

Here Come the Petunia Planters: Gender and Conservation in Colorado, 1950-1980

Eric Busch
University of Texas at Austin

In a state-of-the-field essay published in the wake of an environmental history conference in 2001, historian Richard White noted the rise in cultural approaches to the maturing field of environmental history. But on the topic of gender analysis, White spoke a word of caution against the specter of “predictability, or the endless rediscovery that people have often made nature female.” “Gender,” White wrote, “has more work to do than that.”¹ In fact, a big part of the “work” gender has to do in environmental history involves challenging such the widely shared assumptions about gender. The reflexive superimposition of the twin constructs of gender and nature, along with the false equivalencies concerning nature and femininity that often result from it, only serve to magnify the indeterminacies of each concept.² Separating nature from gender is a difficult task, and one that requires more attention.

This paper considers some of the ways in which gender and women, related and distinct, influenced Colorado’s homegrown conservation movement during the 1960s and

¹ Richard White. 2001. Afterword Environmental History: Watching a Historical Field Mature. *Pacific*

² The same taxonomical disagreements in post-second wave women’s history which eventually led to the advent of gender as a category of analysis have become increasingly visible in environmental history over the past decade or so. Scholarly exchanges over the meaning, usage, and politics of terms like “wilderness” and “nature” have occasionally gotten quite heated. The question of whether or not wilderness was a cultural construction was a particularly thorny one during the 1980s and 1990s, when preservationist-oriented environmentalism was attacked from the right. “If historians continue to treat wilderness only as an idea,” worried historian Morgan Sherwood in 1985, “[then] *reductio ad absurdum*, “wilderness” will become a city park or perhaps a suburban lawn.”² Well, yes, replied William Cronon in his 1994 essay, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” which appeared in his edited volume, *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*.² Perhaps after years of gingerly side-stepping the potential ramifications of accepting wilderness as a human abstraction, it was finally time to confront and even embrace the notion. That way, Cronon suggested, Americans could begin to think of wilderness as their literal backyard, and to tend to it as they might tend their own backyard gardens. Cronon’s “garden essay” was met by angry accusations from other environmental historians (particularly those with activist backgrounds) that he was undercutting the importance of preserving wilderness for its own sake, trivializing the accomplishments of earlier conservation activists, and worst of all, offering ammunition to the anti-environmentalists who never saw anything great about wilderness in the first place. Among those who bristled was well-known environmental historian and activist Samuel P. Hayes. “Cronon’s wilderness,” Hays wrote acidly, “is a wilderness of abstracted ideas, real enough to those who participate in it, but divorced from the values and ideas inherent in wilderness action.”² The testy exchange only underscored the indeterminacy of wilderness as a concept, term, and human value.

Morgan Sherwood. 1985. The End of American Wilderness. *Environmental Review* 9 (3):197-209.

William Cronon. 1996. “The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature.” *Environmental History* 1 (1):7-28.

Samuel P. Hays. 1996. Comment: The Trouble with Bill Cronon's Wilderness. *Environmental History* 1 (1):29-32.

1970s. It stems from my work on the cultural history of Denver, Colorado during the 1960s and early 1970s. During these years, Colorado conservationists forced an extensive debate over whether the state's open space ought to be revalued as a public resource rather than a fungible commodity. Although conservationists focused on environmental matters, their most significant legacy may well have been cultural and political in nature.

Conservationists leavened the endlessly sunny boosterism that was endemic to the Mountain West with a fundamentally new outlook that recognized "natural limits."³ Never again would the region measure its progress using "growth" as the sole metric. Never again would Colorado's elite enjoy quite the same influence over their state's character or its affairs. Conservationists created a new economics of land that eschewed monetary measures of land value, and made the cultural "ownership" of public land a right of citizenship. "Wilderness" thus became an accepted and legitimate "use" of public land, and environmental protection became an acknowledged responsibility of government. The conservationists' cultural re-valuation of landscape forced a corresponding renovation of place identity, and changed what it meant to be a Coloradoan and a Westerner. And finally, the conservation movement became the voice of Denver's politically neglected middle class, whose ascendance revised, and re-gendered, the cultural and political power structures of the state.⁴

At first glance, wilderness preservation seems an awfully narrow platform upon which to launch an effective reform movement. And Colorado's leading conservationists could hardly be called rabble-rousers. Most belonged to the so-called "G.I. generation," were conservative in their politics, and did not see their movement as a vehicle for anything resembling progressive reform. But in effect, that is exactly what it became.⁵ Why?

