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2024

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Fighting Over Grounds: Settler Engagements with Land and Place in Southern Utah

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in Anthropology

by

Neak J. Loucks

Dissertation Committee:
Professor of Teaching, Angela Jenks, Chair
Professor Michael Fortun
Professor Kim Fortun

2024

DEDICATION

To

the people who choose curiosity
and who are willing to engage complexity
in their relationships, communities, and work

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This written page of acknowledgments will hardly do justice to the many people who have supported this effort in direct and indirect ways and whose influence I can see traces of throughout this dissertation. Even so, I will make a brief attempt at communicating the village behind this project coming to fruition.

I appreciate the support and labor of my doctoral committee. I am deeply grateful for the many conversations with Angela Jenks that not only were sites of figuring out what my dissertation was about, but also were interactions through which I have learned much about mentorship and dissertation pedagogy. The energy and attention Angela has offered to guiding me through this process, along with her curiosity, patience, and willingness to navigate several speed bumps along the way, are truly a gift. Thank you to Kim Fortun for breathing life into my project when it was floundering in its early stages; a fresh perspective of just what I needed help the project find its legs and build a foundation from which new pathways could unfold. Mike Fortun's interjections at various points throughout qualifying exams, fieldwork, and writing were important contributions to keeping the spark of analytical enjoyment alive; I am grateful for his perspective of finding value in some of the sideways connections my brain makes (in my endless journeys "into the weeds"), his support for playful intellectual engagement, and his belief in "good enough."

I love that I can see the contours of my academic lineage, with my analytical style having roots in Sara Dickey's anthropological practice—it brings me joy to see the winding journey of both my analytical orientations and topical focus having a thread of continuity from my undergraduate years to now. Present, too, is the influence of the many instances of collaborative thinking that have played out with James Adams and Charlie Curtis. Indeed, there are some perks to living with a fellow anthropologist coming out of the Sara Dickey School of Anthropology. Thank you to my proofreading crew, which also became my hype people in the final days: Ishana, Lore, Max, Abram, Tig, Jay, Charlie, Rani, Alex, Katie, Alan, Sarah, Henrietta, Sydney, and Maria.

My deepest gratitude to the people who have offered so many kinds of support over these years—the substance of these relations, too, is embedded in my analytical engagements and ethical orientations. These people include Katie, Tiger, Charlie, Jay, Tyler, Rani, James, Elizabeth, Jenna, Liz, (Kanab) Max, Simon, Lesley, (Baltimore) Max, Annie, Kaitlin, and so many more. These people have shown up in big and small ways, been enduring presences as well as shifted things in big ways from seemingly small moments, and changed how I think about and experience the world in so many ways.

And finally deep appreciation to the many other people of Kanab, in personal and professional domains, who have made my life so rich.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Fighting Over Grounds: Settler Engagements with Land and Place in Southern Utah

by

Neak J. Loucks

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, Irvine, 2024

Professor Angela Jenks, Chair

This dissertation examines U.S. public lands conflict through the lens of place and place-making, analyzing how commitments to specific visions of place guide settler engagements with contentious land management in southern Utah. Drawing on seven years of closely tracking public lands issues and three years of ethnographic fieldwork in and around Kanab, Utah, I argue that two dominant white settler visions of place—one centered on agrarian heritage and one on wilderness—reflect constellations of qualities that are seen to be enduring features of southern Utah. I present specific points within these constellations across my chapters as I examine land and place in several domains. First, I illustrate how everyday place-making permeates community life in Kanab, examining the various threads that Kanab residents weave in their efforts to define what type of place the town and region is. Next, I show how dominant place narratives are used to frame articulations of “correct” land management and claims about who has a legitimate say in public land decisions, arguing that these narratives function as a form of settler memory. Finally, I show how commitments to particular visions of ideal places influence how individuals receive, interpret, and wield data in relation to land decisions, exploring how symbolic resonance with features of place shapes people’s assessments of the

quality, validity, and relevance of data. I argue that these various place-making dynamics cultivate ill-will that fuels socio-political polarization, all while sharing similar (though largely unrecognized) settler colonial foundations. Utilizing a lens of place to examine land use conflicts in this setting helps reveal often-observed desires embedded in settler engagements with public lands issues and provides an explanatory framework to make sense of the seeming contradictions and inconsistencies observed in pro- and anti-protections discourse and action.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This Land Is Our Land

"This land is your land, this land is my land..." A mass of voices from a crowd of outdoor industry professionals, slightly misaligned in tempo and key, worked their way through Woody Guthrie's famous "alternative national anthem"¹ at a public lands rally in Salt Lake City. It was July 2017, and the Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) was hosting their Outdoor Retailers Summer Show in Salt Lake City for the last time. The rally, and the OIA's decision to move their twice-yearly gatherings of industry professionals to Denver, CO, came as a response to the national monument review that then-Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke was carrying out under President Donald Trump's Executive Order 12792. Though at the time Zinke's review was still in process and no recommendations had been made, outdoor recreationists and preservation/conservation advocates understood public lands to be under attack; they considered the mere existence of the review to be a politically-motivated effort driven by Utah politicians who considered the establishment of two landscape-scale national monuments in southern Utah to be instances of gross federal overreach.

The designation of these monuments—Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument (GSENM) in 1996 and Bears Ears National Monument (BENM) in 2016—are but two points in a constellation of conflict around public versus private land ownership and federal versus state land management in the Intermountain West.² These long-standing animosities were stoked and

¹ See Spitzer 2012.

² The term Intermountain West refers to the geographic region of the western United States spanning from the Rocky Mountain front to the Cascades and Sierra Nevadas. Put another way, it is the American West minus most of California and the western third of Oregon and Washington. While there are both material and symbolic connections between these areas and more general notions of the American West, the Intermountain West is a useful term that groups together areas that, in the contemporary period, share more features with each other (e.g., geographic, governmental, cultural, economic, etc.) than with coastal or near-coastal regions of the West.

brought to a new fervor with Trump's Executive Order 13792. This order declared that the Secretary of the Interior

shall conduct a review all Presidential designations or expansions of designations under the Antiquities Act made since January 1, 1996, where the designation covers more than 100,000 acres, where the designation after expansion covers more than 100,000 acres, or where the Secretary determines that the designation or expansion was made without adequate public outreach and coordination with relevant stakeholders, to determine whether each designation or expansion conforms to the policy set forth in section 1 of this order.³ (Exec. Order 13792, 82 FR 22016, 20429)

The parameters of this review were considered suspicious by many public lands protections advocates given GSENM's September 18th, 1996, designation. While it's possible the correlation of the designation year cutoff with GSENM was coincidental (i.e., the review covered "the last 20 years" without clear explanation of the reasoning behind the selection of that window of time) or that the review was set to start in the year of GSENM's designation because GSENM represented a shift into an era of more landscape- scale of objects of antiquity (more frequent monument designations on scales of hundreds of thousands acres or, in a few cases, one or two million acres), many protections advocates interpreted the date as evidence that the executive order was a treat offered from Trump to Utah politicians. That is, while the review included monuments across the United States designated between 1996 and 2016, the Utah monuments whose designations bookended that time period were seen as the underlying "reason" for the monument review.⁴

³ Review of Designations Under the Antiquities Act." Section 1 asserted that "Designations should be made in accordance with the requirements and original objectives of the Act and appropriately balance the protection of landmarks, structures, and objects against the appropriate use of Federal lands and the effects on surrounding lands and communities." Although interpretations of the Antiquities Act ended up not being a central focus of this dissertation, it is worth noting that this language implies that the Antiquities Act has and has always had a clear set of instructions about its application. Interpretations of the Antiquities Act have not been as straightforward as this language implies due to the dynamics of place commitments and symbolic resonance that I illustrate in this dissertation.

⁴ Some public lands protections advocates I spoke with went so far as to speculate that this "treat" to Utah politicians was tied to the release of recordings leading up to the 2020 presidential election in which Donald Trump spoke freely about the ease with which he could sexually assault women. Many Utah elected officials had initially responded negatively toward Trump when those tapes were released to the public, referencing their respect for

In Utah, state and county officials vocally asserting their opposition to the existing large national monuments led the OIA to declare prior to the 2017 Summer Show that they would be taking the economic impacts of their retailer shows to a state that was “more supportive of public lands.”⁵ A last hurrah in Salt Lake City, the Summer Show’s panels, presentations, and social gatherings were brimming with discussions about how outdoor companies can (and should) engage in public lands advocacy and how to strengthen that advocacy using narratives that highlight the outdoor industry as an economic force. Conversations and promotional materials were saturated with calls to action and ubiquitous public lands slogans and hashtags opposing the review (e.g., “Keep Public Lands in Public Hands”). The rally, marching from the OIA show location to the Utah state capitol building, was one of the scheduled events.

Titled “This Land is Our Land Rally,” the event was described in the show catalog as a “march to the Utah State Capitol to celebrate public lands and their importance to the outdoor industry.” Indeed, while the event was in response to “attacks on public lands,” the tone was celebratory, as though participants were finding triumph in both the solidarity of marching and chanting slogans in a sea of an estimated 3,000 participants and the defiance of being so visible and vocal in support of public lands protections in a state known for its anti-federal and pro-extractive industry stances. Upon reaching the capitol steps, several rally leaders—all young, white adults—took to the stage and sought to amp up the audience by leading the crowd in singing the first couple verses of Woody Guthrie’s “This Land is Your Land.” The signs people

women and/or their religious values, with some shifting endorsements to other Republican candidates. Among these officials were congressmen with a long history of involvement in public lands matters: Senator Mike Lee and Representative Chris Stewart, who endorsed other candidates, and Senator Orrin Hatch, who publicly criticized Trump but did not revoke his endorsement. The Utah congressmen eventually reversed their positions and endorsed Trump later in the campaign. These protections advocates speculated that Trump’s campaign team might have offered to take action regarding public lands in Utah state officials’ favor in exchange for their endorsement.

⁵ While there are active threads of anti-federal and anti-protections sentiment in Colorado, especially in western Colorado, the state government in Colorado tends to take positions more supportive of public lands protections than in Utah.

held as they stood on the capitol lawn and the impassioned rhetoric of many of the speakers that followed circled on the same themes of Guthrie's lyrics, positioning public lands as "our lands" and "my land."⁶ These assertions of a kind of "ownership" were linked to arguments about how public lands should be managed (e.g., privileging some uses over others) and who should get a say in that management, namely that "all American citizens" are collective "owners" of public land. I was struck by how these framings of public land, which I would come to hear in conversations and rhetoric far afield from this rally, sounded like people discussing private property. Yours, mine, ours...at this rally and beyond, the claims both aim to include everyone ("these lands belong to every American citizen") while also carrying a tone of indignance about the mishandling of something personal to individuals ("this land is mine").

This Land is Whose Land?

Writing in 2019 about Guthrie's protest anthem, Mali Obomsawin (Abenaki) argued that, "American patriotism erases us [Indigenous people], even if it comes in the form of a leftist protest song," and such an assessment might be extended to the dominant framings animating public lands protections advocates during the 2017 monument review. The outdoor industry is a very racially white space, and even as the 2017 retailer show had a few events discussing the importance of increasing diversity within the industry, the majority of participants and selected speakers at the rally were white or white-coded. One of the speakers, however, was Mark Maryboy (Diné and Paiute), who was heavily involved in the creation of Utah Diné Bikéyah, a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting Indigenous communities' ancestral land, and the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition, a coalition of five Tribes working to protect the Bears Ears

⁶ A sample of phrases from signs at the rally include "Keep Public Lands in Public Hands," "Protect our Playgrounds," "It's not about Utah, it's about U.S.," "Protect Wild Utah," "Save Grand Staircase Escalante," "Utah Stands with Bears Ears," "Almost Saved is 100% Lost; Protect Our Public Lands," "Monuments for ALL of us," "Birch Please, Leave our Lands Alone," "Monuments for ALL," "This Land is Our Land," and others with similar themes.

landscape. Maryboy was also Utah's first Native⁷ county commissioner, elected in San Juan County in 1986.⁸ Operating in the shared frame of the rally that treated the impending monument reductions as having already occurred, he opened his speech to the predominantly non-Native crowd saying, "Now you know how it feels to have your land taken away." This moment of dry humor poked a hole in dominant (white) environmentalist discourse that obscures both Indigenous ties to land and the settler colonial processes and white supremacist underpinnings shaping public lands conservation/preservation. While the rest of his speech went on to highlight inter-Tribal organizing around Bears Ears National Monument in a manner aligning with the themes of the other speakers, Maryboy's opening line meant that, for a moment, an acknowledgement of settler colonial dispossession interrupted the largely uninterrogated settler enthusiasm for public lands protection.

This fleeting moment of direct reference to colonial processes of dispossession, along with another Indigenous man standing silently in the crowd holding a sign high in the air that read, "Stop White Man's Reign on Tribal Lands," felt like the elephant in the room, blatantly visible reminders of Indigenous presence and the Native dispossession that enabled these very public lands conflicts to exist. But as I observed in the years that followed, much of dominant

⁷ See "A Note on Language" later in this chapter regarding my use of Native and Indigenous as descriptors for people.

⁸ Mark Maryboy served a total of 4 terms (12 years) on the San Juan County Commission. Through a combination of how district lines have been drawn and voter disenfranchisement, San Juan County's commission has been predominantly filled with white Utahns who are part of the conservative and LDS population, despite over half of San Juan County's population being Indigenous (largely Diné/Navajo). Through a combination of a redistricting process in response to a gerrymandering lawsuit and voter registration efforts by such groups as the Rural Utah Project, San Juan County elected an Indigenous-majority county commission in San Juan County in 2018 (Fahys 2019). During the period of this Native-majority, the commission reversed its resolutions regarding Bears Ears National Monument, replacing the previous commissioners' resolution against the designation with a resolution stating support for the Monument (Podmore 2020). Mark Maryboy's younger brother, Kenneth, was one of the commissioners elected in 2018. Although this majority was lost in 2022 (after new district lines were put in place in 2021), the results of this political organizing represent an important disruption to white Mormon narratives of their own demographic and cultural dominance. The district boundaries put in place in 2021 have since been challenged in court, resulting in a return to district lines that support a more even distribution of Indigenous voters by the 2024 general election (Fisher 2024).

environmentalists' engagement with Native perspectives and experience has been limited by ideologies about pristine, untouched landscapes and is often laced with persisting stereotypes about who belongs in that space and how people interact with the landscape. Later in 2017, responses to the Trump administration's eventual monument reduction used idioms of private property to frame the decisions as an act of *their* land being "taken away." The most striking example was a Patagonia brand social media post and webpage stating in white text over a solid black background, "The President Stole Your Land," with a subheading that declared the reduction an "illegal move" and equated the eliminations of monument protections with "stealing" land.

These tensions persist. Though conversations about Indigenous connections to the ancestral lands called public lands have become more common in white-led conservation/preservation organizations and online discursive spaces centered on public lands and outdoor recreation since 2017, such idioms of ownership as Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land" continue to obscure the settler colonial processes that set the scene for contemporary public lands conflict. With hope and relief, white land protections advocates, celebrating President Biden's election in 2020 as a first step to the reinstatement of the full monument boundaries, expressed connection to this song when it was performed at President Biden's inauguration. In contrast, Indigenous people across social media and other online platforms expressed exasperation at the uncritical reproduction of this settler frame, especially after a massive political organizing effort (largely Native-led) to register Native individuals to vote and get people to the polls in the 2020 presidential election. Obomsawin articulates the effect of how Guthrie's song is taken up today:

Woody Guthrie's protest anthem exemplifies [how many Americans perceive] Natives: American patriotism erases us [Indigenous people], even if it comes in the form of a leftist protest song. Why? Because this land 'was' our land. Through genocide, broken treaties, and a legal system created by and for the colonial interest, this land 'became' American land. But to question the legitimacy of American land control today instantly makes one the most radical person in the room--even in leftist circles (Obomsawin 2019).

This erasure is furthered as the song's verses critiquing American capitalism and exclusionism tend to be omitted or forgotten, even in instances like the public lands rally where it was an expression of defiance against Utah state officials and the Trump administration.⁹ When the lyrics are selectively reinterpreted without Guthrie's initial critique, Obomsawin (2019) argues, "the song's provocative gesture becomes merely patriotic...The lyrics as they are embraced today evoke Manifest Destiny and expansionism ('this land was made for you and me'). When sung as a political act, the gathering or demonstration is infused with anti-Nativism and reinforces the [obscuring or omission of Indigenous dispossession]." The "This Land is Our Land" rally reproduced this obscuration even as Indigenous dispossession and contemporary Indigenous presence on and connection to land was made visible through Mark Maryboy's dry humor and the recognition of the then newly-created Bears Ears National Monument as an outcome of Native organizing. This example illustrates a tension that pervades the realm of public lands protections well beyond this particular rally.

"Land Grabs" and Opposition to Federal Ownership and Management

Protections advocates' sense that a reduction of national monument boundaries was taking away "their" land has a parallel among their anti-protections counterparts. When 1.9 million acres of federal public land managed by the Bureau of Land Management was designated Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument by President Bill Clinton in 1996, Utah Senator Orrin Hatch deemed it "the mother of all land grabs" (Larmer 1996). This reaction can be understood as part of a broader history of anti-federal reactions to federal public lands

⁹ I was somewhat surprised that one of the lesser-known verses critiquing capitalism and private property wasn't taken advantage of in a setting where the members of this crowd were staunchly opposed to land transfers of public lands to private property:

There was a big high wall there that tried to stop me.
The sign was painted, said 'Private Property.'
But on the backside, it didn't say nothing.
This land was made for you and me.

management that have long run strong in the Intermountain West. The particular form of opposition centered on county and state government officials challenging federal land management actions—through various avenues such as pitching “land transfer bills” (that would shift ownership from federal to state or local governments or into private ownership) and litigation—came to be known as the Sagebrush Rebellion, first flaring up in the 1970s in response to environment-focused legislation like the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act and the 1976 Federal Land Policy and Management Act (see “Creating Public Lands” later in this chapter). These white settler anti-federal actors wielded languages of colonialism to cast the federal government in the wrong; for example, Cal Black, a vocal actor in the Sagebrush Rebellion who served as a San Juan County commissioner for 21 years prior to his death in 1990, described federal bureaucrats from Washington, D.C. as “colonizers” in their actions to remove cows or vehicles from land or otherwise “protect” it (Thompson 2016). Just as land protections advocates describe a change in monument boundaries through property language, “federal land grab” phrases abound in historical and contemporary responses to land decisions that impose use restrictions on an area of federal public land, whether through monument or wilderness designations or new provisions in resource management plans.

Additional periods of heightened anti-federal opposition have played out in recent decades. Some of these moments have been characterized, journalistically and by protections advocates, as additional waves of the Sagebrush Rebellion turned plural—sometimes called the Sagebrush Rebellions (e.g., Thompson 2021)—even as such events are distinct in their mode of protest. These waves include a spate of bombings in Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service facilities in Nevada in the 1990s and an uptick in anti-federal action during the Obama administration’s relatively pro-conservation era, a time with both increased talk of “land transfer” and flashpoints like the 2014 Bunkerville Standoff at the Bundy Ranch in Nevada. These and other anti-federal actions, such as the 2016 takeover of the Malheur Wildlife Refuge

in Oregon, are loosely connected; although they do not reflect a singular “movement,” key figures and conceptual similarities are found across them. In contemporary public lands discourse, different aspects of these historical anti-federal actions are variously highlighted as relevant historical antecedents by both pro- and anti-protections actors.

Some of the most well-known characters in the anti-protections space are Cliven Bundy and his sons, Ammon and Ryan. Having settled in what is now Bunkerville, Nevada, as part of early Mormon colonizing settlement efforts, the Bundy’s are known for the 2014 armed standoff with federal agents at their ranch in response to the BLM seeking to address Cliven Bundy’s decades of unpaid grazing fees totaling over one million dollars (e.g., Nagourney 2014 in the *New York Times*; ten years later Cliven Bundy has yet to pay any grazing fees [Yachnin 2024]). Ammon and Ryan went on to lead the 2016 occupation of the Malheur Wildlife Refuge in Oregon as an expression of opposition to federally-managed lands and “in support of” two ranchers charged for arson on public lands (although those ranchers said they didn’t want support in the form of an armed occupation and stand off). This opposition to federal land management, like protections advocates’ language, leans on language of property and the federal government “stealing” land. Unlike the protections advocates’ perspective that blends an individual sense of ownership with an image of public lands being “all Americans’ land,” the Bundys’ articulations of “land grabs” center on a personal claim and connection to land.

For instance, in response to the creation of Gold Butte National Monument in Clark County, Nevada, adjacent to the Bundys’ ranch in late 2016, the Bundy family released a statement on social media expressing that they were “saddened, but not surprised, by [President Obama’s]...decision to make *our ranch and home* a national monument” (in Yachnin 2017, emphasis mine). Claiming the move to be an act of “federal overreach,” the statement continued with an emphasis on local connections to land: “If any of this were really about protecting the land, you would come here, work with the local people who love this land, those who have a vested interest in this land, and take the time to learn what this land really needs.

This is about control, pure and simple." (in Yachnin 2017). In a phone call while in federal custody leading up to a trial related to the 2014 Bunkerville standoff, Ammon Bundy cast the designation as an "arbitrary, unlawful act" that was in violation of the Constitution and an example of "how the wicked gain control of the people"¹⁰; the designation for Ammon was a demonstration that "the battle for liberty is right here on *our* land (in Yachnin 2017, emphasis mine).

I encountered an elaboration on this conceptualization toward land when Ammon Bundy visited Kanab, Utah, in March 2021 as part of a "speaking tour" through several Intermountain West states. At the time I lived in Kanab and worked for a conservation organization. With the news of the event, organization leadership told Kanab employees to stay away from the office from the day before the event until the following Monday—a precautionary measure out of concern that the Bundys or their supporters might engage in some kind of anti-monument intimidation, violence, or vandalism given that the organization is closely associated with Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, has a nearly matching name (Grand Staircase Escalante Partners), and was frequently assumed to be formally connected to the Bureau of Land Management.¹¹ Despite the concerns about safety that left me working from home, I couldn't pass up the chance to see the Bundys in action after years of keeping track of their

¹⁰ This kind of negative perspective toward government action presented with language hinting at a theological lens was also present in Ammon Bundy's presentation to a room full of Kanab residents in March 2021, during which he elaborated an image of this process of the wicked gaining control, asserting that environmentalists "infiltrate" the government to further their own extreme "religion" and that they seek to "harm the Children of God."

¹¹ These concerns about violence toward persons or property were long-standing. When the GSEP Kanab office first opened in 2017, staff worried they might receive rocks through the windows. Staff in the organization's Escalante office discussed adding security cameras and planned to stay home in the days following the expected monument restoration. Certainly, such events as the 2014 Bunkerville standoff on the Bundy ranch and the 2016 occupation of the Malheur Wildlife Refuge show that armed engagement is a possibility, and the American West has been site to numerous acts of violence that didn't make national news, ranging from the bombing of a Forest Service cabin in Nevada to personal threats against BLM employees. Kane County, where the primary GSENM office is located, has the highest rates of violence toward BLM employees out of all Utah counties (Nemerever 2019).

anti-federal actions. Advertised in the local paper as “A Night With Ammon Bundy” and described on flyers in town as a “constitution class,” the event wasn’t explicitly pitched as a talk about public lands. Instead, it was a kind of introduction to the “People’s Rights Movement,” a social-political organizing effort that coalesced in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic and brought a variety of far-right stances (e.g., anti-vaxxers and anti-maskers increasingly known as the “health freedoms movement,” anti-protections positions on public lands management, and more general anti-federal perspectives) under a cohesive narrative about “natural rights.” Nonetheless, Ammon’s articulation of his family’s relationship to land and the federal government’s role in disrupting that connection was central to the frame in which he taught his audience how to interpret the constitution.

In contrast to the anger-filled and nearly incoherent ranting of some of the local individuals who spoke before him, Ammon Bundy took the stage with the demeanor of a bashful, humble cowboy. Very quickly it became clear that (this evening, at least) he was not going to be a fire-and-brimstone speaker. Dressed in nice jeans, a blazer, and a cowboy hat, he leaned into a soft-spoken persona, an everyman’s man acknowledging that he “might not be preaching to the choir” and that he “know[s] you are all smart people, and [doesn’t] expect you to believe [him] without evidence.” It felt, as my roommate and I reflected later that night, not so much like a gathering of “Ammon’s army” (Institute for Research and Education on Human Rights, 2020) but rather a service in Ammon’s Church, with his “sermon” a performance of reasonableness and logic, emphasizing themes of family, ties to land, and freedom; “testimony”¹² from audience members became the avenue through which fear, conspiracy

¹² Testimony is a dominant discursive genre in the Jesus Christ Church of Latter-Day Saints. Though not all audience speakers followed the precise format of LDS testimony—only some referred to Heavenly Father and/or integrated their conviction with a connection to their pioneer ancestors—the ways in which audience members were allowed to speak, not necessarily to ask questions but rather to share their own narratives, felt very similar to the speech act of “giving testimony” that I have encountered in a variety of settings during my time in Utah (e.g., when I was invited to join an LDS Ward for dinner while camping in the La Sal Mountains in southeastern Utah in 2017).

theories, and talk of violence were given a platform; and donation boxes were passed around the room as if tithing trays.

Speaking in a soft and gentle voice, Ammon began the story of his family—how they were sent by Brigham Young to a hot, dry desert that previous Mormon settlers had reported as uninhabitable. “So Brigham Young went looking for the most stubborn, ornery people he could find. No one wanted to be there, no one wanted it...but my family went down there and diverted the water and leveled the ground and made a beautiful valley of it.” He told of his family’s resourcefulness in identifying, capturing, and diverting water in this arid landscape, how for 145 years they have diverted water all over the desert. The illustration he created countered protection advocates’ assertions of the ecological damage of grazing livestock on public lands: “It made the desert full of life. Where animals couldn’t survive, now they could—everything benefitted. Rabbits, chuckers, coyotes, even the little insects. It created an ecosystem of wildlife...All of this was because my forefathers ran cattle on the desert.”

From here, Ammon began interweaving his family story with historical information about grazing contracts and legal theories of property. Building from the creation of grazing registries in Nevada’s young statehood to present BLM grazing permits, Ammon carefully walked the audience through historical forms of grazing use and documentation. In contrast to the contemporary structure of ranchers purchasing animal unit months in the form of a grazing permit, Ammon described how grazing rights came in the form of water rights. “There was no need for two registries because you can’t run cattle without water,” Ammon explained. He insisted that this historical format is “very well documented,” including in the form of deeds. His father, Cliven, owns 11 of these, and for the first time that evening Ammon spoke emphatically: “It is a title. It is a deed. And it is real property. You could take these deeds and sell them; you can give them as inheritance, trade them...they are *real* property. They are real property,” a phrase he repeated again just minutes later.

As he moved into narrating how contemporary federal land management came to be, his

family, ranchers, miners, and others were cast as very reasonable. “When my family came and started using the land and making claims on the land, they never claimed the real estate. You have to have 100 acres for one cow—to have enough cattle, you have to have a tremendous amount of land. They weren’t greedy, they didn’t claim it as their own.” Instead, he said, they claimed the forage—“We own the grass!”—again insisting that it was “very well documented.” Alongside this ownership, he said, were miners owning mining rights, foresters owning forest rights, and other users such as hunters and campers. Once again speaking with a calm, lilting voice, he painted a rosy picture of multiple uses in which all users shared the space and any inappropriate behavior, such as a hunter shooting a water tank or a rancher fencing someone out, would be adjudicated by the sheriffs. “It worked and it does work in the west. There is no reason why in these arid lands you can’t ranch, you can’t hunt, you can’t mine, and you can’t camp. There’s no reason why. We’ve done it for a long time and it worked. Of course there are people involved so there are challenges, but you get it taken care of—you might have to take it to the courts to adjudicate it, to litigate it [but it works].” In this utopic past, Ammon said, rights were being established through legal doctrines of prior appropriation and beneficial use. “Everyone could exercise their rights and be just fine, *until* the federal government came in and said ‘no one’s claimed the land, no one’s claimed the real estate.’”

Next, Ammon narrated the decline from this utopia. Though at first the offices that became the BLM (the Federal Grazing Board and General Land Office) operated with goals of getting people to use and settle on the land, he traces a shift toward behavior on behalf of the federal government that he considers unconstitutional based on the interpretation that the federal government was only supposed to deal in national security and adjudicate disputes between independent free states. Citing the impact of World War II on heightened pro-federal nationalism and the evolution of a ranchers’ improvement fund created in 1934 with 12.5 percent going to administrative costs into today’s grazing contract, Ammon painted a picture of sneaky overreach in which the BLM pulls the wool over all of our eyes through incremental

steps, the result being that decades later “we’re all convinced that this land is ‘BLM land.’” Through putting up signs and making maps, Ammon explained, they (the federal government) “got everyone to believe it...which is natural law, it’s adverse possession, it’s not constitutional, but they did it anyway.” “Through a succession of deception,” Ammon argued, “they started getting the ranchers and miners and ranchers [sic] to contract with them; they transferred the rights of the rancher, miner, hiker, camper from the people to them.” “Hijacked!” an audience member called in response.

The “Night with Ammon Bundy” event advanced an opposing view to the “This Land is Our Land” rally with regard to how public lands should be used and managed, yet there are striking similarities across these two events. As with the “This Land is Our Land” Rally, the “Night with Ammon Bundy” crowd was predominantly white—frankly, even more so. Ammon’s illustration of his family’s settlement in arid Nevada activates tropes of pioneer toughness and ingenuity while omitting reference to Indigenous communities already present in the region. His utopic image of minimally-conflicting multiple use features user roles (rancher, miner, hunter, etc.) in which “everyone could exercise their rights and be just fine,” leaving unacknowledged the ways in which settler individuals and settler governments enacted violence against Indigenous groups to secure their ability to carry out such activities. While Ammon’s discussions of ownership included reference to a genuine type of settler private property—water rights do exist in the forms of deeds/titles—he, too, implies land being taken away. The frame through which Ammon presented his family’s care for and rights to accessing land omits Indigenous presence and Indigenous claims to land while emphasizing how the slow creep of federal regulation has progressively restricted and “taken away” what the Bundys consider to be rightfully—and “reasonably,” using the frame of multiple use—theirs. His narrative of decline presents the rich irony of his opposition to a government taking control of land using the narrative that “no one’s claimed the land.” Now you know what it’s like to have your land taken away... And yet, like the indignant protections advocates at the rally, Ammon Bundy and other

anti-federal patriots who articulate changing land management through the language of property and land grabs ascribe such language to changes in public lands management that are far from equivalent to Indigenous dispossession. Just as the landscape of progressive, conservation politics and public lands advocacy is enmeshed in settler colonial processes, so, too, is the landscape of conservative, anti-protectionist advocacy.

Getting Beyond Archetypes

The two events described above—the This Land is Our Land Rally and the Night with Ammon Bundy—illustrate a dominant environmentalist versus rancher framing that has animated public lands conflict since at least the 1970s. Throughout my research, I encountered this framing across discursive settings ranging from individuals in conversation about public lands (both within southern Utah communities and elsewhere) to news media portrayals and politician statements on land controversies. Indeed, self-identified environmentalists and ranchers use this framing themselves, positioning those on the “other side” of land controversies as fundamentally different. “Now, extreme environmentalists,” Ammon Bundy asserted in one of his few moments of emphatic emotional expression, “they believe different than a Christian man or woman. You have to understand that there is a complete different theology. Christian men and women believe the earth was created by God for the benefit of man...we are to take care of it, not to abuse it, but it is for us, to live through this probationary period to prepare to return to God...Extreme environmentalists believe something different. They don’t believe that the earth is for the benefit of man.” He went on to explain that extreme environmentalists “removing people from the land, taking out dams, destroying ranchers...is intentionally to harm the Children of God. Talk to any of them in any details, and you’ll find that this is their religion” (to which the audience responded with “mhmm” and “that’s right.”). Meanwhile, it is not uncommon for protections advocates to cast anti-protections views—especially those within Utah—in relation to both religious beliefs (and, at times, religious extremism) and the ranching archetype. Critiques that focus on anthropocentric interpretations of the Judeo-Christian bidding to “use”

land, and on ranchers' use of water and impact on landscapes in an arid climate, abound in protections advocates' articulations of what anti-protections stances are about.

As I show at various points throughout this dissertation, the environmentalist versus rancher construction has lasting symbolic power. These archetypes are leveraged across land decision scales (e.g., ranging from local to national) and settings. For instance, the caricature of "outsider environmentalists" is activated in local-level conflicts, even in cases where most of the voices calling for the protections-focused option are local residents, as I write about in chapters 2 and 4. They are also at times utilized in ways largely disconnected from personal individual material and economic practice. For instance, anti-protections' assertions frequently center ranchers' interests and express an affinity for ranching even when coming from individuals who do not themselves run a cattle operation, including those whose families never have. The rancher, then, is not just a land user type motivated by their own "rational" economic interests, but rather holds symbolic value well beyond those who practice that livelihood. The common framing of environmentalists versus ranchers and the rhetoric associated with it reinforce the idea that public lands debates involve two mutually-exclusive groups caught in an intractable battle to control land.

As I began developing this project in 2016, however, I knew from growing up in the Intermountain West that such a portrayal was overly tidy. While media I encountered about public lands conflict in southern Utah tended to reproduce these identity categories, my fieldwork introduced encounters that complicated and challenged this framing. In the summer of 2017, I lived itinerantly across southern Utah, spending time interacting with and interviewing folks primarily in Kanab, Escalante, Moab, and Blanding, as well as in encounters out on public lands. In 2019, I moved to Kanab expecting to channel my research questions about public lands management through national monument conflict. Although national monument controversy—including the 2017 reduction of monument boundaries and 2021 restoration of the original boundaries—produced multiple flashpoints and remains a key example in my analysis, I

came to recognize that GSENM is but one node in a network of land controversies spanning spatial and temporal scales (local, regional, and national land discourses, as well as the material and symbolic products of evolving land, people, and government relations through time). That is, this conflict exists as an assemblage of varied but related—legally, symbolically, historically, etc.—land use conflicts.¹³

Watching other land controversies play out and seeing themes from land controversies appearing in other everyday community dramas complicated the dominant characterization of public lands conflict in monument-specific discourse. Ethnographic encounters across differing land controversies and sparks that flew in contexts that weren't explicitly connected to land conflict created productive comparative details, highlighting conundrums that warranted further exploration and making visible patterns that aren't apparent when focusing on a singular land controversy. These examples highlighted both how engagements with land issues are more nuanced and varied than the environmentalist versus rancher trope suggests and how land decisions spur a reproduction of binary position-taking. They also demonstrated how these dominant oppositional views offer different flavors of a shared settler colonial foundation. Ultimately, I came to view these seemingly intractable battles over how land is used and managed as battles over place. Although "place" was not a central component of the initial framing of this project, it became a central aspect of how I came to make sense of the complexity and contradictions of my ethnographic encounters. Amidst rhetoric about turning to data to escape bias and claims that one's own stance was apolitical while the opposition's was biased, there was something more emotional—a pull toward particular features, not just of the landscape but also of how people interact with that landscape and with each other.

¹³ For example, other conflicts within this assemblage include, within Utah, RS2477 rulings, School and Institutional Trust Land Association land decisions, and, in the American West more broadly, the Land Transfer movement, Sagebrush Rebellion, People's Rights Movement, and wilderness designation.

Place and Place-Making

Scholars across disciplines have theorized place through a variety of analytical traditions (Low 2017). While one classic thread of this literature is an articulation of space and place as distinct conceptual categories, with the former being the physical space in which something occurs and the latter (place) being the assorted meanings that may be projected onto particular spaces (Tuan [1977] 2001), this space versus place distinction is not integral to how place appeared in ethnographic encounters and how place figures in this analysis. Thus, I pull from space and place theorizations along different lines than this classic distinction. Within anthropology, place has shifted from being “the uncontested ground of distinctive culture” (Hinkson 2017, 53) to becoming an analytic developed through several lines of theorization. Some of these interrogations have included the spatial practices of colonial governance producing the places in which anthropologists have conducted fieldwork (Asad 1973) and growing recognition of a need for attention to connections between disparate spaces/places even in purportedly “local” settings (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). For some anthropologists (e.g., Casey 1996, Howes 2004, Ingold 2011, Pink 2008, Stewart 1996), “place is neither found nor made but rather congealed out of diffuse phenomena, experienced in the moment, constantly becoming, including in ethnography” (Hinkson 2017, 53). Other approaches focus on the doing or making of place, such as how space gains meaning through practice (e.g., Bourdieu 1977) and how place is generated through discourse and everyday actions (e.g., Benson and Jackson 2012). Some discussions of place focus on the potential for spaces and places to carry symbolic meaning (Turner 1988) or on the various factors shaping what creates place and/or gives place meaning, such as sound (Feld 1996) and lived relationships maintained through stories of events (Basso 1996).

From the many theorizations of space and place, my project adopts a notion of place as

performative (Bell 1999, Butler 1990, 1993¹⁴), dynamic (Lefebvre [1974] 1991, Massey 2005), and involving sentiments of attachment or desire. Places are “actively made and maintained” (Benson and Jackson 2012, 794), the construction of which is shaped by power relations “embedded in race, class, and gender equality; disputed claims to history, heritage, and collective memory; limited access to territory and resources; and other contested social processes” (Low 2017, 69). “Discourses of place” are utilized to make claims to physical spaces and to community membership (Modan 2007, 282), as well as “to legitimate social and spatial relations and create a contested sense of community” (Low 2017, 129). Such place constructions are shared but might be understood as an amalgamation of “all the social constructions of spatial meanings enacted [by individuals] and embedded at the site” (Low 2017, 73; Rodman 1992). Lefebvre’s ([1974] 1991) categories of spatial production—spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space—offer a basic framework for visualizing the intersections of individual, social, and regulatory/governmental place-making. These aspects of spatial production, together, remind of the interweaving of everyday action (the practices through which individuals themselves seek to assert place), regulatory processes, and broader social imaginaries that produce particular kinds of spaces or of shared senses of place. The interplay of these types of spatial production can be seen throughout the ethnographic material and other supporting details I present in this dissertation.

This dissertation brings insights from seven years of closely following American public lands conflicts and three years of immersive ethnographic fieldwork to detail contentious place-making in southern Utah. Although my ethnographic findings arrive at a slightly different notion of place than central space and place literature, my main focus is less about theorizing place and more about theorizing conflict via how place commitments influence how people engage

¹⁴ “That reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (Butler 1993, 2). Put in other words, performativity is the “repeated discursive practices [that] enact and reinforce particular understandings of place” (Benson and Jackson 2012, 797).

with land conflict. My project follows multiple layers of contested, inflammatory place-making and illustrates how idealized visions of place impact how individuals narrate claims about who should have a say in land decisions; how people assess the relevance and validity of data; and how these place commitments cultivate bad feeling and ill-will that fuel socio-political polarization, all while sharing similar settler colonial foundations. Utilizing a lens of place to examine land use conflicts in this setting helps us make sense of the seeming contradictions and inconsistencies observed in pro- and anti-protections discourse and action.

Through the remainder of this chapter, I offer additional contextual information to scaffold the reader in their encounter with the text. First, I present an overview of the history of public lands, the settler colonial processes that produced them, and how the public is organized by the stakeholder models in current land governance. Then I describe my methods, explaining my decision to focus on settler perspectives and how my writing approach addresses issues of privacy and confidentiality. Finally, I close the chapter with an overview of the remaining chapters of the dissertation.

Orienting to Public Lands

While connected to more general ideas of land use and attending to place-making that extends beyond land itself, this project centers on discourse and action around U.S. “public lands.” Public lands are a subset of property owned by federal or state governments that are open to public use in some manner. Not all state- and federally-owned land is “public” in this way; for instance, areas administered by the U.S. Department of Defense for such purposes as military bases and training ranges are federally-owned but not public, and there are similar non-public state lands. Other federal agencies managing land that is typically not open to the public include the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Reclamation, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the Army Corps of Engineers. The majority (around 607 of 640 million acres) of the U.S. government’s land property, however, falls under four federal land management agencies who administer land that is typically open to public use (Hoover et al.

2023). These agencies are the National Park Service (NPS), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). Except for the Forest Service, which is under the U.S. Department of Agriculture, these agencies are part of the Department of the Interior (DOI).¹⁵ Similarly, some state-owned land is managed by agencies not open to the public (in Utah, for example, the Utah Department of Transportation), while land managed by the Department of Natural Resources (a state agency common across many states) or, in Utah, the School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA) are typically open to the public. While both state and federal public land features throughout land conflicts I detail in this dissertation, in this section I focus on federal public land because of its centrality in public lands discourse, sometimes even to the point of overshadowing state jurisdiction involved in a given land decision. In examples where state land comes into play, such as in chapter 4, I provide additional details about relevant state agencies and their missions.

Of the 640 million acres of federally-owned land, which makes up about 28% of all land within the United States, over a third (220 million acres) is in Alaska, a state that accounts for about 18% of total U.S. land area. Nonetheless, federally-owned public land is significant in the contiguous American West, and the top twelve states aside from Alaska with the highest percentage of federal land are in the western contiguous United States (Vincent et al. 2020). The federal land in the top twelve states accounts for 92% of all federal land, and these areas cumulate to notable percentages of total land area. The states with the highest percentage of

¹⁵ A Cabinet-level agency, the DOI contains eleven bureaus attending to various aspects of managing “America’s vast natural and cultural resource” (U.S. Department of Interior n.d.a). Foreshadowing the arguments I flesh out in chapter 3, reminders of settler colonialism pervade not just cultural understandings of public lands but also the government systems through which lands are managed. For instance, reflecting early American articulations of Indigenous people as closer to “nature” and distinct from white settlers, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Bureau of Indian Education are within the Department of the Interior (the “Interior” referring to the land itself). While the absence of restructuring after the 1953 creation of the Department of Health and Human Services and the 1979 Department of Education may speak to the bureaucratic obstacles that deter changes to government structures and processes, such inertia results in an example of the endurance of colonial constructions in plain sight.

federal land are Nevada at approximately 80% (of total land area), Utah at about 63%, and Idaho and Alaska at about 62% and 61%, respectively (Vincent et al. 2020), making the American West a prominent site of public land debates.^{16,17} Within Utah, about 23% of the state falls within national parks, wilderness areas, national monuments, or other federally designated

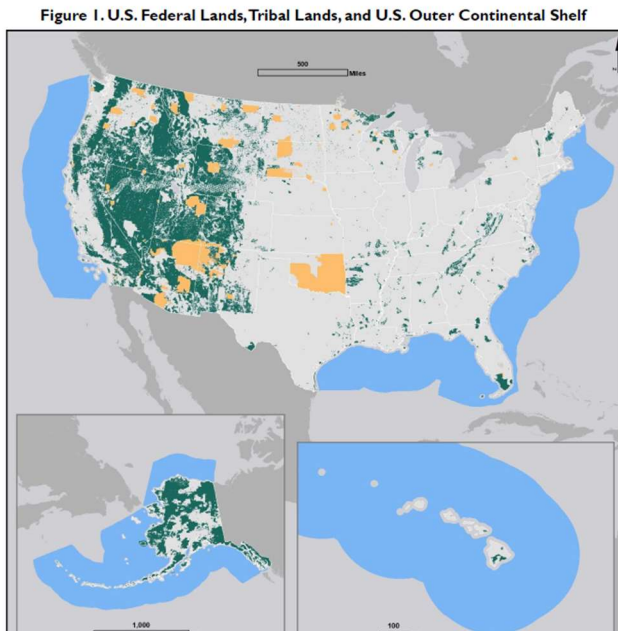


Figure 1.1 Map of U.S. federal lands displayed in Congressional Research Service Report 43429 (Hoover et al. 2023).

VIADROME SERVICE; NPS - NATIONAL PARK SERVICE; USGS - U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY. THIS MAP SHOWS A GENERALIZED IMAGE OF THE U.S. OFFSHORE PLANNING REGIONS ADMINISTERED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR AND THE SURFACE ACRES OF FEDERAL LAND ADMINISTERED BY THE FEDERAL LAND MANAGEMENT AGENCIES (FLMAs) IN THE 50 STATES AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA (TERRITORIES ARE NOT SHOWN). THIS MAP ALSO SHOWS BIA AND TRIBAL LANDS, WHICH REFLECT LANDS HELD IN TRUST BY THE UNITED STATES, FEDERAL INDIAN RESERVATIONS, AND OTHER TYPES OF TRIBAL LAND, BUT IS NOT INCLUSIVE OF ALL TRIBAL LAND HOLDINGS, STATUSES, OR DESIGNATIONS.

areas, i.e., areas with specific land use restrictions (i.e., compared to more general public lands; Utah Public Lands Policy Coordinating Office n.d.).

Whereas 80 million acres of federal land are managed by the National Park Service with a focus on conserving resources with a focus on enjoyment for the public and 89 million acres are managed by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with a focus on habitat conservation for plants and animals, the vast majority of federal land is managed

¹⁶ In the 11 coterminous states in the American West (the top states excluding Alaska), federal land makes up about 46% of all land, compared to around 4% of land in other states (excluding Alaska; Vincent et al. 2020).

¹⁷ That varying percentages are often stated for these states regarding the percentage of public land appears to be due to different statements referring to federal public land only or federal and state public lands; for instance, when including state lands, the percentage of “public land” in Utah jumps from about 63% (federal only) to around 71% (federal and state; the 71%, for example, comes from Utah Public Lands Policy Coordinating Office n.d.). Variations within this range may be due to inclusion or exclusion of particular types of federal and state land, e.g., whether only explicitly public-facing state lands are included, such as state parks or if all SITLA land is included, even that which isn’t currently open to the public.

by the Bureau of Land Management (244 million acres)¹⁸ and the U.S. Forest Service (193 million acres; Hoover et al. 2023). Important to the management conflicts discussed throughout this dissertation, both the BLM and USFS operate with a multiple-use mission, meaning that they are charged with making management decisions while taking into account a wide range of uses “including livestock grazing, energy and mineral development, recreation, timber production, watershed protection, and wildlife and fish habitat” (Hoover et al. 2023). It is this multiple-use mandate that, at least in part, makes it so easy for both pro- and anti-protections perspectives to cast the BLM as a villain in narratives of public lands management—because the desires and goals of some uses disrupt the desires and goals of others, any decision that appears to prioritize one use over another is met with accusations of privileging some public lands users over others.

Constructing Public Lands

The majority of major “land acquisitions” that came to make up the “public domain” occurred between 1781 and 1867 (U.S. Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management 2021, 3). What is obscured through such language is that contemporary conditions of ownership, management, and use were built through the systematic destruction and removal of Native populations and incentives for white settlement driven by colonial principles like the Doctrine of Discovery, the evolution of that doctrine into the American ideology of Manifest Destiny, U.S. government disregard for treaties with Indigenous Nations, and legislative actions ignoring or undermining Indigenous sovereignty (e.g., see Goodluck [Diné, Mandan, Hidatsa, and Tsimshian] 2023, Opie 1998). That the typical language used to describe how public lands came into being obscures these aspects reminds of the settler framing of that dominant telling. As a Moapa Paiute woman participating in a workshop on racial justice at the 2019

¹⁸ Additionally, the Bureau of Land Management manages 714 million acres of federally-owned subsurface mineral estate (Hoover et al. 2023).

Conservation Lands Foundation summit asserted, white conservationists have the privilege to “grow up not having to learn about the Doctrine of Discovery,” while she and her relatives and ancestors have been aware of it by virtue of its lasting detrimental impact on their well-being.

While many of the large “acquisitions” were cessions or purchases in relation to other imperial nations (processes themselves denying or ignoring Indigenous sovereignty), it was the movement of “American” people—that is, white people—into that space that realized a doctrine of Manifest Destiny materially, spurring settler-Native conflict, brutal massacres, and military removal of Native nations and communities. A legal expression of Manifest Destiny and an ideal of Jeffersonian democracy that idealized the yeoman farmer, a series of Homestead Acts starting in 1862 encouraged *families* to settle in the west. Such legislative action to “open up” land to white settlers was not a single demarcation of land available for grants, but rather a series of ongoing infringements on Native land, in later iterations even cutting into existing reservations to provide desirable free land. Thus, the various homestead acts passed throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries defined the realization of Manifest Destiny by seeking to replace brown bodies, Native bodies, with white ones—not just temporarily, as was seen earlier with white trappers, but in the form of settlement, in family and community groups, and with the labor of working the land. The post-Civil War period was a time of accelerated territorial dispossession, not just through these legislative acts but also physical violence aiming to disrupt Indigenous communities and impose white settler norms, including deputizing white settler citizens to enact violence on their own and the state’s behalf (Bruyneel 2021, 65).¹⁹ This agenda for Western land or landscape reflects what Roderick Frazier Nash ([1967] 2001) highlights as the dominant American orientation toward wild nature in the 19th century—a view of needing to dominate, subdue, and tame land to make way for (white) civilization.

¹⁹ Bruyneel articulates this post-Civil War period as a time of layers of dispossession targeting Black and Indigenous individuals and communities, asserting each of these dynamics are related but qualitatively distinct dynamics of dispossession (see Bruyneel 2021, 65-74).

The Homestead Acts were just one of many legal actions that supported the Indigenous dispossession necessary to form a settler colonial state with the public lands we know today. One important theme in looking at such government actions collectively is the steady erosion and undermining of Tribal sovereignty. Some examples include the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that concluded Tribal nations were not foreign states but rather “domestic dependent nations” (*Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, 30 U.S. 1, 1831);²⁰ the formal ending of treaties via the 1871 Indian Appropriations Act; and the General Allotment Act, aka the Dawes Act, of 1887 that transformed communal Tribal property into individual property. The effects of this act weakened Tribal power and expedited seizure of Tribal land, as they assigned set allotments to individual heads of household and sold off the remaining “surplus.” Between 1887 and 1934, these allotments contributed to the removal of at least 90 million acres from Tribal control (Division of Trust Land Consolidation n.d.). Individual allotments were further fragmented as such property was passed down to descendants as inheritance, an issue the Bureau of Indian Affairs terms “fractionation.”

With the rise of notions of conservation and preservation through the work of such figures as Teddy Roosevelt, Aldo Leopold, and John Muir, the 20th century brought a new relation to wild nature into legal policy forms. Cultural shifts in perceptions of the value of “natural” spaces are a necessary precursor to the kinds of legal measures, such as the 1906 Antiquities Act or the 1964 Wilderness Act, that disallow particular uses in the name of preserving and protecting such a space. As Char Miller argues in his narration of how Devils Postpile National Monument came to be,

It was not enough that this particular geological formation was unusual in North America. It had to be identified as important, which required *scientific explanation and a cultural receptivity to the fact of its newly proclaimed ‘value.’* The postpile

²⁰ While this ruling, along with *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832), were affirming that Tribes were not subject to individual state authority, asserting that Indigenous Nations were sovereign and thus not subject to state authority, the simultaneous positioning of those nationals as “domestic dependent nations” had the enduring effect of positioning the federal government as a “legitimate” source of authority over Tribal nations.

also required a committed group of people, experts and activists, to fight in its defense, once they knew what to fight for; it needed as well *a legislative initiative that could transform its legal status*. (Miller 2012, 94; emphasis mine)

That is, cultural understandings that deem an area—its resources or features—to be important or valuable in and of itself *and* the legal frameworks to formalize “protection” are prerequisites for how public lands governance has played out throughout the 20th and 21st centuries.

Like pioneer settlement, these changing attitudes toward land and landscape centering on preservation and conservation of both resources and aesthetic landscapes were also predicated on the removal of Indigenous people materially through physical violence and discursively through characterizations of empty space. The setting aside and protection of spaces through legal avenues throughout the past century has been cast as preservation, but such actions might be better described as “re-wilding”—or perhaps more accurately, a first “wilding.” Such creation of “wildness” or “wilderness” has included forcible removal of Native communities from areas deemed to have awe-striking natural beauty—those charismatic landscapes that strike a chord of the sublime (Spence 1999). The creation of such spaces as National Parks involved the removal of non-white bodies and non-Anglo-American ways of living, except for the most essentialized portrayals of Natives as “close to nature,” “in the past,” and/or playing the role of the “ecologically noble savage.” As with the federal government’s efforts to encourage white settlement, the construction of wilderness called for a continued removal of brown bodies from land and landscapes in the West, but a new relation for white ones. Rather than idealizing the permanence of settlement, notions of ideal wilderness spaces had space for white bodies—and especially the lone white man—as an ephemeral presence.²¹

In both government action and cultural images, then, land management policy

²¹ Although more focused on American “adventure culture,” a domain overlapping but adjacent to mainstream settler American environmentalism, Bruce Braun’s (2003) work on risk, race, and outdoor adventure offers a compelling discussion of the figure of white men as individuals in natural environments.

throughout American history could be characterized as racial management policy.²² Notions of ideal land or landscapes and their policy enactment have been premised on the presence and absence of particular racialized bodies and on people existing in relation to the land itself in specific ways. Namely, two dominant threads that have persisted through the last century are white people “working the land” and white recreators explicitly *not* working or inhabiting the land, instead seeking to preserve or return to “wild” landscapes—as encoded in the 1964 Wilderness Act, serving as a space “where man himself is a visitor who does not remain” (16 U.S. Code § 1131). With the former, a settler imperative of “putting down roots” and modifying the landscape discounted other forms of relating to the land, casting forms of Indigenous use and presence based on territorial rights as proof of available property (Cronon [1983] 2011). With the latter, Indigenous presence in the form of residence, especially when not conforming to romanticized images of a wholly traditional “ecologically noble savage,”²³ was deemed inappropriate for the qualities of a wilderness sojourn.

At present, multiple interpretations of land and landscapes are embedded in land agencies’ policies, regulations, and procedures, ranging from land and its contents as economic resources to scientific management of ecosystems to aesthetic management of viewsapes. Of all the land managing agencies, the BLM perhaps navigates the most complex combination of these various interpretations through its multiple-use mission authorized via the 1976 Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). FLPMA additionally codified a shift from the disposal of federal lands to private ownership that characterized initial settler colonial expansion toward retainment of federal land in the 20th century. This history of the federal government’s

²² Although not central to this project, it’s also worth noting the ways that other aspects of westward settler expansion was shaped by racialized policies, e.g., as in the case of massive Chinese immigration for carrying out the labor of building transcontinental railroad routes while being subject to harsh social and political exclusion (Black 1963; Yung, Chang, and Lai 2006).

²³ See Hames (2007) regarding the role of this trope in conservation and anthropology fields; see chapter 3 regarding settler constructions of Indigenous people as “part of nature.”

actions around land acquisition and management helps set the scene for the conflicts discussed in this dissertation.

Constructing the “Public” in Public Lands

What about the “public” in public lands? While much discourse about public lands utilizes some notion of common property or of American citizens as “shareholders,” formally these lands are property of the federal government. Consequently, “public” does not necessarily mean free to use; for instance, national parks and some national monuments charge entrance fees, and most campgrounds have use fees as well. Funding the upkeep of the infrastructure and labor it takes to manage often high volumes of visitors is a longstanding challenge among land management agencies, with “deferred maintenance” a common feature across agencies.²⁴ Areas managed by the BLM and USFS are more frequently free to use, including “dispersed camping” (not at a campground) with no use fee, leading one interlocutor to describe BLM areas, in contrast to National Parks, as “the true patriot’s land,” emphasizing a sense of freedom and lack of restriction in how one moves through the space.²⁵ Nonetheless, how individuals are permitted to act on and interact with BLM and USFS public lands areas can be impacted by designations (e.g., as national monument via the 1906 Antiquities Act or as wilderness area through the 1964 Wilderness Act), active leases for resource extraction (which can close off an area to the public), and federal laws such as the Archaeological Resource Protection Act. Notably, the Archaeological Resource Protection Act prohibits the removal of or damage to cultural resources by positioning cultural resources as property of the federal government, which is a configuration that Black and Indigenous scholars, activists, and Tribal leaders have

²⁴ As of September 2023, the estimated total of U.S. Department of Interior Deferred Maintenance and Repair backlog projects was \$32.4 billion (U.S. Department of Interior n.d.b).

²⁵ A reminder of the not so tidy categories of people—though this interlocutor spoke in terms—like patriots and freedom—that would typically be associated with anti-protections/anti-federal management positions, this person was a staunch wilderness enthusiast.

challenged, instead articulating the role of power in decision-making about archaeological materials and historiography and critiquing assumptions that specific people's past "belongs to all" (Atalay et al. 2020).²⁶

Even as the legal construction of the "public domain" functionally positions the federal government as a private property owner, the notion of "the public" having a voice in management decisions is built into many of the key laws guiding how decisions are made regarding these lands. Public participation, both that required by law and forms desired and demanded by varying actors, is central to how individuals and agencies perceive public lands management. The 1969 National Environmental Policy Act made public participation, along with assessment of environmental impact, required components for proposed land use decisions on federal lands. One form of required public participation is a mandated "public comment period" for any proposed projects, changes in management policy, etc. Discontent about these processes abound, with difficulty in quantifying and comparing qualitatively different impacts, claims of bias and corruption, and complaints that public comment periods are purposefully designed to be too short for the public to be able to genuinely participate (Cattelino 2015b; Gignac 2019; Predmore et al. 2011).²⁷

These discursive and legal constructions of public participation are predicated on an interest-based or use-based stakeholder model. The construct of multiple entities who "have stakes" in a matter being a part of decision-making processes comes from shifting business ethics in the 1980s that called for expanding consideration beyond financial beneficiaries (e.g., shareholders) to recognize others, such as employees and communities affected by business

²⁶ Challenges to colonial takes on "who owns the past" have increasingly gained legal traction, with successful efforts to repatriate cultural materials and human remains housed in museums and archives, though colonial museological practices remain intact. See Gibbon (2005) for a somewhat dated discussion of debates about legal systems and cultural property.

²⁷ See footnotes 142 and 159 in chapter 4 for more details on public comment processes.

operations, as legitimate voices, for instance, in environmental politics such as exposure to industrial hazards (Kim Fortun, personal communication).²⁸ Formal stakeholder structures not only encompass actors affected by a project, policy, or process but also include entities with decision-enacting power, such as state agencies. In practice, too, avenues through which interests are communicated and advocated do not just occur at the level of individuals but also include a variety of types of actors, such as nonprofit organizations or other community organizations/groups. In this sense, the stakeholder concept or model stands as an important intervention in environmental politics that holds lasting power.

In the remainder of this section, I focus specifically on individuals as part of “the public”—perhaps one of the trickiest facets of the stakeholder model to corral complex and messy reality into effective and functional (let alone inclusive and equitable) categories. Although other stakeholders, such as nonprofit organizations and managing agencies, are key players in various ethnographic examples throughout this dissertation, the following discussion and critique of stakeholder categories in U.S. public lands management focuses on constructions of the “public,” largely conceived of as a collection of individuals, and how this construction figures Indigenous individuals and Tribes. Such a focus comes, in part, from the centrality of the notion of individuals having investments or stakes in public lands management. This focus is also the facet of stakeholder models that most directly connects to individuals’ perceptions of public participation in environmental governance.

How stakeholder categories are constructed impacts how “the public” is organized. BLM, USFS, and USFWS approaches to managing land with public input includes the formation of

²⁸ While my project focuses on public lands management in a U.S. context, it is worth noting that in Canadian First Nations contexts, the term “stakeholder” is nonpreferred/discouraged, as asserted in a British Columbia government style guide on writing about Indigenous issues (Government of British Columbia 2024). The style guide asserts that “partners” or “rights holders” are preferred alternatives. The history described in this style guide—of settlers laying claim to land with physical stakes—represents a different conceptual origin than the notion of stakeholders as described in the main text.

advisory boards with predefined positions. For instance, the USFWS Wildlife Advisory Boards include a role for each user type (hunter, rancher, non-consumptive user) to have a seat at the table alongside an agency representative. The board discusses wildlife management proposals and votes, with the majority outcome becoming the recommendation “from public land users” in agency decisions. USFS Recreation Advisory Councils are structured to have 5 people representing recreation users (in the following categories, as applicable: winter motorized, winter non-motorized, summer motorized, summer non-motorized, hunting and fishing), 3 people representing pre-defined “interested groups” (motorized outfitters and guides, non-motorized outfitter and guides, local environmental groups), and three additional people in the roles of a state tourism official, a representative of affected local government interests, and a representative of affected Native nations’ issues. The BLM maintains 37 chartered Resource Advisory Councils in the West, each of which “consists of 10 to 15 members from diverse interests in local communities, including ranchers, environmental groups, Tribes, state and local government officials, academics, and other public land users” (U.S. Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management n.d.). Advisory committees with defined stakeholder positions to be filled encapsulate the idea of stakeholders gathering around a shared table to examine data, discuss options, and come to a solution that balances interests, finding “compromise” where necessary.

The ways these stakeholder constructions organize “the public” are not inconsequential. The language of stakeholders, Wendy Espland (1998) argues in research on water policy, does the work of treating different participants as commensurate actors, all of whom have “stakes” and “interests” that can be balanced using market logic. Jessica Cattelino (2008, 2015a) has examined such attempted commensuration with regard to management of the Florida Everglades, demonstrating how such framing of environmental management privileges and assumes economic self-interest and showing how the term “stakeholders” sets up a false equivalence between the representation and value of Indigenous sovereignty, the economic

interests of water companies, and the goals of government entities, such as the National Park Service. Furthermore, Cattelino (2019) argues that speaking in terms of defined stakeholders with “interests” having a “seat at the table” creates the image of a complete list of actors and a level field of participation, neither of which is the case.

In the realm of public lands, stakeholder constructions and how they are conceptualized by actors engaged in public lands decisions relegate Native perspectives to a narrowly circumscribed role. Similarly, the advisory committees described above reproduce a notion of mutually exclusive user types and implicitly delimit Native participation to tokenized roles representing Tribal interests. Advisory committee positions representing specific Tribes become understood as the representation of Indigenous interests while advisory committee positions not explicitly labeled as Native—e.g., different recreator roles and even the “at-large” positions—are implied or assumed (by land managers and other individuals engaging in public lands advocacy) to be non-Native land users and, in practice, are typically filled by white individuals. In this way, Native individuals are often conceptually erased from being a part of the general public—the collection of individuals who may have various interests and/or engage with the land in varying ways.

Indigenous individuals’ inclusion in this image of “public” is further circumscribed by the ways settler individuals tend to interpret formal Tribal representative roles (distinct from advisory committees) as evidence that the box for including Native perspectives has been checked.²⁹

²⁹ Increasingly, at least some individuals engaged in public lands advocacy and some individuals working for federal land management agencies are hearing Indigenous critiques of the severely limited acknowledgement of Tribal sovereignty in land management processes. While the formal relationship between the U.S. government is a “nation-to-nation” one, with Tribes being declared “domestic dependent nations,” critics highlight how the legal structures guiding required consultation with Tribes is largely performative. Like structures of public comment and public participation in advisory committees, consultation with Tribal representatives is mandated by federal law. That mandate is supposed to be a recognition of Tribal sovereignty but ultimately reproduces the settler status quo. Such a mandate fails to serve as meaningful recognition, because, like public comment and public participation, consultation is required but there are no clear requirements about how those perspectives have to be weighted in the decision-making process, which is why many Native activists call for the replacement of the consultation process with a model of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent.

This construction, too, perpetuates the notion that Indigenous perspectives on public lands decisions can be encapsulated in one perspective from a Tribal representative. Discursively, the mandated “consultation” portion of land management processes arrives at an implicit partitioning off of Indigenous people and their perspectives as separate from “the public.” The result is a settler colonial double: Tribal sovereignty is performatively recognized, and Indigenous individuals and their specifically Indigenous interests are implicitly omitted from imaginings of “the public.”

In recognition of these limitations of the traditional stakeholder model, numerous scholars have proposed alternatives for articulating individuals’ and institutions’ engagement with management decisions. Cattelino (2019) proposes attention to “local communities,” so as not to assume discrete groups each with their own shared self-interest—and, she seems to imply, not to assume that they act in their own interest. Kim Fortun (2001) proposes the concept of “enunciatory communities” to examine the coalescing of actors in the wake of environmental conflict. Enunciatory communities do not assume shared interests, values, or epistemologies, but are collectivities that form in response to a temporally specific paradox, a double-bind (Fortun 2001). Rather than being stable units of analysis, enunciatory communities emerge and change as they act in real time, not relying on shared beliefs or consensus to take form. In his analysis of clean-up and management efforts of uranium tailings, Thomas DePree (2019) builds on Fortun’s concept of enunciatory communities to critique the common triad stakeholder model of corporation, state, and local community—arguably the prevailing model on which public participation procedures are based in many land/resource management settings. Importantly, DePree (2019, 50) argues that “the late-industrial triad stakeholder model remains a pervasive form of analysis and management,” making the examination of the model and its impact on decision-making processes integral to conducting an emic analysis. These critiques of the traditional stakeholder model highlight the limitations of such a model to effectively incorporate multiple and varied perspectives in decision-making processes, as well as the tendency of that

model—despite existing Indian law dictating special requirements toward federally-recognized Tribes as domestic dependent nations³⁰— to position Indigenous interests and perspectives as just one of many in a multicultural society.

I mention these alternative constructions to acknowledge some of the attempts at reconceptualizing the public in relation to environmental/land use issues. My own task, however, is not focused on constructing an alternative to the traditional stakeholder model. Instead, I attend to the notion of stakeholders here, and at other points throughout the dissertation, because of how a traditional stakeholder model structures public lands management as well as individuals' perceptions of decision-making processes. In the chapters that follow, my intent is to challenge the sense of stability of clear and distinct "stakeholders" by showing how people's "stakes" are more a mosaic that include overlap with "opponents" and contradictions across one's own multiple and varied stakes. I show how traditional stakeholder models of "interest groups" who "come to the table" fail to characterize the vastly different contextual grounds on which contrasting land management arguments stand. Given the prevailing influence of the traditional stakeholder model, I also show how stakeholder models frame decisions with a narrow focus on "land" and "interests," in a largely rational sense, while the settlers I focus on are engaged in a *place*-making endeavor that is driven by desire for a collection of qualities from a range of domains brought together into an image of place. Rather than asserting a wholesale rejection of the notion of stakeholders in environmental governance, I aim to illustrate how

³⁰ The construction of Tribes as domestic dependent nations and the limitations of recognition based on whether a Tribe gains "federal recognition", are all part of ongoing colonial governance. As Pasternak (2017) has asserted in relation to judicial systems taking on First Nations matters in Canada, Indigenous people are playing a "fixed" game in that laws work in conjunction with executive and judicial branches to perpetuate and enforce state territory and authority. Drawing on Sunera Thobani's (2007, 63-64; cited in Pasternak 2017, 12) examination of Aboriginal rights and title cases in Canada, Pasternak argues that even if every case was ruled in favor of Indigenous peoples it would not erase the fact that settler law "remains the authorizing authority deciding the fate of Aboriginal nations." Thus, Pasternak argues, settler courts cannot ethically adjudicate questions of sovereignty, because they are part of one system that claims authority and jurisdiction and will not/cannot rule for the denial of that sovereignty.

people's subjective experiences of public lands decision-making processes are at odds with the stakeholder model institutionalized in US environmental governance. I argue that the mismatch between the conceptual models people hold about public decision-making (i.e., the traditional stakeholder model and normative beliefs about data) and the affective commitments people hold toward idealized places fuels people's beliefs that "the other side" is acting in bad faith. Inflammatory place-making efforts built on different grounds—albeit with the same settler colonial foundations—contribute to social fracturing and the sense of intractability felt within Utah public lands matters.

Methods

The seeds of this project developed from my prior knowledge of contentious public lands issues developed through growing up in the Intermountain West (western Montana) in a family that regularly recreated on public lands. My curiosity about how cultural views and values toward undeveloped landscapes shape people's interactions with those spaces developed while pursuing my undergraduate degree, which led to my undergraduate honors thesis examining social/cultural norms of thru-hikers on the Appalachian Trail. As a variety of conflagratory public lands issues played out during my first couple years of graduate school (e.g., growing political energy around the Land Transfer movement and the designation of Bears Ears National Monument), my attention kept being drawn to public lands politics. In late 2016, I turned toward developing a project examining public lands conflict centered on the inflammatory politics around the two controversial national monuments in southern Utah, Grand Staircase-Escalante and Bears Ears.

Following my preliminary fieldwork in the summer of 2017, my period of extended fieldwork began in August 2019 when I moved to Kanab, Utah. A Utah-based nonprofit organization connected to Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument had posted a position focused on delivering education programs in spring of that year. I had applied for and been offered the position, which enabled me to fund the day-to-day living expenses of fieldwork while

carrying out work in a domain relevant to my research. This position was based in Kanab, which ultimately impacted the contours of my project in multiple ways. It meant that my fieldwork ended up being less mobile than I had initially imagined. Although I did occasionally travel to other locations for work, recreation, or to attend a research-related event, the majority of my time was spent in the Kanab area (a pattern that was amplified during the first year or so of the COVID-19 pandemic). In addition, my employment greatly influenced the development of my social and professional connections and meant that my everyday labor occurred in contexts that continually added depth, detail, and nuance to public lands matters and initiated social/professional connections that may have been harder to establish had I just been pursuing my own research.

Being an employee at a locally-based organization also changed how I was socially categorized within the community. Rather than being seen as a standalone researcher “dropping in” to carry out research, having a job in town resulted in people receiving me as someone living in the community who was also doing research. In a sense, I was seen more as a person, and was welcomed as a new resident, even by people who in some contexts might speak negatively toward or in opposition to the organization’s work. Between the way that my job streamlined my reception as a town resident and my efforts to meet my own social needs, I became involved in a variety of community endeavors, including teaching tap dancing at one of the dance studios in town, coaching youth cross country running, and collaborating to deliver an annual preschool summer science camp, as well as developing a variety of personal relationships through activities like trail running, pick-up Ultimate, and more. Indeed, this community became *my* community, albeit one full of encounters that kept me incessantly emailing quickly jotted notes to myself to flesh out as field notes later. This social positioning added richness to my ethnographic understanding of land conflict because it fostered my ability to see threads of connection—recurring commitments and desires—between explicit public lands discourse and other settings.

Fieldwork, then, was an amalgamation of genres. Although I did carry out some formal interviews with employees of assorted conservation advocacy organizations, most of my ethnographic material comes from informal conversations (both those I initiated by bringing up my research and those in which someone else brought up a relevant topic); attendance at public events (e.g., election forums, forums related to land decisions, community arts events such as theater and musical performances); and monitoring a variety of written-word discursive spaces (e.g., journalistic portrayals across a variety of media sources, public location-based Facebook groups, and the local newspaper which predominantly contains locally-written articles about local issues and events).³¹ These settings are all sites in which people grapple over place and

³¹ Although in some ways my fieldwork ended up being hyper-traditional in the sense of deep immersion in everyday life in a community central to my research topic, the collection of ethnographic materials I draw upon is perhaps somewhat nontraditional, particularly in that I did relatively few formal structured interviews. (Of those I did conduct, I largely did not utilize conventional ethnographic writing styles to incorporate them in my text. See “Writing for Privacy and Confidentiality” below.) This reliance on other ethnographic material reflects some degree of intentional choices reflecting my analytical interests and some degree of circumstance. In some ways, I had an easier time arranging interviews during my preliminary fieldwork in summer 2017 given the relative ease of carrying out the labor of arranging and conducting interviews. In contrast, my longer period of fieldwork while living in Kanab from 2019 to 2022 was influenced by a variety of factors that complicated that labor including the COVID-19 pandemic; working a full time job that, despite its topical connection to my research, involved pursuing organizational objectives distinct from my research focus; and finding myself on changing (metaphorical) terrain with regard to engaging politically far-right interlocutors as I came into my trans identity. My attention toward the variety of other sources described in the main text also reflects a few analytical interests and habits.

As I gained my bearings during my extended period of fieldwork and sought to expand upon what I had learned from in-person preliminary fieldwork and online tracking of news and individual engagement, I found myself more interested in tracking discursive patterns in broad circulation than in the self-conscious articulations of a formal interview. This interest may be rooted in my propensity for being drawn toward narrative and tracing discursive patterns—a habitual mode of analysis, perhaps. Both formal interviews and statements in a variety of social and discursive spaces often provided examples of the reproduction of well-worn features of dominant public lands discourse—important components of this analysis—yet these statements in spaces where others could react (in real time conversation or via online commenting) helped me see new aspects of patterns of public lands discourse. While my personal characteristics and professional position were always variables at play in my various interactional encounters, I felt the influence of people’s assumptions about me, my personal views on public lands, and my research’s goals (i.e., based on my hobbies or my employment with a conservation organization) most in structured interview settings—such as protections advocates’ significant assumptions of a shared political/values frame and assumptions that my research would “support the Monument,” or individuals who hold anti-protections perspectives activating their more tempered and “friendly” rhetoric—each informative in its own way, of course, but leaving out important facets of protections advocacy assertions in non-interview settings. It was more intriguing to see what people with varied positions said to their perceived opponents (and about their opponents) when not in the social frame of an interview and to examine similarities and variations across contexts to triangulate new understandings. It was through this triangulation that the original framing I brought to this research transformed in ways that reckoned with some of the conundrums I found in others’ analyses of the

participate in place-making through the positions they take and the narrative connections they make in justifying their position. The resulting data I use to illustrate my argument in this dissertation is a mix of descriptive accounts of events, paraphrased notes about what individuals said, direct quotes of individuals' spoken statements recorded via audio recorder or direct dictation, and direct quotes from written sources (e.g., from news media and from individuals' comments on social media platforms). When describing discursive themes or patterns, I variously use direct quotes to exemplify a common assertion and summarize patterns of statements and sentiment in more general terms.

Although I left the organization that had originally rooted me in Kanab at the end of 2021, I lived in Kanab until July 2022 and have returned for 3-5 weeks every spring and fall since then. On such visits I have caught up on unfolding town conflicts, tuning into the ebb and flow of different narrative threads in relation to emergent land use matters and, when relevant, pursuing more pointed conversation and observation to clarify my understanding of dynamics I have been thinking through and writing about in between visits. I have also remained attentive to online discursive spaces related to Kanab and to public lands matters more broadly. With land decisions a perennial issue within the community, region, and state, such visits and continued online observation have been the ethnographic gift that keeps on giving, allowing me to adjust, clarify, and confirm my understandings as my argumentative framework has developed.

region/topic and in my own initial fieldwork. For example, when I began to see connections with other facets of everyday life in Kanab—even those not always explicitly connected to public lands decisions—I tailored my frames of attention to more intentionally track these dynamics, which led to new queries to bring to conversations, examinations of journalistic portrayals of pro- and anti-protections positions, and more. Especially with my analytical style tending to emphasize subjective experiences and meaning making, this dissertation would have arguably been strengthened by more examples coming from formal interviews of this reproduction of dominant discourse. At the same time, I recognize the analytical shift that occurred in my research as coming from the odd combination of settings and types of data I put in conversation with each other. Given the inevitable evolution of the kinds of questions we ask about a topic as research progresses, I believe it is the questions I would develop now—having arrived at the conceptual framework of place commitments—that might generate interview responses that elaborate and further elucidate the experiences and meaning-making at play in settler engagements with land management.

Writing for Privacy and Confidentiality

The very same conditions that added richness to my project produced some ethical challenges. Both a small town setting and a narrow professional domain (conservation/public lands work) create situations in which maintaining privacy and confidentiality can be challenging due to the relatively small number of people within those social networks. Additionally, being an employee at an organization committed to public lands matters and typically being warmly welcomed into community activities in a setting where land decisions are such regularly occurring events meant a frequent blurring of research and everyday life. This blurring of lines was only amplified by my growing awareness of the connections between seemingly disparate domains of everyday life. Within the workplace, appropriate IRB documents setting up agreements between myself and the organization were an important step, but such agreements are not, by themselves, a sufficient reckoning with ethical fieldwork, both because of the complexity of immersive, experience-based methods and because of the expansiveness of what may count as data within an anthropological analysis. Additionally, my experiences with this and previous research have taught me that even with conversation and explanation about one's research project, it should not be assumed that all participating in such an agreement share the same understanding about data and about what an anthropological analysis might look like. Similarly, everyday life in a community where land use matters are so salient was ripe with relevant learnings in contexts beyond explicit research moments. My multifaceted engagement across professional and personal domains within such a setting muddled mutual clarity on the when, what, and how of my research, which was further complicated by the anthropological truism that as researchers we may not realize the significance of an utterance, event, or encounter until some point in the future.

