her clients about the importance of stream health, environmental issues, biodiversity, and the future of native species. When guiding a new angler, she admitted, despite her “affinity for wild and native fish,” she tries to be happy for her clients when they catch a hatchery-reared rainbow trout. However, she noted, her “bias shows . . . This usually leads to a conversation, about the fish, the history of the fish, the environment of the fish, they all come into play. I make a point to distinguish the difference between the stocked, wild, and native fish.” Guides like Dennison cherish the opportunity to use guiding as an opportunity to educate clients about the ecological issues of New Mexico or the planet. When guiding children, she commented further, however, it is important to simply get them out into nature, allow them to have a positive experience fishing, get them “hooked into the sport.” This can go along way toward opening potential connections to the natural world. She asked me, “Have you read that book by a man named Richard Louv?” (Dennison, interview: 23 June 2006). The reference to Louv was more frequent than I imagined, with more than half of the

people I formally interviewed and countless others encountered in my fieldwork noting his work and the message it held for the importance of fishing.

For fishing guides like Dennison, watershed coalition leaders such as Barry Thacker (CCWF) or Bob Andry (SRR), fishing can, as fly fishing historian Paul Schullery explains, “invite us into many kinds of wonder” (Schullery 2008: viii). These forms of wonder help to situate oneself in the world, they aid in homemaking. They potentially negotiate worlds of meaning, which is why many describe fishing along the lines of religion. Moreover, these experiences of meaning open up avenues for ecological education and awareness, which some then translate into varieties of pro-environmental behavior. Moreover, for those whose fishing might spark participation in a local trout group or watershed coalition, fishing provides a way into a form of social capital, collaborative work, or coalitions of the unlike, if you will. For all these reasons, I chose fishing as the “entryway activity,” into all of these conversations surrounding religion, environmental values, and lived practices. Fishing is hardly the only such activity, but it is an important one because millions of people do it, many of them note its unique ability to connect them to nature in powerful ways, and for their numbers anglers tend to devote a great amount of time and resources toward fish and water related conservation concerns.

### **Fighting a Deficit of Nature**

According to Richard Louv, children today suffer from what he calls “nature deficit disorder.” In his national bestselling book *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder* Louv cites a statistic from Sandra Hoffereth at the University of Maryland that reveals from “1997 to 2003, there was a decline of 50 percent in the proportion of children nine to twelve who spent time in such outside activities as hiking, walking, fishing, beach play, and gardening” (Louv 2005: 34). This “de-naturing of childhood” has serious

consequences that range from physical and emotional health to environmental conservation, ecological restoration, or sustainability (31).

Children are not the only ones suffering from a disconnection with nature or a decline in engagement with natural spaces. Oliver Pergrams and Patricia Zaradic note a “fundamental and pervasive shift away from nature-based recreation” (Pergrams and Zaradic 2008: 2295). They base this claim on four primary variables: 1) recorded visits to public lands and national parks, 2) hunting and fishing license sales, 3) indicators of time spent camping, and 4) indicators of time spent hiking and backpacking. Some of have critiqued their study as too narrow. For example, many people enjoy the outdoors without going to national parks or buying hunting and fishing licenses.<sup>1</sup> Despite critiques, concerns are legitimate. When talking to those who work in the industry side of fly fishing, such as merchandise sales, magazines, and travel, I heard similar comments about fishing. Although, Brad Pitt certainly popularized fly fishing in *A River Runs Through It*, longtime editor of *Fly Fisherman*, John Randolph, expressed concern in an interview. Not only are license sales declining, he explained, but so too are magazine subscriptions (Randolph, interview: 2 July 2007). Randolph’s concern extends well beyond magazine sales. Because he believes that angling (or other outdoor recreational activities) can indeed have a positive impact on conservation and sustainability, he worries about the environmental implications of an increasing nature deficit, in children and adults alike.

*Last Child in the Woods* was a national bestseller, received the 2008 Audubon Medal, and garnered significant press and attention. However, Louv is hardly the first to point out these issues regarding the benefits of engaging nature for personal health, education, community well-being, and environmental ethics. Throughout his career, Paul Shepard explored what it meant to

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<sup>1</sup> These critiques were most evident on a listserve thread for [www.environmentalstudies.org](http://www.environmentalstudies.org) .