I argue that Colorado's conservation movement was driven by the expansion and increased prosperity of Denver's middle class. These urbanized newcomers quickly came to regard Colorado's mountains as sites of consumption and leisure rather than production or income. Of course, Americans had imagined and idealized "wilderness" as the antithesis of the "oppressive city" long before the 1960s. But this ethos, when combined with the postwar explosion in Denver's population, affluence and access to the

³ By "natural limits," conservationists referred both to the finitude of natural resources, and also the physical irreversibility of human development.

⁴ Most conservationists during the 1960s conceptually isolated government and industry as the worst enemies of wilderness and environmental quality. The irony, of course, was that even as the conservation movement blamed economic producers for environmental problems, human consumption in its many guises was probably already having more of an effect on land use. Denver's population growth, of which conservation itself was arguably an outgrowth, demanded the same dams, roads, and residential developments that conservationists so vigorously opposed. In Colorado, this realization began to sink in during the early 1970s, introducing an element of cynicism and misanthropy (such as in the zero population growth movement) to what had been, up until that point, a movement of resilient idealism.

⁵ The conservation movement of the 1960s and early 1970s was arguably one of the largest and most important "outsider" political insurgencies in Colorado's history. The electoral defeat of the 1976 Olympic Winter Games, which Denver had already won, and which had been backed to the hilt by Colorado's economic elite, was a good indication that the state's priorities were changing. The leader of the anti-Olympics movement, Dick Lamm, went on to become a popular two-term governor, and Senators Tim Wirth and Gary Hart also rode conservationist sentiments into Congress. Numerous state congressional officials also hailed from the ranks of the conservation movement.

high country, stoked high the fires of cultural affinity for Colorado's open spaces and vast public lands. In late 1964, following hard on the heels of the passage of the landmark Wilderness Act in Washington, Colorado conservationists organized themselves into a new statewide advocacy and lobbying organization, the Colorado Open Space Coordinating Council, or COSCC. COSCC's founders imagined it as a science and policy-savvy advocacy organization that would use the expertise of its members to negotiate with industry and government on equal footing. Despite its inelegant acronym, COSCC captured the spirit of its time and place. It celebrated its status as a "true" grassroots movement with no ties to any aspect of Colorado's power structure. Its popularity soared from takeoff, and suddenly, conservationists had the institutional and political strength to demand that Colorado's "quality of life" be weighed more equally against economic growth in future land use decisions.⁶

Despite the inherent difficulties, environmental historians have begun to apply gender to their work, and to join environmental with women's history, in ways that both surprise and reveal. The first part of this essay examines the Colorado conservation movement from the standpoint of women's history, using the personal experiences of women conservationists themselves. I also offer some thoughts in response to Susan Schrepfer's book, *Nature's Altars*, which represents a great stride in the restoration of both women and gender to the history of American environmentalism.⁷ Schrepfer puts forth a chronology of women's involvement in the Sierra Club that in many ways corresponds with that of Colorado's conservation movement, but diverges significantly in others. In addition, Schrepfer uses textual analysis to argue for the existence of fundamental differences in attitudinal and interpretive frameworks of men and women regarding the concept of nature. But did these differences remain static in the postwar years, when so much else was changing? Did they exist in the same degree and form outside of the Sierra Club, or outside of California? Speaking critically, should historians try to avoid essentializing sexual difference with respect to nature? Can we, and should we, attempt to sever the ties that seem to so tightly bind nature and sexual identity together?