The structure and writing style of my dissertation reflects a carefully considered response to these amplified challenges regarding privacy, confidentiality, and clarity of informed consent within this setting. Operating with an understanding that interlocutors themselves are

potential audiences for this work, pseudonyms alone would be insufficient for obscuring personal identities in a small town and niche professional networks. One tactic anthropologists have used for navigating matters of privacy and confidentiality is the creation of “composite characters” in which they mix and match details from their various interlocutors into semi-fictional characters that can still effectively and accurately communicate the author’s observations and analyses. I have decided against such an approach given the possibility of readers embedded in my research setting arriving at hypotheses about who each ethnographic character represents in spite of any statements about the creation of composite characters—a situation that might be more socially fraught than pseudonyms alone by introducing a layer of guessing which features of a suspected individual are accurate and which are mixed-in features of other individuals. Furthermore, fleshing out full characters and attributing statements and behaviors to them feels particularly complicated when relevant insights about public lands conflict in this area popped up in a wide range of situations, including those in which not all participants were definitively aware of the dimensions of my research and those that challenge clear distinctions between “public” and “private” settings.

While details encountered during my professional role and in my personal life variously do or do not fall within the category of material I would use as specific examples to illustrate my arguments, the entirety of my experiences inevitably informs my cumulative insight. I am deeply appreciative of these very features of interconnection and saturation in emotional and relational facets of everyday life, as it is those aspects of my fieldwork experience that supported a deeply humanist analysis and forced me to grapple with the intersection of empathy and ethics across scales ranging from the interpersonal and embodied to analytical and historical. I also aim to be profoundly careful in how I weave ethnographic data from this particular setting. Ultimately, I have landed on a narrative approach that is not “character-driven” in a traditional sense. That is, although I consider my analysis deeply humanist in its attention to the meaning individuals make with the symbolic, discursive, and material ingredients of their worlds and to the emotional pull

of particular bundles of meaning, I do not typically deliver my ethnographic data through illustrations of specific individuals that a reader might follow through the research setting, as is common in ethnographic narrative. Alternatively, one could say the characters throughout this text are the recurring discursive themes in the land conflict domain and the coalesced senses of place, themselves stable and enduring while also messy and contradictory like human selves.

Even with this intentional framing, there are nonetheless instances where the question of when to utilize names for people and organizations arises. Conventional ethnographic ethics suggest not naming or using pseudonyms for interlocutors who are not public figures and stating names for public figures. To some degree, I have followed that convention but with a few variations that take into account the varying implications of being a “public figure” on different scales and questions of digital privacy. Although elected officials technically count as “public figures,” I take the human experience of filling such roles to be quite varied depending on scale—to be a governor or U.S. Congressperson, for example, involves a higher degree of committing to and consenting to public-figurehood than a local position. The small town sociality at play in Kanab also meant that I came upon relevant ethnographic data in public settings from “public figures” not necessarily speaking in their capacity as an elected official. The notion of a public figure is also, at times, complicated by individuals who have held but no longer hold public office yet remain vocal community members about land and other political issues. Ultimately, many southern Utah-based readers of this work, especially Kanab residents, will quickly recognize specific local public figures in some of the examples used throughout this dissertation—they have, after all, been a part of these local land use dramas and related town happenings. My choices around removing names of locally-based public figures are not so much about aiming to obscure the identities of those public figures from readers familiar with this context, but rather to offer a degree of digital privacy. I advance the same tactic when incorporating ethnographic material from online spaces. Although individuals make comments in technically “public” online venues with their name or some other kind of identifier like a social

media “handle” attached, my attention toward how particular discursive patterns show up in such spaces (i.e., rather than in response to a posed interview question) accentuates how blurred demarcations between private and public settings and between research and non-research spaces complicate basic precepts about when a person might reasonably anticipate that their utterances might be written down as ethnographic material.

Thus, with both individual community members who meet or are near to the definition of a “public figure” and online comments connected to people’s names I adopt an ethic of digital privacy that takes into account the ease of carrying out an internet search of someone’s name, especially with additional details like a geographical location or profession, which notably increases the findability of personal information associated with an individual. I model my approach after journalistic choices to avoid unnecessarily naming individuals in articles where doing so would potentially subject them to additional harassment or other harm, even when that person’s name in relation to the topic at hand may be publicly available. Although a variety of these names are already in documents or news articles naming individuals that could be tracked down via my references cited, removing a direct one-step ability to search for specific individuals helps support a partial degree of digital privacy for those whose assertions in various local public forums are incorporated as data in this dissertation. As far as naming organizations, there is perhaps little to be done to maintain true anonymity given the small number of organizations falling within the particular public lands domain and geographical area, but I have sought to apply the same ethic as much as possible.

A Note on Language

Throughout the dissertation, a reader may notice I utilize both “Native” and “Indigenous” as descriptive terms at various points. This choice reflects variation in preferred or dominant terms of Indigenous self-identification as my project’s topics traverse cultural-political scales. Within the American Southwest, “Native” is the more commonly-used and more frequently-preferred term used in inter-Tribal organizing and when referring to individual and collective

identity beyond Tribal affiliation. More broadly, including in other areas of the United States and in international organizing, Indigenous is a more commonly-used and frequently-preferred term. Thus, within my writing I strive to use “Native” in instances linked to public lands issues in the American Southwest and “Indigenous” in instances that are related to broader settings or ideas, although this distinction of political organizing scales is not always clearcut. When discussing matters that may connect to both scales, I use both terms varyingly through that section. When writing in direct reference to an individual’s own words, whether interlocutor or author, I mirror the terms they use. Where Native nations’/Tribes’ names are used, I variously utilize both their own names for themselves and the names under which they are federally-recognized. With regard to capitalization of words related to Indigenous matters (e.g., Native, Indigenous, Tribe/Tribal, Treaty Rights), I follow the style guide published by the Native Governance Center (2021) rather than the editorial guidelines from the Department of Interior Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Similarly, I use a mix of the terms LDS and Mormon when referring to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. When I was growing up in western Montana it was more common to hear LDS folks assert that Mormon was not the “correct” or “polite” way to refer to them and seemed to be taken as slightly derogatory. This may in part reflect LDS folks' desire to distance the contemporary religion from earlier iterations (i.e., creating distance from polygamist tradition). While some LDS individuals and/or communities may still hold this view of the term Mormon, I use the two fairly interchangeably because, in contemporary Utah, many LDS Church members use both terms. Regardless of the degree to which this difference from the social context of my childhood community is temporal (a shift in the LDS Church toward embracing the Mormon label again) or spatial (reflecting more openness to or affinity for the term Mormon within Utah), I match the typical usage in my fieldsite.

Throughout the dissertation I do typically utilize settler place names, which can contribute to reinforcing settler ways of seeing the geographic areas and political/jurisdictional

units. While a future iteration of this work may more effectively disrupt such naming practices, via more time to enact a systematic integration of alternative naming and more research connections through which I might better articulate the nuances of variations in and settler use of Indigenous place names, the text using settler place names was the most feasible writing action at this time. It is worth noting, however, that the settler place names relevant to this context—as with so many across the United States—put Indigeneity, settler colonialism, and locale- or region-specific histories in plain sight. Utah from the settler-given name, Ute, describes one of the Indigenous cultural groups in the state whose self-identified name is Núuchi or Nuche, meaning mountain people.³² Kanab’s town name comes from the Nuwuvi³³/Southern Paiute word *kanuv/kanav* or *kanaw’duhts*, meaning place of the willows—referencing the creek drainage (contemporarily named Kanab Creek) in which Kaibab Paiute people historically and presently collect willow branches. In the region, widely-used place names abound that remind of the very clear presence of Nuwuvi/Southern Paiute residents throughout Euro-American colonization—Kaibab (“mountain laying down”) Plateau and National Forest, Kaiparowits (“mountain home of the people”) Plateau and geologic formation, Paunsaugunt (“place of beaver”) Plateau, the Paria (“elk”) River, and additional locations and/or geologic formations in GSENM and adjacent areas, such as Skutumpah, Wahweap, Toroweap/Tu-weap and towns throughout southern Utah like Parowan, Paragonah, Panguitch, Koosharem, and Kanosh.³⁴ That Indigenous presence, past and present, is regularly omitted

³² As with many Native Nations, legal names of federally-recognized Tribes typically utilize settler colonial names rather than self-identified labels. In practice, Indigenous individuals and governments often vary their use of self-identified and formal/legal names; for instance, multiple federally-recognized Tribes have legal names utilizing the term “Ute.”

³³ Sometimes also spelled (and differently pronounced) Nungwu.

³⁴ Settler colonial history is also visible in place names like the Escalante town and river (named after Spanish explorer Silvestre Vélez de Escalante), Powell Point and Lake Powell (after John Wesley Powell), and Moab (a biblical reference, said to have been suggested by an early settler, William Pierce, given the stark desert environment). Some Nuwuvi/Southern Paiute sources, however, assert an etymological connection to Moab as a variation on moapa or mouuv, meaning “mosquito” (“Place Names-Territories” n.d.).

from pro- and anti-protections images of and claims to public lands amidst such saturation of settler-used Indigenous place names exemplifies the settler memory dynamics discussed in chapter 3.

Finally, readers will notice that some of my citations include parenthetical reference to individuals' Tribal affiliation or status as settlers. This approach both reflects the cultural norm in Indigenous communities and networks in North America of individuals introducing themselves with their Tribal heritage and, often, familial lineage. It also seeks to render both Indigenous (often erased) and settler perspectives (often unmarked) more visible in academic scholarship. My approach is modeled from Max Liboiron's (2021) citational practices. Liboiron makes an important point that "settler" is not an identity but rather a label that describes a quality of one's land relations, as well as one's relation to the settler state (2021, 3-4). Like Liboiron, I only label individuals who have asserted a particular Tribal affiliation, identity, or settler status in their publications and/or professional articulations of self. Although such a guideline perpetuates leaving many settler perspectives unmarked,³⁵ it is an approach that acknowledges the complexity of individuals' lived experiences and avoids enacting racialized settler frameworks of Indigeneity (i.e., frameworks premised on the very logic of elimination at the core of settler colonial processes, such as conflation of Indigeneity with genetics/race, e.g., see Tallbear [Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate] 2013). Of course, each individual's perspective—whether in academic scholarship or journalistic accounts—is shaped by multiple subject positions, characteristics, and lived experiences (including those that influence one's relation to land and to the state) with varying degrees of visibility to others and varying degrees of impact on or relevance to the perspectives one develops. I have tried to include additional facets of

³⁵ Liboiron labels authors who don't state their position in relation to Indigeneity/settleness as "unmarked." In my own work I take this brief discussion of citation practices to communicate that citations without this additional label are instances of unstated affiliation/status, even as this tactic may not disrupt—i.e., remind—the reader of such unmarkedness in scholarship as much as Liboiron's approach.

individuals' identities/lived experiences when they, themselves, have articulated such aspects of their lives as shaping the assertions they make. While it is not possible to identify every facet of every author's positionality—and not practical to list every facet of those who do articulate the variables at place in their own subject positions—I choose to focus on Indigenous and settler categories out of respect to Indigenous actors' norm of communicating their affiliation, as well as due to my project's focus on settler colonial dynamics. I mark these affiliations at the first mention of an individual within each chapter.

Framing Settlers

My project's focus on settler perspectives is an intentional interrogation of how public land controversies exemplify contemporary forms of settler colonialism in U.S. land governance. Like many facets of settler governance and everyday life, public lands issues are imbued with a sense of “everyday certainty” about “institutionalized relations of settlement” that “normaliz[es] settler presence, privilege and power” (Rifkin [white settler, American], 2014, xv). That is, many aspects of public lands are conceptualized and spoken about in ways that naturalize the settler governance guiding land management and settler interactions with or relations to public lands. While the period during which I have carried out this project has been site to notable discursive shifts regarding “honoring Native ties” to public lands, the “everyday certainty” of the basic premises of public land and of land-decision processes remains. These framings persist in many public lands settings even as the Department of the Interior under Secretary Deb Haaland (Kawaik/Laguna Pueblo) has been more responsive to Indigenous organizing around such matters as renaming derogatory place names, agency-Tribe co-management of public lands, and working toward replacing consultation with an FPIC model (Free, Prior, and Informed Consent).

Such persistence of settler colonial logics reflects the ongoing nature of settler colonialism—that it is a structure, not an event (Kauanui 2016 [Kanaka Maoli], Wolfe 2006). Conceptualizing settler colonialism in this way “exposes the fact that colonialism cannot be

relegated to the past” (Kauanui 2016, para. 9). In addition to lifting up Indigenous perspectives, both academic and otherwise, another facet of settler colonial studies involves interrogating the components of this persisting settler colonial engine. As Fiona Nicoll (white settler, Australian) has argued, “We have a political and intellectual responsibility to analyse and evaluate the innumerable ways in which white sovereignty circumscribes and mitigates the exercise of Indigenous sovereignty” (2004 19, quoted in Rifkin 2014, xvi). Mark Rifkin (2014) highlights the usefulness of not just studying where Indigenous people and narratives about them appear most, but also examining settler colonial discourses and dynamics in settings where Indigenous presence is occluded, stereotyped, tokenized, or otherwise marginalized. In this project, I interrogate settler actors and the governing structures that continue to enact settler colonialism. These actors and structures continue to wield so much power and influence in the public lands domain, not just in how public lands decisions are made but also in how conflict around those decisions are narrated and understood. While focusing on settler perspectives—even as a critique of these frameworks—carries the risk of perpetuating Indigenous erasure in public lands debates, my goal in interrogating settler engagements is to disrupt this normalization of settler logics.

Throughout my examination of these settler engagements, I strive to weave in Indigenous perspectives at both scholarly and interlocutor levels. I variously include Native perspectives as voices of expertise and as individuals alongside settler interlocutors. Indeed, listening to Indigenous assertions about land, as well as observing the tensions between mainstream white environmentalism and Native desires and calls to action, have both been productive contributions toward throwing into relief the lasting settler colonial underpinnings of even “progressive” perspectives on public lands.³⁶ However, I intentionally do not place

³⁶ It’s worth noting that although not all the following individuals and organizations ended up being sources of direct citation in this work, my own conceptualization of settler colonialism, especially as it pertains to U.S. public lands management, has benefitted from perspectives and insights from the following individuals and organizations in a variety of capacities/contexts, largely public presentations, over the last 7 years: Talia Boyd (Diné), Davina

Indigenous engagements alongside settler engagements as objects of study. My decision not to dissect Native articulations of claims and connections to land as a third framework on the same plane as the settler engagements organized by place commitments reflects a conscious choice to not reproduce settler and Native positions as commensurate stakeholder views.

Beyond striving to avoid reproducing the same stakeholder frameworks built into land management policy and popular public lands discourse, my focus on interrogating settler engagements reflects my personal consideration of research ethics as a white researcher in a discipline with long and strong colonial legacies. American anthropology's history with studying Native North America, in particular, raises significant ethical questions about non-Native, especially white settler, researchers' engagement with Indigenous individuals and communities as research subjects. Although I do not hold the position that shared identities, lived experiences, or cultural backgrounds are requisite for conducting research with a particular subset of people or in particular settings, as a white settler I am interpellated into anthropology's colonial legacy. This legacy includes exploitation and extraction, often with little benefit to Indigenous communities (even when intended), and frequent reinscription of settler perceptions of indigeneity. I knew that, as a novice researcher with minimal prior relationships in the region at the beginning of my research, it would be difficult if not impossible to carry out fieldwork and develop an analysis focused on Native people as research subjects in a non-extractive way, regardless of my intent to avoid problematic anthropological practices or my prior knowledge of

Smith (Diné), Adesbuh Foguth (Diné), Autumn Gillard (Nuwuvi/Southern Paiute), Regina Lopez-Whiteskunk (Uintah and Weeminuche Bands, Ute Mountain Ute), Carleton Bowekaty (Zuni/A:Shiwi), Shannon O'Loughlin (Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma), Joe Tenorio (Santo Domingo Pueblo/Kewa), Deon Ben (Navajo/Diné), Vanessa Nosie (San Carlos Apache), Teracita Keyanna (Diné), AMy Juan (Tohono O'odham), June Lorenzo (Kawaik/Laguna Pueblo, Diné), Janene Yazzie (Diné), Brett Lee Shelton (Oceti Sakowin Oyate), Judith LeBlanc (Caddo Tribe of Oklahoma), Theresa Pasqual (Acoma Pueblo), Ethel Branch (Navajo/Diné), Hank Stevens (Navajo/Diné), Angelo Baca (Navajo/Diné, Hopi), Julia Bernal (Sandia Pueblo, Yuchi - Creek Nation), Roberto Nutlouis (Diné), Beata Tsosie-Peña (Santa Clara Pueblo/Kha'P'o), Joseph Brewer (Tsalagi/Oglala Lakota), Kelsey Dayle John (Diné), Cris Stainbrook (Oglala Lakota), Lyle Balenquah (Hopi), Jim Enote (Zuni/A:Shiwi), Glendora Homer (Nuwuvi/Southern Paiute), LeAnn Jake Shearer (Nuwuvi/Southern Paiute), Daniel Bulletts (Nuwuvi/Southern Paiute); the Native Organizers Alliance, Native American Rights Fund, NDN Collective.

the settler colonial contours of conservative and liberal takes on public lands. Given colonial legacies within both anthropology and the domain of public lands, I wanted to explore the incorporation of Indigenous perspectives as insightful additions woven with my analysis of settler colonial engagements, rather than those perspectives themselves serving as central objects of study.

This interpretation of an ethical approach to conducting dissertation research as a white anthropologist does not mean a static position on what kind of research is possible or necessary. I see threads of potentiality for future research that might build on my experience as researcher and as practitioner in the public lands space, as well as on my social/professional networks that are significantly more developed compared to when I started my dissertation research. I do not take the multiple and varied Indigenous perspectives at play in public lands issues to be uninterrogable, but in the temporal scope and relational conditions of my dissertation research I felt it was not my place to do so; consequently, I largely take Indigenous critiques of public lands matters at face value in the analysis at hand, rather than interrogating them as I do with settler narratives. These points taken together, the framing and focus of my dissertation reflect the intersection of my ethical commitments in a particular set of conditions, rather than a rigid commitment to particular unchanging research approaches dictated by researcher positionality.

Dissertation Roadmap

The chapters that follow explore land conflicts in southern Utah in a sedimentary manner, with each chapter layering on another facet of understanding, at times expanding or elaborating on previous points and at times destabilizing or complicating what has already been said. This approach is my attempt at weaving non-linear complexity into a linear writing format. Similarly, I strive to balance the use of categorizing, descriptive language for effective communication with reminders of the artificial neatness such categories may imply.

In “Emplacing Kanab,” I illustrate the various threads that residents of Kanab weave in

their efforts to define what type of place the town (and, to some extent, the region) is. This chapter adds depth and detail to the contours of the research setting presented in this introduction while also complicating the notion of (social, cultural, historical, etc.) “context”—a quintessential feature of contemporary anthropological analysis—as a stable ground on which objects of analysis sit. This destabilization of the fore and ground of the research setting through my illustration of how people jostle to define what type of place Kanab is is my first complication of grounds. To people invested in the land use and management decisions in southern Utah (whether because they live there or have connections to the region’s public lands), the “context” in which land conflicts occur is not a given but instead is subject to ongoing efforts to articulate or enact varied backdrops. The chapter traverses numerous facets of community life as sites in which different images of Kanab are asserted. In doing so, it sketches the initial contours of qualities of place—comprising people’s personal identities and characteristics, relations between humans, animals, and landscapes, desirable economic activity, and more—that people ascribe to Kanab and southern Utah.

In “Settler Memory in Public Lands Narratives and Claims,” I describe two dominant narratives that are used to frame articulations of “correct” land management and claims about who has a legitimate say in public land decisions. These narratives typically—though not always—map onto pro- and anti-protections orientations toward land management, and this chapter shows how idealized images of place, centered on agrarian heritage and Romantic wilderness, inform how people take stances regarding public lands and their management. I detail these dominant narratives about federal public lands through the “case” of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, weaving together location-specific details and narrative features that are less tied to specific geographical locations but are, I argue, nonetheless still related to “place” and place-making. I argue that engagements with land decisions in southern Utah are guided by place commitments that are a hybrid of geographically-specific senses of place and broader place types. These narratives define which

relations to land matter and at what scales (i.e., localism vs. abstract national democracy) and conflate land and place, fueling the illusion that people are standing on the same decision-making ground. As I detail the “ground” on which each of these camps make their claims, I argue that although these narratives are typically seen as being in direct opposition to each other, they both are built on similar conceptual foundations and function as forms of “settler memory” that render the impacts of settler colonial violence and dispossession both present and absent (Bruyneel 2016). Building on Kevin Bruyneel's (2016, 2021) articulation of “settler memory,” I utilize the features of these narratives to demonstrate how settler memory functions as a place-making tool.

“Symbolic Resonance with Place in Encounters with Data and Expertise” builds on the previous two chapters to show how commitments to particular types of place influence people’s engagement with land decisions. I compare how individuals receive, interpret, and wield data and how they perceive expertise in different contexts. I illustrate how people with opposing stances grapple over what is considered valid data, how data points are placed in narrative webs of cause and effect, and how “formal” data are reconciled with subjective experience. Elaborating on a concept of “symbolic resonance” borrowed from Tracey Heatherington (2005, 2010), I argue that people’s interactions with data and expertise are shaped by symbolic resonance with idealized places and that the role of such resonance (or dissonance) is amplified in decision-making contexts. Foreshadowed in the everyday place-making of “Placing Kanab,” symbolic resonance shapes what meaning is assigned to any given moment, detail, or datapoint. The examples in this chapter demonstrate that individuals, organizations, and agencies treat the conflict space as if “data” is a given but, in fact, receive and use data in alignment with the commitments, desires, and logics that drive their engagement with land decisions. Considering data interactions through a lens of symbolic resonance helps illustrate how individuals are not necessarily standing on the same “ground” as they approach land decisions. Understanding people’s interactions with data as impacted by resonance or

dissonance with their desired places fleshes out the affective aspects of data interactions, illustrating how one's own conclusions about data can feel so self-evident while others' contrasting conclusions feel like evidence of ill intent, bad faith, or intentional deception.

In my concluding chapter, I circle back to the implications of place commitments with regard to the traditional stakeholder model that is embedded in public lands management policies and procedures. I argue that people's engagement with land decisions can be more effectively characterized or organized in relation to their desires for particular kinds of places than through emphases on identity or even interests. Just as this frame helps explain the sticking points of the stakeholder model guiding public engagement in public lands decisions, it also explains how the notion that "we all love the land," often turned to by those hopeful to build bridges, has limited purchase, as "love" is also not a singular agreed upon ground and instead encompasses a variety of human-animal-land relations. What becomes more visible when we focus on place, rather than identities or issues, when considering land conflict? I close the dissertation with two ethnographic examples illustrating how place commitments constrain alliances across social groups with different place commitments. These examples consider the tenuous connections between predominantly white environmentalism and Indigenous activism and between residents of the same town struggling to find common ground despite shared material interests.

Each of the chapters in this dissertation moves through a different facet of how place comes to matter in public lands conflict. Chapter 2 illustrates the everyday place-making that permeates community life in Kanab, Utah. Chapter 3 presents the two dominant settler narratives utilized in making public lands claims, showing the qualities of ideal place that feature in these narratives and demonstrating how these narratives and related claims-making logics function as a form of settler memory. Chapter 4 considers the influence of place commitments on interactions with data, exploring how symbolic resonance with features of place shapes people's assessments of the quality, validity, and relevance of data, as well as their use of data

to form arguments and opinions about land decisions. My concluding chapter revisits conceptualizations of place and its role in conflict and closes with two brief considerations of the social-political impacts of these place commitments, namely how such commitments—and their settler colonial dynamics—constrain the formation of alliances between or coalitions of individuals and groups.

CHAPTER 2

Emplacing Kanab

Entering the Field

Toward the end of my job interview in 2019 for a position as Education Programs Manager with a small conservation-focused nonprofit organization based in Kanab and Escalante, the conversation turned away from what skills and experience I brought to the position and toward the community in which I would be living. “Do you understand what kind of place Kanab is, and what doing this [conservation/public lands-related] work is like in this setting?” one of the hiring committee members asked. Though posed without naming the specifics, this question nodded to the fiery contestations about public lands management in southern Utah that we had discussed earlier in the interview and the ways that, for many public lands protections advocates, “local” engagement with public lands issues is linked to the broader social-political community setting, namely that the GSENM-adjacent towns were heavily conservative, predominantly Mormon, and—from many conservation-minded people’s perspectives—rife with dirty politics. I offered assurance that I was up for the conditions, pointing to my own experience of growing up in a conservative community with LDS cultural influences in Montana and to the Utah-specific knowledge I held from tracking conflicts around Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and Bears Ears National Monument since late 2016.

At one level, my answer to such a question could offer information to the committee about what kind of mindset or awareness I had about the southern Utah area I intended to focus my extended fieldwork on and, if I were offered the job, where I would be working for an organization that had clearly and loudly taken a “side” in debates about Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. The committee would likely be wary of an employee burning out quickly if they lacked knowledge of how inflammatory land politics are in the area and/or had a

romanticized view of southern Utah that included the stunning landscapes but omitted the sociopolitical dynamics of the Monument-adjacent towns.³⁷ Their inquiry spoke to their sense that people motivated to work for such an organization out of deep love for southern Utah’s wild landscapes might jump at a job without understanding what doing public lands advocacy work in that setting might be like. At another level, I understood the committee to be posing this question as a kind of warning—“do you realize what you’re getting yourself into?”—about the challenging sociopolitical conditions I would encounter living and working in the region. The question and the discussion that followed served as a kind of disclaimer that these communities are not easy places to live for those who are not politically conservative, not members of the LDS Church, and are environment- and conservation-minded.

This portion of the job interview and numerous conversations that followed with people associated with or supportive of the organization as I prepared for and then settled into this new job and life as a resident of Kanab formed an early map of “what kind of place Kanab is” from the perspective of those who celebrate the large amount of federal public lands in southern Utah and support legal protections (i.e., land use restrictions) for those lands. I was told to expect personal and professional obstacles due to how my employer was negatively perceived in the community and warned that attempts to carry out educational programs related to GSENM would be met with opposition from school administrators and/or parents. People with deep emotional connections to southern Utah as a “wild” and “pristine” landscape—those who celebrated the creation of GSENM and worked to protect it, many of whom had lived in the area between one and four decades and still felt excluded from the “local” community—told me of

³⁷ I would later learn that several members of the hiring committee had themselves experienced some degree of having a great love for the landscape while feeling ostracized from the community even after decades of living there, and I take these experiences to be influential on how they imagined what challenges newcomers to the area might experience. While they had chosen to stay in the area for decades in spite of inflammatory land politics and feelings of social exclusion, it seemed they wanted to ensure that any potential employees were disabused of an overly-rosy image of what it means to work for a conservation advocacy organization in such a setting.

past instances of parents pulling their children out of school when BLM staff came to do educational programs, presenting such images as indications of strong and complete opposition to the federal land agency. They told me of the assembly at the local school in 1996 shortly after GSENM's designation at which attendees wore black armbands in mourning and schoolchildren released 50 black balloons representing the harm 50 states had experienced and would be experiencing at the hands of an overreaching federal government. They told me how people in Escalante, an even smaller town on the north side of the Monument, burned effigies of President Bill Clinton and Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt in response to the monument designation.³⁸ These narrations were not simply a reporting of historical events but efforts to inform me of what kind of community I was entering and what work as an employee of a conservation nonprofit would be like.

The black armbands, black balloons, and effigy burning appeared not just in the conversations I had in my early days in Kanab but in news articles reporting immediate reactions to the monument designation (e.g., Cates 1997, Larmer 1996) and later presented as context in news articles (e.g., Nijhuis 2017, Peterson 2009) and scholarly texts about other land conflict in the following decades (e.g., Brugger 2009, Trainor 2008). Over time, I came to

³⁸ The report of individuals being burned in effigy in relation to land use and conservation issues is intriguingly recurrent. For instance, actor and filmmaker Robert Redford purportedly burned in effigy in 1976 due to this opposition of a power plant project proposed on the Kaiparowits Plateau (a proposed project that is part of the long history of proposed and cancelled projects in relation to that area leading up to the 1996 GSENM designation; *The New York Times* 1976). In a similar act of symbolic violence, Indigenous wildlife biologist Robert Mesta (Pascua Yaqui) was hung in effigy outside a public hearing regarding condor reintroduction in Kanab in 1996 (Nielsen 2006, 190). While the turn toward this particular form of public protest is itself a fascinating area of potential inquiry, the repetitiveness of reference to these types of events in neutral to pro-protections accounts (popular and scholarly) specifically as a characterization of the context—without more detail than that it happened, as if the mention of burning or hanging in effigy speaks for itself—intrigues me, especially as it regularly implies a characterization of this place in the present, even as the last reported instances of this were in 1996. Although I don't discount that such actions have important meaning about the emotional valence of land issues to those anti-protections "locals," liberal and/or protections advocate enrollment of these past events imply such events to offer key insight about the present, implying little to no cultural change. What such a detail seems to be doing rhetorically is positioning "the locals" as culturally backwards or primitive and emotionally ungoverned, as if they are the "savage" in opposition to the "civilized."

recognize these discursive grooves worn through the telling and retelling with striking images as “stable elements” (Harding 1991)³⁹ or “mnemonic devices” (Bruyneel 2021, 28) that, while presenting this place in relation to federal public lands, function in land protections discourse to present oppositional “locals” in a frame of cultural backwardness—highlighting these actions as evidence of a kind of barbaric rage—in contrast with a steady march toward more “modern,” environmentally-conscious land decisions. Although at the individual level there is variation, including genuine affection for the town, among people who support land protections and are political minorities in the community, this negative image of the town and community, including the “almost ritualistic telling” (Bruyneel 2021, 21) of particularly symbolically pungent details, remains fairly consistent in pro-protections discourse, with the “the locals” as a foil in the story of efforts to protect—in the eyes of protections advocates—the more important place of “southern Utah” or “GSENM” as encapsulated in undeveloped landscapes.

As narrated to me, such illustrations were meant to communicate what kind of place this was, but I felt wary of simply reproducing them as contextual details. These comments offered

³⁹ Harding (1991) uses an examination of media and academic accounts of the 1925 Scopes Trial to discuss how many analyses taking secularism and modernism as the default frame portray religious fundamentalism. “The elements [in these tellings],” she argues, “like those of an origin myth, are remarkably stable” (1991, 376). The telling and retelling of such narratives with these stable elements as “answers to ‘modern’ academic questions, invariably blot out fundamentalists’ realities and turn all born-again believers into aberrant, usually backward or hoodwinked, versions of modern subjects, who are thereby established as the neutral norm of history” (Harding 1991, 374). Modern framings of “fundamentalist, [and] even...conservative point[s] of view [are] erased and then reinscribed within, encapsulated by, the modern metanarrative in the ‘news’” while leaving the modern gaze’s “right to exist without explanation” (Harding 1991, 382, 391). This framing, she argues, not only homogenizes, stigmatizes, and appropriates” the voices of fundamentalists but also misses how fundamentalism is a part of modernism (Harding 1991, 383). I see this dynamic of the unmarked modern perspective and framing of fundamentalism—and, I would argue, a more general or diffuse notion of traditionalism—as backwards, aberrant, hoodwinked, and/or repugnant in land protections’ articulations of conservative “locals” in my research context. Although Harding’s analysis ended up playing a smaller role in my analysis than earlier iterations and a full discussion of how this particular publication has been taken up in other scholarship is beyond the scope of this dissertation—and even this footnote—her analysis remains an important offering for thinking about how unmarked worldviews and (scholarly, journalistic, and popular) representations of others’ worldviews have “constitutive power as a hegemonic discourse which directly defines and dialogically generates its ‘other’” (Harding 1991, 392).

an indication of what this particular subset of people saw the place and community to be like, and I was mindful that their perceptions of other people's perceptions of them were a point of data distinct from those "other people's" actual perceptions of them. These people described the town's conservative residents, often spoken of as "the locals" even by those who had also lived in the area for many years, with a tone of disdain. It was easy to feel frustration with these seeming caricatures of the "the locals" when, from the outset, there was much about Kanab that felt comfortable and familiar. As someone who is not conservative nor a member of the LDS Church and whose own steps toward expressing a nonbinary trans identity happened in my first year of living in Kanab, I've had many conversations with folks outside of Utah who assume Kanab is a difficult or even scary place for me to be. Navigating tensions between the rich sense of community I developed in Kanab and discourse that seeks to exclude people like me is an ongoing complexity of being connected to Kanab, yet as I first arrived amidst warnings to prepare for animosity I felt at ease. While there are dissimilarities between Kanab and my hometown in Montana, I spent the first 18 years of my life in a semi-rural, predominantly conservative town with a substantial LDS community. There was enough overlap in interactional norms and sensibilities between these two communities that I felt a sense of familiarity and established working relationships with minimal resistance, despite my employment with a conservation organization.

The presentation of the region within other scholarly analyses also ranges from highly critical to highlighting positive qualities like welcomingness. Even as some details provided by participants in interviews and surveys may be "confirmed" or "disproved," each author paints a different picture of place while setting context and drawing conclusions. Studies produced by researchers working for Utah higher education and government institutions largely take people's self-articulation at face value resulting in a neutral to sympathetic portrayal (Eisenhauer,

Krannich, and Blahna 2000, Durrant and Shumway 2004, Trainor 2008⁴⁰). Two ethnographic projects focusing directly on GSENM conflict (Croft 2015, Brugger 2009) offer rather different characterizations of what kinds of places the Monument-adjacent communities are. Croft's (2015) Masters Thesis in Community Leadership examined GSENM conflict through interviews with Kanab residents filling roles of local environmentalists, BLM employees, and traditional residents, presenting perspectives about land, land management, and the views about "the other side's" views and offers an important discussion of the limits of consensus-based approaches to environmental conflict. Croft's thesis leans pessimistic—likely informed by her overall experience living in southern Utah and working as a conservation advocate through various roles over the years⁴¹—with much frustration about the discourse and tactics coming from politically conservative anti-protections positions. Her thesis primarily casts "traditional residents" in a critical light. In contrast to Croft's analysis and to the dominant land protections

⁴⁰ Notably, Trainor's analysis includes a more in-depth discussion of Paiute investments in land management in the area and of Indigenous connections to GSENM than many other publications, especially for its time of publication.

⁴¹ As a longtime resident of Escalante who grew up in Salt Lake City, Croft has substantial knowledge about community dynamics and land issues in Utah, as well as deep personal commitments as a member of one of the Monument-adjacent communities and advocate for public lands protections. That her thesis at times reads as a manual to help conservation actors understand local environmental conflict dynamics is unsurprising. As she explained to me in 2017, her pursuit of a Community Leadership masters degree was in part motivated by her experiences participating in community life in Escalante as an outspoken environmentalist—including a mix of tight-knit community and the heavy toll of vitriol from some of the same people—and her growing activity in local environmental politics following an incident of leaking oil on nearby public lands in 2013. Croft went on to serve as Executive Director of Grand Staircase Escalante Partners from late 2016 to late 2019, enduring perhaps the most inflammatory years of GSENM conflict since its creation due to national monument review by DOI Secretary Ryan Zinke and subsequent reduction of GSENM's boundaries by President Trump. In 2015, her thesis concluded that partial solutions might be found through attending to the "common ground" found in her interviews of a love for land but that the dynamics of local environmental conflict were dysfunctional and haunted by the specter of potential violence. By our conversation in summer 2017 that occurred during Secretary Zinke's monument review, her outlook was more bleak. Not only did she feel a mental and emotional strain of watching the Trump administration take action after action in opposition to her own values (environmental and otherwise), but she felt the monument review had reopened old wounds in the community that had started to heal—that "traditional residents" who had perhaps started to accept the Monument and acknowledge some of the benefits to the community had stepped back into vocal opposition. When we reconnected in 2019 with her as my boss for the first few months of my tenure as Education Programs Manager at GSEP, three years of protections advocacy centered on this local hotbed issue turned national flashpoint for conservation/public lands advocacy grew Croft's political savvy while taking a heavy mental and emotional toll. Since then she has developed additional expertise in Indigenous and Public Lands law and now works for the Bears Ears Partnership.

discourse, Julie Brugger's portrayal of that subset of southern Utah residents is softer and more forgiving in her 2009 doctoral dissertation in anthropology examining people's democratic imaginaries in relation to GSENM. Brugger describes entering the field with expectations—largely negative—about “the locals” (also variously described in publications as traditional residents, longtime residents, and longtime locals) to learn that she “was completely mistaken” and that the people she met were “warm and genuine” (2009, 28).⁴² Her resulting analysis receives their assertions that they simply “want to be heard” without interrogating what “being heard” means and, as a result, leaves some facets of longtime locals' characterizations of the situation somewhat uninterrogated. For instance, her description of the cultural-political conditions of the setting leans more into the ways these rural communities are marginalized than interrogating the overlapping layers of privilege and marginalization at play. In each of these scholarly publications, “place” is somewhat taken for granted in the ways each author produces an image of a stable context in which their explorations of other research questions sit, even as they end up drawing characterizations with quite different emotional valences.

Given the ways in which I had an easy time finding comfortable social roles within the community, it would be easy to slip into an approach similar to Brugger's (2009) in which a positive personal experience of feeling welcomed pulls the pendulum to the far end opposite of the negative portrayals of the rural West generally and of southern Utah specifically that are frequently encountered in public lands protections advocacy discourse. In many ways, the people and landscape of Kanab and southern Utah are dear to me, yet both the tensions in my own experience and the variety of personal experiences individuals have as they seek to be a part of a community suggest that Kanab cannot be captured in a single description. While I experienced my queerness and transness being accepted by individuals across a variety of

⁴² With a great love for landscape and appreciation for the warmth from community members she didn't expect, Brugger moved to Escalante around the time I moved to Kanab.

cultural, political, and religious backgrounds, and I observed people within my own social connections create their own senses of community with little to no harassment or discrimination, another queer adult reported slurs being yelled at them from a passing vehicle while walking down the street and youth are regularly subjected to anti-queer bullying (whether they are queer or simply non-normative in their interests and self-expression) by peers and, by some reports, are met with unsupportive responses from school staff. Some people with family roots in the “core” of the community—multigenerational locals and members of the LDS Church—experience a deep sense of being held in community while others with the same background describe “the negative side of small towns,” like hurtful gossip and social ostracization for minor deviations from expected norms. Some newcomers who are more politically liberal, non-religious, and/or non-dominant in some other way chafe against the local politics and either eventually move away or build a kind of parallel community that sidesteps the “traditional” parts of Kanab, while others find places in community activities that are much more culturally and politically mixed. While tourists of many racial and ethnic backgrounds appear to be welcomed, local residents remain predominantly white and some residents of color report experiencing racial microaggressions as well as occasionally more explicit and aggressive expressions of racism. I found fulfilling roles and connections within the community, but, based on all the varied experiences different individuals reported, I suspected I might be differently received if, for instance, I was a Black trans person instead of a white trans person or was expressing a queer identity as a Mormon or ex-Mormon instead of having never been a member of the Church. Contrasting experiences and characterizations of Utah, southern Utah, and Kanab abound, and as I listened, observed, and interacted in community, the variety of perspectives and experiences reported and of narratives offered up challenged my efforts to lay down a clear and stable “context” or characterization of this place.

Contested Contexts as Assertions of Place

Taken together, the various experiences people reported to me gave me the sense that what this place might appear to be could be quite different depending on individual characteristics and the specific contexts in which an individual is situated. As my research progressed, figuring out what “Kanab” and “Utah” meant to differently positioned people furthering various discursive threads of public lands debate became a central focus of my research. Efforts to track down clarity and check accuracy about specific details and data points were, of course, a part of this analytical journey, but, importantly, my task of this chapter is not to declare what kind of place Kanab is but rather to illustrate the various threads that residents of Kanab weave to assert what type of place the town (and, to some extent, the region) is. Rather than assert that a particular frame accurately describes the town, community, and/or region, I argue that the scene in which public lands debates are set here is one of contested contexts. I examine the avenues through which people grapple over the “context” in which land decisions play out and the tensions navigated in categorizations of the town and its people. Importantly, I do not seek to adjudicate or rank the validity of contrasting experiences, as a multitude of complex factors can produce such contrasting individual experiences of inclusion and exclusion, acceptance and ostracization. Instead, my focus is on how people construct and assert ideas about the essence of this place—articulations of the core, enduring qualities that encapsulate Kanab as a town and community, which are embedded in broader characterizations of public lands management that engage place at additional scales, such as southern Utah as an ecogeographic region and Utah as a state with key environmental and cultural qualities.

I argue that people’s explicit and implicit articulations of the core qualities of this town, community, or region are discursive acts of place-making. First, I explore how narratives about past events are used to imply ideas about ongoing cultural and political qualities of the town/community. Presenting two recurring historical references, one casting Kanab favorably

and the other critically, I describe how speakers reference these past events to suggest meaning about enduring values that apply to this place's present. In the second section, I examine how people are socially categorized as insiders and outsiders, moving through many configurations of inclusion and exclusion to draw out contours of belonging that destabilize the common reification of "locals" and "move-ins" as a comprehensive and accurate portrayal of identities and social positions in media and interlocutor portrayals of southern Utah's land conflict. I show that not only are insider-outsider boundaries more complicated and malleable than the "local" vs. "move-in" binary suggests but also additional subject positions—such as good and bad newcomers—are produced as residents navigate their commitments to being seen as a warm and welcoming place while defending the notion that particular values and particular people "fit" with this place. Finally, I turn to everyday place-making in locally-based online groups, examining how seemingly insignificant moments in everyday life can become sites of declaring appropriate and/or desirable relations between people, animals, and physical space. Assertions about appropriate configurations of humans, pets and livestock, and physical space are implicitly and explicitly connected to notions of agrarian heritage and the encroachment of non-agrarian sensibilities. This chapter demonstrates how variables like values, people, and relations are part of how people conceptualize place and illustrates how the "context" of what kind of place Kanab is is itself a perpetual work in progress.

Presenting Enduring Values with Narrations of the Past

The stories that people tell about Kanab's past are one facet of how people build their own sense of place and assert their idea of place to others. In this section, I consider how narrations of past events are utilized to characterize Kanab, using two historical moments that were recurrently drawn upon to communicate a message about what kind of place Kanab is. These two narratives did not typically appear in direct juxtaposition to each other. Rather, in moments where an individual or entity (e.g., organization, business, local government) engaged in an expression of place, the selection of different narrative threads (and not others) produced

implications about the cultural and political qualities of this place. Such drawing on past events to communicate a message about an enduring and present quality of place was a discursive practice I encountered with a variety of narrators and audiences. That is, the examples I describe in this section are narrative threads I've seen presented between Kanab residents, by Kanab residents to visitors or other non-residents, and—particularly with more negative portrayals—by non-residents to others. The way past events are framed to indicate enduring qualities become assertions that Kanab is the site of a community with particular values and attitudes.

“Ahead of their Time”: The All-Woman Town Council

One “event” narrative that is drawn upon to paint a picture is the story of Kanab’s all-woman town council. In 1911, Kanab elected the first all-woman town council in Utah. This Utah “first” (sometimes also asserted as a nation-wide first, though the first record of an all-woman city government was more likely in 1888 in Oskaloosa, Kansas [Kansas Historical Society n.d. in Turley 2020]) has been highlighted positively through local theater productions—especially during heritage-focused holidays and events—on at least one highway billboard, in a display at the local museum, and in written descriptions of Kanab history aimed at visitors, such as brochures. This historical event is regularly part of articulations of Kanab to visitors in tourist-facing materials and to residents in celebrations of heritage and history, for instance in the form of reenactments during Kanab’s sesquicentennial celebration in summer 2020 (the 150 year celebration of the town’s existence, not aligned with a particular round-number anniversary of the town council event). Though the billboard highlighting women’s roles in early Utah governance and most tourism brochures are genres that don’t dive into details, theatrical renditions (such as the sesquicentennial reenactment or how the all-woman town council was woven into the locally-written and -produced play, *Montezuma and the Petticoats*) and assorted online articles and resources (e.g., Davis and Fields 2018, Turley 2020) do. The story goes that men in town were too tied up in their business and recreational ventures to be interested in local

governance, so in an election where nobody was on the ticket, a group of younger men put a handful of women's names on the ballot as a way to mock the generation of older men who had dominated the town. Even though the women were elected as a joke, they accepted the positions and over two years (1912-1913) passed numerous ordinances trying to "whip the town into shape," addressing issues such as gambling, alcohol, traveling merchants, stray animals, and waste water in the streets.⁴³ Historical accounts suggest that despite passing ordinances to clean up and improve the town, the women weren't necessarily taken seriously, with men often refusing to pay fines for violating the new ordinances (Turley 2005). This lack of cooperation meant the council had to hire a marshal to enforce the ordinances and struggled with high turnover and the high financial cost of keeping someone in a position—the enforcer of a "petticoat government"—that was mocked.

Despite the challenges the women faced and the fact that after the two year term the local government returned to being run by men (and continues to be heavily dominated by men), local tellings of this historical event (and to some extent state-level tellings aimed at public audiences⁴⁴) such as theatrical renditions written and directed by and cast with current Kanab residents and performed to audiences largely made up of other residents emphasize the

⁴³ In an interview, Mary Chamberlain, who served as Kanab mayor 1912-1913 as part of the all-woman town council, described, "Our election was intended as a joke and no one thought seriously of it at the time. When election day dawned, there was no ticket in the field; no one seemed interested in the supervision of the town, so the loafers on the ditchbank (of which there were always plenty) proceeded to make up (the group's) ticket as a burlesque, but there was no other ticket in opposition, so, of course, we were elected" (in Davis and Fields 2018).

⁴⁴ I believe the ways that historical resources intended for a public audience seem to incorporate more of the celebratory features discussed in this section, compared to, for example, a publication in a historical society journal, hints at the varied meaning cultivated for different purposes. For instance, Turley's (2020) version of the story written for the Utah "Better Days Project" discussed the story aligned with the Better Days curriculum objective of celebrating women's history, whereas the same author (Turley 2005) writing in *Utah Historical Quarterly* engages the political and cultural dynamics shaping how the election prank came to be and the women's response, as well as putting this event into context in relation to other gender politics. While public-facing stories (Turley 2020), tourist-facing materials, and local theatrical renditions emphasize the progressive "trailblazer" aspects of this event, Turley (2005, 328) points out, citing Karen Blair (1980, 90), women's participation in city government was more readily accepted because it meant women's attention was directed to municipal affairs instead of women's rights.

women's stint in local government as a success and a point of pride, especially among those with pioneer heritage. Local renditions of this story don't omit that the women's election started as a joke; instead, emphasis on the women's practicality and no-nonsense approach to "cleaning up" the town (physically and morally) in response to what started as a joke almost takes on a tone of "the joke's on them [the men]." The story becomes an expression of the women's competence and strength, their important place in Kanab's history, and a kind of "one-upmanship" toward the men in town through the image of women who got more done for the town than any of the men had, all while keeping up with their own homemaking and child-rearing.

At the same time that the recognition of this "first" taps into a celebration of pioneer spirit via stories of tough women who could run the town *and* their households, this present-day framing also carries a tone of claiming a kind of progressiveness—not in the sense of claiming a contemporary political identity of being "liberal," but pride about being a "leader" in more contemporary values by having women in government at a time when it wasn't common.⁴⁵ That

⁴⁵ Though not central to Kanab-specific discourse, it's also worth noting at the state level there is a similar discourse about Utah being a "leader" in women's rights. Kanab's all-woman town council has been highlighted at the state level as well. For instance, Brigham Young University filmed historical reenactments of Kanab's all-woman town council and an independent filmmaker in Kanab made a short documentary about it that has been shown at Utah Women's conferences (e.g., the 2015 Women of the Mountains Conference). This piece of history comes to represent celebrated qualities that are claimed as part of Utah's features in state level discourse, such as Lieutenant Governor Diedre Henderson's assertion in a dedication to a monument of the all-woman town council in Kanab in 2024 that this piece of history shows "Utah's women have always been trailblazers." Additionally, women in Utah were given the right to vote in 1870, and present-day teaching of Utah history celebrates Seraph Young's casting of a ballot in a municipal election on February 14th of that year as the first woman in the U.S. to do so under a women's equal suffrage law. (Wyoming had enacted women's suffrage first in December 1869, but women there did not have an opportunity to vote until September 1870.) Curricula created by the Utah Women's History Association (Brown, Watkins, and Kitterman n.d.) note, however, that granting suffrage to women at that time was driven by aspects of how Mormons existed in relation to the broader United States. First, if given the right to vote, Mormon women would boost votes in support of polygamy, which was still endorsed by the Church. Second, there was a hope that granting women's suffrage would alter others' perceptions about the LDS Church, demonstrating that Utah women were not oppressed, helpless, or enslaved as was a common perception. Finally, women's suffrage could strengthen support for the Mormon-organized People's Party, since most women in Utah were Mormon, which would build stronger opposition to the Liberal Party formed by the increasing number of non-Mormon settlers. Later national efforts to pass anti-polygamy laws included measures to revoke women's suffrage, and women in Utah lost the right to vote in 1887 when the U.S. Congress passed the Edmunds Tucker Act, which focused on restricting the LDS's Church's polygamist practices. This act took away voting rights for *all*

their election was initially a joke rather than a feminist-driven effort isn't glossed over or seen as detrimental to the telling of the story but, instead, contributes to humor in locally-written and -produced plays and to the celebration of a particular image of strong women "taking charge" to whip the men back into moral shape. Furthermore, though mocked by the town's men at the time, many of the ordinances the all-woman town council enacted that constrained and prohibited "immoral" behaviors put their actions in alignment with contemporary LDS morality (e.g., regarding alcohol, smoking, and gambling). In these ways, all-woman town council narratives imply the progressiveness of a town "ahead of its time" alongside—rather than challenging—respect for traditional gender roles and LDS morals.

In contrast to political liberals commonly assuming "gender equality" and "women's empowerment" to be their domain, at odds with conservative values, these tellings celebrate the town being a trailblazer with regard to women in government *with* pioneer heritage and "traditional values." Traditionalism and celebrating women is not seen as a contradiction or as mutually exclusive. Instead, the contemporary framings of this past event highlight women's dedication to the roles they ended up in as a contrast to the men's apparent apathy about

women in Utah, regardless of their involvement in the LDS Church or with polygamy. In 1899 the Utah Women's Suffrage Association was formed, and Martha Hughes Cannon, who would go on to be elected to the first Utah state senate, led advocacy for regaining the right to vote. With Utah's finally-successful appeal for statehood in 1896, women were re-enfranchised via the constitution that states "The rights of citizens of the State of Utah to vote and hold office shall not be denied on account of sex. Both male and female citizens of this State shall enjoy equally all civil, political and religious rights and privileges." As with my exploration of the narration of Kanab's All-Woman Town Council, my intent here isn't to argue that early suffrage in Utah "isn't really" a sign of forward-thinking toward women's rights but rather to demonstrate how motivation for a given act can be multifaceted with even contradictory desires resulting in support for the same action, as well as to demonstrate how narration of the past often flattens the factors leading up to a past event/action to support present-day desires, such as an image of progressiveness around women's rights. Amidst these narratives presenting an image of being on the forefront of political and cultural changes regarding women's rights, the specifically settler colonial patterns in the same realm do not receive the same attention. Even after the passage of the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act, many states, including Utah, still made local laws and policies that prohibited Native Americans from voting, arguing that Native Americans living on reservations were residents of their own nations and thus non-residents of the states. On February 14, 1957, the Utah state legislature repealed its legislation that had prevented Native Americans living on reservations from voting, becoming one of the last states to do so. While such blatantly prohibitive laws no longer exist, Utah has been home to voter districting that has restricted the voting power of Native residents relative to their percentage of the population (e.g., in San Juan County; Fisher 2024).

managing the town. In “one-upping” the men in their town governance while continuing to carry out their domestic tasks, they prove themselves not just strong, trailblazing women but competent across domains, upholding the private sphere and seeking to enforce morality in the public sphere. The story offers a counter to stereotypes about women’s subjugation in a highly patriarchal cultural-religious setting by claiming a “first” for women holding positions in government and in illustrating women using that power to try to improve the town in ways that align with contemporary LDS cultural norms. The present-day celebration of those women subtly challenges non-LDS, politically liberal assertions about Mormon culture devaluing women.⁴⁶

Local articulations of the all-woman town council are about more than just describing a past event. Such narrations are acts of place-making that frame the past in a way that amplifies desirable themes from the present-day perspective. In its celebration of the strength and competence of these women, these performances assert a notion of place that challenges negative stereotypes about LDS and Utahn culture held by many non-LDS and non-conservative individuals, who make up a large portion of land protections advocates. While public perceptions of Mormonism/the LDS Church have varied through time, with ebbs and flows of positive or negative images (Chen and Yorgason 1999, Haws 2013), in politically liberal social contexts—including, and perhaps especially, in land protections advocacy spaces—I encountered expressions of negative stereotypes much more commonly than positive or neutral representations. Such stereotypes cast Mormons, especially those living in Utah, as culturally backward, old-fashioned, or “behind the times” with oppressive patriarchal structures that strip individuals who are not male heads of household, especially girls and women, of agency. Performances and narrations of the All-Woman Town Council claim a different kind of place

⁴⁶ For instance, on the website LDS Living, an article titled “Did you Know the First Woman Mayor with an All-Woman Town Council Was a Latter-day Saint?” discussed the all-woman town council through a lens of “valiant Latter-day Saint women” taking part in paving the ways for women’s rights (Lambert 2016).

than articulations made by many non-LDS, especially non-conservative, individuals about Kanab, the southern Utah region, and/or Utah as a state.⁴⁷ Even as it is well-known that, at its time, the all-woman town council was laughed at and ridiculed rather than celebrated, the telling of it now presents a positive, celebratory, and affectionate take on the all-woman town council in a way that projects enduring qualities of the women and values of this place through time.

“Behind the Times”: Kanab City’s Resolution on the Natural Family

While the All-Woman Town Council story is retold through multiple venues celebrating an image of strong, competent women and a kind of progressiveness that aligns with pioneer heritage and the values of the contemporary mainstream LDS community, another more recent town council event is presented by liberal non-Mormons as evidence of how conservative and “traditional” Kanab is. While narrations of the all-woman town council carry a tone of “ahead of their time,” narratives about the Kanab city council’s 2006 passing of a nonbinding resolution that defined the natural family as a marriage between a man and woman “as ordained of God”

⁴⁷ It’s worth noting that debates over whether or how women are devalued in LDS cultural-religious structures are not simply a conservative versus liberal or LDS vs. non-LDS matter. Within the Church itself, there are ongoing discussions and debates about this matter, spurred in part by the reality that even the highly centralized LDS Church structure does not produce a monolithic LDS experience. For example, in March 2024 a woman Church leader asserted that women in the LDS Church are more empowered (by the Church’s structure, theology, etc.) compared to women in other religious denominations (Kemsley 2024a). When a quote by this leader was posted on the LDS Church’s official Instagram account, there was a flurry of responses across social media and in Utah newspapers and radio shows (and likely in person, though I was not living in Utah at the time), with many women members of the Church pointing out the contradictions of this assertion and ongoing restrictions of women’s role in Church leadership and constricting cultural norms, arguing that they have tried to have their voices be heard and included in Church decisions with little success (Kemsley 2024b,, Fabrizio 2024) The question of how women in Utah fare economically and politically has been the focus of academic research, even within Brigham Young University, which is owned by the LDS Church and subject to the Church’s rules, guidelines, and ideals (e.g., Karpowitz, Mendelberg, and Shaker 2012, Karpowitz, Monson, and Preece 2027). The celebration of the all-woman town council is one example of the way that women are discursively celebrated and lifted up as competent and imbued with pioneer spirit. Such discursive framings and efforts to create more opportunities for women to remedy gender inequality occur alongside cultural ideals of traditional gender roles and the persistent underrepresentation of women in Utah’s state, county, and local governments, both relative to women’s percentage of the population and relative to other states (Jacobs 2021a, Townsend and Madsen 2023). Utah is regularly ranked last out of all states in an annual assessment of women’s equality carried out by the web platform WalletHub (Jacobs 2021a, 2021b, McCann 2024).

with a home open to “a quiverfull of children,”⁴⁸ are lifted up by some to cast the community as a “backward” place that is culturally “stuck in the past.” Titled “The Natural Family: A Vision for the City of Kanab,” the resolution additionally encouraged traditional gender roles for women and men and argued that the natural family is the “fundamental unit of society” and “results in healthier, happier, more productive, and more civically-engaged adults as well as healthier, happier, safer, and better educated children” (Kanab City Council Meeting Minutes, January 10, 2006). The resolution asserted that the home built on marriage is “the source of true political sovereignty and ordered liberty,” language that hints at connections between ideas about family and governance that occurs in anti-federal threads of anti-protections discourse, the analysis of which I develop further throughout this dissertation (Kanab City Council Meeting Minutes, January 10, 2006).

In the months following the passing of the resolution, news outlets across Utah and beyond, including the *LA Times* (Simon 2006) and *New York Times* (Johnson 2006), picked up the story. While the news stories centered on the controversy of the resolution within the town—there was significant opposition to the resolution among residents for numerous reasons beyond the question of same-sex⁴⁹ relationships—these articles ultimately seemed to be “about” how conservative and traditional the town was. The *LA Times* article linked the passing of the resolution to both land use conflicts and distaste toward the Best Friends Animal Sanctuary, the largest no-kill animal sanctuary in the United States, located on 3,700 acres (plus an additional 33,000 acres leased from the BLM) just north of Kanab. The article suggested that the act was

⁴⁸ Such language of a “quiverfull of children” is not specific to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. The language in the resolution is like that found in the Quiverfull Movement, sometimes called the Christian Patriarchy movement, that puts forth a theological position emphasizing large families (and the avoidance of any forms of birth control) as a blessing from God and as a way to expand and strengthen Christianity. The Quiverfull Movement is more directly associated with evangelical Christianity, though large families have historically been celebrated within the LDS Church as well.

⁴⁹ Note that when describing this example, I use the terms that were used in news articles and community members assertions at the time of the resolution passing (e.g., same-sex, gay and lesbian); where I refer to my own experience or LGBTQ+ experiences in a general way, I use LGBTQ+ or queer as an umbrella term.

pushback against a sense of losing power locally: “They’ve already lost control of their land and their economy. They don’t want to lose the core of who they are” (Simon 2006). Although this particular statement is one layer out—an articulation of a journalist from outside Kanab informed by short-term engagement with the issue—this notion of a core under threat pervades many aspects of community discourse and decision-making, as illustrated throughout this and following chapters. Defending his choice to support the resolution, Mayor Kim Lawson⁵⁰ said, “I don’t see anything wrong in supporting the principles this community was founded on,” couching the action in the notion of the persistence of values and norms from the town’s (settler) founding (in Havnes 2006b). He asserted that the resolution “simply puts up a moral standard. We look to local government that holds the protection of the natural family to be their first responsibility” (Kanab City Council Meeting Minutes, January 10th, 2006). Writing in the Salt Lake Tribune, Havnes (2006b) wove together the 1911-1913 All-Woman Town Council and the 2006 Resolution on the Natural Family, suggesting that the town had shifted backwards with regard to equality, going from an all-woman town council nearly 100 years prior (aligning with the narration of the all-woman council as a marker of progressiveness) to a resolution that Theresa Beesley of the Utah chapter of the National Organization for Women described as “relegating women to a restrictive role” and ignoring that many families cannot get by on a single income. Beesley’s criticism of the resolution exemplifies the perspectives that made up much of the opposition to the resolution, with people arguing that the resolution devalued community members who didn’t meet that traditional notion of family for such reasons as infertility, being single parents, or having to work outside the home out of economic necessity.

Parallel to this debate about whether the resolution ostracized individuals who were unable to fulfill that image of family but were otherwise in alignment with conservative, LDS values was a narrative about homophobia that became the centerpoint of how the passing of

⁵⁰ Though “Kim” is frequently assumed to be a woman’s name in broader U.S. culture, Kim Lawson is a man.

this resolution is commonly framed to exemplify what kind of place Kanab is. At the time, leaders of state LGBT organizations criticized the resolution (Havnes 2006a), and, at the national level, prominent travel columnist Arthur Frommer encouraged tourists to boycott Kanab in their travels for its homophobic attitudes. Locally, the link between the resolution and accusations of homophobia came to be understood as an economic issue. Seeing the real and potential financial impacts of the resolution's notoriety via travel cancellations and external calls for a tourism boycott, business owners' opposition to the resolution grew. Then-head of the Chamber of Commerce, Ted Hallisey, reported that he was receiving emails about the resolution with about twice as many in opposition as those in support (Johnson 2006). The Kanab Boosters—a group created in the wake of the passed resolution consisting of business owners concerned about the economic impact of bad press like Frommer's call to boycott tourism in the town—created a sticker for business owners to put in their windows stating “Everyone welcome here,” surrounded by a circle of rainbow-colored figures, indexing how, in the national discourse at least, this topic had become a gay and lesbian issue. Though some business owners felt uncomfortable with the rainbow reference,⁵¹ for many business owners in Kanab, a personal opposition to homosexuality or gay marriage didn't preclude a desire to communicate to potential tourists that anyone—including gay and lesbian people—were welcome to spend their dollars in Kanab. In response to critics who said he was bigoted for supporting the resolution, Mayor Lawson declared that “[t]he measure is not meant to discriminate or be exclusionary...[and] Kanab welcomes all comers regardless of their views on marriage” (Havnes 2006b).⁵² These tensions between defending “conservative values” and

⁵¹ There was a later round of stickers created by the Chamber of Commerce that didn't feature rainbow-colored people, though most of the stickers still up in town businesses display the rainbow design produced by Kanab Boosters.

⁵² At the state government and LDS Church leadership level there is a similar push and pull of defending traditional conservative values and striving to cultivate a degree of welcomingness. The Church's position on various

maintaining a “welcoming” posture pervade many aspects of community life in Kanab and are a recurring theme in place-making efforts, as I discuss later in this chapter.

This particular moment in Kanab’s history isn’t typically brought up unprompted by those who see and experience Kanab as a warm and welcoming place, but for those who view the community in a negative light it serves as a talking point for characterizing the community’s values. Both at the time the resolution was passed and in the years that followed, including the time I resided in Kanab, the passing of this resolution became an oft-cited point in conversations and articles about what kind of place Kanab is. Online forums with timestamps across the last decade in which users asked how queer-friendly southern Utah is include references to the 2006 resolution as representative of the town’s attitudes. Land protections advocates who had moved to the area or who lived elsewhere but had been long-engaged in public lands issues in the region told me about this event, especially in the early months as people sought to introduce or orient me to Kanab. Notably, people brought this past event to my attention without me asking direct questions about Kanab’s welcomingness or community members’ attitudes toward queerness (including by individuals who didn’t know I was queer), with it being treated as evidence of a more general attitude of exclusion, intolerance, and conservatism from which one is expected to draw conclusions about what that means for public lands debates and decision processes. Within currently active locally-based Facebook groups, the resolution was occasionally brought up in potential new residents’ posts asking about the community, largely from people, whether newcomers or longtime residents, who had been on the receiving end of painful social ostracization.⁵³ The resolution is a centerpiece in a 2020 post about LGBTQ+

legislation related to equality and nondiscrimination in relation to LGBTQ+ people and how its endorsement has influenced Utah state legislators is an example of another site of this tension.

⁵³ Individuals who brought up this resolution in response to potential resident inquiries were not always those who had moved to Kanab from somewhere else (whether recently or a long time ago). A couple of times I observed such reference from people born and raised in Kanab who had clear social connections to the traditional part of the community but had observed or felt the sharper aspects of social ostracization in a small-town community. Although the relevance of the natural family resolution to my project is in how it shows up as an emblem meant to

bigotry on the “Kanab Right Watch” website, which presents assorted details about the community to illustrate Kanab as a site of hostility and far-right extremism. In a post in one of these Facebook groups, an individual who was at the time a Kanab resident, relayed their experience of having anti-queer slurs yelled at them from a passing vehicle while walking in town, asserting that such an experience “isn’t surprising given the resolution on the natural family” while linking to a Wikipedia article about the resolution. Significant, to me, in this example is the way they connected their specific experience to the idea that their experience is explained by and is evidence of an integral feature of this place as exemplified by the passing of the resolution. In these instances, the resolution becomes evidence to support the argument that Kanab is a “backward” and hostile place. Such presentations of the past are, themselves, subject to contestation. For instance, while the resolution on the natural family is typically brought up as an emblem of how conservative, “traditional,” and bigoted the community is, others within the community—including some who fall within the LDS “core” of the community—express frustration when asked about the resolution and push against the event implying broader meaning about the town. They are quick to point out that not only did people in the community not know the resolution was under consideration (and thus didn’t have a chance to voice opposition before the resolution was passed), but also that it was a resolution crafted by an external organization (the conservative think-tank, the Sutherland Institute) that circulated the resolution to multiple town councils in small towns around Utah⁵⁴ rather than being a locally-

represent or characterize the place and how this links up to the notion of place that informs protections advocates’ view of southern Utah residents in relation to public lands issues, I note this variation to remind readers that the patterns of people’s lived experiences, social networks, and views or values are not as tidy as they seem, even as the task of formulating an argument in my own writing can participate in implying tidy categories.

⁵⁴ It’s unclear whether the resolution was sent to towns outside of Utah; the Sutherland Institute website no longer has a page on their website discussing the resolution.

driven initiative.⁵⁵ While the resolution is no longer “on the books,” having been quietly removed at some point in the last decade, this past event becomes an emblem of qualities like hostility and conservatism in contexts well-beyond answers to direct questions about LGBTQ+ acceptance, suggesting that the event is used to communicate enduring qualities of place beyond that specific domain.

Bringing Values Forward and Projecting Them Back

Both those who cast Kanab in a warm, positive light and those who cast it in a critical, negative light turn to the place’s history in articulations of what values the community holds. That stories of the past are part of articulating what a place is in the present suggests that people’s conceptualizations of place are understood to include enduring qualities that make up a core or essence of that place. The differing perceived relevance of (narratives of) past events relates to contrasting notions of what kind of place Kanab is. Representations of the all-woman town council, especially the affectionate locally-produced renditions, offer an “ahead of their time story” that celebrates scrappy, no-nonsense female competence in a way that doesn’t disrupt traditional gender roles and meshes with more general appreciation of “pioneer spirit.” In contrast, characterizations of Kanab that utilize a narrative about the Resolution on the Natural Family offer a “stuck in the past” story, with the 2006 town council actions serving as shorthand for a more negative representation of a conservative cis-heteronormative patriarchal setting. Like the “stable elements” of black balloons and politicians hung in effigy presented in the story of GSENM’s designation, stories about past happenings in Kanab, too, seem to become stable elements that stand in for broader notions, whether positive or negative, about the enduring cultural-political essence of the place. That different aspects of Kanab’s past might result in contradictory assertions of what the Kanab community is like highlights ongoing efforts to define

⁵⁵ That Kanab was the only town to pass the resolution is likely more representative of the ways that the subsequent bad press served as data for other town councils considering it than of it being uniquely committed to traditional values.

this place. People frame or craft narratives that link past and present in ways that celebrate desirable qualities, downplay or obscure negative realities (like Indigenous dispossession or ongoing challenges to gender parity), or spotlight particular qualities over acknowledging nuance, all with implications about enduring qualities of place.

Whether something is a historical point of interest, what details are emphasized about this event, and what meaning is assigned to different details are all shaped by what argument a speaker is trying to make about what kind of place Kanab is. These two tales about moments in Kanab's town council history create contrasting images about what kind of place Kanab is in the present. These uses of historical narratives to indicate that certain values are core to this place highlight how, like the management of the surrounding public lands, the essence of Kanab is regularly contested and negotiated. As I describe below, such narratives of past events that communicate enduring values are just one site of place negotiation.

The Right People with the Right Perspectives

Locals and Move-Ins

The social categories of “local” and “move-in” dominate discourse about public lands decisions making, other land use decisions, and community decisions more generally within Kanab.⁵⁶ Each social category has an anticipated or expected position on land use decisions, with “locals” typically assumed (by those on “both sides” of the matter) to be against land protections, opposed to federal management, and supportive of agrarian uses of public lands and “move-ins” assumed to be supporters of public lands protections, wilderness enthusiasts, and opponents of agrarian uses of public lands, especially cattle grazing. In this respect, the local versus move-in construction loosely maps onto the prevailing characterization

⁵⁶ This distinction occurs in other places within southern Utah as well, though not always with the same terms. For example, in Escalante, the small town on the north side of GSENM, I more frequently heard reference to old-timers or long-timers and newcomers. I don't have sufficient depth of ethnographic knowledge of Escalante to assert whether the dynamics there are the same as what I describe in this section, but the basic categories are, at least on the surface, near equivalents (see Brugger 2009).

of ranchers versus environmentalists in public lands debates. People who self-identify as either rancher or environmentalist and others who take the rancher versus environmentalist frame as a given frequently utilize the locals versus move-ins binary. To some extent, scholarly publications have also reproduced this binary. In laying out different types of characters in her dissertation, Brugger wrote, “In contrast to longtime residents of these areas, newcomers are primarily urban, college-educated, middle-class professionals” (2009, 90). However, as I argue below, this perception of who newcomers are, or what they are like, may be more indicative of who is a *visible* newcomer.

“Locals” criticize “move-ins” for trying to dictate how public lands are used and managed, and they accuse “move-ins” of trying to foist their values on the community to override the existing (conservative, traditional, and/or agrarian) values. When activating this social categorization, people claiming “locals” status often highlight the length of time someone has lived in the area as a central criterion for who should “have a say” in shaping what the community is like. For instance, during the hubbub following the passing of the resolution on the natural family, described above, one Kanab resident quoted in an *LA Times* article about the issue asserted that, after living in Kanab for 78 years, her view is that “maybe (just maybe) when you have lived here even a fraction of that time, perhaps you will have earned the right to call Kanab ‘your’ community” (Simon 2006).⁵⁷ Such articulations about length of residence determining the validity of someone’s opinion are not uncommon, particularly in online comments about contentious community issues in locally-based Facebook groups. By this measure, “move-ins” are cast as being invalid sources of critique because they haven’t “earned”

⁵⁷ Though in some sense this example is data about national news media portrayals, which goes through its own layer of filtering or editing in relation to existing beliefs or stereotypes about a place, I view this particular instance of reporting on Kanab’s local drama as an uncritical reproduction of local articulations of insiders and outsiders, with this quote aligning with the time of residence focus I encountered in assertions delineating insider/outsider statuses. Even as there is much that could be said about large newspaper portrayals of Kanab/southern Utah and the issues that occasionally bring those areas into national news, here I utilize this quote to exemplify how people use a length of time criterion when drawing insider/outsider boundaries.

a right to have a say by virtue of having not lived in Kanab long enough.

“Move-ins” variously lament the ways they still feel excluded in the community even after living in Kanab for many years and/or seek to “reclaim” the term with pride. People claiming “locals” status activating the criterion of length of residence is met with bitterness from “move-ins” who have lived in Kanab for most of their adult lives. An illustration of reclamation of the term occurred during a meeting organized to hear updates from Best Friends Animal Sanctuary and their attorney hired to fight a proposed frac sand mine in late 2019, a land conflict I discuss in depth in chapter 4. At this gathering, people in the audience had the opportunity to speak in front of the crowd. A couple speakers utilized the local vs. move-in binary in characterizing the conflict, speaking of the “locals” with strong criticism and condescension while asserting pride in being a move-in. Inverting the way “move-in” is commonly framed as less legitimate than “local,” a speaker framed their intentional choice to live in this place as a reflection of their care and love for this place and, notably, its landscapes; they emphasized this intentionality in contrast with people living in a place just because they were born there and had always lived there. A couple of speakers that followed took up this thread, reiterating how choosing to live in this town meant that their commitment to what happens to the community and its surrounding landscapes was just as good as—perhaps even superior to—the relation to the town and landscapes claimed by “locals.”

What Makes a Move-In?

The way that people of varying political persuasions and varied positions on land management utilize this framing to discuss social positions within the community gives the impression that these categories accurately reflect the criteria by which localness and, by extension, belonging are assessed. Based on this discourse, which had pervaded my preliminary fieldwork and my early orientations to the community by wilderness enthusiasts who sought to support my work efforts early in my position as Education Programs Manager, I expected to be promptly labeled as a move-in and to have that categorization produce a

recognizable impact on my day-to-day interactions, work goals, and research pursuits. And yet, throughout the time I lived in Kanab, “move-in” never became a salient term in how I was seen and categorized by others in the community. Furthermore, beyond initial introductions and the process of starting new connections, in both social and professional realms, my relative newness to the community was rarely brought up as a relevant detail.

My own experience of expecting to receive the “move-in” label but then not being labeled as such offered initial hints about how such signifiers are actually applied. Though I was working for an organization that had friction-filled relationships with many employees in the local BLM office and with other people in GSENM-adjacent communities, I was not immediately associated with staunch environmentalism. Early on, people assumed that I worked for Best Friends Animal Sanctuary or the BLM—two employers who regularly hire individuals who move from elsewhere to Kanab for the job; when I clarified where I was working, protections advocates responded enthusiastically and people who I took to be part of the “traditional” part of the community often hadn’t heard of the organization or didn’t realize it wasn’t just a subset of the Bureau of Land Management. Despite the organization’s efforts to challenge President Trump’s reduction of monument boundaries—a reduction that many southern Utah residents were pleased about—my role in the organization was arguably the “least political” in that I was tasked with delivering education programs that had historically been focused on purportedly “neutral” topics like natural and earth sciences and archaeology. Both my position with the conservation-focused nonprofit and my presence (due to fieldwork efforts) at events organized to oppose proposed projects like the frac sand mine contributed, I believe, to protections advocates assuming I held the same perspectives—about land use and management, as well as about the local social and political dynamics—as them.⁵⁸ At the same time, I didn’t explicitly present myself as an

⁵⁸ These assumptions hint at how the “correctness” of the pro-protections position is naturalized. Indeed, upon learning that I was conducting dissertation research about public lands conflict, a frequent response from folks who had little to no details about my specific research questions or framework was praise and gratitude—“We’re so glad you’re doing that for the Monument!”—assuming that my research would find and assemble more

“environmentalist” and, because I didn’t become a loud voice at the events I attended due to being focused on observing and asking others about their perspectives rather than on “having a say” about land decisions myself, the way I was read in the broader community went beyond simple associations with my place of employment.

Beyond my work encounters and explicit fieldwork efforts at land-related public events, I found that it was easy to get involved in a variety of community activities. Collaborations that started through my job turned into a volunteer role on the board of an educational foundation. I started teaching tap dance classes, first to adults who I’d met volunteering at a trail race and later to kids. I reached out to the local high school cross country coach and, after helping out with that team for a season, found my role as coach to a newly formed 5th-8th grade cross country team. Participating in an annual 2-3 week scavenger hunt on public lands carried out by local businesses, I developed acquaintances among people who I didn’t otherwise encounter on a regular basis. Due to the varied ways I engaged in community activities, many people first encountered me through avenues not directly linked to land issues or to my work with a conservation organization. Even when my work with a public lands organization later came into play, it didn’t immediately “other” me to people who knew me through another setting. It was this community involvement that led a collaborator-turned-friend to declare in surprise when reflecting (in 2021) that I’d only been in town for two years, “It feels like you’ve been here forever!” My newness had quickly become unremarkable.