be human in relationship to the natural world. According to Shepard, we owe our cultural reality to our biological legacy. This biological legacy is rooted in human evolutionary history and the human legacy of hunter/gatherers and pastoralists who were more connected, on a day to day basis, with the workings of the natural world. Our increasing disconnection from nature, through agriculture into modern technology, has detrimental impacts that range from social isolation to psychological trauma, not to mention concerns surrounding long term human and ecological sustainability. In the opening pages to *Coming Home to the Pleistocene*, Shepard reminds readers that “the best expressions of our humanity were not invented by civilization but by cultures that preceded it, that the natural world is a set of contexts that we can more fully realize our dreams” (Shepard 1998: 6). Shepard set the stage for Louv with his own explanation that children vitally need to engage in the “spirit of place,” for such engagement contributes to the development of the individual in the midst of society (Shepard 1977: 23). For Shepard, close contact and interaction with nature are essential to being human. Similarly, E.O. Wilson and Stephen Kellert believe that the affinity for nature is potentially a genetic predisposition disrupted by technology and cultural artifact, the goal then they believe is to find ways to get back to nature and encourage “biophilia,” or “love of nature” once again. Gary Paul Nabhan throughout his work on bioregionalism, food, and culture, insisted with Stephen Trimble in *Geography of Childhood: Why Children Need Wild Places* that human interactions with nature must occur most prominently with children, for childhood is the pivotal moment when one begins to conceptualize one’s relationship to the larger world (Nabhan and Trimble 1995). These are but a few influential thinkers, whom Louv builds upon and is indebted to.

What is interesting, however, about the popularity of Louv’s work, is that while engagement with nature might be declining, Louv’s argument seems to have struck a chord with

people. His book is so popular, in part, because it is written in an accessible manner. He provided examples that people can relate to, such as the debate between homeowner associations and children who want to build tree houses. Moreover, I can't help but wonder, or hope, that as awareness of environmental issues rises, so to does a desire to return to nature. I believe fishing might provide one such avenue. Louv agreed when he explains that while "fishing and hunting are messy – to some morally messy – removing all traces of that experience from childhood does neither children nor nature any good" (Louv 2005: 24). In part, Louv admitted, the power of nature-based activities, like fishing, comes from their potential to inform one's spiritual and ethical life (295). The "messy" side of fishing or hunting provides a ground to engage the world of ethics, whereas the experience and the spaces of experience are the ground for the spiritual.

### **Fishing is More than Fishing (Piscator non Solum Piscatur)**

In what historian Paul Schullery called one of the "wisest and most gracious," yet "little known" fishing books, in *Thy Rod and Thy Creel* Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Odell Shepard describes a beautiful trout by calling it a "little sunrise" and "baby angel" that "enlarged my former conception of the splendors of the world" (Schullery 2008: 166; O. Shepard 1930: 116-117). As I trace in Chapter 3, such sentiments are not uncommon in the angling world. For some, these moments, where the beauty of fish and their aquatic homes enlarge one's conception of the splendors of the world work in religious ways where meaning-making, and world-orientation occur. While the angling religious quest is as much about the process and culture of fishing as the fish themselves, for others however, angling religiosity should extend beyond the fish and hence such moments of world enlargement carry with them an ethical mandate.

Most notably famed fly fishing writer and conservation pioneer Roderick Haig-Brown believed fishing offered an avenue for contemplating the natural world and the human relationship to it. For him, fishing was really just a "way to see and know the fish and through

them somehow to become more intimate with the land about the streams their presence graced” (Robertson 1984: 100; see also Keeling 2002: 253). Knowledge, however, is not enough. Haig-Brown spent a good portion of his career articulating not only the spiritual benefits of rivers and fishing but the need to protect and conserve the very places where one’s wonder of the world might expand. If fishing is a spiritual process, for him, “conservation is a religious concept – the most universal and fundamental of all such concepts . . . without moral concepts and without a sense of responsibility for the future of the human race, the idea of conservation could have little meaning” (Haig-Brown 1961: 21). Science should guide conservation, but without spiritual values and religious grounding, the analytic world of science would not hold water.

As I frequently heard in the field, fishing not only opens up worlds of wonder, but offers occasions for ecological education. Almost every angler I interviewed noted how their fishing had encouraged them learn more about the ecosystems of the fish they sought. Karen Dennison, a fly fishing guide who gave up her career as a laboratory scientist, explained that she uses fishing to teach basic ecology to her clients, particularly when she is working with children or youth fishing programs. “Fishing provides the best hands-on teaching tool.” Fishing can be fun, engaging, and educational (Dennison, interview: 23 June 2006).

Now, don’t let the angling applause fool you. It is and can be quite controversial. As I note in Chapter 3, fly fishing in particular suffers from a syndrome of elitism that should be rethought, particularly in light of multi-stakeholder collaboration with other anglers. Moreover, fishing – whether catch-and-kill or catch-and-release – is a common target of animal ethics and a source of great debate. This is not the place to engage such a complex discussion, however. For an insightful primer into that discussion, I recommend the work of fly fishing’s premier historian Paul Schullery, particularly his most recent work *If Fish Could Scream: An Angler’s Search for*

*the Future of Fly Fishing* (2008). Fishing, like hunting, and unlike other forms of outdoor recreation such as backpacking, bird watching, or surfing, carries with it an inherent level of violence. For some this is troubling, for others it provides an opportunity to more fully engage, appreciate, and grapple with the human relationship to the natural world. Just like in ecological restoration, humans must fully comprehend the violence of fishing. In so doing, I believe that one way of paying back that debt is through activities of restoration ecology.