The second section examines some of the conceptual difficulties that I have encountered and lessons that I have learned as I try to incorporate a sustained gender critique of this complex and fast-changing place and era in my dissertation. "Petunia planter" and "destroyer" were not epithets hurled back and forth among antagonists, but rather ways in which conservationists, and their opponents, described *themselves*. In 1968, a leading male conservationist referred to his movement as a "bunch of petunia planters," seeing in its imputed femininity a possible point of pride; evidence of his movement's essential "outsider" and "grassroots" status.⁸ One year earlier, a prominent

⁶ On the federal level, the best evidence of this emerging trend in public policy was the passage of the landmark Wilderness Act in 1964, after eight trying years of legislative wrangling. Some leaders of the Colorado conservation movement, particularly Colorado Open Space Coordinating Council (COSCC) founder and Denver industrialist Edward Hilliard, were instrumental in this effort.

⁷ Susan Schrepfer. 2005. *Nature's Altars: Mountains, Gender, and American Environmentalism*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.

⁸ Roger P. Hansen. 1968. History of COSCC: speech given at Wilderness Leadership Conference at Blackwater Falls State Park. In CONS 137 Colorado Environmental Coalition. Denver: Denver Public Library Western History Collection.

Denver land developer wrote a Maslowian-tinged poem titled I AM MAN, which he then circulated to friends, celebrating the potential of masculine capitalism while at the same time condemning “irresponsible” land users as “destroyers.”⁹ These are simply two instances of the surprising flexibility of gender identities that inhered both inside and beyond the conservation movement during the 1960s. These attitudes toward confounded attempts to impose a rigidly antagonistic gender framework on any historical analysis of the movement. Conservation in Colorado bent gender in unique and ambiguous ways, creating unlikely alliances and antagonisms, and complicating traditional notions of what constitutes “male” and “female” attitudes toward the environment. What does the gender indeterminacy of 60s-era conservation in Colorado tell us about the movement, and the place?

Nature's Altars, by Susan Schrepfer, locates California's Sierras as the physical, spiritual, and cultural fount of “Western” American conservationism. Recreation and sport is widely acknowledged to have been the single most important gateway to conservationism across the states of the American West. Mountain sports were singular among American sporting pursuits because of their longstanding sexual integration, which in many cases extended back to the late 19th century. Friendships that developed between men and women on hikes and climbs translated into alliances in emerging conservation groups like the Sierra Club. Founded in 1892, the Sierra Club was at least as much a sporting and social club as an advocacy organization in its early years, and it welcomed women as participants and organizers on its frequent excursions into the high Sierras of California. Schrepfer expertly salvages the writings of early women conservationists and submits them to rigorous literary analysis. Her close reading of journal entries, articles, and essays penned by both men and women in the early conservation movement demonstrates that while they agreed on the importance of wilderness preservation, they often conceived of nature very differently. The men of her study tended to invoke battlefield and frontier metaphors to describe wilderness, while women were more inclined to speak of nature in terms of ecology or domesticity.

The origins of the early conservation movement in Colorado track very well with Schrepfer's history of the Sierra Club. The Colorado Mountain Club (CMC), was founded in 1912, emulated the Sierra Club, mirroring its easy cross-gender camaraderie. Its monthly magazine, *Trail and Timberline*, has remained in continuous publication since the club's founding.¹⁰ In 1923, the CMC boasted over 1,300 members, most of them in Denver. The Great Depression dropped membership to just over 400 by the mid-1930s. After that, it took another twenty-five years, until 1960, for the club's numbers to get back to 1923 levels, but then, in the space of ten years, they doubled. In the 1920s, and then again in the 1960s, the Colorado Mountain Club was one of the largest, and

⁹ George M. Wallace. Year unknown. I AM MAN. In *George M. Wallace Papers*.

Denver: Denver Public Library Western History Collection.

