

Aboriginal Influences and the Original State of Nature: A New Paradigm for Conservation

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National parks and wilderness areas originated in the United States and have since spread around the world. Given the history of the United States, it should then come as no surprise that national parks and wilderness are inherently racist. From the early 1600's, when Europeans first landed on the eastern shore of what was to become the United States, until the late 1880's, people of European descent waged constant war against the continent's aboriginal inhabitants. These were wars of annihilation and extermination. Indigenous peoples were portrayed as uncivilized savages and subhuman vermin marked by God for destruction by the superior White race. Indigenous women and children were routinely slaughtered. Even Native Americans, who had converted to Christianity, were butchered and their lands stolen¹. George Washington, the first President of the United States, orchestrated a genocidal campaign against America's original owners², as did virtually every president down to and including Abraham Lincoln³, the man who freed the slaves.

Native people, who survived, were forced onto apartheid-like reservations, but even there the genocide continued. Corrupt Indian agents stole monies appropriated to feed their wards and thousands of Native Americans starved to death. Reservation peoples were prohibited from practicing ancestral religions and other aboriginal customs. Children

were torn from their mothers' arms and shipped to boarding schools where they were beaten if they dared speak their native language¹. Then there was Wounded Knee.

The U.S. military had confined the Sioux to reservations in South Dakota. After years of suffering, a new, native religion swept the West, including the Sioux reservations. Wovoka, a Paiute shaman, had a vision that there was to be a second coming of Christ, except this time Christ was going to be an Indian, who would rid the world of Whites. All native people had to do was dress and dance in certain, entirely peaceful, ways⁴. As might be expected, this set off a new wave of Indian-hating hysteria. The military was summoned and attempted to disarm a group of Sioux, who had gathered to practice this new religion. A shot was fired and the military opened up with everything they had including rapid-fire cannons. The soldiers fired so enthusiastically that over half the U.S. casualties were from friendly fire. That is, the soldiers shot each other in their eagerness to gun down fleeing savages. Two thirds of the Sioux dead were women and children, some killed as far as two miles from where the initial shot had been fired. Twenty members of the 7th cavalry were deemed, "national heroes" and awarded the Medal of Honor, the U.S.'s highest decoration, for

their part in the “battle”. The Sioux call it murder⁵. Such is the history of the United States. Even this, though, was not the worst of it.

What is now California was once populated by hundreds of thousands of indigenous peoples. Yet there are no large Indian reservations in California nor did the U.S. ever mount large-scale military campaigns in that state, unlike other areas of the American West. Why the difference? -- because California passed a law which said that any White could kill any Indian, at any time without cause. Local Whites formed sporting parties to hunt down savages. That law was eventually rescinded but a second law was passed, which made it illegal for Indians to testify against Whites in courts of law, so the killing continued until there were few aboriginal people left⁶. There may have been closed seasons on deer (*Odocoileus* spp.) or elk (*Cervus elaphus*), but there was no closed season on Native Americans.

Today, Native Americans make up less than two percent of the U.S. population and are the most disadvantaged segment of society with the highest unemployment and death rates. Except for a few large tribes like the Navajo, Native Americans are also in the process of being bred out of existence. On many reservations, as little as one-sixteenth aboriginal blood is needed to be counted as a tribal member.

Yellowstone was declared the world's first National Park in 1872.

That legislation stipulated the park was not to receive any funding from the U.S. government. Instead, park management was to be financed solely by entrance and concession fees. In 1873, financial panic gripped the nation, what we today would call an economic recession or depression. Grant, the general who won the U.S. Civil War, was president and he decided to start a new war to divert the country's attention from his failed domestic policies and corrupt administration. He did this by sending General George Armstrong Custer and 1,800 men into the Black Hills on the Sioux Reservation³⁴. This was in direct violation of existing treaties with the Sioux and was illegal. Nonetheless, as Grant had hoped, gold was discovered and Whites poured into the Black Hills, setting off war with the Sioux.