Ecological restoration, however, does more than simply allow one to give back to nature, to streams, to watersheds, and to fish, but it can create opportunities for collaborative, multi-stakeholder work. If fly fishers, for example, suffer from a case of elitism, then perhaps such multi-stakeholder work would prove fruitful for “getting along” with other anglers as Tom McGuane suggested they should do (McGuane 1999: xii). As I trace in the previous chapter, and as Andrew Light explained, ecological restoration not only works to “heal nature,” but can potentially restore human relationships (Light 2002; 2004). The potential truth of this statement was evident in my field work, particularly in the Valle Vidal. While I went there to explore native trout restoration, I found on numerous occasions that anglers were working alongside hunters, ranchers, and even children to rebuild the banks of Costilla or Comanche Creek, both streams whose structure had been overgrazed and trampled by elk, grazing cattle, and overuse.

While fly fishers often tout fly fishing as the form of freshwater angling most likely to contribute to conservation or restoration, I don’t believe there is anything inherent about fly fishing that makes it so. Perhaps, due to other socio-economic considerations (i.e. fly fishers tend to be more affluent, educated, and have more free time, they have the time and energy to devote to volunteer work) fly fishers might contribute more time and effort to trout and other freshwater

conservation.<sup>2</sup> However, such elitism should be shed, as all anglers would do well to work together.

What is important is not so much the mode of fishing, or fishing at all, but the occasion to get outside and engage natural spaces. Fishing is a “gateway activity” which can expand one’s wonder and appreciation for nature. It can potentially be used as an educational tool for children and adults, alike. Wonder and knowledge combined, might in turn encourage pro-environmental behavior. Here values of nature find root in practice and experience, which then are engaged through other practices such as restoration or other forms of local grassroots environmental politics.

In Chapter 6, I note the concept of “distancing” as highlighted by environmental philosophers Thomas Princen and Michael Maniates (Princen, Maniates, and Conca: 2002). According to Princen, Maniates, or Anna Peterson, often individuals and communities fail to enact potential environmental values because they feel helpless and the issues seem too large (Peterson 2008). Other people might not practice pro-environmental behavior because they do not see how certain issues relate to them. These points encompass distancing. Fishing, or other outdoor activities, provides starting points for potentially overcoming some of these barriers to pro-environmental behavior. As Mike Maurer, the president of New Mexico Trout explained in an interview,

Fishing gives you a way into conservation issues. It gives a focus. The issues stretch across a map that fills the whole book. Fishing is sort of concentrated or focused. You can focus a conservation ethic. I mean, you can be concerned and be a conservationist, but sometimes by God how can you choose when there are so many different things and issues that are important. The list of environmental concerns is staggering. You could run yourself ragged

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<sup>2</sup> One would do well to initiate an extensive quantitative study of angling, angling preferences, socio-economics of anglers, and their contributions to fresh and saltwater conservation, preservation, or restoration. Such a study would be immensely helpful for angling groups and other grassroots environmental organizations. As far as I can find, no such study exists.

trying to do them all and keep up with a literature. So I think, you know, I realize there are other things that are important. It's the thing I personally find most important, where I can focus my own energy (Maurer, interview: 21 July 2006)

Maurer hit the nail on the head with this comment. Fishing facilitates one of many ways around issues of helplessness or distancing. While others are increasingly discussing sustainability, home energy use, local food, which are all important and I devote energy to them in other areas of my own research, we must not forget that biodiversity, water quality, and wilderness areas (no matter how constructed or restored they are) remain essential endeavors in the long list of environmental concerns.<sup>3</sup> Here, in the varieties of fishing, are potential practices and experiences that can shape environmental values and behavior. And, if the fishing is done religiously, as Haig-Brown believed, the affective or spiritual values emergent from fishing provide the bedrock for successful conservation initiatives.