¹⁰ Hugh E. Kingery and Eleanor Eppich. 1988. *The Colorado Mountain Club: The First Seventy-Five Years Of A Highly Individual Corporation, 1912-1987*. Evergreen, CO: Cordillera Press.

most eclectic social clubs in the city. For most of these decades, women consistently accounted for nearly half of the CMC's membership.

But Schrepfer's history is less useful for understanding 1960s-era conservationism in Colorado. Although conservationists in Colorado maintained institutional and personal ties with the leadership of the Sierra Club, instead of shedding women members or turning away from the ecological view of nature, Colorado's particular strain of conservationism embraced both. The movement came to rely increasingly upon the scientific expertise and organizing savvy of its female members. Based in large part on their efforts, Colorado became a nationally-known intellectual wellspring for lay ecology. The fact that the Sierra Club, and COSC and other Colorado groups went in different directions in this regard is partially explained by the institutional history of the national Sierra Club itself. By the mid-1960s, the organization was pulling in enough money to make what had been volunteer staff jobs into salaried positions. At the behest of David Brower, the Sierra Club's controversial and charismatic leader, these positions were usually filled by men. Conservation in Colorado, meanwhile, remained volunteer-driven, never raising enough money to create a large number of paid staff.

The personal histories of prominent women conservationists in Colorado reveal perhaps better than anything else the discrepancies between the Colorado conservation movement and the Sierra Club in the decades following World War II. Far from fading into the background, the 1960s saw women surge into positions of power and authority within the Colorado movement. Some of the top women leaders had advanced degrees in science, and were able to leverage their expertise in exchange for acceptance, however grudging, from both their male counterparts within the conservation movement and their male adversaries in industry and government. As the conservation movement in Colorado rapidly grew in stature and influence, the institutional power within the movement began to translate into unofficial "community power" of a distinctly political dimension. The mere presence of women in the movement ensured a more open gender regime within Colorado's conservation movement—one that contrasted starkly with that of opposing industry and government groups, which in some cases remained inhospitable to women until well into the 1980s.

Two caveats are in order, however. First, there is nothing to indicate that sexism was naturally any less prevalent within the movement than it was outside of it, or that the conservationists' looser gender formation was the result of anything other than expediency. Second, women conservation leaders in the 1960s were not, feminists in any modern sense of the term. Although they pushed back hard against sexual marginalization, their primary loyalty was to the cause of conservationism. Their emotional and intellectual investment in it made it difficult for them to do the work that would have been required to mount a sustained feminist critique of their movement. Still, the disparities in the gender regimes of conservationism and those of industry and government were real. And although it went largely unremarked at the time, the conservationist approach of "activism by consultancy" offered women a point of entry into the centers of political power in Colorado that at the time did not exist anywhere else in Colorado.

Estella Leopold's experience in the conservation movement highlights the instant credibility that accrued to women who had a PhD. in the hard sciences. As the youngest daughter of the revered conservation writer Aldo Leopold, her conservationist bona fides

were inbuilt. After graduating from Yale in 1955 with a doctoral degree in botany, she found her first job at the Denver-based Paleontology and Stratigraphy Branch of the U.S. Geological Survey, as a research botanist. Despite her conservationist pedigree, Leopold did not feel immediately compelled to involve herself in conservationism, and remained aloof from it for her first eight years in Colorado. The publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, followed two years later by the passage of the landmark Wilderness Act, along with the public announcement by the Department of the Interior that it planned to build two dams bracketing the Grand Canyon as part of the massive Central Arizona Project moved her to take action. Angered particularly by the proposed dams, Leopold joined the fledgling Colorado Open Space Coordinating Council to help stop them. Under their aegis, she began what became known as the Grand Canyon workshop in 1965. But because Leopold worked for a branch of the Interior Department, she had to be circumspect in her activism. Letting others, like friends and fellow COSCC members Ruth Weiner and Amy Roosevelt (niece of FDR) press their case in public, Leopold focused on the science of the dams. In her spare time, and with the help of friends in the Colorado's scientific community, Leopold assembled a stratigraphic and economic argument against the dams. Her work would play a key role in their eventual demise.¹¹ In 1969, she served a term as president of COSC.¹²