General Custer once boasted that given but a single troop of cavalry he could ride through the entire Sioux nation. Well, in 1876 Custer put that hypothesis to the test on the Greasy Grass (a.k.a. Little Bighorn) and rode into history when his command was killed to the last man by the Sioux and their Cheyenne allies. A national hysteria ensued. In 1877, the U.S. military was looking to kill Indians, any Indians. The Nez Perce were a peaceful people, who occupied a large, highly productive area where the states of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho meet today. After years of

having their best lands stolen by Whites and their culture denigrated by missionaries, a handful of Nez Perce rebelled and killed a few Whites, intensifying national Indian-hating hysteria. The Nez Perce quickly realized that if they were cornered by the U.S. military their people would be annihilated as payback for the Custer massacre, so the entire tribe decided to flee to Canada, a country with a more enlightened aboriginal policy.

The way directly north, however, was blocked by the U.S. military, so the Nez Perce fled east, which eventually took them through the newly established Yellowstone National Park. While in the park, a small number of White tourists were killed or wounded by the Nez Perce, which only heightened national hysteria. The park's indigenous Shoshone inhabitants avoided both the Whites and the Nez Perce and had absolutely nothing to do with this incident⁷. Nevertheless, tourists fled the park and tourism declined to zero, as no sane White person wanted to visit a park filled with blood-thirsty savages. No tourists meant no entrance fees, no concession fees, and no national park.

To solve this problem, Norris, Yellowstone's second superintendent, invented the myth that Native Americans never used the park because those simple-minded people feared Yellowstone's geysers and thermal areas. Norris also had the park's original Shoshone owners forcefully

removed to distant reservations in Idaho and Wyoming⁸. Thus, Fortress Conservation⁹ was born. That is, throw out the rightful, indigenous owners without compensation and then lie about it. It should also be remembered that the U.S. Military ran Yellowstone National Park from 1886 to 1916 when the National Park Service was created⁸. Moreover, as several authors have noted, the U.S. Park Service's treatment of indigenous peoples has been less than honorable¹⁰. I would call it despicable.

Wilderness, though, is even worse because it absolves Whites of all their misdeeds. If everything was a wilderness untouched by the hand of man, then Whites could not have stolen indigenous lands nor committed genocide. If I could ban one word from the English language, it would be, "wilderness" as wilderness is a thousand times worse than slavery. Slaves, after all, were bred and kept alive. No such kindness was shown to Native Americans. In addition, freed slaves became citizens of the United States 70 years before the federal government "granted" U.S. citizenship to indigenous people. Moreover, freed slaves joined the Union Army to hunt down and kill aboriginal peoples.

Some contend that indigenous peoples were conservationists. While calling aboriginal people conservationists may appear to be the only kind things Whites have ever said about Native Americans, in reality it is an act

of “immense condescension” because it implies that native people lacked agency¹¹ -- defined as the ability to manage their affairs or to purposefully modify their environments. If indigenous peoples lacked agency then they were no more than animals. Instead, as I and others have documented by keeping ungulate numbers low through hunting and by purposefully modifying plant communities with fire, aboriginal people **created** ecosystems across the globe. What Europeans saw when they first stepped off the boat had not been created by God or Nature, but by indigenous peoples¹².

For nearly 100 years, large numbers of food-limited elk have severely overgrazed Yellowstone Park’s northern range destroying aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) and willow (*Salix* spp.) communities¹³ -- vegetation types that normally have exceedingly high biodiversity. Wolves (*Canis lupus*) were introduced in 1995 and since that time the elk count on the northern range has fallen from 19,000 to just over 4,000. This has spawned a plethora of publications, both popular and academic, on the importance of keystone carnivore predation and trophic cascades¹⁴. Although purported to be science, this outpouring is simply more White racist theology.