### **Recasting Religion**

Haig-Brown is not the first to insist on rooting the science and practice of conservation in religion and spirituality. Lynn White argued that religion was not only the cause but the solution to the world's ecological issues (White 1967). Aldo Leopold grounded his land ethic in a combination of science and the affective, and J. Baird Callicott continues to build on Leopold's land ethic by exploring the moral insights of religion in search of a successful approach to environmental ethics (Leopold 1974; Callicott 1994). Others, such as John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker, have devoted their careers to finding resources of environmental ethics found within the world's religious traditions. More recently, Bron Taylor has been exploring the

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<sup>3</sup> As I completed this paragraph, I received an email notice about a new United States Forest Service program devoting \$3 million to over 70 fish habitat protection and restoration programs. Recognizing the need to fix crumbling stream-banks and dilapidated culverts, and to improve water quality for brook trout and other aquatic species, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently provided more than \$3 million to support 70 fish habitat projects in 31 states across the nation. With an additional \$7.8 million in partner contributions, the projects will restore and enhance stream, lake, and coastal habitat to improve recreational fishing and help recover endangered species. See [www.fishhabitat.org](http://www.fishhabitat.org) for more information.

emergence of what he calls a “global civic earth religion” that is as much rooted in secular culture as it is in the world’s religious traditions (Taylor 2008). Throughout all of this work, religious traditions and beliefs, cultural customs and practices provide central components for locating successfully enacted environmental ethics.

With the exception of Taylor, who has skillfully ridden the waves of surfing spirituality in some of his work, what distinguishes my approach to religion and environmental ethics from these previous projects is a few things. I am looking for religion outside of religion, so to speak. If, as I argue in Chapter 2, scholars of religion, such as Hall and Orsi, are turning to the lived world of everyday religion in order to understand religious belief, practice, and culture, then perhaps those concerned with religion and environmental ethics should do the same thing. The lived religion approach to religion highlights practice. Environmental ethics should equally be seeking lived approaches to ethics.

Up to this point, much of the work on religion and environmental ethics has operated, as Anna Peterson succinctly pointed out, under the assumption that if the proper values of nature can be located in and articulated out of religion, then right practices will follow (Peterson 2007). Peterson doubted this correlation between values and practices. In doing so she cited, among other studies, a recent survey by Duke University that reveals while more than 80 percent of Americans express a strong concern for the natural world, fewer than 20 percent of those Americans engage regularly in any form of pro-environmental behavior (Duke 2005). For Peterson, our values must find root in our practice. I agree. While texts and philosophies are crucial for sorting through the messy worlds of ethics, Peterson wondered, how we can close the gap between our expressed values and lived practices. If she asks how our values might impact our practices, I cannot help but wonder how our practice might influence our values. Those

concerned with religion and ecology would do well to consider these questions. In part this is why I am advocating the use of approaches to religious studies such as lived religion, because they take practice and materiality as the ground for religious values and ethics.

One may ask, however, why not look at traditional religious practice then? Why fishing? Through fieldwork, textual analysis, and historical evaluation, I have found that fishing, for example, is seen as an equally legitimate religious arena, at least by the practitioners. If anglers use the language of religion to describe their devotion to what some merely call a sport, as a scholar of religion I feel it is our duty to investigate those pronouncements. Religion is not relegated to churches, synagogues, or temples. Everyday life as Robert Orsi, David Chidester, or Tom Tweed have variously explored, is the space of religious belief, community, and practice. Humans, in their quests for meaning or homemaking, continually rethink and redefine the terrain of religion. As scholars we must take note of those innovations.

Tom Tweed rightly explained that while religion is quite fluid while simultaneously locative. Religion aids the religious in movement while marking boundaries – perhaps by making space sacred or restoring degraded spaces. As a scholar writing about water related activities, I am intrigued by Tweed’s use of aquatic tropes to describe religion. In fact, Tweed explained that aquatic metaphors are essential for exploring religion because “whatever else religions do, they move across time and space. They are not static. And they have effects. They leave traces. They leave trails” (Tweed 2006: 62). Religions, no matter the variety, he believes are aquatic flows. He is correct to note that through flows, religion helps to secure ethics, foster homemaking, and negotiate one’s relationship to the world. However, as Manuel Vasquez rightly pointed out, these flows are not totally deterritorialized (Vasquez 2008). They are instead pushed upon and restricted by a variety of other flows, such as geographic, economic, political, or social forces.

He wrote that “we need a set of tropes that highlight the fact that places are always interconnected and marked with crisscrossing relations of power. This is precisely where the metaphor of network can be fruitful, allowing us to embed space and the practice of place making in dynamic fields of domination and resistance” (Vasquez 2008). Pondering Vasquez’s network approach to religion, I cannot help but push the aquatic metaphor from the flows to the spaces of flow. If religion is the water, then the banks of a stream are the network that somewhat dictate the movement of the water. Flowing in the banks of a stream, the water can resist or erode. The water can rise above the bank and expand into a floodplain or it can recede in a drought to barely a trickle, all the while working with, against, and through the networks of the riverbanks.