Ruth Weiner and her husband Robert moved to Colorado in 1964, after they graduated from Johns Hopkins with doctorates in chemistry. With four children and a mountain of school debt, cheap family entertainment was the order of the day, and the Colorado Mountain Club fit the bill. Through it, she met Estella Leopold and others who were already active in the conservation movement, and along with her husband she joined COSCC shortly afterward. Although her interests in conservationism were not as focused as were Leopold's, Weiner approached environmental issues with the same intense commitment that had propelled her through graduate school, despite the extreme sexism that was then endemic to most academic sciences. The biggest problem she encountered among her peers, she would later recall, had nothing to do with her professional merits: "Being married put you one step below women who were not... I was supposed to be wifey and mother first." Shrugging off such criticism, Weiner became of COSCC after only a few months' membership. In 1967, at the height of the legislative battle over the Central Arizona Project, COSCC sent her to Washington, D.C. for three months to lobby and offer scientific testimony before Congress in opposition to the Grand Canyon dams. She often testified together with well-known Sierra Club leader David Brower. "His trip," she later recalled, "must have cost the Sierra Club about twenty times what my trip cost (COSCC), because I stayed with friends. If somebody took me out for a meal, I would eat everything in sight." The gender implications here are hard to avoid, and point to the differences between the status and regimes of COSCC and the Sierra Club. Still, the collective effort paid off, as the dams were stricken from the Central Arizona Project a year later.

Beatrice (Betty) Willard was a decade older than Leopold and Weiner. An alpine ecology, in 1967 Willard put her expertise and penchant for organizing to work in order to start a summer learning program for adults, which she called the Seminar for the

¹¹ Estella Leopold, interview with author, Denver, CO, October 26 2007.

¹² Estella Leopold. 2008. Environmental Movement History--focus on Colorado: personal notes given to author by the subject.

Environmental Arts and Sciences. The SEAS conferences, held in Aspen Colorado, lasted for the next eight years. Willard believed that one of the most important functions of conservationism was to introduce the concept of ecology into mainstream American thinking about public land and natural resources. SEAS was technically open to the public, but in the spirit of environmental consultation, the program catered specifically to business and public leaders, who wished to learn more about how to deal with the environment, and more obliquely, environmentalists. Capitalizing on Colorado's growing reputation as a hotbed for scientifically oriented environmental activism, Willard invited high profile guests from the highest realms of politics, business, academia and the arts, many of whom were outspoken in their skepticism of environmentalism.¹³

Willard turned to the many experts in the Colorado movement, including Estella Leopold and Ruth Weiner, for help in organizing and running the event. Although the SEAS seminars were meant for laypeople, its themes, presentations, and discussion topics were intellectually rigorous and advanced by even today's academic standards. SEAS workshops discussed everything related to the environment, covering hard science, aesthetics, psychology, spirituality, and engineering. One workshop, moderated by Margaret Meade, had a title that could easily have come from the program of next year's Environmental History Conference: "The Cultural Dimensions of Environmentalism." Between workshops, participants were encouraged to go on field ecology trips, which were guided by Betty Willard and other local experts, in order to develop a sense of the ecology of mountain ecosystems. The first SEAS program was comprehensive, provocative, and well executed, gaining the attention of industry and government heads, who continued to attend until the programs eventual demise in 1976. It was a textbook example of the "Colorado" approach; educating, rather than chastising the powerful.

This list barely scratches the surface of these particular women's experiences and activities as part of the Colorado conservation movement. And there were many others. Amy Roosevelt, mentioned previously, became the chair of COSCC's Outdoor Education workshop, tasked with finding ways to education Colorado's children, particularly those in Denver's underprivileged areas, about the outdoors and conservation.¹⁴ Vim Wright filed suit against the development of the Florissant Fossil Beds in 1969, and held off a developer's bulldozer by lying in front of it as she waited for an injunction to be delivered from the district federal court in Denver.¹⁵ The site became a national monument soon afterward.