Along with this experience of not being labeled as a “move-in” when I had expected to be, I discovered, over time, other variations in how labels of local and move-in were doled out. New arrivals to town who had some kind of family connection to people who were already mainstays in the community were not classified as “move-ins.” Nor were newcomers who were

evidence to support the Monument (and that my research goals were to do so—even in the face of my descriptions of my research that in no way implied an explicitly pro-protections or pro-GSENM endeavor).

members of the LDS Church labeled as such. It's not that such newcomers are always fully accepted by their fellow ward members without friction—after all, there is variation in how people understand and practice their faith, something that is true across all Church members but even more likely when comparing people from different geographic areas.⁵⁹ But, significantly, even with some social friction or ostracization, they were not labeled as outsiders or move-ins. Such patterns could easily support an idea not uncommon in some parts of the community (especially liberal non-LDS people): that what “really” matters for whether someone is seen to belong is being in good standing as a member of the LDS Church. To some degree it may be true that people in such social positions are more quickly or easily recognized as

⁵⁹ This variation is an important aspect of disrupting the stereotypes and assumptions built into dominant public lands discourse. While Church leadership is highly centralized and structured in ways that perpetuate some values over others (e.g., patriarchal norms), lived Mormonism is far from monolithic and when non-Mormons speak about individuals as if they are identical to the formal positions the institution takes, individuals whose personal relationship to the theology and cultural norms of the Church varies from those formal positions feel unfairly characterized. It is true that the Church's stance on a given issue has great impact, as seen through the ways LDS legislators have fallen in step with the Church's endorsement of or opposition to particular legislative bills, including those related to LGBTQ+ rights (with formal Church positions over time/in relation to different bills including both opposition to and endorsement of laws seeking to protect those rights, with individuals having different perspectives about whether the Church's endorsement of pro-LGBTQ+ bills represents a degree of tolerance/acceptance or a strategic move to protect religious freedom, e.g., in the 2022 federal Respect for Marriage act, and/or not alienate too many LDS members [Kemsley and Steck 2022]). Nonetheless, multiple Mormonisms exist in both formal (i.e., via organizations) and informal (i.e., individuals' relation to their faith and views on sociopolitical issues) ways. Not only do queer Mormons navigate their faith and queerness (e.g., Ostler 2021, Pray 2024), but straight LDS members form their own opinions. For instance, while dominant non-LDS discourse about Mormonism is that people will always fall in step with whatever position their ward bishop takes, a question to an LDS friend in Kanab about what stance their bishop took about LGBTQ+ people was met with something between surprise and confusion; they pushed back that what their bishop thought about queer folks had no sway on their own perspective and framed the bishop's opinion as no more persuasive than any other voice. Even in contexts not directly broaching individuals who have crafted their Mormon faith to arrive at different conclusions on social issues than Church leadership, a sense of variation is present: in my time in Kanab, I heard relative newcomers from northern Utah clarify, “We're not southern Utah Mormons,” implying they weren't as conservative and didn't feel as strongly about public lands issues or stake such intense opposition to protective public lands management. Similarly, I heard LDS members in Salt Lake City articulate, “Oh, but we're not Provo Mormons,” implying that Provo Mormons are on a whole other level of religiosity. Although the historic location of Brigham Young's arrival is in Salt Lake City—the “This is the Place” monument—Provo is arguably the center of contemporary Mormonism, being the site of Brigham Young University and the LDS Missionary Training Center, as well as being found in 2013 to be the most religious metropolitan area in the U.S., as measured by self-reports of religiosity and frequency of church attendance in a Gallup Poll (Newport 2013). Although the overall percentage of the population made up of LDS members is falling in the state, including in Provo, Utah County, where Provo is located, has typically held one of the highest concentrations of LDS members out of all Utah counties (3rd highest in 2018, overall highest in 2021; Canham 2018, Toone and Walch 2021).

“locals,” especially in a moment where land decisions or community decisions are being debated, but such connection through family and/or the Church does not provide a satisfying explanation for when a newcomer *isn't* labeled a move-in. After all, I was not labeled a move-in and it was not a term used in everyday conversation to label a variety of relative newcomers with some of the very characteristics that supposedly made one an outsider, such as being politically liberal or being queer. It was also not a label given to new residents who were conservative but non-LDS. These variations revealed cracks in the taken-for-granted discourse that true locals are defined by the length of time they have lived in the area and that newcomers are inevitably labeled “move-ins.” Rather than length of residence being the primary criterion for status as a local, it seemed that alignment with the people and values seen as the dominant core of the community was just as, if not more, important. Rather than a short length of residence automatically giving a person a move-in label, it became increasingly clear that the term move-in was applied when people asserted positions seen to be at odds with the existing core qualities of the place; in a location where land issues are so central, the effect is that it is typically “environmentalist”-type positions that activate the use of the move-in label.

Performing Localness

The varied application of local and move-in labels and related declarations of insider/outsider status hint at the malleability of these categories. Because “belonging” is not truly defined by a simple variable of length of residence, discursive work positioning oneself in relation to ideas of the right kind of people for this place can enable individuals to make bids for localness. At the 2019 city council election, reliance on the length of residence was key to how some of the candidates presented themselves. One asserted that he was “one of the few Kanabites here” having been born and raised in Kanab and emphasized spending only 8 years of his life living elsewhere during his mission, attending Brigham Young University, and teaching at Southern Utah University. Another asserted that Kanab is “the only place I have lived as an adult.” However, the positioning of localness has become increasingly complex. Such action

was epitomized at the 2022 county commission election forum. An established public event genre in Kanab, the election forum was an opportunity for candidates to share their perspectives on a variety of issues and pitch what they would focus on as county commissioners. Like other election forums, audience participation was tightly managed, with preset questions being posed by a moderator instead of soliciting questions from the crowd. As each of the speakers took turns presenting themselves to the crowd through introductions and responses to questions, I realized that every candidate had moved to Kanab in adulthood; none were Kanab “born-and-raised.” Notably, each candidate’s narration of their life and connection to Kanab didn’t try to hide this fact. While the length of time each had resided in Kanab varied from decades to just six years, none of these candidates were questioned or challenged regarding the appropriateness of their running for county commission, and none were called “move-ins” at the forum or beyond.

Election forums in Kanab are events that put on display the types of discursive performances that position someone as a “local” or in alignment with “locals.” Significantly, these candidates *know* the talking points that are important to demonstrate “localness” to an audience. To some extent, such a demonstration involves expressing basic political conservatism, which at the very least distances one from the label of “move-in.” But gaining a connection to the label of “local,” particularly in a decision-making domain such as an election, calls for something more: demonstrating that one knows what kind of place Kanab is, has the ability to speak about the issues that might threaten those qualities, and uses language that shows a willingness to defend those qualities. Matters of land use loom large here, not just regarding public lands management but also matters like zoning, regulations that might impact private property (i.e., by hindering “freedom”), and development. I was struck by the performance of a candidate whom I had previously encountered while participating in a community coalition focused on county residents’ health and well-being. In that previous setting, this person had worked with a coalition in an open-minded and collaborative manner to support

the coalition's goals. In contrast to some of the stronger discourse in town resisting any sort of change, this person was optimistic and positive about the proposed change in how the coalition would be run and how it would more effectively serve the community. At the election forum, their demeanor was much different. Gone was the collaborative posture, and in its place were vehement expressions of the threat of the federal government. The original boundaries of GSENM had been restored eight months prior, and at the time of the forum there were not any front-and-center impending federal land decisions at hand. Nonetheless, this candidate highlighted the federal government as a major threat, warning about loss of control of land decisions with provocative language like "the federal government has a target on our back." While in the broader context of the community, this person was described by folks from across the political spectrum as someone who was thoughtful, considerate, and balanced when navigating thorny community issues, here they performed a more rigid perspective in alignment with the values and perspectives put forth by vocal, conservative "locals," traveling along well-worn anti-federal and anti-regulation grooves, key components of opposition to use-restricting land management.

While that candidate successfully demonstrated themselves to be a person in alignment with this place by being well-versed in locally relevant concerns, including expressing the "right" perspective on public lands issues, another candidate's reception as the right kind of person to be running for county commission and having a say in local decisions took a hit when a gap in their knowledge of land issues came to the fore. At an earlier election forum in Big Water, a smaller town on the east edge of the county about an hour from Kanab, this candidate had stumbled in response to a land-related question involving state-owned land held by the Utah School and Institutional Lands Trust Administration. The person posing the question had used the acronym, SITLA, that is a part of many southern Utah residents' everyday vocabulary, pronounced "sit-la" (e.g., "Do you know if that parcel is BLM or SITLA?"), and the commission candidate hadn't known what that was. Though such a gaffe has one level of social meaning

regarding the person's lack of knowledge of locally relevant issues, it also threw this candidate's alignment with localness into question. Although they knew the acronym by the time the Kanab forum happened, the damage was already done, and other candidates highlighted their "not even know[ing] what SITLA is" to discredit the candidate. They were not elected.

Just as having the "right" perspectives led these county commission candidates to, with the exception of the SITLA faux pas, successfully avoid "move-in" labels and be seen as close to or part of "the locals," expressing a view considered mismatched with the perceived "correct" qualities of place is a recipe for lack of political success. In contrast to the 2022 county commissioners, B, a city council candidate who identified themselves as a Republican and clearly expressed right-leaning views at the city council election forum in fall 2019 was cast as an outsider by a prominent long-standing resident (who had himself held various local and county positions through time) for their opposition to the proposed frac sands project. As a child of one of the founders of Best Friends Animal Sanctuary, this city council candidate had spent their summers as a teenager working at Best Friends in its early (pre-nonprofit status) years and had returned to work at Best Friends after a career in the Marine Corps. As an engineer for Best Friends they were involved in the organization's information gathering to assess the impact of the project on the sanctuary's water future and spoke as a representative of the organization at the Keep Kanab Unspoiled meeting I attended. Despite their expression of general conservative values and status as a military veteran—two qualities generally lifted up in this community—B's potential election to the city council was cast as a threat to the core of the community. In a series of online posts,⁶⁰ a prominent community member declared that the candidate was a

⁶⁰ For example, one post sharing a screenshot of an apparent old Facebook profile photo with a Bernie Sanders mural declared, "[This person] is running for Kanab City Council. Although it's a non-partisan office, [this candidate] is a registered Republican. These posts are from his 2016 and 2017 Facebook. Nothing like this appears on [their] new Facebook page. You can be against the Frack mine but to support Bernie Sanders and AOC and to call Immigration holding facilities concentration camps is not only dishonest, it's an extreme leftist fake news propaganda tool used by the democrats to stop illegal immigration into our country. [this candidate] is the wrong choice for Kanab City Council. Vote the real Republican in for city council, that would be the stable Incumbents...It's about conservative values." Another post showing a screenshot of a post appearing to have come

“leftist extremist Democrat” rather than a “true” Republican.

In a letter circulated in the community urging voters to vote for the incumbents, this critic demarcated both this candidate and A, the other nonincumbent and the only other candidate opposed to the frac sand mine, as newcomers, highlighting that “both have recently moved to the area from out of state. [One, A,] is retired and moved from Las Vegas. [And the other, B,] arrived from California to work for Best Friends and is the son of a Best Friends founder.” While not explicitly labeling these candidates with the noun of “move-ins,” this statement is jam-packed with locally-relevant “dog whistles” that plug into the standard narrative of “locals” and “move-ins” mapping onto “ranchers” (and those committed to agrarian heritage and related values) and “environmentalists.” These signals include emphasizing their moves as “recent” and “from out of state,” while omitting B’s lifelong connection to the area; marking A as a retiree, a social category that is sometimes part of the narrative about people with the wrong kind of values (including environmentalist values) moving to areas of the rural West and highlighting A’s urban connections (Las Vegas); highlighting B’s connection to Best Friends, an organization seen as out of alignment with the true essence of this place; and recasting B’s time in California (where he was stationed in the Marine Corps) through a frame that implies he is “from California.” California is seen negatively across the Intermountain West, with such a reference

from the city council candidate’s Facebook page in 2016 showed a photoshopped image of President Obama wearing a hat that said, “I already made America Great.” This screenshot was accompanied by the prominent community member’s assertion: “Another late 2016 post from [this candidate].. No question he is an extreme leftest [sic] Democrat who hates our president and his efforts to clean up the Washington Swamp. Those who say city council seats don’t have an effect on national politics, don’t believe the saying that ‘all politics are local.’ Just look at Moab. The Grand Canyon Trust and SUWA and the river runners and the backpackers, took over the town. Then they changed the county government to a council, divided up the districts and took control of the entire county even though the majority of the voters are still solid conservative Republicans. We honor [this candidate for their] service as a soldier in the Marine Corps, but [their] political philosophy is out of touch with the vast majority of Kanab and Kane County residents. Vote for all the incumbents not just for 2 or 3 because [this candidate’s] supporters are telling their people to only vote for [them]. That means if conservative votes don’t vote for all the incumbents, [they] could win without a clear mandate of voters. Thank you for reading this post, Please share with your friends and neighbors, vote by mail starts today. Get out the vote.”

indexing newcomers with different (liberal) values⁶¹ and of a socioeconomic class that drives up home prices. This long-time resident and others encouraged voters to “Keep Kanab in Honest Hands”⁶² and “Stand United: Vote the Trifecta.” The trifecta included just one person who had generational family connections to Kanab and had grown up in the area, while the other two had moved to the area some years prior. That these individuals were lifted up as representing the core of the community while B was cast as an outsider, even as all expressed generally conservative views at the election forum, highlights how land issues are heavily weighted in whether—or, perhaps more significantly, *when*—people are labeled as insiders or outsiders.

Welcoming Locals

Expressing values perceived to be at odds with what kind of place Kanab is—such as positions on land use supporting protection, preservation, conservation, or government regulation—becomes grounds for marking individuals as the wrong kind of people for this place. At the same time, boundary work demarcating what kinds of values and people do or don’t belong in Kanab is argued to *not* be exclusionary, specifically because these demarcations are seen less as personal opinions and more as enduring qualities of place. Like how the narration of the all-woman town council can represent, to some, both progressivism and traditionalism without contradiction, the assertion of conservative values is seen as capable of standing alongside a demeanor of welcomingness to visitors and new residents alike (even as there are tensions around both) without being a contradiction or paradox. For example, during the city council meeting in 2006 at which the Resolution on the Natural Family was considered, Council

⁶¹ This trope of liberal Californians moving to the Intermountain West—encountered not just in my fieldwork in Kanab, but growing up in western Montana and visiting relatives’ communities in western Colorado—persists even as, at least in Kanab, it seems many newcomers from California are in fact conservative and seeking a more conservative government context.

⁶² A slogan drawing a connection—and implicit counterargument—with the group “Keep Kanab Unspoiled” that was fighting against the proposed frac sands project in the months leading up to this city council election.

Member Carol Sullivan⁶³—the only woman on the council—queried whether the resolution would end up excluding people who don't fit that vision, to which Mayor Lawson responded that

We are just stating our stand, and we don't exclude anyone. We are reconciling, not abolishing. This Resolution doesn't discriminate, it doesn't prevent anyone from coming to Kanab. It simply puts up a moral standard. We look to local government that holds the protection of the natural family to be their first responsibility. (Kanab City Council Meeting Minutes, January 10th, 2006)

While liberals, both resident and from afar, are quick to critique such claims, I argue that this pairing is not considered contradictory to those asserting it because specific values and types of people are seen to be unchanging qualities that are part of this place. From this point of view, it is not wrong or even rude to blatantly declare values that are seen as part of this place. As a man, speaking at a public hearing after the city council passed the resolution, expressed, "It's reasonable to let people who lead unconventional lifestyles know they will be more comfortable living in San Francisco, or in Santa Fe, than in Kanab" (Feldman 2007).⁶⁴ Both Mayor Lawson's and this man's statements operate with the notion that simply stating the "truth" about what this place is is not exclusionary. Such statements are, themselves, an act of place-making that helps maintain both the perceived conservative cultural core of the town *and* the assertion that it is a friendly, welcoming place.⁶⁵

⁶³ Sullivan later spoke to journalists about the matters saying that though she had gone along with the rest of the council members in voting for it because it was nonbinding, she had felt that the resolution was chauvinistic and wondered why it should be a government issue. She explained, "It kind of made me feel like the odd one out... the square peg in a round hole. But that's how it is when you're the only woman on an all-male council."

⁶⁴ The way this statement leans into the notion that Kanab is a place with conservative or traditional values in contrast to urban places is common local political discourse. It reproduces broader cultural notions of rurality equaling conservativeness, heteronormativity, and whiteness and urbanness equaling political liberalism, queerness, and racial diversity, even as in practice both rural and urban spaces are more complex than these stereotypes suggest.

⁶⁵ Similarly, alongside discourse in many contexts ranging from the comments of Facebook posts to election forums that emphasizes the distinctions between locals and move-ins or between good newcomers and bad newcomers are occasional shifts into pretending like such insider/outsider negotiations aren't at play. A striking example of this was at the 2019 city council election forum at which the candidates responded to a question about locals and move-ins ("What does it mean to be local or a move-in, and how does that affect our community?") with expressions like, from the Kanab born-and-raised candidate, "as for being local, I don't think we should use this term...we're all neighbors...people move here because it's a great community, not the red rocks or hills" (a statement implicitly reinscribing the idea that community members aren't here for the landscape) and, from one

Like the man in the public hearing who suggested that Kanab is a better fit for some types of people than for others, other people-centered place-making assertions include illustrating the matched and mismatched people through stereotypes about “environmentalists,” hinting at how attitudes toward land use and land governance saturate practices of drawing insider/outsider boundaries. For instance, ideas about what the right kind of person for this place is are hinted at in comments like one from a person who moved from northern Utah to Kanab and, after about 8 years, returned to northern Utah: “Dear new comers to Utah, welcome and remember Hunting season is Jan 1 to Dec 31. Cancel your REI membership and send that fluffy down jacket back to where it came from. Safety orange is the new color, it can be purchased just about any store in Utah, usually right next to the ammo and ear plugs and coyote calls.”⁶⁶ Here, the commenter draws connections to hunting as an outdoor pastime that fits with this place, in contrast to REI memberships and down jackets as markers of outdoor recreation that are associated with liberals and environmentalists. This passive-aggressive “coaching” offered to newcomers links up to a central aspect of popular discourse, media portrayals, and even scholarly articulations (e.g., Brugger 2009) about southern Utah communities—many of which imply that the typical new arrival is liberal and environmentally-minded in a way that is at odds with local sentiment. That the actual characteristics of newcomers are more complicated than that assumption implies is an important clue about how the “move-in” label actually functions and about the varied social positions that exist beyond neatly classified “locals” and

of the candidates who was accused of being an outsider “from California,” “I like everybody...I agree with [him]...it’s a false dichotomy; are you a good person or not? Do you love your neighbor or not?” Another candidate suggested that what made the difference was one’s own mindset: “it depends on how you act; you could be living here 30 years and still think of everyone as your enemy or move here last week and feel embraced; we set the tone, each of us,” essentially implying whether one felt like they belonged to the community depending on whether they wanted to be. Meanwhile, before and after these responses in the forum the candidates drew stark lines delineating what kinds of views were seen as correct for an elected official in this community to have and made efforts to cast some of their fellow candidates as move-ins (and expressed such boundary-drawing rhetoric outside of the forum context as well).

⁶⁶ Though this post’s language is nonspecific to Kanab (“Dear new comers to Utah”), the context in which it was posting was to new Kanab residents assumed to be coming from out of state.

“move-ins.”

Rapid growth since 2020 perhaps amplifies the labor of maintaining both of these facets of place.⁶⁷ Along with an uptick in tourist visitors has come an influx of new residents with varying degrees of familiarity and overlap with the perceived “core” qualities of the community. In the ongoing task of balancing welcomingness with “preserving” the perceived essence of this place, it’s not uncommon for longtime “locals” to assert, in a variety of discursive settings, that it’s fine for new people to come here but new residents shouldn’t try to change what this place already is. One place this sentiment is expressed is comments on Facebook posts in locally-based groups or on posts put out by local organizations/businesses. One such comment demonstrates how this sentiment is built on a notion of preexisting, enduring qualities of place:

we need to find ways that ‘new comers’ know that is what this area is about and not about where they lived before. They can choose to move here but when they do, they need to understand the limitations that need to exist to keep them from making changes the current residents don’t want.

This notion that newcomers should not try to change the essence of this place through asserting differing views and values or desires for how the town should be is encapsulated in the frequent turn to phrases like “if you don’t like it, you can leave”⁶⁸ and “newcomers should respect what this place is; if they can’t respect it, they should leave.” The potential threat of newcomers trying to change this place is encapsulated in attitudes about people with the wrong views ending up in local government. Similar to the anti-California sentiment expressed toward the city council candidate above, one commenter on a post by the Kanab Office of Tourism (in which many comments spoke bitterly about the threat of tourism and growth to Kanab’s “small-town charm”)

⁶⁷ In 2022, Southwest Utah (Kane, Garfield, Washington, Iron, and Beaver Counties) was reported to be the fastest growing (highest rate of change) region of Utah (Hollingshuas et al. 2022). It is worth noting, however, that news articles discussing rising rates of both tourism and “outsiders” moving to Utah, generally, and southern Utah, specifically, span at least the last three decades.

⁶⁸ Such phrasing is not uncommon in broader conservative anti-immigration discourse, and I see a parallel in the ways particular images of “America” are taken to be inherent and “correct,” with divergence from this image in even small ways sometimes met with this type of phrase.

said, “though not as bad, Big Water is getting the Californians too. *Keep them off the city councils though!!*” (emphasis mine). Such a sentiment implies that people with the wrong views and values being in decision-making positions are a threat to the preservation of this place’s core. While there are many ways in which I experienced welcomingness and warmth in the community without feeling like I was biting my tongue or hiding my authentic self, to those who experience the sense of an inherent conservative and agrarian cultural core under threat, the notion of being a welcoming community comes with a major caveat: we are welcoming as long as you don’t rock the boat and don’t try to change what this place is.

Such a framing demarcates what kind of person (and what kinds of views and values) align with or are a part of this place. Notably, it also defines who has a right to have a say in the community *on the basis of a preset notion of what that “say” is*. That is, how certain people and perspectives are seen as aligned with or part of this place precludes the notion of a legitimate voice prior to or separate from the specific views that voice is expressing. Ultimately, this measure seems a more powerful indicator about who is or isn’t marked as an outsider than length of residence or prior family connections. Discursively, these criteria preclude the possibility of “locals” having different views and values than those said to be enduring in this place, even when they meet all the qualities associated with being local, like being born in Kanab and living there their whole life.

Self-Fashioning Localness

Kanab residents negotiate these ideas about what kinds of people and values fit with the place and how newcomers should behave in a variety of ways. People whose identities, experiences, or political beliefs are cast as mismatched with this place cope in a variety of ways ranging from moving away from the community, to staying due to their love for the landscape but being vocal about their distaste for “the locals,” to keeping relatively quiet about their views and values, to seeking the humanity of political Others through leaning into similarities rather than difference (with the effectiveness of such a strategy being influenced by all axes of

privilege and marginalization). The reality is, however, that there is much more variation among new arrivals than the traditional local vs. move-in discourse suggests. For those seeking to be more directly recognized as a “local” or, at the very least, not an outsider or “move-in,” there is work to be done. In the following paragraphs I present a few examples of how individuals have self-fashioned themselves to be in alignment with the perceived core qualities of this place.

One example of an individual positioning themselves as “one of the locals” is C, whose public self-presentation and political trajectory in Kanab politics has fostered ideological and cultural alignment with specific conservative and agrarian values. Despite originally moving to Kanab to work at Best Friends Animal Sanctuary—Kane County’s largest but, according to some “locals” and some “move-ins,” “most hated” employer—they have successfully worked their way up in local politics, first serving on the city council and then becoming a county commissioner. As with the commissioner candidates described earlier, one aspect of this self-fashioning involves articulating the right politics, which C has done with increasing specificity. While they spoke of themselves as a libertarian at the 2019 election forum, their language evolved through the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic to align with “constitutionalism,” a political framework that, though not limited to Kanab, is favored in much anti-protections discourse, such as the ideas put forth by Ammon Bundy in events like that described in the introduction chapter. In Kanab’s political discourse, much of constitutionalist rhetoric focuses on individual liberty and county supremacy.⁶⁹ Beyond this shift toward alignment with political discourse associated with vocal “locals,” C has asserted themselves as part of the purported cultural “core” of the community, those with pioneer and agrarian heritage. For example, in 2020, C was very vocal about being a

⁶⁹ The idea of personal liberty is sometimes—perhaps increasingly in recent years—linked up with ideas of “self-sovereignty” as articulated in ideas from the Sovereign Citizens Movement. County supremacy is the notion that the only legitimate form of government, especially regarding law enforcement, is at the county level. Although the arguments asserted by the Sovereign Citizens movement and by those in favor of county supremacy (who often self-describe themselves as constitutionalists) are distinct logics about governance, both of these ideas appear to travel through similar social/cultural spaces in the American West.

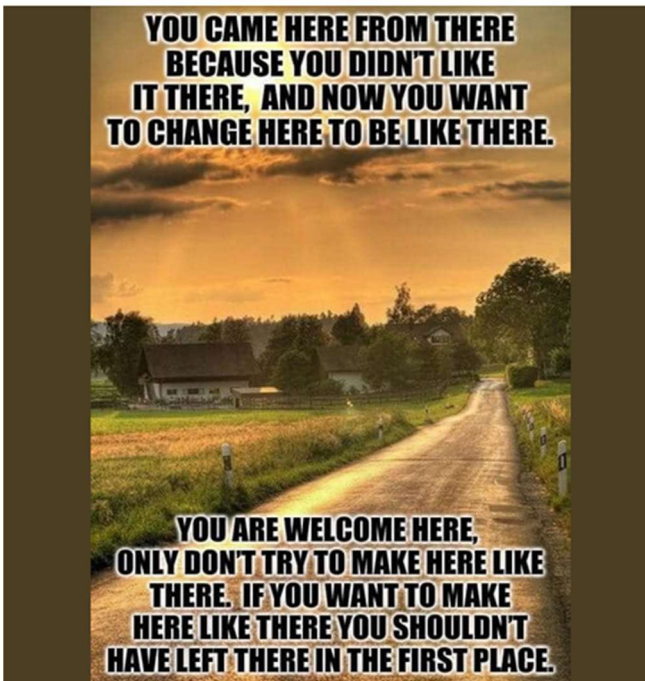
proponent of a “Right to Farm” ordinance that would protect residents’ “right” to engage in agricultural activity in areas zoned rural residential and rural agricultural. Such residential agricultural/animal husbandry practice is still guided by typical requirements of land to animal ratios and restrictions on number of animals, but, importantly, the Right to Farm policy as framed in the 2022 Kanab General Plan articulates that new residents in such areas should “accept [and cannot expect the city to be responsive to complaints about] the environment typical of farming areas, including farm odors, farm equipment on the roads, and noise typical of farm animals.” Speaking about this ordinance in an online post before it was formally adopted, C positioned themselves as part of the social-cultural group holding agrarian heritage in this place, stating, “The ‘Right to Farm’ land-use protection is, in my view, one of the ways that we can *retain our* rural heritage and unique identity” (emphasis mine).

Another example of efforts to socially position oneself as in alignment with “local” qualities and desires is in posts and comments people make in locally-based Facebook groups related to the touchy matters of development/rapid growth of the town and community cultural change. Although questions of undesirable “development” and desirable economic prosperity are a point of tension that has increasingly caused more visible splitting of the purportedly united “locals” political bloc, a frequent refrain from “locals” is that the amount of development and growth coming to the town is sad and a threat to Kanab’s “small town” feel, including the ever-present threat of “becom[ing] Moab” (see chapter 5). I was struck by how quickly some new arrivals—people who are a part of recent growth—took up the same thread, mimicking the longtime locals with comments lamenting the pace of growth both on posts specifically about a development/growth topic and on posts about unrelated topics. For instance, on a post asking about a new restaurant in town (see later section in this chapter), a relative newcomer positioned himself as alongside the locals with the phrase, “With as much growth coming into this town, which is sad, you’d think someone would bring in a Full On BBQ Joint,” encapsulating a common sentiment in which residents’ desires for certain businesses in town are connected to

its economic upswing and population growth at the same time that they express sadness, frustration, or grief about the rapid growth of the town from 2020 onward. For a newcomer to join longtime “locals” in critiquing or lamenting development is to make a bid to position oneself as belonging and, perhaps, is a kind of distancing themselves from being a part of that growth.

Along with such efforts to align with “local” perspectives on new town growth and development are newcomers positioning themselves as the respectful newcomers who appreciate what this place is and aren’t trying to change this place. One striking example is the genre of online posts in which a relative newcomer will, apparently unsolicited, post a comment in one of the locally-based Facebook groups about how they’re new but they moved here because they like what this place already is and do not wish to change it. Some of these posts, such as the one shown in Figure 2.1, utilize images that are similar to those shared by longtime

I am not from Kanab, but I LOVE it here. What I love about it is that it's beautiful, but mostly I love how kind and friendly and beautiful most people are...I don't want it to change!



locals in online spaces (e.g., this exact image was shared in on locally-based Facebook group in June 2022, and as a distinct post in another in October 2023 with the caption “just to remind some people”). Utilizing that type of “meme-ified” image expressing the sentiments that “locals” express about newcomers, the person posting performed ideal newcomer behavior: “I am not from Kanab, but I LOVE it here...I don’t want it to change.”

Figure Error! No text of specified style in document. 1.1: A screenshot of an image shared multiple times in various locally-based Facebook groups.

Another type of positioning in alignment with the perceived place qualities of the rurality and agrarian heritage are assertions of connections to small towns, implying some kind of cultural connection even among those not born and raised in Kanab. For instance, a newcomer to Kanab who posted in Kanab Classifieds acknowledged the discussion about development, argued that people shouldn't be judged for where they come from, but then moved on to position himself and his wife as in alignment with rurality/small town life by asserting roots in small towns and sharing old photos connecting them to agrarian activity (see Figure 2.2). Each of the photos came with captions, many of which positioned the person's post in alignment with



Figure 2.2. A screenshot of an individual's Facebook post highlighting their connection to rurality despite having moved to Kanab from Las Vegas.

local values. For example, a photo of the poster and his father planting seeds had the caption, "My dad teaching me the value of hard work," while other photos had descriptors placing the person's past in small-town, working class Nebraska; narrating the willingness to put up with inconveniences like no shower during their interim period living in an RV and small cabin; and demonstrating competence by building their own home in Kanab. In this way, newcomers seek—and may achieve—a degree of acceptance and inclusion amidst a dominant discourse that new arrivals are at odds with and a potential threat to the essence of this place.

Locals and Move-ins: Reprise

Taken together, these instances of individuals asserting and negotiating their and others' status as insiders or outsiders reveal how particular kinds of people, values, and attitudes are seen as part of the essence of this place. I take this ongoing discursive labor around who does or doesn't belong to be an important aspect of place-making. The notion of insiders and outsiders has long been articulated in this setting using language of "locals" and "move-ins," including by those who are frequently excluded by such labels. While typical local/move-in discourse implies the categories are all-encompassing and mutually exclusive—that a resident must be one or the other and that each position comes with preset, unchanging sets of values that oppose the other—these examples show that negotiations around insider/outsider status are more complicated. Though I believe some degree of that variation is longstanding, recent changes in the intensity of tourism and the volume of new residents have amplified the complexity and visibility of the variables shaping how those labels are applied.

Rapid change and community members' responses in the past five years highlight community variation that challenges the dominant framing of "locals" as a homogenous bloc. Although it's worth remembering that individual perspectives have always been more varied than dominant discourse implies, Kanab has been subject to fairly rapid change in the last five years, including an influx of both visitors and new residents. Amidst this change, there is genuinely more variation in perspectives about what kinds of changes and growth are desirable and more variation among commitments to particular values or ideologies than dominant narratives suggest. One result of this complex set of changes is that there has been more splitting of stances on community decisions among Kanab's conservatives. Although dominant place narratives from those invested in a conservative, agrarian small town place cast development as generally bad, economic opportunity as generally good, and government regulation as generally bad, these valuations are reproduced with varying degrees of intensity across a range of people, with attitudes toward how much each of these values should be

weighed against each other seeming increasingly varied. This variation includes people socially positioned as “locals” critiquing proposed projects (e.g., “[Prominent community member with multigenerational Kanab family] is just pushing the golf course because his step-children will get rich off it”) and political activity like a write-in campaign during the 2022 county commission election by an individual in a multigenerational Kanab family taking a more restrictive stance on development (although she was not elected). The amplification of such disagreement and debate between people who demonstrate sufficient qualities to be marked as an insider and/or to avoid outsider accusations complicates the underlying logic of local/move-in discourse that implies someone who fits with this place already has a preset point of view about how the community should be.

Even so, the application of local versus move-in labels peak in contexts in which decisions are being made and individuals (whether they have decision-making power or not) will take a position on that decision. Although this discussion of how people negotiate insider/outsider boundaries has emphasized discursive practices that exclude, day-to-day life is not always so intense even for those who purportedly “don’t fit” with the ideal image of what kind of person belongs. It is the addition of some kind of pressure, such as a land decision or an election, that brings out harsh exclusionary articulations. Whether there is a decision to be made matters. Seeing the ways in which only some newcomers—typically those with views that lead them to be socially read as “environmentalist”—end up labeled as move-ins, alongside how the locals/move-in discourse is amplified in decision-making contexts such as land use decisions, demonstrates how locals versus move-ins discourse maps onto the rancher versus environmentalist trope, which is itself assumed to also represent conservative versus liberal values. Framing people as locals or move-ins on the basis of the length of time they have lived in the area seems to have historically worked as shorthand for sorting those who are aligned from those who are misaligned with the perceived essence of this place. We see this basic categorization at work in residents who moved to Kanab as adults two to four decades ago:

those who expressed the right political and cultural views—such as general conservatism, anti-protections stances, and agrarian heritage views regarding land use and human-land-animal relations—are essentially seen as local and their arrivals were unremarkable, and those who have been advocates for land protections and opponents of agricultural and industry uses of public lands remain seen as move-ins and as threats to maintaining the essence of this place.

Kanab's recent rapid change has complicated the "shorthand" use of local versus move-in labels. Whereas previously the use of terms newcomer and move-in seemed to be near-synonyms, and assertions about insiders and outsiders could simply equate new arrivals with non-belonging environmentalists, local discourse about newcomers has shifted since 2020. Although it's not clear whether the proportions of new arrivals with various views and values have drastically shifted, anecdotally there has been an influx of newcomers to the area since 2020 who are politically conservative. Speaking at the 2022 county commission election forum, candidates spoke of these people as "political refugees," describing them as people trying to get away from liberal states to escape over-regulation and restrictive pandemic policies.⁷⁰ Set within these candidates' navigation of the tricky topic of development and growth, these newcomers were not derisively called "move-ins" but were instead cast in an empathetic light.

Though length of time and where one has moved from are sometimes relevant variables in the equations behind how people are socially categorized, whether one is seen to align with or threaten perceptions of the core essence of this place is more impactful. Despite rhetoric in which California symbolizes qualities seen to be at odds with this place (e.g., urbanness, political liberals, lack of agrarian toughness), one's place of origin alone isn't necessarily a determining variable for whether one is cast as a "move-in"—for instance, "Californian" only

⁷⁰ Such a framing stood in stark contrast to the 2019 city council election forum, which was dominated by the traditional local versus move-in rhetoric implying that most to all newcomers are the wrong kind of people.

gains derogatory salience when symbolically linked to other undesirable qualities. Indeed, many newcomers who might earn the label “political refugee” are from California. The ways in which people self-fashion themselves as “locals” amidst personal details that could, in theory, disqualify them from such status demonstrates the ways in which declarations of who is the right kind of person for this place is a practice that includes much more than simply time in residence. As the examples here show, ultimately whether someone is new to the area is less significant than whether they support or threaten the image of a conservative, agrarian heritage place.

Everyday Encounters: People, Animals, and Spatial Relations

In addition to the framing of past events as representative of enduring qualities and marking individuals as insiders or outsiders based on whether they are the right type of person for this place, everyday moments can become infused with meaning such that any small detail may become indexical of enduring qualities of this place. One venue where little moments can become overflowing sites of struggle over place are the afore-mentioned locally-based Facebook groups. These groups include Kanab Classifieds, Kanab Unclassifieds (formed as a reaction to efforts to curtail “political” and other inflammatory talk in the main Classifieds group), and Kanab/Fredonia Rant and Rave (formed as an explicit rejection of the moderation of inflammatory posts in the other two groups).⁷¹ While individuals sometimes make posts in these groups that are explicitly about political or other issues that are sure to get a rise out of people, the everyday grappling over place is most striking in the ways that a post about a seemingly inconsequential or nonpolitical happening in town can become a site of place assertions. In this section, I present a variety of examples of place grappling in locally-based online settings that show how aspects of everyday life are imbued with meaning about desirable or “correct”

⁷¹ Each of these groups is moderated by different members of the community. None are formally connected to city or county government entities, though representatives from different parts of city and county government regularly use these Facebook groups for disseminating information (e.g., such as upcoming meetings/public hearings, election campaign statements, statements from city/county officials clarifying happenings or formal government positions on issues around which community discussion develops, etc.).

relations between people, physical space, and other animals.

Bike Lanes and Liberal Commies

One area of community life in which political ideologies are tied to specific objects or imagery is in the context of city infrastructure. In 2020, a local public health employee painted a temporary bike lane running along Main Street from the town park past the elementary school and to the middle and high schools. The lane was intended both for use during the 2020 Back to School Triathlon and to be a trial to see what a more permanent bike lane might be like. The employee circulated a survey on Kanab Classifieds to gather feedback from the community, and responding comments quickly filled with negativity. There was debate over the pros and cons of the bike lane. “It’s great unless you live there” because it impedes street parking, one community member said. Some were confused about how a bike lane on the road makes kids safer than riding on the sidewalk, and others wanted the city to prioritize making rain gutters and sidewalks more widespread through town instead of focusing on making a bike lane. In addition, some commenters asserted that the bike lane was a sign Kanab was “becoming Moab” and that “liberal commies” were taking over the community (although these more inflammatory comments seem to have been removed and eventually comments were turned off for the post).

Even though the argument for a permanent bike lane had been centered on increasing safety for children riding their bicycles to school and the public health employee pitching the idea was Kanab born-and-raised in a “core” multigenerational Kanab family, was an active member of the LDS Church, and a member of the Kanab Patriots Facebook group known for its members’ far-right conservative views, the bike lane indexed for some people a kind of place associated with political values they despised. The question of a bike lane in town was an opportunity to fast track one recurring narrative that Kanab is a conservative place under threat from liberal ideals. The backlash linking it to undesired development (being “like Moab”) and to “liberal commies” illustrates how infrastructural features come with symbolic strings attached.

Defining Good Animal Relations

Another realm in which people grapple over Kanab's essence is in social media posts related to loose animals. Such posts elicit assertions about proper relations between humans, animals, and space, specifically what kinds of relations are fitting with Kanab. When someone posts photos of found animals (e.g., a dog running loose) out of concern for the animal, it has repeatedly become a venue for a debate over whether it's reasonable to let such animals run free. Significantly, the fact that someone would assume the dog was "lost" and that the owner would be concerned sometimes becomes an opportunity to label people as being unaware of what kind of place Kanab is, with (assumed) newcomers being seen as having a mismatched sensibility about animals moving through space. A post seeking to alert the community of a potentially lost animal may be received as evidence that the poster is new to the area, liberal, and non-agrarian and responses to it may challenge the notion that a loose dog is out of place. For instance, individuals have responded to such posts with comments like, "the dog knows where home is." More acerbic expressions cast dog matters in terms of "Best Frienders" encroaching on "the locals," such as one post on Kanab/Fredonia Rant & Rave describing a negative encounter with someone regarding their chained up dogs. The post read

I don't know what makes you bestfriend-ers feel so entitled to show up and [cursing emoji] trespass onto people's property..? Two times in one day. My dogs were chained up today because I keep them inside most days, they've been missing outside. My backyard isn't fenced in so I have to chain them when [they're] not in their comfy kennels inside. For that reason this lady felt the need to harass my brother and trespass twice IN ONE DAY. I'm not going to deal with this any longer. I've had one too many of my dogs growing up get hurt or sick because of you guys feeding them, unleashing them, and brining [sic] your own dogs around them to deal with it any longer. *From all kanab locals, stop it. I know most people have had the same issue.* At some point people are going to break and it's not going to be good. You're not above anyone here, laws imply [sic] to you, no I'm not going to give you a doggy treat for not minding your business, and you guys aren't as perfect as you think, y'all steal money from people lol. (emphasis added)

Among the comments of this post were additional stories of "inappropriate" action taken by (assumed to be) "Best Frienders," sarcastic articulations of newcomers'/Best Frienders' attitudes ("Mon....Put your dog on a leash its dangerous.....Tuesday...can't believe your dogs on a leash that's no life for a dog" [sic]), some comments challenging the poster's indignation,

and an effort to validate the person's anger about someone trespassing while challenging their sweeping categorization of all Best Frienders as bad and of all Kanab locals as having the same point of view. That commenter argued,

Some ONE person came into your yard and messed with your dogs. This I do not condone, because if it isn't yours don't touch it...That, I hope most can agree on. But what I have an issue with is because of the actions of one individual person, you are stereo-typing a bunch of people who work at the same place. Placing blame on them and like another said before, threatening them...You say you speak for all Kanab residents, but you do not because I for one have not given you permission to speak for me. I have had the opportunity to meet and get to know so many people who are employed out at Best Friends and do not appreciate the derogatory remarks towards them because of what one person did...I would be so upset as well if some ONE decided to mess with my animals. But Please do not say you speak for me when you do not.

In response to this assertion, another person challenged, "it's not just one person. *It is a culture of people who come here thinking they know better than the locals.* It starts with visitors and continues with employees (who were mostly visitors first)" (emphasis mine). These assertions hint at differing sensibilities about how dogs should be contained and cared for, but in these online encounters people aren't just arguing over correct or ethical care and control of dogs. Rather, posts expressing something like concern about a loose dog can elicit assertions that such people didn't understand what kind of place this is and assertions about who does or doesn't really belong in the community. Posts complaining about "Best Frienders" behavior can become sites of rehashing the notion of "locals" as having values and sensibilities distinct from people who move here to work at the animal sanctuary. Not all people who post with concern about loose dogs are Best Friends employees, but the idea of "Best Frienders" as a particular type of outsider pervades posts and comments about animals (see below for an expanded discussion of community perceptions of Best Friends Animal Sanctuary).

These articulations of fitting relations between dogs and space are rarely connected to explicit articulations of agrarianness, but online interactions about other animal matters hint at the ways that questions of animals in relation to people and to physical space are connected to notions of agrarian heritage and enduring agrarian identity. Like with posts about loose dogs, a

post trying to helpfully communicate that there are loose cows somewhere is likely to be met with reactions that accentuate contours of agrarian “locals” and newcomers, people “in the know” marking the author of the post as an outsider in their responses explaining open range. One such post was met with a slew of comments communicating that the cows were not out of place but rather that the author of the post was in an “open range” area; while some of these comments came across as politely offering information/explanation, others implied an emphasis on “open range” as a desirable detail of what kind of place this area is. Some accentuated the post’s author as a newcomer (“it’s open range country you moved to; they have the right of way unless you fence your property”) and judged them for not knowing this (“Hysterical post! In Utah we have open ranges”; “Omg safe [sic] them all,” a jab implying a connection to Best Friends and the wrong kind of perception of cattle). In a similar scenario, albeit with a less frequently encountered animal, someone posted about a loose goat up on K-Hill, the sandstone bluff near the center of town with a cement “K” constructed on it. As with loose dog and loose cow posts, the initial post expressed a mixture of concern for the animal and wanting to be community-minded by checking to see if anyone was missing a goat.⁷² Over the course of several days and several posts, talk of the goat’s whereabouts and backstory played out. Some people coordinated efforts to catch the goat and find it a place to live after no one claimed it as theirs. Others expressed concern and sympathy, while a handful of comments challenged whether the loose goat was even a matter of concern. These ranged from polite (“The goat isn’t gonna let itself die of thirst, it got up surely it can get down. Most goats I’ve had know their way home just a matter of time till they go back.”) to sarcastic (“Yeah, and the 726 feral cats running around need to be rescued too [laughing emoji]. It’s a goat.. they will survive anywhere”). In a similar

⁷² One early comment during the online discourse about the goat hinted at how folks are aware that issues like this can become inflammatory. The commenter asked, “Any ‘kind’ suggestions as to what to do for this animal?” Such a comment demonstrates an awareness of and an effort to head off mean-spirited comments that add political and symbolic meaning to the issue at hand.

vein to this latter comment, one person wrote, “Hikers ruin everything,” linking the question of whether a person would or should be concerned about a loose goat to implied distinctions between agrarian people and outdoorsy (implied environmentalist) people. Such comments challenge the notion that a loose goat is “notable” and cause for some kind of action, implying that it is normal in this place for a livestock animal to be running about.

Such place assertions about appropriate treatment of or interactions with animals are embedded in broader negotiations or contestations about Best Friends Animal Sanctuary in relation to the local community. Formally founded as an animal sanctuary in 1993, Best Friends had grown out of a religious movement, the Foundation Faith of the Millenium (itself an offshoot of an earlier British religious group, the Process Church of the Final Judgment), that had purchased land from one of the multigenerational settler families in the Kanab Creek drainage north of town and begun moving animals to the land in 1984 (Glen 2001, Wyllie and Parfrey 2009).⁷³ While many people of varied political persuasions recognize this animal welfare organization as a significant contributor of funds to local community initiatives, attitudes toward Best Friends as an organization and its employees as individuals vary. People who move to Kanab to work at the sanctuary typically hold different norms and values about “appropriate” care of pets (e.g., loose dogs, animals left outside in the cold or tied up for extended periods of time) compared to norms in the community that people (both in support of and opposed to those norms) associate with rural, agrarian culture. Such contrasts may be even greater when it

⁷³ Some “locals” point toward this cult-like beginning of Best Friends to cast the sanctuary in an othering light, even as such social-religious groups are a recurring feature in the region—southern Utah has been home to several cult-like religious followings, such as non-dominant Mormon offshoots like the fundamentalist Latter Day Saints (FLDS) on the Utah/Arizona border between St. George and Kanab. A couple of residents more invested in southern Utah as a wild and pristine landscape with opposition to cattle grazing on public lands linked attitudes toward Best Friends and its employees to the conservative values at play in discourse about the natural family resolution, telling me that the “real” reason why “locals” didn’t like Best Friends was because there are “hundreds of lesbians” who work there. Alas, with just a few hundred Kanab-based Best Friends employees, this rumor turned out not to be true. Ultimately, I take these varying assertions about Best Friends to be primarily informative about the place commitments of the people making such comments.

comes to livestock, with the sanctuary representing the opposite of celebrated ranching traditions. In contrast to agrarian traditions centering animal husbandry for food, part of the sanctuary houses livestock animals (with no intention of human consumption) and many sanctuary employees are vegan or vegetarian.⁷⁴ Such differing values show up in the comments as someone replied to a comment saying, “[Person’s Name] you need a goat,” with “for the BBQ.”⁷⁵

Some commenters in the Facebook group took the loose goat conversation as an opportunity to take a jab at Best Friends, responding to questions about whether Best Friends would catch the goat and/or house it with sardonic commentary about how the sanctuary doesn’t “actually” rescue animals. Such comments link the event at hand to a sore point in the community regarding the sanctuary’s policies about local animal intake and veterinary care. The organization’s efforts focus on a larger scale of supporting networks between animal shelters and sanctuaries and utilizing spay/neuter initiatives to work toward a “No Kill by 2025” goal, historically directing people to municipal animal control when stray animals are found locally and pointing people to other veterinary services in the area. This mismatch between the organization’s mission and some Kanab residents’ expectations has fueled criticisms that Best Friends “doesn’t care about local animals.” This sore point is only exacerbated by the shortage

⁷⁴ A stark illustration of this contrast can be seen in reactions to 4-H, which engages youth in raising an animal that is eventually auctioned and butchered with lessons on nutrition, animal care, and finances. This activity is relatively common to rural 4-Hers (though many 4-H members in such areas don’t carry out livestock projects). Early in my fieldwork I expressed a sense of nostalgia at the smell of manure to a Best Friends employee because it reminded me of 4-H activities as a young person. I received in response an emphatic articulation of how they couldn’t understand how those livestock projects were anything but traumatizing to the children doing them.

⁷⁵ The matter of meat consumption and how it relates to a particular (rural, white) agrarian core is another theme at play in a town where a cowboy heritage is celebrated but where the local grocery stores carry more specialty vegan products than one would expect for a town its size due to consumption practices of Best Friends employees and some tourists. When someone posted asking about new signage that was related to an Indian food truck (based in St. George but regularly serving food in Kanab for at least a year at this point) starting to serve food out of a storefront during a coffee shop’s closed hours, someone commented, “Seriously [sic] ??? We could better use a BBQ joint...Real meat...,” a statement I take to be an implicit linking of particular food practices with white settler agrarian heritage.

of veterinarians in rural areas of the American West that is felt in a real way in Kanab and surrounding areas (Peterson 2022). Though there was a layer of joviality in some people's commentary—"So did anyone rescue that goat yet??" as a standalone post a couple of days after the initial hubbub and updates like "I'm here to report he's having a nap" and "Goat SAR [Search and Rescue] on the scene!"—with many onlookers being amused by this small-town saga, it was nonetheless another venue through which place negotiations, via ideas about what is "normal" for animals and what role humans might play in intervening with an animal's whereabouts, sprang forth from the simple happening of a loose, unclaimed goat.

Poop Out of Place

Of course, "trolling" comments are not unique to this online setting. The significance of these comments is not in their needling effect, but rather in the ways that commentary around such events as loose animals become sites of asserting enduring qualities of place and denoting which people are "mismatched" with a no-nonsense agrarian perspective toward animals. This genre of engagement is so well-known to those who have watched it play out over and over that people joke about being able to identify seemingly innocuous posts that are going to blow up with those kinds of comments, sometimes—when it seems like something that was truly intended to be helpful or benign rather than slyly needling—with an empathetic, "they must be new here...[and thus do not understand the political dynamics of the local Facebook groups.]" One such post was made by someone following the 2022 July 4th parade complaining about the horse poop that was left in their yard and asking that whoever's horse pooped there come remove it. Some of my friends and I saw the post before the comments started rolling in, and we joked that the poor person didn't realize what they just started. Sure enough, the comment section became a site in which people voiced support for horse poop in someone's yard to assert the appropriateness and desirability of horses and their riders participating in the parade and, in a more general sense, being in the physical space of the town. Comments on the post adamantly celebrated the presence of horses and their riders, including references to

newcomers not understanding what kind of (agrarian) place this town is and linking even the mere presence of manure to an idea of a desirable agrarian place. As one commenter expressed, "I don't ride, but I'm glad I live in a community where there is horse poop in people's yards."

Attitudes toward livestock manure and what such manure "means" about a place extend beyond the town and into the realm of public land use. Whereas those with an affinity toward agrarian practice are unlikely to consider the presence of manure a disruption to outdoor recreation, those drawn to southern Utah landscapes who view it as "wild," "pristine," and "remote" frequently react with disgust at the presence of manure in the spaces they hike. Encounters with livestock manure were a common feature of wilderness enthusiasts narrating their outdoor escapades to me, such as when emphasizing undesirable management practices and/or when telling how their trip was great except for the cow poop.

Primed for Place Assertions

The multiple facets of everyday place-making, particularly instances in which a seemingly innocuous topic can become a site of vigorous place declarations, offer a first glimpse into the wide array of variables that can be a part of people's conceptualizations of place. While newcomers may unwittingly ask a question or make a statement of approval or disapproval of something in town on one of the locally-based Facebook groups, the reactions to such posts suggest that there are symbolic strings attached to details such as how physical space is used and organized, how animals should be interacted with, and how people and animals should move through space. Those strings link to ideas about what kind of people and practices belong to this place.

That little moments become sites of possible meaning—against which people may speak up to assert a counter-meaning—highlights the sense of threat some people feel regarding the sense of place they desire and/or view to be the core of the place. For example, local parades have been a site of angry commentary in the locally-based Facebook groups in the past couple

of years. A new city rule prohibiting the throwing of candy (due to safety) was received by some as a challenge to “small town America” and a sign that Kanab might become more like the “over-regulated” (implied liberal) urban places. When the local American Legion color guard didn’t participate in the Western Legends Heritage and Music Festival parade, an angry post assumed that that change from the past was a result of liberals’ suppression of the town’s patriotism, with encroaching outsiders trying to replace conservative patriotic values and rituals with what they perceive as liberals’ disrespect toward veterans. It was later confirmed in the local newspaper and in posts on Facebook from city officials that the American Legion had been asked to participate, as usual, and had chosen not to do it because they didn’t have the capacity to carry out the task at that time. That people would jump to the conclusion that the change was a result of someone encroaching on this place to try to make it different highlights the hair-trigger sensitivity of place-making concerns in Kanab.

Conclusion

This chapter has journeyed through a variety of place-making practices through which people assert and grapple over what kinds of values, people, and relations are “right” in or “matched” to this place. Turning toward the past to say something about enduring cultural and political values of a place is an intriguing bridging of past, present, and—in efforts to “protect” this place or assuming that such values will persist—future. People use contrasting narratives of past events to produce positive and negative images of what kind of place Kanab is, both via which events are focused on and via how those events are framed. The all-woman town council narratives challenge negative stereotypes about LDS culture and claim a kind of progressivism, implying these positive features to be enduring qualities through projecting the present-day interpretation of the event onto the past. Lifting up the resolution on the natural family to illustrate what kind of place Kanab is does its own kind of time work, collapsing past, present, and future such that this 2006 happening becomes an emblem of the values enduring in this place.

As many of these examples have illustrated, negotiations of who is “local” is more varied than dominant local/move-in discourse suggests, and the work of drawing insider/outsider boundaries is especially activated when there are decisions to be made. The category of move-in is more frequently activated when land and environmental issues are at hand. People’s senses of place include ideas about the right kind of people for this place and the right kinds of relations between people, space, and other animals. These various discursive practices illustrate how negotiations of place are an ongoing process, in which potential “threats” to a sense of place may amplify efforts to define or declare the correctness or “fit” of particular qualities.

There are also temporal implications in the discourse about what kinds of people belong in this place; how people navigate insider/outsider boundaries through a time of increased population growth and development; and online comments that link moments of everyday life to ideas about correct ways for people, animals, and space to relate to each other. In these instances, it’s as if the present is always just shy of a threshold. As people grapple over place, the present—what this place is now—is seen as still continuous with what this place has been in the past. But this present is right on the edge, with the enduring qualities of place being under threat from observed and anticipated changes. Importantly, acts of place-making in this context are less about bringing about a yet-to-be-fulfilled place—these are not future-oriented utopian projects—and more about protecting and preserving an idealized past-present place.

Protections advocates’ articulations of what kind of place Kanab is have made up a smaller portion of the examples in this chapter for a few reasons. This chapter has focused on interactions and discursive labor *in community*. The town and people in it are a more central aspect of the agrarian heritage sense of place toward which most anti-protections perspectives are drawn. For protections advocates, including both those who live in the area and those who do not, negative perceptions of “the locals” are relevant to their desired place in so much as they are seen as an obstacle to achieving and maintaining land protections and as a threat to

the heart of their own sense of place—this region’s undeveloped landscapes. These distinctions between pro- and anti-protections desired places—as well as their often-unrecognized similarities—are the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

Settler Memory in Public Lands Narratives and Claims



Figure 3.1: Two signs encountered at different points of entry into Kanab reflecting contrasting emphases on cultural and landscape features. (Peery 2022, *The Rambling Raccoon* 2020)

Introduction

As one drives into Kanab, the signs indicating your arrival hint at contrasting visions of place. Enter from the south or east and you'll be greeted by a large sandstone block declaring, "Kanab, Utah: A Western Classic," with an engraving at the top stating, "Settled 1870." Enter from the north and you'll encounter another sign playfully reversing the phrase "greatest show on earth" to read "greatest EARTH on show." A compass rose motif highlights 4 heavily-visited public lands areas in the four cardinal directions relative to Kanab—3 national parks (Bryce, Zion, and the Grand Canyon) and Lake Powell, a national recreation area). These signs each hint at the way people and land are differentially configured in agrarian heritage and wilderness senses of place. The agrarian heritage sense of place centers on people in community holding shared views and values, with land as the setting of important social/cultural history and land as material resource. The wilderness sense of place spotlights the land as a main character, with the local community as more of an obstacle to the enduring core of this place than a part of it. As the previous chapter showed, the question of "what kind of place" Kanab is is answered by ongoing efforts to delineate enduring qualities of place and to assess present conditions in relation to whether they are in alignment with or a threat to those enduring qualities. While the

previous chapter focused more on how people and the community of Kanab figure in pro- and anti-protections visions of place (positively and negatively, respectively) and the values, interactions, and relations that “fit” with that place, this chapter focuses on how land, land use, and ideas about proper governance of land figure in the visions of place embedded in public lands debates. Both people and land have significant positions within these two competing notions of place, though they are differentially spotlighted.

Within the context of Utah’s public lands, the “for” and “against” positions on land decisions largely center around the following stances. There are those who consistently advocate for fewer rules and regulations that limit how land can be used, sometimes due to being explicitly in support of ranching, extractive industries, and/or development and sometimes on the principle that the government—especially the federal government—shouldn’t be controlling how people use the land. Some people who end up on this “side” are opposed to federal lands existing at all, calling for “return” of the land to State governments or for privatization (“land transfer”). However, this position against use restrictions isn’t necessarily against public lands as a whole, and many people within this position see their own benefit from federal public lands (whether for being able to graze livestock without having to own large expanses of land or for their own forms of enjoyment such as hunting, riding OHVs/ATVs, or even hiking or biking). Across variation in specific details of each person’s view is a common thread in support for “local” (ranging from county to state level) management. In opposition are those who consistently advocate for more land protections (i.e., more limitations on what types of uses are permitted in certain areas via such designations as national monuments or wilderness areas) and who consider federal ownership and management of areas called “public land” (land managed by BLM, USFS, NPS, USFWS) as valid, appropriate, and good. In narratives about the conflict these positions are often pitched as “ranchers versus environmentalists” and “locals versus outsiders and move-ins,” with the occasional enrollment of other binaries of rural/urban and working class/elites (even as such binaries do not map neatly

onto anti- and pro-protections positions). The driving narratives associated with each of these positions regarding land use restrictions/protections are enmeshed in senses of place grouped around agrarian heritage and appreciation of wilderness or wild landscapes. When linking positions about present management to the past, these narratives focus on pioneer heritage and romantic wilderness, respectively.

In this chapter, I focus on the settler narratives that animate these positions on public lands management, especially in settings of conflict about management actions and decision-making processes, and I illustrate these narratives' roles within broader visions of place.⁷⁶ I hone in on the trappings of place-making in direct relation to public lands management, articulating how land figures in the two dominant images of place put forth in public lands discourse; how each of these positions conceptualize appropriate governance, the public, and ownership; and how these ideas of land, related social histories, and governance cast Indigenous people in particularly settler colonial ways. I illustrate how the narratives used to

⁷⁶ As discussed in my introduction, my decision to focus on settler engagements and to not frame Indigenous engagements with land decisions as a "third position" on the same plane as these articulations is an intentional effort to avoid reproducing settler multicultural pluralism in which Indigenous perspectives are presented as just one of many diverse perspectives in a multicultural society, which reconstructs the imagery of "diverse" stakeholders coming as equals with commensurable interests to the table. Such "homogenizing heterogeneity" (Simpson, Mohawk, 2000) that positions Native people as just another racial minority undermines claims to Tribal sovereignty. My central task in this chapter is not to summarize all perspectives at play in public lands matters (and, thereby, imply that what I do and do not focus on marks what perspectives are relevant or worth paying attention to), but rather to highlight the settler colonial dynamics of what are frequently the most politically dominating discourses. As Fiona Nicoll has written in her work focused on whiteness in Australia, "rather than [as white scholars] analysing and evaluating Indigenous sovereignty claims...we have a political and intellectual responsibility to analyse and evaluate the innumerable ways in which white sovereignty circumscribes and mitigates the exercise of Indigenous sovereignty" (Nicoll, 2004, 19, quoted in Rifkin 2014, xvi). Examinations of contemporary Indigenous political strategy and land discourse are vital contributions toward developing complex, multifaceted understanding of land issues in a settler colonial nation, yet a deep interrogation in this area was not my place as a white settler with the relationships, rapport, and skills/knowledge available to me during the period of dissertation fieldwork. In this and other parts of my dissertation, I aim to integrate Indigenous perspectives as part of the analytical conversation and, at times, ethnographically with Native individuals speaking as themselves (as opposed to in a formal Tribal representative capacity), seeking to point to Indigenous scholars, activists, and other individuals whose assertions highlight the settler colonial dynamics of American public lands issues. I am also aware of such an effort being a work in progress, not only in learning to see differently but also in developing skills to more effectively seek out those with perspectives that have been strategically under-valued in normative academia and other spaces. Finding my place as a white settler in settler colonial studies is a work in progress.

describe and justify the two dominant settler positions in public lands discourse are enactments of what Kevin Bruyneel (white settler, Canadian) calls settler memory. In applying this concept to public lands discourse, I illustrate how settler memory is not just a mechanism of upholding the settler state, as Bruyneel illustrates (2016, 2021), but also a place-making tool that is highly operative in fleshing out idealized visions of place that guide individual and organizational engagement with land decisions. Examining these narratives alongside each other throws into relief the stark differences in each position's claims logic that help explain how land decision conflicts come to feel so intractable—as if there is little to no chance of finding common ground or middle ground. At the same time, this comparison offers an opportunity to render explicit the similarities between these two settler-centered engagements. Although these two archetypal positions are typically portrayed—and experienced—as being diametrically opposed, and they do indeed put forth different claims logics, their settler colonial bones are largely the same.

“Settler Memory” as Concept and Analytical Tool

My analysis in this chapter utilizes political scientist Kevin Bruyneel's concept of settler memory to illustrate the dynamics of the dominant animating narratives of public lands discourse. This concept helps communicate the work these narratives do to sidestep reckoning with Indigenous interests while obscuring the deep saturation of settler logics throughout public lands governance and debate. Bruyneel (2016) uses the term “settler memory” to describe “the mnemonics—that is, the functions, practices, and products of memory—of colonialist dispossession and settlement that shape settler subjectivity and governmentality in liberal colonial contexts,” with the United States serving as a quintessential example of how liberal-democracy and settler colonialism can be mutually reinforcing rather than contradictory (351). In this section, I explain key characteristics of settler memory, provide examples, and articulate how my application of settler memory elaborates on Bruyneel's analyses of settler memory in various contexts.

Features and Effects of Settler Memory

Settler memory is an active practice that relates people to space. By active practice, Bruyneel means that settler memory is not a reference to a dislocated past but rather helps to reproduce the contemporary settler colonial assemblage. Thus, even as “memory” indicates a connection to past events, the work of settler memory is not just a rewriting of history but present-day maintenance of settlement. Practices of settler memory relate people to space in that they justify, naturalize, and/or obscure settler claims to land, space, and state/nation. Thus, settler memory is a component of settlement—necessarily “ongoing because politically the matters of claims to space are not settled”—as “a practice, a status, and a site of conflict” (Bruyneel 2016, 353). The active quality of settler memory as a practice can also be seen in how it is not just what is remembered but *how* it is remembered—what forms memories take—that is of importance to Bruyneel (2021, xiv).

While the politics of memory—such as “the power relations that shape ‘what is available to be remembered, who is permitted to remember, and the practices, occasions, and timing of remembering and forgetting’”—are at play in settler memory, the power dynamics at play should not be equated with explicit expressions of adjudicating or controlling memory (Brendese 2014, 2). One central feature of settler memory is that it is a habitual practice. Thus, while “active,” it is not strictly self-conscious or intentional. This quality of settler memory is important for understanding the ubiquity and lack of explicit intention or awareness about when settler memory is at play. However, the notion of a habit as an unthinking automatic behavior is not equivalent to “collective amnesia” (Bruyneel 2016, 351). It is not a forgetting of the past but habitual practices of selective recollection that re-legitimate present-day violence, dispossession, and appropriation (Bruyneel 2016, 351).

Bruyneel’s notion of settler memory sits alongside several other analytics that are productive for examining the dynamics and impacts of settler colonialism. Related concepts that overlap while also offering slightly different lenses include “colonial unknowing” (Vimalassery, Pegues, and Goldstein 2016), “settler common sense” (Rifkin [white settler] 2014), and, slightly

more adjacent, “amnesiac white supremacy” (Brendese 2014, 2023). The application of a memory-centered concept for this particular setting is especially fitting for the context of public lands because of how frequently people turning to the past to formulate claims about proper management in the present,⁷⁷ though Rifkin’s (2014) notion of settler common sense also offers an apt layer to settler public lands discourse in describing “the ways the legal and political structures that enable nonnative access to Indigenous territories come to be lived as a given, as simply the unmarked, generic conditions of possibility for occupancy, association, history, and personhood” (xvi). Bruyneel’s own justification for focusing on memory—specifically habitual forms of collective memory—centers on the goal of “unearth[ing] the political commitments and implications of a people’s relationship to the past” (2016, 352). Importantly, examinations of memory in this case are not, as David Thelan argues, about “how accurately a recollection fit[s] some piece of a past reality” but rather “why historical actors construct...their memories in a particular way at a particular time” (1989, 1125, quoted in Bruyneel 2016, 352). In addition to memory being a fitting concept for analyzing narratives that rely heavily on claims about and declaring connection to the past, memory is an important aspect of place and place-making. As Bruyneel describes, “just as memories make a house a home, memory makes a space into a place, and in the settler colonial context placeness means belonging, appropriation, and authority for some people and displacement, dispossession, and alienation for other people” (2016, 352). In this sense, memory is an act that assigns meaning; it is a situating force. It positions “people in and through time...often in relationship to space, in very material forms,” for instance “the production of the memory of a people in place and time *habituates* settlement” (Bruyneel 2016, 353). In this sense, settler memory “places” settlers and constructs places that

⁷⁷ A dynamic that is not just found in individuals’ articulations of proper public lands management as is the focus of this chapter and, largely, this dissertation, but also a part of default approaches to land/resource management. For instance, evidence of past (typically pre-colonial and/or prehistoric) presence of a species in an area is required for approval of “reintroduction” efforts in that region.

naturalize that settlement.

A key aspect of Bruyneel's argument is that settler memory brings about a simultaneous presence and absence of Indigenous people and settler colonial violence. This assertion is distinct from the notion of Indigenous erasure. While Indigenous erasure does capture facets of settler memory at work in that meaningful aspects of Indigenous experience and/or settler violence are "left out" of narratives (Bruyneel's "absence"), settler colonial processes and practices are not invisible. Instead, settler colonial reminders are all around us as part of the everyday, such as place names of Indigenous origin, and in narratives of past and present (Bruyneel's "presence"). And omitted details are themselves meaningful—such "silences are productive absences" (Bruyneel 2021, 133). Settler colonial actions are, in fact, visible, but present settler violence is typically glossed over while contemporary Indigenous people and Tribes are rendered politically irrelevant.⁷⁸ Thus, as Bruyneel asserts, "these settler memories are both there and not there at the same time, before our eyes but also *dispossessed of active political meaning* in and by the settler imaginary" (2016, 351; emphasis mine).

This presence/absence dynamic results in what Bruyneel describes as an Indigenous necropolitics, or necro-Indigeneity. An adaptation of Achille Mbembe's necropolitics,⁷⁹ necro-Indigeneity is, Bruyneel argues, a corollary to anti-Blackness in the United States (as opposed to anti-Indigeneity) that captures "the settler practice of honoring or memorializing the 'dead' as part of establishing the status and belonging of whiteness on territories dispossessed from

⁷⁸ The settlerness of American society is also frequently overshadowed by U.S. racial politics that center on a white-Black binary. Bruyneel (2021) offers a helpful metaphor for understanding settlerness in relation to this binary logic. He argues that settler identity is constitutive of whiteness and that in relation to the white-Black binary, one might imagine a three-dimensional image that when viewed head on appears to be a two-dimensional representation but when tilted "reveals another element that shifts one's sense of the entire scene" (6). Within this metaphor, it is the work of settler memory that strives to maintain the simpler two-dimensional view of U.S. racial discourse.

⁷⁹ "The contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death (necropolitics)...Necropolitics and necro power [account for]...the new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*" (Mbembe 2003, 39-40 in Bruyneel 2021, 22).

Indigenous peoples” (Bruyneel 2021, 22). While anti-Black racism might be characterized by Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s (2007) view of racism as “the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death” (28), Bruyneel (2021) articulates necro-Indigeneity as “the presumption of death already enacted, or to be marked for death that is not premature but overdue” (22). This concept connects to the notion of “terminal narratives” that Michael Wilcox (Yuman descent, 2010) describes and critiques. “Terminal narratives,” Wilcox argues, cast the combined annihilation and assimilation of Indigenous people as an inevitable trajectory of the North American continent, and such narratives are prevalent in popular and scholarly renditions of Indigenous people and colonialism. Such narratives have lasting impacts, such as within archaeological interpretation of artifacts and sites, which results in a feedback loop of continuing to assume meaning through a colonial lens and miss alternative interpretations that recognize enduring Indigeneity, recognizes not just survivance but thrivance, and understands Indigeneity to be dynamic in response to colonial conditions (Acebo 2024; Kauanui [Kanaka Maoli] 2016). Whereas contemporary Indigenous people assert they are “just as Indigenous” as their ancestors (Acebo 2024), settler memory marks “authentic” Indigeneity using images that not only are stereotypes and caricatures but are also impossible for Indigenous people to meet in the context of centuries of settler colonialism, as if cultural change marks the extinction of “true” Indigenous culture.⁸⁰

Settler memory relies on this positioning of Indigeneity to enact white settlerness, rendering Indigenous people and violence toward them as “foundationally relevant but not politically relevant” (Bruyneel 2021, 93). That is, even the violence of settler colonization is not made invisible, but rather relegated to settler state origin stories and minimized in contemporary politics. Settler memory undermines efforts to understand Indigenous people’s politics and

⁸⁰ As Jean O’Brien (White Earth Band of Ojibwe, 2010) articulates in her analysis of local history documents in New England, “the implicit argument posed is that [Indigenous people] reside in an ahistorical temporality in which they can only be the victims of change, not active subjects in the making of changes” (105).

settler colonialism in the U.S. “by rendering Indigenous peoples and settler colonialism invisible or barely visible as active contemporary forces” (Bruyneel 2021, 3). As a corollary to this effect, Bruyneel asserts, settler memory also removes the “settler” component of white identity and white supremacist policies, practices, and discourse from public and political discussion.⁸¹ Settler memory thus produces not just “colonial unknowing” (Vimalassery, Pegues, and Goldstein 2016) but also racial unknowing.⁸² The “living dead” metaphor of Indigenous necropolitics encapsulates how settlers may leverage connection to Indigeneity (e.g., claiming [usually nonspecific] Native ancestry), incorporate Indigenous symbols (e.g., mascots), and celebrate a romanticized idea of “Natives” as part of America’s origins, all while disavowing the political relevance and political agency of Indigenous nations and Indigenous individuals in the present. An additional facet of this dynamic, to add to Bruyneel’s largely literature-centered analysis, is that the maintenance of this disavowal requires a dismissal—or, perhaps more accurately when considering the landscape of public lands politics, a lack of acknowledgement of—the sustained political agency of Indigenous people, acting in individual and Tribal government capacities, throughout American history into the present.⁸³

Importantly, the practices of settler memory are not about “forgetting” or about “ignorance,” but rather are an instance of white settler disavowal. This aspect is vital to understanding the insidiousness of settler colonial logics throughout the political spectrum.

⁸¹ This idea of removing or obscuring the “settler” aspect does not necessarily mean a complete departure from narratives of settlement. For instance, as this chapter details, pioneer heritage is important to anti-protections arguments. Such (celebratory) narratives of settlement are still carrying out the work of settler memory in this obscuring way, as the violence of settlement is downplayed, reframed, or sidestepped.

⁸² Bruyneel argues that the obscuration of the “settler” aspect of white identity in the United States is not only damaging to Indigenous interests but also an obstacle to furthering conversations about race and changes to unjust racialized experiences throughout society (e.g., mass incarceration, violent policing, and intersections of race, class, gender, and heteropatriarchy; see Bruyneel 2021, 3).

⁸³ There are a multitude of publications and other resources detailing Indigenous activism and political organizing in the United States. For a snapshot of this rich history, see Blansett (Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Shawnee, and Potawatomi) 2018; Josephy, Nagel, and Johnson 1999; Kiel (Oneida Nation) 2013; and a digital art exhibition created by students at College of William and Mary (Muscarelle Museum of Art 2020).

Bruyneel’s assertion that settler memory is an act of disavowal rather than a result of ignorance is a vital interruption to the continued assumption in many politically liberal spaces that “education” will directly solve a variety of societal troubles and inequities—that if people “just had the right information” they would draw the “right” (ethical, just) conclusions. The active work of settler memory also shows up in assumptions that colonial impacts can be resolved through recognition of and apology for past harms. Settler “apologies” in the present may be well-intentioned, but they are a move that enables settler comfort without demanding action to remedy or repair the damage for which they are apologizing. Such discursive actions might be more accurately described as (typically white) settler moves to innocence (Tuck [Unanga̋, Aleut Community of St. Paul Island] and Yang 2012, building on Mawhinney’s [1998] discussion of “moves to innocence” related to racism and white privilege).

Examples of Settler Memory

The mnemonics of settler memory include places and teams named after Indigenous peoples, place names, holidays such as Columbus Day and Thanksgiving, and selective commemoration of past events, e.g., President Obama’s proclamation recognizing the sesquicentennial of President Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, but no commemoration of the execution of the Dakota 38, ordered by Lincoln just days before signing the Emancipation Proclamation.⁸⁴ Settler memory, Bruyneel argues, also comes in the form of court rulings, which reproduce statism—the idea that “the state” is the sole legitimate form of governance of people—and via the practice of legal precedent institutionalizing settler colonial claims and interests. That the judicial system is portrayed as impartial helps to naturalize the settler colonial assemblage, even as settler courts, as Shiri Pasternak (2017) has argued, will never side against their own sovereignty. Another key example in Bruyneel’s work is the settler

⁸⁴ In December 1862, President Lincoln authorized the execution of 39 Dakota men of 303 convicted of killing white settlers during the 1862 U.S.-Dakota War; 38 men were hung in Mankato, MN on December 26th, 1862, the largest mass state execution in U.S. history to this day (Bruyneel 2016).

memory enacted in popular and scholarly renditions of past events, such as how Bacon's Rebellion is framed and analyzed by historians (Bruyneel 2021, 21-44). Importantly, even liberal or progressive tellings of past events or important anti-racist work, such as the work of James Baldwin (Bruyneel 2021, 76-110), frequently enact settler memory, highlighting the distinction between explicit anti-Indigenous rhetoric and the insidious pervasiveness of settler memory.

Settler memory is a "productive capacity of settler colonialism" with widespread effects (Bruyneel 2021, 9). These effects center on the normalization of contemporary settler colonization and the enforcement and naturalization of Indigenous territorial dispossession and disempowerment. Enactments of settler memory reproduce the legitimacy of the state (and its imperial violence, see Bruyneel 2016, 350), deny Indigenous political agency, and shield or obscure the settlerness and whiteness of white settler interests. My work utilizes Bruyneel's concept to examine the narratives and claims logics of both those in support of public lands protections and those opposed to use-restrictions on public lands. Like Bruyneel, I highlight how both politically liberal and politically conservative perspectives tend to enact settler memory; such an observation in this instance shakes loose entrenched understandings of public lands debates by naming the settlerness of these perspectives and highlighting the similar settler underpinnings of perspectives frequently taken to be polar opposites. I am, of course, not the first to name settler commitments in public lands discourse, as such critiques are a regular part of Indigenous activist discourse. Here I seek to contribute to existing challenges to normative characterizations of public lands conflict while also detailing how settler memory plays a central role in subjective experiences of public lands matters and in the place-making efforts that saturate land use conflicts in southern Utah. While Bruyneel's argument incorporates a notion of settler memory making a place, i.e., the settler state, I elaborate on this idea to argue that place-making in a more specific sense—the efforts to "preserve" particular idealized visions of place—is an important genre of settler memory.

Through the remainder of this chapter, I detail features of agrarian heritage and

wilderness senses of place, considering them through a lens of settler memory. I illustrate desirable land uses and their connections to the perceived history, desirable governance, constructions of the public, and conceptualizations of ownership found in each sense of place. These details collectively enable an articulation of the “claims logics” embedded in dominant settler positions on public lands issues, as well as reveal the stakes of maintaining the underlying assumptions of such claims. As I move through each of these facets of how land, the public, and governance are configured in agrarian heritage and wilderness senses of place, I highlight how these configurations do the work of settler memory.