Religions like, cultures, negotiate boundaries. The banks of the river provide those boundaries. Streams, rivers, watersheds, offer connected yet expanding boundaries through which one might conceive of community or bioregion, the spaces where one engages their social, religious, or environmental concerns. The water of the river or stream is the stuff of religion. It represents the cultural flows in the human quest for meaning. All rivers have sources, in springs, and just like the religious, the angler often seeks those sources of rivers and of religion. They are, as John Randolph mused, the “natural paradigms of life’s need for form and meaning” (Randolph 2002: 70). In those quests, the religious negotiate boundaries, while exchanges, which can be conflicting or collaborative, take place.

The interface of the water with the stream bank, between religion and the elements of the world is, I believe, where those concerned with religion and environmental ethics should turn their gaze. This is the nexus of values and practice. This is the space of religious creativity and innovation, compliance as much as resistance. This is the space where humans respond to the

changing conditions of the world around them. And the issues are changing, for some those concerns are familial, for others they are ethnic, for my informants the concerns are environmental. Responding to each set of concerns takes different tools. Therefore, as scholars of religion our definitions and approaches to religion must be fluid enough to consider these variations.

Through culture and religion, humans are perpetually negotiating boundaries (Albanese 1999: 4). As scholars, we are also perpetually negotiating the boundaries of religious description as we attempt to make sense of the worlds of the religious. However, in doing so, I believe that like the stuff of religion, our scholarly definitions of religion demand fluidity and the ability to shift as we respond to the religious pronouncements and practices of our subjects and informants. For an angler who would rather find god on a stream than in a church, the stream bank or the river bed becomes the space of religious experience. Perhaps that streamside spiritual encounter becomes the source of not only community practice but ethical moorings. We should critically explore those.

We live in a time when environmental concerns are on the rise – global climate change is garnering more attention daily, endangered species are becoming extinct, deforestation continues at unprecedented rates, and the list can go on. Humans, then, are responding to these issues in new, unique, and innovative ways and often using the tropes and tools of religion to explain their activities, motivations, and goals. If we are concerned with the nexus of religious values and environmental practices, we should take note of this reality.

For so many, the sport of fishing is so much more than sport. It, as Randolph explained in *Becoming a Fly Fisher*, a religious practice and spiritual quest that leads from enjoyment to education and then engagement to the point that

. . . the river has taken possession of him [sic]; the ardor he has had for fish now includes the river itself. He becomes its voyeur, then its companion, and finally its champion, its defender. He will fight to preserve its fish, its beauty, and most importantly its health. It has become his river, a member of his family and more. Elder fly fishers are the earth's true river ecologists, for they know how much there is to lose, and how it is lost. (Randolph 2002: 258).

In an interview, I asked Randolph about this passage. In his response he lamented the loss of the elders and the dearth of young, concerned anglers, also mentioning Louv.

Fishing in all its varieties can be an entryway activity into something considerably more than simply fishing. Therefore, I believe that in a time when nature deficit is on the rise, we should not only shift our gaze of religious studies to activities like fishing because they are interesting topics, but because they might provide entryway activities for re-engaging the natural world, and doing so religiously. Here practices might give rise to values, which can in turn influence pro-environmental behavior.

Early models of religion and ecology, while essential to the field, have typically sought guidance in the texts and philosophies of traditional religions. Often they assumed that religious values always dictate practices. And they do to some degree. However, as scholars are realizing, we need to explore what religious communities do in their everyday lives. Textual sources are certainly crucial. For many, the text is the starting point of religious belief and practice. For some, however, experiences provide the bedrock of religious belief and community. We should look at how those experiences shape belief and values. Even when I am citing texts from fly fishers, much of that angling writing is not scriptural interpretation, but essays, poems, and musings on one's most recent day of fishing. The text is rooted in practice, rather than the practice being rooted in text. Such an approach, I believe, is something akin to what Anthony Weston and Jim Cheney emphasized in their ethics-based epistemology rather than an

epistemology-based ethics (Cheney and Weston 1999).<sup>4</sup> This brings me back around to my intrigue with the philosophies of American Pragmatism, particularly as most recently advocated by environmental ethicists.

### **Piscatorial Pragmatism**

Throughout this work I have argued that I agree that pro-environmental behavior must be rooted in pro-environmental values, which perhaps the most promising forms might indeed be articulated in the realms of religion and spirituality. However, uncertain of the direct correlation between values and practices, I also believe that environmental values must be rooted in practice and experience. If fishing provides a practice and an entryway experience in nature that can educate on science and ecology, if it provides experiences of a potentially religious nature, and those in turn shape one's values toward nature, then perhaps those values might in turn find practical realization, not in more fishing, but through the engagement of local grassroots environmental politics or ecological restoration. In other words, here I see a potential move from practice and experience to values back to practice.