Although Leopold, Weiner, and Willard came to conservationism by way of the Colorado Mountain Club, there were other points of entry for women interested in environmentalism. The conservation movement in Colorado overlapped considerably in personnel and in scope with historic preservation organizations, and the prominent Colorado Federation of Women's Garden Clubs, which was active in highway

¹³ The list of famous personalities on the 1967 SEAS program is nothing short of remarkable in its eclecticism: I.M. Pei, Margaret Meade, Robert McNamara, Sen. John Saylor, Mich. Gov. George Romney, Sen. Lee Metcalf, William White, Ansel Adams, David Brower, Laurance Rockefeller, Stewart Udall, and Walter Reuther each gave addresses and participated in various workshops during the five day gathering.

¹⁴ Amy Roosevelt. 1967. Activity Highlights 1965-66: Future Goals. Colorado Environmental Council collection. Denver: Denver Public Library Western History Collection.

¹⁵ Estella Leopold, interview with author, Denver, CO, October 26 2007.

beautification and anti-billboard advocacy. It was not hard to see the institutional strength of Colorado's powerful League of Women Voters chapter behind each these efforts. Estelle Brown and Ruth Newlon, two other notable conservation leaders, came to the movement by way of these more civic-oriented organizations. Both had been active in anti-billboard and highway beautification efforts in Colorado since the late 1950s.¹⁶ There may have been some resentment on the part of women conservationists who did not have doctorates for their more accredited peers. Because the Colorado conservation movement so privileged science, and fetishized the "expert," women with advanced degrees almost certainly enjoyed higher status within the movement, and more name recognition outside of it. Ruth Weiner certainly noticed: "There were a lot of women in the environmental movement [who] weren't working and didn't have advanced degrees. And it became their lives. For a professional person, it wasn't. They may have felt a little left behind."

How are we to interpret the experiences of these women in the swirl of changes taking place in American society? From the standpoint of women's history, the years between the end of World War II and the emergence of the women's movement lack the rigorous interpretive frameworks of earlier and later eras. "Whatever the reasons," writes Nancy MacLean, "women's historians of the postwar period have not yet generated interpretive frameworks that go beyond looking backward, forward, or sideways from the women's movement."¹⁷ Interpretive framework or no, one may note the ways in which the interrelated changes taking place in the American sciences and the professional wage structure combined to inform the experiences of the women in Colorado's 60s-era conservation movement. Of the seven or eight most prominent women leaders, a slight majority had acquired science doctorates during the 1950s, each from top schools, just when the barrier restricting women's access to graduate-level science programs was beginning to crumble. With the notable exception of the academy itself, these women's degrees offered them access to fields of work in which they could hold the same titles and do the same work that men did. Although they were occasionally criticized as neglectful wives and mothers, their accredited expertise and professional status could not be gainsaid. And although they were "only" volunteers in a cause that outwardly had little to do with the advancement of women, conservation brought them to the proverbial tables of civic and state power that had long been the exclusive preserve of men. Viewing these accomplishments in light of what had come before, rather than what would come after, magnifies their significance. After all, they were contemporaries of the activists in Women Strike For Peace, which organized against nuclear testing and war. But while WSP couched their appeals in the language of domesticity and maternalism (a tactic with roots tracing back to "republican motherhood") women conservationists pointed to their diplomas. There were major differences in the two movements aside from this, of course.

¹⁶ Dick Lamm, who would become the state's governor in 1974, was still a young and unknown lawyer, Estelle Brown hired him on behalf of the Colorado Federation of Women's Garden Clubs to lobby the Colorado statehouse against billboards. It was his first foray into politics. (Governor Richard Lamm, interview with author, Institute for Public Policy Sciences at the University of Denver, July 18 2006.)

¹⁷ Nancy MacLean. "Postwar Women's History: The "Second Wave" or the End of the Family Wage?", in *A Companion to Post-1945 America*, ed. Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rozenzweig (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 235-259.

