

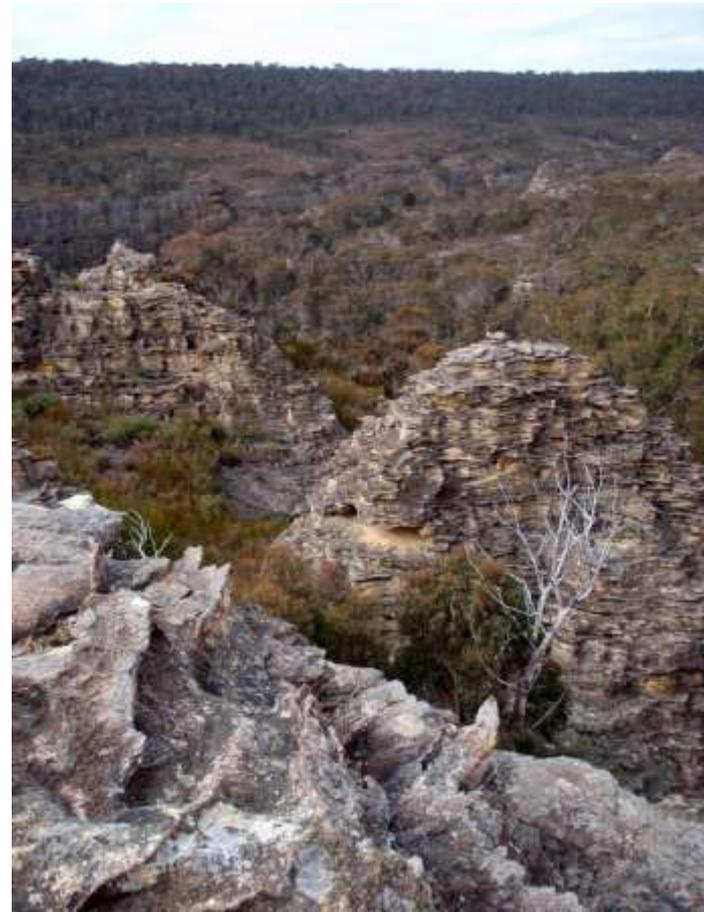
The Commodification of Nature

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Consider the big picture

- The whole tourism vs. nature conservation debate is caught up in a battle of ***philosophies and ethics***.
- Unless we consider our worldview, philosophies and ethics we will not understand the key issues in this debate.
- Conservationists constantly need to remind themselves *why* society so often 'doesn't get' what conservation is about.
- It is because of society's ***worldview and ethics***.



Anthropocentrism vs. ecocentrism

- Humans are obsessed with themselves = anthropocentrism
- Our society has been modernist, consumerist and resourcist - this has proved to be ***unsustainable*** and has resulted in the environmental crisis
- Ongoing ethical debate between those who believe that nature has *intrinsic value* and those who see it *just as a resource* to be exploited.



Modernism, resourcism and utilitarianism

- **Resourcism** says nature is just a resource for human use, and has no value or rights of its own
- **Utilitarianism** says nature is just for human use.
- **Modernism** is resourcist and utilitarian and saw nature as a machine, not an organism (Descartes and Newton). Nature was just 'mere matter in motion'.
- Modernism completed the 'the intellectual divorce of humankind from nature' (Oelschlaeger, 1991).



Ecocentrism vs. Resourcism

'There are some who can live without wild things, and some who cannot ... Like winds and sunsets, wild things were taken for granted until progress began to do away with them ... For us of the minority, the opportunity to see geese is more important than television, and the chances to find a pasque-flower is a right as inalienable as free speech'

Aldo Leopold

'The earth and its resources belong of right to its people ... Conservation means the wise use of the earth and its resources for the lasting good of men.'

Gifford Pinchot, first Director of the U.S. Forest Service



The ecocentric view

- Thoreau – *‘we need the tonic of wildness ... some life pasturing freely where we never wander’*
- Muir – *‘In God’s wildness lies the hope of the world .. The great fresh unblighted, unredeemed wilderness’*
- Leopold’s land ethic – *‘enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants and animals, or collectively: the land’*
- In the early 1900s, the idea of national parks for *nature conservation* won out over Pinchot’s idea of being just for our use. This has been called ‘the best idea America ever had!’.



Eco-centric view - management

- Nature is ‘self-willed’ and has a right to *exist for itself*, not just for human recreation or exploitation. Parks are for nature *and* people.
- Nature may be seen as ‘sacred’, a source of spiritual renewal, something we have a responsibility to protect
- The remaining large natural areas (defined as **wilderness**) should be protected
- Humans go to wilderness on nature’s terms, without roads or mechanised access, and ***without over-use***.



Commercial access to wilderness

It's not **eco**-tourism when there is no 'eco' to it. It is often about:

- selling nature as a commodity
- making a buck, as nature is seen as 'having to pay for itself'
- putting human rights *above* the rights of the wild

In other words, it is a continuation of the modernist, resourcist exploitation of the Earth.



The commodification of national parks and wilderness is often ***not sustainable***, often even when only for tourism. ***‘Commodification’ is a step backwards from 100 years of conservation ethics where the ethics of Thoreau and Muir had won the day.***



Exploitation continues



- Exploitation has many guises
- = ‘Wise Use’ (US lobby by that name) = ‘Multiple Use’ (buzz word in 1970s by developers) = ‘Sustainable Use’, the latest academic buzz word for exploitation. It suggests that national parks are somehow currently ‘unsustainable’. In fact they are the most ecologically sustainable land use.
- Note it is not **ecologically** sustainable use.
“sustainability” is all too often a ‘soft excuse to avoid the hard realities of environmental science’. Prof. Ralph Buckley
- National parks **don’t exclude people**, they exclude inappropriate activities that impact on the conservation of nature – and rightly so.

Academia, TEEB, and governments

- Society, academia and government are riddled with anthropocentric and resourcist worldviews.
- Intrinsic value is often given ‘lip service’ but then ignored in decision making (as is ethics)
- Even the TEEB project of UNEP states ‘*people and ecosystems are interdependent social-ecological systems*’
- ‘Ecosystem services’ are a useful concept about the benefits nature provide humanity, but is *anthropocentric* and does not acknowledge nature’s intrinsic value.
- The Federal government’s ‘National Landscapes’ program is **not** about celebrating nature but about ‘branding’ & ‘increasing tourist market share’.

A future in the balance



Modernism has led to:

- the environmental and climate crises
- an ecological footprint of 1.5 Earths
- a world where 60% of ecosystem services are being degraded or used unsustainably
- a drop in the Living Planet Index of 28%
- extinction rates at least 1000 times normal and a future where half the world's species will be extinct by 2100 (without action).

- The commodification of nature just continues this appalling trend (via globalisation).
- It does ***not*** lead to ecological sustainability, it does not offer a solution to the environmental crisis.



A question of values and worldview



- This debate continues – is nature sacred, something we ascribe intrinsic value to?
Or is it *just* a commodity for human use? Something we can use to increase our market share for tourism?
- At the time of Muir and Pinchot in the early 1900s the eco-centric view won out, and national parks **were primarily for nature.**
- Today, modernism seeks yet again to turn nature into just a commodity to be traded. Postmodernism has failed to stand up for the rights of nature.
- If we are truly ‘taking stock’ then we have to acknowledge that an ecologically sustainable future and the future of wilderness still **hang in the balance.**

‘A sustained willingness to change depends on a love of the Earth that human beings once felt strongly, but that has been thinned and demeaned as the land was commodified’.

Herman Daly and John Cobb (1994)

‘For the Common Good’