Since the late 1990s, a cohort of environmental philosophers has been attempting to rethink the role of environmental philosophy in formulating successfully applied ideas and ethics. In doing so, they have turned the philosophical terrain of American pragmatism. Historian and philosopher James Kloppenberg correctly stated that “numerous contemporary thinkers have invoked pragmatism to bolster a wide range of political arguments” such as gender, race, law (Kloppenber 1996: 125). We can now add the environment to that list.

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<sup>4</sup> They write that ethical action is first an “attempt to open up possibilities, to enrich the world . . . Ethics is pluralistic, dissonant, discontinuous – not extensionist . . . The task of ethics is to explore and enrich the world” (117-119). Ethics, they argue, is based on upon practice and engagement. Places become sacred through practice and based on a world of participation.

Much of this move toward pragmatism is a response to a perceived failure of environmental philosophy to develop applicable environmental ethics. While environmental philosophers, ethicists, or scholars of religion and ecology/nature have indeed formulated some inspiring means of articulating the value of nature, there appears to be a gap in the application of those values into environmentalism, practices of sustainability, and so forth. Evaluating this gap, then, pragmatism has offered some helpful outlets, primarily because it is a philosophy that seeks not necessarily to apply values to practices, but seeks philosophical insight or ethical guidance based on an in-this-world approach. This approach appeals to me as a potential avenue for closing the gap between values and practices on two levels.

First and foremost, whether we are defining religion or seeking religion based environmental ethics, pragmatism intrigues me as a methodological approach to our scholarship. In many ways, a pragmatist approach to scholarship is akin to the lived religion approaches to religion. Both seek insight in the workings of experience and the everyday world, as opposed to abstract theoretical formulations. In fact, Tom Tweed admitted his work could be “understood as pragmatist” because he works through theories that are embodied in the everyday realities of the religious (Tweed 2006: 8). These theories of religion are rooted in place, move with the flows of culture, and adapt to the changing realities of the world. Chidester, Orsi, Hall, and all those whom I stand on to construct my own descriptions of religion take the same approach by seeking religion as it is emergent from and deployed within the quotidian realities of life.

Second, however, I believe that beyond a method for developing definitions of religion or ethics we need to at least explore the pragmatist approach to environmental ethics because I believe that ethics and values are more successfully enacted when they are correlated to the everyday workings and experiences of all those upon the sustainability of this planet is

dependant: everyday people. While we sometimes operate within common cultural frames, use common languages, and common religions, individuals and communities experience the world in their own ways. Our ethics should apply to those experiences. It is not enough, as Bryan Norton reminded us, to do the work of applied philosophy, where the resolution of environmental problems comes from scholars “throwing fully formed theories and principles over the edge of the ivory tower, to be used as intellectual armaments by the currently outgunned environmental activists, to aid them against the economic philistines in the political street wars that determine the fate of natural environments” (Norton 1995: 345). While Norton’s language is maybe overly harsh he has a point. Unfortunately, as I noted in the previous chapter, Norton seemed to be equally guilty of throwing philosophical language out of the academic window. He, no more than Callicott or others he has written against, constructs his theories out of the lived reality of environmental conflict. The same goes for Light, who has written quite a bit about ecological restoration. While he has observed restoration efforts, there is little evidence he engages them by getting his own feet wet, so to speak.

We, as scholars, need to evaluate our approaches to environmental ethics and find ways that allow our theories and ethical formulations to make sense and function in the midst of the variety of environmental struggles taking place today. Our theories, in other words, need to correspond to the experiences of those working for river restoration or native species, for example. If lived religion theorists are seeking to define religion as emergent from the street, our ethics need to emerge from the midst of environmental conflict, ecological restoration, or biodiversity concerns, to name a few. Ethics should make sense in the context of experience. This is, in part, a pragmatist approach.

Beyond having ethics that make sense in light of experience, pragmatism seems useful for furthering this inquiry into issues surrounding the gap between values and practices and the relationship of those values to prior experiences in nature. After all, throughout my fieldwork I often heard tales of experiences in nature that shaped ones values. As one angler explained

I think about fish. I am a church-goer. I believe that the lord is my savior and so forth. You think about God on the river too. You get out there and wonder how it all came to be. You look at the bugs. The transformations of the land. . . But fishing, you see the effects of cattle on the bank. Campfires along the stream. All these people use nature, degrade it and don't think about the next guy or next generation. That is one reason I joined New Mexico Trout. I enjoy going out with the Forest service folks. I try to volunteer for everything I can. It is encouraging to see progress, such as buck and pole fencing along the Guadalupe River. You see nature recovering quite quickly . . . The guys that go out now are dedicated fisherman, but that is what leads them to get involved in volunteer projects (Day, interview: 21 June 2006).