Still, in small but significant ways, women's access to graduate education was widening the avenues through which they could enter public life in Colorado.

I had originally approached this topic with the expectation of analyzing instances of the same malign and hegemonic genderization that often surrounds our current political debates. The evidence does not bear this out, however, despite the conspicuous leadership of women in the Colorado movement. Near the beginning of the period I study, the women's movement had not yet happened, and even as it began to during the late 60s and early 70s, gender was not yet the serviceably universal political currency that it is now. Purposeful attempts to feminize conservationists into irrelevance were much fewer and farther between than I had anticipated, or than the literature might suggest. Despite, or perhaps because of the prevalence of sexism during these years, overt appeals to gender baiting might not have been instantly politically decipherable in the way that they have become since the beginning of the so-called "culture wars."

Conservation pitted people against each other that otherwise would have had little reason to disagree. Edward Hilliard, for example, was the vice president of the Redfield Gunsight Company in Denver, and a respected member of the city's business community. Hilliard, however, was at the heart of the conservation movement, and founded two major environmental organizations by staking them with his own money. His masculine bona fides thus intact, Hilliard was free to think and talk about nature in "feminine" ways, without being dismissed as fatuous or overly sentimental. As a sportsman who worked for a company that made hunting equipment, Hilliard was able to speak to what became a large constituency of Colorado's conservation movement. The movement's strong corps of experts, and its teaching spirit, made it expensive and time consuming to fight them in the court of public opinion, or to question their expertise.

But if conservationists were so good at "bending gender" in order to neutralize it as a political weapon, why would they maintain such extravagantly high standards of professionalism, even though they were really nothing more than a group of unelected volunteers? Why would they place such emphasis on scientific and legal proficiency, and so thoroughly reject political acts that would annoy business and government interests? Perhaps one reason was because they had seen it work. COSCC was founded by young, white-collar professionals, who brought with them the experiences and skills acquired at work at work. They went out of their way to share the mores, and meet the behavioral expectations of their erstwhile opponents in industry and government. Their approach became the basis for many of their key accomplishments.

This emphasis on professionalism and expertise also became the basis of imposing internal hierarchies within the movement itself. Conservationists valued the same skills and qualifications as a corporation might, and assigned status accordingly. The importance attached to this status sometimes even superseded the expressed goals of the movement itself. When pressed to name her proudest accomplishment as part of the conservation movement, Ruth Weiner replied, "I'm proudest of the fact that the first and probably only integral mathematical equation ever to appear in hearings testimony was

put there by me.”¹⁸ Such an organizational culture erased, at least outwardly, the differences between how men and women viewed and talked about nature. The precise language of science and law, which women mastered and used as well as men, became the gold standard by which conservationists judged themselves and one another.

The political climate has obviously changed since the 1960s. In 1996, George Lakoff's book *Moral Politics* attempted to lay out some of reasons behind the jagged cultural divisions that today define our political landscape. Lakoff argued that “liberals” and “conservatives” held two different conceptual codes of morality: conservatives followed what he called the “strict father model,” valuing hard work and self-discipline, and liberals the “nurturing parent” model, which values community, and cooperative efforts to improve society.¹⁹ The use of metaphor in political rhetoric became calibrated to appeal to this central division, only deepening the ideological differences in Americans' world views. Whether or not one agrees with Lakoff's model, it highlights the central role that gender plays in dividing the American polity, a role to which modern environmentalists can ruefully attest. The challenges for environmental historians as we move further into the 21st century, remain great. Environmentalism is still a political project, and its historians ignore that fact at their own peril. But the cultural history of environmentalism shows that it has not always been that way. Can we find ways to disaggregate the gendered notions of our present politics from our scholarship? Is there a brighter future hidden in our environmental past?

¹⁸ Ruth Weiner, interview with author, Los Alamos National Laboratories, Albuquerque, NM. March 8, 2008.

¹⁹ George Lakoff. *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.