Desirable Land Use, Desirable Relations to Land, and Perceived Land Use History

Locally and regionally, themes of pioneer heritage are woven into assertions about land and its use by those who typically oppose preservation- and conservation-focused management. Though not all who participate in celebrating pioneer heritage are heavily invested in particular forms of public land management or are necessarily fervent supporters of anti-federal, anti-conservation stances, pioneer heritage is practically idiomatic of anti-federal arguments about appropriate land management. Within this celebration of pioneer heritage are ideas about good or desirable land uses centered on the use of land as a material resource. Some protections advocates attribute conservative locals support for uses like livestock grazing and extractive industry to a Mormon commitment to “using the land as God intended,” as one individual working in the conservation space wryly expressed their idea of the opposing side’s commitments, and Croft (white settler, multi-generational Utahn, 2015, 36-37) points to theology as a component shaping longtime locals’ perceptions of land use. Indeed, as Roderick Nash ([1967] 2001) has described in *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Judeo-Christian values have shaped attitudes toward and values about human-land relations,⁸⁵ and I don’t dispute that

⁸⁵ That Nash poses Judeo-Christian influences on a particularly utilitarian view as a precursor to the values of American preservation and conservation movements perhaps offers a scholarly parallel to an implicit idea in protections advocates’ interpretations of their opponents’ views on land use: that a more utilitarian view in the past was understandable but, in the assumption of human progress, the “higher” values of aesthetic and ecological

Mormon and/or general Judeo-Christian theology influences what is seen as a desirable land use in this context.⁸⁶ Ethnographically, however, I heard explicit connections between religious values and arguments for particular land use more frequently from protections advocates seeking to characterize their opponents than as central pieces of anti-protections individuals' own articulations about what they support and why.

In line with the commitment to an overall agrarian-centered sense of place, the use of public lands as open range for cattle is considered not just an acceptable use but a desirable one, carrying affective layers connecting people, animals, and land. This connection is, I believe, sincere. Those who are involved in cattle operations express relation to and affection for the land formed through the labor of running cattle. The physical labor of “working the land” is seen to form relationships with and, as I discuss later in this chapter, claim to that land.⁸⁷ The

appreciation are now understood, making a commitment to utilitarian perspectives “backward” or “stuck in the past.”

⁸⁶ An example of this contrasting view of resources was encountered during the fall 2022 LDS General Conference, which included a theme of stewardship. While much of the talk around stewardship fell within a general frame of “caring for the Earth,” it was delineated as distinct from a typical protections advocate position by reminding LDS members that the role of stewardship “is not solely about conserving or preserving them...The Lord expects us to work diligently, as moved upon by His Holy Spirit, to grow, enhance, and improve upon the resources he has entrusted to us—not for our benefit only but to bless others” (Caussé quoted in Fletcher Stack et al. 2022). It is important to note, however, that while the LDS establishment appears to typically align with anti-protections narratives in Utah, LDS attitudes toward the environment cannot be neatly encapsulated by this resource-use centered lens and associated anti-protections positions. For instance, the Mormon Environmental Stewardship Alliance (MESA) operates as an LDS-centered environmental protection advocacy group, and I encountered LDS members working within preservation/conservation organizations and enjoying recreation on public lands typically associated with protections advocates (hiking, backpacking, other low impact activities). One evening while camping in the La Sal Mountains in southeastern Utah before the start of a volunteer stewardship project, I was invited to have dinner with an LDS Ward that was camping nearby. After all had been served and were gathered around the fire, a few individuals gave testimony—presenting a personal narrative about experiences that brought them closer to God. One man spoke of how he had never felt closer to God than when he was in the outdoors, speaking about time spent in natural landscapes in ways similar to wilderness enthusiasts celebrating the spiritual experience of being in “wilderness.” I mention these varied engagements not to necessarily challenge the idea that Judeo-Christian and/or Mormon views of the environment are at play but rather to remind of the variation often missed in narratives about who holds what kinds of attitudes.

⁸⁷ Such ideas about “working the land” are akin to a Lockean notion that mixing one’s labor with the land contributes to making the land one’s own (Locke 1689, *Second Treatise*, Chapter 5 §§ 25--51, 123--26). Such a notion is part of the settler ideology shaping westward expansion of the early United States, embedded in such notions as Thomas Jefferson’s image of the yeoman farmer (Nash [1967] 2001). Just as Jefferson’s agrarian/pastoral image ultimately centered the image of a white male farmer, the centrality of the agricultural,

relations formed are not just between individuals and the land, but also relations to family and community, as tasks like moving cattle, branding, etc. are typically done with family members and friends. “Heritage,” too, is an important aspect of how those opposed to use restrictions value certain land uses.⁸⁸ People who run cattle and people who are in community with cattle-running families express warmth about continuation of a land use practice that past settlers in the area—for some, “their ancestors”—engaged in.

That livestock grazing is seen as evidence of enduring heritage, connecting people past

ranching, and other manual labor of Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (e.g., Chinese immigrant rail workers, Latinx agricultural workers) is often obscured in celebratory frames of manual labor used to articulate white settler masculinity. This implied whiteness is embedded in anti-use-restrictions articulations of the desirability of manual labor and related land use, engaging not just in settler memory but also erasure of non-Indigenous, non-white people present, and often enrolled in decidedly non-romanticized manual labor, throughout settler westward expansion. For example, with the centrality of ranching for Utah-based anti-protections narratives, it is the image of the white cowboy that evokes positive feeling—a John Wayne type figure (Kanab was, in fact, the site of many Western films produced in the 20th century) or simply the familiar figure of a family member, while the existence of non-white cowboys past and present is unrecognized, ignored, or considered irrelevant, despite the large proportion of Black, Mexican, Indigenous, and other non-white people cowboys in American history (Glasrud and Searles 2016, Goldstein-Shirley 1997; see also Jafri 2013 on portrayals of racialized cowboys against the default white, hypermasculine, settler colonial archetype).

⁸⁸ The notion of “heritage” looms large in Kanab. While I focus on heritage in public lands arguments in this chapter, the idea of heritage is also a part of the Kanab-centered place-making, like that described in the previous chapter. Like many towns in Utah, Kanab has several sites centered on narrating the past, including the Kanab City Museum, the Heritage House, and the LDS Church’s Family History Center (a common feature of Utah towns), along with other signage pointing out historic homes and highlighting people involved in Kanab’s Hollywood movie past. The Kanab Museum underwent renovations in recent years, resulting in an outcry in early 2024 from a subset of community members known for participation in far-right discourse who took the removal of the term “Heritage” from the museum’s name and new displays bringing together a variety of historical narratives under one theme as a concerning “apparent shift of focus and purpose of the Kanab Heritage Museum” (Jennings 2024, A1). The removal of “Heritage” from the formal name of the Kanab Museum occurred some years ago to reduce confusion with the Kanab Heritage House, such as in Google searches, according to a city employee. The curation of the museum items after the renovations brought together subtopics of Kanab’s history under the cohesive theme of “Home.” With undertones about a conservative place under threat, people expressed concerns about these changes on locally-based Facebook groups with language implying an attempted heist on the historical narrative of the town, such as responding to someone’s assertion that nothing nefarious was amiss with “things aren’t always what they seem” and “have you ever heard of ethnocide?” One attendee at the meeting convened by those concerned said that the meeting was largely a platform for far-right calls to mobilize; speaking about a local far-right leader’s “Committee for Safety,” they said, “i went to the meeting. it was a joke. there was a room full of people concerned about the museum. we were all hijacked to have to listen to some vigilantes from oregon try and convince us to organize.” Such a report hints at how effective far right political actors are at finding connection points between points of cultural concern (such as “heritage”) and more extreme political views on liberty and governance. Although it sounded like many attendees were not necessarily “taken in” by the political speech at this forum about the museum, such linking of extreme political stances to everyday community matters is not unique to this instance.

and present, helps explain a component of the anti-use-restriction position that regularly seems to be unseen or dismissed by protections advocates. Whereas protections advocates angrily critique continued BLM prioritization of grazing (e.g., in the form of continuing permits, maintaining low Animal Unit Month fees) with the argument that it's privileging a very small number of local residents over not just all other local residents but also all other public land users, supporters of grazing see such action as an appropriate recognition of heritage and continuation or preservation of enduring agrarian qualities of this place, both land and community. The idea of this agrarian heritage is compelling even to people who don't have a ranching background themselves, such as a Kanab resident who was originally from California but married into a multigenerational Kanab family,⁸⁹ who, upon seeing a GSENM-related sweatshirt I was wearing, engaged me in conversation about national monument conflict, posing a largely rhetorical question about "why the government is trying to stop people from grazing cattle on the land like their families have done for generations." Thus, while protections advocates call upon ideas of rational quantification of land user interests to make a case for why grazing shouldn't be prioritized, their opponents, motivated by a connection to an agrarian heritage place, view grazing as a desirable land use for what it represents about enduring agrarian heritage. In this sense, while the positive valuation of "working the land" is utilitarian, the symbolic value of utilitarian land uses—how they figure in the agrarian heritage place—seems at least as, if not more, powerful in animating stances against use protections.

This symbolic layer of utilitarianism extends beyond ranching heritage. A position that also frequently goes along with support for grazing is an openness to extractive industry on public lands. At the surface, this pairing is somewhat intriguing given that extractive industries aren't themselves "agrarian" and, in theory, such activities on public lands could pose a threat to

⁸⁹ And is very much included as part of the core community by traditional locals as part of the community despite his California origins, serving as yet another example of the malleability of various signs and symbols when designating insiders and outsiders.

cattle and/or the forage they rely on. There are several factors, however, that may support this pairing pattern. Communist geographer Phil Neel (2022) casts rural desire for extractive industry as an expression of people's understanding that they need a job to survive—a reality he poignantly describes as “the economy [being] a hostage situation.” The effects of these conditions, he argues, include political polarization: “it’s the illusion of jobs in revived rural industry and agriculture that helps attract people to the far right in these locations” (Neel 2022). I agree with Neel’s assessment that such material realities are at play in shaping what land use actions an individual sees as desirable. In southern Utah, attitudes toward industry projects are not just about the prospect of jobs (whether real or illusory), though discourse about bringing jobs to the area is found in land use debates. I argue that there is something more symbolic and affective at play in attitudes toward land uses like mining and lumber. While extractive industry land uses aren’t explicitly tied to pioneer heritage, such land uses do engage the idea of “working the land” with (presumed) physical labor—the image of the blue-collar industrial worker being not too far from that of the agrarian worker. And, while not extending as far into the past as general white settlement, the area does have a history of assorted industry operations, particularly in coal, oil, and lumber. Major employers in this realm, such as the nuclear energy facility and lumber mill in nearby Fredonia, shutting down in the 1990s⁹⁰ not only had local economic impacts but also was felt by some to be a loss that might threaten the preservation of

⁹⁰ Those committed to these ideas about utilitarian labor/use of land typically blame environmentalists for these closures, along with other proposed projects that didn’t end up moving forward, even as they are situated within a complex set of conditions of supply and demand also subject to a globalizing economy and volatile market prices that impact whether companies pursue and/or continue resource extraction. For instance, changing lumber, coal, and uranium prices have impacted the economic feasibility of extractive industry projects in the American Southwest. Ultimately, it has proven tricky to find clarity on the extent to which waning markets versus the prospect and expense of legal battles with environmental opposition are drivers of the ambiguity of feasibility and the back and forth of energy companies proposing and cancelling projects. For instance, the idea of a coal mine on the Kaiparowits Plateau (currently within GSENM) has been an on-again off-again project proposal since the 1960s (Bill 1994). With a number of industry operation closures occurring in the 1990s, the economic impacts of these closures are often linked to the creation of GSENM in anti-protections narratives about the harmful impacts of use-restricting land designations.

Kanab's enduring cultural and economic qualities. Another component of openness to extractive industry uses on public land may be less about the specifics of the land use and more about values held regarding appropriate governance, which I discuss later in this chapter.

Some of the openness to such uses may come, too, from another feature of how land use is understood through the agrarian heritage/anti-use-restriction view, which is an attitude that multiple land uses can coexist alongside each other. A common sentiment expressed by those opposing use restrictions is that outdoor recreators, including "hikers" and "backpackers" who are associated with calls for land protections, can still recreate on lands being used for more utilitarian purposes like livestock grazing or extractive industry. In his presentation in Kanab, Ammon Bundy painted a downright utopic image of people engaging in multiple land use (implied to be largely without government intervention, linking up with ideas about desirable governance). Like the picture Bundy painted, this notion that utilitarian uses don't preclude co-occurring recreational uses is one of the narrative threads that makes a claim to "reasonableness" of anti-protections perspective while implying, or sometimes explicitly stating, that those seeking to restrict uses to favor a particular form of recreation are being unreasonable and/or selfish. As I show below, the desires at the heart of protections advocates' place commitments helps explain why such an argument isn't compelling to many protections advocates. This sentiment also tends to dismiss the relevance of ecological impacts of land uses and the recognition that some uses are more impactful than others, but within the frame of anti-use-restriction discourse this notion that many uses can coexist is layered on top the positive valuation of specific agrarian and utilitarian land uses.

The desirable land uses and perceptions of land use history that figure within protections advocates' attitudes toward public lands contrast with anti-protections attitudes both in what specific land uses are desirable and in how different land uses are seen to impact each other. Whereas pioneer heritage animates affection for utilitarian land uses, I argue that a love for wilderness is a driving affective force in protections advocates' engagement with public lands

issues. Areas of public land can be formally designated as “wilderness areas” or, if being assessed for whether they qualify to be designated wilderness, “wilderness study areas,” and some land protections advocacy focuses on arguing for such designations.⁹¹ When I articulate people’s commitments to a wilderness place, however, I mean the broader cultural ideas about wilderness and wild spaces—how rugged, remote landscapes are associated with the idea of wilderness, even when a more general notion of preservation or conservation, rather than formal wilderness designation, is at play. I argue the desire for wilderness also lurks alongside

⁹¹ Scholars have detailed the evolution of how “wild” spaces have been perceived and valued (e.g., Cronon 1990, 1993, 1996; Nash [1967] 2001; Oelschlaeger 1991; Opie 1998). Through the intertwining of 19th century Romanticism and concurrent rising interest in primitivism, the idea of unpeopled, undeveloped wilderness became sacred and iconic (Cronon 1996). A positive valuation of “wilderness,” or “wild nature,” has been integral to the American conservation and preservation movements developing from the 1860s, increasingly informing what types of landscapes are seen as desirable/of value. Beginning largely among middle and higher class white men viewing “natural” landscapes from urban, industrialized vantage points, these changing attitudes eventually grew more widespread, for example, National Parks becoming a part of the imagery of (white) family road trips with enjoyment and the public support seen for preservation-focused legislation through the 1960s and 70s. (Neel [2022], however, argues that early environmentalist efforts were not exclusively driven by urban elites and, instead, enrolled rural working class individuals who worked on the landscapes in question; he laments that threads from these efforts have largely been ignored and have dropped out of mainstream environmentalist discourse, resulting in “untouched” wilderness becoming a prevailing driver of contemporary environmentalism in ways that don’t resonate with rural residents living around the landscapes in question.) Advocates of wilderness protection assert that wilderness has inherent value worth protecting against encroachment by its opposites—civilization, modernity, society, industrialism—and that this protection is accomplished by “keeping” spaces wild or by “returning” and “restoring” spaces to previous wild states.

These landscape ideals are built into the 1964 Wilderness Act, operationalizing dominant cultural conceptions of wilderness to produce a legal definition of wilderness and a set of prohibited uses on areas designated as legal wilderness. The ever-recited quote from the Act declares that “A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized 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 of 1964, 16 U.S. Code § 1131; emphasis mine; this particular wording of wilderness is typically presented in protections advocate discourse/materials as a quote from Howard Zahniser, who was the primary author of the Wilderness Act, rather than a citation of U.S. Code). Legal wilderness is “an area of undeveloped Federal land *retaining its primeval character* and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to *preserve its natural conditions* and which...*generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable*” (Wilderness Act of 1964, 16 U.S. Code § 1131-1136, emphasis mine). It must be “at least five thousand acres...[or] of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition.” Thus, the spaces that become valued as wilderness must *appear to be* outside of and unaffected by modern industrial society. Though an in-depth discussion of the processes of wilderness designation is a tangential journey to this chapter’s focus, the legal definitions of wilderness and practices of wilderness restoration are a rich example of the very peopled actions that go into producing the perception of unpeopled spaces and are another excellent example of settler memory in public lands management.

other arguments for land protections. While contemporary protections advocacy includes discourse about ecological stability, biodiversity, and resilience against climate change—discussions I take to be sincere—the positions these narratives support remain tied to underlying desires for and conceptualizations of wilderness. Even when these scientific arguments are at play, a positive valuation of and desire for “untouched” landscapes continues to fuel mobilization around protecting particular landscapes.

The ease with which desire for wilderness can readily intertwine with ecological issues may be supported by the way that mainstream white American environmentalism has frequently viewed environmental issues via a focus on an image of a non-cultural “Nature.” Though a notion of protecting the natural environment for “nature’s sake” is not inherently problematic on its own, the version this idea takes in dominant white American environmentalism starts to blur into ideas of protecting “pristine” nature, i.e., wilderness, often leaving out the cultural and political dynamics of environmental issues. An example of this tendency is found in white environmentalists’ engagement with opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) in 2016. Indigenous organizing led to the creation of Sacred Stone, Oceti Sakowin, and Red Warrior Camps seeking to block construction of DAPL, the construction of which the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe argued was a violation of the Treaties of Fort Laramie (1851 and 1868).⁹² Settler environmentalists rallied in sending financial and material support to the camp, quite compelled by the slogan “Water is Life” and by the connection DAPL had to questions of clean water and climate change. While these encounters were a time in which some white settlers were learning about specifically Indigenous issues for the first time, friction between the expectations about protest of white settlers and Indigenous leaders occurred in the camps (Gilio-Whitaker [Colville

⁹² This Treaty guaranteed “undisturbed use and occupation” of reservation lands. While the proposed pipeline pathway was not directly on reservation lands, the prospective harm that could come from the effects of the pipeline, such as in instances of a spill/leak, would impact Tribal members’ ability to live “undisturbed,” e.g., given impacts on water quality.

Confederated Tribes] 2019) and white environmentalists engaging from afar were motivated by the idea that fighting the project helped protect the environment, through water quality and fighting climate change related industries, but missed or lost the key thread of Indigenous sovereignty (Hayes 2016). Whereas “Water is Life” in the Standing Rock assertion linked environmental issues to colonialism and sovereignty, many non-Native allies supporting the protests took this message in through a “nature”-centered lens. These settler understandings of DAPL primarily as an environmental issue largely missed or ignored how the issue, and Indigenous resistance, was explicitly related to sovereignty, Treaty violations, and the failures of the Tribal consultation process.

During my time following public lands debates, I found this pattern to be not uncommon, with instances of support for Tribes’ and Indigenous individuals’ desires louder with issues that were also seen through a lens of wilderness/pristine landscape protection and quieter with Indigenous matters that didn’t have that overlap.⁹³ Thus, while I don’t doubt the sincerity of ecological arguments for particular use-restrictions, I maintain that even instances of land management arguments framed around ecological integrity or resilience in the face of climate change (as became a more common framing between 2019 and 2024) maintain a connection to an idea of pristine nature and are often intertwined with the emotional pull of wilderness. This desire for wilderness helps explain the types of land use and land relations protections advocates support and don’t support. That the notion of wilderness is often seen as apolitical (see later in this section) further contributes to obstacles to recognizing political and historical facets of public lands management and use.

Although wilderness or wild landscapes are defined in part by being unpeopled, such a definition doesn’t mean protections advocates call for preventing all land uses. Instead,

⁹³ See Caroline Goodman’s (2016) MA thesis on the tenuous alliances between Indigenous organizers and environmentalists in the context of Bears Ears National Monument. I also return to this pattern in considering the outcomes of settler place commitments in the concluding chapter.

desirable land uses are ones that don't leave a lasting visual, auditory, or olfactory impact. In contrast to a utilitarian notion of "working the land" as a material resource, those motivated by the idea of wild landscapes engage with the land as an aesthetic resource. Many protections advocates seek wilderness experiences—immersions into natural landscapes that do not exhibit impacts of modern life. Such immersion means viewscapes that don't include human settlement, evidence of other human travel over the land, human-created noises like music or machinery, and smells like vehicle exhaust or livestock manure. Thus, activities like hiking and backpacking (if "done correctly") are compatible with the wilderness place, while extractive industry operations, livestock grazing, and ATV/OHV use are at odds with perceptions of wild landscapes as a core quality of southern Utah as a place, often eliciting visceral expressions of disgust from wilderness enthusiasts.

Embedded in wilderness as a concept and discourse is a delineation of "appropriate" or desirable human relations to these spaces. The image of pristine wilderness requires all humans to be visitors, not inhabitants. While absence of *permanent* human presence is central to considering spaces to be wilderness, criteria for wilderness designation implies that these areas' protection is, at least in part, for individual sojourn, with a component of assessment for wilderness status being whether the space offers "outstanding opportunities for either solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation" (Wilderness Act 1964; BLM Policy Manual 6310, Bureau of Land Management 2021). Visitors are expected to be viewers who may be influenced or transformed by their surroundings but not actors who influence or transform their surroundings. Thus, wilderness advocates are inclined to disapprove of those who might use public lands as spaces of long-term residence,⁹⁴ and they are incensed by land uses that might reduce the

⁹⁴ Because of the minimal regulations on most BLM land, it is feasible to utilize such spaces for long term residence, either banking on a lack of agency capacity or attention to enforce camping limits (camping in a single location not to exceed 14 days within a 28-day period) or moving around with sufficient frequency to technically meet those requirements. My perception is that attitudes about "living on public lands" in this way is potentially more mixed than it has been in the past, particularly as long-term travel/residence in built-out vans or other forms of camping vehicles has become more popular. That said, the rise in popularity of "dispersed camping"—camping

“wilderness qualities” of the space, whether small scale such as the presence of cow manure, ephemeral such as OHV noise, or larger and more enduring, such as impacts of an extractive industry project.

Within protections advocacy, stances in favor of maintaining the “wild” features of landscape and opposing actions that might make human impact more noticeable connect to the idea that these landscapes have historically been “wild” or “untrammeled”—that such features are enduring qualities of the ecogeographical area of the Colorado Plateau and/or southern Utah’s “canyon country.” Thus, while the desire for wilderness is in some ways non-geographically-specific—desired aesthetic experiences not rooted in a specific location—it is integral to a specific vision of place connected to southern Utah’s undeveloped landscapes. Utah’s wilderness, particularly the striking sandstone landscapes of the southern part of the state, has been the focus of many writers, with that literary tradition serving as one thread of protections advocacy (Smith 2020). Such texts, such as the writing of Edward Abbey (1971, 1975, 1991), Terry Tempest Williams (1992, 2002), and Wallace Stegner (e.g., 1987, 1999)⁹⁵, are often cherished by those who hold a personal emotional connection to the region through a wilderness lens. The undeveloped areas of the Colorado Plateau are seen to be “pristine” and “wild,” the type of spaces that are worthy of protection because of their grandeur and supposed

in areas with no campground, typically on BLM land—is a notable point of concern among protections advocates for ecological and aesthetic reasons. Agency staff and frequent land users (local recreators, guides) have described to me their own observations of increased impact in particular areas in southern Utah, which people hypothesize to be a combination of impacts of social media bringing viral attention to specific areas, a rise in absolute numbers of public lands visitation in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns, and a rise in public lands visitors who may not have been exposed to ideas like “Leave No Trace” Principles. Discussing such impacts is a site of tricky discursive negotiation as long-time wilderness enthusiasts seek their own personal experiences in wild settings and hold the idea that such experiences are “for everyone,” but then balk at threat of “too many visitors”—i.e., enough to disrupt the sense of solitary experiences in wilderness—and at people who they deem to be not visiting properly.

⁹⁵ These authors have been, themselves, wilderness advocates, e.g., Stegner’s (1991) participation in The Utah Wilderness Coalition’s book, *Wilderness at the Edge: A Citizen Proposal to Protect Utah’s Canyons and Deserts* and Terry Tempest Williams’s ongoing participation in advocating for wilderness protection, especially of the Colorado Plateau (e.g., Young 2021).

lack of human influence. The frequent articulation in both written and spoken descriptions of the GSENM area that it was the last part of the contiguous United States to be formally mapped comes to be shorthand for the place's extreme wildness, a remote and rugged landscape. As described in one 1999 *Smithsonian Magazine* article:

Southern Utah was still a *blank space on the map* of America when the Escalante River canyons were traversed by a contingent of John Wesley Powell's second Colorado River expedition in the 1870s. Subsequent attempts to tame the wilderness they'd surveyed never got much past go. (Doherty 1999, emphasis mine)

Doherty's narration offers an example of the ways the Colorado Plateau and specific areas within it, like the land that became GSENM, are seen to be exemplary wilderness—a standout in comparison to other wild spaces due to its “emptiness,” its grandeur, and a space late to be tarnished by modernity (i.e., via settlement and government mapping) relative to other parts of the country.⁹⁶ Like the narratives of pioneer heritage that justify particular land uses in the present in relation to historical land use, arguments for land protection animated by a commitment to wilderness build a connection to a perceived past, presenting the image of unpeopled wilderness—exemplary wilderness, even, relative to other undeveloped area by virtue of being temporally the least tarnished by settler impact—as the core essence of this place that is under threat and worthy of preservation.

⁹⁶ Those that advocate for protections of southern Utah landscapes tend to value wilderness in general (non-place-specific) ways and are often supporters of protections in other specific places as well as efforts to influence state and national level policy on public lands protections more generally. Yet for many, the landscapes encapsulated within the geologic region of the Colorado Plateau seem to have a special status. I take this specialness to arise from the ways in which these landscapes invoke a sense of the romantic sublime—the qualities that writers like John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Edward Abbey, Wallace Stegner, and others produce feelings of awe, closeness to God, relief from the stresses of society, and heightened mental clarity or enlightenment. Though contemporary wilderness advocates often depart from explicitly religious tones, they retain similar notions of the sublime and picturesque. To many protections advocates, the red rock landscapes of the Colorado Plateau are the epitome of such an enchanting landscape to the point of bringing people back to reference to religious experience. A kind of religiosity is expressed by some individuals' as they articulate the conviction they feel about preserving the Colorado Plateau. “I'm not even a religious person,” expressed an Orange County, CA resident who had visited the region multiple times, “but the Colorado Plateau is sacred!” A resident of Seattle visiting Escalante in July 2017 described how his yearly trip to Utah's canyon country is “a spiritual pilgrimage.” “I know in our current society we have to drill [for oil] somewhere,” he said emphatically, “but please, not here.” Thomas Dunlap (2004) provides an interesting analysis arguing that American environmentalism demonstrates qualities of being a religious tradition.

These ideas about historic land use, good human relations to land, and desirable present day land uses are part of the settler memory at work in narratives that seek to naturalize or justify particular positions regarding public lands management. How land use past and present is cast in both of these narratives, particularly as enduring qualities of place that should be protected, rely on a notion of *terra incognita* and *terra nullius*—the labeling of a space as unknown, a blank space on a map, and the idea that an area of land belongs to nobody, respectively. The land uses that each narrative seeks to protect are ways that people engage with land in the present and develop relations to and positive feeling toward the land and/or landscape.⁹⁷ Yet the arguments for such uses being worth protecting are built, in part, on the idea that protecting those uses represents a (desirable) *continuation of the past*, a maintenance of the core essence of this place. In order for pioneer heritage and unpeopled wilderness to be seen as the core essences of this place, the land must be seen as having been a “blank space” and as belonging to nobody. This “unknowing” is not a forgetting of Indigenous people and their longstanding presence prior to settlers but rather the habitual work of rendering Indigenous past presence and current presence as irrelevant to contemporary day politics. These narratives imply that, before both pioneer and wilderness sojourn settler encounters, there was nothing there that was meaningful to their visions of what this place is. Furthermore, each picture of desirable land use and appropriate human-land relations—especially once integrated into claims to “having a say,” as I detail later in this chapter—involves an omission. For the agrarian

⁹⁷ Some scholars make clear analytical distinctions between land and landscape. The slipperiness with which interlocutors may move between discussing land and landscapes (including when they may use one term but mean the other) does not greatly change the argument at hand, however, so I do not focus on distinctions between the two other than pointing out the aesthetic and sensory desires of the wilderness place that are perhaps more “landscape” (including concepts borrowed from land management, such as soundscapes and viewscapes) oriented. For others, a distinction is made between Indigenous and settler colonial concepts of land (e.g., demarcated as Land and land, respectively, in Liboiron 2021). While this distinction is an important disruption to default settler frames about land, I do not have sufficient knowledge or ethnographic data to effectively engage this distinction in this work. The notion of land at play in the settler engagements I detail is obviously the latter, but indeed, recognizing the settlerness of this conceptualization and recognizing other Indigenous notions of Land are likely an important part of efforts to reconceptualize public lands management.

heritage view that celebrates pioneers' and present-day residents' "working the land," there is an omission of Indigenous uses of and shaping of the land and the plants and animals on it that, though operating with different ethics, bear the similarity of human-land relations that involve material resource use. Within the ideal relations of humans with wilderness—where one is merely a "visitor who does not remain" (Wilderness Act of 1964, 16 U.S. Code § 1131)—the visitor/inhabitant dyad doesn't capture human-land relationships, historical and in the present, that may fall outside that binary, such as ongoing cultural and spiritual relations to landscapes⁹⁸ or the shaping of a landscape through cultivation of culturally significant plants.

Casting Indigenous Characters in Pioneer Stories and Everyday Life

While the *terra incognita* and *terra nullius* built into these dominant settler attitudes about land use past and present imply an absence of Indigenous people and their use of and connection to land, neither the agrarian heritage place nor the wilderness place omits Indigenous people altogether. Instead, each includes distinctly settler interpretations of Native people saturated with paternalism and understandings of Indigenous people as "closer to nature" in the agrarian heritage and wilderness narratives, respectively. How these narratives cast Indigenous people are a quintessential example of the presence/absence dynamic, or necro-Indigeneity, of settler memory. They exemplify some of the habitual framings that influence settler attitudes toward public lands and that serve as an obstacle to true recognition of or reckoning with Indigenous sovereignty and interests.

To illustrate how Indigenous people are positioned within visions and narratives of the agrarian heritage place, I turn to "pioneer stories" in a theater performance, the temporal framing of Indigenous people in that and other public events, and the presence of Indigenous people in everyday Kanab. While efforts to define Kanab as a conservative agrarian place aren't

⁹⁸ Such landscapes include traditional homelands that may now be difficult for Tribal members to access given forced movement to reservations, either restricting movement or even fully relocating people away from homelands, and land management that maintains remote areas.

always explicitly centered on pioneer heritage, the idea of pioneer heritage is at-the-ready when arguments about continuity of land uses from the past through present are made. Furthermore, attention to pioneer heritage is amplified in Kanab- and Utah-based anti-protections land claims. Pioneer stories and references are a tool through which the history of land use and claims to having a say are narrated. With Utah's settler history dominated by narratives of specifically Mormon settlement and the continued cultural dominance of the LDS Church,⁹⁹ towns and cities across the state have "pioneer museums" or "heritage museums" that highlight white, LDS settlement in those specific locales. Historic buildings that have been preserved are typically connected to Mormon settlement, such as the homes of religious and community leaders like Brigham Young and, more directly associated with southern Utah, Jacob Hamblin. Kanab has both a city museum and a preserved home that has become the Heritage House Museum featuring a guided tour focused on Kanab's LDS pioneer settlement. As an institution, the LDS Church has a robust history infrastructure, having recorded LDS missionary and settlement efforts throughout the region in such resources as the Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel Database and encouraging current members to learn about personal family connections to the past in the Family History Centers found in many Utah communities. The official state holiday of Pioneer Day (commemorating the arrival of Mormon pioneers in the Salt Lake Valley) is as big a holiday as the Fourth of July and is supplemented by numerous local events centered on celebrating LDS heritage, such as Kanab's annual Jacob Hamblin Days.

⁹⁹ Note that here I mean to emphasize how continued cultural dominance of the LDS Church shapes which settler stories are remembered. Indeed, Mormon settlers were not the only people settling in Utah through the second half of the 19th century. Perhaps much to Brigham Young's chagrin, who led LDS followers west to escape religious persecution and establish their own "kingdom of heaven on earth" (i.e., sovereignty separate from the United States), the California Gold Rush brought an influx of settlers only shortly after establishing the State of Deseret (Shearer 2004). Even with this disruption of non-Mormon westward movement, the Mormon Church's regional colonization efforts were strategic and persistent resulting in many Mormon communities throughout what is now Utah, Nevada, and Idaho. Still, just as settler narratives deemphasize established Indigenous presence, choices about which stories from the past to tell may influence the sheer dominance of LDS-centered narratives about the past.

In 2020, the Jacob Hamblin Days aligned with the Mormon Pioneer Heritage Festival, a traveling musical show produced through Snow College (located in Ephraim, UT) titled, “Mormons and Indians: The Real Story.”¹⁰⁰ Though advertised online as “the PERFECT Sunday Event for Every Faith and Family,” the content and framing of the show was ultimately a celebration of LDS heritage. The narrative arc of this show and how it was received in the community show a common positioning of Indigenous people in local settler renditions of the past and demonstrate how this type of exhibition of history and storytelling function as a form of settler memory, construing Indigenous people as both present and absent and obscuring past and present settler colonial violence.

The show was written and produced by an LDS musician who was the president of the Utah Pioneer Heritage Association, though the performers were involved in developing some of the stories and songs with details from their own family history. Leading up to the performance, a southern Paiute person had commented on a Facebook post that the local Kaibab Paiute had not been included in this event at all. Responses to that critique defended the show, saying that “there [were] Native people on the cast.” There were two Native women in a cast of nine and, like the other performers, their personal family stories were incorporated into their parts of the performance. While the white actors told stories of their families’ settlement, the two Native performers told stories of their grandparents that reflected colonial violence. L spoke of her grandmother being bullied in school for being Native, and P performed a narration and song about her grandfather who served as a Navajo code talker in WWII. P’s story didn’t sugar-coat her grandfather’s experience; though she spoke with pride about his military service, she also

¹⁰⁰ This show went on to tour throughout Utah. At these later performances (the Kanab performance was the debut show), it is unclear whether the event was advertised under this title. Social media advertisements for these later events suggest it may have been presented simply as the Mormon Pioneer Heritage Festival with no additional performance title. These incomplete details create some ambiguity about whether the title was added specifically for the Kanab performance (perhaps by someone locally who was involved in planning Jacob Hamlin Days), added by the creators but removed perhaps due to critical feedback, or some other explanation.

spoke of Navajo people put in “concentration camps,” forced to relocate in The Long Walk, put in boarding schools, and subject to intimidation from white people at any time. She spoke of William T. Sherman’s famous anti-Indigenous quote—“the more [Indians] we kill this year, the less we have to kill next year”—and laid bare her grandfather’s conflicted feelings about serving in the military: “Grandfather had to decide if he was going to serve the country that had treated his people this way.” L’s and P’s parts of the performance, however, felt like add-ons to the main story celebrating Mormon pioneers, disjointed from the shared themes woven through the other seven performers. That is, though all the performers’ stories were collectively framed as individuals telling stories about their families’ specific experiences, the non-Native performers’ stories shared themes of celebrating not just individual ancestors’ strength or perseverance but the broader notion and success of pioneer settlement. As the introducing speaker expressed at the beginning of the show, the event’s “goal [was] to reignite the memories we have of pioneer heritage,” and the audience’s reactions aligned with this overarching theme: in contrast to cheers and enthusiastic applause at the ends of the white actors’ vignettes, the applause in response to P’s and L’s stories was delayed and polite but subdued.

The memories reignited were quintessentially settler memory. The show wove through various vignettes featuring general Mormon and family-specific storylines, with some narrated from the perspective of individual actors in the present about their ancestors and some acted out as the characters of the stories. As Bruyneel (2021) reminds, settler memory is not so much erasure as it is distinctly settler articulations of Indigeneity, and the vignettes in this performance clearly exemplified that. Indigenous people did enter into some of the white actors’ stories. Speaking of early settlement, one character told another, “If the desert doesn’t kill you, the Navajo and Apache will.” Another actor told a story of a great-great-great-grandfather, Peter, who “became an explorer, a colonizer” and “befriended the Native people.” The story described the Paiute starving due to the effects of a drought (any impacts of white settlement on this

starvation are not mentioned), settlers being warned to leave as “Chief Black Hawk”¹⁰¹ assembled warriors from “all five Paiute Tribes” (here, a brief glimpse of colonial violence—“they are angered from the disease we’ve brought and land we’ve taken”). When Peter argued that he had friends among the Paiute, he was told “when an entire Tribe declares war, you can’t count on friendships.” Nonetheless, Peter chose to stay in the area, even as the other settlers returned to the more-established and military-fortified Parowan. His family harvested their crops, but then “he woke suddenly with an uneasy feeling” and found that all his livestock were taken and slaughtered by his starving “Native American friends.” “He wanted to do something rash. But then he thought, ‘These are my neighbors, and I hate what they have done, but I guess they did what they would with what they thought was community property,’ and shared what he

¹⁰¹ The layers of settler memory at play go deep. The Chief Black Hawk referenced in this story is likely drawing upon a Timpanogos leader who is said to have led many campaigns against Mormon settlers. The proximity to accurate details stops there. The story describes settler interactions with Paiute people and reference “all five Paiute Tribes,” likely a superficial pull of information from the Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah, a federally-recognized Tribe with five bands (Cedar, Indian Peaks, Kanosh, Koosharem, and Shivwits—details that Utah’s schoolchildren are tested to remember in learning Utah state history)—a framing that reminds of the mismatch between contemporary settler state boundaries and Indigenous cultural groups, as there is also the Kaibab Band of Paiute Indians right on the Arizona/Utah border with traditional homelands throughout southern Utah but whose reservation land is only in Utah. There are several other southern Paiute (Nuwuvi) bands, including the Moapa Band and Las Vegas Band within Nevada state boundaries. Though a small detail, a statement like “all five Tribes” does the work of painting a settler version of the past, simplifying and glossing over the magnitude and complexity of Indigenous presence. Furthermore, “Black Hawk” was one of a handful of Timpanogos leaders navigating settler conflict in the first several decades of Mormon colonization; the Timpanogos nation is Snake Shoshone, not Paiute, and his actual name might have been Nu’lunts (Mary Meyers of the Timpanogos Tribe quoted in Gottfredson n.d.). It is rumored that the name Black Hawk may have been asserted by Brigham Young or other Mormon settlers, though I could find no solid records confirming that; it’s not completely implausible, however, given that Illinois—where Mormon settlers traveled from—was home to a Sauk leader named Black Hawk who was involved in opposition to settler violence and displacement of his people in the decades leading up to and overlapping with Joseph Smith’s declarations about Mormonism in the 1830s. More broadly, the name “Black Hawk” proliferates in white settler perceptions of Indigeneity that get taken up in ways that seek to evoke an idea of strength and bravery while implying that actual Indigenous people are a thing of the past. As Winona LaDuke (White Earth Nation) articulated in a T.V. interview on the show “Democracy Now!” following the use of “Geronimo” as the code name for Osama Bin Laden, “The reality is, is that the military is full of Native nomenclature. That’s what we would call it. You’ve got Black Hawk helicopters, Apache Longbow helicopters. You’ve got Tomahawk missiles. The term used when you leave a military base in a foreign country is to go ‘off the reservation, into Indian Country.’ So what is that messaging that is passed on? You know, it is basically the continuation of the wars against Indigenous people” (Democracy Now! 2011). Whatever the origins of the name, the Timpanogos nation does use the name Black Hawk in describing that part of the effects of settler colonization on their website (<https://www.timpanogosTribe.com>).

had...He was angry, but he still gave food to the Indians.” Back in Parowan, word spread that 30 pioneers were killed, and it’s rumored that Peter was one of them, but when the rescue party came to the area, they saw Peter using his plow, but instead of oxen, it was “all of Peter’s Indian friends pulling the plow.” Such a narrative puts settler colonization front and center but in a distinctly settler way, subtly casting Indigenous people as aggressors or antagonizers and presenting the white settler main character as a generous and compassionate man who, in the face of what others view as a break in the relationship he claims to have with the Native people (i.e., them taking livestock), leans in to sharing what he has instead of reacting with violence. Thus, the story reproduces settler stereotypes about Indigenous people, celebrations of paternalistic enactments of sharing resources, and an image of Native subservience. Though one level of interpretation of Indigenous people pulling Peter’s plow represents an exchange—their labor in return for the livestock they took—the image evoked, particularly with that line as the punchline and closing of the vignette, is a degrading one, made even more uncomfortable by the audience’s response. The white portion of the audience exploded in applause and cheering at this “resolution” of the story, while the small contingent of Native folks in the audience didn’t seem amused.

Another story about interactions with the Paiute in this show tapped into a locally dominant narrative of Jacob Hamblin being a friend to Native people, having learned Paiute and Ute languages and building relationships that enabled Kanab to be established in 1870 after an earlier failed attempt due to violent interactions with local Native groups. This story described one of Jacob Hamblin’s sons being sent to arrange a trade of items with a Paiute chief and being too greedy about what he took in exchange for what he gave. This son returned to Jacob, who promptly sent him back to the Chief to return some of the blankets he took. When he returned to the Chief, the Chief said that he went along with the unfair deal the son had demanded, because he knew that Jacob would send the son back to make the deal fair. The story ended with a painfully paternalistic punchline: “You see,” said the Chief, “Jacob Hamblin is

your father, but he's our father too." Like the story of Peter, this vignette portrays a white settler man as an individual who is diplomatic, generous, caring, and fair and suggests that these qualities have earned them not just respect but, via the framing of paternalism, adoration and even subservience from local Indigenous people. In contrast, Indigenous people in the story, even when presented as individual characters such as the Chief, are not "relevant" as individuals to the story except to speak necessary lines. Thus, even as the storylines include moments of direct reference to settler-Native conflict and of settler colonial violence,¹⁰² these descriptions of settler presence reinscribe a habitual recollection of settlement that celebrates and takes as given settler success and relegates Indigenous experiences to being relevant only insofar as they help create the desired settler image.

These portrayals of Indigenous people in Mormon heritage stories as antagonists and as dependents grateful and subservient to paternalistic white man figures ("Peter" and Jacob Hamblin) amplified the sense of disjuncture between the overarching theme of celebrating pioneer heritage and the Native performers' sections. In addition to laying out a stark contrast between the degree of humanization in the family experiences relayed by P and L and the

¹⁰² Though such stories take settler-Native conflict as a "given," they leave out significant aspects of settler initiation of such conflicts. Within a few years of LDS settlement in the Utah area, LDS leaders turned toward intentionally breaking up local Indigenous communities, carrying out violence to be able to remake themselves as "native" or construct the area as a homeland (Farmer 2008). As Brigham Young declared, "I say go [and] kill them ... Tell Dimick Huntington to go and kill them—also Barney Ward—let the women and children live if they behave themselves ... We have no peace until the men [are] killed off—never treat the Indian as your equal" (in Christy 1978, 224, fn 30). Though such statements are not necessarily distinct from other non-LDS settler attitudes throughout U.S. history, such calls to violence can be jarring for LDS members seeking to live the values they have taken from their theology. LDS faith leaders are well aware of contemporary Church members' reflections on what positions faith leaders have held and how, for some, such reflections cause questioning of faith. One instance of a response to such concerns is a website dedicated to "hard questions" that claim to take unsavory parts of LDS history head-on (such as the Church's historical stances and actions toward Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color) and then discuss the matter taking into account a variety of sources and acknowledging ambiguity and uncertainty (e.g., lack of clear "historical record"), while ultimately arriving at a pro-LDS conclusion (B.H. Roberts Foundation n.d.). (The website is hosted by the B.H. Roberts Foundation, a nonprofit organization that describes itself as having "a bias toward faith and believes that open research can support a healthy, mature and justified belief in the gospel" [<https://www.bhroberts.org/about>]). Readers are invited to chat with an "LDSbot," and at the end of an article, the website prompts a survey asking whether the reader found the article to be a balanced, unbiased assessment, whether they are a member of the Church, and how the article affected the surety of their faith.)

Indigenous people in the pioneer stories, the performance set stories of settler success alongside Native trauma (albeit lifting up the strength of the performers' ancestors)—once again leaving settler colonization right in front of our eyes without directly naming the connection between the contrasting genres of celebration and trauma. Thus, even if not intended to land this way, the inclusion of two Native performers helped to reproduce habitual recollections of a settler past. The audience reactions to punchlines like Native people pulling Peter's plow and a chief declaring that "Jacob Hamblin is...our father too," along with the contrast between their enthusiasm for Mormon settler perseverance and polite applause for the Native experiences, amplified this sense.¹⁰³ The jarring mix of the casting Indigenous people as part of the challenges to settlement that Mormon pioneers overcame, paternalistic narratives that use Indigenous people to cast pioneer leaders in a positive light, and the presence of Native performers whose presence and own narratives disrupted implied "terminal narratives" of Indigenous people strikingly encapsulates the complex dynamics of settler memory in action.

While this performance was just one evening in Kanab, such configurations of Indigenous people in articulations of this region as a pioneer-rooted agrarian heritage place extend beyond that event. The simultaneous presence and absence of Indigenous people in narratives, materials, and events that celebrate Kanab's past and seek to reproduce Kanab's placeness regularly positions Native people as part of Kanab's past, not present, despite the close proximity of Fredonia, AZ (about 7 miles away) and the Kaibab Indian Reservation just

¹⁰³ As the show progressed, I wondered how the two Native performers felt about these storylines. Their interactions with audience members after the show were gregarious, and I later saw P's public post about the performance asserting that "this opportunity gives us the platform to tell stories of our ancestors. We are very grateful we have the opportunity to represent our Native heritage, and to portray the truth of what our people faced." My efforts to contact the performers to learn more about their personal experience in the show were unsuccessful, so the question remains of whether the performers' positive regard was accompanied by critiques of the show's portrayal of Indigenous people. Though I stand by my interpretation of the overall effect of the performance, including how these performers' stories were incorporated, I also see multiple layers of meaning and interpretation being possible, including the ways in which those individuals telling those stories could have been a positive and powerful experience.

west of Fredonia. Given this proximity, many Southern Paiute/Nuwuvi people shop in Kanab grocery stores and enroll their children in local youth activities. Additionally, Page, AZ lies just over an hour's drive from Kanab and just north of the Navajo Nation, a town where Native people (predominantly Diné/Navajo) make up over 50% of residents.¹⁰⁴

Even with this geographic proximity, Kanab as a town and southern Utah as a region is narrated as a predominantly white place, with Indigenous people typically narrated as part of the past.¹⁰⁵ For example, in a promotional insert created by the Kane County Office of Tourism for Kanab's sesquicentennial celebration, a timeline featuring a handful of historical events mentions Indigenous presence twice: "1000 Years Ago - Ancient inhabitants cover the area—evidence of their daily lives is left everywhere and much of it collected at Red Pueblo Museum," and "June 14, 1870 - Kanab was first settled in 1864, broken up in 1866 during Indian wars and resettled to stay in 1870." The insert includes a "Heritage walking tour map" focused on historical houses, the town's most central LDS Church and Family History Visitors Center, and a monument to John Wesley Powell. It offers a recommendation for a two day "Heritage Itinerary" that includes Kanab's Little Hollywood History, the Heritage House, long-standing restaurants,

¹⁰⁴ A marker of this proximity of Indigeneity yet centrality of whiteness in Kanab are school enrollment demographic statistics, which indicate that in the 2015-16 school year Kane School District was 90% white and 3% Native American, compared with Fredonia-Moccasin School District where 16% of students were Native and 5% were two or more races, which may include Native folks), with nearly ¼ of students being racial minorities (Groeger, Waldman, and Eads 2018). In Page during the same time period, Native American students made up 73% of students (Groeger, Waldman, and Eads 2018). These schools exhibit patterns similar to other locations throughout the country, including large differences in graduation rates (90-94% in Kane School District compared to less than 20% in Fredonia-Moccasin School District) and in-school biases, such as white students in Page School District making up only 17% of students but 33% of students in the gifted and talented program (Groeger, Waldman, and Eads 2018).

¹⁰⁵ Another ethnographic encounter helps illustrate the embeddedness of a paternalistic frame, like that presented in the heritage festival narratives. In a discussion I overheard at the thrift store in summer 2020, two elderly, white-coded women discussed a project someone else was organizing to get supplies to a Native community. Seeking to clarify where the collected items were going, one woman asked, "to our Indians? Or to Navajo?" In addition to imbuing an icky settler residue, the reference to "our Indians" is yet another reminder of the underlying remembering or recognition of the actual lived presence of Indigenous people in Kanab's history and to the present even as narratives about place and past frequently omit or render irrelevant to the present and to land claims.

and Best Friends Animal Sanctuary, as well as more nature-focused activities of a stargazing tour and sledding at Coral Pink Sand Dunes. The vignettes in the insert address the All-Woman Town Council, Montezuma's Treasure, the "Roll Away Saloon," Little Hollywood, and Best Friends Animal Sanctuary. Certainly, the effort to weave Best Friends into a pioneer heritage narrative ("Kanab is well known for its pioneer history, and the Best Friends Animal Society are local modern day pioneers...") may be tied to the organization's many donations to local initiatives and to the fact that a target audience for the insert was tourists. But that the organization that frequently serves as a punching bag for those most fervently defending Kanab's traditionalism is cast as part of Kanab's heritage while Indigenous people are relegated to the past demonstrates the strength of settler memory's capacity to disavow ongoing Indigenous presence and harmful settler colonial impacts.

Just as the (white) settlerness of Kanab presented as an enduring quality through time ignores the geographic proximity of Native folks also living their lives and holding generational ties to the region, positioning Indigenous people as part of the past seems to create a kind of temporal distance. Even as Indigenous presence in and connection to this place (area of Kanab and the region more broadly) is continuous throughout the various periods of the past covered in references to Kanab's history, the past in which Indigenous people are included is usually not proximal. More attention is given to "ancestral Puebloans" in a temporally and spatially vague way than to the Kaibab Band's direct relation to the Kanab Creek drainage or to other contemporary Indigenous connections to the region or to landmarks in the region. The local museum, even after recent updates to the framing of the materials, amplifies prehistoric Indigenous people over recent past and present-day Indigenous people (an opening line to the museum's updated curation reads, "From the Ancestral Puebloans, to the early Settlers and on through the golden age of film-making, Kanab has been making its place in history"). Many long-time locals (and wilderness enthusiasts, see section later in this chapter) enjoy visiting archaeological sites that indicate the presence of Indigenous inhabitants in a very distant past—

distant enough that it gains a different frame than the details of the more recent past, which requires some massaging of details and interpretation to align with settler desires and claims. In the telling of the history of place, it is as if a gap is forced: contemporary Native people may be present, but this framing suggests all they get to claim when looking toward the past is “ancestral Puebloan” culture¹⁰⁶ rather than continuous connection to place (such as the continuous connection narrated at an event hosted at Best Friends Animal Sanctuary in August 2021 featuring Kaibab Paiute speakers who talked about their own experiences collecting willows and other culturally significant plants in Kanab Creek, including where the animal

¹⁰⁶ Settler memory abounds. While “ancestral Puebloan” is a term that has been used within archaeology as an updated term for “Anasazi” that non-Diné/Navajo Tribes typically do not prefer (on the basis of one interpretation of the word “enemy ancestors” to refer to non-Navajo cultural groups identified in archaeological sites in the region), it is a gloss that I heard various Native individuals challenge. Some Pueblo nation individuals request a slight adjustment—ancestral Pueblo rather than ancestral Puebloan—while others have deeper critiques, such as the ways it groups together a collection of Indigenous people and Tribes in a way that implies a generic cultural group that doesn’t reflect the varied and complex ancestry of contemporary Indigenous groups. Others critique the ways the term Pueblo still connects to colonization via the impact of Spanish colonizers. Another facet is the specifically Paiute challenge to the classification of prehistoric presence in the region as “ancestral Puebloan,” which discursively links to contemporary “Pueblo” Tribes, e.g., Hisat’sinom/Hopi, A:Shiwi/Zuni, Áak’u/Acoma, and others, and obscures Nuwuvi/southern Paiute connections to the region. The language used in various settings is complex, with the continuation of both settler-focused labels and self-determined Indigenous labels playing out in tandem, in part due to the incorporation of specific labels in the legal realm (e.g., formal federally-recognized Tribe names). Hopi archaeologist Lyle Balenquah has described NPS resistance to using Tribes’ own preferred names in interpretative signage/materials (in a statement made in 2020; it is unclear if the various changes made in the Department of Interior under Secretary Deb Haaland [Kawaik/Laguna Pueblo] or in the NPS under Director Chuck Sams [Cayuse and Walla Walla] include more openness to such Tribe-led interpretation). Furthermore, in contrast to the typical white settler liberal desire for one clear answer about what is the “correct” term to use, Diné archaeologist Adesbuh Foguth has shared contextual information about the term *anaasázi* (the Diné word from which the anglicized word “anasazi” is derived) in social media posts, seeking to communicate how the word is differently received within a Diné context compared to a Pueblo Tribe context and describing how such differences mean different usage in different context, such as her not using the term in broader Native spaces but using it personally and, as required by the Navajo Historic Preservation Department, in the context of cultural resource management documents. Among such complexity, settlers continue to use the term Anasazi as part of business names, in public school education, and more. A more in-depth exploration of the nuances of how contemporary Native individuals and groups relate to and/or critique the term is both outside my scope of knowledge and a tangent to the point I seek to make here, but the ways in which the term was challenged at various points throughout my fieldwork reminded me of the way that the term “ancestral Puebloan,” used as a taken-for-granted label for past Indigenous people, is itself an artifact of settler remembering that, among protections advocates, often comes along with well-meaning settlers’ desires to have a clear-cut, unambiguous reality of which terms are “correct” and which are “offensive”—such simplification might also be considered part of the work of applying a settler frame to past and present Indigenous experience.

sanctuary is now located¹⁰⁷).

Like the framings in the performance put on by the Mormon Pioneer Heritage Festival, settlers' various inclusions and omissions might be best understood as habitual recollections. The habitual positioning of Indigenous people in a part of the past that is discontinuous from the present shows up in small moments of everyday life. An advertisement from the Office of Tourism for another heritage celebration in November 2021, described an event "with Pioneer and Native American reenactors." In the words of one local (white settler) person, "What is a Native American reenactor? They are alive and well, and [are in] no need of reenactors." Rather than being an intentional slotting of Native people in the past, I believe this unfortunate phrasing and the fact that such phrasing went unnoticed by most viewers of the advertisement reflects how constructions of Indigenous people as more part of the past—as a role to be "reenacted" alongside the role of pioneer—are a default for many non-Native people, with such a construction being so normalized it regularly goes unnoticed. That such representations and phrases are more likely a habitual mode of recollection rather than a matter of conscious choices—i.e., an explicit intent to exclude contemporary Native people—highlights the ubiquity of settler memory and how individuals' subjectivities and desires can be so solidly rooted in colonial logics yet feel, to those who hold them, distant from the more explicitly colonial rhetoric found throughout American history.

Seeking "Unpeopled" Wilderness

While those in support of land protections more frequently express greater openness toward "honoring Native perspectives," a true reckoning and revisioning of public lands

¹⁰⁷ The audience was largely made up of folks connected to Best Friends and others I knew to be more drawn to the wilderness place version of southern Utah. There is more that could be said about these folks' reactions to such stories that, I would argue, reproduce settler stereotypes of Indigenous people in other ways, but relevant here is that even as there are moments where such stories are narrated, they are not often taken in by settlers in ways that might challenge their default constructions of settler and Indigenous presence in Kanab and surrounding areas.

protections catches on the persistent animating power of the idea of wilderness and desire for wilderness experiences. While discursively there is support for the idea of wilderness for its own sake—a kind of inherent value of wild nature—a central aspect of how many protections advocates relate to public lands is in seeking wilderness experiences. The sensory qualities of a “wilderness experience” are those giving the impression of a landscape not only uninhabited by humans but also unaffected by human activity. To create that perception, much narrative work must be done to remove and recast Indigenous people in relation to land. A consideration of how a Romantic notion of wilderness has informed preservation and conservation efforts and how Indigenous people have figured both in the idea of wilderness and in efforts to preserve “wild landscapes” in the United States helps illustrate a perhaps quieter but just as powerful settler memory at work in public lands protections advocacy.

One way that Indigenous people are effectively minimized in images of the wilderness that white settler protections advocates seek to protect is through what environmental historian Bill Cronon (1993) has argued is American environmentalism’s strong ahistorical or anti-historical impulses.¹⁰⁸ That is, in perpetuating a strict dualism between nature and society and casting the former outside of history except for “natural” processes of biological evolution or plate tectonics, environmentalists “tell linear narratives of environmental degradation as moral fables whose purpose is to transform people’s consciousness and behavior in ways that will ultimately mean an end to linear time, heralding the coming millennium when cyclical time will reign once again over a stable equilibrium that applies as much to humanity as to nature”

¹⁰⁸ George Shulman (2008, 148) asserts it is a general American tendency to hold an anti-historical orientation. Bruyneel (2021, 100) highlights an important point that the impulse is anti-historical (against history), not ahistorical (without history). It is not an absence of historical awareness but a resistance to reckoning with it—as Bruyneel reiterates, not a full absence of history but a disavowal of history. As Vine Deloria Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux) wrote in *Custer Died for Your Sins*, “the white must learn to stop viewing history as a plot against himself” (1969, 174-175). Encapsulating Deloria’s point, Bruyneel characterizes history as something that “haunt[s] white Americans as a hostile force” thus fueling white settlers’ distancing from historical tellings that assert past harms as having political relevance today (2021, 100). These are all reminders of Bruyneel’s emphasis that settler recollections are not evidence of ignorance but rather disavowal.

(Cronon 1993, 11). He argues that American environmental discourse tends to utilize a sense of linear human time that is about falling (degradation) and a cyclical nature time with qualities of homeostasis and equilibrium (Cronon 1993). The epitome of nature outside of linear human time is wilderness, which Cronon (1996) says “represents a flight from history” (16). Whether an Edenic garden, a frontier, or the sacred sublime, wilderness, Cronon argues, “offers us the illusion that we can escape the cares and troubles of the world in which our past has ensnared us,” that we can step outside of time (1996, 16).^{109, 110}

Although Cronon’s discussion of wilderness in American environmental discourse is somewhat dated, his characterization of the conceptual contours of the concept of wilderness remains applicable for articulating a key influence in U.S. public lands protections advocacy. Whereas American environmental discourse broadly has evolved in many directions less explicitly focused on desire for or preservation of wilderness, the concept of wilderness remains central to public lands protections advocacy today, not just in advocacy for formal wilderness designation but in orientations toward undeveloped landscapes more generally (even those that

¹⁰⁹ Cronon also suggests that understanding wilderness as something before humanity’s “fall” might produce the problematic consequence of disinvesting from efforts to address environmental challenges that aren’t about protecting “pristine” spaces because such challenges “surface in landscapes that have already ‘fallen’ and are no longer wild” (1996, 20). I would argue that his critique is supported by a big picture view of environment-related movements in the U.S., with strains of conservation and preservation playing out largely separate from organizing efforts focused on environmental injustice. This effect of the emphasis on “pristine” spaces may also contribute to the differential mobilization observed around matters of Indigenous sovereignty that is described in the conclusion chapter of this dissertation.

¹¹⁰ That wilderness is conceptualized in an ahistorical manner is partially how it gains its apolitical veneer. With wilderness constructed as Edenic, set aside from normal time and space, to visit such landscapes is to step outside of society and, thus, away from social/political issues and problems like discrimination or inequality. Part of the appeal of a “wilderness experience” is that it’s seen (by those who have not experienced obstacles to recreating in such spaces) as an experience available to anyone, regardless of their personal characteristics. Such a “natural” and sometimes unforgiving landscape is seen to “strip people down” to more basic and authentic selves and, with regard to encountering other people in such a space, that differences between people don’t matter as much as they do in “regular society”—that wilderness has a kind of leveling effect. Differences that are said to matter less fall in both directions: that someone can feel relief from ways they feel like they don’t “fit” in society and that someone who has an advantage in society, e.g., being wealthy, loses that advantage—is “just another person”—in wild nature. Such a perspective that wilderness offers a utopic experience outside of politics may fuel protections advocates’ claims to apoliticalness or value neutrality in land debates, as well as the “all Americans’ lands” component of their claims logic.

don't meet formal criteria for wilderness designation). One possible driver of this enduring centrality is that older individuals whose affective ties to undeveloped landscapes coalesced in earlier decades make up a significant (in size and financial giving power) subset of white settler protections advocates. This is not to say that public lands protections discursive spaces have not also changed in the last several decades or that public lands and other facets of environmental discourse are mutually exclusive—indeed, even the last seven years alone have been site to changing threads, including, for example, framings of public lands management in relation to climate change prevention/mitigation, environmental justice, and Indigenous sovereignty.¹¹¹ Importantly, part of my argument is that a persisting emotional attachment to the notion of wilderness—or perhaps more accurately to “wilderness experiences”—continues to shape white settler protections advocacy, in both narratives and the flows of attention and financial resources in public lands debates, even where other environmental narratives/arguments are at play.

The trace of a pristine landscape outside of human influence and time can be found in the field of restoration ecology and, to an even greater degree, in laypeople's perceptions of restoration ecology. Though seeking to support ecological stability, work in this field has, in practice, frequently operated with the benchmark of returning to (settler perceptions of) “pre-contact” (i.e., European colonization) landscapes, as if the start of colonization is the start of the linear human time described above. These configurations force implications of either Indigenous people being extinct (Wilcox's “terminal narratives” [2010]) or being “part of Nature” (Redford 1991; Hames 2007) and not having a significant impact on landscapes before settler colonization. Restoration ecology efforts are not monolithic and contemporary varieties of

¹¹¹ Although the continued relevance of the idea of wilderness may be amplified in my fieldwork space by the particular qualities of southern Utah's landscapes (i.e., that those participating in southern-Utah-specific advocacy are more likely to be the public lands advocates motivated by wilderness), differential patterns of engagement with varying public lands issues across the United States suggest its relevance is not limited to public lands issues in this geographic region.

restoration ecology disrupt these assumptions. For example, some contemporary approaches include attention to incorporating Traditional Ecological Knowledge (Robinson et al. 2021) and, overlapping with changes in resource management more broadly, increasing instances of Indigenous co-management, such as buffalo restoration led by various Native nations throughout the U.S. (e.g., the various efforts organized by the InterTribal Buffalo Council and the Wolaḱota Buffalo Range managed by the Siḱaṅḱu Laḱota Oyate, and actions taken as a result of advocacy, such as the 2024 removal of a dam that has blocked salmon migration between the Klamath Basin and the Pacific Ocean after advocacy from Yurok, Karuk, Shasta, Klamath, and Hoopa Valley Tribes).¹¹² Within the interactions I had with conservation professionals, acknowledgements of the complexity of setting a baseline toward which restoration efforts strive were not unheard of, for instance in comments about how ecological change is constant, making identifying what to return to difficult. However, even those who discussed such complexities in conversations with me usually defaulted to a notion that the target point to “return” to was a pre-colonial landscape with little recognition of the built in assumptions about “untouched landscapes.”¹¹³ Importantly, the more simplistic notion of restoration ecology typically dominates in protections advocacy discourse outside the scientific field itself and, to some extent, remains embedded in public lands management. Although Department of Interior management approaches have shifted from the 1963 Leopold Report articulation of national parks being “a vignette of primitive America” toward an ecosystem function approach, in practice many restoration efforts have continued to be “defined by the pre-European environment, to the extent that it is known” (Dilsaver and Babalis 2023, 313). With ecological

¹¹² See Ramcilovic-Suominen et al. (2024) as an example of considerations of decolonial environmental justice in landscape restoration in global context.

¹¹³ Let alone the other complexities of engaging in modifying ecological variables. See Hilderbrand, Watts, and Randle (2005) for an example of restoration ecologists’ examinations of common “myths of restoration ecology” and the actual complexity and variability that challenge such assumptions.

change itself a constant, the question of what to “restore” a landscape to typically becomes implicitly or explicitly a question of “when,” imbued with the same ideas about pristine landscapes and the degradation of “modern society” found in conceptualizations of wilderness. Thus, even in conversation efforts purportedly focused on ecological restoration, the answer to “restoration to what?” becomes an imagined pre-European colonization landscape with little recognition of the role of Indigenous land practices shaping landscapes and the distribution of plant and animal species.

While restoration ecology is driven by a desire to “return” to (what is imagined to be) ecological regimes from before the impacts of European colonization, there is no recognition of or desire to also “return” to the cultural, political, economic conditions of that time (i.e., decolonizing). In this way, restoration ecology engages in a kind of museumification that disavows past Indigenous resource management in favor of the myth of “untouched” nature while failing to reconcile the concept of restoration and natural ecological change. Furthermore, the laws and policies guiding restoration work, such as the Endangered Species Act, compared to those guiding recognition of Tribal sovereignty and incorporation of Indigenous perspectives in public lands management, reveal that more weight is put on protecting and restoring “native” plants and animals than on acknowledging Native connections and Tribal sovereignty.^{114,115}

Thus, the legal tools used to “preserve” and “restore” wild spaces further exacerbate colonial

¹¹⁴ Ironically, invasive species stand as a metaphor for colonialism—the ecological issue isn’t so much that they exist or change the system but rather how drastically they override the existing ecosystem’s stability. Though those invested in conservation, preservation, and/or restoration ecology are adamant about the removal of invasive species for this reason while leaving uninterrogated the parallels between “invasives” impact on ecosystems and settler colonialism.

¹¹⁵ *Restoring Nature: The Evolution of Channel Islands National Park*, by Larry M. Dilsaver and Timothy J. Babalis (2023) offers a detailed descriptive account of the intended and unintended consequences of such laws and policies. Though their descriptions do not include a direct comparison with the rules and regulations of Tribal Affairs in relation to public lands, the contrast between how much legal power ends up backing individual species (what actions are and aren’t allowed if a particular species is present) and how minimally Indigenous perspectives and sovereignty are taken into account (e.g., the way that federally-mandated Tribal consultation focuses on checking the box of whether an effort to consult with a Tribe was made rather than requiring Tribal input to be weighted in the decision-making) is stark.

patterns. While the conceptualizations of and legal framings of what landscapes and ecosystems are being restored to has evolved overtime (see Dilsaver and Babalis 2023, 312), colonial understandings of “nature” and “natural landscapes”—for instance, “pre-contact” landscapes remaining a desired goal—have lasting power.

With its skeleton made of binaries such as untouched/impaired, primeval/modern, and visitor/inhabitant, wilderness discourse implies that the landscapes that are now so cherished as wild public lands are “what is left” of previously empty (unpeopled) landscapes—what remains not-yet-damaged by the encroachment of modern society—or spaces that have been “restored” from a damaged state, “returned” to their natural (unpeopled) state. The assumption or habitual perception of noncommercial or public land as authentic, pure “nature” is an example of Andrew Rifkin’s (2014) notion of settler common sense. Though national parks are not the focus of this dissertation—typically being public land that is least contested by settlers—the creation of national parks stands as a clear example of the ways a celebration of unpeopled landscapes requires both a past removal of Indigenous inhabitants and a discursive sleight of hand. Acts to “preserve” land, like the typically awe-striking settings that have become national parks, require the creation or production of unpeopled landscapes. Such production involved the removal of the Indigenous communities living there and/or the restriction of their use of resources from that area, often ignoring existing Treaty Rights and utilizing military force, such as when the Miwok were forced to march out of Yosemite Valley by military escort (Kantor 2007, Spence 1999). While NPS interpretation at national parks often includes reference to “prehistoric peoples” and, in recent years, some parks have collaborated with Native nations to revise narrations of Indigenous presence, visitor experiences of national parks—especially those in the American West—tend to center on the idea of viewing and interacting with an unpeopled natural space. BLM lands, which share a history with national parks but typically have less developed visitor infrastructure, are also commonly seen as being enduringly “empty.” Yet they, too, are a result of settler colonial dispossession of Native land and restrictions of Indigenous access to and

uses of public lands.¹¹⁶

As more appreciative lenses of “wild” nature were developing through the late 19th and 20th centuries, Indigenous people were commonly positioned by white writers, artists, and politicians in one of two ways. The first portrayal put Indigenous inhabitants as part of the natural environment, continuing a long tradition of dehumanizing non-white, non-Anglo-European communities. George Catlin’s 1830s conceptualization of “national parks” included Native inhabitants because they were seen as part of “nature” rather than part of fully-human “culture.” This configuration of Indigenous people in set aside landscapes was at play in early visitors’ experiences in Yosemite National Park where Southern Sierra Miwok people, whose living conditions were exploitatively controlled by park administrators, engaged in various traditional and performative practices on display for tourists.

By the 1950s though, the park service had shifted gears and forced remaining Miwok residents to leave the park, moving toward the second portrayal that came to dominate over the 20th century. The second portrayal casts Indigenous inhabitants as a scourge on the land, denigrating non-white, non-Anglo-European cultural beliefs and practices. This latter view gained popularity as American westward expansion accelerated—likely due to its usefulness in rationalizing claims to land—and is embedded in John Muir’s notion of uninhabited wilderness. The desired National Park landscapes were one of pure nature, brought about by forcing Tribes to relocate and/or restrict resource use, though the requirement of removing humans was

¹¹⁶ It wasn’t until 1978 that the American Indian Religious Freedom Act was passed to support access to sites of spiritual significance. Though a notable legal step in securing access to public lands, the act doesn’t cover all uses, thus often requiring further advocacy for Native folks to be able to access and use (e.g., harvest culturally significant plants or animals) their lands in traditional ways (e.g., see Blackfeet fight to access areas of Glacier National Park; Craig, Yung, and Borrie 2012). Beyond “legal” access/allowance of particular uses, the ongoing inequalities produced through settler colonial dispossession contribute to Native individuals being unable to access landscapes culturally significant to them due to logistical obstacles to traveling to those landscapes, which can be quite distant from where individuals are living due to forced colonial displacement, as was explained to my colleagues and I when speaking with Tribal representatives about their Tribes’ relations to the landscapes of GSENM; part of the “absence” of contemporary Native people on GSENM landscapes was a lack of feasibility to get there.

applied unevenly. In some parks, allowances for existing white settler inholdings were explicitly written into their creation at the same time that Native communities were forced to move, despite previous Treaty agreements (Kantor 2007). Although many Tribes pushed back against removal and restriction, settler judicial rulings through the 20th century primarily upheld the federal government's restriction of Indigenous land and resource use in national parks (Miller 2012).

The removal of Indigenous people to create spaces in which individuals could seek solace and spiritual transformation is connected to another racialized component of the construction of "wilderness" or "wild nature." Preservation of natural spaces specifically for individuals' enjoyment was initially mobilized in the U.S. by people in urban environments (Nash [1967] 2001). In opposition to modern, industrial culture, primitive, wild nature came to be seen as "an oasis free of the ills of civilization, a retreat to which the harried and battered, the suppressed or oppressed, might turn for relief" (Oelschaeger 1991, 111). This perspective lives on in contemporary wilderness enthusiasts, many of whom seek out outdoor recreation experiences that enable this sense of separation and solitude. Despite such rhetorical positioning as a space for the "harried and battered, the suppressed and oppressed" to seek relief, part of what early preservationists sought relief from were increasingly multicultural, multiracial urban spaces, to move from spaces of racial contamination to spaces of white purity, as exemplified by racist and anti-immigrant commitments held by such preservation leaders as John Muir and Aldo Leopold and the people with whom they collaborated (a point discussed in some American conservation discursive spaces with varying reception; see Kashwan 2020, Brune 2020) and in sentiments about protecting forests from foreign others (Kosek 2006). Within conservation discourse, historically, have been parallel arguments about who was and was not a responsible manager or steward of land, with negative valuation placed on non-Anglo-European perspectives and practices (see Kosek 2006, 143-163 for a discussion on the influence of notions of wilderness and racial purity on early institutionalized U.S. land

management). Though contemporary protections advocates often identify as politically liberal and, at a surface level, express support for a multicultural, multiracial society, reckoning with the white settler legacies of public lands, wilderness preservation and conservation, and outdoor recreation plays out in complex ways that reveal the stickiness of settler memory. Settler configurations of Indigenous people in relation to land and “nature,” along with the sense of wilderness as nature outside linear human time, still haunt land protections advocacy today.

Archaeology in the Wilderness Place

One obvious disruption to the idea of wilderness as untouched landscape is the material evidence of past human presence found in archaeological sites and artifacts. How such evidence is incorporated into many wilderness enthusiasts’ visions of pristine landscapes and becomes enjoyed as part of a “wilderness experience” hints at the ways that contemporary visions of wilderness implicitly place Indigenous people as part of the past and as part of nature. These perceptions make the settler perspectives saturating the laws that guide the management of these “cultural resources” unremarkable to the typical white settler wilderness enthusiast, leaving those laws to mesh well in the claims logic of the dominant pro-protections described later in this chapter.

While not a pastime exclusive to protections advocates, visiting archaeological sites is a form of outdoor recreation that readily meshes with the land use activities desirable in that frame, such as day-hiking or backpacking. While some outdoor recreators enjoy learning to see like an archaeologist—being able to pick up details of prehistoric human presence that aren’t obvious without specific knowledge of what to look for—the archaeological features settler visitors tend to find most exciting are those that are visible to the untrained eye, such as pictograph (painted) and petroglyph (chipped/carved) rock writing,¹¹⁷ cliff dwellings, and

¹¹⁷ Although not a term adopted by all Indigenous groups whose ancestors produced pictographs and petroglyphs, “rock writing” is a term that was encouraged by a variety of Indigenous individuals I worked with in my capacity as Education Programs Manager. This term was presented as a way to better encapsulate the cultural function of such images—communicating messages, such as pilgrimage routes—and to elevate viewers’ perspectives of the

granaries.¹¹⁸ The better preserved such features are, the more exciting to settler visitors.

Enthusiasts also look for pieces of clayware (mostly found as small sherds after many decades of settler looting that removed or broke more substantially preserved pots) and for lithics, i.e., worked rocks such as flakes, cores, or a tool like a scraper or—an especially “exciting” find—a projectile point. Notably, settler interpretations of archaeological sites—especially by the outdoor recreationist as a casual viewer—don’t demand acknowledging past Indigenous inhabitants as shapers of the landscape, even though both Indigenous histories and academic archaeological work indicate widespread, impactful land/resource management practices (for a somewhat dated overview, see Hammett 1997; also, e.g., Baker 2002, Denevan 1992, Griffen 2002, Lewis 1982, Pyne 2000).¹¹⁹ Protections advocates typically express respect toward and a strong desire to protect such sites from damage and enthusiastically support federal agency and nonprofit efforts to educate the public about how to visit sites with respect.¹²⁰ Such attitudes

meaning beyond “just a picture.” This latter aspect is related both to encouraging a more complex understanding of the cultural meaning of pictographs and petroglyphs and to distinguishing Indigenous rock writing from present day visitors marking rocks, which is understood by Indigenous and settler land protections advocates alike to be vandalism and is, legally, treated as such.

¹¹⁸ Less commonly sought out are features that can take a trained eye to identify, such as pueblos, which are stone houses typically not built alongside cliffs thus usually more difficult to see as sediment and vegetation has filled in areas and walls are subject to more forces that might knock them over.

¹¹⁹ An example of such landscape impacts in southern Utah is Nuwuvi/Southern Paiute people’s intentional cultivation of particular plants, the patterns of which are still measurable in the present (Sabata 2018). Although such landscape modifications were being actively used when European colonizers arrived in North America, such practices have been largely ignored and/or gone unrecognized, with the idea of pre-European-contact landscapes as the model for “untouched wilderness” persisting (Dods 2002).