Here fishing does more than facilitate values, but encourages an engagement of those values through volunteer or grassroots work. Therefore, if ethics and values are to impact behavior they should maybe take root in real-life experience. This is part of the pragmatist message. Individuals are always enmeshed in social conditions. They make their decisions based on a variety of socio-cultural experiences; our approaches to applicable environmental ethics should take note of those experiences. Along these lines, pragmatism promotes pluralism and process rather than top-down mandates.

This does not mean, however, that anything goes as some have critiqued of pragmatism. Indeed, these critiques are valid in some cases, depending on the pragmatist in question. More contemporary forms of pragmatism, especially the work of Richard Rorty or Stanley Fish, do indeed move into the realm of deconstructive postmodernism, with emphases on the historicity of knowledge and discourse as the marker of experience.<sup>5</sup> Rorty has expressed distrust of

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<sup>5</sup> In Rorty (1979), he insisted that science was merely another "genre of literature," and that objective knowledge is impossible to find. Elsewhere, in "Dewey Between Hegel and Darwin" (1994) Rorty was critical of Dewey and James for their insistence on experience, as he saw experience as predicated on language. However, other

experiences in favor of language and discourse, whereas Dewey believed that experience was the precondition for language (Rorty 1979: xl, xii; Dewey 1938: 74).<sup>6</sup> By celebrating pragmatism, I tend toward the more classical pragmatist such as Dewey and Peirce that emphasize the world of experience and the test of method.

As explained in the previous chapter, pragmatism by highlighting experience first, tends toward epistemological anti-foundationalism. In other words, pragmatists resist the idea of fixed, a priori truths, and unchanging moral criteria. In part, this is why Norton rejected the idea of throwing pre-fabricated environmental ethics out of the window to environmental activists. While Callicott, as he explained in *Earth's Insights*, recognized the need to have an environmental ethic that is culturally flexible, he also argued that environmental ethics need some form of foundation upon which to act and make decisions. For Callicott, this is science, conservation biology, and Leopold's land ethic. I agree with Callicott that the best available scientific evidence should guide environmental decision making, particularly in difficult situations where pluralistic discourse leads to a stalemate such as the one on the Ocklawaha River.

Sometimes, process does not work, so you need some flexibly foundational framework upon which to make environmental decisions. I believe that this is in line with forms of pragmatism where experience and the test of method, over-time, reveal potential truths that can guide action in particular contexts. Moreover, conservation biology, as evident in the notion of adaptive management, is certainly flexible and adaptive over time as it responds to restoration

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contemporary pragmatists, such as Richard Bernstein and Hilary Putnam, have challenged Rorty's dismissal of experience in favor of language. For Bernstein (1966/1971) experience is the foundational point of knowledge, which carries with it social and political implications. Putnam (1990) countered Rorty by arguing that what it is to be human is rooted in experience and engagement with the world.

<sup>6</sup> In *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938) Dewey wrote that "a universe of experience is a precondition of a universe of discourse" (74).

projects or changing environmental conditions. I see this approach as moderately foundational, somewhat like the riverbed of religious networks. There is a foundation there, but as new evidence or experiences emerge, that riverbed can indeed shift.

What appeals to me most about pragmatism, is the emphasis on practice, engagement, and experience. For some, such as Norton as I noted in the previous chapter, the pragmatist breed of antifoundationalism means that value claims are not possible or should be removed. I do not agree with this. I believe that values are crucial. However, scholars cannot always expect to articulate the values and ethics that lay people should follow. Instead, those values should be, and often are, rooted in particular experiences of the world. Yes, values can and do shape action. But they seem to do so more decisively when they are tethered to familiar or personal experience rather than abstract philosophical norms. Again, experiences can and do shape values, which in turn can potentially impact behavior. But, these values are in line with the lived religion approach, emergent from the individual or community's need to deal with pressing problems of daily life. The values, in this sense, have a certain instrumental or functional value as people attempt to make sense of the worlds they find themselves thrown into.

However, sometimes these values collide, as is the case on the Ocklawaha River or even in various cases of native trout restoration. This collision of values can and does impede the process of plural collaboration. Such collisions reveal the sometimes overly optimistic character of pragmatism, which believes that in pluralism and process communities will work, democratically, toward better solutions. Dewey's insistence on democracy as *the* way of life is certainly noble. Unfortunately, process and democracy, despite the ideals, do not always proceed with every participant in the room or on level playing field. Moreover, in the context of environmental decision making, some philosophers and activists might argue that if no one is

speaking for non-human animals, then not all parties are at the table, which reveals a certain anthropocentrism of pragmatism.<sup>7</sup> Mary Midgley rightly noted that we live in “mixed communities” (Midgley 1998). So, is the Rio Grande Cutthroat trout at the discussion table? If not, should science speak for the cutthroat? If new versions of environmental pragmatism hope to make headway in the realm of environmental ethics and politics, it must grapple with some of these thorny issues.