First, as Stiner and I have documented, even early hominids, let alone indigenous peoples were more efficient predators than carnivores¹⁵.

Second, while wolves have lowered elk numbers, wolf predation has not reduced Yellowstone's bison (*Bison bison*) population, which is still overgrazing the park. Third, what wolves? Between 1835 and 1876, 20 different expeditions spent 765 days on foot or horseback in the Yellowstone Ecosystem, yet no one reported seeing or killing a single wolf¹⁶. Fourth, wolves are not known to carry drip torches or to start fires. According to fire-scar data reported by the Park Service, Yellowstone's northern range historically had a fire frequency of once every 25 years¹⁷. This means that an area equal in size to the northern range historically burned once every 25 years -- not by one large fire, but by many small fires.

Well, Yellowstone has had a let-burn policy now for nearly 50 years, yet none of the northern range has been burned. The Park Service¹⁷ has said this is because "lightning has chosen not to strike", but the government's own data shows that lightning strikes the northern range an average of four times per km² per year¹⁸. Those lightning strikes, however, occur during June, July, and August when the park's grasslands are too green to burn. Thus, the only plausible explanation for the documented burn interval that historically occurred on the park's northern range is that all those fires were purposefully set by indigenous people to manage their

environment¹⁸. Elsewhere I have compared known lightning-ignition rates in the United States with potential aboriginal-ignition rates and found that aboriginal-set fires were 270 to 35,000 times more frequent than fires started by lightning¹⁸. It must also be remembered that hunting by native peoples has been a natural process in the Americas for at least the last 12,000 years and longer on other continents.

If as I and others have documented, namely that indigenous peoples the world over acted as both keystone predators and keystone fire-starters, why then does the scientific community continue to ignore those data?

Anthropologist Omer Stewart addressed this very issue 50 years ago.

Views of peasants and country folk belonging to the same race and culture as the investigators are placed below consideration, but ancient practices and explanations of red Indians and black Negroes warrant no serious thought, even if known. Usually the White scientists refuse to learn the ways of the colored aborigines, whether New World or Old World because it is assumed such children of nature could contribute nothing to modern scientific inquiry.¹⁹

Unfortunately what passes for scientific discourse today is the same racism that Stewart described.

Recently Dr. Bruce Smith, who spent his career as a wildlife biologist employed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, published a book on elk management in Jackson Hole, which includes southern Yellowstone National Park, Grand Teton National Park, the National Elk Refuge, and

several federal wilderness areas. The valley's over-abundant elk problem has a long and storied history that need not be repeated here except to note that biologists, environmentalists, and sport hunters all assume that 15,000 to 20,000 elk have always occupied Jackson Hole. Dr. Smith's book has been favorably reviewed in academic journals by prominent wildlife ecologists and the environmental community has given Dr. Smith an award for his work in Jackson Hole. In short, wildlifers and environmentalists all praise the book²¹. In reality, though, the book is simply another discourse in White racist theology. Not only are Native Americans not even mentioned, but Dr. Smith also ignored all the existing archaeological data.

Dr. Gary Wright spent years excavating archaeological sites in Jackson Hole and published a 1984 book on his findings²². Now if thousands of elk have always inhabited Jackson Hole, as assumed by Dr. Smith and others, then elk bones should be common in the valley's many archaeological sites. Instead, elk bones are rare to non-existent in archaeological sites and according to the evidence unearthed by Wright, aboriginal people, who inhabited Jackson Hole for at least the last 10,000 years, subsisted primarily on plant resources²³. Moreover, as archaeologist Wright noted,

Keep in mind that I have [been] battling wildlife biologists from Grand Teton and Yellowstone Parks for some years. One told me, after a seminar I gave at the Jackson Hole Biological Research Station on the faunal resources of the regions, "Even if you demonstrate that no elk were here, we would still continue to argue for them because our management policies require a herd of at least 10,000 elk by the end of the last ... deglaciation."²³

Similarly, I was once told by a Wyoming Game and Fish Department biologist, "We are not going to consider your data because if you are even close to being correct, then everything we are doing is wrong, and we are not ever going to consider that possibility."²³ Is this science? Or is it theology? After the results of Dr. Wright's research became known, federal and state agencies terminated Dr. Wright's funding. Scientific fraud, after all, begins with who gets funded, or hired, and who does not.