¹²⁰ These education efforts focus on teaching about actions like avoiding touching rock writing, staying out of structures, not bringing dogs to archaeological sites, packing out all human waste, avoiding eating at or near sites, and more. Created with Tribal input, the Visit With Respect initiative from the Bears Ears Partnership became a key model in the preservation/conservation networks in the southwest that informed other communications about archaeological site visitation that followed from other Colorado Plateau organizations. A key shift from dominant messages in the past was a principle dedicated to reminding visitors that ancestral landscapes are sacred to Indigenous people in the present. The Bears Ears Visit with Respect principles can be viewed at <https://bearssearspartnership.org/visit-with-respect>. The efficacy of such education efforts is unclear, although such initiatives address a significant subset of public lands visitors: people who are new to visiting such spaces and thus may not have prior knowledge of low-impact land use ethics and may not have strong pro- or anti-protections stances. In general, protections advocates seem to hold sufficient “respect” for archaeological sites to not engage in blatant damage, though even some protections-minded individuals can be a bit lax on following through with

toward archaeological artifacts, however, don't necessarily involve a robust, complex orientation toward Indigenous people past and present. Over the course of many instances out on the land in both work and recreational capacities, I observed a wide variety of undertones to the interest in archeological features. Some of those reactions bring a humanizing lens with curiosity about people living on this landscape and appreciation for the ingenuity of Indigenous technologies. More common, however, is a kind of fascination that feels more mythologizing than humanizing and that draws a line between what are desirable or undesirable signs of impact—a line differentiating what might be seen as wilderness and what is tarnished—in a way that seems to disconnect evidence of past Indigenous inhabitation both from contemporary Indigenous people and from political matters like settler colonialism and Indigenous sovereignty.¹²¹

Archaeological features—and by extension, Indigenous people—occupy an unstable or contingent position in the dominant vision of the wilderness place. First, not all archaeological resources are of interest. While some protections advocates show some interest in markers of

practices like keeping dogs away from sites and staying out of structures. Attitudes toward archaeological sites among public lands users and anti-protections advocates whose commitments vary from the wilderness place seem to vary, ranging from generally respectful to more aggressive forms of damage. As with other forms of federal public land violations (such as wilderness area violations), verbal reports from agency staff suggest such actions are likely repeat offenders and, around inflammatory areas in southern Utah, perceived to at least sometimes be actions taken by people who “don't view the federal government as a legitimate authority.” In these cases, lack of awareness of federal rules or lack of education about respectful visitation practices is unlikely a key driver of such actions, though multiple times in response to questions about how the agency plans to address such repeat cases agency staff answered with “education.”

¹²¹ I have found it difficult to articulate this disconnection. It is not necessarily “dehumanizing” in the dominant meaning of that word, but rather a kind of lack of real personness—an attitude that doesn't view ancient people as real people and casts Indigenous people as inherently in the past, as if more connected to ancient people than to the present day. A more blatant example of this energy toward archaeological artifacts and Indigenous people was at an event hosted at Best Friends Animal Sanctuary in 2021 at which Kaibab Paiute speakers talked about their own and their families' connections to the land in this region and, specifically, to the Kanab Creek drainage including the area where the animal sanctuary is located. These presentations positioned the Kaibab Paiute very much in the present, with stories of the speakers themselves going out on the land to harvest various plants with parents and grandparents—in some ways a stark reminder of how temporally close Indigenous dispossession in the area is. Despite this focus on stories within the lifetimes of the speakers, one of the first questions during the Q&A—from a crowd largely made up of individuals recognizable as proponents of land protections—inquired where one could buy cultural artifacts—items associated with archaeology/prehistoric people that could be displayed in a settler home (“the baskets you mentioned—are those just for Paiute people to use or are they available to buy somewhere?”).

pioneer settlement, such as old cabins or the remainders of settlers' constructions to get through the "hole in the rock" when traveling from Escalante to Bluff,¹²² there is typically much less enthusiasm for archaeological resources marking settler pasts, a notable contrast from the positive and enthusiastic interest in Indigenous archaeology. Though both protected under federal and state laws and programs meant to preserve historic artifacts and sites, evidence of settler activity is more likely to be viewed as something marring the landscape and the sense of wilderness, whereas rock writing, cliff dwellings, and granaries are not. A joke I heard multiple times while engaged in group hikes or volunteer activities in which we encountered historic settler items such as old tin cans, was a leader's (e.g., from a nonprofit organization focused on public lands protections or a land agency employee) response to participants asking, "how old do you think that is?": "Oh, looks to be about 49 years old." This response nods to an NHPA definition of historical items as any artifact older than 50 years, which creates what is sometimes called "historical trash."¹²³ To jokingly off-the-cuff date an item to 49 years old is to imply that the item is undesirable in the natural landscape and should be picked up as part of clean up/restoration efforts, even though the item is, based on its appearance, almost certainly older than 50 years (e.g., encountering types of cans that were common in the mid-20th century but less so 50 years ago in the 1970s) and thus is technically illegal to remove.¹²⁴

One could argue that the distinction between these different archaeological materials are about temporality, with the Indigenous features so appreciated by protections advocate visitors being many hundreds to thousands of years old and settler archaeological materials being at

¹²² These examples are both archaeological sites located within GSENM boundaries.

¹²³ From an archaeologist's point of view, much of the material archaeologists study could be considered "historical trash." In this discursive context, it typically ends up meaning items that are recognized as slightly older versions of contemporary refuse (e.g., old tin cans, which are quite common on public lands)

¹²⁴ To protect any staff who've been on the trips during which these jokes occurred, it's worth noting that I didn't observe staff actively removing such items from the land after making that joke. I instead include it here as an example of how particular historical items are perceived as an undesirable presence on the land.

most a couple hundred years old. Yet even such a temporal schema for declaring what materials are desirable to encounter on a landscape—essentially, what does or doesn't threaten a sense of wilderness—reproduces the notion that the distinction between untouched and touched landscapes is the point of settler arrival. These contrasting attitudes toward Indigenous and settler archaeological artifacts show that evidence of Indigenous inhabitation is not seen as a threat to a sense of wilderness or to a sense of pristine landscape. While historic settler materials are more frequently treated as something that disrupts a sense of wilderness, markers of past Indigenous people on public lands are seen as part of the experience of moving through such landscapes. I argue that typical orientations toward archaeological resources among protections advocates perpetuate longstanding flavors of settler memory that, in romanticizing ancient people and their remaining material artifacts, imply Indigenous people are part of nature and are largely a part of the past. Thus, even as Indigenous archaeological features could be seen as a perpetual reminder of settler colonialism, they are instead rendered politically irrelevant in the present, other than being a desirable component of public lands worthy of protection.

The legal structures shaping the preservation of archaeological materials also enact settler memory. Archaeological sites and artifacts are “cultural resources” whose management and protection on public lands is shaped by legislation including the 1906 Antiquities Act, Section 106 of the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the 1976 Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), and the 1979 Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA, amended in 1988).¹²⁵ Section 106 of the NHPA mandates Tribal consultation (a fraught process that many Tribal representatives and Native activists describe as insufficiently

¹²⁵ This list is not a comprehensive list of laws and policies shaping the relationship between public lands and Indigenous individuals and Tribes—for example, other impactful legislation includes the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (Joint resolution in 1978, codified as public law in 1996) and the 1990 Native American Graves and Repatriation Act. Here, I focus on laws specifically guiding the protection of cultural resources that most directly apply to how archaeology figures into pro-protections discourse.

recognizing Tribal sovereignty), and the remainder of these laws provide important legal tools that Native nations and other Indigenous activists have used strategically to protect ancestral material culture and culturally significant locations. These laws, however, do significant work in the settler mind to position “cultural resources” as part of a shared national heritage. For instance, the Antiquities Act laid out presidential capacity to proclaim national monuments in a frame centered on scholarly interest—to protect “historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest that are situated upon the lands owned or controlled by the Government of the United States” (Antiquities Act of 1906, 16 U.S.C. § 431). A contemporary explanation given by the National Park Service about why the Act was passed emphasizes this scholarly frame, noting the tension between academic study of and private citizens engagements with archaeological sites and presenting the concern over “loss of information” as a driver of efforts to place such a law (National Park Service 2023).¹²⁶ ARPA, which updated and created more specific language around prohibited activities and penalties for violations of those prohibitions, declares “archeological resources on public lands and Indian lands [to be]...an accessible and irreplaceable part of the Nation's heritage” (Archaeological Resource Protections Act of 1979, 16 U.S.C. § 470aa). This language of “irreplaceable part of the Nation’s heritage” appears in various public-oriented materials, such as a BLM webpage on the laws and policies guiding cultural resources management (Bureau of Land Management n.d.) and a Forest Service webpage on archaeological resource protection (USDA Forest Service n.d.). In both legal texts and public facing information from federal agencies and nongovernmental organizations invested in historic preservation of cultural resources, the

¹²⁶ The webpage (National Park Service 2023) answers the “why” with the following: “In the last quarter of the 19th century, Europeans and European Americans who moved into or travelled [sic] west of the Mississippi River generated public and scholarly interest in the “antiquities” they encountered. Scientists funded by the federal government or private benefactors began expeditions to study archeological areas and form collections for museums and other institutions. Private citizens, at the same time, collected objects in haphazard ways and sold them for personal gain. Concern over the loss of information galvanized a scientific and political coalition to pass a federal law to preserve America’s archeological places and the information they contained on public lands.”

emphasis is on such resources as part of a national (settler) heritage—resources to protect “for the present and future benefit of the American people” (USDA Forest Service n.d.) and “diverse and iconic cultural landscapes, historic structures, and archaeological sites that belong to all Americans” (National Trust for Historic Preservation n.d.). This framing was a central component of protections advocacy discourse during the 2017 monument review, in which protections advocates sought to counter anti-protections utilization of the concept of (pioneer) “heritage” to defend their support for the reduction of monument boundaries, in which the natural and cultural resources of public lands were recurrently articulated as “all Americans’ heritage.”

In addition to the focus on cultural resource protection as a matter of settler national heritage, these laws are saturated with other markers of the dominance of a settler frame. First, the legal basis on which an individual might be charged with a crime of vandalism or theft at an archeological site is as damage to federal property, which reinforces the naturalization of settler jurisdiction. These laws also center on settler perceptions of what is of “archeological interest,” centering durable material culture over other land-related cultural resources such as Native oral histories and landscape impacts like enduring patterns of plant species distribution. In various conversations with Nuwuvi/southern Paiute individuals discussing the desires and obstacles to connecting with GSENM landscapes through 2020 and 2021, they remarked that the enduring presence of their people is dismissed within archaeology given that their material culture—utilizing more plant and animal materials—is less physically enduring than clay pots and stone houses.¹²⁷ The result is that Tribal nations have varying success using the tools of settler governance to protect culturally significant locations depending on how well what they wish to be protected aligns with the bias toward recognizing certain material forms of cultural resources

¹²⁷ One of these individuals also challenged the notion that all clayware can be attributed to Pueblo Tribes’ ancestors, claiming Paiute ancestors also engaged in the production of clayware.

over others. The legal definitions and procedures that guide federal agency action have real consequences in the reproduction of settler colonial management even when individual interest in being responsive to Indigenous articulations of cultural significance exists. One land agency employee explained to me that individual staff interest in broadening how culturally significant “objects” or sites are conceptualized to shift from “objects” to the scale of landscapes and more readily include landscape features like springs or certain plant species came up against structural obstacles like narrow definitions and pressure to “follow bureaucracy to the T.” Taken together, these facets of cultural resources protection show that even as the laws guiding the management of cultural resources have been important tools for protecting Indigenous heritage in a frame of settler governance, these laws enact settler memory in how they claim and reframe evidence of past Indigenous presence.

One way to accentuate the contours of how settler memory saturates settler outdoor recreationists’ and protections advocates’ understandings of archaeological materials and the legal structures that guide management of cultural resources is to consider challenges to and critiques of these dominant frames. Whereas settler viewers enjoy archaeological sites and artifacts as interesting features of the past—often spoken about as “ancient people” in a mythologizing way—Native individuals and Tribal documents articulate a “living relationship” with many aspects of land, including what are recognized as archaeological sites but also extending to include other features (e.g., springs, waterways, specific plant and animal species, topographic features, etc.). Important, too, is Native individuals’ assertion that Indigenous interaction with archaeological sites occurs through a different relational frame than settler visitation to such sites. Moreover, whereas both settler law and protections advocates’ perspectives take archaeological materials, especially those on public lands, to be part of “the Nation’s heritage” and treat the idea that the past belongs to everyone for granted, a 2020 panel of Black and Indigenous activists and scholars—Shannon Martin (Gun Lake Pottawatomii/Ojibwe), Michael Blakely, Dorothy Lippert (Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma), Rachel

Watkins, and Sonya Atalay (Anishinaabe-Ojibwe, facilitator)—named and challenged this assumption, arguing that white settlers shouldn't be calling the shots about how to study, interpret, and preserve historic and archaeological sites that center on Black, Indigenous, or other communities marginalized in white settler society (Atalay et al. 2020).

Finally, the field of archaeology has long been an upholder of settler narratives about the past, with interpretations of artifacts influenced by the worldviews and values of largely white male archaeologists and by politics and biases producing opposition to narratives that challenge settler assumptions. As archaeologist Paulette Steves (Cree-Métis) described in a 2023 webinar hosted by the Crow Canyon Archaeological Center, titled “Un-Erasing the Indigenous Paleolithic: Re-Claiming and Re-Writing the Indigenous Past of the Western Hemisphere (the Americas),” arguments supporting a longer (earlier) Indigenous presence on the North American continent than white settler archaeologists initially proposed have long been dismissed—even considered a “career killer”—despite meeting disciplinary standards of evidence. Steeves (2021) has documented at least 500 sites that meet the scientific criteria by which an area is defined as a legitimate archaeological site that date to before ~11,000 years before present, yet this evidence has been largely ignored with the still-settler-dominated field being largely resistant to arguments placing Indigenous arrival prior to that time.¹²⁸ Why such resistance to correcting the narrative in the face of archaeological evidence? There are stakes to such narratives, with the

¹²⁸ This disconnect is also seen in instances like the 2021 publications in academic and popular journals regarding preserved human footprints in White Sands National Park that suggested Indigenous presence in the Tularosa Basin (New Mexico/Texas) several thousand years before the settler archaeology narrative about Indigenous presence in North America. Demonstrating the very dynamic Steeves describes, the National Park's own narrative about the footprints reveal that a variety of footprints throughout the past 25 years were variously dated to around 18,000-22,000 years before present, yet the archaeological discipline remained resistant to adjusting or questioning the dominant narrative. Popularly, the idea that there was evidence for such longevity of Indigenous people was framed as a new finding when news stories circulated about the footprints (Bennett et al. 2021, U.S. National Park Service n.d., Zimmer 2021), with a moment of high volume sharing among settler protections advocates excited to voice support for Native perspectives. At the same time, I observed Native individuals also sharing the articles with sardonic comments like “we've been telling you this [i.e., how long Indigenous people have been here] for years” and “it's almost like we know our own history” (see also Martin [Sappony Tribe] 2021).

presentation of Indigenous people as relatively recent newcomers (e.g., ~11,000 years instead of what Steeves argues could be 130,000 years or more) supporting implicit (and sometimes explicit) legitimization of settler colonization by emphasizing Indigenous people, too, as a kind of “immigrant,” diminishing Indigenous claims to sovereignty via refusal to recognize the longevity of their presence and ties to this land.

While there is some increasing recognition of land being sacred to Indigenous people in the present, both at the level of government discourse (and some action, though still limited by existing legal definitions) and land protections organizations and advocates, the above conceptualizations of archaeological features on public lands remain prominent. The legal construction of Indigenous pasts as all Americans’ heritage, how that notion is reproduced in settler advocacy for and interactions with archaeological sites on public lands, and how Indigenous sites are more readily integrated into recreationists’ desires for wilderness experiences compared to other historic/archaeological resources all represent the mechanics of settler memory that emphasize Indigenous people as part of the past, imply that Indigenous people are “closer to” or “part of” “nature,” and mark past presence Indigenous presence as aesthetically desirable but not politically relevant in the present. In contemporary land protections discourse, especially since 2020, there are more statements about “honoring Native perspectives,” and some organizations have taken more steps to incorporate Native individuals into their programming and boards of directors. Even so, the endurance of these settler frames and of the emotional pull of particular experiences—such as coming upon that well-preserved cliff-dwelling or finding an undamaged projectile point—should not be discounted as a persisting force. As a few Native individuals working with or in settler-led conservation organizations shared with me, even with good intentions many settlers remain attached to ways of thinking and feeling they’re used to and chafe when Native individuals “speak directly” or “tell it like it is.”

White Settler Reckoning

The work of a wilderness-centered settler memory is that even as the unpeopled spaces of American public lands are a product of settler governance (Banivanua-Mar & Edmonds 2010) and thereby reflect settler colonial commitments, these “natural landscapes” (including an assortment ranging from perceived to be “pristine” to showing signs of human impact but still considered “natural” and “undeveloped”) are largely seen to be ahistorical and apolitical. These characteristics of wilderness not only obscure the violence and dispossession that brought about public lands and their preservation, but also continue to shape how individuals and organizations grapple with contemporary calls for reckoning with these legacies and their continued impact on who interacts with those spaces and how. Lovers of wild nature increasingly find themselves recipients of messages that challenge this understanding of wilderness and America’s public lands.

Although early conservation/preservation efforts were explicitly racist and emphasized white purity, most people in the present who consider themselves wilderness advocates see themselves as socially liberal and accepting of diversity. A manifestation of these combined qualities is the expression that wilderness and public lands are “for everyone.” From 2017 to 2022, however, general ideas of what it meant to support diversity and inclusion increasingly included the idea that one is “willing to learn.” Thus, when protections advocates and outdoor recreators with marginalized identities describe their racialized, classed, and gendered experiences in outdoor spaces, or when Native individuals bring attention to the settler colonial processes that have produced such spaces, the frame of liberal inclusion calls for hearing those voices. As a result, individuals, companies, and organizations must grapple with the push and pull between wilderness ideals and diversity and inclusion ideals. The “growing pains” of the field as wilderness enthusiasts, conservation advocates, and outdoor recreationists (often overlapping categories) navigate this reckoning illustrate an evolving aspect of settler engagement with Indigenous connections to public lands. They also demonstrate the

persistence of the underlying settler foundation with adaptations that seek to acknowledge past harms without significantly disrupting dominant protections advocacy desires and goals.

Calls for more attention to Indigenous connections to public lands are not themselves emergent; indeed, one only needs to consider Indigenous activism defending Tribal sovereignty to see efforts spanning the entirety of the U.S. colonial project. However, the degree to which white-dominated advocacy for public lands protections pays attention to present-day Indigenous connections has changed notably in the past ten years. One likely catalyst for that shift was the Native-led organizing that resulted in the designation of Bears Ears National Monument, the creation of which launched a beloved landscape (the Colorado Plateau) into the spotlight of public lands protections advocacy. Though pro-protections settlers' great enthusiasm for the Monument through a lens of wildlands protections at times seemed to eclipse the points made by the Tribes in the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition,¹²⁹ this overlap between white settlers' desires to protect public land and Indigenous organizing was a moment that spurred greater visibility of Native ties to public lands within settler discourse. At the 2017 Outdoor Industry Association Summit in Salt Lake City and the 2019 Conservation Lands Foundation Rendezvous,¹³⁰ glimpses of recognition of unequal access to outdoor spaces occurred in summit materials, speakers, and workshops. The extreme whiteness of outdoor recreation and

¹²⁹ Native-led organizing resulted in the 2015 formation of the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition (BEITC), a formal consortium of the Navajo Nation, Hopi Tribe, Ute Indian Tribe, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and Zuni Tribe with a structure "distinct from a typical non-profit or grassroots organization...[by virtue of being]an extension of each Tribe's sovereign authority" (Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition n.d.). The BEITC worked to protect landscapes sacred across their respective Tribes. While opponents of the Monument designation criticized President Obama's use of the Antiquities Act to establish the Monument as a "lame duck" move late in his time as president, a staff member of an organization supporting the BEITC's efforts suggested that such a late move was a result of President Obama waiting on Congress to take legislative action toward protecting these cultural landscapes. I was unable to confirm what BEITC's original ask was in terms of what mechanisms would be preferred to bring about protections of those areas. While the designation of Bears Ears National Monument was a result of organizing and political advocacy amongst the Tribes, the Monument quickly found a place in wilderness enthusiasts' existing pantheon of threatened wild landscapes. For more on the tensions between Tribal interests and "environmentalist" interests around BENM specifically see Caroline Goodman's (2016) master's thesis.

¹³⁰ By the next CLF professional gathering, the name had been changed from Rendezvous to Summit.

wilderness appreciation has been pitched as a “diversity problem,” with efforts to create more access and inclusion becoming part of corporate initiatives with such businesses as Patagonia and REI. Such efforts to build awareness and make confessional statements about the racist and colonial underpinnings of the preservation- and pleasure-focused commitments people have were at play in some pockets of public lands discourse between 2017 and 2019 but skyrocketed in 2020 in response to political organizing after the police killing of George Floyd. In the summer months of 2020, conservation/preservation nonprofits ranging from small, geographically-specific organizations (e.g., Grand Staircase Escalante Partners) to large, national-level organizations (e.g., Sierra Club) made public statements of support about current events (the protests and associated organizing) and began also speaking to issues of race within conservation and preservation, including acknowledgement of racist and colonial histories in a confessional genre.

This confessional genre might itself be understood as a mode of settler memory. The discursive role of naming past harms is not without meaning, but with the explosion of settler reckoning in the public lands advocacy realm after 2020, the naming of the “actual history” of public lands didn’t seem to equate to a major rethinking of what goals individuals and organizations might pursue in their advocacy. There were more calls for “inclusion of Native perspectives” and some uptake of long-standing Indigenous critiques of Tribal consultation, but the settler-underpinnings of public lands decisions making processes remained largely in place, and the dominant pro-protections white settler desire for wilderness experiences kept its emotional valence. Where colonization is recognized as a “mistake” or “sin,” the discursive genre of apology often comes into play (e.g., Bruyneel 2021, xv, 139, 170-171). The notion of apology for the past mistakes of colonialism is itself a mode of settler memory that implies settler colonialism is “a thing of the past” while demonstrating its continuation in the present.¹³¹

¹³¹ For instance, in examining the instance of the Obama administration’s use of the code name Geronimo for enemy combatant Osama Bin Laden, Bruyneel (2016) argues that requests to the White House for an “apology” for

Particularly since 2020, acknowledgement of the past violence and dispossession that brought about contemporary public lands took on a feel of a confessional speech act, which Tuck and Yang (2012) have written is a type of “move to settler innocence.” An example of how such admissions appeared in the land protections space is the “public lands curriculum” produced by The Wilderness Society that seeks to “tell a more authentic and complete story of public lands.” With a call for learners to “know the past, change the future,” this set of materials was created in response to white settler reckoning in 2020 (and has been revised and updated a few times since) and seeks to acknowledge the settler colonialism and racial exclusion in American preservation and conservation history. While it’s beyond the scope of this project to examine the ways this curriculum has been used, the narrative presented in the modules of the curriculum stand as an example of the confessional mode in which simply naming past harms is assumed to be the righting of wrongs, with the underlying premises about public lands, wilderness preservation, and “all Americans” claim to it remaining intact. Certainly not all users of this curriculum will end there, but the curriculum’s narrative structure exemplifies a common approach by well-meaning protections advocates. Among those engaging in settler confession, I encountered attitudes that could be characterized as a sense of ‘yes, those were all bad things, and what’s done is done’—a desire to acknowledge without truly giving up on the desire for wilderness, even as such acknowledgments implicitly or explicitly reveal the artificiality of

using the name Geronimo to label an enemy combatant risk “reproducing a politics of recognition and multicultural discourse or diagnosing it as a sign of collective amnesia, as if only people knew all the ‘facts’ of history things would be fine, or better” (363). Instead, he follows the argument of Indigenous activists and scholars Winona LaDuke (Ojibwe) and Suzan Harjo (Cheyenne and Hodulgee Muscogee) who deem the instance of Codename Geronimo of a continuation of a posture of warfare against Indigenous people (see also footnote 101 in this chapter). Thus, the use of the name is not “an absence of respect or sensitivity for Indigenous people, but [rather] is more evidence of the active presence of settler colonial assemblage in the specific form of US liberal colonialism” (Bruyneel 2016, 362). Similarly, the U.S. government has tried to enact resolution through formal apologies for past harms and in some judicial system rulings, economic compensation to Tribal nations for seizure of unceded territory. The Great Sioux Nation’s (Oceti Sakowin) refusal to accept a settlement payment in lieu of returning unceded territory in the Black Hills taken by the U.S. government demonstrates a refusal to accept the colonial framing of land as a “fungible commodity” and stands as a challenge to both the legitimacy of the settler state and the implication that a financial exchange would “resolve” the past wrong of land seizure (Bruyneel 2021, 70)

wilderness to those committed to it. In a sense such artificiality was already visible—such as in how Wilderness Quality Inventories themselves disrupt the idea that wilderness spaces are what remains of “never-touched” landscapes as they use assessments of “the appearance of” untouchedness, even with known histories of human impact. Ultimately, like the practice of “land acknowledgements”—a practice that Indigenous individuals have variously argued in favor of or in critique of, along with articulating distinctions between merely “performative” land acknowledgements and more meaningful engagements¹³²—naming the racist and anti-Indigenous origins of American public lands doesn’t always come with action to disrupt or rechart a pathway forward.¹³³

Another variable shaping the reception of assertions about the racial and settler colonial underpinnings of wilderness preservation is the prevailing construction of wilderness as apolitical—that sojourns to wild spaces largely step *out* of societal issues like racism and inequality. Over the past 6 years, land acknowledgements have become commonplace and conservation organizations have increased their programming related to diversity, equity, and inclusion and Native connections to public lands, but not everyone is in agreement. Some staff

¹³² There is much more to be said about land acknowledgements in relation to reproductions of and efforts to disrupt settler memory and about the varied perspectives Indigenous individuals and Tribal representatives have on this matter, but such a discussion is beyond the scope of this document.

¹³³ Efforts to change national park portrayals existed before 2020, typically Indigenous-led, such as Blackfeet Nation members seeking to develop Indigenous-centered tours of Glacier National Park (Weber 2019). Though less a focus of my examination here, efforts (primarily Indigenous-led) to change how histories are told within land agency interpretive displays have been a site of action with some success, albeit slowed by the plodding speed of federal agency bureaucracy. Beyond these practices of representation, there have been multiple successes in Tribal efforts to gain a position of co-management of public lands, such as with Bears Ears National Monument, or management of public lands or certain species, such as turning management of the National Bison Range (located in the Flathead Indian Reservation in Montana) over to the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. My focus on the persistence of desire for wilderness in white settler engagements with public land debates is not meant to imply that there haven’t been changes in land management coming out of ongoing resistance to and challenging of the default settler state. Instead, my point is to demonstrate how an affective pull toward a settler notion of wilderness and wild landscapes shapes public lands discourse, especially white settler protections advocates. The fact that white wilderness enthusiasts are often unaware of the ongoing organizing and activism led by and centering Indigenous interests and is paid little attention when a prospective land use decision doesn’t overlap with landscapes that strike the sublime (see conclusion chapter) hints at the lasting power of the pull toward “wilderness experiences.”

and board members across organizations supporting public lands, conservation, and/or wilderness preservation didn't agree that such matters are related to the work of the organization, for example expressing concerns of "mission creep"—that addressing such issues in the context of protecting natural landscapes risks pursuing goals that are not truly connected to an organization's *raison d'être*. Others wanted the trappings of organizational moves toward diversity, equity, and inclusion—with seemingly genuine intentions—but chafed against calls for more drastic reckoning and restructuring. Incorporating awareness of exclusion and inequality in relation to public lands and wilderness preservation produced a kind of friction between the language about natural landscapes that organizations had been using and the narratives laying bare white settler preservation/conservation histories. The result was a flurry of chaotic, sometimes contradictory, messaging that seems to have peaked in the latter half of 2020.

Constituents of these types of organizations had varying responses to this type of messaging. For some, the notion of liberal inclusion won over, expressed as appreciation for the new types of messaging and programming organizations were providing (and, at times, criticism when messaging or programming seemed unaware of racial and colonial dynamics). It was not uncommon, however, for the matter of Native connections to public lands to be lumped together with more general ideas of diversity and inclusion in public land use and decision-making that skirted questions of Indigenous sovereignty. Additionally, while there was enthusiasm for "honoring Native perspectives," what that meant in practice was ambiguous among white settler protections advocates—not just with regard to the spectrum of action from verbal recognition of Indigenous ties to actual change in how land decisions are made, but also with regard to whether "honoring Native perspectives" included Native perspectives that weren't focused on preservation/conservation goals. Some settler protections advocates found a kind of middle ground, trying to support these new stances without "corrective histories" spurring deconstruction of the cherished concept of wilderness. Still others pushed back, for instance defending John Muir in response to The Sierra Club's article "Pulling Down Our Monuments,"

which discussed Muir's attitudes toward non-white people, both Native and non-Native, as well as the social and political networks in which he lived (Brune 2020).¹³⁴

Amongst increases in messaging and organization/company DEIJ initiatives, my observations working in the conservation nonprofit field and descriptions from other individuals putting energy and expertise into trying to change the outdoor industry (e.g., Nelson 2021) demonstrate that, like many other settings in which "DEI" or "DEIJ" has become prominent, there is often openness to "low-hanging fruit" but resistance to more robust changes, such as those that require rethinking one's own relationship with and ideas of wild nature. As one outdoors diversity advocate, C.J. Goulding, described, "[Outdoor] Companies place a priority on the marketing of diversity, and not the cultural or systemic changes that need to happen in order for that change to be sustainable...they are more willing to repaint the house—marketing, influencers, surface-level workshops, statements—than repair the foundation" (quoted in Nelson 2021).

Conservation/preservation-focused nonprofits may have different goals and organizational models than outdoor recreation companies, but I would argue Goulding's critique applies to both realms. Even as settler-led organizations seek to revise how they speak about wild landscapes and public lands to "honor Native perspectives," these organizations seem to be balancing the tension between love for wilderness and critiques of wilderness, as many

¹³⁴ Beyond the ethnographic space in which I was working and engaging with individuals and organizations, additional pushback to calls for reckoning further blurred distinctions between matters of Indigenous sovereignty and general liberal inclusion. In response to people with marginalized identities sharing some of their experiences using public lands, especially in online settings where people aren't speaking face-to-face, there are regularly a handful of comments (the proportion of the total comments varying depending on the context) in which white outdoor recreators and protections advocates express skepticism of those narrations through such assertions like "I've never seen anyone be anything other than welcoming," implying discrimination is not likely to be happening because they haven't observed (explicit, overt) instances of it. Another response to some messaging about diversity, equity, and inclusion is the exasperation about how everybody is "mak[ing] everything about race," a statement that is not uncommon to hear from those on the political right across many discursive contexts (media, education, etc.). I take such comments to be their own genre of settler disavowal that center presentism and the generalization of personal experience to deny the relevance of settler legacies and deny the legitimacy of others' present-day experiences.

would-be donors still hold a deep emotional connection to the idea of wilderness. Though there have been some shifts toward supporting Indigenous interests and putting settler organizational resources toward Indigenous-led initiatives, these types of organizations seem to attempt a kind of “both, and” of supporting (some) Indigenous interests while continuing to pursue land protections through the lens of desiring wilderness, thus limiting the extent to which the settler memory embedded in the concept of wilderness might be dislodged from white settler protections discourse.

Desirable Governance

Embedded in each of the visions of place that guide dominant anti- and pro-protections narratives are ideas of what kind of governance is desirable. The agrarian heritage place prioritizes localism and direct interaction with the land, while the wilderness place relies on a notion of national democracy. These contrasting ideas about how public lands decisions should be made not only highlight one of the areas in which opponents stand on mismatched ground (i.e., arguing over land use while holding different ideas about the structure of the decision-making process itself), but also exhibit how, despite being “foundationally relevant” to narrations of place, Indigenous people are not cast as “politically relevant” in the present (Bruyneel 2021, 93). Both of these two images of desirable governance function as settler memory that disavows Indigenous claims.

Localism

The agrarian heritage sense of place embraces a perspective of localism with the idea that good governance of public lands comes in the form of prioritizing what those living close to the land want. This idea does connect to the political ideology of “county supremacy” that takes the county to be the most legitimate level of government,¹³⁵ but I take rhetoric about county

¹³⁵ The idea of county supremacy asserts that the county level is the most legitimate form of government. Although it’s not always clear in these arguments why the unit of the county is more correct than the state level or city level, it is in blatant opposition to the simultaneous detachedness and overbearingness of the federal government (impersonal due to people making decisions being “far away” and overbearing as in making decisions

supremacy to be a specific expression of a more general desire for localism that morphs into various forms depending on the political-legal environment. Within the public lands discursive space, prioritizing local views is a persistent, consistent component of anti-protections arguments. This localism seems linked to the goal of preserving a particular kind of rural, conservative place with (settler) agrarian heritage, albeit in a circular manner: because particular values, relations, economic activity, and governance are seen to be core features of this place, alignment with or desire for those features is part of how “locals” are defined, and preference for localism within anti-protections narratives relies on that definition of local aligning with agrarian heritage ideals. In practice, the political actions taken don’t necessarily adhere strictly to a purist notion of localism, instead utilizing whatever political ideologies and tools may help accomplish the preservation of the idealized conservative agrarian heritage sense of place. Thus, the ideology of county supremacy is typically useful but most use-restrictions opponents are open to whatever tools help bring about alignment with the other features of the place they seek to “preserve.”

One version of this is anti-use-restriction advocates generally persistent support for the State of Utah’s various legal battles with the federal government seeking to gain more control (management or ownership) over what are currently federal public lands. Additionally, what

that affect the lives of people from afar). A more specific articulation of a justification for why the county level is legitimate is Ammon Bundy’s assertion that a county sheriff is the only legitimate form of law enforcement because it is the only elected law enforcement position (and the only elected representative that is given law enforcement power), which he contrasted with “no constitutional authority for federal, state, or city police.” (Indeed, it is Bundy’s opposition to city police that led him to express a statement of support for the Black Lives Matter movement in 2016, even as his politics put him in close proximity to far-right white supremacist groups.) At his presentation in Kanab, Ammon Bundy argued that the elected nature of the sheriff’s position produced a “check” against abuses of power, creating “accountability from the people” by not getting re-elected if the sheriff gets out of line. Insisting there is no need for law enforcement at any other level, he reassured the audience that if there was a need, “the sheriff can deputize anybody in the county; there is no need for any other kind of standing army.” Such “reassurance” was bone-chilling to me as the image of the sheriff deputizing others—authorizing individuals to wield violence over others—reminded of the slave-hunting origins of police/sheriffs (Brucato 2020, Spruill 2016). As I sat in that crowd, I felt like this idea as a tool to reinforce white supremacist, cis-heteropatriarchal, settler societal norms could very well be what made this idea “reassuring” to those in the audience.

rhetoric is used and stances taken by the State of Utah and individuals varies depending on the political environment. For example, conservatives' energy around the idea of "land transfer" (transferring federal public lands to state government, county government, and/or private ownership) grew during a conservation-friendly Obama administration but then quieted down with the Trump administration's public lands actions falling in alignment with the types of land use seen as desirable by those claiming "local interests" should be more heavily weighted. More recently, discourse and litigious efforts, such as lawsuits filed by the State of Utah,¹³⁶ have returned to the idea of removing public lands from federal ownership and management during a presidential administration more favorable to conservation efforts. Thus, while much of the discourse arguing for fewer use restrictions incorporates anti-federal language—features that support the linking up of anti-use-restrictions efforts with other (less explicitly public lands focused) far-right political movements—the more consistent thread is less about a principle of "who owns the land" and more about who should have a say. And if taken one step further, the arguments about "who should have a say" are premised on the assumption that local views inevitably align with the maintenance of agrarian heritage qualities of place.

For much of the time I have been engaged in this research, characterizing use-restrictions opponents as anti-federal patriots (people highly patriotic and invested in the idea of the United States of America but staunchly opposed to the federal government) has felt applicable, yet watching attitudes and expressions shift over changing administrations reveals that anti-federal discourse is just one tool used to protect a particular vision of place. When federal actions counter the image of the agrarian heritage place, such actions are declared "federal overreach," but when federal actions are sufficiently aligned with features of the agrarian place—what kinds of land uses are favored and the extent to which "local control"

¹³⁶ For instance, the State of Utah filed a lawsuit challenging the restoration of the boundaries of GSENM and BENM proclaimed by President Biden in October 2021 and then in the summer of 2024 filed a lawsuit challenging the indefinite retention of public lands as federal property that is essentially a pro-lands-transfer effort.

appears to be valued—the fact that the federal government owns and manages the land shifts out of the spotlight.¹³⁷ If the federal agencies “cooperate” (in the words of one local official)—which in practice means deferring to county commissioners and following the desires of “locals” (as defined in the boundary work described in the previous chapter)—the “federal” aspect of federal public lands is not a major problem.

Use-restrictions opponents seek to justify the argument for privileging local voices with the reasoning that people who are in physical proximity to the land should have the greatest say. One flavor of this justification compares residence to visitation, asserting that residence near these undeveloped landscapes counts more or means more than “tourists,” who may use public lands but are mere visitors, and argues that land decisions should reflect that (whether by genuine local control such as via land transfer or by the federal government simply weighting local perspectives more). Another flavor of this argument emphasizes that those living in the area interact with the land more and, thus, should have more of a say in what happens to the land. When pushed by other residents who hold different positions toward public lands management, the argument about a multi-generational relationship to the location and the land is likely to be amplified.

The reliance on such justifications amidst the history of settler displacement and dispossession of Indigenous people—people already residing in the area and interacting in with the land—shows how the justifications embedded in a localism claim logic essentially require ignoring, disavowing, and/or recasting Indigeneity and settler colonialism past and present. The

¹³⁷ This is not to say anti-use-restriction advocates don’t take issue with or point out detriments of federal ownership. For instance, one argument those committed to the agrarian heritage place make is that such large portions of federal land in a county have a negative impact due to fewer property taxes collected (although the federal program PILT—Payment in Lieu of Taxes—is meant to mitigate such effects, see footnote 216 in chapter 4). It is notable, however, that the rise and fall of the volume on this particular argument varies in relation to alignment with or contrast to the desirable features of place, with anti-federal arguments activated when federal actions misalign with the agrarian heritage place and federal actions/collaborations treated as largely unremarkable if neutral or favorable to that sense of place.

settler memory at work in this localism argument obscures how contemporary Indigenous people also live nearby, interact with the land, and have done so multi-generationally—people who meet the reasoning on which localism arguments are built but whose interests are not a part of what these vocal use-restrictions opponents argue for when they call for local control or for privileging local interests. The way anti-use-restriction rhetoric about localism conveniently excludes Indigenous people who are also “locals” is at play around GSENM and is even more dramatically apparent when one expands the scope to the state level. A stark example of the implied terms and conditions of who this argument really seeks to declare about who should have a say is around Bears Ears National Monument in southwest Utah, where, for instance, around 50% of San Juan County’s residents are Native, over 95% of which are Diné/Navajo (around 43% of residents are white, with the most of the remainder being Hispanic or Latino; U.S. Census Bureau 2020) but have rarely been represented as such in county government due to longstanding Native disenfranchisement. Rhetoric about privileging local voices—meaning local settler voices—continues to be a part of opposition discourse toward Bears Ears, specifically, and national monuments, generally, in Utah, even amidst political efforts to boost Native voter enrollment and challenge gerrymandered districting¹³⁸ that have forced the sheer volume of Native residents into settler vision and made explicit that white settler “locals” are not the only people who meet the criteria embedded in this claim logic. “Localism” claims backed up by justifications of pioneer heritage and current geographic proximity center on the argument that those who have relations to the physical land should have their desires prioritized, while ignoring that Indigenous people in the present also have relations to the land in question and also have ancestors with prior claims and connections, extending, in fact, much further than the

¹³⁸ These efforts resulted in the first ever Native-majority San Juan county commission, elected in 2018 and sworn in in early 2019. Though that majority was lost in 2022, persistent efforts to address historical districting patterns that enabled white voter blocs to bring about over-representation in local and county government have continued, with a notable step forward with judicial approval of redistricting in 2023 that results in 2 of 5 county districts being majority Native instead of the previous singular majority-Native district (Fisher 2024).

settlers' own ancestors—a detail that must be omitted when relying heavily on the “length of time” criteria to make a claim about who should have a say. Because settler memory makes ongoing settler colonial processes opaque, those appealing to this land relation logic are rarely put in a position of having to argue why their claim is legitimate over Indigenous claims. Furthermore, such narratives elide the settler processes that brought about the current “dominant” (by number and by degree of cultural and political power) perspectives in the region. The land relation argument (often appealing to pioneer heritage) blends into the geographical proximity argument (asserting that those who interact with the land have the strongest claim), making it even easier to ignore claims of those who have been physically displaced. Taken altogether, these examples illustrate how the localism logic shields the explicitly settler interests of the arguments made by this dominant anti-use-restriction position.

National Democracy

Proponents of public lands protections are typically critical of such emphasis on privileging local interests, being more likely to consider public lands decisions made in such a way as evidence of government corruption and bias. Protections advocates instead utilize an image of a national democracy and the concept of majority rule in their vision of rightful governance of public lands. In individual and organizational assertions about what actions the federal government should take regarding a land decision, it is common to point to poll or survey data to assert a general statement like “the majority of Americans support protecting America’s public lands” or to declare majority support for a particular issue, such polls conducted during the 2017 monument review. Additionally, data collected through public comment periods may also be used in this way when it is publicly available. Protections advocates take the notion of majority rule as a given in this claims logic when they point to these percentages to assert that preservation- and conservation-centered management approaches should be prioritized and to critique actions taken that appear to favor “local interests” or corporate interests.

The national democracy claim logic being central to protections-focused arguments

hinges on the assumption that what the “majority” of Americans want is pro-protections. A premise embedded in such chants and signs as “Keep public lands in public hands”—a phrase popular in protections advocacy spaces since at least 2017, though possibly originating out of earlier opposition to Land Transfer efforts—is that the majority of “the public” supports preservation and conservation initiatives. Just as the localism claims logic is, in practice, only applied in ways that support actions that are aligned with the image of a conservative agrarian place, the notion of majority rule in a national democracy is functional for protections advocates when it appears to align with the preservation of the image of southern Utah’s wilderness place. These two claims logics don’t offer precise parallels—for example, residents who support public lands protections have voiced, “hey, I’m a local too,” spurring responses that more readily make visible the underlying place commitments behind anti-protections localism arguments, while the question of how committed protections advocates would remain to majority rule if polls about Americans’ attitudes toward public lands suggested that desire for protecting wild spaces *wasn’t* the majority position remains largely a hypothetical. The data to which protections advocates turn, being in the form of surveys and polls, in theory allow this assumption to be a presumption—a conclusion drawn based on available data—but I nonetheless see the influence of place commitments in how the details of how such statistics are produced are paid little attention (a practice that isn’t necessarily unique to protections advocates but rather foreshadows the ways that place commitments can influence interactions with data, as discussed in chapter 4). It may be that, indeed, a majority of Americans do support public lands protections. However, those utilizing this claims logic conveniently don’t focus on the dynamics shaping the statistics they often cite—such as the surveys conducted by pro-protections organizations, such as The Wilderness Society, in which data collection is sometimes not a random sample but rather a survey shared in settings that would select for people who support land protections. Like any public input portion of governance, who participates in public comment periods in public lands is shaped by who is motivated and able to engage, which is

shaped by pro-protections organizations' efforts to encourage their constituents to take part, for instance through social media campaigns encouraging the submission of public comment, creating forms with comment templates for individuals to submit, and educating constituents on how to write a "substantive" comment that will be more likely to be treated as meaningful (compared to a template) when considered by federal staff.¹³⁹ This idea that the majority of Americans definitively support the positions favored among fervent protections advocates also relies on an implicit assumption not wholly dissimilar from the political right's rhetoric of "speaking for the silent majority."¹⁴⁰ The surety and weight with which adamant protections advocates spoke to me about what "the majority of Americans want" citing data with relatively small sample sizes drawn from sources likely to be shaped by protections advocacy organizing shows how data aligned with an individual's desires can readily be taken up with this claims logic, even as there may be many Americans who simply don't have a strong feelings either way about public lands management, whether because of differing values regarding undeveloped landscapes or because they have other more pressing political matters to attend to.

These uses of data aside, the national democracy and majority rule features of protections advocates' image of desirable or rightful governance of public lands are another variety of settler memory. Like in the discussion of archaeology above, illustrating how Indigenous cultural resources are cast as part of a national heritage belonging to everyone, wilderness itself has been cast—historically and in the expressions of contemporary protections advocates—as a form of national heritage. This idea of preserving "untouched" lands seen to

¹³⁹ Generic template submissions are typically weighed less heavily than substantive original comments as I learned when volunteering for a research firm tasked with classifying over a million comments submitted during the 2017 national monument review.

¹⁴⁰ The notion of "the Silent Majority," though not exclusive to describing conservative perspectives, was put forth in Nixon-era Republicanism (Lowndes 2016) and popularized through such media as Rush Limbaugh and Fox News. Protections advocates attributed language of the silent majority to local county commissioners when describing past and present dynamics, asserting that when they personally spoke with the commissioners about why the commission voted opposite of the majority of perspectives presented in a public hearing, a commissioner replied that he spoke for the silent majority.

have a distinct wildness to them was lifted up as a thread of nationalism in the early decades of the United States as an independent nation, highlighting ruggedness and wildness—especially the landscapes of “the West”—as a unique feature of the United States distinguishable from more orderly, “tame” landscapes of European countries (Nash [1967] 2001; Opie 1998).¹⁴¹

For the landscape to serve as an answer in the search for a sense of national tradition and pride, parts of the natural world had to be transformed into cultural heritage, even as a key point of the idea of wilderness was that it was something unsullied by cultural influences. Thomas Patin (2004) describes how this transformation occurs through verbal, pictorial, museological rhetoric, arguing that “[national] parks are essentially museological institutions, not because they preserve and conserve, but because they employ many of the techniques of display, exhibition, and presentation that have been used by museums to organize and regulate the vision of visitors” (41). Such tactics found in literature, landscape painting conventions, and the designs shaping visitor experience of national parks carry out the “dreamwork of imperialism” (Mitchell 2002; Patin 2004, 46). Landscape architects hired at national parks and national monuments continue to manage “viewsapes”/“viewsheds” (variations on landscape and watershed, respectively) to maintain the aesthetic qualities associated with the wild

¹⁴¹ Environmental historian Alfred Runte ([1997] 2010) describes the discourse amongst political leaders, writers, and artists seeking to articulate American nationalism through landscape. Against criticism about America’s historical and cultural lack—“‘Who reads an American book? Or goes to an American play? Or looks at an American picture or statue?’ asked British clergyman and critic Sydney Smith in 1820”—were attempts to lean into scenery as a cultural asset and to assert a visual supremacy of the sublime found in America’s landscapes (14). A young United States comprising only the eastern seaboard, however, insufficiently bolstered this claim to scenic nationalism; few were convinced that these natural landscapes alone were superior to European geography, driving a turn toward not only landscape features seen as the most majestic but also landscapes perceived to be unmarred by cultural influences that would offer a kind of religious purity in contrast to “Europe’s altered landscapes [that], however, historic, revealed only the muddled word of God” (Runte [1997] 2010, 16). Thus “the West” and the nation’s westward expansion was an important component of this search for what would make the U.S. “stand out” from Europe. Runte also argues that land during westward expansion entering into the “public domain” was an important piece of how such spaces came to be preserved and marked as part of national identity. That the land was government land—even if, initially, only meant to be temporarily—and wasn’t open to sale and settlement until it was “cleared of Indian title” and had been officially surveyed helped preserve the West’s “wildness.” Even with disposal of lands to private settlement, Romantic conceptions of wilderness meshed well with remaining land held in the public domain as the most dramatic scenery was, in its ruggedness and difficulty to access, less desirable for settlement.

landscapes said to be part of a national cultural heritage.

This connection of majestic and sublime landscapes to a kind of national identity remains prevalent today. Whereas the image of existing national parks as national icons goes largely uncontested by settlers of all political persuasions, it tends to be only protections advocates who emphasize a specifically *national* cultural heritage to advocate for the preservation of other undeveloped public lands, especially landscapes with wilderness aesthetics. This notion of wild landscapes as “all Americans’ lands” and a “national treasure” has been a key idea in protections advocacy discourse, especially in relation to the 2017 monument review, consequent monument boundary reduction, and later 2021 boundary restoration. During the 2017 monument review, many public comments made by individuals and organizations/associations (e.g., American Association for the Advancement of Science, etc.) opposing the review and impending reductions utilized language of wild public lands as national natural and cultural heritage. Such a discursive tactic may have been, for some, an existing conceptualization and, for others, a result of guidance from protections-focused nonprofits.¹⁴²

¹⁴² Some examples of what comment coaching for constituents looks like include the organization sharing a few bullet points about recommended talking points, offering a class/webinar on how to write effective public comments (utilizing knowledge about how comments are recorded and categorized by agency staff), and offering full letter templates. However, comments submitted by different people using the same text (e.g., a template from an organization) are counted differently than those that appear to be unique, with it being rumored that government staff may be classifying such templates as only 1 comment regardless of how many submissions of a single template was made. The ways form letters and petition signatures are counted impact what story is told with public comment data. During the 2017 monument review, The Wilderness Society contracted Key Log Economics to analyze the comments submitted to the Department of the Interior (all publicly available on Regulations.gov). This firm utilized crowdsource volunteers—primarily recruited through pro-protections organizations, via snowball recruitment spreading from The Wilderness Society to other protections-focused organizations—to classify submitted comments (the 1.3 million comments submitted via regulations.gov by the end of the official comment period; by August 2017, the total reached 2.8 million) with regard to whether they mentioned specific Monuments or specific issues, and rating the degree of support or opposition to the executive order spurring the review (using [this form](#), live link as of September 2022). They used these classifications to train and test a machine learning algorithm, which was then used to review the full 1.3 million comments received by the end of the comment period (Wang et al. 2017; by the time of this report, an additional 1.5 million comments had been submitted that were not included in their analysis). Of the comments included in this “1.3 million” count, 43% were in the form of petitions or bundles (752 petitions/bundles totaling 562,054 “comments”); the remaining 57% of comments were either unique comments or single copies of form letters. Counting each signature on petitions and all form letters as separate comments, Key-Log Economics reported that 99.2% of comments opposed the executive order to review the monuments (i.e., supported the monuments staying as is; they also

This notion of particular public lands (i.e., cherished for having certain natural, wild qualities) being a specifically *national* treasure is called upon in multiple ways to make public lands claims.

The positioning of public lands as “all Americans’ lands” and a “national treasure” is part of a claims logic that asserts public lands should be managed (between the lines: protected) for *all*, not just those who live near to and/or interact often with the lands in question. This construction readily meshes with commonly held ideas about wilderness as a sojourn space for an imagined “anyone.” Proximity to these lands by virtues of local residence—featured in localism arguments—hold little sway over those who are motivated by sublime wilderness when the proper relation of humans to wild spaces is seen as one of visitation, not residence or development. Furthermore, part of the purported power and appeal of wild spaces is that they are an oasis for *anyone*—that anyone (in theory) can access these lands and that who you are (in theory) matters less when you are in the setting of wild nature. It is an idea that anyone can visit and, in the words of one protections advocate, “have the same experience.” With the

note the machine learning algorithm was unable to separately identify neutral comments); of the comments reviewed by humans, 93% opposed the executive order, 5.5% supported, and 1.2% were classified as neutral. Of Utah-based respondents (779), 90.9% were classified as opposing the Executive Order—a data point much leveraged by pro-monument groups to try to best Utah state government with their own argument (about Utah residents having the most say). The data are presented with little attention to what factors might be shaping who submitted public comments to the DOI or to how the crowdsourced comment-classifying volunteers could potentially influence the results by virtue of being drawn from pro-wilderness/protections networks. Public comment remains an important component of an otherwise opaque and bureaucratic decision-making procedure. However, how is such public input to be understood when many factors shape who submits comments? From issues of whether a public comment period gets advertised—or, perhaps more significantly, *who* is enrolled in commenting via encouragement from organizations—whether information about the decision is available in language(s) accessible to those who might have an opinion, and whether an individual has time to write comments, knows how to use the online portal or where to mail comments, etc., there is little to suggest that, in aggregate, the public comments for any given issue/decision are “representative of” a broader American public. The point isn’t that we can know for sure that a more complete and accurate polling of people’s views would tell a different story, but rather that a process very much shaped by whether people are aware a decision is under consideration and a comment period is happening, whether they have the capacity to comment, and so on yet the collective trends of such comments are used to justify positions and decisions. In the wake of the Key-Log Economics analysis of monument review comments, protections advocates were thrilled to be able to say “99% of Americans support...,” which in turn fueled the narrative about how the Trump administration’s action to reduce monument boundaries was ignoring the voice of “the American public.”

picturesque and sublime features of the Colorado Plateau, a veritable poster child of what protections advocates mean when they declare public lands to be America's national treasures, this claims logic asserts that one's geographical proximity isn't a central factor determining whether an individual would be expected to have an investment in—and whether they should “have a say” in—how the land is managed. Certainly, some people who advocate for preservation also live in the region—many having been motivated to move to the area to be closer to their beloved, unpeopled landscapes—but the real and potential affective ties of people from any geographical location are considered valid in the framing of “all Americans' lands.”

A variation on the language of public lands as a “national treasure” is protections advocates' use of the phrase “America's best idea” to describe public lands, a phrase drawn from a 1983 statement by Wallace Stegner—a writer much cherished by wilderness advocates—who wrote, “National parks are the best idea we ever had. Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, they reflect us at our best rather than our worst.” Stegner's assertion that national parks “reflect us at our best” and are “absolutely democratic” requires an image of the past that doesn't acknowledge Indigenous removal to create parks and how such forced removal (and other actions like restricting hunting and other traditional practices within national park boundaries) was far from “democratic.”¹⁴³ The way that those drawn to the wilderness

¹⁴³ Stegner's statement also feels particularly of a white settler vision in its use of a superlative (“America's *best* idea”) to describe the setting aside of national parks as undeveloped recreational spaces. Alan Spears (2016), a Black American working for the National Parks Conservation Association, finds positioning land preservation in such a way peculiar, given the racist, sexist history of the United States—critiquing the phrase not just for its erasure of dispossession required to create such parks but in suggesting the creation of national parks is a greater achievement than political efforts to expand various human rights and political rights beyond land-owning white men. In an article that first appeared on a Trail Posse website (an organization focused on people of color in relation to public lands) and later was published in High Country news, Spears writes of the strangeness—essentially, the whiteness—of the “America's best idea” phrase, pointing out that there are many other governmental actions that many people might consider more important than the creation of National Parks. He argues that “the Emancipation Proclamation; the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution; the Voting Rights Act of 1964, and Civil Rights Act of 1965...all occupy a higher place than our national parks in the order of best ideas.” He goes on to list other legal landmarks of likely interest and value to folks holding other marginalized identities and argues that describing national parks as America's best idea is even damaging to the

place celebrate public lands and preserved places like national parks and wilderness areas through their own kind of nationalism—one that disavows the colonial violence that brought about public lands—serves as an example of Bruyneel’s (2016, 2021) point that liberal democracy and settler colonialism are not mutually exclusive. To protections advocates, the idea that public lands management guided by a “majority rules” national democracy is the right kind of governance for this land appeals to liberal statism and erases Indigenous interests as unique claims, i.e., as related to Tribal sovereignty. With this notion of desirable governance in mind, the level of “honoring Native perspectives” that many white protections advocates—especially those who experienced adolescence and young adulthood during the environmental movements of the 1960s and 70s—are comfortable with are more likely to perpetuate “neco-Indigeneity”: they may acknowledge Native connections to public lands but erase contemporary Indigenous people and groups as political agents and generally sidestep the truth that today’s public lands aren’t the only lands seized to build a settler nation.

Constructions of the Public and Language of Ownership

Each of these visions of ideal or appropriate governance of public lands include implied images of who makes up “the public” (or relevant public) and of how that public is configured in relation to each other and to land. Both of these notions of the public play a part in enacting settler memory. The sense of the public embedded in the agrarian heritage place might be characterized as a populist vision. Although in practice, those seeking to protect their idealized agrarian heritage place span a wide range of socioeconomic statuses, degrees of political power, and willingness to use governmental tools to accomplish what they want, the populist image of regular people—often with implications of proximity to rurality and manual labor—versus “the elite” is discursively powerful. Though typically very patriotic, use-restrictions

_____ parks themselves, as it “may be preventing us from creating and sustaining the diverse constituency our national parks need to survive and thrive in their second century” (Spears 2016).

opponents' vision of the public that is relevant to public lands consists of people actively using the land. Rather than embracing a nation-scale image of the public, use-restrictions opponents are more likely to paint an image that claims a kind of ownership even while remaining open to an image of shared public use.

While there are some anti-protections arguments centered on land transfer to state or private ownership, many iterations of desirable public lands management for those opposed to use restrictions aren't necessarily anti-public. Instead, they lean into an image of multiple use, suggesting that different land users can peacefully coexist. Such an image was described by Ammon Bundy during his presentation to Kanab residents in 2021: "We need to transfer these lands and resources back over to the situations we were in where the ranchers were using the grass, the miners were using the minerals, and the rest of us are camping, hiking, using it."¹⁴⁴ In speaking rhetorically to opponents—those who seek land protections—with the declaration "no one is trying to take the beauty of getting out there and camping," his image of public land use positions the stance of allowing many uses and not limiting uses as reasonable and, in a sense, community-minded in its orientation toward people only claiming what they need. In conversing with those expressing anti-use-restrictions and/or anti-federal threads, I regularly encountered this sentiment that protections advocates are the ones being "unreasonable" in their view that certain land uses (i.e., grazing, mining) prevent their own ability to recreate on the land.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Such an articulation leads to a muddling of meaning. While the phrase "keep public lands in public hands" is associated with land protections advocacy in opposition to arguments put forth by people like Ammon Bundy, the images of desirable land use and management presented in his talk in Kanab were not anti-public, per se, but anti-regulation. Consequently, when a sign with that slogan was held by a protections advocate who attended the Bundy presentation, obscuring their identity by wearing an inflatable t-rex costume, some attendees later expressed that they thought the sign was in support of Bundy's message—implying an image of "public" that is opposite to, rather than synonymous with, the government.

¹⁴⁵ The logic embedded in the peaceful image of multiple use painted by Ammon Bundy and articulated in various ways by other anti-use-restriction voices is one that disavows the interconnections between different domains—for instance, it ignores or dismisses how an industry project might impact local water sources, how livestock grazing might impact erosion, native species, and water quality, and so on. This disavowal of such interconnectedness helps support action based on particular values or principles—such as "business freedom" and a minimally regulating government (see chapter 4)—and takes part in claiming qualities of reasonableness, public-

Though not all anti-protections arguments explicitly leverage the specific narrative Ammon Bundy has used to frame his position and the political movement he is cultivating, the way that his family's use of land in the American West, and how it relates to his anger about public lands management in the present, offers an illustration of one way this vision of the public and language of ownership is intertwined. While speaking in Kanab, Ammon Bundy utilized a narrative about his family's settlement in what would become the state of Nevada and the family's issues with federal management of public lands to build toward a more general political argument. This narrative offers a version of how opposition to use-restrictions constructs images of public land use and ideas of property. Nodding to the environmental conditions, he described how Nevada's early approach to managing resources didn't involve a grazing right registry, "because you can't graze cattle without water," and instead focused on recording water rights, with livestock watering rights as a subset within water registries. These water rights, which Bundy emphatically declared to be "*real* property" ("That is very well documented....it is a title, it is a deed, and it is real property. You could take these deeds and sell them. You can give them as inheritance, trade them...they are *real* property. They are real property") and asserted that these forms of property were older than even the state itself ("the people knew and had rights to them before that, but the state took awhile to get established"). After likening this water right to miners' mineral rights with empathy, Bundy went on to describe how "when [his] family came

mindedness, and even generosity, as is the case in this discourse about multiple use. Beyond questions of whether the desires of the opposing perspectives are seen (i.e., whether the aesthetic desires of those seeking wilderness experiences are even seen, let alone accepted as a reasonable desire) or how different impacts may be differentially valued (i.e., whether ecological stability for its own sake is considered "worth" protection), this approach to articulating one's own and one's opponents' positions about a land use decision (and arguably other political matters) produces an image of simplicity that allows one's own stance to be cast as reasonable and others' as unreasonable, greedy, or close-minded. In this frame, protections advocates arguing to restrict impactful land uses gets cast as intolerant or uncooperative—if outdoor recreators are "just walking around," anti-protections individuals have said, why can't they just walk past industry equipment or cows and put up with simple actions like passing through areas leaving gates how they found them (whether open or closed). Arguably, this perspective expands well beyond land use and land management, such as when people assert that individuals holding homophobic or transphobic views have no impact on others around them and that people challenging their views are the ones being intolerant of diverse views/values.

and started using the land and making claim on the land, they never claimed the real estate.” Again leaning into an image of reasonableness, he described, “You have to have 100 acres for one cow. To have enough cattle, you’d have to have a tremendous amount of land. They weren’t greedy, they didn’t claim it as their own. They claimed the forage—‘we own the grass!’—associated with water rights, and it was very well documented. In the same area, the ranchers owned the grass and on the same land the miners owned the mining rights, and a forester owned the forest rights. And people started camping, and it all worked out.” Regarding potential conflict between users, this image of multi-use doesn’t see issues between the land uses themselves but rather acknowledges potential interpersonal conflicts, which Bundy reassured have been and could be addressed by the sheriff.¹⁴⁶

Although few anti-protections individuals speak with the precision and specificity about property that Ammon Bundy does, the image presented in this utopic illustration of multiple use exemplifies an intriguing perspective that does, in a more general form, seem more broadly held by anti-protections folks, especially in regard to arid regions that have been more frequently used for livestock grazing than for food crop agriculture. This attitude is a kind of blurring of the notion of public and private ownership, with individuals laying some kind of claim to the land—“it is ours,” with the “we” being multigenerational locals and/or people who hold the same views and values about desirable land use and governance. Yet this assertion also, for the most part, doesn’t claim or argue for personal private ownership. Thus, it is not uncommon to hear rhetoric about “the federal government stealing our land,” while also supporting the vision of non-privately-held lands on which many different people can engage in many different uses. To

¹⁴⁶ “It was a problem if a hunter shot a water tank and a rancher tried to fence someone out, but it could be adjudicated by the sheriffs. It worked and it does work in the West. There is no reason why in these arid lands you can’t ranch, you can’t hunt, and you can’t mine, and you can’t camp. There is *no* reason why. We’ve done it for a long time and it worked. Of course there are people involved so there are challenges but you get it taken care of—you might have to take it to the courts to adjudicate it, to litigate it.” (The last bit about litigation suggests some slippage between Bundy’s utopic vision with minimal government and action in the world as it is.)

some degree, this combination suggests that claims to what is “theirs” amidst continued shared use could be characterized as a mode of usufruct rights—contractual claims to the use of particular resources without ownership—while painting a more intimate picture of “the public” as being those who primarily live nearby and work on the land, with outdoor recreators acceptable visitors as long as they do not try to stop other land uses. Significantly, people from “far away” are excised from the image of a relevant decision-making public. Even with complicated attitudes toward tourism, visitors are not seen as entirely bad. They are, however, seen as “Other” to the more narrowly defined relevant public painted in an image of people engaging in multiple uses alongside each other, often articulated with the motif of “rural locals” versus “urban elites.”¹⁴⁷

Protections advocates cultivate a different image of the public that is centered on a more abstract notion of “the American public,”—perhaps aptly characterized with Benedict Anderson’s ([1983] 1998) language of the imagined community of a nation. In this vision, “all Americans”¹⁴⁸ have a legitimate say in making federal public lands decisions regardless of their proximity to the land in question. Of course, many public lands enthusiasts do travel to the landscapes they love—southern Utah being one region that draws people to return again and again, often with expressions of a unique, sometimes spiritual, connection to those landscapes; but the image of the public within protections advocacy doesn’t require direct interaction with the land for a person to be a part of “the public” considered relevant to public lands decision-making.

The language of ownership that appears in protections advocacy discourse appears

¹⁴⁷ See footnote 155 in this chapter for more on the rural/urban and classed aspects of American environmentalism.

¹⁴⁸ I heard this reference to a national body in variations of implicit to explicit language of citizens, creating a blip in otherwise “inclusion”-focused language that I would argue was less about intentionally excluding undocumented immigrants and other non-citizen residents and more an instance of leaning into language that emphasizes a claim to or stake in public lands decision, with non-citizens omitted in this discourse via a perception of irrelevance (despite, for instance, the underrecognized intersection of public lands and border patrol activities, particularly along the southern border of the United States).

tightly coupled with this image of the public, frequently used to assert the legitimacy of an individual from anywhere in the U.S. “having a say” in public lands decisions. In pro-protections discourse, language that essentially characterizes American citizens as shareholders, private individuals holding a stake in something collectively owned, has been strikingly common. Protections advocates speak in this shareholder language to justify that “as a public land owner” their perspective should count—that they have a legitimate “vote” to cast regarding how public lands should be used and that the outcome of such “votes” (e.g., expressions via public comment or participation in a poll) should be respected like shareholders voting on a company decision. Since 2017, items like bumper stickers, shirts, and hats declaring the person using/wearing such items to be a “Public Land Owner” have been popular. This cultural interpretation of who “owns” public lands frequents protections advocacy organizations’ messaging, including calls to action, as well as educational materials, such as a 2020 version of the “public lands curriculum” produced by The Wilderness Society mentioned earlier in this chapter. In its first module, the text describes public lands as “areas of land and water that today are owned collectively by the U.S. citizens and managed by government agencies” (The Wilderness Society 2020, 8).¹⁴⁹ Thus, while anti-protections arguments challenge the legitimacy

¹⁴⁹ Notably, updated versions of this curriculum were released in 2022 and 2024 with revisions made in response to feedback (both from people who had used the curriculum and non-white individuals whose perspectives were, I believe, solicited after some critique of the original version. By the 2022 version, this language of collective ownership had been replaced by an assertion that “public lands and waters are areas of land and water that are open for public use and are managed by government agencies with guidance and support from people residing in the United States” (The Wilderness Society 2022, 9). It’s unknown from my vantage point whether this specific change was a result of a government official pointing out the technical inaccuracy of the original assertion (public lands are formally government property) or a result of feedback pointing out whose experiences are erased or ignored in that original framing. The revised opening sentence shifts away from language of collective ownership and replaces the emphasis on citizens with people residing in the U.S. Given that the remainder of this module shows substantial changes—a result of The Wilderness Society working with The Avarna Group, a DEIJ-focused consulting group that has been active in the public lands/conservation space for several years, and a variety of other individuals—I am inclined to believe that this shift represents a small disruption to the idiom of ownership I describe in the main text. That said, I take these revisions to be exemplary of some of the dynamics described earlier in this chapter (in “White Settler Reckoning”). Whereas the original version of Module 1 merely summarized the different agencies that manage public lands/waters, types of public land/water designations that exist, and activities one can do on public lands, the revised version offers a highly sanitized acknowledgement of colonization (“Since the arrival of Europeans, Indigenous peoples have faced and continue to face significant historical and

of federal ownership of public lands, protections advocates recast that ownership into this vision of American citizens as shareholders, even as the legal structures guiding public lands decisions and resource protection operate on the premise of the lands being government property (e.g., ARPA protects archaeological resources by defining vandalism of such as damage to government property).

This idea of all Americans having a valid say in public lands issues, regardless of their personal proximity to a specific location, fashions its own version of private property rights as a political right (a value more frequently associated with political conservatives and used explicitly in anti-regulation discourse), claiming that actions by a federal administration that undo or work against land protections are a violation of an individual's property rights as a “public land owner” (with either an implicit assumption of or explicit reference to the idea that the majority of fellow public lands owners hold the same position). Whereas the anti-protections perspective presents outsiders as “urban elites” who aren’t a part of the relevant public, the pro-protections vision of public lands owned by all Americans doesn’t necessarily discount “locals” as part of the public but rather positions them as a minority in a majority rules frame. Thus, protections advocates typically interpret land decisions that align with anti-protections locals’ perspectives as evidence of bias and corruption—of agency staff privileging a minority of shareholders’ voices by catering to local officials and local residents.

Despite having these contrasting views about what constitutes the relevant public with regard to public lands, these property-focused rhetorical features at times sound quite similar. Both those for and against use restrictions use the language of “land grabs” to describe federal

ongoing injustices”); states that “from some Indigenous people’s perspective, public lands are stolen lands that were taken from Indigenous people and later transformed into public parks, forests and refuges we know today”; and asserts that “to best protect these lands for future generations and prevent the deep racial injustices of the past from being repeated, the entire history of public lands must be acknowledged” (The Wilderness Society 2022, 9). While a deeper dive into this document, its origins, and its receptions is beyond the current temporal limits of completing this dissertation, The Wilderness Society Public Lands Curriculum offers a rich text for analyzing the shifting narratives in an advocacy realm seeking to reckon with its white settler foundation.

actions they consider undesirable—such as local and state officials calling President Bill Clinton’s 1996 designation of GSENM a land grab, or protections advocates calling the 2017 monument reductions a land grab (most famously in the outdoor clothing company Patagonia’s social media and website displays declaring “The President Stole Your Land”). This language continues into the present. After the 2023 designation of Baaj Nwaavjo I’tah Kukveni Ancestral Footprints of the Grand Canyon National Monument in an area of Arizona BLM land not far from Kanab, Kanab locals (and state officials) repeated language of the proclamation representing a “federal land grab” that would damage ranchers’ livelihoods and that was an affront to proper American ideals of freedom. Even after shifts in protections advocacy spaces to be more attentive to Native connections to public lands, the tendency toward characterizing the State of Utah’s efforts to disrupt federal ownership and management of public lands as “land grabs” persists. As articulated in a press release by a prominent conservation-focused organization and a *High Country News* headline to national audiences after the most recent attempt by Utah State to bring land management issues to what they take to be a favorable Supreme Court: “Utah is trying to steal *your* public lands” and “Utah wants *your* public land” (emphasis added),.

Idioms of private property and stealing abound. As I traveled around southern Utah in the summer of 2017 while Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke was conducting the monument review, a wilderness enthusiast in Escalante described the prospect of monument reductions (felt as impending by many protections advocates even if not yet formally declared) by making an analogy of someone seizing personal property. On his yearly pilgrimage from Seattle to the Colorado Plateau, he explained how he tried to communicate to his conservative friends how he felt about public lands: “How would you feel if someone just cut out a part of your own land and said, ‘this isn’t yours anymore’? That’s what this would feel like to me if the public lands were privatized...these lands, it’s like everybody’s a co-owner.” Not long after, I spoke with a tourism office employee in Blanding, not far from the newly created Bears Ears National Monument. Originally born and raised in the South, he told me that while he wasn’t from here, “as a

Southerner” he could relate to the “locals” chafing against the government “coming in and telling them what to do.” He then went on, using strikingly similar language to the wilderness advocate’s metaphor, albeit without the reference to everyone being co-owners, to liken the creation of the BENM to the government taking a part of your personal property and marking it off as theirs.

These perspectives on ownership elide the settler seizure of Native land, while also reflecting how thoroughly saturated individual settler perspectives are with colonial logics. Even with an increase in educational materials in the protections advocacy realm about public lands seeking to remedy past erasures, habitual ways of discussing the public in relation to public lands and using those visions of the public to make claims about who has a legitimate say either ignore coerced treaties, broken treaties, and seizure of unceded territory that include the spaces we know today as public lands or acknowledge those actions—i.e., via statements of acknowledgment and teaching corrective histories—without those corrective histories spurring significant disruption of entrenched conceptualizations of public lands, the public, or claims logics about who should have a say. Mishauna Goeman (Tonawanda Band of Seneca, 2015, 72) has described the conflation of land as property within colonialist logic, which conceptually places Indigenous people’s relations to land within colonial frameworks. Building on Goeman’s articulation, Bruyneel (2021, 55) asserts that emphases on land as property render “Indigenous people’s social relationships in and with land...illegible to the settler eye, other than as a threat and obstacle to settler colonial, capitalist imperatives and social relationships.”¹⁵⁰ The

¹⁵⁰ These articulations of the effects of conceptual categories on the capacity to recognize different relations to land connect to examinations of the concept of “dispossession,” which incorporates this kind of collapsing of land and property (Bruyneel 2021, 59). Even the language used to discuss settler colonization carries settler conceptualizations that often hinder recognition of Indigenous relationality. As Robert Nichols (2018) has argued, dispossession is “a mode of *property-generating theft*”—a process that doesn’t simply steal property but rather turns land into property to be stolen (22, emphasis in original; see also Nichols 2020). This relationship between dispossession and colonial property generation reminds of the persisting impacts not just of legal structures but also conceptual frameworks guiding public lands management (and broader issues of governance) and the ways

pervasiveness of property language in settler public lands discourse, then, can be considered another mechanism of settler memory.

Both of these visions of the public and how they relate to desirable modes of governance of public lands also largely exclude Indigenous people in two key capacities. Both configurations deny the argument that Indigenous people might have a unique claim to land, i.e., via Tribal sovereignty, while also frequently omitting or obscuring recognition of Indigenous people as part of a more general public. Those seeking to preserve their vision of the ideal agrarian place are, themselves, implying a kind of “unique claim” that mimics claims to Indigeneity.¹⁵¹ They utilize a more intimate image of the public as varied land users coexisting in shared physical space; call for historic use rights to be respected; and support a claim logic of localism through arguments of geographic proximity or direct use-relationship, all while ignoring the use rights of Indigenous people, who can and do make claims about such close interaction with/use of the land (albeit with less colonizing language and usually with Indigenous notions of relationality rather than Judeo-Christian notions of land and resource use) that, if measured by these purported criteria, would usurp local settlers’ “we were here first” attitudes. And as discussed in an earlier section, when speaking of “locals” having a more legitimate claim to having a say in how land decisions are made, Native locals who meet just as many of the purported criteria to be a “local” are rarely acknowledged and are instead omitted from narratives of who makes up the relevant public. Localism arguments have even at times ironically cast the federal government in the language of colonization, such as when late county commissioner and “sagebrush rebel” Cal Black called bureaucrats from Washington “colonizers” in their actions to remove cows or vehicles from land

colonial frameworks—even with “good intentions”—constrain more complete recognition of non-colonial ways of being.

¹⁵¹ Farmer (2008) has written about constructions of Mormon Indigeneity that offers a more in-depth exploration of this particular dynamic of LDS settlers’ historical overwriting to emphasize connection to land and place as a kind of claim to indigeneity to the region.

or otherwise “protect” it (Thompson 2016).

While the localism of the agrarian heritage place ignores or dismisses prior claims within their framework of proximity to land and historic use, the abstracted national democracy at play in the wilderness place and the notion of all Americans as owners overlaying federal ownership naturalizes and reaffirms the legitimacy of the settler state. Though not fully erased, particularly after the recent push amongst white settler protections advocacy to “honor Native perspectives,” Indigenous people in the present are commonly positioned as simply one minority in a multicultural society (Gilio-Whitaker 2019, 21-26) and many preservation/conservation organizations’ efforts to “honor Native perspectives” are understood through this more general lens of the “value” of diversity and inclusion. This “logic of inclusion” in liberal U.S. political and cultural frameworks itself reaffirms settler governance, representing an assimilation to and affirmation of the settler colonial context (Bruyneel 2021, 121).

