

Conservation Matters

A monthly column focused on conservation education, as the result of collaboration among several area conservation commissions and organizations. If your town's commission or conservation organization would like to contribute articles, please contact Jessica Tabolt Halm, jesshalm78@gmail.com.

Title: *A Timeline of the American Conservation Movement*, As Told By the Great Books and Events That Defined It

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'Conservation' as a political movement emerged from a time when natural resources were considered inexhaustible and more a source of profit than worth conserving. The very term - conservation (as opposed to conservative) at times out of favor, remains as the wise use of natural resources through informed stewardship with a look to the future:

AD 23/24-79. Gaius Plinius Secundus or 'Pliny the Elder' Roman naturalist, authored detailed encyclopedic descriptions of botany, zoology, geology and mineralogy with the relations between each as part of 37 book collection. May have been first work on natural resource conservation,

c.1445 B.C. Moses: *Old Testament, Genesis 1:28* - "...be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." This exalted Christians as being over the Earth. Ecology later dictated otherwise stressing interdependence. But in 1968, during the Apollo Mission, this same Biblical passage was recited again by the astronauts in claiming dominion over the moon and what lay below. Their photographs taken looking back at Earth left a somewhat different impression; *"Is this all there is?"*

1750-1840 The industrial Revolution: The discovery of lime, coal & iron ore near the village of Coalbrookdale in Shropshire, England led to a dramatic change in the human condition. From home-based hand-crafted products human labor transitioned to the mass-production factory machine line leading to a rise of "the working class" with their industrial baron overlords, slavery, recruitment of child labor, pollution, rural v. urban, labor unions v. capital, a perceived mastery over Nature, an "increase in standards of living," a search for meaningful materialism, international trade, the anti machine Luddites, all this leading to making Britain the world's leading colonial power of the day.

1804 Lewis and Clark Expedition: Ordered by President Thomas Jefferson to explore lands well northwest of the Mississippi River and the Louisiana Purchase. The expedition reported back after two years and 8,000 grueling miles on the geological and other valuable natural resources of this vast region. Later the Louisiana Purchase doubling the size of the U.S.

1827-39 John James Audubon: (1785-1851) American ornithologist, naturalist and painter. Published *The Birds of America* including 435 vivid color plates depicting over 700 species of birds. He was lionized in Britain as America's "woodsman" earning the

attention of King George IV and the Royal Society and leading to seeing birds as an indicator in health of the natural world not unlike the canary in the coal mine.

1854 Henry David Thoreau: (1817-1862) *Walden*. A disciple of Ralph Waldo Emerson, professed self reliance and nonconformity, passive resistance (Martin Luther King studied) followed by the need for 'civil disobedience.' One need not go beyond one's resources for sustenance and the enjoyment of life, he professed and not necessary to live out our lives of quiet desperation. Many of the luxuries and comforts of life often become hindrances. What should be the master plan for America?

1865 George Perkins Marsh: (1801-1882) *Man and Nature*. A lawyer, diplomat and historian with no training as a scientist but who spoke 20 languages. This book, seen as the fountainhead of the American conservation movement, attacked the myth of the inexhaustibility of natural resources and that Nature did not always heal itself. Nature left alone is in harmony, the early term for *ecology*). Is 'man' a part of nature or dominant over it? And what are the cumulative effects of the overuse of soils, water, forests and animals? Past civilizations have been doomed after exhausting their lands. This book is excruciatingly detailed in its 472 heavily footnoted pages but still holds its own in today's ongoing debate over natural resource conservation. Marsh's birthplace in Woodstock, Vt. is a National Park well worth visiting.

1892 John Muir: (1838-1914) As founder of the Sierra Club in 1892 he camped out with **Theodore Roosevelt** (1858-1919) in Yosemite Valley in 1903. As a result the 26th president went on to establish five national parks, 18 Monuments, 150 national forests as well as the U.S. Forest Service leading after his time to the Weeks Act (1911) and ultimately creation of the White Mountain National Forest seven years later.

1908, May 13-15: White House Conference on Conservation of Natural Resources called by President Theodore Roosevelt with Gifford Pinchot as chairman and all governors invited leading to the National Conservation Commission and creation of the U.S. Forest Service by Pinchot who became its first forester.

1949 Aldo Leopold: (1887-1948): *A Sand County Almanac*. Coined the term 'A Land Ethic' meaning that land was a community not a commodity. This became the first formal presentation of a holistic approach to viewing ecosystems beyond their mere scientific definitions or in purely economic terms. With John Muir as his inspiration, he emphasized that we are not conquerors of nature but its stewards; that non-human members of the biotic community and that community itself are critical to the balance of human survival.

1962 Rachel Carson: (1907-1964) *Silent Spring*. First time an alarm had been raised over the widespread application of killer chemicals born of the industrial/agri-business age and finding their way into the human food chain as DDT, 2,4-D, Dieldrin, Endrin, Aldrin, Heptachlor, BHC and many more as the killers of insects, rodents and unwanted plants. She coined the term "Web of Life" also documenting that ecology also exists within the human body. President John F. Kennedy was greatly influenced by her book which likely led to creation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Administration a decade later.

1972 (June) **United Nations Conference on the Human Environment.** '*Only One Earth*' held in Stockholm, became an agency of the U.N. to raise awareness, support

research/action. Led to the Montreal Protocol and **Task Force on National Greenhouse Gas Inventories**. In 1988 followed the U.N. **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** with 195 member nations - the U.S. opting out in 2017 - called by the World Meteorological Organization concerned about increasing global warming.

2005 Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*.

Examines demise of the Anasazi/Cahokia Natives in the U.S. southwest, Maya of Central America, Moche & Tiwanaku of S. America and others. Might this be happening in the U.S. today? Such 'ecological suicide' (*ecocide*) results from habitat and soil destruction, water despoilation, over hunting/fishing, introduction non-native species, unchecked human population growth and the increased *per capita* impact of people now close to 7 billion on the planet. Beware of the ongoing wars for natural resources and the overthrow of elites by disillusioned masses who have been left behind.

2018: "I have eliminated more unnecessary government regulations in my administration than any other president in our history."

Other sources:

Nash, Roderick: *Wilderness and the American Mind*, The evolution of how wilderness has been viewed through the ages from when it was challenged to a time of its appreciation (1967).

Rutkow, Eric: *American Canopy, Trees, Forests and the Making of a Nation*, without wood there would not be the nation we know today. From pre-colonial times to this day.

Smith, Frank E: *The Politics of Conservation*, Great legislative battles over the protection of America's natural resources and growth of the conservation movement. (1966)