Critiques aside, however, I believe that pragmatism does offer interesting insights into the religious studies quest for religion as it is lived and more applicable and lived forms of environmental. An appealing aspect of pragmatism, particularly that of Dewey, is his insistence on work as a way into social capital or democratic collaboration. In his work on education, such as *The School and Society* or *Democracy and Education*, Dewey articulated ways to reform educational systems so that they might more fully engage the workings of society. For Dewey, every school should operate as an “embryonic community life, active with types of occupations that reflect the life of the larger society, and permeated throughout with the spirit of art, history, and science” (Dewey 1899: 46). As Minter highlighted, Liberty Hyde Bailey pushed Dewey’s ideas into gardening, agriculture, and the work of nature study in education (Minter 2006: 17-50). In gardening and nature study, children only developed a “deep appreciation for nature,” but learned how to work together in community (35). More recently, Orr has written extensively on the failure of contemporary education to connect humans to the natural world, after all he writes that “all education is environmental education” (Orr 1992: 80). He too suggests hands-on

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<sup>7</sup> I am first and foremost thinking of the work of John Seed and Joanna Macy. In working to overcome the emotions of environmental issues, they developed what they call “The Council of all Beings,” which allows humans to symbolically take on the persona of non-human animals and speak for them at the deliberating table, so to speak. Participating in a council of all beings can be a very powerful and eye opening event.

approaches for facilitating nature appreciation, as well as community spirit or the encouragement of social capital.

These thinkers are on to something here. I saw their point manifest in some of the restoration projects I visited. One might, in some ways, compare ecological restoration to gardening. As I noted in the Valle Vidal I watched individuals of varying backgrounds working together on stream restoration projects for native trout, all for very different reasons. Talking with Jim O'Donnell, who led the Coalition for the Valle Vidal, he explained that he believed that those sorts of projects were vital to the long-term success of the Coalition in protecting the Valle Vidal from oil exploration. He made this statement while reminding me that "New Mexico can be a difficult place to get community work done" (O'Donnell, interview: 4 December 2007). His point is in reference to the diverse ethnic make-up of New Mexico. He also explained that early projects made the work easier, because he was able to approach different constituencies on their own level, in their own terms. For example, he could talk to ranchers about ranching, anglers about angling, or hunters about hunting. The collaborative work in the Valle Vidal provided a localized foundation. This is important, he reiterated, in an area suspicious of federal government. While he was an outsider to them, he said, "They all said wow here is an outsider who is not telling us how to use the land, but looking at how we use the land and tying its importance to our own culture" (ibid). What was effective was that he tied the land and water of the Valle Vidal to their experience.

### **Restoring Home Waters**

While fishing, among other things, brought volunteers to the Valle Vidal for restoration work, the restoration work provided another layer of experience that can potentially contribute to the enactment of environmental values. Here restoration functioned as a facilitator of social capital. Each group or person involved perhaps got involved for their own reasons, values, and

experiences. However, projects devoted to restoring rivers and native species functioned as a common ground upon which a diverse group sought to, in some ways, become native to New Mexico. The same holds true for my other case studies, even in the midst of some of the conflict.

In this work, they were building homes for fish while negotiating their own place in those watersheds. This is, in many ways, as Tweed said, the religious work of homemaking (Tweed 2005). I believe that even when the religious language was not present, the work was very implicitly that of religion as groups attempting to orient themselves to the world around potentially ultimate concerns. Or, to take a cue from Chidester, who asked what difference it makes to call any cultural activity religion, religious work is that which “forms community, focuses desire, and enters into human relations of exchange” (Chidester 2005: 2). Fishing, restoration, and these manifestations of civic environmentalism all fit Chidester’s criteria and do real religious work.

One might say that fishing focuses desire, while simultaneously opening up desire. For some it is a desire for more fish. For others, however, there is a desire to see the waters of those fish protected or even restored. If fishing is sometimes a solitary exercise, then the collaborative work of restoration is certainly a community endeavor characterized by various levels of exchange (between humans and humans, or humans and non-humans). This is not to say that all of the exchanges are collaborative or successful. Sometimes they are entrenched in conflict and irreparably so. However, even in those cases, we need to understand why the conflict is so deep, or investigate what claims are groups making about the fish, rivers, or watersheds.

In doing this investigative work, I believe that as we explore the lived realities of religion and civic environmentalism, our scholarship should equally be lived and engaged. It is not

enough to simply examine the workings of culture, but to ask how our scholarship can equally be at home in the watersheds through which we wade.

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