Beyond merely symbolic gestures, some white settler protections advocates are supportive of genuine change in how Tribal representatives are incorporated into public lands decision-making, but there appear to be limits. That is, white settler protections advocates support these ideas up to a point—that is, as long as central frameworks, about public lands as a national treasure in which all Americans have a say and about favoring protection of undeveloped landscapes, are not too significantly challenged. Many land protections advocates want to “honor Native perspectives” through hosting Indigenous speakers, incorporating land acknowledgement language in organizational materials and events, and—for some—arguing for more Tribal governments having more of a say in public lands decision-making, but few wish to consider frameworks that would demand a complete restructuring of their own relationships to public lands and emotional connections to wild landscapes. Put another way, I didn’t observe many white settler protections advocates enthusiastically learning about and engaging with

Land Back movements.^{152,153} As discussed in the introduction chapter, federally-recognized Tribes have a defined position in the public lands decision-making structure in the form of mandated “consultation.” White settlers’ perceptions of the broader “at-large” public, then, defaults to fellow settler public land users, as the Tribal consultation component is assumed to be the site of Native participation—a kind of tokenization of the role of formal Tribal representatives. In this sense, Native individuals are rarely conceptualized as fellow individual citizens that make up the broad American public. And while interactions between the Department of the Interior and federally-recognized Tribes have changed under the leadership of Secretary Deb Haaland (Kawaik/Laguna Pueblo), settler support for Tribal involvement in decision-making is not consistent but rather peaks when Tribes’ position aligns with settler desires for environmental protections and fades when Tribal interests are at odds with those desires, which I return to in the final chapter of this dissertation.

¹⁵² Also sometimes referred to as one word, e.g., LandBack or Landback.

¹⁵³ The notion of “land back” has been pursued in numerous forms since colonization, though organizing and action around the concept has developed into emergent ways in the 21st century. White environmentalists (and other white people) often bristle at their initial encounter with the idea of “Land Back,” assuming the request--the only way to be a good ally to Native people--is for white people to hand over their property and move away. Some articulations of Land Back are in this individual deed/property title sense, and some settlers have been compelled to do just that (such as a man’s return of a parcel of land to the San Luis Ute Tribe and individuals turning their property over to Tribal governments while arranging agreements to continue living there; Kenney 2019). However, the movement is more complex and means many things in many contexts. As Ronald Gamblin (Anishinaabe/Inninee/Métis, 2019) writes, “When I hear Indigenous youth and land protectors chant “Land Back!” at a rally, I know it can mean the literal restoration of land ownership. When grandmothers and knowledge keepers say it, I tend to think it means more the stewardship and protection of mother earth. When Indigenous political leaders say it, it often means comprehensive land claims and self-governing agreements. No matter what meaning is attached, we as Indigenous nations have an urge to reconnect with our land in meaningful ways.” What draws all these varied forms of “Land Back” together is, he argues, “Indigenous peoples confronting colonialism at the root. It’s about fighting for the right to our relationship with the earth. It’s about coming back to ourselves, as sovereign Indigenous Nations.” There are multiple versions of what Land Back means, in terms of what actors in this space are calling for, but a good introduction to this political movement can be found at <https://landback.org/>.

Conclusion

Settler Memory Redux

As Bruyneel points out, not all forms of settler memory are the same. With regard to the settler dynamics of white nationalism versus that of the liberal left, Bruyneel (2021) contrasts that “white nationalism [is] deeply rooted and maintained through colonialism, through white settler claims to land and life” while the liberal left tends to view settler colonialism as either a mistake or a sin of the past (137). He argues that “white nationalists led by Trump embrace colonialism and the violence of conquest as a defining and positive feature of the history of the American nation” (2021, 139). Though conservatism woven with Mormon culture tends to include more paternalism, as described earlier in this chapter, the vision of the agrarian heritage place is centered on the same kind of commitment: “*standing the ground* of the white settler colonial nation and of settler domesticity” (Bruyneel 2021, 140; emphasis original).

While political conservatives are quick to criticize the “woke left” for “going too far” on matters of diversity, equity, and inclusion, mainstream liberal discourse includes especially sneaky forms of settler memory. Anti-federal patriot sentiments that call for county supremacy and frequently have ties to far-right, including explicitly white supremacist, groups enable quick identification of settler commitments. Yet it is common for political liberals to express openness to opposing violations of liberal racial principles while still disavowing and reproducing settler colonialism (Bruyneel 2021, 120). Drawing on Stuart Hall’s (1980, 341) assertion that “race is...the modality in which class is lived” and Patrick Wolfe’s (2016, 117) notion that “race is colonialism speaking,” Bruyneel encapsulates one of his key points about the intersections of settler colonialism and the politics of race, arguing “whiteness is the major modality through which settler masculinity is lived” (2021, 10). It is the work of settler memory that “undermines critical attention to white settler society as a whole” (Bruyneel 2021, 4).

These variations in how settler memory appears in practice, along with how settler memory does significant work to shield the whiteness and settlerness of white settler interests,

are important components of understanding ongoing settler colonial dynamics of public lands discourse and governance. Settler culture, in both discourse about land decisions and the legal systems shaping public lands management, minimize recognition of Indigenous political agency. This feature of settler public lands engagement is regularly missed as pro- and anti-protections positions go head-to-head in vitriolic debate. In my work I make the point that public lands constituents think they are “standing on the same [decision-making] ground” but conceptualize that ground in starkly different ways. And yet, if there is one ground we all might be standing on, it is the assemblage of habitual modes of thinking, relating, and governing that continues to reproduce and naturalize not just the settler state but settler subjectivities.

Mapping Place Constellations

The language of these pro- and anti-protections narratives—as with much public lands discourse—focus on “land” as people grapple over who should have a say in land use and management decisions. This chapter’s examination of numerous facets of these narratives, however, show that settler public lands debates are ultimately contestations over place, with relevant features of place linking matters of land to a range of other qualities and variables. Though the narratives employed in arguments about federal land management play out at a different discursive scale than the everyday place-making characterized in chapter 2, these narratives further flesh out the idealized places toward which pro- and anti-protections settlers are drawn. The anti-protections position lifts up pioneer heritage, moving from a broader social history of place to a specific application to land. Particular social-cultural qualities of being a place with pioneer heritage inform understandings of ideal human-land relations and of claims to whose relations should be prioritized. This narrative centers an argument of localism that utilizes similar types of claims as Indigenous people while obscuring the ways in which pioneer heritage is predicated on Indigenous displacement. In contrast, land protections advocates take a general notion of land and human-land relations and apply it specifically to place—typically a different “place” unit than the towns/communities that center in the opposing position, instead

partitioning off this “place” via landscape, ecological, and/or geological qualities. Protections advocates’ actions are driven by persisting notions of “sublime wilderness” that have informed much conservation/preservation activity throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Like the pioneer heritage narrative, these ideas of the landscapes at hand obscure settler colonial violence and dispossession, even as contemporary protections advocates express a desire to support or honor Tribal relations to the landscapes they are seeking to protect. In contrast to an emphasis on localism, this view positions public lands as “an American treasure” that “all Americans” have an equal stake in. Each of these positions takes a more general idea about relations between people, land, and place and applies it to specific arguments about whose perspectives should carry the most weight in public lands decisions. In concluding this chapter, I wish to highlight a few features of these place constellations and how commitments to place operate in the public lands sphere.

That each of these narratives operates as a form of settler memory helps reveal another feature of how people relate to ideas of place. The components that make up a vision of place are asserted to be core or inherent qualities that people aim to maintain, preserve, protect, and/or restore, and such idealizations have a specific temporal orientation. They are not future-oriented, striving toward an imagined utopia, but rather experienced as defending a sense of place that is seen as enduring through past and present and considered under threat. Whether for or against land protections, people’s place commitments are driven by a sense of this place *is* (already) this kind of place, *has been* this kind of place, and is *in danger* of no longer being that place—that it may not be this kind of place in the future, unless sufficient parts of the characteristics that make up a place constellations are maintained. Yet significantly, these senses of place that people so ardently seek to preserve are *idealized*, laced with settler nostalgia as they present a past and present that obscure the settler colonial violence that produced those qualities of place, whether agrarian- or wilderness-centered, that are so desirable and perpetuating the misrecognition of Indigenous political relevance. While both

claim a kind of historicity as they turn to (their ideas of) the past as a kind of precedent in effort to establish legitimacy, they exhibit a kind of anti-historical impulse (Cronon 1993), both in their disavowal of histories that misalign with their senses of place and in their denial of and aversion to change. In this sense, these place commitments are deeply conservative, each seeking to preserve the image toward which they are drawn.

Just as the binary of locals versus move-ins is not as simple as measuring length of time residing in Kanab, the question of “who has a right to decide” or “how decisions should be made” is not as simple as the surface level of claims logic discourse, i.e., prioritizing local desires and interests or of a national democracy. The agrarian heritage place relies on an argument about proximity to the land increasing the weight that should be given to local residents’ interests, but, as I illustrated in the previous chapter, who is defined as “local” is linked to a precluded set of views and values. The localism claim logic enriches our understanding of the stakes of defining who “belongs to” or “is local to” this place described in chapter 2. The idea of public lands as a part of national heritage and as the property of “all Americans” is central to protections advocacy discourse, yet this claim logic’s fit with the wilderness place relies on the assumption that at a national level, the majority of “all Americans” support pro-wilderness and conservation-centered land protections. Both of these claims logics are intertwined with place commitments about *what should be done with the land to maintain a desired place*.¹⁵⁴ Considering these pieces in relation to each other highlights commitments to a collection of qualities as a whole—not just individual values, desires, or actions but the constellation of things making up a full image of place.

I utilize a constellation metaphor to characterize these collections of features that appear in narratives justifying positions about public lands for a few reasons. While there are

¹⁵⁴ In this sense, while claims logics are formed by piecing together parts of these place constellations, the claims logics themselves might be considered part of the constellation, not just a conclusion about but a part of these ideal visions of place.

consistencies across the discursive threads used in each of these dominant subject positions, not all of the pieces neatly fit together at all times or for all situations. Instead the qualities described here, as well as in the previous and following chapters, can be loosely grouped together, with different parts emphasized at different times depending on the context and/or what narratives will functionally shore up arguments for preserving the desired place. I describe these groupings as place constellations not only to capture that sense of loose patterns of connection, but also to emphasize the projection of meaning onto a collection of points—the drawing of a larger picture of place with units that can, on their own, have different meaning or be enrolled to create a different image, just as different constellations can be drawn from the same night sky shaped by varying cultural frameworks. This creation of meaning—grouping together particular ideas about land, relations, governance, and more into a singular image—helps explain how seemingly disparate variables end up discursively connected in articulations about what kind of place southern Utah is and how public lands should be used and managed.

In focusing on these two dominant narratives and their corresponding place constellations, this chapter risks implying to a reader a more rigid, black-and-white image of public lands conflict than one sees “on the ground.” Importantly, there is more diversity of perspective than encapsulated in these two discursive tracks, including individuals holding perspectives on public land management that break from stereotypical patterns of positions held by ranchers vs. environmentalists, conservatives vs. liberals, rural people vs. urban people, and

so on.^{155,156} Even so, these discursive tracks are meaningful as two opposing focal points around which political activity gathers—they are the narratives that help organize, connect, and give meaning to the various components that make up a place constellation or idealized vision of place. I believe that the prevalence of sorting into such a binary and polarized set of discursive threads is not simply a matter of simplification that occurs through any attempt to

¹⁵⁵ Some examples of the variation of perspectives actually encountered include the following: Among anti-protections people, there are splits between people who still think the land should be “public,” even federal, but without use restrictions, while others are opposed to any federal ownership/management. Among the latter, there are splits into people who think public land should be in state hands, people who think it should be in county hands, and people who think it should be in private hands. Many ranchers, for example, don’t necessarily call for private ownership of the land they graze cattle on (purchasing that much land would be cost prohibitive for most) but rather expect the federal government’s management to be supportive of cattle grazing with minimal restrictions and minimal fees—that it’s okay for the land to be federal but that it should be managed in support of local interests. For those supporting use restrictions to protect land, the degree of restriction of recreational use may vary. For example, wilderness enthusiasts are generally vehemently opposed to ATV/OHV use on public lands but may vary on their attitudes toward bicycle use. Some individuals stake a more balanced perspective between the idea of land protections and land uses that may support local economic well-being. There are many public land users who recreate in a variety of ways (ATVs/OHVs, horseback riding, hiking, hunting and fishing, etc.) who generally support access to public lands and enough preservation efforts to keep the spaces usable for those recreational purposes but who aren’t invested in more restrictive actions for the sake of preserving “nature” for its own sake. In Kanab, proposed land uses on state trust land such as the frac sand mine (2019) and golf course (2021) ended up characterized in very binary ways, but conversations with assorted residents revealed a wide range of opinions such as traditional locals’ opposition to the project but with hesitance to speak up for fear of being associated with “move-ins”/environmentalists; traditional locals who typically supported such industry projects but who worried about the potential impact on the town’s future water; and individuals from longtime local families who criticized the golf course proposal, some out of concern for water and some out of concern about development with criticism that it was a project using community resources to support just a few individuals profiting. Additionally, there are conservation-oriented public lands supporters that are concerned about the ecological impact of cattle grazing but hold some empathy for others’ connection to a ranching tradition. However, even with these variations, the oppositional binary narratives remain the loudest perspectives in public lands discourse and reproductions of those well-worn positions carries more political weight and stokes the energy of long-term, ongoing opposition more than varied and nuanced perspectives.

¹⁵⁶ It’s also worth noting that while this exploration of entrenched patterns of understanding the situation around these two discursive focal points aligns with the stereotype of rural working-class people supporting destructive policies against urban, higher-class wilderness enthusiasts, Phil Neel (2022) offers an important reminder about parts of the history of the American environmental movement that disrupts this pattern. He asserts that the dominant casting of “destructive rural workers” versus “distant urbanites” committed to wilderness and environmental policies ignores that early support for the American environmental movement came from workers in extractive sectors, such as unions advocating for sustainable forestry. That a particular flavor that of environmentalism—one centered on the idea of “untouched” wild nature—has come to dominate popular and scholarly understandings of American environmentalism is informative about the dynamics of settler colonialism, race, and class that have obscured other threads of environmental organizing including Indigenous activism calling for Indigenous forms of land management, the environmental justice movement, and rural workers invested in sustainable resource management.

characterize positions (i.e., in my own writing and/or in media portrayals of the conflict), but rather reflects both the pull of one's commitment to a particular cohesive vision of place and the influence of governing processes. To the former point, the place commitments I articulate throughout this dissertation shape people's engagements with public lands issues in ways that help reproduce these dominant collections of ideas and values—that is, although there is variety in perspectives among people across identities, experiences, and commitments, there may be a kind of gravitational pull toward these focal points as individuals seek alignment with idealized visions of place. To the latter point, even though not everyone aligns perfectly with one narrative or the other, and individuals may hold complex collections of views and values, many facets of the decision-making processes in land use and management force binary positions. While there are instances where multiple options may be at play, such as in BLM management plan drafting that requires multiple (usually 4-5) alternatives to be proposed, many decision-making processes are basic “for” or “against” decisions. Whether made by land agency staff and/or voted on by elected officials, decisions about land use and management often involve yes-no decisions like approving a permit, right-of-way, or sale. Thus, even amidst some calls for compromise, “finding a middle ground,” and “seeking shared ground”—and though individual perspectives may contain more nuance—decision-making structures foster recycling through binary positions.

Even as these narratives share a settler colonial foundation (obscured by settler memory), their differences produce a sense of intractability about southern Utah's land conflict. When these two claims logics come together in the land decision space, people experience great frustration with the opposition. Though they speak about land use and management, their engagement is informed by broader visions of place that contrast with each other, not just in what land uses/relations are desirable but in how decisions should be made and who makes up the relevant public for public land decisions. In this sense, even as they may “come to the table” as stakeholders, they are not standing on the same ground. This sense of intractability is only

fueled by the ways in which these claims logics fit neatly within one's own place constellation as evidence of nefarious intent. From the vantage point prioritizing localism, arguments about the protection-focused desires of an abstract broader American public are hardly persuasive and can be woven into discourse about the tyranny of external forces—outsider individuals and an overbearing federal government—seeking to grab what they shouldn't have claim to.

Meanwhile, to those operating with the notion that public lands, especially those seen to be pristine and awe-striking, belong to all Americans, the logic of localism feels anti-democratic and can feed discourse about anti-protections arguments as always ill-intentioned and/or corrupt.

This attention to how components of a place constellation are linked to each other; how understanding public lands engagements through a lens of place suggests consistency in people's assertions and behaviors; and how such engagements fuel bad feeling between pro- and anti-protections individuals continues in the next chapter as I examine how individuals' place commitments shape their interactions with data and expertise.

CHAPTER 4

Symbolic Resonance with Place in Encounters with Data and Expertise

Introduction

In this chapter, I summarize how normative ideas of data and expertise saturate perceptions of decision-making processes and examine multiple cases of how people interact with data and expertise in land use decision contexts. I describe contrasting encounters with data, articulating dynamics such as differential weighting of lived experience and abstract numbers, modulations of scale when attributing cause, and interpretations that highlight or deny connections between variables. I argue that these various data interpretation practices are shaped by place commitments, with individuals' reception, interpretation, and wielding of data and expertise being shaped by the (affective) pulls of symbolic resonance (Heatherington 2005) with idealized places.

These examples demonstrate that individuals, organizations, and agencies treat the conflict space as if "data" is a stable object with straightforward meaning but, in fact, receive and use data in alignment with the commitments, desires, and logics that drive their engagement with land decisions. Considering data interactions through a lens of symbolic resonance helps illustrate how individuals are not necessarily standing on the same "ground" as they approach data related to land (and community) decisions. Such data interpretations playing out amidst persisting assumptions about a shared ground and about data as objective, apolitical, and unambiguous in meaning fuel a sense of others' bad faith engagement. I describe various collections of data points and discourse about them to demonstrate how both implicit and explicit norms of "evidence-based" decision-making interface with contested incorporations of data into land use arguments. Both proponents and opponents of any given land decision commonly appeal to "data" to claim an unbiased or apolitical stance, often with the

corresponding argument that the opposing side is misinterpreting, manipulating, or ignoring data. Understanding people's interactions with data as impacted by resonance or dissonance with their desired places fleshes out the affective aspects of data interactions, illustrating how one's own conclusions about data can feel so self-evident while others' contrasting conclusions feel like evidence of ill intent, bad faith, or intentional deception.

The first two cases explore conflicts around 1) GSENM that has drawn attention on a national scale and 2) a proposed frac sand mine around which fiery engagement remained focused at a local level. In these instances, I show how the data that "feels true" to different individuals is shaped by whether/how much that data resonates with one or more points within a place constellation. I also illustrate how markers of expertise are received through this same symbolic field. The third and fourth cases examine how settlers engaged in public lands debates who are committed to a vision of an agrarian heritage or wilderness place bring this lens to data that are not explicitly related to public lands matters, incorporating sufficiently resonant data into existing assertions about the state of public lands management in southern Utah. Viewing these data interpretation practices through a lens of symbolic resonance with place reveals a pattern of consistency behind assertions that otherwise appear contradictory. This dynamic, especially in a context of normative assumptions about data, fuels people's sense that those holding opposing stances must be engaging in bad faith.

Social Studies of Data and Expertise

Scholars across social science, historical, and critical theory fields have analyzed numerous facets of the social, cultural, and political dynamics of data and expertise. Scholars critically examining the production and use of scientific knowledge have highlighted the cultural and historical particularity of quantitative authority (e.g., Poovey 1998) and how quantitative authority obscures subjective, political decisions (e.g., Callison 2014, Rose 1991). As Nikolas Rose (1991) has argued, numbers are used to depoliticize the political, "externaliz[ing] the individual from the calculation, [so that] the objectivity conferred by calculation establishes a

potential domain of ‘fairness’...above party and peculiar interests” (678). In this argument, it is the numbers as external to, and calculable without, a knower that helps to create the sense of a “view from nowhere.” Because quantitative authority produces the impression of objectivity, “numbers,” as Candis Callison (2014) has stated, “[typically] act as a resource for closure and removal of an issue from the domain of public debate” (172).

Historically, most Americans may have been willing to grant Science a large degree of cultural authority even while remaining minimally aware of the behind-the-scenes methods and results of scientific research (Tuomey 1996), but reception and trust of scientific knowledge has become increasingly complicated in American society and beyond. While there are many articulations of what drives increasing distrust of scientific knowledge and/or the shift into a “post-truth” informational landscape (see, e.g., Malcolm 2021), one facet of this dynamic is the changing boundaries of public versus private processes of knowledge production. While, historically, experimental data remained “in the laboratory”—largely behind closed doors where the messy process of experimentation takes place before a “fact” is presented to the public (Latour 1983, Shapin 1988)¹⁵⁷—this “backstage” work of scientific research has increasingly been put on stage in ways that seem to fuel distrust of scientific knowledge (Hilgartner 2000). The analyses in this chapter add to this arena by elaborating how factors outside the knowledge production process itself—i.e., commitments to particular visions of place—shape when and where expressions of distrust (or returns to leaning on “science” and, typically quantitative, “data” as authoritative) occur.

From another angle, another kind of distrust in scientific research may be fueled by the reality that some “scientific knowledge” has reproduced or justified patterns of privilege and inequity—patterns examined in critical analyses of the biases built into scientific knowledge

¹⁵⁷ As Latour (1983) said, “Certainty does not increase in a laboratory because people in it are more honest, more rigorous, or more ‘falsificationist.’ It is simply that they can make as many mistakes as they wish” (164).

production that reproduce racism, sexism (and cissexism), heteronormativity, patriarchy, and more. For example, scholars have demonstrated the ways that whiteness taken to be the “universal” or “unmarked” human body results in structural racism built into medical technology and medical education, in ways that can produce worse health outcomes for non-white populations (e.g., Muniz 2022, Obermeyer et al. 2019, Plaisime, Jipguep-Akhta, and Belcher 2023). While normative data discourse reproduces the naturalization of quantitative authority with an implication of lack of bias, S. Lochlan Jain (1999) illustrates how broader societal values or the values of powerful groups (e.g., patriarchy, racism, etc.) shape objects in ways that help some and harm others, such as technology development and testing for vehicle safety that results in vehicles that are safer for bodies closer to the average male body size than the average female body size. White settlers in my examination of pro- and anti-protections stances in many ways fall into categories of those least harmed by such built-in ideologies. There is some degree of distrust of this variety, however, resulting from government action and (inaccurate or misleading) communication about nuclear testing in Nevada that has made southern Utah communities a part of the “downwinders” experiencing negative health impacts and shaped some southern Utahns’ sense of antagonism with the federal government (Dickson 2004, Fox 2014). While some aspect of this type of distrust of “science” or “data” may be a part of white settlers’ engagements with data regarding land use decisions, the more extensive connection to the way that ideologies like settler colonialism and white supremacy get built into scientific knowledge and technology here is that my examinations of data encounters suggest those same embedded ideologies—in their particular pro- and anti-protections flavors—are a part of how data are received (and accepted or challenged).

Various factors shape who is seen as a credible voice in different contexts, as illustrated by instances where people must adopt technical/scientific language to be taken seriously in a research or policy realm (e.g., see Epstein 1995, Collins and Evans 2002) and by settings in which adopting scientific language as a marker of authority may be less effective, such as

discussions of climate change in non-scientific settings (Callison 2014). When and where expertise is recognized may also occur in relation to existing inequalities, such as ethnic or racial hierarchies (Hecht 2002). The maintenance of credibility or authority in relation to data may occur by connecting expressions of data with traditional markers of expertise, in a kind of impression management or as social drama (Goffman 1959, Hilgartner 2000, Smith and Howe 2015). When what is presented as reasoned, logical, and apolitical data analysis is challenged by competing claims, the credibility of the speaker may become more important. As Phillip Smith and Nicolas Howe (2015) argue about climate change discourse, “when logos and pathos are contested, ethos comes to the fore” (51). The result is a series of “performances and counter performances...[that] attempt to embody the sacred and discredit their opponents” (Smith and Howe 2015, 40).

Contrary to liberal discourses about conservatives being “anti-science,” the power of scientific language and normative markers of expertise are utilized by political conservatives when advantageous, as described later in this chapter and in studies of climate change denialists’ efforts to discredit climate scientists via claiming positions as “high-minded defenders of scientific objectivity” and “true defender[s] of the scientific ethos” (Smith and Howe 2015, 146, 149). Across political persuasions, some knowers seek to perform an expertise that appears as a view from nowhere, while knowledge recognized as produced from a particular position can readily be cast derogatively as “special interest groups” (Haraway 1988). As an example later in this chapter shows, however, there are times when normative markers of expertise have the opposite effect—decreasing one’s credibility by those markers indicating outsidership—and times when narratives of personal experience hold more sway than quantitative data.

While both pro- and anti-protections individuals may speak about data in ways that reproduce the idea of quantitative authority and leverage quantitative and/or “scientific” data to make their arguments, their actual engagements with data reveal a more complex situation. Their data interactions might be better understood through a lens of considering that “what

counts as data...is a social process with political overtones” (Boellstorff and Maurer 2015, 3). Thus, while both positions may at times appeal to rationality and objectivity, those appeals occur amidst data interactions that are influenced by cultural and political commitments. Applicable in this context is Donna Haraway’s (1988) assertion that “struggles over what will count as rational accounts of the world are struggles over how to see” (587). Arguably, in a variety of spheres, including the relationship between data and public policy/governance decisions, the central boundary work at play is less about the line between scientific and non-scientific spheres (see Locke 2002) and more about the line between “biased” and “unbiased” data and between trustworthy and unreliable messengers, with a variety of factors—including place commitments—shaping that categorization.

Normative Notions of Data in the Public Lands Domain

In chapter 3, I illustrated the visions of land use, governance, and claims logics embedded in narratives put forth by two dominant settler positions regarding public lands, examining how both of these narratives function as settler memory and how specific features get grouped together into a constellation of features making up images of place. Anti- and pro-protections ideas about how public lands decision-making “should” occur play out in a context in which “data” is an integral feature of both governing structures¹⁵⁸ and broader popular ideas about decision-making. Just as settler individuals, organizations, and agencies may see themselves as participating in public lands decisions as stakeholders coming to a shared table but be arriving with contrasting ideas about how different viewpoints should be weighted and

¹⁵⁸ My focus in this chapter is on interlocutors’ engagements with data, though it’s worth briefly noting the embeddedness of a techno-rational vision of land management in land agency structure and processes. The techno-rational management of public lands in which credentialed experts utilize scientific knowledge as the basis for decision-making was encouraged by Gifford Pinchot in the early years of federal forest management, during which time he formalized the education required to fill positions within forest-managing agencies (Miller 2012). In the late 19th century when “the world was beginning to belong to the credentialed,” the discursive and institutional work that Pinchot and others did to establish forestry as a scientific and academic field that held the appropriate expert knowledge for forest stewardship significantly shaped forest management and public lands policy throughout the 20th century (Miller 2012, 24).

how decisions should be made, much of how people speak about data implies data to be a straightforward object that can be set on that stakeholder table and clearly seen as the same object to all parties. Within formal decision-making processes, what data can sit on that table largely follows normative ideas about quantification and objectivity, and the additional “data” of stakeholder perspectives must also arrive at the stakeholder table through specific input-gathering structures to serve as material that can “count” in the decision-making process.¹⁵⁹

Superficially, data discourse across pro- and anti-protections positions appears similar in that both utilize appeals to “evidence” and pitch data and the use of data as an indicator of

¹⁵⁹ Public input and Tribal consultation must be conducted through formal procedures to be considered part of the data informing a public land decision. Perspectives heard in other, unofficial settings are technically unable to be formally considered (even as informal conversations undoubtedly shape agency staff perspectives on issues). Procedures for public comment and Tribal consultation, then, are essentially *data-making* processes—serving as a kind of insistence that such qualitative and the messy or complex material of individuals’ perspectives be moved closer to data ideals of being “measurable” in some way. Indeed, much of the data processing of material collected during a public comment period appears to center on classifying and counting comments as “for” and “against,” regardless of the explanations or reasoning presented in those comments. Such data wrangling seeks to meld the legal requirements for public comment and Tribal consultation (bringing with it complex qualitative material in the form of human perspectives and experiences) with an objectivist view on data that not only craves quantification, but also implies comments’ value or purpose is in this tallying of for and against positions. Such tallying nods to a notion of democratic “voting” even as the mandate to have public comment periods does not include a specific mandate about how public comment is to be measured, weighed, or incorporated into the actual decision.

Unsurprisingly in this settler colonial setting, little specificity is given, legally speaking, regarding how and how much input from Tribal representatives should be weighed; “consultation” is legally mandated in a largely performative nod to Tribal sovereignty, with no clearly delineated requirements for how tribal government perspectives are included or responded to. The categorization of Native nations as “domestic dependent nations” enables consultation processes that continue to disregard Indigenous sovereignty and to perpetuate Indigenous dispossession through land decisions that insufficiently address Tribes’ concerns. As Native advocates in both public lands and Tribal sovereignty discursive spaces assert, consultation is not consent and consultation is not co-management. The political efforts in southeastern Utah by the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition to be included as co-managers of Bears Ears National Monument with the BLM and USFS marks a notable challenge to the status quo of consultation. While the framework of free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) has been incorporated into several articles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, it remains largely unincorporated in U.S. legal structures, though it remains a point of focus for advocates of Tribal sovereignty within the U.S. Relevant to understanding the relative separation of white environmentalism and Indigenous activism with regard to land issues, FPIC is a framework that has long been a focus of Native articulations of Tribal sovereignty in relation to land decisions but was new to most non-Native audience members during a series of panels about Native perspectives on land management in fall 2020 and summer 2021 hosted by Talia Boyd, then staff member at Grand Canyon Trust and is not a focus of the talking points from non-Native individuals and non-Native-led organizations expressing support for “including Native/Indigenous perspectives” and “honoring Native/Indigenous ties.”

neutrality. That is, when land decisions are being made, people across positions appeal to what the data “say” or “show”—obscuring the interpretive work that shapes what conclusions are drawn—to support a claim to being “unbiased” and an assertion that *their* stance is “not about politics.” The corollary of the assertion that one’s own appeal to data is an indicator of a lack of bias and a divestment from “being political” is the accusation (sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit) that the “other side” is biased and is being political through misinterpreting, manipulating, and ignoring data. After all, if data is construed as “neutral” and “nonpolitical” and the data are understood to clearly support one’s own conclusion, the Other’s claims to the same apolitical stance while arriving at such different conclusions about what should be done is experienced as clear evidence of nefarious, deceitful, and/or bad faith engagements with land governance processes.¹⁶⁰

The interaction between data points and individuals’ perspectives and desires is a central focus of this chapter. My goal here is not to play the role of fact-checker, even as some parts of the cases below involve threads that may feel like a back-and-forth debate or assessment of the data and their interpretations, but rather to focus on the role of data in relation to place commitments and public lands arguments. Much of what people say when using data to back up assertions about public lands issues is somewhat true. And somewhat false. Or, more accurately, close examination of how people interact with data challenges the

¹⁶⁰ An example of this type of appeal to data in relation to “being political” is found in the 2019 open letter regarding the city council candidates written by a prominent community member (featured in chapter 2’s discussion of defining “locals”) in which the writer asserted the letter was not about political needling but rather “pointing out factual information” in response to “an interest group [that] has been pushing leftwing propaganda.” While his letter linked the city council election to hot button political issues, arguing that conservative positions on gun control and abortion would be under threat if the wrong city council candidates were elected, he maintained in a news interview about the letter that he was “not trying to be divisive” (Fuchs 2019d). This example highlights the common discursive feature of people labeling points of view that don’t align with their own as an “interest group,” with such a label carrying a derogatory tone and seeming to represent something distinct from “the public.” The meanings applied to this label carry some irony in the framework of stakeholders, which essentially formalizes the idea of representatives from different groups with particular interests being a part of the decision-making process.

true/false binary implied within a modern rational, or objectivist, framing of “data.” People’s engagement with data is shaped by underlying commitments to particular features of place, all while the notion of data as a marker of an unbiased, apolitical position remains dominant among those individuals and while data in decision-making structures of land managing agencies remains in a relatively positivist frame.

Symbolic Resonance

I borrow the concept of symbolic resonance from Tracey Heatherington’s (2005, 2010) study of conflict around a proposed national park in Sardinia. Heatherington utilizes the idea of symbolic resonance to describe how rural Sardinians opposed the prohibitions of agrarian activity on “the commons” that would come with a national park designation. Their opposition was not centered on their personal economic reliance on shepherding but because of emotional attachment to symbols of agrarian activity—the symbolic resonance of a lifeway (shepherding) with place (Sardinia). Heatherington uses the notion of symbolic resonance to help position Sardinians’ anti-park stance within her central argument that rejects the binary opposition of reason and emotion and asserts that hard distinctions between thinking and feeling were wielded to further marginalize rural Sardinians. In the U.S. public lands space, the more prevalent binary in how individuals interpret others’ argumentation is political/non-political, though to some degree such categorization implicitly maps onto ideas of (subjective) emotion vs. (objective) reason.

Just as pro-park Italians saw irrationality in Sardinians’ opposition on the basis of a commitment to shepherding lifeways that they were not economically dependent on personally, conservationists are quick to view pro-ranching stances as irrational because of how few people “actually make a living” running cows on GSENM and because the operations big enough to remain commercially viable are “not even owned by locals.”¹⁶¹ That the Bureau of Land

¹⁶¹ The number of permittees with allotments on GSENM appears to have remained steady over the years in the range of 90-100, though the actual level of use varies year to year based on precipitation, available forage,

Management within southern Utah, including within GSENM, continues to facilitate grazing in the face of a decreasing number of people participating in ranching as a livelihood and an increasingly arid environment is a persistent source of frustration and anger for conservationists who desire less ecologically impactful uses of the land.

While this parallel with Heatherington's illustration of land conflict in Sardinia focuses on the affective pull of agrarian symbols for rural Sardinians, Italian conservation supporters viewing such attitudes as irrational, I argue that symbolic resonance is at play in both anti- and pro-protections engagements with U.S. public lands issues. Similar to pro-park discourse in Sardinia, it is also the case that within American public lands activism and discourse efforts to set aside public lands for preservation or conservation are associated with "disembodied, universalizing discourses of science [that] currently define legitimate knowledge about 'global nature'" (Heatherington 2005, 159). Though scientific discourses, especially within political domains, tend to claim a kind of disembodiment in their claims to objectivity, my articulations of protections advocates' commitments to a wilderness place throughout this dissertation demonstrate that, even amidst utilization of disembodied, non-emotional scientific discourse, pro-protections positions are also very embodied and emotional, as exemplified in the sensory specificity of the desired wilderness experience.

negotiations with conservation projects and BLM scientific research, etc. (U.S. Senate 2015). Although anti-protections rhetoric about the Monument refers to the area being "locked up" by "the feds," in the grazing domain at least, the number of permittees and amount of allowed grazing did not change as a result of the monument designation; ten years after the Monument's designation approximately 1.1% of residents in Kanab held grazing permits on GSENM, while on the north side of the Monument 27.4% of Henrieville, Tropic, and Cannonville residents, 1.9% of Escalante residents, and 5.6% of Boulder residents held permits (Lilieholm et al. 2006). Permittees as a percentage of overall residents have only gone down in years since as populations of these areas have increased and the number of permit holders remained steady. Within the framework of a "majority rules" democracy described in the previous chapter, protections advocates are quick to view public lands catering to "such a small number of members of the public" as bias and, in the words of a few interlocutors, "the ultimate special interest group." I was not able to confirm whether the only commercially viable ranching operations are not owned by locals, though protections advocates' focus on ranching solely through a commercial lens—perhaps a take that seeks to speak in the same frame given the anti-protections narratives about economic impacts of land use restrictions—misses the symbolic and emotional valence of ranching as an agrarian activity, regardless of its commercial viability.

In this chapter, I further develop and expand on Heatherington's use of the term symbolic resonance. The place commitments people have—or put another way, the place constellations toward which people are drawn—impact how individuals receive and formulate arguments with data based on how that data might be resonant or dissonant with the qualities that make up that idea of place. The points that make up a place constellation vary in type—they may be values, a feature of physical landscapes, or visions of particular kinds of economic labor, governance, and relations between people, animals, and land. Although these components of place are linked to material actions and decisions, perceived as enduring qualities they function symbolically as representative of an ideal place. The “resonance” (or dissonance) at play occurs between aspects of the real world and images of the ideal place.

Attention to the symbolic aspects of how people engage with data, and how they incorporate data into their images and narratives of public lands issues, fills a gap between materialist sentiments about why people would be for or against a land management decision and the observed affective commitments resulting in the actual positions people take. Just looking at how people relate to land as a productive resource doesn't fully inform the positions they take, which helps explain why models from the state (such as trade-offs with other socioeconomic programs—e.g., tourism-boosting initiatives or Payment In Lieu of Taxes program for counties with high percentages of public land) are often disliked by those opposed to land use restrictions. Though economic security is a real concern for residents in rural areas adjacent to large areas of public lands, the orientation toward particular land uses and types of labor is not exclusively practical but instead at least partially symbolic—resulting in, for instance, support for particular proposed projects connected to desirable forms of labor even when such projects are expected to bring few jobs that would be filled by local residents. That is, just as Heatherington's interlocutors expressed their opposition to the national park through the argument that the well-being of the community was threatened specifically because of the economic impact of land use restrictions on shepherding, even when they and their familial and

social networks were not economically reliant on shepherding practices/products, what appear as material/economic arguments can be utilized in symbolic ways in American public lands discourse.

Engagement with land use and management is an emotional matter. Like the individuals responding to the proposed national park in Sardinia that Heatherington describes, individuals who live in southern Utah or are drawn to southern Utah from afar get emotional about public lands issues. Heatherington argues that the public debates themselves become objects of memory and feeling, a “thing” to which individuals react, such as a Sardinian interlocutor avoiding the public debates because they make her feel upset (2005, 153). So, too, do some individuals in southern Utah avoid engaging with land management debates because of how they can be sites of vitriol and high emotion. Although at times people’s assessments about whether a proposed action or a given data point aligns with the agrarian heritage or wilderness place can seem like a simple thought process (i.e., is it aligned with a value embedded within one’s desired vision of place?), I take symbolic resonance to be an emotional process—it seems less a precisely calculated line of thought and more an affective pull toward place. Relevant to my consideration of what produces the sense of intractability felt in public lands conflicts, the concept of symbolic resonance also offers an explanatory model that reveals the fairly consistent patterns behind assertions and behaviors that often appear, at the surface, inconsistent. The intersection of people from each position feeling that their data conclusions are “obvious” and that their opponents’ conclusions are inconsistent—typically called hypocritical—fuels the sense of “bad feeling” (felt as negative emotions) toward the Other and suggests that these deep, affective commitments are not easy to change by “just giving people the right information.”

Case 1: Interpreting Economic Data

Within ongoing public lands discourse, one central genre is the economic impact of different land ownership, use, and management approaches. While such economy-focused

narratives are ongoing in public land discourse, a striking example of how pro- and anti-protections narratives engage with data about economic activity occurred in summer 2017. Then Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke was conducting a Trump-ordered review of all national monuments created since 1996, the year that Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument was created, to assess whether the size of each monument was “appropriate” for the “objects of antiquity” being protected. Given this review and the emergent possibility that national monument protections might be undone, pro- and anti-protections arguments were at top volume. In the mix were economic matters like the impact of high percentages of public land on tax revenue and property values and what land use practices support (desirable) jobs. One flavor of anti-protections discourse that was particularly relevant during the review was the argument that additional protections, such as wilderness and national monument designations, negatively impact local communities by curtailing land uses that are seen as bringing well-paying, seasonally-stable jobs (associated with industries like fossil fuel extraction and logging).¹⁶² Thus, it is no surprise that a study showing the opposite became a major citation point for those in favor of land protections. The study became a central talking point at multiple scales, being highlighted in organizational statements and at the 2017 summer Outdoor Industry Association conferences, as well as referenced in my one-on-one conversations with pro-protections individuals. Protections advocates’ utilization of the study findings and others’ counter-claims provide an opportunity to examine two aspects of data interaction in which symbolic resonance is at play: the differential weighting of on-paper numbers versus lived

¹⁶² While the example in this chapter focuses on GSENM, this argument about negative economic impact is not limited to GSENM or even to national monuments generally. Land use restrictions—whether in the form of designations like national monuments or wilderness areas or in the form of a road or other construction project not being approved to protect a threatened species or maintain a crucial habitat area—as a whole are narrated as economically detrimental in other areas of Utah (e.g., an hour and a half’s drive west of Kanab in the St. George area, the proposed Northern Corridor highway and its impact on desert tortoise habitat/undeveloped landscapes has been another site of common narratives regarding economic impacts, “environmentalists vs. locals,” and litigation as a normal feature of land decisions [Eddington 2023]).

experiences and where/how people draw causal links between different variables.

The study was conducted by Headwaters Economics, a Montana-based nonprofit research group, and analyzed the local economies around 17 national monuments in 2011, 2014, and 2017.¹⁶³ An organization that bills itself as independent and nonpartisan with the goal of “work[ing] to improve community development and land management decisions,” Headwaters Economics’s studies tend to focus on rural communities and land-related issues. Their studies examine issues like economic development, equity, natural hazards, public lands, outdoor recreation, and tax policy. This particular study considered economies around national monuments created between 1982 and 2001 that were greater than 10,000 acres (operating under the assumption that smaller monuments are unlikely to have significant economic impacts). They compared economic indicators of population, employment, personal income, and per-capita income growth before and after monument designation, concluding that local economies around all the monuments studied expanded following the creation of the national monuments, with 13 of 17 growing at the same or faster pace compared to similar counties in their state.¹⁶⁴

While the study authors are careful in their summarizing assertion to say that these growth trends “do not demonstrate a cause-and-effect relationship,” they clearly speak back to the common anti-protections argument about the economic harm of national monument designation: “the study found no evidence that the new national monuments prevented economic growth” (Headwaters Economics 2017b, 3). Despite the qualifying statement about cause and effect, summaries of findings (both one in the form of a more formal study abstract and one as a two-page document with photos and graphs appearing to be aimed at public

¹⁶³ I suspect the 2017 update was precipitated by the monument review itself, but I have not been able to track down whether this is the case.

¹⁶⁴ Data from their study can be visualized at <https://headwaterseconomics.org/dataviz/national-monuments/> (link active as of November 2023).

viewers) operate in a frame that takes for granted the idea that these standard economic indicators carry straightforward, uncomplicated meaning and draws cause-and-effect-implied conclusions that were celebrated and highlighted by protections advocates:

The Headwaters Economics 2017 review confirms that all the regional economies adjacent to the studied national monuments experienced growth following a monument's designation. National monuments help nearby communities diversify economically while increasing quality of life and recreational opportunities that make communities more attractive for new residents, businesses, and investment. (Headwaters Economics 2017b, 3)

Although the study authors seem to speak directly to the argument of monuments causing economic harm with statements like “the study found no evidence that designating these national monuments prevented economic growth” and “key economic indicators....either continued or improved in each of the regions surrounding the national monuments,” they—like the protections advocates who pointed to the study—slip into presenting their data as uncomplicated indicators of the positive impact of national monument designations. Their summarizations not only imply a causal relationship but also assume the kinds of economic change described is unequivocally positive. To this latter point and how it relates to speaking back to common anti-protections narratives, the description of the findings assumes that the economic growth they describe is the same shape as anti-protections images of lost economic growth—that it fits neatly as a direct response to assertions of negative economic harm.

Because the Headwaters Economic Study concluded monument designation didn't have a negative economic impact and, at various points in the study discussion, present an overall positive benefit of the national monuments to gateway communities, monument supporters comfortably cited the study to back their position with data. During the summer and fall of 2017 when I most frequently heard people cite this study, these references were primarily made in conversation about the most contentious monuments under review—Bears Ears and Grand

Staircase-Escalante¹⁶⁵—but references were to the study as a whole (e.g., “this economic study shows national monuments benefit the communities around them”), with little to no elaboration on the details of the economic indicators that collectively make up the picture of “economic growth” or about specific regions/monuments, even though the research group did provide monument-specific summaries. Protections advocates leaned into the cultural authority of quantified data, contrasting “a study” (research) looking at “economic indicators” (measurable and quantified, thus seen to be impartial) with their opponents’ narratives which they saw as lacking evidence, i.e., being unbacked by objective data. While implicitly reproducing the idea that quantified, objective data is the correct type of data for the domain of federal decision-making, they emphasized that research findings from a “nonpartisan” research group meant that protections-centered management is not so much a value-driven position but the “correct” management choice, as shown by the data. That is, the format or mode of data—falling within the normative economic study genre—became part of what protections advocates pointed to as proof their position was “right” or “good.”

Although protections advocates (and, to some extent, the study authors) presented the study findings as a demonstration of clear economic benefits of national monument designation, those opposed to protections-centered management were not readily persuaded by such findings. Though when looking at public lands matters more broadly, those same anti-protections voices would agree to the general idea of properly-produced data being used to make land decisions and would, in other settings, make the same kinds of arguments (“the data clearly show [that a specific position] is correct, and those who think differently are “bringing politics into it”), in this case, those opposed to GSENM and other land protections were not

¹⁶⁵ I read the ways more “controversy” surrounds GSENM and BENM compared to other similarly large national monuments as a result of both protections advocates vociferous defense of Utah’s canyon country (compared to other undeveloped landscapes) and both community and government (Utah state and county level) opposition to federal management, especially when focused on land protections.

more willing to consider these findings could be true despite having markers of quantification and coming from a purportedly nonpartisan source. Individuals' commitments to prioritizing or being persuaded by a data "gold standard" of impartial and (typically) quantitative data waver when conclusions are drawn that are discordant with desired outcomes.¹⁶⁶ The presentation of or reference to the study findings did not change the arguments about negative economic impacts coming from those who favored reducing the sizes of the monuments. Instead, anti-protections voices would turn toward narratives about individuals' and families' economic experiences (sometimes in reference to specific people but more frequently in a general sense, i.e., "it's becoming too hard [financially] to raise a family here"), often comparing them to experiences of more economic stability/prosperity in the past, while doubling down on the argument that national monuments hurt local communities.

Contrary to the normative vision of what counts as good or appropriate data for decision-making, what counts as "good" (and/or relevant, appropriate, etc.) data to pro- and anti-protections individuals varies in the public lands setting. Attitudes about what counts as "good" and "unbiased" data are less about consistent types of data (e.g., that one position is pro-science and the other anti-science) and more about whether a piece of data resonates with a person's vision of what kind of place this region is and should be. These patterns of resonance or dissonance also shape whether particular data are lifted up to be highlighted or paid little attention. Anti-protections voices didn't consider the Headwaters Economics study to be good or relevant data. Some made accusations that the authors of the study were already biased—untrustworthy messengers due to the perception of a pre-existing pro-protections position¹⁶⁷—

¹⁶⁶ See Malka and Adelman (2022) for a summary of research (largely within the experimental genre) around people's interactions with facts related to political beliefs.

¹⁶⁷ This logic is somewhat tricky to articulate, but just as Kanab "locals" are frequently defined by whether they hold a pre-existing set of beliefs and values and "move-ins" are labeled as such because of environmentally-focused values, this notion of the study authors not being a trustworthy source felt similar—as if the study's authors could be deemed untrustworthy because they had arrived at a pro-monument conclusion.

while others pointed to the experiences of people living in the GSENM-adjacent communities to suggest the study findings must be wrong, or at the very least irrelevant, as it contradicted personal stories of economic hardship. Thus, while protections advocates presented this study as if the data spoke for themselves (and anti-protections individuals do the same in conditions where the data appears to support their position), data do not speak for themselves but instead are utilized for speaking toward the legitimization and naturalization of pro- and anti-protections claims.

The seemingly contradictory assertions about southern Utah's economy are a surface-level clue about the differential interactions people have with "economic data," a category of information frequently treated as straightforward and clearcut. The Headwaters Economics study, specifically, was not a major focus of anti-protections assertions—their counterclaims, like the study authors' statements speaking back to the idea that monument designation prevents economic growth, were largely indirect or parallel to opposing arguments; yet many of their economy-related assertions readily fall into conversation with the study's conclusions. In the paragraphs that follow, I use the subsections of the GSENM-specific summary to explore contrasting engagements with varying types of information (quantitative and qualitative) about economic activity. By delving into some of the specifics of that study's findings and putting those findings in conversation with additional ethnographic data, it becomes clearer how the economic story of the region is more complex than either narrative of sheer benefit or detriment. This complexity—that is flattened by the treatment of "economic indicators," and other similar constructs, as offering clear, singular meaning—enables two divergent economic stories to arise, even when relating to the same economic patterns. Examining the on-paper numbers and how they mesh with lived experiences helps reveal how such contrasting understandings about local economic activity could develop and how the desire for particular features of place helps filter which data are considered compelling, relevant, and/or valid.

The GSENM-specific summary (Headwaters Economics 2017a) presents data with

subsection titles that are non-specific enough to readily open a space for resonance with the wilderness ideal place; that is, the general headlines don't make as explicit and direct claims as the protections advocates citing the data, but they don't disallow such interpretations. For instance, the headline, printed in all caps, "ECONOMY GROWS AFTER DESIGNATION" doesn't claim anything about cause-effect or rate of change. In that section, a graph of "Total Employment" shows varying rates of change but a generally steady increase from 1970 to 2015—with no blatantly obvious signal in the wake of the 1996 monument designation. The section also displays statistics about percent increases from 2001 to 2015 in population growth, personal income, job numbers, and per capita income. Although other Headwaters Economics studies about public lands and economic activity take a more comparative approach,¹⁶⁸ the information presented in the summary lacked comparative context to assess whether the steady growth depicted in the graph stood out from similar areas without a national monument or how the increases in the four economic indicators compared to the same area in decades before the GSENM's designation. Nonetheless, protections advocates confidently asserted that the study showed national monuments support economic growth.

Monument-driven or otherwise, by these economic indicators the economy around GSENM has grown since the Monument's designation, yet narratives of economic harm persist. This mismatch is not just about one side being right and the other wrong but about how data interactions are influenced by place commitments. By digging into *how* the economy has grown, considering the varying individual economic experiences people in the community have, and paying attention to how certain economic features relate to qualities of ideal places, it becomes clearer how symbolic resonance between varying data points and features of the ideal agrarian

¹⁶⁸ For instance, the report "West is Best: How Public lands in the West Create a Competitive Economic Advantage," compared economic growth across categories like west and non-west areas (Headwaters Economics 2012, Rasker, Gude, and Delorey 2013), and the report "Federal Lands in the West: Liability or Asset?" compared economic growth in counties with the highest and lowest 25% proportions of federal land, and highest and lowest 25% proportions of protected federal land (Lawson 2017).

heritage and wilderness places produce contrasting economic narratives.

Labor, Income, and “Prosperity”

Two headlines in the GSENM summary assert “PROSPERITY ON THE RISE” and “NON-LABOR INCOME GROWS FASTEST.” The 17% increase in real per capita income from 2001 to 2015 (\$30,687 to \$35,812) is treated as a straightforward illustration of “growing prosperity,” but this singular statistic flattens the varying financial experiences in the region. That non-labor income is the fastest growing type of income hints at how contrasting narratives about the local economy may coexist. The document highlights that from 2001 to 2015, non-labor income (“investment income such as dividends, interest and rent, and government transfer payments such as Social Security and Medicare”) increased 49% (from \$127 million to \$189 million), and in 2015 non-labor income accounted for 44% of total personal income. Although I don’t have access to details about the distribution of that non-labor income, and financial practices like investing are not limited to folks of one political persuasion or one residence history (e.g., newcomer or long time local), patterns of who has investment income and what they may be looking for in a community are hinted at in the study’s articulation that “for people with investment income and many retirees, protected public lands and recreation provide important aspects of a high quality of life.” Social studies of demographic changes in the American West confirm the appeal of “natural amenities” that draw new residents moving from elsewhere (Gosnell, Haggerty, and Travis 2006; Power and Barrett 2001; P. Robbins et al. 2009; Shumway and Otterstrom 2001) and show that such changes may be perceived as threats to sense of place if they threaten the prevailing economic practices and land uses (Keske et al. 2017). The people who enthusiastically move to towns around GSENM specifically because of their love of the natural landscapes tend to be from demographics that are more likely to have non-labor income, such as being older and socioeconomically well-off. Prior to 2020, it may have also been the case that they were more likely to be proponents of preservation and conservation (though this narrative—one reproduced by both pro- and anti-

protections individuals—about who typically has moved to the area is complicated when environmentally-minded people are flagged as “move-ins” while others moving to the area have gone largely unmarked). With their own financial stability and a desire for protections of the landscapes that drew them to the area, neither wilderness enthusiasts’ personal experiences nor their place commitments are likely to lead them to consider complexities or nuances of the study’s economic indicators and conclusions. For the purposes of supporting the vision of the wilderness place in southern Utah, any economic growth is positive regardless of the context because of how it functions, in the eyes of protections advocates, to disprove the idea that national monuments generally and GSENM specifically harmed the economy.

Though a normative economic analysis frame joins protections advocates in considering a rise in personal income via increasing non-labor income as a big picture positive (i.e., with the implication that Baby Boomers with investments retiring to western towns means more money injected into the local economy through consumer spending, thus implying that even non-labor income in such a community is beneficial to the community as a whole), those drawn toward the agrarian heritage place relate to such data in a different way. Rather than any growth being seen as positive, newly-arrived retirees—a demographic associated with the non-labor income that is highlighted as robustly growing—may activate a sense of threat around what kind of people belong in this place. And while, at the macro level, an increase in non-labor income may impact available jobs and labor income by being a source of money spent within the community, individuals seeking sufficient employment at living wages will not necessarily feel those effects directly or clearly. Thus, to those committed to the agrarian heritage place, the kind of growth encapsulated in the statement of steady growth may be the “wrong kind,” coming along with qualities (such as more protections advocates in the form of well-off retirees moving to the area) that appear a threat to their ideal place, and may feel at odds with lived experiences around labor and wages.

Desirable Labor

Another area of mismatch between the meaning pro- and anti-protections perspectives place on economic data is regarding types of labor. In the GSENM-specific summary, another headline asserts “TRADITIONAL JOBS HOLD STEADY,” stating that commodity industries’ share of the overall economy in the region was already declining prior to the designation of GSENM. The section presents, again, noncomparative statistics showing the very small percent of jobs coming from those sectors (agriculture [6% of total employment], mining [0.4% of total private employment], and timber [0.2% of total private employment]). This presentation of data resonates well with arguments from those committed to the wilderness place, as it emphasizes that such industries are just a small portion of economic activity and, via the claim logic of the wilderness place centered on all Americans having an equal say and not prioritizing a small number of people’s interests, justifies prioritizing conservation and preservation over agricultural and extractive industry uses. Another section declares “SERVICES JOBS INCREASING ACROSS THE BOARD,” describing how the majority of employment growth in the Grand Staircase-Escalante region comes from the service industry. From 2001 to 2015, service jobs grew 42% (from 3,916 to 5,561), while non-services shrank slightly (a 3% decrease, 1,057 to 1,027). The study—and protections advocates citing it—take these findings as positive, and they propose that a desire by “many entrepreneurs [to] locate their businesses in areas with a high quality of life” drives this increase, implying that the protected natural landscapes create this “high quality of life.”^{169,170}

¹⁶⁹ Though somewhat tangential to the analysis at hand, the study interpretation and conclusion seems to operate with constructs and implied connections reflecting assumptions already imbued with particular values. “High quality of life” referred to in the study remains implicitly defined at least in part as being high quality because of the large areas of protected land. One might ask, high quality for whom or by what measures? In a similar fashion the study takes for granted the notion that people with money (entrepreneurs or retirees) wanting to move there is automatically positive, even as some of the definable economic effects of particular kinds of newcomers they mention (increased spending in the community) often come with other effects (that they don’t mention), like rising costs of living or, in the case of increasing tourism, decline in available affordable long-term housing.

¹⁷⁰ The economic patterns identified here in relation to federal public land and land protections are similar to those in other locations. In another Headwaters Economics report looking at percent changes in population, employment, personal income, and per capita income from 1970 to 2015 in rural counties in the American West

While the study presents these shifting economic sectors in a neutral to positive light, a deeper dive into the economic sector data, put in conversation with the vision of an agrarian heritage place, illustrates how anti-protections perspectives may arrive at the narratives they do. Within this dataset used by Headwaters Economics, I consider the information provided through multiple lenses, as if turning a kaleidoscope to reveal a different perspective generated from the same material. In their document, “A Profile of Socioeconomic Trends” that aggregates data for the GSENM region, Headwaters Economics provides tables, graphs, and narration about economic activity at varying levels of granularity spanning 1970 to 2018 (Headwaters Economics 2020). These data offer another way to consider what’s at play in shaping anti-protections narratives about economic activity.

This report shows that the overall number of jobs in the non-services industry (agriculture, manufacturing, mining, construction) continued to grow from 1970 to 2000, but they didn’t grow at the same rate as employment within the services sector (in this study, not just the “service industry” as popularly conceptualized but also education, healthcare, real estate, etc.).¹⁷¹ Thus, while the number of jobs in the non-services category grew (estimated at 866,

(Lawson 2017), the study authors compared counties from the top and bottom 25% of proportion of federal land and found significantly greater percent increases in population, employment, and personal income for counties with the highest percentages of federal land than those with the least percentage of federal land. (The differences between the bottom 25% and top 25% counties were as follows [first number for bottom percentile, second number for top percentile]: Population - 20% vs. 97%; Employment - 51% vs. 157%; Personal Income - 90% vs. 223%; Per Capita Income - 57% vs. 61%. Income figures were adjusted for inflation.) A similar comparison between the top and bottom quarters of counties with *protected* federal land (i.e., federal land with designations such as National Parks, Wilderness Areas, National Conservation Areas, National Monuments, and/or National Wildlife Refuges) found a similar pattern. Like the monument study, this report leaves unexamined the multiple possible interpretations behind the finding that “non-labor income is a primary driver of growth” (Headwaters Economics 2012) and flattens the complex economic dynamics of community change and growth centered on “natural amenities.”

¹⁷¹ The authors note that the services/non-services distinction they use in their examination of socioeconomic trends is not a classification used by the U.S. Department of Commerce but rather an interpretive choice they made to “help organize the information into easy-to-understand categories” (Headwaters Economics 2020). I read this sorting as reflective of the way that examinations of economic activity in relation to public lands and conservation policies is a central focus of Headwaters Economics’s work and thus is implicitly in conversation with the specific question of how public lands impact labor that anti-protections rhetoric suggests is harmed by public lands and/or land use restrictions.

1,004, and 1,230 in 1970, 1990, and 2000 respectively, a 26% growth rate between 1970 and 2000), these industries went from making up around 33% of all jobs in the GSENM region to around 18% of total jobs. (Similarly, government jobs, while also increasing, went from 25% to 19% of total jobs; though government jobs don't hold the same symbolic power of those in agricultural and extractive industries, they are known for being stable positions with good benefits—a factor that contributes to people who dislike the federal government/the Bureau of Land Management working for that very agency.) In contrast, the “services” category, which includes many types of labor both directed at services for the community and the tourism-focused service industry, grew from making up nearly 29% of all jobs to nearly 60% of all jobs. Within the non-services category, farming dropped from 18% of total jobs in 1970 to 10.4% in 1990 and 6.9% in 2000. Manufacturing (including forest products, which included the local mills prior to their closures) fell from 11.8% to 7.6% between 1970 and 1990 and down to an estimated 4.7% in 2000. Extractive industries like mining and fossil fuels remained steady with a very small number of jobs within the region (making up only ~0.2% and ~0.1% of all jobs in 1990 and 2000), while the category “agricultural services, forestry, fishing, and other” grew from 0.3% in 1970 to 0.5% in 1990 and 1.5% in 2000. Though construction remained steady between 1970 and 1990 (3.1% and 3.2%, respectively), it jumped to 5.3% in 2000. From 2001 to 2018 (data displayed separately, at least in part due to changes in how different forms of labor were organized into economic sectors), the non-services sectors grew just over 6% while the services sector grew 51.6% over the same time (with a faster rate of growth between 2001 and 2010 than between 2010 and 2018).

My point in describing these data is less about how anti-protections individuals wield such statistics¹⁷² and more about bringing attention to how the very dataset used to support

¹⁷² Indeed, I did not encounter anyone digging into the study's statistics to point out the data that in fact support their own arguments about particular industries or make points about these industries as a percent. To the extent

arguments about the positive economic impact of monuments reflects patterns that hint at how the economic changes of the past several decades are experienced so differently by those committed to the vision of an agrarian heritage place. While protections advocates can assert that agricultural and other “non-services” areas have “remained steady” or even grown slightly, the large and rapid growth of other sectors resulted in the economic labor aligned with the agrarian heritage place becoming a smaller percentage of overall jobs. Thus, on the ground, a smaller percentage of individuals and families in GSENM-adjacent towns are engaged in and organizing their lives around such activities; this proportional shift may indeed be part of the sense that the region’s agrarian and other utilitarian relationships to land and labor are “being lost.”

Whether drawing upon numerical economic indicators, personal anecdotes, or general perceptions of community change through time, people putting forth narratives in response to the question of the relationship between protected public lands (i.e., national monument designation) and the economy are drawn toward data that align with their existing perceptions of place and desires to “preserve” particular qualities of that place. While protections advocates can point to how the economy has “grown”¹⁷³ and not be wrong by standard economic measures, those opposed to land use restrictions describe economic changes—often in qualitative ways, although also sometimes turning toward quantitative points that support their positions—that can be linked to actual economic and demographic changes. Important, too, is that while people are talking about economic experiences—and indeed contrasting narratives can be pulled from that alone, as increases in income primarily through non-labor sources can

that statistics are sometimes used in anti-protections assertions, it would more likely come in the form of citing a more narrow statistic, such as the absolute or relative decline in the farming sector.

¹⁷³ And, if they were to dig deeper into the Headwaters Economics study, they would be able to point to population, employment, and personal income growing at faster rates in the GSENM region than the U.S. average (Headwaters Economics 2020, 42).

coexist alongside economic hardships such as the struggle to secure a livable wage and/or affordable housing—they also interpret shifting economic activity in relation to ideas about what is good economic activity and whether the qualities they consider to be enduring and desirable features of this place are persisting or under threat.

The decline in commodities industries (such as oil/gas drilling, manufacturing, and lumber) may be driven more by changing flows of global capitalism¹⁷⁴ than by the designation of GSENM, but regardless of cause, the decline of industries with historically well-paying positions and growth of positions with nonequivalent wages reflects a shift in how one might “make a living.” As these industries have declined, the three sectors that have expanded in the region are education, healthcare, and tourism. The growth of these first two sectors is largely explained by a gradually growing population. Though more consistent than tourist-centered services, positions in these sectors typically require specific training and certifications.¹⁷⁵ The significant increase in tourist activity may be driven by numerous factors. Significantly, the State of Utah launched a “Mighty Five” campaign in 2013, with advertisements in various cities across the country, to bring attention to Utah’s five national parks (Zion, Bryce, Capitol Reef, Arches, and Canyonlands). Photo- and video-centric social media like Instagram and TikTok and the rise of “influencers” have undoubtedly also shaped awareness of—and desire to visit—specific viewsapes (e.g., Angels Landing in Zion, Kanarraville Falls outside of Cedar City, Peekaboo and Spooky slot canyons in GSENM) . The “Mighty Five” advertising campaign has been so successful at highlighting Utah’s national parks, plus the effects of social media, that the landscape and infrastructure impacts of heavy visitation have become a challenge (e.g., to

¹⁷⁴ It’s perhaps a bit sassy to throw around such phrases as “flows of global capitalism” unexplained and uninterrogated. Alas, this dissertation can only try to accomplish so much. For some interesting discussions on globalized capitalism and the metaphors we use to discuss them see Appadurai (1990), Gillespie (2012), and Heyman and Campbell (2009).

¹⁷⁵ There has been a big push in Kanab to get various professional training and certification programs up and running within the community, such as through a Utah Tech University satellite office at Kanab High School.

national park and BLM staff, as well as to city and county governments) and in 2021 the State was rumored to be working on a campaign¹⁷⁶ to draw visitors to other areas—including GSENM—to help disperse the negative physical and positive economic impacts.

This pattern of declining and growing industries articulates with the agrarian heritage ideal place in a couple of ways. Critics of tourism-centered economies highlight that much of the economic growth produced by tourism is in the service industry with positions that are often not high-paying jobs that can readily support a person and their family. Those seeking employment in Kanab and surrounding towns share challenges with many others across the nation, like securing a job with a livable wage and/or being scheduled for sufficient hours at one employer to secure healthcare and other benefits. Additionally, because of the seasonal aspect of tourist visitation, workers can experience a boom-and-bust cycle throughout the year in which they may have no work or insufficient hours through the winter months. Business owners can experience a similar cycle of struggling to have sufficient staff in the busy season and then having to navigate revenue vs. staffing costs and consider both profitability and social relations in the slow season. This seasonal rise and fall pattern is reflected in the Headwaters Economics socioeconomic trends data in a graph of number of jobs over time (Headwaters Economics 2020, 38). Thus, even as household and per capita income may be rising on paper, there remain difficulties for working people seeking to make a sufficient living to support themselves and their families. Perhaps it is no surprise that people experiencing some of these challenges are unlikely to find such study findings compelling.¹⁷⁷

Beyond the practical challenges of working in a tourism-centered economy, an important

¹⁷⁶ At the time a few folks employed in state and federal positions said this effort was called the “Black Jewel” campaign, although I don’t believe that title was a part of any public-facing advertising.

¹⁷⁷ This pattern occurs at the national level, too, with discourse about the economy through indicators such as stock market numbers and gross domestic product. Unsurprisingly, those struggling to get by in the conditions of late capitalism are unlikely to find such numbers compelling when their own experiences are something quite different than prosperity.

aspect of how data about economic activity are received and utilized is how ideas about desirable and undesirable economic activity are part of the constellation of features that make up the ideal places toward which people are drawn. While tourist recreation is a potential threat to the wilderness ideal (increasingly so after the significant growth in visitation post-2020), many wilderness advocates are also outdoor recreationists, resulting in a careful dance of delineating good and bad forms of recreation on the land (e.g., quiet and low-visible impact vs. loud and high-visible impact), as well as ideas about too many people being negative (in terms of both physical impact and a sense of a “wilderness experience”), especially too many people without knowledge of wilderness ethics.¹⁷⁸ Tourism may be a potential threat to wilderness, but this concern is often reconciled—rendering tourism-centered economic growth available for supporting pro-protections arguments—such that it isn’t inherently a “bad” form of economic activity within the wilderness place frame if done “correctly,” in ways that don’t disrupt the aesthetic experience of enjoyment of wilderness.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ Various outdoor recreationists with marginalized lived experiences (e.g., on the basis of race, class, gender and sexuality, cultural heritage, etc.) have critiqued how the lines drawn through these reasonings perpetuate easy access for mainstream white environmentalists and outdoor recreationists whose families participated in such activities and obstacles for and judgment toward those who come from different traditions of relating to land and who may be the first in their families to explore specific forms of outdoor recreation. Leave No Trace ethics, a behavioral standard taken up by many wilderness-focused outdoor recreators, are rooted in notions of Romantic wilderness. Wilderness enthusiasts’ boundary drawing between good and bad outdoor recreators falling along these lines ignores other (potentially equally sustainable in terms of ecological impact) traditions of engagement. This reinforces patterns in which white outdoor recreators who’ve had ready access to learning LNT-style ethics and etiquette are seen as appropriate recreators and judge people of color for not interacting with natural spaces in “the right way,” ignoring the colonial and racist legacies shaping who has historically engaged in outdoor recreation and how (e.g., Capalby 2021, Gosalvez 2020, Williams 2019). Although goals to not damage landscapes and ecosystems are well-intended, anecdotes of white recreators policing non-white recreators with regard to whether they follow such behaviors abound, including reports of white people disrupting Indigenous people’s traditional harvest of culturally significant plants. Many white outdoor recreators are largely unreceptive to facing head-on the historical and cultural dynamics shaping who has and hasn’t had access to various forms of outdoor education or to the particularly white settler cultural ideals of outdoor recreation aesthetics that center a wilderness experience, with many individuals reacting strongly when people holding marginalized identities describe their experiences of engaging in outdoor recreation or being in outdoor recreation community spaces, insisting that natural/wilderness spaces are “for all” and that the community is welcoming to everyone (usually by citing that they themselves have never felt unwelcome, seeming to miss the point entirely that the qualities of their own lived position is what offers such a low-friction experience).

¹⁷⁹ Note, too, that the application of a wilderness place ideal in southern Utah doesn’t necessarily mean a full rejection of a fossil fuel-centered economy. Critiquing protections advocates for their use of vehicles and

In contrast, a vision of place celebrating agrarian heritage gives value to specific forms of economic labor. While both pro- and anti-protections voices frequently turn toward an argument that the data support their side, with the assertion or implication that numerical data straightforwardly offer some kind of “truth” about the situation, symbolic resonance or dissonance can transform what meaning, if any, a piece of data is seen to have. The reception of economic data by those drawn to the agrarian heritage ideal assign positive and negative value to specific forms of economic labor, largely aligning with whether the labor involves “working the land” in some way. That much of the economic growth since the monument designation is in the service industry, much of it tourist-focused while employment has remained steady or fallen in areas like timber, agriculture, extractive industry, and manufacturing makes findings of economic growth less meaningful when the latter types of economic activity are seen as “good” labor. With those types of jobs making up a smaller proportion of employment in the region than previously and much of the post-designation economic growth occurring in the service industry which is symbolically dissonant with the agrarian heritage image, studies showing “economic growth” don’t sway anti-protections’ perspectives and those voices often reproduce arguments that the Monument harms the economy without naming explicitly the nuances at play (i.e., “yes, there was economic growth, but it was in tourism and we don’t like/want tourism”).¹⁸⁰

petroleum-based outdoor equipment is perhaps a favorite pastime of some of their opponents, but at least some protections advocates see and speak to that dependence. The merging of wilderness-focused public lands advocates and activists organizing for just transition of energy systems is in its infancy; those forging such pathways appear to be younger and more likely to be Native or non-Native people of color. More frequently, wilderness advocates address the fossil fuel problem in an externalizing manner: “I know we need to drill for fossil fuels somewhere, just please not here. This place is sacred.”

¹⁸⁰ It is worth noting that those who culturally and politically fall within that traditional mainstay of the community that is drawn toward the agrarian heritage ideal place is not a monolith. Instead, this purported anti-tourism/anti-development bloc is complicated and appears to be bifurcating as more folks try their hand at tourism-centered businesses and the pros and cons of a tourism-centered economy are felt with greater intensity after 2020. (We should, however, perhaps question just how homogenous those perspectives were before—like positions on many other issues, the “blocs” are not as clearcut as the discourse would have them be.) Increasingly, there are individuals from the more traditional part of the community who benefit economically from the large expanses of

Normative economic measures and qualitative descriptions of economic experiences feature in contrasting arguments about the economic conditions of Monument-adjacent communities. These “opposite” arguments that both have some connection to patterns within this dataset occur not just in relation to personal experience (i.e., an individual struggling to “get by” is not readily persuaded by an overall economic growth statistic) but also in relation to visions of ideal places. Lived experiences shape what patterns matter, but it’s not just a matter of whether an individual’s own experience aligns with a narrative of improvement or decline. Indeed, socioeconomically well-off local residents opposed to land use restrictions, too, lift up narratives of local economic struggle. How certain facets of data resonate (or are dissonant) with a vision of place influences what data is pulled to the foreground or ignored, as well as what meaning is “found” in the data. Data that appear to align with a particular position about land management and/or with values about economic activity, community change, and governance are more likely to be paid attention to and lifted up to make an argument. Within the constellation of features of the ideal place toward which anti-protections individuals are drawn are notions of desirable and undesirable forms of economic activity—their desirability not just about material or practical matters that can be reduced to financial equations, but about the symbolic value of particular forms of work (and, in that labor, desirable forms of relating to land, landscapes, and animals) that connect to agrarian heritage. And even as wilderness advocates may speak with concern about the explosion of the very service industry that makes up much of the economic growth found in the study, the study findings serve as a counterclaim to the idea that monument creation resulted in economic harm, making the study resonate with—and have

largely undeveloped public lands in the region. Like the wilderness advocates who seek to stop extractive industries to protect southern Utah’s “pristine” landscapes while continuing to participate in a fossil fuel economy, there are those who oppose land use restrictions and regulations, especially those facilitated by the federal government, who benefit from land management policies that protect aesthetics of undeveloped, wild land. This latter position or perspective is exemplified by the Kane County Tourism Office’s slogan “Kanab: Magically Unspoiled” that leverages the appeal of undeveloped landscapes while rendering invisible the various land use restrictions on surrounding public lands that help maintain the “unspoiled” aesthetic.

utility for—the pro-protections wilderness place.

Case 2: Data and Expertise in a Local Land Use Decision

Debates about the Monument are, in a way, abstract. At nearly 2 million acres, GSENM in its entirety may be inevitably so—no one individual can necessarily experience all its facets in a direct way. The local-level skirmishes force land decisions out of the abstract space, bringing people face-to-face with decisions that have to do with their lives, not just principles about pioneer heritage or wilderness. Nonetheless, these local skirmishes are subject to the same push and pull of symbolic resonance, and the reception of data occurs in relation to features of the ideal places toward which people are drawn. In southern Utah, land decisions are plentiful, from the zoning decisions common to all city and county governments to the proposals for use and sale of assorted government-owned lands that occur fairly regularly in the region due to the large percentage of state and federal land. Unlike conflict about Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, these issues are rarely subject to a national level of organizing and only occasionally receive national-level news coverage. Yet these types of decisions regularly become central town dramas with competing yard signs and debate playing out in public hearings, commissioner meetings, the local newspaper, Facebook “Kanab Classifieds,” and the even more inflammatory and less moderated Facebook group, “Kanab/Fredonia Rant and Rave.”

One such local drama was unfolding when I moved to Kanab in August 2019. A company called Southern Red Sands (SRS)¹⁸¹ had proposed a frac sand mining project on a

¹⁸¹ Southern Red Sands was previously called Integrated Logistics, then Integrated Sands; a spokesperson from the company said the change in name was a marketing move to differentiate their company from Great Lakes area frac sand operations (Fuchs 2019c). At the time, Southern Red Sands had 2 full time employees, one of whom was a county commissioner, and described itself as a “start-up” due to its lack of history/experience with frac sand mining, although it was backed by The Gardner Company, an established real estate business based in northern Utah.

640-acre parcel of SITLA land¹⁸² approximately 10 miles north of Kanab, aiming to yield 700,000 tons of sand expected to be sold for use in hydraulic fracturing procedures primarily in the Uinta Basin in eastern Utah. In hydraulic fracturing, silica sand is injected with water into fissures to help keep those fissures open throughout the process of extracting fossil fuels. To procure this sand, sediment is mined (via “open pit” mining), “scrubbed” (a water-intensive process to purify the sediment into silica sand, removing material detrimental to fracking procedures, such as clay), and hauled away via semi-trailer trucks to their destinations for use in fracking operations.

While Southern Red Sands already owned the mining permits for the area, pursuing such mining required additional permits, approvals, and sales across a variety of governing entities. After communication between the company and these entities earlier in the year, city council, and county commission meetings were held in July that included a public comment period followed by a vote. Hundreds of residents crammed into the public library’s multipurpose room on July 9th, 2019, for a city council meeting featuring presentations by the company, an opportunity for public comment, and a vote (Fuchs 2019a, 2019b). Approximately three dozen people spoke¹⁸³ during a 2-hour public comment period, with one resident speaking in support of the project and the rest opposing it (Fuchs 2019b). At the end of the meeting, the city council voted to approve the sale of 600 acre-feet of water per year to the company.¹⁸⁴ In that same

¹⁸² SITLA land is state trust land that is managed for the purpose of producing revenue to support the Permanent School Fund and 11 other institutional beneficiaries. Depending on whether the SITLA parcel has active leases for agricultural or industrial activity, it may or may not be “open to the public” for activities such as hiking, driving OHVs/ATVs, hunting, or other recreational endeavors.

¹⁸³ As this event occurred before I arrived in Kanab, this detail is from news articles, and it is unclear whether approximately that many people were there who wanted to speak or that that many spoke during the time allotted with additional public comment restricted by limits on the length of the meeting.

¹⁸⁴ This pattern of voting opposite of the dominant perspective shared during public comment is common in Kanab. When questioned on why they voted in opposition to the majority of the public comments, varying answers may be given. Some Kanab residents who favor environmental protections told me that commissioners have said, in response to such a question, that they “speak for the silent majority” in the town, implying that the dominant view expressed during public comment is outweighed by an even larger number of people who didn’t attend the meeting who are assumed to hold a view that aligns with how the council members or commissioners voted. Another stance that I have observed local officials and political candidates take on these matters is one of denying agency, acting with an attitude that the projects are going to happen regardless of whether people find them

month, SRS secured another 600 acre-feet per year from the Kane County Water Conservancy District, and the Kane County Planning and Zoning Commission approved a conditional use permit that would allow the company to build up to six storage silos.