It really should come as no surprise that the wildlife profession is fundamentally racist once you understand how that discipline developed. Aldo Leopold was the father of wildlife management in the United States. He held the first university position in the field and wrote the first wildlife management text³⁵. He also was a founding member of the Wilderness Society, as well as a prominent member of the Ecological Society of America and the Wildlife Society. As a Forest Supervisor, Leopold established the first wilderness area in the U.S. Aldo Leopold was an

extremely prolific writer and he has been lionized by the environmental movement²⁴.

Unfortunately, Aldo Leopold was also a racist of the worst kind for he totally ignored Native Americans. Dr. Leopold began his career as a Forest Ranger in New Mexico. New Mexico is a very dry state and indigenous peoples built with stone. There are thousands upon thousands of highly visible archaeological sites in New Mexico including Chaco Canyon, which is now a World Heritage Site. In addition, there are Pueblo, Zuni, Navajo, Ute, and Apache reservations in the state. Furthermore, there is a written historical record dating to the mid 1500's when the Spanish first explored and then occupied the area. How anyone could work in New Mexico as Aldo Leopold did and not even mention native people speaks volumes of how deeply Indian-hating and racism is buried in American culture and the scientific community. Similar situations exist in African national parks and other protected areas throughout the world³¹.

For instance, uncontrolled elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) populations are having serious negative impacts in many southern African national parks. Most biologists claim this destruction is "natural" and deny that aboriginal hunters had any significant effect on elephant numbers²⁵. They conveniently overlook the fact that indigenous peoples, such as the Wata,

were skilled elephant hunters. The most proficient Wata hunters killed 50, or more, elephants per year using “primitive technology.” One arrow, one dead elephant, in minutes²⁶.

To stop the growth of an elephant population only slightly more than three percent of the animals need to be killed per year, while a four percent offtake rate will drive elephant numbers to extinction. Thus, a handful of indigenous hunters could easily have controlled elephant numbers. One Wata hunter alone could have controlled a population of 1,000 elephants by killing no more than 35 animals per year²⁹. Without indigenous elephant population control, large numbers of very old baobab (*Adansonia digitata*) trees would not exist on the African landscape, because baobabs are one of the first species elephants eliminate²⁷. Nothing is more unnatural than an African ecosystem without hominid hunters and firestarters, unless, of course, one does not believe in evolution.

Unfortunately, the vast majority of biologists and ecologists have no interest in human evolution. Anyone who thinks that huge quantities of animal biomass can be tied-up in elephants and other mega-herbivores and not be subjected to intense human hunting, knows absolutely nothing about human evolutionary ecology or why men hunt¹⁵. Instead evolutionary

considerations are ignored because they do not support romantic, religious, and racist views of nature.

Contrary to what one might think, conservation and sustainability are not the end products of evolution. Instead, conservation will develop only when a resource is economical to defend. Think of economics as calories. If it takes 1,000 calories to defend a resource but less than 1,000 calories are obtained when that resource is consumed, evolution by natural selection will quickly eliminate the inefficient, be they humans or animals. Regarding types of land ownership with open-access on one end of the spectrum and private property on the other, private property is the most conducive to conservation³². Furthermore, within any one society, conservation benefits elites more than it does the common man or woman³³. In short, conservation favors the rich and well fed, while preservation favors the super-rich and the super well fed. National parks and wilderness areas are preservation, not conservation. Opinion polls in the U.S. show that the public supports conservation, but not preservation, which is why the term conservation is now applied to most everything, while preservation is seldom mentioned.