After the permit and water sale approvals in July, opponents worked to stop the project along multiple fronts. Those familiar with federal land management procedures pointed out that BLM approval would be needed for a right of way, a decision that would be subject to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and thus require an environmental impact assessment. Although NEPA doesn't require protective action beyond conducting the assessment, these individuals were hopeful that an environmental impact statement describing negative ecological impacts would help slow or stop the movement toward realizing the project. One Kanab resident started a petition to send to SRS's financial backer, the Gardner Company, calling on the company to remove its support for the project due to being "inconsistent with Gardner Company's commitments to 'community' and 'sustainability'" (Fuchs 2019b). "No Frac Sands" yard signs proliferated in the lawns of pro-protections residents. In September, wilderness-loving residents gathered near the site of the proposed mine to read poems and sing songs, fueling their spirits for the emotionally taxing pathway of fighting the project—a well-worn pathway for many of these residents having fought against past industry projects in the region in

distasteful, and thus, they argue, city and county entities should try to secure a strategic position in a presumed inevitable project. Such was the case at this meeting: in a deflecting move, the Kanab mayor asserted that the project, due to being on land under SITLA jurisdiction, wasn't really in their control, such that "regardless of what we do here tonight, this project will go forth" (Fuchs 2019a). There is another facet of this dynamic that may be at play, though I don't have a clear sense of the magnitude or widespreadness of this framework, which is that one person living in a small southern Utah town and working in public lands conservation explained that they had been told, "you should obey your elected representatives"—hinting at an alternative view of the role of elected officials that flips the notion of elected official serving constituents into members of the public obeying elected officials as community leaders. Such a pattern was suggested by the person relaying this experience to me to be a projection of hierarchical norms of the LDS Church onto government. During my fieldwork it remained unclear to me how widespread this take on elected officials was, and certainly individuals within the LDS Church have, in conversation with me, directly challenged the notion that they would just do what their ward bishop or higher-up Church leadership would tell them to do. Nonetheless, such an encounter suggests not all community members (along with their elected officials) have the same idea of what the constituent-elected official relationship should look like.

the past.¹⁸⁵

The most coordinated response came from the Best Friends Animal Sanctuary and a “citizens group”¹⁸⁶ formed in response to the proposed project called Keep Kanab Unspoiled. Located just down-watershed from the site of the project, Best Friends was especially concerned about how the project’s water use might affect their ability to continue their work of caring for around 1600 animals at the sanctuary. Given these concerns, the organization hired an independent hydrogeologist to conduct a study projecting future water scenarios if the mine moved forward into operation. Keep Kanab Unspoiled arranged meetings in which community members could hear updates from Best Friends representatives and organized fundraising efforts to help pay for legal costs of fighting the project, ranging from setting up an online donation platform to putting together a silent auction at the library and, later, a live auction at the Kanab Center.¹⁸⁷ This block came to serve as the primary voice of the opposition, with KKU and Best Friends representatives (such representatives sometimes being the same person) being quoted in news articles about the issue as counter-voices to SRS representatives and city and county officials.

Those opposed to the project held numerous concerns about environmental impacts and

¹⁸⁵ This genre of engagement does not require the presence of the opposition—the songs and poems were not a performance of protest to an outside audience, but rather an event meant to boost the energy and resolve of those opposing the projects. As a person opening the event explained, “When we come together we inspire each other and remind ourselves how we all care about public lands.” This event, which featured songs and poems celebrating wild nature as well as astronomy viewing with a telescope, was pitched as one of several that would occur monthly such as “a hike to the Red Knoll summit, full moon dance, blessing of the land, campfire poetry reading, star party, and a tour of the planned SITLA frac sand site.” Although I never encountered information about following events happening, these types of activities reflect a particular mode of interacting with “nature” linked to sensory features of wilderness experiences.

¹⁸⁶ While this group organized meetings to plan action and collect funds to support the legal fight against the project, this self-described “citizens group” remained non-institutionalized (i.e., I don’t believe they sought 501c3 or other formal status).

¹⁸⁷ The items advertised for this auction were “Paintings, *Native American art*, crafts, jewelry, holiday decor, local business gift cards, vacation rental, *Patagonia clothing*, and much, much more...” (emphasis mine) hinting at the particular aesthetic sensibilities of the primary KKU audience—settler wilderness enthusiasts with a romanticized image of Indigenous people.

their ramifications for the community. Kanab's water future was central to these concerns, on matters of both availability and contamination. Drawing water from the same source as municipal water, the project was granted up to 1200 acre-feet per year, the water use of approximately 2,400 households—nearly half the size of Kanab. The water would be used to wash the sand to separate the desired silica sand from other components, a process that involves the use of flocculants such as polyacrylamide and acrylamide,¹⁸⁸ raising concerns about groundwater contamination. Opponents argued that the potential threat to the community's future water, especially in the context of ongoing drought and many signs of worsening climate change, was not worth the risk. Additional concerns included ecological impacts, such as vegetation removal and the destruction of cryptobiotic soil crust, as well as increased noise and air pollution from semi-truck traffic hauling sand away from the facility.

Alongside these community-impacting concerns was a strong thread of local opposition animated by an aesthetic appreciation of undeveloped (“wild”) spaces and values of ecological well-being for its own sake. These values were expressed fervently in one-on-one conversations with me and at Keep Kanab Unspoiled (KKU) meetings. Not only was this project considered a threat to a “pristine landscape,” but also it was seen as part of a bigger picture of an ongoing battle between southern Utah's wilderness and “locals” wanting to destroy those “untouched” landscapes—that is, while people were specifically organizing in opposition to this project, they connected it to past similar conflicts (proposed industry projects) in a picture that both represented their endurance in fighting such projects and the persistence of “locals” desire to destroy natural beauty. Although the ecological and community impact concerns described above were used in arguments against the project, the notion that the project would destroy

¹⁸⁸ Although the term “flocculants” was used in the frac sands discourse in a way that emphasized such chemicals as a kind of foreign threat, flocculants are also typically used in wastewater treatment, and thus already play a part in people's everyday lives whether they know it or not. The flocculants used for frac sand processing are, however, associated with health issues (e.g., acrylamide is a neurotoxin), and there are multiple ways those chemicals could inadvertently enter groundwater (Russell 2013).

natural beauty seemed to be brought up just as often. Indeed, Keep Kanab Unspoiled (the name a reference to the Kane County Tourism Office's slogan "Kanab: Magically Unspoiled") was said by speakers from the group to be named to "reflect the importance of the *virgin beauty* of our surroundings" (emphasis mine). This articulation of virgin beauty reminds of the guiding power of the image of "untouched" and "pristine" landscapes and shows how these ideas are even applied to landscapes that have known land use histories that contradict a strict definition of untouched; this pattern reminds of the importance of particular sensory experiences on a landscape, over actual land use history or other features like remoteness, for activating the idea of untouched landscapes in those drawn to the wilderness place. Through this lens, the frac sand mine represented a threat to the wilderness vision of place that sees southern Utah's natural landscapes—"pristine" and undeveloped—as under threat. Uncompelled by arguments about pristine landscapes, people in support of the project were quick to point out the appropriateness of SITLA land being used for such a project, reminding others that the purpose of that land is to generate revenue for schools and implying that generating that revenue inevitably involves some kind of extractive industry.

This argument about the revenue-generating purpose of SITLA land is perhaps best understood as a discursive move shoring up one's position—i.e., it is strategic to highlight SITLA's purpose as doing so aligns with the position that most resonates with the agrarian heritage image of place. Underlying such discursive moves were two primary threads guiding the development of positions in favor of the project. First, the project came with the prospect of jobs—reportedly up to 40 positions directly, although some would be technical (requiring particular certification/training that many local individuals don't have) and some would be shift work (positions considered less ideal in a family-centered cultural setting), and up to 100 indirectly (e.g., jobs driving the trucks that would haul the sand away). Importantly, the project offered the possibility of jobs for Kanab residents that were the *right kind* of jobs—that is, positions within the industrial sector that resonate with ideas of desirable utilitarian economic

labor. The frac sands proposal, and others like it, held appeal to those drawn to the agrarian heritage idea of place because they give the impression of—or perhaps the hope of—a *return* to a community in which bygone economic sectors (extractive industry, agriculture, etc.) expand to become central once again. With economic changes in the 1980s and '90s resulting in the closure of industry-related businesses being experienced as a sense of loss, present-day proposed projects seem to be received with an aura of hope that the cultural-economic conditions of the past can be regained.

Second, many local supporters framed their position in relation to an ideological commitment to free enterprise. When city and county representatives (who approved necessary permits and water sales), city and county officials (who didn't have an official governing hand in the project), and project-supporting residents were asked what their position on the issue was, a common refrain was that they had no business trying to stop the project because each individual (with some blurring between the individual as a person and the individual business) has a "right" to pursue their business interests. Although the proposed project would be carried out via a lease on SITLA land, SRS's "right" to pursue the project was put in the frame of private property rights—that by owning the mining claim, the company had a right to realize that claim and that others, such as the governing entities granting permits for water and road rights-of-way, shouldn't get in the way.¹⁸⁹

This framing effectively sidestepped questions of impact on the community and the surrounding environment, curtailing debate about the pros and cons of the project by declaring

¹⁸⁹ While SRS's mining claim was framed with ideas of private property rights, government agency management of resources like water or road access were not. Even as individual rights are so prevalent in anti-protections discourse, something like an individual's right to clean water in sufficient amounts—a right that might be protected/supported by a public agency's management of water resources—is not lifted up and/or linked to the frame of rights or personal liberty/individual freedom. I believe further precision in characterizing these points of the agrarian heritage place constellation could be gained by a pointed comparison of the conditions in which an entity's (individual, private business, public/government agency) relation to a area, resource, or right is or isn't placed in a frame of individual freedom and/or private property rights. At this time, such an endeavor must be a future analytical task.

the primacy of free enterprise over all other variables. One striking version of this assertion came from a candidate, M, at the 2019 city council election forum. The candidates had been asked to share their perspectives on the frac sand mine;¹⁹⁰ M's answer circled around the notion that government should be hands-off, illustrating an image of the world in which an anti-regulation, pro-business position allows things to run their natural course and that interrupting that is an affront to personal freedoms. M illustrated with an analogy: "Think of it this way—if there are a bunch of French fry restaurants in town and I like fries, and then someone tries to establish a sweet potato fry business in town, but I don't like sweet potato fries, who am I to say they can't have a sweet potato fry establishment here?" In this way, M shifted the conversation away from debate about the known and potential impacts of the project and framed opposition to the project as a kind of self-centered instance of hindering others' freedoms while trying to force one's own personal preference onto others.¹⁹¹

That some people's "support for" the project was centered less on enthusiasm for the specific project and more on commitment to a value or political ideology woven into their vision of place illustrates another influence of symbolic resonance in relation to data. This type of resonance enables one to largely sidestep getting into the weeds about the possible impacts of the project via strong resonance with notions of personal freedom and free enterprise, a kind of throwing one's hands up to claim, "Who are we to say what someone else does?" Such an attitude, as exemplified in rhetoric like M's sweet potato fry comment, essentially denies the interconnectedness of things, such as between political ideology, governance, and material systems. The idea that one (an individual or government entity) shouldn't get in the way of

¹⁹⁰ That this question was asked at the city council election forum reminds of the ways that particular points of view, including positions on land projects, signal localness or insiderness (or their opposites, move-in status or outsiderhood). The city council was not involved in the permitting or water sales for the frac sand mine, yet audience members still posed questions about the candidates' positions on that specific project.

¹⁹¹ This candidate was successful in their city council campaign and later went on to successfully be elected county commissioner.

someone else pursuing business simply because they “don’t like” what that business has to offer appeals to a notion of “live and let live” while eliding the ways in which various business practices have differing impacts on environmental systems and on others’ abilities to live lives with their own freedom (e.g., freedom to live in a safe and healthy environment with clean drinking water).¹⁹² Although of a different flavor than the symbolic resonance shaping protections advocates’ simplistic uptake of economic data as a discursive tool to support their position, this denial of interconnectedness is also an effective discursive tool—one for anti-protections arguments—to avoid direct engagement with questions of and data about environmental or community impact. Leaning into the resonance with ideas of personal and business freedom opens up space for spotlighting the points that also resonate with the ideal agrarian heritage place, such as the right kind of jobs, while minimizing demands to reckon with possible detrimental impacts. A rhetorical framing that equates a frac sand operation with a restaurant business and personal tastes also casts opposition as unreasonable and a threat to freedom, creating a subtle shift in the frame of what the land decision is about.

Symbolic Resonance in Taking “For” and “Against” Positions

Symbolic resonance with such values as free enterprise contributed to how people defended “for” and “against” positions in a way that challenges the default image of how people might stake a position regarding a land use decision. That is, symbolic resonance between decision-making processes and the idea of free enterprise or minimal government, along with dissonance between the agrarian heritage ideal place and the “environmentalist” orientation

¹⁹² While my focus here is on the ways resonance with the idea of free enterprise aids individuals sidestepping conversations about impact, I will note that when local public officials supporting the project were pushed on the matter, they simply downplayed the significance of environmental impacts, for instance pointing out that the mining would be restricted to a 100-acre section of the 640-acre SITLA parcel and saying, much to ecologically-minded folks’ ire, that the company would just “put the unused sand back on top once they had mined what they needed.” (Beyond the parameters of this initial project, SRS’s mining claims in the general vicinity totaled around 13,000 acres, preventing competition from the creation of other sand mines in the present and leaving open the possibility of continuation/expansion in the future if it was economically advantageous to do so [Fuchs 2019c].)

(aligned with features of the ideal wilderness place) of opposition to the project, strongly influenced how individuals developed and expressed their position. At times, then, it seems that for some in support of the project, their support was less about enthusiasm for the mine itself and more about following patterns of resonance with their desired image of place and/or resisting that which was dissonant. In this latter sense, some “proponents” of the project might be better described as the opposition’s opponents. While some expressed direct support for the frac sands operation itself (e.g., through narratives about jobs and economic well-being), the symbolic weight of free enterprise was so great that the emphasis placed on not impeding others’ freedom to do business often seemed to overshadow desire for the specific project itself.

Just as some “proponents” were not necessarily enthusiastic about the frac sand mine specifically, not all who opposed the project were in the social category typically labeled as “move-ins” or “environmentalists.” There were others, including long-time locals, who opposed the project but who didn’t get involved in the opposition organized by Keep Kanab Unspoiled and Best Friends. I heard from and heard about a handful of long-time locals (individuals with multi-generational connections to Kanab) who spoke of their concerns quietly rather than engaging in the community meetings and efforts organized by KKKU. One long-time local spoke of this quiet opposition through a frame of hesitance to speak up, such as at a public hearing, against the dominant narrative about what “locals’ views” were on the issue—as Chapter 2 demonstrated, in concert with other individual characteristics, simply “having the wrong views” can threaten one’s status as “local.” As I attended meetings and other events organized by Keep Kanab Unspoiled, I was also struck by how much anti-local sentiment—rhetoric casting Kanab’s “local” core as backwards, nefarious, and distasteful, i.e., the negative configuration of the Kanab community that features in the wilderness vision of place—was woven into discussion of and assertions about the proposed project. It felt unsurprising that individuals from the more “traditional” part of the community who opposed the project weren’t involving themselves in such activity. Not only was this activism space saturated with desire for the ideal

wilderness place, but also it leveraged an orientation of condescension toward “locals.” Considering this complexity of what shapes varying “for” or “against” positions, as well as noting obstacles to people with shared positions on a land-use decisions developing collaborative action, reminds that the configuration of positions people hold is more complex than dominant narratives about southern Utah land conflict suggest and illustrates the influence that features of place have on whether/where those with shared interests recognize each other.

Data and Expertise at the Frac Sands Water Forum

Many moments as this land decision played out offered glimpses of the pull toward particular ideas of place and how resonance or dissonance with a place commitment shaped the positions people took on the issue. One such moment was an explicit presentation of data in the form of a “water forum,” held at the end of October 2019, a few months after the initial approving votes from the county commission and water conservancy district, to communicate information and respond to questions about the impacts of the project on local water sources. Though appeals to scientific data in relation to this land use decision were more frequently made by opponents of the project, events that enroll all sides in a discussion of “data” with the implication that such a discussion can help clarify the “right” course of action in contentious land decisions are not uncommon in the area, demonstrating an enduring notion of the importance of data in decision-making and of communicating data to stakeholders. The water forum was hosted by the Chamber of Commerce, which declared a neutral stance and was said to have invited “all stakeholders” to participate (e.g., including Southern Red Sands, the county commission, etc.), framing the event as a discussion where “experts” were coming together to share information related to the potential impact of the frac sands project on local water resources at a “nonpartisan” event. Yet the choreography of the event and the differing ways people interpreted this event suggest that few experienced it within such a framing. The varied presentations and audience reactions to those presentations illustrate how such an event is enacted and received in relation to place commitments, with symbolic resonance impacting

perceptions of quality, trustworthiness, and validity of data and expertise.

Only two representatives accepted the invitation to speak, each distinctly associated with “against” and “for” positions on the project: the hydrogeologist hired by Best Friends and a representative chosen by the Kane County Water Conservation District. The hydrogeologist, Kenneth Kolm, was a consultant hired at least in part because of his past project modeling water availability for Moab, UT, and who was in this context and in news stories regularly identified as “a former professor at the Colorado School of Mines.” At the request of the animal sanctuary, he and another hydrology consultant had conducted a study modeling the potential impacts of the proposed frac sand mine on future water availability. Roger Holland, a long-time Kanab resident and geologist, spoke as a representative of the Kane County Water Conservancy District, a county-level entity operating water systems for residents outside of Kanab City¹⁹³ that had approved the sale to SRS of up to 600 acre-feet of water per year. Although he was not a KCWCD employee, he was recognized as an expert explicitly via his decades of experience as an exploration geologist/mining consultant and implicitly via decades of experience in relation to this specific area. Even before they gave their respective presentations, the subtext seemed clear that this “forum” was a debate with each speaker representing “for” and “against” positions on the frac sands issue and, to some degree, the “local” and “outsider” perspectives.

From the outset, the hydrogeologist’s participation reminded of the outsidership of his expertise. A Colorado resident, Dr. Kolm joined via video call, his face projected onto a hanging

¹⁹³ KCWCD lists varying taglines in different online locations ranging from a water conservation lens (“Developing and protecting our water resources one drop at a time”) to a more direct nod toward valuing agriculture (“Conserving and Developing Water for beneficial use both domestically and agriculturally within Kane County”). As the provider of water to residents outside of Kanab City, they have statutory powers to acquire, own, and operate a water system, borrow money and issue bonds, and levy and collect taxes. They’re also in charge of county water treatment (i.e., their system is composed of one reservoir, 12 wells, treatment plants, and distribution facilities). They aren’t in charge of all water, however, and the sale of 600 acre-feet from KCWCD (of an average of 2144 acre-feet per year with 1884 of that set aside for future sale) was just one of the water sales made to Southern Red Sands.

screen in the middle school cafeteria and, once he shared his screen to display his presentation slides, reduced to a small square in the corner of the projected image. This digital distance was contrasted with the following presentation by Mr. Holland who spoke at the front of the middle school cafeteria room, his facial expressions, body language, and other paralinguistic features much more readily visible to audience members. In addition to the humanizing effects of physical proximity, the contrast between the virtual and in-person presentations accentuated Mr. Brinkerhoff's position as a Kanab resident, boosted further by his familiarity with many members of the community (especially among long-time residents opposed to protections-centered federal land management).¹⁹⁴

Another integral difference between these presentations were their linguistic registers and types of data presented. Dr. Kolm's presentation was quite technical, utilizing scientific terms well-known in earth science disciplines but not common to everyday language,¹⁹⁵ with little to no definition or explanation. Perhaps trying to meet a specific time limit, he spoke quickly, packing a large volume of information into a small amount of time. Even aided by background knowledge from studying Earth and Oceanographic Sciences during my

¹⁹⁴ Although, at the time, I could sense this degree of familiarity between him and some community members, including the forum "mediator," and an attitude of criticism and dismissal about his role as representative from protections advocates who had participated in land conflicts over multiple decades, I didn't have a clear sense of this character's position within the community. I later came to understand details that shaped how he was received by those in support of the mine as a trustworthy local expert. Although he was not born in Kanab, he had lived most of his life there, including graduating from Kanab High School, serving as a Kanab City Councilmember, and engaging in "part-time ranching" (a phrase I read to mean someone who ranches as just one of many livelihoods and/or more for the enjoyment of the practice than as a central income source). Notably, he was a city councilmember when GSENM was designated and had been a vocal opponent to the Monument, asserting that "we can have a coal mine and wilderness...but the environmentalists want to control all that country" (Larmer 1997). Trained in geology at University of Utah, he had worked as a mining consultant/exploration geologist. With these qualities, he had both markers of localness and formal markers of expertise in the eyes of anti-protections residents.

¹⁹⁵ For instance: hydrostructure units, boundary condition, recharge, evapotranspiration, preliminary water budget, self-contained system, unconsolidated sediments, clastic materials, pedogenic and eolian deposits, closing term, etc. (with some terms stated once and then referred to using acronyms, such as PWB for preliminary water budget). While none of these words are particularly obscure, per se, they have particular definitions and premises in hydrogeologic modeling that aren't immediately clear to the average audience member.

undergraduate education, I struggled to keep up with the quickly unfolding pieces of his argument; I wondered how comprehensible the presentation might be for people without prior knowledge in related fields. In a framing that in a presentation to scientific peers would be considered thorough and responsible, Dr. Kolm couched the study results in a discussion of the uncertainties of the models and limitations of the studies.

While Dr. Kolm's report on the development of the model and its findings felt like a presentation one would encounter at an academic conference, Mr. Holland's presentation felt more like a genre of storytelling, with his delivery of narrative in an informal register and use of descriptive anecdotes producing a sense of personableness. His informal demeanor—with comments that took jabs at frac sand mine opponents and likely established rapport with project proponents—stood out as a markedly different register.¹⁹⁶ Rather than numerical data about possible future scenarios, Holland offered narratives of personal experience from the past. In nontechnical language, he spoke of his decades of experience drilling wells in the area, reassuring that in “over 20 years of digging wells there has never been an issue getting water.” Seeming to refer to the hydrogeologic study and other materials examining the project as “protest documents,” he asserted that he'd “read every one of [them] and made notes on them to see what [he could] gleam.” He argued that what happens “on the ground” is more important: “Let's cut down on the information [the abstract numbers of the study] and go up there and drill a well and pump it and see what happens.” Instead of presenting an analysis of the prospective increased water use and rates of recharge, his presentation wove repeating comments on three key themes. First, he challenged opposition to the project by making comparison to other uses (e.g., “grocery stores don't have to prove their viability [to get a water permit]” and “If we're

¹⁹⁶ For instance, in opening his presentation, he asked, “Is everybody happy?” When members of the audience called out, “No!” he responded with, “if you're not happy, it's *your* problem.” When presenting his professional experience, which included exploration geology for mining companies, he said “coal—[sarcastically] oh, that's another bad word.”

concerned about water use, does anybody know what Best Friends water usage is?") and by suggesting the opposition was less about water and more about distaste for the word "frac" (arguing "fracking is not a bad thing"). Second, he emphasized his on the ground experience, talking about drilling wells in specific locations around Kanab (largely outside the specific catchment affected by the mine), asserting that "people there aren't experiencing any problems" and reiterating that over the past several decades people have not experienced problems. Third, he offered two things absent from the scientific frame of Kolm's presentation: personal belief and surety. Numerous times throughout the evening, Holland emphasized his conclusions being specifically his, such as "In my opinion...", "In my experience...", and, most strikingly, "I don't believe there will be any effect on Kanab Creek; *that's my belief.*" Dr. Kolm communicated that the models indicated that a detrimental impact on water, of varying magnitudes, was more likely than a neutral or positive impact, including a "worst case scenario" in which the mine's water use could result in detrimental declines in water availability within five to ten years.¹⁹⁷ In contrast, Mr. Holland narrated his experience, past and present, emphasizing this personal experience as the source of his certainty that there was no need to be concerned about the impacts of the project on water availability; in his words, "This is not going to affect anything, end of story"

In a tightly controlled "Q&A" following the presentations, the speakers responded to questions audience members submitted on paper slips, only a curated selection of which were spoken aloud by a moderator. The moderator quickly shut down a handful of attempts from

¹⁹⁷ Dr. Kolm's modeling focused on the potential impacts of this specific mining operation sits alongside other studies suggesting that both population growth and climate change are expected to lead to water deficits in "business as usual" scenarios (Alpha Engineering 2013, MWH Americas Inc. 2016). Kanab is not unique with regard to projected water shortages but rather is joined by much of the arid southwest. One response to such concerns about water availability in southwestern Utah has been another proposed land use project, the Lake Powell Pipeline, that would seek to pipe water from Lake Powell (itself declining in water volume over recent years, including almost reaching the point of being unable to produce electricity through the Glen Canyon Dam in the second half of 2022) to the growing city of St. George—a land use conflict discussion for another day, though it bears some similarities with the examples discussed in this dissertation.

audience members to speak directly to the presenters and the crowd. In a town with a history of public hearings that can bubble over into shouting and verbal threats of violence, this format helped continue the performance that this was a forum rather than a debate.¹⁹⁸ Even with this tightly controlled format, the interactions between the Dr. Kolm, Mr. Holland, the moderator, and the audience simmered, with presenters interrupting and speaking over each other, a few audience members trying to speak up, and Mr. Holland trying numerous times to needle the audience into further breaking that frame.¹⁹⁹ While there was not a full break in the structure, the antagonistic energy was palpable, even to me, someone who had only been in the community a few months at that time.

The interactions in this Q&A further emphasized the contrasting features of each of these speakers' registers. In response to the questions submitted by audience members directed to Dr. Kolm (about specific outcomes of the frac sand mine as projected in the model), many of Dr. Kolm's answers included a degree of hedging—even when providing a well-informed hypothesis, he reminded folks that he “can't say for sure” given the uncertainties in any model or “it isn't simple to answer.” When Mr. Holland questioned the validity of the model, ending with a statement-question, “so, it's not 100% accurate over time,” Dr. Kolm responded with an explanation of the scientific process: “we have a hypothesis that it's going to be impacted, and we're modeling that...that doesn't mean it will be true, it's a mathematical estimate.” Whenever Dr. Kolm turned toward explaining a part of the model in response to an audience question, Mr. Holland returned to concrete action, saying that instead of focusing on

¹⁹⁸ Though not a key focus of this chapter's analysis of data, this tightly controlled format, the presence of 3 in-uniform law enforcement at the door to the cafeteria, and the mediator's beginning speech about the rules and procedures of the forum that nod to past forum/public hearing dynamics (“no standing up and pointing fingers,” “have patience,” “no yelling,” “limit questions to topics presented, ask questions to presenters not to each other,” “I don't want to further divide this community...I'm not saying any position is valid or invalid”) are all signs of how this “informational event” is situated within a broader history of fiery contestation.

¹⁹⁹ For instance, when a question submitted by an audience member was posed to Mr. Holland by the mediator (“Dr. Kolm uses science. What did you do?”), Mr. Holland's first response was to turn to the audience and ask, “Whose the person that asked that question?”

uncertain projections, answers would be found by “actually getting out there and drilling [to see what happens].” Throughout, each of the speakers seemed to try to push the other to engage in his own frame—Kolm trying to get Holland to respond to questions with data and analysis that were directly connected to the question of future water availability in Kanab Creek, and Holland trying to get Kolm to declare a definitive answer about what he *believes* personally, to state a position and stand behind it. Despite the moderator’s closing saying he hoped everyone came away with a better understanding of the issue and that “we aren’t as divided as we think,” the dynamics of the presentations and Q&A period expressed the debate embedded in the juxtaposition of these two speakers and the typically already-formed opinions of those in the audience. By the time the event concluded, individuals from both sides seemed triumphant that the event had demonstrated the obvious correctness of their position; each felt that their side had “won” the “debate.”

Pro-protections individuals were receptive to Dr. Kolm’s presentation. They spoke of his presentation as a clear demonstration of expertise and viewed his credentials as a PhD-holding scientist affiliated with a university as a marker of credibility. It seemed they did not need to understand every technical detail to trust the findings, and they did not find the inherent uncertainties of modeling to be a source of doubt. They scoffed at the “lack of expertise” in Brinkerhoff’s presentation, shaking their heads in disbelief as he spoke and remarking afterward that much of what he said was hardly relevant to the question of the mine at all—they pointed out that his orientation toward the past, rather than future, and use of examples talking about Johnson Canyon, an area east of town rather than in the vicinity of the proposed project, had little bearing on the answer to what the impacts of the mine might be. “Of course the water conservancy selected him to speak” a frac sand opponent told me with exasperation, because Holland’s illustration of the water situation let KCWCD’s sale of water to SRS remain in a neutral or positive light. To them, Holland’s position within the community was a sign of cronyism and obvious bias, and his turn toward personal experience and observation, particularly with its

focus on the past without addressing the new “input” of the frac sands operation, made the question of what data to trust no contest.

Those in support of the frac sand mine (or at least opposed to the opposition via distaste for “environmentalist” or disapproval of any government entity stopping a business from operating), saw these purveyors of data in a rather different light. The very features of Mr. Holland’s presentation and his community position that were interpreted as demerits by frac sands opponents were embraced.²⁰⁰ In response to an audience-submitted question that read, “Dr. Kolm uses science. What did you do?” Holland responded with, “I know how to drill a water well, I know how to make it productive. I grew up here...SRS needs to drill some wells and do some testing, and I’m not trying to give myself a job, but I do this well.” This type of statement offered an indication of proficiency and expertise while marking important connections to Kanab localness and to a utilitarian value (“I know how to make [a well] productive”). Although frac sand supporters didn’t express the same kind of open visceral distaste toward Dr. Kolm as opponents expressed toward Mr. Holland, highly technical language presented by a disembodied speaker via video call with repeated reminders of the uncertainties and limitations of the models held little sway in comparison to the resonant components of Mr. Holland’s in-person presentation. The communication of limitations and uncertainties that is considered a best practice within scientific discursive spaces instead created reason to doubt or, perhaps

²⁰⁰ Similarly, those opposed to the project considered a county commissioner’s employment with Southern Red Sands an obvious sign of conflict of interest—a conflict they didn’t consider socially/politically resolved by his act of recusing himself on the commission’s vote on its own sale of water to SRS. Of course, such overlap of interests is a conflict of interest by legal definitions, making this commissioner’s recusal appropriate and the questions about lasting influence via social connection founded. Yet I think it is productive to consider alternative meaning found in such a configuration of relationships that may “make sense” within the image of tight-knit community in the ideal agrarian heritage place: the commissioner’s connection to the company was an immediate marker of undesirable bias to frac sands opponents, but to others in the community his connection represented trustworthiness—a sense that because he was a part of that company and a part of the community holding the “right” values to be “local” in the ideal agrarian place, people could perhaps trust the project would be good for—and not harmful to—the community.

more accurately, not taken seriously by those in favor of the frac sands project.²⁰¹ Set against the local resident who offered “decades of experience” to back his assertion of certainty that the water situation is and would be fine, the pieces of Dr. Kolm’s presentation that would be markers of trustworthiness within scientific settings quickly became evidence that the findings of the hydrologic study carried too much uncertainty to be relevant. That the modeling suggested potential detrimental outcomes of the mine’s operations also made its results dissonant with the agrarian heritage place, such findings were even less likely to be taken seriously. A resonant position presented from someone closely connected to the traditional, agrarian, and/or anti-protections parts of the community and in plain language emphasizing lived experience was enough to make the matter of whether his anecdotes logically addressed the questions about the specific impact of the mine unimportant.

While there are several social, cultural, and/or political factors that may have been at play in these receptions of data at this event, I argue that each side’s reactions to the two speakers and the data they presented are best understood less as evidence of consistent attitudes toward particular types of data (e.g., quantitative vs. qualitative, modeled vs. observational) or particular types of experience (e.g., credentialed vs. lived experience), and more as the outcome of this particular event’s features filtered through commitments to aspects of agrarian heritage or wilderness places. Such resonance (and dissonance) occurs at a primary level—what aspects of the event resonate with pieces of one’s desired place, such as

²⁰¹ As Hilgartner (2000) has argued, the process of scientific knowledge production and communication to the public plays out with a “backstage” that includes the messiness of testing and producing knowledge and a “frontstage” where findings are communicated in a tinder, more straightforward fashion. Some scientific matters, such as modeling, are particularly prone to pulling back the curtain to reveal the complexities of the scientific process given the complexity of the process; the perceived messiness of these complex processes of selecting parameters and running models seeking to represent processes in the world can be used to discount the validity of such knowledge. This frontstage backstage dynamic could be at play in this situation, however, I believe that it is not just the opening of backstage to non-scientists that explains reactions to this presentation—after all, those for whom Dr. Kolm’s presentation resonated with their desire to “preserve” natural landscapes paid little to no attention to the uncertainties presented, while those in favor of the project were quick to notice those uncertainties and declare them reason to not take Dr. Kolm’s conclusions too seriously.

perceptions of insider or outsider status—and secondarily, i.e., greater receptiveness to data and markers of expertise that support the land use decision outcome/position that most aligns with one’s place commitment.

Project proponents’ dismissal of the hydrology modeling data was fueled by how those data’s findings were dissonant with the place commitments held by many anti-protections individuals, in that it suggested reasons to stop the project (challenging beliefs about free enterprise) and highlighted possible environmental impacts of the project (a link to “environmentalism”). It helped, too, that Mr. Holland’s presentation offered personal witness (“I’ve seen with my own eyes”), anecdotes set in specific familiar locations, and a sense of certainty. These features resonated with the vision of the ideal agrarian heritage place, not just in its linking up to markers of insiderness but in supporting the “for” position that already resonated with narratives about jobs and free enterprise. That people in support of or at least open to the frac sands project did not find Dr. Kolm’s scientific data persuasive should not be taken as indicative of anti-protections individuals’ consistent opposition to quantitative and/or scientific data—an image itself common in pro-protections’ illustrations of their opponents as “anti-science.” Nor should frac sand opponents’ dismissal of Mr. Holland’s narratives be taken as an across-the-board rejection of non-credentialed forms of expertise or of insights gained through personal experience.

Conditions that Activate Symbolic Resonance

When is “scientific data” valued or not? When is “personal observation” valued or not? When is a formal credential a marker of credibility versus a marker of outsidership? The answers are not as straightforward as a consistent position or value held by each side. Initially, I thought perhaps the social norms of the traditional local part of the community simply favored personal anecdote as a form of data. Certainly, the valuing of scientific data by those opposed to the frac sand mine and dismissal by those in favor of it aligned with broader public lands conservation discourse that casts protections advocates as people committed to science and

their opponents as anti-science. Yet triangulation with other encounters with science (and the idea of scientific knowledge as unbiased), personal experience, and formal credentials or lived experience demonstrates the variations in context that shift how data and expertise are received. This contrast helps reveal the influence of symbolic resonance with desired places playing out in land use decisions.

Importantly, decision-making contexts raise the stakes of how any data point or marker of expertise is interpreted. In contexts that don't demand staking a position on a land use matter, attitudes toward science and markers of expertise are more flexible across the board. That supporters of the frac sands project didn't find Dr. Kolm's modeling data convincing was framed by protections advocates as an indication of the Other's anti-science, anti-education (and, by implication, backwards) worldview. Science and education in other contexts, however, are not always treated as a threat. Although there are numerous other cultural factors shaping how much educational aspirations are realized,²⁰² excitement about educational opportunities for Kanab's youth and young adults extends into the part of the community that tends to support land uses such as the frac sands project—the part of the community that protections advocates take to be anti-education and anti-science.

While some of this energy centers on more explicit occupational training, such as trade skills certification programs, science education—when presented in politically neutral ways and especially when folded into the broader umbrella of “STEM” (science, technology, math, and

²⁰² For instance alongside expressions of enthusiasm from people throughout the community for creating educational opportunities, especially related to STEM and career-supporting certificate programs, for Kanab students, pursuing higher education beyond high school is not an especially strong cultural norm with just under a third (~31%) of Kane School District graduates pursuing postsecondary education (though this percentage is only slightly lower than the state average, both of which are notably lower than the approximately 61% of high school graduates nationwide who enroll in some form of postsecondary education; Utah State Board of Education 2024, Bureau of Labor Statistics 2024). While some protections advocates criticize the schools, suggesting they don't value science enough to teach it well, recent test results from the Utah Division of Education place Kanab schools at a few percentage points above average in science proficiency and nearby Valley schools a few percentages below average (Utah State Board of Education 2024). Yet none of these variables necessarily provide definitive meaning regarding community attitudes toward science.

engineering)—is a big hit. Despite being a small town with physical distance from more established educational “enrichment” opportunities (e.g., educational programs at museums, arboretums, etc. as observed in more populated areas of Utah), a handful of local entities regularly put on STEM and other science learning opportunities. The local Extension Office hosts 4-H day camps and other workshops centered on STEM activities, and the Kane County Education Foundation puts on a yearly preschool summer science camp²⁰³ and financially supports a variety of other educational opportunities. When additional opportunities are offered—for instance, from a visiting program from Southern Utah University, a guest presentation from a BLM scientist, or ecology-centered activities I pitched to local teachers when working as Education Programs Manager—such opportunities are typically received openly as long as they don’t threaten to open a door to local land politics. Keeping such a door closed felt, at times, a fine line adjudicated slightly differently by different individuals (e.g., varying receptivity from a superintendent versus a classroom teacher), but it was content that could be interpreted as supporting a pro-protections management position—not science education—that was treated as a threat. Whether nonprofit or government entities were viewed as a threat, too, varied. I was told to expect resistance in my education work just by virtue of our organization's name but was mostly warmly received in my efforts. With regard to attitudes about the Bureau of Land Management, I heard rumors of parents in the past pulling their children from school if a BLM employee came to speak (even about a general science topic and not the Monument itself) but also saw BLM-hosted activities/educational booths welcomed at a variety of events (including those centered on serving local youth). Furthermore, when it is

²⁰³ As a reminder of the integration of my everyday life with the contents of this research, and perhaps as transparent communication: in my capacity as Education Programs Manager with GSEP and as a board member of the Kane Education Foundation, I helped plan and deliver this science camp for three years and, in the process, developed the curriculum now used in a three-year rotation for this science camp. The content of the three years’ themes (earth science, life science, physical science) sides steps questions of land management—they are 4–6-year-old participants after all—but engages participants with their surroundings using local, observable examples.

advantageous to do so—i.e., when scientific data appears to be in alignment with desired land management practices—anti-protections voices don't hesitate to appeal to science or "looking at the data" and calling for an "unbiased" approach. For example, in an article about Utah's public land conflict a prominent Kanab community member who has served in a variety of roles related to local/county government and previously worked for the BLM was quoted, saying, "We need to have additional people on the ground to analyze the data... There is a lot analysis [by federal scientists] that is not being done properly." This assertion illustrates how, discursively, data or arguments made with data that misalign with one's desired sense of place do not result in a rejection of normative ideas of data, science, or analysis but rather in discrediting or dismissing who was doing those analyses and how.²⁰⁴

Similarly, while the respective formal qualifications of the speakers seemed to be leveraged by both opponents and proponents to bolster the framing that their position had been backed up by the event, these assignments of value to particular kinds of knowledge or expertise aren't consistent across other contexts. Protections advocates took Dr. Kolm's PhD to be a marker of legitimacy and trustworthiness, finding it meaningful that he had a more advanced degree than Mr. Holland's 1971 Bachelors of Science in geology. In contrast, the reference to Kolm as "Doctor" during the forum started out as perhaps a neutral honorific, but as the tension grew morphed into a different tone, with Mr. Holland's taking his own jab at Dr. Kolm's expertise with a comment laced with condescension, "Maybe the *Doctor* would know."

²⁰⁴ Another area beyond public lands issues where one can observe appeals to language of science when resonant with particular views and values was in the discourse around wearing masks to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and in the inflammatory discourse about abortion. One illustration of this is an image with text a Kanab resident posted in the Kanab/Fredonia Rant and Rave Facebook group that stated, "If you believe in the science of wearing masks but not the science of life beginning at conception then you don't believe in science. You believe in a political ideology." Such an assertion illustrates how the idea of science—and by extension, the notions of what is and isn't scientific or political or values-driven—may be utilized by those protections advocates would declare anti-Science. Though laypeople and scholars alike may disagree with the post's assertion classifying "life begins at conception" as a scientific view and instead assert that is a cultural belief, the significance here is the appeal to or use of the idea of science as distinct from political ideology in narratives defending one's own set of beliefs and values.

While the recurring reference to Colorado School of Mines might have been heard as a marker of prestige by protections advocates, frac sand mine supporters' recurring reference to this point (at the event and in contexts later where the event and study was discussed) seemed more about reminding of his outsider status. In contrast, Mr. Holland repeatedly reminded the audience of his connection to Kanab and of 45 years of experience working in the region, and his anecdotes included not just his own observations but "reports" of experience from unnamed-but-physically-placed people ("folks in Johnson Canyon"). While such self-positioning was remarked upon by project opponents as part of what made Mr. Holland an untrustworthy source (i.e., signs he would always side with "what the locals want"), this was an early performance of a genre I came to know well from anti-protections voices that emphasized one's relation to and personal knowledge of this region and what one has seen (or not seen) with one's own eyes.

In a non-decision space, however, people of all political persuasions tend to be more open toward multiple kinds of data and forms of expertise. Such was the case during a series of gardening presentations organized by the Healthy Kane County Coalition. Over 6 events spanning the winter months, community members from across varying social, cultural, and political persuasions gathered at the library to hear speakers cover an assortment of garden-related topics. Some of the speakers held advanced degrees in horticulture-related fields, while others were identified as "experts" for a particular topic based on their long-time interest in and engagement with a specific gardening practice. Some of the speakers were part of the long-time local social network, while others were relative newcomers. From the doctorate-holding extension agent who moved to the area a year or so prior, to the elementary school principal with a deep passion for herb gardening, to the father of one of the event organizers who drove from northern Utah to present and both held an advanced degree and had ties to the traditional, pioneer heritage part of the community, the speakers were enthusiastically received by the audience members. In this space, the notion that both scientific data and more localized knowledge, such as about nuances of soil and microclimate variation around the county, were

valuable and relevant to successful gardening was readily embraced by all in the audience. Research conducted through formal scientific methods (e.g., through USU extension initiatives) and individual efforts of trial and error were both recognized as valuable tools for informing gardening practice. These instances, particularly in relation to advanced degrees, suggest that although Kolm's doctoral status was the focus of some negative and condescending remarks, those attitudes were more expressions marking him as an outsider, given his presentation's alignment with a pro-protections argument, than exemplifying a consistent negative orientation toward credentialed expertise.

Comparing the reception of different types of data (numerical through scientific method vs. personal observation/anecdotal) and different markers of expertise (formal credentials vs. lived experience) at the water forum versus non-decision contexts helps refine our understanding of what types of decisions or events activate place commitments. I interpret the positive reception of Mr. Holland's message among those committed to the agrarian heritage place was less a result of or indicator of staunch anti-science commitments and more because his statements about water availability didn't challenge points of their ideal place constellation that get may be activated or come under question when land decisions are being made—here, and often with land decisions, notions of good economic labor and the primacy of free enterprise. While there was some active resonance with the project itself, given the prospect of local jobs in an industrial sector, the notion that businesses should be able to do as they please was perhaps an even bigger factor. Thus, Mr. Holland's message was well-received by those drawn to the agrarian heritage place because it offered reassurance that they could remain in alignment with these desired features of place without having to attend to the possibility that the project could harm their and their community's access to clean water—his interpretation did not force a reckoning of connections between systems. Similarly, the project opponents' framing of Mr. Holland as either a kind of buffoon or duplicitous crony due to his use of personal anecdote instead of scientific data isn't a result of those drawn by the wilderness place always devaluing

personal experience as a form of data. I argue that personal experience as a form of data was targeted in this instance, because Holland's message supported actions that were dissonant with the ideal wilderness place—toward arguments for avoiding certain land uses for the purpose of maintaining natural landscapes. Furthermore, that the hydrologic model data demonstrated the potential risks of the project was an opportunity for project opponents to lean into a triad about science, bias, and land management embedded in protections discourse: that scientific data is unbiased, that if one takes on a scientific perspective the obvious conclusions support a pro-wilderness/pro-protections position, and that, consequently, protections-centered approaches are apolitical and correct.

Ultimately, the varying reception of the two speakers at the water forum and their contrasting data and modes of expertise offers another glimpse of symbolic resonance in action. The meaning individuals pull from such an event tends to follow patterns of whatever resonates with the vision of place toward which they are drawn. Even as the water forum was presented as a straightforward delivery of information—an event that readily fits in traditional stakeholder model in which data can be set on the table for all to see and discuss—the data and the speakers' expertise filtered through their relation to the community interacted with points within each place constellation. Where resonant with a desirable quality of place, data and expertise are lifted up, and where dissonant they are ignored, dismissed, or framed as a marker of something negative (e.g., bias, duplicitousness, or outsidersness). In this way, symbolic resonance both muddles the straightforward application of data to decision-making and, as I briefly discuss in the conclusion of this chapter, fuels narratives and negative feelings about others' data interpretations.

Frac Sands Denouement

Although there are many other intriguing facets of the conflict around the proposed frac sand mine, including its similarities to a handful of other local land dramas that played out between 2019 and 2024, I close out this section with a brief description of key actions taken in

early 2020 and local reactions to those outcomes. Those local reactions illustrate that although resonance with specific points of a place constellation spurs the development of narratives used to argue one's position, symbolic resonance plays out in relation to visions of place that encompass numerous qualities or characteristics, at times producing contradictions whose resolution demands new rhetorical tactics.

In the end, those opposed to the mine got what they wanted. In January 2020, Southern Red Sands backed away from the project, stating the project was no longer feasible due to “economic, transportation, and other logistical issues” (Maffly 2020).²⁰⁵ Shortly thereafter, Best Friends Animal Sanctuary bought SRS's federal land mineral claims and put in a bid to SITLA to purchase the parcel that had been under consideration for the frac sand mine, and their offer was accepted. The purchase was funded by a combination of donations and charitable loans²⁰⁶ from wealthy supporters of the sanctuary. Like the lease that SITLA had approved for Southern Red Sands, the sale of a parcel is not an uncommon avenue through which SITLA produces revenue, and SITLA's then-executive director stated that the price Best Friends paid for the land was greater than what it would've sold for on the open market (Maffly 2020; the sale was advertised publicly, but no competing offers were received). Conservation and preservation proponents applauded the move, even as the action seemed primarily about protecting the organizational interests of the sanctuary: the move was articulated as protecting BFAS and their animals by protecting the aquifer from which their water comes.

Those who had supported the frac sands project and those who already disliked Best

²⁰⁵ SRS did not provide additional detail about why they backed away from the project, leaving unclear whether these feasibility assessments were of the type typical for companies deciding whether to take action on mining claims (e.g., focused on costs of the operation in relation to current and projected selling prices of the material being extracted) or if they included anticipated legal costs given the organized response against the project. In the wake of the company's reversal, a handful of mine opponents expressed this environmental “win” as an outcome of the multi-faceted opposition, including the organization of a legal team to fight the project via litigation.

²⁰⁶ BFAS received large sums of money from people connected to the organization to make the land purchase possible with the agreement that that money would eventually be paid back with little or no interest.

Friends (two highly overlapping but not fully matching sets of people), however, reacted with anger. In a sudden reversal of the rhetoric used to explain their support for the frac sands project through a frame of free enterprise—“Who am I to stop a private business from pursuing their own interests?”—and through pointing out that SITLA’s purpose is to generate revenue, many who had been in support of or open to the frac sand mine took Best Friend’s land purchase as an affront. Individuals made negative posts about the sale in locally-based Facebook groups, such as one that declared, “Best Friends is no friend to Kanab!” Yard signs popped up around town declaring “Save Red Knoll”—a phrase that could have just as easily represented opposition to the frac sands project just weeks before, but instead referred to the SITLA parcel becoming BFAS property. In language almost sounding like public lands advocates, anti-protections/pro-frac sands individuals criticized the move as Best Friends “taking away” public land. Despite the Best Friends CEO’s reassurance that the organization planned to keep the land open to public users (Maffly 2020), disapproving residents repeated the narrative that the organization would prohibit grazing, ATV use, and hunting—enduring pastimes for long-time locals—in an area some current residents have frequented for decades.²⁰⁷

This strong negative reaction to the sanctuary’s purchase from this part of the community—which was quickly labeled hypocrisy by those celebrating the end of the frac sands project—exemplifies a significant aspect of symbolic resonance with visions of place. While arguments for or against a proposed land use or management policy often hinge on alignment

²⁰⁷ SITLA land is subject to different rules, regulations, and policies than BLM-managed federal public land, and SITLA parcels leased for extractive industry projects are often closed off to public access. Even so, many SITLA parcels in southern Utah remain unrestricted in terms of public access, functionally experienced by public users (of all protection persuasions) as indistinguishable from BLM land unless one cares to look up an area’s jurisdiction. Whether an area is BLM or SITLA matters in terms of which offices/staff carry out management tasks, but many public land users move through both spaces with little attention to which agency manages it (the exception perhaps being those with particular hunting permits that require individuals to be aware of being in the correct parcel for their permit).

or misalignment with a specific feature of place, any action is experienced in relation to the bigger set of points that make up a place constellation. The quick departure from the principle that individuals and businesses should be permitted to pursue their own economic interests unfettered by restrictions or regulations in the wake of the sanctuary's move to do just that highlights an instance in which numerous points of resonance and dissonance came together at once. While putting the spotlight on "freedom" and free enterprise helped shore up arguments to "protect" the vision of the agrarian heritage place when the business at hand was an industry project that had additional points of resonance with that place, Best Friends exercising its own "business freedom" (a term sometimes used by frac sands proponents) came alongside multiple points of dissonance: that purchasing the land to prevent further industry projects on it represented "environmentalism", even if BFAS was focused on protecting water for its operations more so than preserving the landscape for the sake of maintaining its natural, undeveloped qualities; that BFAS's purchase was seen by many as the cause of SRS's departure from the project and thus as the cause of lost prospects of desirable jobs; and that the animal sanctuary already had a complicated and sometimes tense relationship with some portions of the traditional part of the community. My time spent living in Kanab revealed that traditional locals' attitudes toward Best Friends is not nearly as homogenous as pro-protections narratives declare (and as some anti-protections narratives imply). Longtime locals and others who are socially sorted into this traditional core variously hold negative, neutral, and positive perceptions of the organization (including recognition of BFAS as a notable sponsor of a variety of community events and even some from this part of the community working for the organization²⁰⁸). Even so, numerous aspects of Best Friends Animal Sanctuary are dissonant

²⁰⁸ Interestingly, it seemed more common for "locals" to work in units of the organization not directly related to animal care, such as facilities maintenance or landscaping and occasionally the veterinary clinic, but rarely in the units focused on day-to-day animal care (dogs, cats, wild friends, horses and pigs, etc.), positions with high turnover typically filled by newcomers who move to Kanab specifically to work at Best Friends. Though this particular pattern was not enough a focus of my examination to be sure of any significance of this observation, it

with features of the ideal agrarian place, from the contrasting attitudes about proper animal-human relations (both with domestic pets and livestock animals) to the origins of the sanctuary beginning with a land purchase that transferred property from a multigenerational ranching family to a group of “outsiders” (some of whom have lived in the area for decades now), to the fact that the organization tends to attract newcomers (as employees) whose views not only misalign with the agrarian heritage place’s orientation toward animals but also lean more politically liberal in contrast to the conservative values purported to be at the core of the community.

Reactions to BFAS’s purchase after previous assertions about freedom to pursue one’s own business interests, then, illustrate the navigation of conflicting points of resonance. Each point in a place constellation may be activated at different times, but these points exist in relation to the broader constellation. The full image is important: the notion of free enterprise in the agrarian heritage place is not truly the idea of business freedom for everyone all the time, but rather a value and discursive expression that those committed to this vision of place typically find desirable—it being a facet of desirable governance in this vision—but that only applies if other details of a situation are sufficiently in alignment with other aspects of place. Notions about good and bad land uses, insiders and outsiders, desirable economic activity, and enduring cultural-political values and human-animal-land relations considered “core” to this place (with all of these influencing each other, e.g., an individual connected to dissonant features being read as an outsider) are guiding currents, such that Best Friends’s exercise of freedom to pursue/protect their organization’s interest was not treated equally to SRS’s pursuit of business interests of realizing their mining claims and was, instead, experienced as a threat to the ideal agrarian heritage place.

does make me wonder about the influence of animal relations and types of labor aspects of place on individuals’ navigation of symbolic dissonance and available jobs.

Local Land Decisions as Place-Making Events

Kanab is a town with its own genre of town hubbub centered on decisions about how land is used, and as the town cycled through one land decision drama after another, I increasingly felt like “I’ve watched this movie before.” The frac sands conflict came after previous conflicts, such as the 2013 proposed Andalex coal mine that protections advocates told me about when I talked with them about the frac sands issue, drawing parallels in how different facets of the community reacted and seeing the success of preventing that coal mine as an example of effective use of litigation. And it came before a handful of other conflicts I was able to observe firsthand, such as the 2021 proposal for a golf course on a different parcel of SITLA land that would also call for the sale of water. The golf course proposal produced even more visible variation in opinion, with environmental arguments against the project sitting alongside other opposition. This included some long-time locals telling me cynically that it was a project a prominent community member, as a KCWCD representative, was trying to push through because it would benefit his relatives and others arguing that such a project would be more a service for visitors than for locals.²⁰⁹ Even with this variation, much of the loudest discourse about the project—especially that at public meetings and online in locally-based Facebook groups—reproduced patterns of engagement with land decisions organized by symbolic resonance with agrarian heritage and wilderness visions of place.²¹⁰ When the golf course bid was denied by SITLA, local protections advocates celebrated the decision as an environmental win. A week later, SITLA accepted a different, higher bid for the same parcel for a high-end vacation rental/resort—a move that both spurred gleeful declarations of, “take that,

²⁰⁹ Local residents who golf regularly do so at the Mt. Carmel Junction golf course, at 15–20-minute drive from Kanab, or when making more of a trip of it, travel to Page or St. George.

²¹⁰ Here, the pro-protections stance could be perhaps most accurately labeled as an environmental protection place. I keep the label of wilderness place, however, in reference to the values and emotional pull toward particular landscape aesthetics that are at the core of this vision of southern Utah as place.

environmentalists!” and upset from people committed to both of these visions of place because of the ways that the image of unfettered development threatens both visions of place for different reasons. Alongside these local land use decisions were periodic peaks in relation to federal land decisions, such as the restoration of the original monument boundaries in October 2021 and subsequent process of redoing the Monument’s resource management plan, that activated common patterns of narratives about “correct” governance structures, desirable land uses, and who has a right to have a say in either.

These types of dramas and people’s data interactions within them play out again and again, activating well-worn patterns even as each carries some variation, both in individual attitudes and in how different aspects of a proposed decision may activate resonance or dissonance with visions of place. This repetition typically feeds the amplification of the image of two distinct positions that rarely meet/overlap,²¹¹ and how such conflicts play out are, themselves, reinscribed into wilderness place and agrarian heritage place notions of what this place (including its community) is like. With the recurring quality of these periods of amplified engagement with land use decisions, the dynamics of these land use dramas become a part of the everyday place-making of Kanab. During such flares of negotiating place, land use decisions highlight division and amplify notions of place articulated throughout the previous chapters—matters of who belongs and who has a right to have a say in land use decisions.

Enrolling Other Data in Arguments about Place and Land Decisions

The examples of how people interpret data about the economic impacts of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument and data presented related to the frac sand mine

²¹¹ The idea in the agrarian heritage vision of place that Kanab is a welcoming place is a part of this mix, though. One way these flashpoints of division are navigated in narratives of the town are presenting these conflicts as a humorous quirk of the community, as was done in the locally-written and -produced play *Montezuma and the Petticoats*. Outside the theater, I found similar attitudes casting the intensity of these disagreements as a community quirk not uncommon in spaces where individuals from varying backgrounds were committed to collaborating on non-land related projects.

illustrate the effect of symbolic resonance with place in contexts directly related to questions about land use and management. While I described how different kinds of expertise are received differently—and generally more openly—by both pro- and anti-protections individuals outside the pressure of a decision-making space, symbolic resonance does occur with data from contexts not directly related to land use decisions. In the remainder of this chapter, I bring attention to how pro- and anti-protections individuals enroll such data to bolster their narratives about land use and land decision-making processes when it resonates with a facet of their vision of place.

Case 3: School Enrollment and Narratives of Community Demise

One instance of data being enrolled in narratives about public lands management due to its symbolic resonance is local officials' interpretation of school enrollment data in Garfield County, the county on the north and more remote side of GSENM. As the above section on economic data describes, a pillar of anti-protections discourse is the argument that use-restricting management approaches are economically harmful. One particular thread of this notion focuses on the impact of public lands and their management on youth and education, a connection leveraged in anti-protections arguments from at least the time of the 1996 monument designation. In 2015, this theme was at play when Garfield County school and county officials presented data about trends in school enrollment as evidence of the harmful effects of monument designation. Still connected to the affective power of arguments about harm to children, this argument took declining school enrollment as a signal of or proxy for the conditions of the community as a whole, specifically as a kind of answer to the question of whether it is economically viable for families to raise their children in and around Escalante, Utah. Looking at how officials wielded the school enrollment data to support a longstanding narrative about the economic harm of public lands and use-restricting management shows the recruitment of indirectly-related data and interpretive choices around attribution of cause and attention to scale that narrow the frame to boost that resonance.

Discourse about the harm of restricting industrial economic use of public lands has been present since at least the creation of Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument. In the wake of President Clinton's proclamation (held at the South Rim of the Grand Canyon), people in Kanab gathered at the high school gym wearing black armbands and carrying signs with phrases like "Shame on you Clinton" and "Why Clinton, Why? You're our President" (Larmer 1996). Another expression of opposition came in the form of students releasing 50 black balloons into the air, an act that Larmer (1996) described as a move "to symbolically warn other states that the president could unilaterally lock away their lands, too" but was described by some Monument supporters, who were telling me about the history of local reactions to the Monument, as an expression specifically centered on harm to children and their education.

Discursive links between education and public lands are multiple, with actual economic and policy factors serving as the seeds for how such narratives are leveraged. One of the ways the monument designation was cast as harming children was centered on SITLA parcels that became in-holdings upon GSENM's designation. It is typical for the federal government to try to purchase or swap private and state-owned parcels within the boundaries of newly created national monuments or parks, and this was the case in 1996 after the Monument's designation. Like many of the private property in-holdings created by the designation, SITLA parcels within GSENM boundaries were either purchased by the federal government or swapped with "equivalent" BLM parcels outside the Monument.²¹² Just as ranchers subject to land swaps didn't necessarily find their new parcel equivalent in terms of proximity to water sources, existing

²¹² Whether an alternative parcel is a fair "equivalent" of the inholding transferred to federal ownership is another site of bitter feelings and contested interpretations, both in frames of potential and real revenue generated for SITLA parcels and of the use value of private owners' parcels (e.g., availability of water, infrastructure already built for livestock, etc.). Though not a key ethnographic example in this dissertation, narratives told to me about these swaps seem to build a bridge between dissatisfaction about the land received for the land given up and common anti-protections talking points about federal overreach and the federal government's disregard for local connections to land. While economic detriment is a key piece of anti-protections discourse, comments about these land swaps suggest that treating land strictly as a fungible commodity (as done in land swaps) may be at odds with relations settler individuals and their families have with specific areas.

grazing infrastructure, etc.,²¹³ critics didn't find SITLA swaps satisfactory, arguing that the revenue generated by purchases and/or the potential revenue of alternative parcels were less than the potential revenue from leases to extract natural resources on the original parcels. With conflagratory language deeming the designation the "mother of all land grabs," Senator Orrin Hatch and the rest of the Utah delegation asserted that Utah's schoolchildren would suffer as a result of the designation because it disrupted plans for a coal mine on the Kaiparowits Plateau, the area that had just become the center of the Monument (Larmer 1996). Connecting their argument to SITLA's task of generating revenue for schools, they argued that schools would take the hit because Andalex (the company intending to develop the mine) wouldn't be paying fees on 200,000 acres of SITLA land within GSENM's boundaries. This perspective has persisted for over twenty years. Although the SITLA website highlights the GSENM land exchange as an example of the success of the agency's work, describing that process as being a fair trade and emphasizing that they secured both a fair land trade and compensation for lost mineral royalties,²¹⁴ anti-Monument locals' expressions, to me and in public settings between 2017 and 2023, were quick to characterize that exchange as an act of coercion—the federal government "forcing" the state to "give up" those lands—and a financial loss that harmed Utah's youth.

In addition to discourse about SITLA funds, narratives about the negative impact of public lands on children and their education also feature the role of property taxes in school funding. As is the case with public schools throughout the United States, a portion of education

²¹³ This interpretation was shared with me in 2017 by a Kanab resident whose family has a ranching history in the area, although this person worked full time for the county in tourism-related areas.

²¹⁴ "For example, the 1996 presidential designation of GSENM enveloped more than 200,000 surface acres and mineral estate lands belonging to the public school system and other trust land beneficiaries. SITLA, along with Utah's congressional delegation, worked with the federal government to ensure a fair land trade and even secure compensation for lost mineral royalties. A portion of lands acquired by SITLA in that exchange, known as the Drunkards Wash Block straddling Carbon and Emery counties, generated \$1.5 million monthly in royalties from coal bed methane development for more than a decade." ("SITLA Land Transfers..." 2015)

funding comes from property taxes.²¹⁵ Kane County's land area is 85.5% federally owned, 4.1% state owned, 10.3% private or local government owned, and Garfield County is 90% federal land, 4.8% State owned, and 5.1 % private or local government owned (Utah Association of Counties 2016). The total revenue collected from private property taxes in these counties is less than in counties that have similar property values but a higher share of private property and lower proportion of public lands, which anti-protections and anti-federal voices (overlapping but not always synonymous perspectives) argue harms local schools due to lost property taxes. The existence of the Department of Interior's Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) program, in operation since 1977,²¹⁶ holds little sway against this argument, at times seeming ignored, not known, or critiqued by those who feel certain of a negative relationship between federal land ownership and local youth well-being. In more formal discourse, such as in the 2015 Garfield County Economic Development Plan, PILT payments are acknowledged but critiqued, along with Secure Rural Schools payments, as being "far lower than the local property tax payments on public land."

The multiple threads articulating federal public lands and use-restricting management as a harm to Utah's young people produce an argument resonant with the ideal agrarian heritage

²¹⁵ Statewide in Utah, around 55% to 60% of property taxes has gone toward education funding in any given year, and around 30% of all school funding comes from property taxes (Office of Legislative Research and General Counsel 2010). For the 2023 tax year, 59% of property taxes statewide went toward schools, with fairly wide variation by county—for instance, the two counties in which GSENM is located fell on the higher and lower ends, with Garfield County at 72% and Kane County at 51% (Utah State Tax Commission 2024).

²¹⁶ Payments have been made since 1977. The original law was Public Law 94-565, dated October 20, 1976 and was amended by Public Law 97-258 on September 13, 1982 and codified in Chapter 69, Title 31 of U.S. Code. The law's purpose is to address the impact of local governments' inability to collect property taxes on federally owned land, making annual payments to local governments to carry out vital social services for all tax-exempt federal lands administered by DOI agencies. Payments are calculated based on population, revenue-sharing payments, and the amount of federal land within the county, and these payments are in addition to other federal payments to states (e.g., grazing, oil and gas leasing, timber). The full code updated in 2004 can be found [here](#). Utah receives the second highest amount of PILT payments, behind California. Within Utah, Kane County has the 4th highest percentage of federal land area but is 18th in PILT payments, as these payments are distributed proportional to the population size of areas receiving PILT. Additional funding for some schools in this region comes from UCA 53A-17a-109, which provides funding for Necessarily Existent Small Schools.

place. That ideal place celebrates traditional, family-centered life, making jobs that a man could work and support a family with preferred and making appeals to the well-being of and educational opportunities for children carry emotional weight. That ideal place also lifts up governing logics of local/county supremacy. Thus, while the DOI casts PILT as “one of the ways the Federal Government can fulfill its role of being a good neighbor to local communities,” it’s unsurprising that around GSENM, the federal government is rarely seen as a “good neighbor” and is much more frequently cast as a villain (U.S. Department of Interior n.d.c). Matters of taxes and SITLA revenue are some of numerous instances in which arguments about what is good for or harmful to schoolchildren is utilized to add emotional weight to an already bubbling pot of anti-federal sentiment. In these arguments, the emphasis is on how excess federal public lands harm schoolchildren, without engaging in deeper discussion about how public schools are funded and discussion of whether public schools’ reliance on property taxes and somewhat unpredictable resource extraction income is an ideal or equitable way to fund public education. The complex dynamics of school funding are, however, beyond the scope of this dissertation. While there are many important and interesting questions to ask about school funding in relation to land ownership and land use, here I am interested in how data is incorporated into existing arguments about land management in ways that reflect symbolic resonance with idealized visions of place.

In 2015, ideas about land management and schools came together in a way that marked school enrollment as an indicator of community well-being. The data pattern of declining school enrollment was ripe for enrollment in an anti-protections narrative, as it was seen as evidence of a threat to a desirable feature of place (a particular kind of normative family-centered community).²¹⁷ Anti-protections community leaders enrolled that data in a narrative of

²¹⁷ Significantly, if the school enrollment pattern had been stable or growing alongside the undesirable use-restrictions put in place by GSENM, such data would have been unlikely to catch anyone’s attention, as it wouldn’t

community demise that amplified its resonance with the agrarian heritage place by attributing the pattern to the restrictive land use policies put in place by national monument designation. The then Garfield County Superintendent²¹⁸ and the District Administrator presented to the county commissioners about falling school enrollment in Escalante. In the data from 1990 to 2015, during the 3 years following the 1996 designation of GSENM, school enrollment exhibited a small decline and then a small increase, followed by a steady decline from 1999 to 2015.²¹⁹ From a St. George News article describing this event (Miller 2015), it is difficult to tell whether the school district staff were driving the argument connecting monument designation to the dire school situation or if that was a narrative offered up by a county commissioner well-known for his anti-federal, anti-GSENM sentiment. The article's author uses quotes from the then-commissioner, an outspoken anti-protections figure in Utah, and stories of individual families who found it too economically difficult to stay to paint a picture of "the dying town of Escalante," a place on the "verge of devastation" (Miller 2015). In an article in the Salt Lake Tribune (considered by many the "liberal" news source in Utah), additional quotes from the Superintendent reveal some of the genuine logistical challenges that come with dropping enrollment; for instance, funding is given on a per student basis but must still cover the basic

plug into variables suggesting boosts or threats to place, even as such a pattern could indicate the strength or endurance of a desirable place quality.

²¹⁸ The Garfield County Superintendent went on to become the superintendent for Kane County. Although it remains unclear whether he was the source of the original attribution of cause to the Monument, becoming aware of his involvement in the 2015 school enrollment matter made his resistance to a variety of education programs and student groups make more sense to me. While more faculty and staff within the public school system were more open to GSEP-led programs than I had been led to expect, he remained fairly wary of my program offerings (perhaps due to his own perspectives and/or perhaps due to anticipated opposition from some parents).

²¹⁹ I've attempted to pull up school enrollment data from before 1990 to get a longer view and see what fluctuations may have occurred, but it has proved to be relatively difficult to do, as the Census website seems to limit accessible data to the past 10 years. This impulse to understand this pattern in broader context to parse out which interpretations or causal links drawn "hold up" or "make sense" is characteristic of navigating data and data interpretations in my research process. I flag it here, as readers may also have such an impulse upon encountering such data. While there are missing pieces of information in terms of understanding this broader context, the central point at hand is less about assessing the accuracy of various claims and more about who finds what data relevant and why.

costs of running a school (utilities and teacher salaries) regardless of whether a class is 25 students or 20 (Maffly and Wood 2015). Indeed, the district is striving to keep multiple schools open due to the distances between towns in the county using a budget that would otherwise indicate consolidation into fewer schools with more students.²²⁰

While there are legitimate challenges to running a school district with falling enrollment, as this enrollment was taken up by local officials, it gained salience within a constellation of views and values related to federal lands, land-management, and ideas of family and community. The selection of quotes used in an article in the conservative-leaning *Deseret News* (owned by the LDS Church²²¹) highlighted this family frame, which is a discursive centerpiece of Utah LDS culture (McKellar 2015b): “Our communities were founded by the strong family unit. Without the family, you’re not going to have schools, and if you lose the school, you lose the community;” “Take the school out of the community, and you might as well bury it.”

In meetings following the school district staffs’ presentation, the county commissioners unanimously declared a state of emergency for Garfield County, explicitly linking the school enrollment to land management issues with the assertion that restrictive federal land-management policies endanger Escalante and other communities in southern Utah. This declaration laid out that restrictive land management policies cause economic decline and employment challenges, making it too difficult for families to live in Escalante and other nearby small towns. This general argument was not new; it had been circulating in anti-protections discourse in the region since at least GSENM’s designation, with likely ideological roots in early anti-federal discourse and action of the 1970s Sagebrush Rebellions. The dropping school enrollment, after county officials became aware of it in 2015, was seized upon to be emblematic

²²⁰ This financial challenge is shared by many rural areas in the United States. Programs like Secure Rural Schools and Funding for Necessarily Existent Small Schools seek to address these funding issues, though challenges remain.

²²¹ *Deseret News* is owned by the *Deseret News Publishing Company*, a subsidiary of *Deseret Management Corporation*, which is a holding company owned by the *Jesus Christ Church of Latter-Day Saints*.

of this long standing idea—presented as a canary in the coal mine of the threat of federal control of public lands to the vision of community, family, and economic labor desired within the agrarian heritage place. The datapoint of declining school enrollment resonated with the agrarian heritage place commitment because it could be wielded to tie together multiple features of the ideal agrarian heritage place: notions of rightful land governance (privileging local/county over federal); ideas about good economic labor, like agriculture and industry centered on natural resources and manual labor, and the harm of policies that restrict those uses; and values about community that center the traditional family as envisioned through politically conservative and/or culturally LDS lenses and, for some, preservation of the community’s multigenerational Mormon pioneer heritage.²²²

Seeing the symbolic resonance at play here is not to dismiss the budgetary challenges of a school district keeping open necessarily existent small rural schools, the real challenges to achieving financial stability in the area, especially with the additional cost of raising children, or the expressions of concern from community members about their ability to continue living in Escalante or surrounding (even smaller) towns. Yet how wielders of the school enrollment data focused on narrow spatial and temporal scales to assign cause and effect while ignoring other broader systemic patterns illustrates how the data were swiftly placed in an existing structure of meaning. Existing commitments to the ideal agrarian heritage place and associated anti-

²²² Individuals’ assertions to journalists included the common feature of declaring one’s own stance as being not about politics. News articles quoted the prominent county commissioner as stating that the concern about enrollment and the state of emergency was not about politics, though the same articles suggested some connection to other threads of anti-federal, anti-GSENM sentiment. At the same time that the declaration of a state of emergency was passed, the commissioners also voted unanimously in support of a resolution calling for the transfer of public land from federal to state control, a genre of resolution passed by other rural Utah counties (McKellar 2015a). Seeming to be speaking about both the state of emergency and the land transfer resolution, State Representative Ken Ivory (of West Jordan, a suburb of Salt Lake City) was quoted in a *Deseret* article saying, “Hopefully this will be one more wakeup call that will help bring us toward the critical mass that all leaders, local, state and national, will be relentless and unashamed and demand the basic fundamental right to liberty, property and right to govern ourselves” (McKellar 2015a). Here we see a glimpse of the worldview many anti-protections individuals experience as truth: the notion that federal public lands management carried out as it currently is is morally wrong and, in some conceptualizations, outright unlawful.

protections arguments guided interaction with these data—that attention was brought to it at all, as well as what kind of narrative was formed to interpret its significance. The argument formed with the data, in turn, resonated with others drawn toward the agrarian heritage place.

One layer in which symbolic resonance is at play is in the visual representation of data, which becomes readily apparent when comparing contrasting graphical representations of school enrollment data in settings where the primary viewers differ in the ideal places toward which they are drawn. The dropping school enrollment is mentioned as a concern in the 2015 Garfield County Economic Development Plan and is presented in a graph that also highlights the 1996 GSENM designation on the x-axis (years). In this image, the y-axis (number of students enrolled) has a range just large enough to display the data for the years shown, thus the lower limit of the y-axis is 800 students and the upper limit is 1200. Consequently, the line graph displaying around 1150 students in 1998 falling to just about 800 in 2015 looks like a precipitous decline, particularly between 1998 and 2008. With the period of 1990-1998 showing a stretch of relatively stable and sometimes growing enrollment and the labeling of GSENM's 1996 designation, this image readily resonated with preexisting narratives of the threat of protections-centered federal land management. The projected enrollment for 2015-2020 implies a steeper decline than in more recent years of apparent plateau; the image encapsulates the idea of a “dying community” with the line graph nearly reaching the X-axis limit that gives the feeling of a decline toward zero, despite the Y-axis bottom range cutting off at 800.

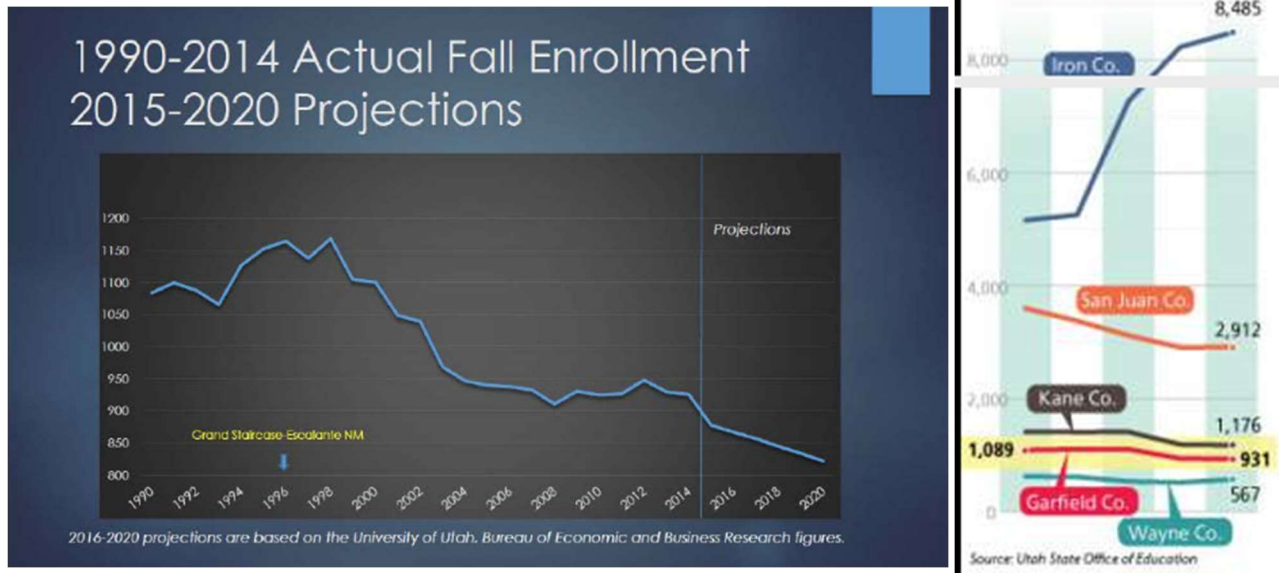


Figure 4.1 Two graphs related to school enrollment displayed in the Garfield County State of Emergency document and a Salt Lake Tribune news article, respectively.

The Salt Lake Tribune, the Utah newspaper that tends to take a more balanced and sometimes implicitly pro-protections stance, presents a different image. In an article about the declaration of a state of emergency (Maffly and Wood 2015), a graph of school enrollment displays data for three counties surrounding the Monument (Wayne, Garfield, and Kane) as well as from two additional southern Utah counties, Iron County and San Juan County. In geographical relation to the Monument, only a small portion of the edge of San Juan County borders Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, which borders GSENM, although they are counties with significant percentages of federal and state lands; San Juan County is home to Bears Ears National Monument, making it perhaps more similar in land governance conditions to the GSENM-adjacent counties. Notable for the visual representation of enrollment numbers is the fact that both Iron and San Juan Counties have a significantly higher population and thus greater school enrollment, resulting in a necessarily larger Y-axis range. The starting and ending values are labeled for each county—for Garfield County 1,089 in 1990 to 931 in 2010 (suggesting they are working with the same numbers as the Garfield County officials). Due to the y-axis range starting at zero and ranging to around 8,600, however, the “decline” of the line

graph of the county's enrollment does not give the impression of a drastic decline. Aside from a noticeable decline in the early 2000s, the line's descent is barely perceptible.

Whereas the Economic Development report places the figure in a narrative about the detrimental impacts of federally-managed lands, especially management centered on use restrictions, the SLT article places this graph with a drastically different y-axis range in a different set of details to produce a more measured argument. Their school enrollment graph is set along graphs of unemployment and job growth over the same time period, with the collection of images given the heading "Long, slow decline?"; the caption of the three graphs summarizes that economic activity has remained steady through time, the presentation and timing of the article implying an indirect challenge to the Garfield County commissioners' chaining together of school enrollment as a proxy for job loss as result of restrictive and damaging federal policies. The collection of graphs and tables as a whole gives the impression that panic and a "state of emergency" are not warranted. In this way, the *Salt Lake Tribune's* take on the matter offered an alternative interpretation of what the enrollment data meant, one that more readily resonates with pro-protections place commitments.

There are many ways meaning can be drawn from data, with different images created depending on what temporal and spatial scales are incorporated into framing any given number or trend. I take the interpretive pathways of the school enrollment data to be reflective of the influence of place commitments on data interactions, in part, due to the variety of conclusions one could draw about the cause and meaning of declining enrollment and the additional explanations offered to other data points that challenge the resonant interpretation. The assertion that declining enrollments are a direct result of the national monument designation sets these two variables in a frame disconnected from broader sociopolitical and economic factors that have contributed to the changing dynamics of Escalante and other rural towns, namely globalization and its effect on the very industries considered to be "good" economic labor in the image of the agrarian heritage place. Around GSENM, economic declines in

extractive industries in the 1990s and early 2000s are blamed on the monument designation's restrictive effects, treated as an isolated cause and effect, even as those patterns align with broader patterns of declining industries in the U.S.²²³ Just related to matters of land use, the region experienced several changes in the years before and after the monument designation (e.g., the closing/cancellation of other extractive industry projects not directly related to the Monument) that impacted available local employment.²²⁴ Relatedly, the narrative attributing the community's "decline" to GSENM omitted consideration of the broader political and economic shifts that fueled such closings and cancellations (i.e., it being cheaper to harvest and process lumber and extract oil elsewhere). The town of Escalante was referred to in isolation, separate from other trends such as declining rural populations across the United States, the aging of the American population overall, and rural areas' slow recovery following the 2008 recession (Ajilore and Willingham 2019, Parker et al. 2018).²²⁵ When this linkage between declining school enrollment and the harm of GSENM's use-restricting management policies was leveraged years later in the Garfield County Commission's 2021 resolution in opposition to GSENM boundary

²²³ For example, those the closing of lumber mills in the region is blamed on restrictive policies on the federal public land in question, especially GSENM, the U.S. lumber industry as a whole was on the decline, with a loss of 21% of all jobs (48,000 out of 226,000) between 1989 and 1995 (a statistic attributed to the Western Wood Products Association in Israelsen 1995). Though such a pattern doesn't rule out federal public land policies as a driver of this change (e.g., it could be that overall shifts toward more resource preservation/conservation contributed to this reduction in jobs), anti-protections arguments from people living in southern Utah are much more commonly focused on specific happenings within the regional frame.

²²⁴ For example, Utah Forest Products, a mill that employed 65 people, closed in 2002 (Maffly and Wood 2015). Such closures occurred beyond Escalante as well, such as the Fredonia mill (owned by Phoenix-based Kaibab Forest Products) closing in 1995 that had employed around 200 people, after laying off about 90 people in 1991; the closure of the Fredonia mill was blamed by many on environmentalists' opposition to logging and the Environmental Species Act (Israelsen 1995), though such pressures appear to be just some of many factors shaping the economic feasibility of such activity. Both of these mills logged in national forest areas north and south of what eventually became the Monument.

²²⁵ Limitations of considering Ajilore and Willingham (2019) and Parker et al. (2018) in this context include that their data focus on the 2000s, which aligns with when Garfield School District's enrollment was varied but generally steady and does not overlap with the period of decline from the 1100s to the 900s in the late 1990s and early 2000s. That said, these sources describe recognized demographic shifts within rural America in recent decades.

restoration, critics in an opposing “citizen’s resolution” suggested additional explanations, asserting that “Vacillations in school enrollment have been the result of the decision of many county families to home-school their children, standard age-related demographic cycles, and the trend apparent in Utah and across the nation towards smaller families.”²²⁶ The argument that federal lands and their “restrictive” management alters community structure and, by extension, student enrollment is connected to more general anti-federal sentiments and notions of public lands beyond the specific area designated as a monument. Nonetheless, the “state of emergency” rhetoric implied a kind of regional exceptionalism through its emphasis that the monument designation, specifically, has destroyed the community’s ability to maintain its traditional structure. The declaration of the state of emergency focused on federal government decisions about federal land in the county, omitting consideration of other potential drivers of community change.

Importantly, symbolic resonance shapes how data in rebuttals to this narrative are received. The notion that school enrollment is an indicator of community well-being or stability relies on economic activity and employment as the critical link between land use policies and school enrollment. Data that might challenge narratives of decline, such as state data showing that Garfield County’s job numbers and unemployment rates in 2015 remained similar over the previous 19 years since the Monument was designated, are not persuasive to those making the argument about a dying community. Even when such data seem to contradict an argument of economic decline, various points in the constellation of the agrarian heritage place are experienced as under threat, leading such data to be reconciled via other explanations. Job

²²⁶ This “citizens resolution” was disseminated by a group called the Monumental Collective (which no longer has an online presence). I include their assertion as further elaboration on the multitude of variables that could be contributing to this school enrollment pattern, even as they do not provide specific sources for these assertions. That this group would be open to—and motivated to—consider the multitude of variables that could be contributing to these patterns makes sense given the different place commitments of those who wrote this pro-GSENM response to the commission’s resolution.

numbers might be similar, but those jobs may be undesirable and/or financially less ideal, such as tourism jobs that are seasonal and/or low-paying (i.e., “not as helpful for workers who want to build families and career” [Garfield County chief economist Carrie Mayne in Maffly and Wood 2015]). Citing both the rising median age (33.8 to 39.9 years over 15 years) and decline in average family size (from 3.4 to 3.2 persons per family), Garfield County chief economist Carrie Mayne interpreted unemployment numbers through an outmigration lens: “The county has experienced significant outmigration. That is what could be pulling down the unemployment rate” (Maffly and Wood 2015). That the unemployment rate might not reflect job losses if those who find themselves unemployed must move elsewhere is not implausible, but my goal in this work is not so much finding the most plausible data interpretation but rather illustrating how one’s place commitments appear to influence which possible explanations are seen are reasonable, persuasive, or good analysis (and when individuals are invested in considering more complex sets of variables or keeping a simpler frame).

Case 4: Utah Welfare and Narratives of Exceptional Nefariousness

Just as data about school enrollment were readily taken up by those committed to a traditional agrarian heritage place as evidence of the harms of federal land use restrictions while omitting attention to a more complex network of factors, other forms of narrow causal attribution that emphasize local/regional influences resonate among those committed to the wilderness place. Specifically, interpretations of data that support a narrative of Utah exceptionalism—namely, that certain features of Utah are exceptionally bad—resonate with the ideal wilderness place. In this section, I describe how a Propublica investigation into welfare services provision in Utah resonated with the wilderness place’s image of traditional Utahns as uniquely nefarious and a threat to their desired vision of place. I argue that the investigation’s framing resonated with this notion of Utah exceptionalism, prompting protections advocates to interpret this investigation as “yet more evidence” of Utah as a site of uniquely unethical and/or biased governance.

In December 2021, Propublica, “an independent, nonprofit newsroom that produces investigative journalism with moral force,” published an article focusing on the centrality of the LDS Church in providing welfare services in the state of Utah (Propublica n.d.). In highlighting the Church’s role in helping the state meet its Maintenance of Expenditure requirement to receive federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funding and the risks of leaving individual bishops in charge of decisions about who receives Church aid, the article is solidly within Propublica’s editorial remit of “shining a light on abuses of power and betrayals of public trust” (Propublica n.d.). In both the title (“Utah Makes Welfare So Hard to Get, Some Feel They Must Join the LDS Church to Get Aid”) and the story weaving together welfare statistics, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Church and the State, and narrations of personal experiences, the author, Eli Hager (2021b), paints a picture of shady deals and discriminatory disbursement of aid by Church bishops. Rather than arguing that this author’s framing was intentional, I take Hager’s argument to be an artifact of liberal, non-LDS discourse about Utah and the LDS Church that already views Mormons as cultural Others. There is much to be examined and said regarding the real impacts of LDS cultural dominance in Utah, the entwinement of the State of Utah and the LDS Church,²²⁷ and non-LDS images of the LDS

²²⁷ While such examinations are outside the scope of this dissertation, a small sampling of details that add to the complex image of religion and government in Utah suggest roots of accuracy in some stereotypes of the role of religion in the state’s cultural and political environment while also hinting at the caricaturization common in non-LDS liberal portrayals. For instance, it is true that members of the LDS Church are overrepresented in state government, with 86% of Utah’s 103 state congresspeople being members of the LDS Church in 2021 compared to the state’s population being about 60% LDS (Davidson 2021b; by political party, 1 of 81 Republicans and 13 of 22 Democrats were non-LDS), and that in 2021 (and much of the time historically) all of the state’s national congressional seats and statewide political offices were held by LDS Church members. (Davidson [2021a] implies that Mormons have experienced a sense of declining political power at a national level with LDS members of U.S. Congress 2021 being at its lowest in 32 years; in 2000, Congress was 3.4% LDS and was, in 2021, 1.7% LDS, with LDS Church members making up approximately 2% of the U.S. population.) That said, the image of Mormons as quintessential American Conservatives has a more complicated history. While some aspects of contemporary conservative discourse aligns with and may even have drawn from Mormon notions of self-sufficiency (such as Tucker Carlson’s [1992] praise for LDS notions of welfare in the conservative Heritage Foundation’s *Policy Review*), historically Utah has been “politically normal” (Rod Decker in Davidson 2021b), in that from 1896 to 1972 the state’s presidential election results varied with Utah votes aligning with the winner of 17 out of 20 presidential elections during that time (Davidson 2021b). It was not until after *Roe v. Wade* that election results became so starkly Republican-dominant. Despite this shift and the Church’s leadership continuing to present views typically

Church that variously cast Mormons as “model minorities” or “freaks” (Chen and Yorgason 1999), much of which falls beyond the scope of the argument at hand.²²⁸ In the following paragraphs, I focus on the analytical and interpretive moves that made this investigation’s narrative particularly resonant with protections advocates’ vision of how Utah and Mormonism figure in the ideal wilderness place.

The article paints a picture of welfare in Utah through details from interviews with people in need of welfare support; a narrative about the history of welfare in the state, budget data; and details about an MOU between the State of Utah and the LDS Church regarding welfare services. The article highlights how difficulty in accessing aid through government-run programs forces people to seek aid from other sources; in Utah, the majority of non-governmental welfare services are offered by the LDS Church at centers like Welfare Square in Salt Lake City and from individual ward bishops. With the role of bishop being assigned by Church leadership who “call” men from the ward to fill the unpaid role, those seeking aid through a bishop are subject to “bishop roulette” (David Smurthwaite in Hager 2021b). Whether one receives aid—and whether one faces requirements such as being told one has to get baptized to receive aid—comes at the discretion of individuals who, though given “a slate of questions to ask low-income people who

aligned with conservative politics, “liberal Mormons” are not unheard of even as their voices remain marginalized in relation to messages from central Church leadership (not only did I experience LDS members’ politics being more complex than non-LDS stereotypes of Mormonism, but also this dynamic has been a subject of journalistic publication, e.g., Kaplan 2021).

²²⁸ Narratives about the harmful impacts of the LDS Church’s political sway in Utah government often focus on arguments about nefarious political engagement. Like the analytical style of much of this dissertation, I find the question of whether individuals are being intentionally duplicitous or nefarious in their actions less intriguing than the discursive and material impacts such cultural dominance/entwinement with government. Though an argument for another time and place, the picture painted of Utah welfare in the investigation described in this section and interlocutor reactions led me to more compelling questions, such as: How does the entwinement of the State of Utah and the LDS Church (in the realm of welfare, and perhaps other domains) obscure and reveal the negative impacts of neoliberalism over the past 25 years? Narratives that focus on this entwinement as both “unique and “causal” seem to obscure broader political, legal, and economic patterns and processes (i.e., that how those broader patterns play out in this particular site may be of a particular flavor shaped by LDS dominance but that the conditions driving or enabling particular actions are in fact not unique to Utah). At the same time, the “centralizing” effect of the LDS Church’s dominance in Utah may help reveal the impacts of those broader patterns and processes.

[come to a bishop] asking for help...are not professional welfare providers [and] not professional therapists” (David Smurthwaite in Hager 2021b). The result is that state officials may direct an individual to an LDS source of aid after denial from a public program and while some bishops readily extend aid to those in need regardless of their identities or position in relation to the Church, others present an ultimatum such as requiring baptism into the Church to receive aid or deny aid on the basis of not meeting normative LDS expectations (e.g., expressing or “acting on” [The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints n.d.] an LGBTQ+ identity, having not been in regular attendance at Sunday services, or not paying the expected 10% of their income to the Church in tithes [Hager 2021b]).²²⁹

The article's description of the financial relationship between the State of Utah and the LDS Church with regard to welfare spending implies that such a financial arrangement is unique, even as it references datasets that demonstrate such arrangements have been used by numerous states since the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, often colloquially often referred to as the 1996 welfare reform bill/law. Central to this aspect of the article is a description of the MOU between the Utah Department of Workforce Services and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Welfare Services. This MOU includes an agreement that the State counts a portion of the services and volunteer hours provided by the LDS Church as part of its own welfare spending; as a result, Utah has avoided spending at least \$75 million that it otherwise would have been required to spend as its Maintenance of Effort in order to access federal TANF funding (Hager 2021b). Although the article provides details that, taken together, suggest that Church services counted toward the MOE are largely those that

²²⁹ The personal anecdotes shared in the article demonstrate how “difference” (e.g., in race, gender, sexuality, religious belief, etc.) can have starkly different valence—and different impacts in people’s lives—depending on one’s marginalization, vulnerability, and socioeconomic precarity. Notably, one’s position in relation to the Church (i.e., member, former member, or never a member) appears to greatly influence how departures from dominant norms and expectations, such as with one’s gender and sexuality, are received, with larger and more severe social penalties for people who are or previously had been members of the Church.

don't involve aid distributed via the discretion of individual bishops, it does not explicitly clarify that the experiences with bishops described in the article are a component of Church welfare services separate from social service centers.²³⁰ This ambiguity about which services count toward the state's MOE; the way the article links the fact that "counted" funds are allocated to programs focused on topics like marriage to Church values; and the way it lists numerical details about Utah's welfare aid through time without mentioning other contextual factors (such as funding at the federal level and how Utah compares to other states) encourages an interpretation of Utah's welfare landscape as being driven by a unique LDS Church-State relationship enabling bias and questionable counting of "services" exceptional relative to other states. Such a framing supports the impression taken from interlocutors who encountered the article that the investigation was more a story about the LDS Church's sneaky yet domineering tactics than about one state's variation of filling in the gaps in the wake of the 1996 welfare reform bill/law.

I don't read the ProPublica article as an intentional effort to cast the LDS Church as a

²³⁰ Some ambiguity remains of what, precisely, is and isn't counted, but the article and the MOU imply that it is a subset of Church aid that counts as spending toward the state's MOE: "According to the memorandum of understanding between the Church and the state, Utah takes credit for a percentage of the hours that Church volunteers spend producing and packaging food and clothing for the poor at Welfare Square and similar facilities" (Hager 2021b). Later in the article, a quote from Liz Carver, the then-director of workforce development at the state Department of Workforce Services, suggests a specific subset: "'I mean, we could be counting millions of hours of [LDS Church members'] volunteer time, bishops helping their communities, all that stuff,' she continued, suggesting that the current amount of [assistance from religious institutions, largely but not exclusively the LDS Church] that Utah is claiming as the state's is minimal and necessary'" (Hager 2021b). The MOU describes that "certain volunteer hours associated with food production and distribution and other social and humanitarian services expended by [LDS] Welfare Services to the extent such services meet one [of TANF's 4 goals.]" Highlighted in the deck of screenshots included in the article is the point that among the services provided are "employment resource centers; teaching family relationships, marriage, and parenting classes; handling pregnancy classes; and adoption hot-lines," which is captioned by Hager (2021b) in a manner that implies a connection to conservative LDS Church values about the family: "Under qualifying 'social and humanitarian services' that the state will count as welfare, the agreement lists LDS Church programs that teach about marriage, pregnancy, and adoptions." These and other aspects of the article aim to exemplify the inappropriate involvement of a religious institution in delivering social services—implying that Utah's particular intertwining of Church and State is a sneaky way for the state to avoid spending money on social services and for the LDS Church to further its conservative values.

villain,²³¹ but this framing enables resonance with the ideal place at the center of protections advocates' efforts. The way that numerical data about Utah's welfare spending and qualitative descriptions of welfare services are presented in this study, with minimal contextualization of those numbers in relation to broader shifts in U.S. welfare coverage and funding over the past 25 years or comparison with other states, produced an image that readily resonated with the protagonists and antagonists of protections advocates' vision of place, received as clear evidence that Utah's government and, in some perspectives, LDS residents are exceptionally nefarious and biased. In the weeks after the article's publication, this reception and utilization of the article's data played out among liberal acquaintances in my social and professional circles, the majority of whom were also ardent supporters of public lands protections. Reactions to the article seemed to come as a mix of amazement and confirmation: shock that the Church and State were even more "in cahoots" than an individual had previously known, along with a

²³¹ Indeed, the article highlights genuine inequities in how welfare aid can be accessed in Utah and is a part of a broader series on welfare in the southwest ("Welfare States: How the Southwest Transformed Welfare"). In this series, each article highlights struggles people face while trying to access support and critiques those procedures and systems. For instance, alongside the Utah article, another article, with the title "These Single Moms Are Forced to Choose: Reveal Their Sexual Histories or Forfeit Welfare," centered on rules in New Mexico that require women applying for welfare to report the biological fathers of their children in order to receive public assistance (Hager 2021a). Another article details how Arizona spends a majority of its welfare budget on the Department of Child Safety, including a narrative of a mother who applied for welfare and in response welfare funds were used to remove her child from her home (Hager 2021c), and in 2022 Propublica solicited responses from readers about racial disparities in Arizona's child welfare system (Hager and Fields 2022). The series also includes broader discussions of the welfare system in articles titled "States Are Hoarding \$5.2 Billion in Welfare Funds Even as the Need for Aid Grows" (Dreyfus 2021), "The Cruel Failure of Welfare Reform in the Southwest" (Hager 2021d), and "Welfare Is No Substitute for a Child Tax Credit" (Hager 2022).

Ultimately, the series as a whole reveals the negative impacts of 25 years of public assistance implemented through the rules of the 1996 welfare reform bill and neoliberal interpretations of those rules; in that sense, the series and the article specifically about Utah illustrates the negative impacts of neoliberal welfare policy (albeit not in such language). At the same time, the framing that emphasizes the financial participation of the LDS Church in delivering public assistance as exceptional is significant. Whether the similarities with other states that fill much of the financial gap with services provided by religious institutions were not acknowledged because of the series focus on the Southwest or because of the author's and editors' underlying perceptions about the uniqueness of LDS Church, the article leans into popular perceptions of Mormonism that characterize the LDS Church as uniquely socially and politically powerful. Although mentioning the decline in federal funding and the need for states to fill that gap, the article's tone and framing implies that reduced access to government-disbursed welfare driving people to have to seek aid from the LDS Church is a uniquely pernicious arrangement blending Church and State.

posture of lack of surprise, as if “of course” the Church is “essentially controlling welfare in the state” and gatekeeping access to it. In these people’s conversations and social media post captions, details that were at least noted in the article regarding some of those broader connections (e.g., mentioning the 1996 welfare reform law) were quickly subordinated to the points that resonated with the idea that Utah, as a cultural-political entity, is anomalous in conducting ethically questionable welfare practices. Thus, regardless of the author’s own commitment to or belief in a non-LDS narrative about Mormon exceptionalism, liberal individuals committed to public lands protections perceived and circulated this article as part of the “proof” of a uniquely nefarious state government infiltrated by the values and norms of the LDS Church.

The resonance with protections advocates’ experience of Utah’s Church-State as antagonist made this welfare narrative—with no direct links to public lands management—a compelling packet of data that was, for a time, enrolled to bolster the idea that anti-protections voices (seen to be part of that Church-State conglomeration) should be assumed to be bad faith actors. While many features of the ideal wilderness place are not necessarily specific to Utah (e.g., “untouched” landscapes), the constellation of features making up this particular place commitment are rooted in the region. Just as southern Utah’s landscapes strike a particular chord with regard to desirable landscape aesthetics for a wilderness experience, so too is the vision of the enduring features of the political environment. As one employee of a preservation organization asserted to me in an interview, “there isn’t divergent public opinion across state legislators, commissioners, and the BLM...[they are] all on the same team, and the team is the LDS Church.” The image of the LDS Church being inordinately involved in state welfare services readily aligned with existing understandings of local, county, and state officials being inevitably linked to the traditional LDS part of the community and being committed to privileging values of that worldview over “good faith” engagement with decision-making processes. Ultimately, any narrative reproducing an idea of (negative) Utah exceptionalism is likely to resonate with protections advocates’ place commitment and be uplifted as evidence that

decision-making processes in this setting are inherently corrupt.

Such resonance has important ramifications for how protections advocates may conceptualize and articulate their posture toward other “stakeholders” in the public lands domain. As described in chapter 3, the claims logic associated with pro-wilderness and pro-protections stances includes a commitment to the idea of democracy and of public land being “all Americans’ land.” Relatedly, individuals and organizations working toward conservation goals, through advocating for specific designations (e.g., as national monument or wilderness area) and for management plans that support those goals, speak of the importance of “listening to local voices” and “including local people” when pursuing changes to the land management of nearby federal public lands. (This advice being separate from the message of incorporating Tribes’ goals and desires reminds of the implicit construction of “local people” as white settler, likely-conservative individuals in such rhetoric.) This public lands advocacy “best practice” is expressed with what feels like a genuine intention and desire to build connections and establish shared goals with a demographic that doesn’t typically share the emotional pull toward a wilderness ideal. Talk about this approach among conservation professionals can include an openness to conversing and collaborating with ranchers, with such relationship-building mentioned in case study discussions about using partnerships to further conservation goals at a conference that brought together “friends” groups connected to different public lands around the American West.

With regard to Utah, however, “building relationships with the locals” is cast in a different light. In various sessions at this conference I caught glimpses of Utah being drawn as an exception: a strategy for partnership-building between members of the public, friends groups, and government agencies was described, followed by “...unless you’re in Utah”; when referring to building relationships in Utah settings, “all bets are off”; there are recognized patterns of successful “best practices,” but in Utah “the same rules don’t apply.” These kinds of statements

spurred chuckles and knowing glances from the audience.²³² I don't want to discount the challenges to enacting conservation goals in Utah contexts—indeed, it is through experience that people working in conservation organizations and adjacent spaces come to view Utah this way, and although Utah is not the only state to have strong threads of anti-federal sentiment with resistance to use restrictions on public lands, the state has been the site of highly organized efforts at state and county levels challenging federal land decisions.²³³ Important to my point here is that this notion of Utah exceptionalism—boosted whenever resonant data comes along, such as with the Propublica investigation—reproduces a different frame in which the unlikelihood of developing partnerships with (conservative) locals in Utah is seen as a foregone conclusion (in a way that differs from how protections advocates face challenges to building cross-political relationships regarding public lands in other locations). Furthermore, a common version of this message is not just that Utah's engagement with public lands is unique but that lack of cooperation (with conservation efforts) in Utah is connected to malintent. In this interpretation, the subtext of statements about how “the same rules do not apply” is that local perspectives in Utah are part of an assemblage of bad faith actors (ranging from lay people to county and state officials) who are part of a monolithic religio-politico-cultural entity that is assumed to come to decision-making processes with nefarious intent and a willingness to play dirty.

Viewing Utah as exceptional does important work to reconcile this public lands advocacy “best practice” of including local voices in the development and negotiation of proposed land

²³² I encountered another variation of this in 2017 while interviewing a staff member of an organization focused on protecting southern Utah's wild landscapes: “Utah is its own unique place when it comes to conservation—most bad ideas start in Utah.”

²³³ This high level of organized response may be, in part, a response to the high level of commitment on behalf of protections advocates to the striking landscapes of southern Utah. Protections advocates are quick to assign the county and state resistance to residual Mormon desire for sovereignty (i.e., the State of Deseret). The degree to which Utah's anti-federal energy is unique in the land management world compared to other states is tricky to determine; there ultimately is experiential truth to this singling out of Utah's engagement with public lands issues, but the magnitude of that uniqueness as well as the cause(s) are difficult to declare with certainty.

management changes with the fact that some of the loudest and most powerful voices in Utah do not favor a conservation lens, are not drawn emotionally to ideas of pristine wilderness, and—perhaps most significantly—are staunchly opposed to the claims logic held by those committed to the wilderness place which doesn't privilege local perspectives and desires.²³⁴ For those pulled toward the wilderness ideal place, local voices holding anti-protections views pose a challenge to bringing about protections-focused land designations and management policies. Anti-protections perspectives pose a challenge to protections-focused goals in many American public lands settings, not just in Utah, but both the high degree of organization and effort on the part of county and state officials and the affective pull of southern Utah's rugged red rock landscapes as charismatic wilderness raise the stakes of whether and how "local voices" are included and weighted. If best practices for public lands advocacy emphasize building partnerships, including with locals, but local voices in Utah oppose the desired land protections that resonate with the wilderness place, protections advocates need to do some discursive work to address that tension. Narratives about Utah exceptionalism, particularly those that present Utah as exceptionally bad, support the vision of the ideal wilderness place by circumscribing Utah's local voices away from the "all Americans" of the claims logic presented in chapter 3 that are argued to have a valid say in public lands management. Though that claims logic already seeks to discount the idea that local voices should be privileged over an abstract democratic majority, narratives that cast Utah as exceptionally bad resonate with the ideal wilderness place because they implicitly excise Utah "locals" from "the public" and seek to legitimize pursuing protections-focused goals in the face of local and state opposition and without cooperation with

²³⁴ Notably, those drawn to the agrarian heritage place may also enjoy spending time in undeveloped landscapes, including in low-impact activities like hiking and backpacking; a key distinction is that those committed to the wilderness place advocating for land protections typically call for maximum protection (i.e., maximum restrictions on use), which I take to be driven by desire for "pristine" wilderness with specific sensory and aesthetic qualities. A common pushback to pro-protections calls for land use restrictions is that people don't understand "why environmentalists are being so greedy," arguing that people who want to go backpacking in undeveloped landscapes can do so alongside many other uses.

“local voices.”

Though the Propublica article about Utah welfare did not become a long term central talking point in protections advocacy discourse, the way that the story was received and, for a few months after its publication, highlighted by politically liberal Utahns as evidence of the state’s corruption and shady governance, shows how data interpretations that conclude a kind of exceptionalism about Utah, especially in relation to the LDS Church, resonate with the wilderness ideal place. In the case of welfare in Utah, those drawn toward the wilderness ideal place not only readily accepted an analysis that largely focused on Utah practices as unique with minimal attention to how those practices were situated in a broader welfare landscape, but also emphasized details from the article in ways that further minimized influencing variables or context from beyond the state. Data interpretations that enable symbolic resonance (such as the author’s analytical choices) and amplify that resonance (how people took up particular pieces of the article) do important work for protections advocates. Alongside the ways in which the undeveloped landscapes of southern Utah are seen as exceptional in their ruggedness, “pristine” quality, and beauty, narratives of exceptionally bad governance resonate with the wilderness ideal place through the “confirmation” of anti-protections voices acting in bad faith.

Conclusion

This chapter has journeyed through numerous instances of encounters with data and expertise, spanning economic data about the effect of national monuments, data and markers of expertise related to assessing the potential impacts of a proposed frac sand mine, and data from contexts not directly related to land use/management. With some data, different facets of the same dataset can be emphasized to back up contrasting positions, as is seen with economic data about rural southern Utah counties. While “studies” are a recognized type of data within institutional decision-making processes, how persuasive the findings of a study are or how heavily an individual weighs the findings of a study is shaped by whether the findings align with their personal experience and resonate with features of desired ideal places. In cases

where the numbers by themselves might go unchallenged, the effect of symbolic resonance is seen in what causal links are drawn between variables (often via what spatial and temporal scales are included within the frame of interpretation); how a singular point of data or “fact” can be set in different contexts to produce contrasting conclusions;²³⁵ or what meaning is assigned to enroll data in an existing argument or stance, as seen in the instances linking school enrollment to monument designation and welfare coverage to Utah exceptionalism and LDS abuses of power. When data misaligns with a preferred position, its meaning or impact can be discounted by shifting into the realm of negotiating what forms of expertise matter and are trustworthy; thus, an advanced degree as a marker of expertise at the 2019 Water Forum became a sign of “outsiderness,” while advanced degrees in other contexts—especially non-decision-making ones—are not. The influence of symbolic resonance on interactions with data is a pervasive, everyday condition. Just as any seemingly innocuous aspect of everyday life in Kanab could become a site of place-making, as described in chapter 2, any little data point may be accepted, highlighted, refuted, or ignored in accordance with whether that data is resonant or dissonant with qualities of one’s desired ideal place. These instances of encounters with data and expertise demonstrate how place-commitments shape people’s engagement with data, meaning (including definitions), and expertise, such that even as “data” as a concept is agreed upon (at least discursively and legally as written into management policies and procedures) as something necessary for decision-making, the reception and use of data is part and parcel of ongoing place-making practices via the influence of symbolic resonance.

Having detailed the push and pull of resonance and dissonance with desirable and undesirable visions of place, I close out this chapter discussing a few consequences of symbolic

²³⁵ The way that one point of information may be taken to support both anti- and pro-protections narratives about, for example, economic activity in relation to national monuments is similar to Lauderdale’s (2016) experimental study showing how Republicans and Democrats incorporated a “fact” (e.g., President Obama’s favorable opinions on Egyptian democracy-promotion efforts and free trade agreements) into a collection of preexisting views and values to draw essentially opposite conclusion about what that point of information meant.

resonance shaping encounters with data and expertise.

Chaotic Data Environments

Before I developed an understanding of people's engagements with public lands issues occurring through commitments to particular kinds of places and a framework for articulating the influence of those place commitments on interpretation and reception of data, I frequently found myself on long data-examining journeys after each encounter with a person's use of a data point to make an argument, trying to compare and contextualize that data to attempt to understand what to make of people's contrasting assertions. The analytical framework of place commitments that shape people's engagement with data brings some order and clarity to the cacophony of contested data assertions, which I discuss later in this section. However, this difficulty in "fact checking" the various numbers spoken by individuals and displayed in different documents is representative of the data environment in which those forming arguments about proper land management are immersed. Recognizing this chaotic data environment perhaps opens a pathway for a more compassionate understanding of the ways some people become so entrenched in worldviews that may be harmful to themselves and others (see De Cruz [2020] on poor "epistemic landscapes"). This data landscape is difficult to navigate even with the best of intentions to find "accurate" information. Much of what people consume is already filtered through one or more layers of interpretation, making it challenging to locate original sources of particular data points and identify what contextual details have been selected or omitted. All this precedes even getting to the matter of people's views and values shaping what meaning is drawn from one set of data placed in one set of contextual details. That the data environment in which actors are immersed is typically messy further dismantles the notion that there is a clear set of data around which stakeholders can gather and fuels place-driven conclusions that might be considered partial truths.

This chaotic data environment is a setting ripe for symbolic resonance with place commitments—these are the right conditions for place-driven conclusions to be drawn, whether

intentionally deceitful or not. Not only is it difficult for a singular interpretation to be “proven” or “disproven,” given all the varying configurations of sources and interpretations that can be produced, but also resonance and dissonance with various data may make that data environment less dizzying. Data that resonates with the visions of place people are drawn toward can aid in sifting through the hodgepodge of numbers and interpretations, with that resonance making a particular piece of data or interpretation *feel* true. The power of this resonance and how it shapes what feels true to individuals should not be discounted. In the public lands space, it often seemed that any point of data resonant with one’s desired place was readily accepted and woven into arguments for preserving that place. Drawing attention to other contextual factors that might be at play or variations from the asserted point tended to only occur when data or its interpretation were dissonant with one’s place commitment (and could not otherwise be dismissed through other discursive framing).

Implications at the Stakeholder Table

The examples presented in this chapter show varied instances of how data interactions are influenced by individuals’ place commitments. Yet such interpretive work plays out in contexts where both pro- and anti-protections voices frequently express normative ideas of data and data in decision-making processes, encouraging the reproduction of such a frame in conceptualization of land management and use decisions. With people often speaking about data as if it is a straightforward artifact with clear and obvious information yet experiencing encounters with data (whether firsthand or through various purveyors of information) in relation to the constellation of features that make up the image of place they take/desire the region to be, people both for and against land use restrictions on public lands assume they are standing on the same ground—or sitting at the same stakeholder table with a shared framework for discussing data and making decisions—while they encounter data on grounds constructed with ideas about the enduring “core” or qualities of this place and claims-making logics that shore up connections drawn between different points of a place constellation.

Like interlocutors' normative expressions about data, the decision-making processes and structures used by public lands managing agencies assume data are stable objects with clear meaning that can be set on the stakeholder table for all to look at and that discussions about that data play out with all participants seeing the same basic object, even if they might have different priorities or desires. Given the mismatch between the structure and associated normative data discourse and people's actual interactions with data, it is no surprise that so many individuals hold negative perceptions of and feelings toward the various forms of public engagement built into public lands decision-making processes.

"Obvious Conclusions" and the Cultivation of Bad Feeling

Another significant outcome of data encounters shaped by symbolic resonance with place is the cultivation of negative affect toward those who hold opposing views on land use and management or, put another way, who are drawn toward a different vision of place. Symbolic resonance with points of a place constellation makes data feel true and conclusions drawn from data feel "obvious."²³⁶ Experiencing conclusions drawn from resonant data as self-evident (and experiencing the Other's data interpretations as suspect in its dissonance with one's desired place) paired with the enduring frame about data being an unbiased tool for decision-making generates bad feeling toward those holding opposing views and amplifies people's sense of

²³⁶ For example, tangential to the deeper discussion of welfare, discourse about charitability can turn in distinct ways around the metric of time volunteered and money donated that led to a study asserting that Utah is "America's most charitable state" (Pierce 2021). Non-LDS Utahns readily point out that those numbers are so large because of the volunteer time and money related to individuals volunteering in Church roles and Church-centered charitability, with the implication or explicit statement that such closed-loop service, i.e., Church members service Church members, perhaps shouldn't count as a representation of a broader charitable ethos. From the more traditional and LDS subset of Utahns, the assertion that Utah is the most charitable state is not disqualified by the fact that much of the time and money measured in that metric is connected to the Church but instead understood as a supporting factor—that Utah is the most charitable state is related to positive cultural norms of LDS community. Similarly, a data point about how hay and alfalfa make up 0.2% of Utah's GDP but makes up 68% of the state's water use (Maffly and Eddington 2022) is utilized by protections advocates to point fingers at who is to blame for water issues and presented with a tone that such a statistic "makes obvious" what practices are bad and where change should happen to support the water future for the state. Those "obvious" conclusions are, to those rooted in the traditional agrarian heritage place, merely evidence of environmentalists' anti-agrarian bias.

polarization, reducing the likelihood of individuals realizing shared interests or commonalities in some parts of their own place commitments with those of others. Negative perceptions of the Other exacerbate discontent and perceptions of division in land decision processes.

A key quality of this dynamic is that many engagements with land use/management decision processes start with assumptions that the Other is acting in bad faith. Because one's own data interpretations and conclusions feel right, obvious, or self-evident, individuals tend to experience and assert their own position as "nonpolitical." In contrast, arguments formed with data dissonant with one's vision of place make the Other's position appear blatantly political. Protections advocates' version of a claim to being nonpolitical frequently links their arguments for land management to notions of science, generally, and ecology, specifically,²³⁷ while those opposed to federal management and use restrictions more frequently situate their argument about not being political via asserting that caring about families and community well-being is "not political." While one's own interpretation feels right, efforts to point out the hypocrisy of the Other doesn't have much impact on changing people's minds about an issue—instead accusations and claims about who is and isn't "being political" tend to fuel the sense that others are engaging in bad faith. Pro- and anti-protections individuals assert that they aren't trying to be antagonistic but are merely seeking "meaningful engagement" with other stakeholders about the issue. It seems, however, that an image of meaningful engagement that is sufficiently resonant with the image of the agrarian heritage place is often insufficiently resonant with the

²³⁷ As Heatherington has summarized, "Discourses of environmental governance, from qualitative descriptions to measurements, map-making, and data flows exchanging monitoring information, are presented as objective scientific assessments and rational planning for conservation and development" (2010, 36-37). Expertise in the form of a highly-trained, rational liberal figure and data practices are understood to be outside cultural influences, purporting to be a marker of value neutrality applied to decision-making about land use and management. My drawing a similarity between both pro- and anti-protections voices situating their perspective as outside of politics is not to necessarily claim ecological sciences as "political" but rather to point out the conceptual leap that is made when land management decisions are cast as value-neutral scientific decisions, with particular aesthetic values of "wilderness experience" woven in with notions of ecological stability.

image of the wilderness place and vice versa.²³⁸

This dynamic was characterized by Gregory Bateson (Bateson [1936] 1958) as a pattern of social fracturing he labels “schismogenesis.” Bateson defines schismogenesis as “a process of differentiation in the norms of individual behaviour resulting from cumulative interaction between individuals,” arguing that individual reactions to other individuals are key drivers of collective fracturing (as opposed to notions of “group mind” or collective consciousness, [1936] 1958, 175). Key to this idea is that complementary or symmetrical behaviors from two groups spur the continuation and/or amplification of the other, resulting in a positive feedback loop that fuels collective fracturing.²³⁹ Harrison and Loring (2014) utilize and build upon this concept of schismogenesis when talking about fisheries conflict. Importantly, they demonstrate how the conflict itself is an emergent phenomena, such that schismogenetic fracturing isn’t just people “responding (only) to the behaviors or actions of individuals, but [also] *to their own social imaginary of the conflict*, with its various symbolic meanings, political interpretations, caricatured antagonists, and historical legacies of slight and perceived injury” (Harrison and Loring 2014, 9;

²³⁸ What is meaningful engagement, when basic definitions are viewed through the lens of one’s desired place. Just like the term “meaningful engagement,” people with opposing positions on public lands protections carry place-informed ideas of what meets the criteria of being an “object” eligible for preservation (a central point of conflict in that realm is whether a “landscape” can be an object) and of what is the “smallest area possible” to protect/preserve a stated object. Even a statement like individuals just wanting their “story to be heard,” as Julie Brugger’s interlocutors asserted, can be saturated with implicit ideas about such a desire meaning a degree of management aligned with one’s desired place, contributing to people’s sense that the public participation in land decisions is largely a performance playing out with a government decision “already made” (Brugger 2009, x, 203).

²³⁹ Bateson ([1936] 1958, 1972) describes two forms of schismogenesis: complementary and symmetrical. In the former, he argues, opposite or complementary behaviors (e.g., assertiveness/dominance and submissiveness) perpetuate and amplify each other in a positive feedback loop; the more one person or group behaves assertively, the more the other submits and vice versa. In symmetrical schismogenesis, participants in interactions respond to a given behavior with the same behavior—also a positive feedback loop, but one that amplifies the same behavior rather than pushing two groups to opposing, complementary poles. Both, he argues, can result in disequilibrium and rending of social fabrics in the absence of some kind of stabilization via reciprocal relations and/or social relations characterized by both complementary and symmetrical interactions. Patterns of social fracturing may continue long after an initial point of disagreement or perceived wrongdoing, as the reception of others’ behaviors is shaped by passed down symbols and narratives. As Bateson described, “The fathers have eaten bitter fruit and the children’s teeth are set on edge. It’s all very well for the fathers, they know what they ate. The children don’t know what was eaten” (Bateson 1972, 479).

emphasis mine). Arguably, public lands conflict itself has a place in both the agrarian heritage and wilderness places, with well-worn discursive pathways reproducing protagonists and villains protecting or threatening each vision of place. Important to my take on symbolic resonance is that the pull toward desired places and the experience of symbolic resonance are affective experiences, and this *emotional* aspect of individuals' engagement with public lands issues is a significant quality of schismogenetic polarization.

Symbolic Resonance and Intent

Importantly, my argument abstains from taking a definite stance regarding individual intent, both because of the difficulty of verifying any individual's statement about their own good faith efforts or deceit and because I believe the ways that particular place commitments and desires influence how people receive, interpret, and wield data, meaning, and expertise 1) spans a spectrum from explicit deceitful strategy to earnest belief in particular values; 2) are relevant to understanding conflict and political engagement regardless of whether people's manipulations of data are "intentionally" deceitful'; and 3) do the same discursive place-making work and cultivate bad feeling regardless of whether if they are "good faith" interpretations (i.e., biases/hypocrisy that people aren't aware of being biased or contradictory) or "bad faith" interpretations (i.e., being intentionally misleading and knowing that the data don't really support their argument). I posit my use of symbolic resonance to encapsulate both explicit and implicit, or conscious and subconscious, varieties. Having been immersed in discursive and community spaces in which these kinds of data interactions occur regularly, I would guess that much of this resonance (and dissonance) occurs in more subtle or implicit ways that are shaped by affective pulls toward features of place without intent to deceive. After all, it is one's own perspective *feeling* so obvious and correct that leads anti- and pro-protections individuals to be so adamant that the other is engaging in bad faith.²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ Meanwhile, while resonant data and interpretations feel true, conceptualizations of rationality and emotionality as mutually exclusive categories persist, with the obviousness of one's own interpretation being

Challenging narratives both within the research space and in some academic analyses, I hope to decenter emphasis on intentionality to sidestep foregone conclusions about how we are to treat positions that appear to be hypocritical. These explorations of interactions with data and negotiations of expertise are also not a commitment to extreme data relativism; by that, I mean that my argument about symbolic resonance in pro- and anti- protections stances is not the equivalent of asserting all data interpretations are equally valid. On both these matters—intentionality and validity—individual instances sometimes appear more blatantly “scammy” than others. However, I argue that over-emphasis on adjudicating these factors when seeking to characterize this conflict space risks folding such a characterization into the very image of a shared ground or shared stakeholder table that reproduces stalemates and schismogenetic fracturing, as well as continues to obscure the multiple flavors of underlying settler logics. Focusing on how place commitments shape data encounters, rather than whether the interpretations from such encounters are intentionally deceptive, creates more space to examine the mechanisms and impacts of people’s experiences of data, decision-making, and conflict. Indeed, various data interpretations and arguments formed with them may be “hypocritical,” but the desired places that shape what data are compelling, and the discursive moves that come out of such resonance offer more analytical purchase than simply identifying arguments as such.

Making Sense of “Hypocrisy”

Actors in the conflict space talk about bias as something that is illogical and highlight the hypocrisy of their opponents’ engagement, but when considered through the lens of symbolic resonance, people’s biases follow relatively consistent patterns reflecting the commitments toward trying to “preserve” their ideal places. By identifying the groups of qualities, ideas, and

conflated with rationality and opponents’ behavior frequently being cast as unreasonable via its emotionality, such as protections advocates’ frequent return to narratives about historical effigy burning (see footnote 38).

values that are pulled together in creating idealized visions of what kind of place southern Utah is and interrogating how symbolic resonance with those places influence encounters with data and expertise, the assertions and actions from pro-protections or anti-protections parties that appear inconsistent and/or hypocritical make a kind of sense. While such navigation with data can be messy and, at times, requires choosing resonance with one point from a place constellation even if it contradicts with another, consistency is nonetheless found in how favored data interpretations generally align with one or more aspects of a desired place. In the next chapter I close out this dissertation with a brief illustration of how symbolic resonance with data and the other place-making efforts described in this dissertation prevent recognition of shared interests and direct resources toward settler priorities in public lands management.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

Whether on the scale of federal land decisions that mobilize people politically at a national level or on the scale of land decisions that play out more as a local drama, these “land” decisions are placemaking efforts that encompass more than the material placemaking of concrete land uses. When people take positions on land decisions, they are driven by place commitments. Thus, land decisions are not just about material interests or even exclusively land-related values, but rather are linked to constellations of variables that make up images of the ideal places that are perceived to be the “true” characteristics of the region; desirable land use is an aspect of these places, but land use is enmeshed in desires about governance, economic labor, animal-human-land relations, and interpersonal relations. Guided by the emotional pull of idealized visions of place, individuals act to protect and preserve the constellation of features that they take to be inherent and enduring qualities of this place and that they sense are regularly “under threat.” Indeed, it is when characteristics of place seem to be under threat that place commitments seem most activated. That people’s place commitments make the correctness (or wrongness) of certain interpretations or actions seem “obvious” and make Others’ contrasting takes on the same interpretations or actions seem unreasonable and/or evidence of acting in bad faith fuels political polarization and social fracturing. Thus, even as people may hold more complex views than is suggested by stakeholder archetypes, such complexity is often obscured, and even when people are inhabiting particular stakeholder subjectivities, they do not arrive at the same table to peer at the same data. In this conclusion, I consider implications and potential areas of future analysis, closing this dissertation with brief discussions of how a place-centered analysis shifts common frames of understanding conflict, how place commitments prevent recognition of shared interests, and how settler desires influence partnerships in public lands advocacy.

Place-centered Analysis

A focus on how commitments to idealized visions of place shapes engagement with public lands issues offers a logic to the inconsistencies or hypocrisy seen in people's words and actions. Understanding these images of place as idealized and as a constellation of qualities *in relation to each other* enables a way to conceptualize the implicit calculations shaping how one might arrive at a position with a decision that activates conflicting facets of place. For example, the traditional agrarian heritage place carries ideals seemingly in tension with each other, such as the idea that individuals should have complete economic "freedom" and the idea that the community as a whole should maintain a focus on agrarian and industrial activity; though in practice favoring the former ideal may, at times, bring about a position that is technically at odds with the latter, these tensions are smoothed over in the ways that they both connect to freedom, liberty, and/or rugged individualism. This framework and an understanding that different points of a place constellation may be differentially activated in a given context may also help to make sense of the "surprising" or, in relation to other contexts, apparently contradicting positions individuals sometimes take.

Understanding people's engagements with land use decisions as emotional pulls toward ideal places that are an amalgamation of assorted ideas, values, desires, and histories presents an explanatory frame that offers mechanisms behind the dynamics, and messiness, of people's engagement with sociopolitical processes. Identity-centered explanatory frames tend to reproduce the assumption of neatly defined, mutually exclusive stakeholder positions; values-centered explanatory frames often arrive at conclusions emphasizing hypocrisy; and interest-centered examinations regularly return to the question of "why do people vote against their own interests?"²⁴¹ while assuming what those interests are and that people's material interests are more important than symbolic ones. Alternatively, an explanatory frame that privileges the

²⁴¹ An approach exemplified in the popular press book *What's the Matter With Kansas?* (Frank 2005).

affective pull toward ideal places helps make sense of the seemingly chimerical assertions and actions observed in settler engagements with land use decisions and other questions of governance. Through a lens of symbolic resonance with features of a desired place, people's seemingly contradictory asserted values and reactions to proposed land use decisions and related laws and policies can be traced to some kind of (typically unstated) condition relating each idea or value to other points in a place constellation—such as ideologies of personal/business freedom primarily applying when aligned with other desirable facets of place, or the effects of settler memory obscuring the white settler interests embedded in both pro- and anti-protections desires and claims-making logics.

Within the public lands space, place contestations remain under-analyzed and poorly understood. I argue that people's subjective experiences of public lands conflict and land use decision-making are at odds with some of the basic assumptions of traditional stakeholder models—models that offer structural and procedural explanations but are less adept at addressing how different stakeholders arrive at the table with different contexts, essentially seeing a different table with different contents upon it. They are largely standing on different grounds by which they make their arguments and believe arguments and data points should be assessed. I believe the sense of intractability experienced in this setting comes, at least in part, from the fact that contestations over context (e.g., not the level of how the land should be used/managed, but at the level of how those decisions should be made) remain largely indirect. As settler pro- and anti-protections individuals engage with public lands decision-making, they set their arguments within their preferred context without recognizing or naming the built in assumptions of that context. While direct debate occurs about what land use/management actions should be taken, the image of place and the claims-making logics through which assertions are made are not recognized as building distinct grounds. That the fight over what ground people are standing on is largely not addressed explicitly contributes to the sense of bad feeling and schismogenetic fracturing described in the previous chapter. To engage with an

issue with unspoken or implicit place commitments, while acting as if people are meeting on the same rational, data-driven ground, is to arrive, again and again, at the sense that “the Other” is simply intentionally obstinate, self-interested, and ill-willed. This in turn distracts from or shields the settler colonial similarities between white settler interests embedded in both these visions of place and in the land governance processes that guide public lands management.

Failing to more fully recognize the influence of place constellations and their affective pull results in protections advocates assuming that individuals “having the right information” will change their minds. At various points throughout my fieldwork and related professional work, both nonprofit protection advocates and agency employees expressed orientations toward “educating” people about public lands that operated, sometimes implicitly and sometimes explicitly, with the logic that motivating a pro-protections attitude toward GSENM or solving wilderness area violations was a matter of getting the right information to people who, it was assumed, didn’t have that information. Thus, it was assumed that teaching science, especially if connected to topics related to the Monument, to local schoolchildren would foster pro-protections attitudes. Agency effort focused on educating local residents about wilderness area rules and regulations even as staff acknowledged that many of the violations in the area were “repeat offenders” by people who “don’t view the federal government as a legitimate authority.” Within the wave of DEIJ discourse that occurred within land protections advocacy spaces in 2020 and beyond, this same assumption came into play, with it being thought that communicating corrective histories, on its own, will effectively disrupt or deconstruct the settler foundation at the root of white American environmentalism/wilderness preservation. Assuming land management is just about land, rather than reckoning with the complexity and emotionality of place commitments, is in line with assumptions that identification of the “right” path forward is solely informational in order—the notion that if people just had the right information, the facts, the data, then they would see the correct way to move forward. Yet, it is not true that exposing the area’s youth to science learning automatically leads to a greater appreciation of wilderness

aesthetics. Even in cases where a point of data may be considered a “fact” by people with contrasting positions, the meaning drawn from such a data point occurs in relation to other underlying desires. A place-centered analysis shows how shifting individuals’ perspectives on an issue is not just an informational matter.

Further Analyses

The examination of these two dominant images of place in public lands issues has frequently had me grappling with the question of how much the specific geographic location matters in each of these images. Specific features of this region—for instance, its specific Mormon Pioneer history and its awe-striking canyon country landscapes—do matter, yet there are also facets of these places that are not, as many theorizations of place presume, necessarily tied to a specific physical locale. While the characteristics of southern Utah landscapes particularly activate wilderness place commitments, desired wilderness aesthetics are not exclusive to or inherently tied to this area. And while much rhetoric about who belongs in Kanab and other southern Utah communities utilizes the idea of longtime, multi-generational residence, not only is the actual social categorization of insiders more frequently related to particular views and values, but also features of the agrarian heritage place, like desired governance and economic labor, extend to other settings as well (as seen in the resonance of Ammon Bundy’s People’s Rights Movement discourse throughout the Intermountain West). Ultimately, a full interrogation of this question was beyond the scope of this dissertation, but I see such consideration to be a ripe area of future analysis. Further investigation of this movement between images of specific geographic locations and more general “place types” that both the wilderness and agrarian heritage places dance between would extend theorizations of place. I believe a deeper understanding of the dynamics of these place types—visions of place that are not necessarily tied to specific individual geographic locations—could help us explore how the cultivation and mainstreaming of far-right political perspectives in the U.S., as well as the reproduction of normative neoliberal imperial capitalist status quo on the part of “liberals”

despite "equity and inclusion" rhetoric, have been so effective.

Another area of further exploration lies in the role of place commitments in other political domains and/or public discourse about governance and decision-making processes that are not explicitly tied to land use and management. While the application of theorizations of place and place commitments may seem particularly relevant to the domain of land use decisions, my demonstration of the multiple components that make up visions of place indicates that place encompasses much more than material and symbolic understandings of land specifically. That analytical threads in my research kept leading me to such questions as “what everyday practices keep far-right expressions proximate and/or foster the mainstreaming of such expressions?,” despite efforts to maintain focus on land use decisions and public lands conflict, hints at how the public lands domain is already linked to broader political formations. It is worth asking how place commitments—and the emotional experience of desiring ideal visions of place—may be at work in political contexts beyond land management. How might such interrogations foster insight about the commitments behind the issues, interests, and logics found at the discursive surface level of political debates? How might considerations of place and the emotional connections to place in other contexts enhance our understanding of political polarization and schismogenetic processes?

Obstacles to Identifying Shared Interests

When protections advocates seek to bridge divides through language of a shared “love for the land,” they are not completely off base. During my time engaged with the people and land of southern Utah, I’ve seen individuals love the land through a wide variety of lenses. Yet even these attempts risk ending in hurt and misunderstanding. Individuals’ relations to and interactions with land figure differently in the places toward which these settlers are variously drawn, and with their love being embedded in constructions that enact settler memory, a disconnect from Indigenous forms of loving the land is likely to remain. Land and landscapes are a piece of the place constellations guiding people’s engagements with public lands, but

those place constellations include differences in valued ways of interacting with land as well as other features of place less explicitly connected to land itself. Thus, a shared love for the land alone is unlikely to build sturdy bridges that overcome the ongoing sense of intractability or disrupt the settler colonial dynamics of public lands management without more attention to the place commitments guiding settler engagements with public lands.

Yet, stepping away from the amorphous notion of what it means to love the land into the space of identifying concrete shared interests offers little purchase. Like the examples in chapter 2 in which any innocuous post on Kanab Classifieds could become a site of debate over what kind of place the town is, each of the local land use dramas becomes a setting in which the unique details of each issue are adorned with familiar recurring themes. That the land decisions are, by virtue of the decisions being made, an act of physical place-making with real material impacts appears to be regularly overshadowed by other (e.g., symbolic, relational, social, ideological) aspects of place. Thus, even when there are shared interests at the material level—Will there be water for the town in the future? Can people find affordable housing?—engagement with the issues, and the data and expertise wielded in the process, is subject to symbolic resonance with people's place commitments. When a decision is being made, such as whether to approve a permit for a particular business endeavor, the stakes seem to not just be that individual decision and its material impacts but rather how that decision might affect the push or pull toward one place constellation or the other.

One impact of place commitments in the debates that play out locally (such as those about the defeated frac sand mine, the proposed golf course, and approved development projects) is that people are more likely to reproduce the “environmentalists vs. locals” binary (that is dominant in GSENM and other federal land management discourse) than to engage in dialogue about similarities and differences in people's interests. Even when most of the opposition to a project comes from local residents and doesn't instigate a national-level mobilization of protections advocates, the import of this binary is employed to label one side as

“local” and the other as not. That people often operate with these archetypal characterizations of stakeholder positions makes it difficult to truly engage community issues.

Place-centered engagements with public lands decisions fuel polarization. Resonance and dissonance with and between various aspects of place result in assertions and actions that seem contradictory and hypocritical to others, cultivating bad feeling. Configurations of opponents as antagonists and as threats to ideal images of place contribute to encounters starting with an assumption of difference and bad faith. As such, it seems rare for individuals to meet each other at the level of issues or interests. In conversations with my various social and professional connections in Kanab, I was struck by how I heard friends, acquaintances, and work collaborators from pro- and anti-protections perspectives and from liberal and conservative political values speak the same concerns—for example, about the challenges of people finding sufficient employment at a livable wage and of the lack of affordable housing. Despite recognizing and critiquing the same challenges individuals and families experience, alliances between folks in these different camps and conversations about what might be done to address these challenges rarely develop.

A striking example of how place commitments impact the (lack of) mobilization around what are, at least in theory, shared interests is the ever-recurring discourse in Kanab about not wanting Kanab to “become Moab” (a town that is a tourist hub in southeastern Utah) and fears that it is already well on its way to doing so. Such articulations, in conversation and in online posts, come in phrases like “We don’t want to be Moab,” “Is Kane County going to turn into Moab?” and “STOP THE MOAB-ing OF KANAB.” As rhetoric that comes up in election forums and other public meetings and is frequently posted about in locally-based online groups (regularly quickly amassing hundreds of comments), the potential Moabification of Kanab is a perennial hot topic. Significantly, this sentiment is expressed by both pro- and anti-protections individuals. In theory, this shared concern creates potential for new collaborations, particularly as the purported stronghold of the “traditional” part of the community has become increasingly

varied in attitudes regarding what role city and county government should have in managing development, tourism, and community growth.²⁴² Both individuals drawn toward the agrarian heritage place and those drawn toward the wilderness place have expressed to me their concerns about unmitigated growth and have critiqued the county commission's and city council's propensity toward approving any action that supports growth and development, with people from different backgrounds raising the question of whether the commissioners are acting for the benefit of the community or so that a select few can "make a quick buck."

The community, infrastructural, and environmental impacts of intense tourist visitation and rapid growth can be observed in Moab's own trajectory. These impacts affect the livelihood and well-being of the community as a whole, regardless of one's political persuasions or place commitments. In theory, then, people with varying place commitments have shared interests in this domain, yet the shared stakes of navigating rapid development and increased tourist visitation are often overshadowed by ideas of place that reside in expressions of "we don't want to be Moab." For pro-protections individuals, these expressions include a specific worry about environmental damage of tourism and the threat of popular tourist activities to wilderness qualities (e.g., Moab is particularly known for its OHV/ATV recreation). For anti-protections individuals committed to the agrarian heritage place, Moab seems to represent a cowboy town lost, its integral features of place overrun by tourists and the services developed for them. Additionally, because Moab has experienced an influx of new residents in recent decades resulting in a demographic shift toward a more politically-mixed community, there is a sense that

²⁴² Arguably this "locals" (usually anti-protections/anti-federal) part of the community has always included more variety than dominant discourse implies, but in the wake of a big uptick in tourist and prospective resident interest in Kanab has seemed to spur more of that variation and/or more vocalization about varying tolerance for government metering of such growth. For instance, political elections for city and county positions in recent years—elections that are so thoroughly dominated by Republican candidates that the Republican primary is functionally the general election—have involved more splitting of the "traditional" portions of the community than I observed prior to 2020 with such splitting being largely driven by candidates' positions on development and government influencing of community growth.

Moab's local governance has been infiltrated by new residents holding liberal and environmentally-focused values. Thus, for them, fear of becoming Moab is about community changes, from tourists and new residents, that might overshadow the image of Kanab as a cowboy heritage town. We saw in chapter 2 how a proposed bike lane—an infrastructural change that in cities is often associated with gentrification, another mode of community change—was slandered by commenters associating such a move with the type of things that would happen/are happening in Moab and with “liberal commies.” Thus, although people's expressions relating Kanab's growth to concerns about “becoming Moab” include some shared concerns around material and social impacts of such changes, these other facets of what “becoming Moab” represents to people—shaped by contrasting place commitment—mean that little collaboration develops around reckoning with rapid growth.

Further Analyses

The emotional valence of people's engagement with land use decisions is central to this discussion of obstacles to recognizing shared concerns or shared interests. Not only is emotion central to the sense of the Other's bad faith engagement, but also I take the pull toward a desired place to be an important emotional experience. Although explicit theorizations of desire ended up falling out of the central frame of this analysis, considering how an effort to identify the desires—as an affective experience—behind the positions people take remains an intriguing area of study that seems a promising frame to locating coherence in assertions and actions that seem contradictory when examined through a focus on “interests.” My hunch is that bringing more attention to desire in both wilderness and agrarian heritage visions of place may help clarify and bring to the fore settler colonial, white supremacist, and (cis-hetero)patriarchal desires that are embedded but often obscured in American cultural and political domains. It may be helpful to bring my analysis of place commitments in public lands management into conversation with Eva Mackey's (2016) theorizations of “settler states of feeling.” And, considering the impacts of such an affective force in various political domains, public lands or

beyond, may help elucidate how desire functions sociopolitically.²⁴³

Place Contestations and the Persisting Impacts of Settler Desires

While instances of settler memory within wilderness and agrarian heritage constructions of place already function to obscure the white settler interests in dominant pro- and anti-protections narratives, the emotional pull of place commitments, how symbolic resonance with place shapes what feels “true” or persuasive, and the sense of others’ engagements occurring in bad faith—all within a frame in which both sides regularly appeal to normative ideas of data and rational, objective decision-making—produce a sense of intractability and fiery emotion that further distracts from the settler colonial elephant in the room. These dynamics perpetuate the marginalization of Indigenous relations to land and discourage reconceptualizing land management approaches that more effectively incorporate recognition of Tribal sovereignty. There have, in fact, been notable collaborations between Native nations and land agencies in recent years—a result of Indigenous activism and changes in DOI staff/leadership—that have demonstrated that even within an enduring settler colonial government, co-management that includes Tribal governments holding decision-making power is possible.²⁴⁴ Such changes in public lands governance should not be discounted, but neither should the continuing impact of the white settler engagements with public lands described in this dissertation—dynamics that endure amidst existing efforts to disrupt the settler status quo in public lands management. The

²⁴³ This question of desire’s function was central to Deleuze and Guattari’s (1996) theorizations of desire. Though as an anthropologist and person in the world I *do* care about “meaning” perhaps to a greater extent than these authors imply in their work, I find their focus on asking how desire functions compelling (even as my sense of their theorizations is that they are always on the cusp of explaining such function without quite arriving there, although such an impression may come from my preference for drawing upon ethnographic examples to illustrate theory). As Rubenstein (2021) elucidates, “Deleuze and Guattari announce a political theory of intensity and desire rather than of value and ideology,” and I believe this conceptual shift may be a generative mode of engagement for examinations of contemporary American political movements (393).

²⁴⁴ And yet, in the push and pull of political cycles, the political/governmental context in which public lands decisions play out will shift once again. With the results of the 2024 presidential election, it is reasonable to anticipate that priorities and commitments within the DOI, including those that have fostered more effective collaborations with Tribes, will shift in the incoming presidential administration.

fiery dynamics of place-driven engagement with public lands issues and how such engagements reproduce images of public lands conflicts centered on these two dominant positions, characterized as complete opposites and reiterating tropes of “ranchers versus environmentalists” (both of which are implied/assumed to be white settlers), contributes to obscuring the specifically white settler interests of both ideal places.

Another outcome of place commitments guiding engagement with public lands decisions is the reproduction of settler-guided public lands advocacy, even when protections advocates speak about “honoring Native perspectives.” A brief comparison of protections advocates’ differential mobilization in relation to varying public land use decisions offers a striking example of the persisting dominance of settler desire for wilderness aesthetics. As discussed in chapter 3, arguments for public lands protections do often incorporate rationales beyond the celebration of wilderness, including ecological arguments (biodiversity, habitat connectivity, etc.) and, especially since 2020, honoring contemporary Native connections to these landscapes. One only has to compare mobilization across public lands landscapes, however, to see that desire for “sublime wilderness,” especially very charismatic landscapes, continues to drive where public lands enthusiasts direct their attention and both individual and corporate philanthropic flows of funding.

During and after the national monument review ordered by President Trump in 2017, protections advocates, as individuals, nonprofit organizations, and for-profit businesses mobilized massive energy and funding to push back against the reduction of GSENM and BENM in southern Utah, asserting wilderness, ecological, and Native ties threads within arguments about the reduction being an affront to “all Americans” who “collectively own” the land. The two other national monuments reduced in size after the review, Missouri Breaks National Monument (Montana), and Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine National Monument (off the coast of New England), garnered little attention in regional and national level protections advocacy discourse. Though on principle people were opposed to all of the

reductions, GSENM and BENM became a focal point for protections advocates across the United States—not just in online discursive spaces, but also in encounters I had in settings ranging from a dog park in southern California to an individual’s presentations in Maine about protecting southern Utah canyon country. Mobilization around these monuments massively outpaced advocacy challenging the Missouri Breaks and Northeast Canyons and Seamounts reductions.

An even more compelling case to understand how desire for wilderness qualities, and particularly those that draw people in with features of the sublime, continue to drive protections advocates’ engagement is the comparison of the mobilization around protecting GSENM, BENM, and the Colorado Plateau more broadly to the (relative lack of) mobilization in response to the building of a wall along the U.S. southern border in Arizona through public lands that are similarly undeveloped, in an arid ecosystem, and within national monument boundaries (Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument). Although the construction of a border wall through this undeveloped landscape hit issues of ecological stability, Indigenous sovereignty, and impacts on Indigenous communities—concerns present in protections advocacy discourse surrounding public lands in southern Utah—organizing in opposition to the border wall received much less attention among white settler protections advocates and did gain national-level momentum. The Tohono O’odham Nation opposed the construction of the wall across their homelands, and the Center for Biological Diversity articulated the threats to habitat connectivity and biodiversity, with local and regional organizing such as protests at the San Pedro River in 2020 (Brocius 2021), yet this land use decision didn’t capture the attention of the broader field of protections advocacy (settler) constituents. The construction of the wall produced ecologically detrimental impacts from large construction equipment, rubble from dynamite blasting clogging drainages, reduced water availability due to large volumes pumped for construction purposes, and the actual barrier preventing any animals from passing through (Brocius 2021). Indigenous Tribal governments and organizations mobilized to articulate how the project damaged their material

and cultural interests (Reznick 2021). In protections advocacy discourse, southern Utah landscapes are often said to be uniquely at risk because of their fragile desert environment, with riparian areas being of special value in such dry areas, and uniquely important for their role as wildlife corridors; yet those same ecological features exist in this southern Arizona national monument. And while there are efforts, both performative and genuine, to incorporate and honor Native perspectives in relation to southern Utah's landscapes, importance to Indigenous communities on its own does not appear to mobilize white settler protections advocates—as was seen with the border wall construction and as is observed in the contrast between what land use decisions garner attention in public lands advocacy spaces dominated by white settler voices versus calls to mobilize in other contexts, such as the advocacy work of the Native Organizers Alliance. Thus, while Utah's canyon country and other awe-striking landscapes hold a central place in white settler protections advocates' vision of acting to protect public lands—and the continued desire for Romantic wilderness shapes what issues feature in dominant images and narratives about “public lands conflict”—other land use decisions that pose similar ecological threats and toward which Indigenous nations and organizations have voiced opposition gain far less attention outside of Indigenous-centered networks.²⁴⁵ Such desires remain particularly strong among older, upper-middle class, white protections advocates—commonly self-identifying as environmentalists—who make up a large portion of advocacy organizations' donor bases and the most passionate of which serve on nonprofit and foundation boards.

That sublime landscapes that tap into people's desires for particular sensory and affective experiences receive big flows of protections advocacy attention and money demonstrates how such desires continue to shape engagement with public lands management,

²⁴⁵ Examples of such land use projects around which notable Native organizing that spans across the country occurs include the Line 5 Pipeline (Michigan), the Magellan Pipeline (Minnesota, through a national monument), and mining at Oak Flat (Arizona).

reminding that white settler interests pervade even the most well-intentioned settler advocacy for protective public lands management. Even as contemporary protections advocates often express a desire to support or honor Tribal relations to the landscapes they wish to protect, the animating concept of wilderness not only obscures the settler violence and dispossession that produced today's "wild" and "pristine" public lands but also tends to misrecognize Indigenous engagement, being more likely to take the form of assuming an inherent connection between Indigeneity and environmental protection than recognizing Tribal government and activist claims based on Indigenous sovereignty.

Although strategic alliances do develop—for instance to direct white settler resources to supporting the Standing Rock camp or in the case of bringing about the designation of Bears Ears National Monument—they are not only less likely to develop in situations where an affective pull of wilderness is not activated (such as with the southern border wall), but also this tendency for white settler protections advocates to miss the role of Indigenous sovereignty leads to surprise when Indigenous Tribes or individuals break with white settler protections advocates' positions. Although white settler protections advocates—perhaps reproducing settler notions of an "ecologically noble savage" (Hames 2007) and/or perhaps shaped by which Indigenous actors they find themselves engaging with based on their own public lands advocacy—tend to assume Indigenous Tribal governments and individuals always favor environmental protection as envisioned by the mainstream (white) American environmental movement, the reality is more complex. For instance, while the five Tribes of the Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition advocated for the use of the Antiquities Act to designate Bears Ears National Monument to achieve their goals of protecting and co-managing sacred landscapes, in another context the Ute Indian Tribe in Colorado opposed the designation of Camp Hale Continental Divide National Monument. This monument, designated in 2022, was celebrated by protections advocates as another step toward meeting the "30 by 30" goal of protecting 30% of America's public lands by 2030 and highlighted as a successful instance of collaborating with "the locals"—with such a label, as

mentioned in chapter 3, implying white settler ranchers (and other pro-ranching conservatives) in the area. Representatives of the Ute Indian Tribe, however, expressed anger about the federal government excluding the Tribe from making decisions about the land, excluding the Tribe from monument co-management, and designating the land as a national monument instead of returning that land to their reservation, a return they had been advocating for. To the Ute Indian Tribe, it was an instance of the Biden Administration demonstrating that, for all its rhetoric about changing their approach to engaging with Native nations, the administration was continuing enduring practices of not including Tribes in decision-making about areas that are their traditional homelands and from which they were violently forced off. They also asserted that the administration was essentially picking and choosing when to genuinely engage Tribes, primarily including Tribes who express alignment with what the administration already intends to do (Ute Indian Tribe 2022). Dana Powell's (2018) ethnographic analysis of energy-related land use decision-making on the Navajo Nation, too, serves as an example of the complexity and variation in Indigenous interests, motivations, and visions of Indigenous sovereignty related to land decisions.

Finally, the politics around renewable energy projects on federal public lands are another site in which the mismatch between white settler protections advocates' desires and Tribal and Indigenous activist goals become more visible. Although protections advocates oppose fossil fuel industry and mining operations on U.S. public lands, the promise of renewable energy as an alternative that could reduce the need for extractive industry projects on public lands tends to resonate enough with protections advocates' sense of positive actions for the environment such that they tend to support renewable energy projects. Yet, in numerous instances such proposals are opposed by Indigenous groups (e.g., the Yakima in opposition to a solar panel project on their homelands in Washington state, or internationally, the Saami in opposition to wind farms in Scandinavian countries [Oaster 2023]), as such projects disrupt these traditional homelands and continue to deny Indigenous sovereignty. Such instances remind of the colonial underpinnings

of the “liberal” perspectives many settler protections advocates hold, in which an assumption that renewable energy is assumed to be always desirable comes up against Indigenous assertions of sovereignty, a political dynamic some scholars and journalists have labeled “green colonialism.”

These land use decisions that put protections advocates and Indigenous communities in opposition to each other remind of the baseline default of settler colonial governance of American “public land,” and such disruptions challenge us to consider land use decisions in a more multifaceted way than simply being for or against land protections or land use restrictions. Whereas engagement driven by symbolic resonance often obscures interconnections, such disruptions as Indigenous opposition to “environmentally friendly” energy projects that come as a “surprise” to settler protections advocates help bring into view the interconnections of such matters as energy consumption/lifestyle practices, ecological integrity, sovereignty, and the ongoing impacts of settler colonialism. Even as settler protection advocates’ intend to become more just, equitable, and inclusive and some new narratives are gaining traction, the landscape of progressive politics in the U.S. is still solidly enmeshed in settler colonial processes. As the conservation and public lands advocacy fields grapple with trying to catch a wave on the rising tide of calls for justice, equity, and inclusion, such efforts snag on the threat that such work poses to dominant ideologies about American nature, wilderness, and public lands for all. As Max Liboiron (Michif-settler, 2021) reminds, “Colonialism lurks in assumptions and premises, even when we think we’re doing good” (45).

Further Analyses and Action:

There is much left to examine regarding the specifically settler aspect of settler engagements with U.S. public lands. One area that I seek to develop further in the future is bringing together the embedded mechanisms of settler memory in dominant pro- and anti-protections perspectives and the past- or preservation-oriented aspect of people’s visions of place. That both pro- and anti-protections individuals seek to protect what they see as the core

of what this place is points toward a site of future engagement with how settler colonial nostalgia functions in this and other public decision-making realms. Both of the settler positions in this pro- and anti-protections binary enact a kind of nostalgia about a (perceived/imagined) past place or past-present place that is always “under threat,” with both engaging a notion of purity. While the wilderness place hinges on a notion of natural purity, seeking to “return to” some kind of primeval conditions and to preserve landscapes labeled as untouched, the agrarian heritage place involves an emphasis on the preservation of a kind of cultural purity that, like wilderness, doesn’t really exist in the way it is discursively constructed.²⁴⁶

Finally, this journey through analyzing settler engagements with land and place circles back to the question of what it might look like to engage in public lands management in ways that refuse settler memory. Indigenous activists throughout American colonization have already brought about important disruptions and refusals, including in recent years shifting approaches within the Department of the Interior and its various agencies, as well as influencing popular awareness and perceptions of Native issues. However, I seek to follow Bruyneel’s (2021, xv, 10) example of thinking toward how white settlers may participate in refusing and disrupting settler memory. What actions might white settlers take in public lands domains as part of that refusal? Even as my own actions in that space are quite rudimentary, I hope that this dissertation’s exploration of the pervasive work of settler memory in public lands discourses and in the role of place commitments motivating particular land use stances may serve as tool for shedding light on this subset of settler colonialism in action and for charting pathways that

²⁴⁶ Once again this type of illustration is not unique to southern Utah public lands conflict, but is encountered in other threads of far-right political discourse such as Ammon Bundy’s campaign for Idaho governor using the slogan “Keep Idaho Idaho” that positioned himself and his political views as part of Idaho’s core cultural qualities even as he moved to Idaho in his adult life and presents a platform of more extreme beliefs about governance than what Idahoan conservatism has historically looked like (Villegas 2021). As Thompson (2024) writing for High Country News characterized, a pattern of a “Political New West” may be emerging of conservative newcomers to Intermountain West states pushing political rhetoric and action toward more extreme political beliefs than have been observed historically, with political candidates from this subset of individuals often leveraging the notion that such views/values are core features of those places that are under threat.

disrupt entrenched settler approaches to land management. Such refusals may occur within the established frames of current land management—as Judith Le Blanc (Caddo Nation) stated in a webinar panel facilitated by Talia Boyd (Diné) about carrying out Indigenous organizing within a settler colonial government frame, “We have to work within the systems that exist in order to expand the democratic processes that can be used in the moment to protect our sacred spaces.” And as advocates of Land Back principles, such as those organized within NDN Collective, have asserted, so, too, should we seek to rework those systems. I don’t yet know what my role—in my scholarship and as a person in the world—in disrupting the settler status quo in public lands management might be, and I sense that the deeply emotional valence of both pro- and anti-protections settler positions makes shifting perspectives and commitments among settler individuals a complex task. The pull toward visions of place with settler ideals is strong, often serving as an obstacle toward building common ground. And yet, this cultural-political landscape is not as binary as the for-against influence of land decisions implies. Refusing settler memory in this case may also mean naming more explicitly the common ground that does exist between pro- and anti- settler engagements—the taken-for-granted settler logics in both—and encouraging settler actors to learn about and participate in developing emergent articulations of the public and public decision-making that disrupt settler memory and encourage modes of governance that further disrupt the settler colonial status quo.

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