As study after study has shown and as predicted by human evolutionary ecology, indigenous peoples whose lands and resources have

been usurped to create protected areas become, “the enemies of conservation,” something education alone will never change³¹. If local people are to support conservation or preservation, then their lands must be returned along with ownership of wildlife and all other resources^{32,33}, plus they need to be paid. Why is the world filled with cattle, goats, sheep, chickens, and the like? Simple, they are private property and anyone, who wants to use or consume those resources, must financially compensate their owners. Similarly, why are there national ballets, symphony orchestras, sport teams, and other high-priced, ticket items favored by elites? -- because the performers are paid. How long do you think a symphony orchestra would last if its members were not paid for their services? Right, so why then should poor, indigenous people provide free conservation services for Whites and other elites? How long do you think movies would be made if everyone could view them for free?

In general, community-based conservation programs have had a poor track record because conservation-generated income has habitually been siphoned off by various levels of government or through elite capture, including graft and corruption³². To be successful all the money from community-based conservation programs must reach the individual people, who actually bear the associated costs. It is really quite simple, pay local

people to provide conservation services or repeal the laws of evolution. The United States and other developed countries can afford to practice preservation because they are rich and their people are very well fed. In addition, they are expertly managed police states. You do not think the U.S. is a police state? Then obviously you are not a Sioux, or Nez Perce, or Blackfoot, or... [a long, nearly endless list].

Endnotes

1. There are a great many publications on these subjects. For example see –

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3. Nichols, D.A. 1978. *Lincoln and the Indians*. Minnesota Historical Society Press, St. Paul, MN.

4. The new religion was called the Ghost Dance.

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Terborgh, J., and J.A. Estes, editors. 2010. Trophic cascades. Island Press, Washington, D.C.

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Stiner, M.C., editor. 1991. Human predators and prey mortality. Westview Press, Boulder, CO.

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16. In addition, elk were seen only once every 18 party-days and bison were seen only three times, none of which were in the present confines of Yellowstone National Park. Those same first-person, historical journals also mentioned the lack of game or the absence of food 45 times.

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Parker, I., and M. Amin. 1983. Ivory crisis. Chatto and Windus, London, United Kingdom.
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28. Unlike carnivores, humans can prey-switch down to lower trophic levels, which allows humans to take their preferred ungulate prey to very low levels without adverse impacts on human numbers. In fact, once men are forced from hunting to collecting lower-ranked, but more abundant resources, the human population actually increases. As predicted by optimal foraging theory, aboriginal hunters kept elk

populations so low that elk bones are rare in nearly all western archaeological sites. There are more elk in the western U.S. today than at anytime in the last 12,000 years and those animals are causing serious ecological damage even outside protected areas.

Kay, C.E. 1990. Yellowstone's northern elk herd: A critical evaluation of the "natural regulation" paradigm. Ph.D. Dissertation, Utah State University, Logan, UT.

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29. Archaeological and historical data indicate that Native Americans killed mostly female ungulates because females generally have larger fat deposits than males. Humans the world over have a physiological need for animal fats. The fattest elephants are young cows that have never bred. Thus, these figures are based on indigenous peoples killing the fattest elephants. If, however, elephants were killed without regard to sex, then the kill figures and offtake rates should be doubled. Therefore, instead of one Wata controlling 1,000 elephants, you would need two Wata hunters – still a very low number.

30. It may come as a shock to many, but domestication is conservation. Farmers are conserving wheat, corn, and the like, while pastoralists are conserving cattle, sheep, and goats. In addition, it seldom is possible to conserve more than one species at a time. If you are conserving corn, for instance, elephants will not be welcome in those fields. The same with carnivores and livestock. Rich people do not tolerate the theft of their property, so it is totally illogical and morally unjust to expect local indigenous people to tolerate the theft of their crops or livestock by animals, such as elephants or carnivores, favored by elites.

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