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“Wilderness” Revisited: Is Canadian Park Management Moving Beyond the “Wilderness” Ethic?

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Abstract

This paper questions whether the rescaling of conservation practice in Canada to include local and Indigenous communities, NGOs, and private market-based actors represents a move away from wilderness-thinking in conservation, and what implications this might have for the future of conservation in Canada. We explore the links between Cronon's "wilderness" ethic and coloniality, racism/sexism/classism, and political economy, and the extent to which recent trends in conservation practice, such as co-management arrangements, private tourism proposals, and a shift in programming to attract a diverse public to parks, help us to move beyond the limited vision for conservation and environmentalism that the wilderness ethic provides. We interrogate the ways in which the concept of wilderness is being employed, resisted, and transformed by a multitude of actors in three parks and conservation areas across Canada. We argue that although recent developments in conservation practice help to redress some of the worrisome aspects of wilderness-thinking in parks, they also reinforce and re-emphasize problematic lines of thinking and praxis. While the wilderness character of Canadian parks has shifted a great deal since the turn of the 20th century, the wilderness ethic remains deeply embedded within conservation discourse and practice.

Keywords: wilderness, conservation, decolonization, Indigenous peoples, Parks Canada

Key Messages:

- Cronon's critique of the wilderness ethic has been foundational to critical literature on conservation in Canada.
- The rescaling of conservation to include Indigenous communities, NGOs, and private interests in some ways represents a departure from wilderness-thinking in conservation.
- Despite advances made, a problematic wilderness ethic remains deeply embedded within conservation discourse and practice.

Le concept de « milieu naturel » réexaminé: est-ce que la gestion des parcs canadiens va au-delà de l'idéologie de la « nature sauvage »?

Abstrait

Le présente texte s'interroge à savoir si la réorganisation des pratiques de conservation au Canada pour inclure les communautés autochtones et locales, les ONG et les acteurs du marché privé constitue un virage par rapport au concept de nature sauvage et, si oui, quelles en sont les conséquences pour l'avenir de la conservation au Canada. Plus précisément, nous

études les liens entre l'idéologie de la « nature sauvage » de Cronon et la pensée coloniale, le racisme/sexisme/classicisme et l'économie politique ainsi que l'importance des tendances récentes en matière de conservation, démarches qui nous aident à aller au-delà de la vision limitée de la conservation et de l'environnementalisme que propose l'idéologie de la nature sauvage. Ces tendances récentes sont les arrangements de cogestion, les propositions de tourisme privé de même que les changements dans la programmation pour attirer un public diversifié dans les parcs. Nous analyserons aussi les façons dont le concept de nature sauvage est utilisé, contrecarré et transformé par une multitude d'acteurs dans trois parcs et aires de conservation du Canada. Nous soutenons que même si les progrès récents dans les pratiques de conservation contribuent au redressement de certains aspects préoccupants de l'idéologie de la nature sauvage dans les parcs, ils renforcent et réaffirment également ce mode de pensée dans la recherche et la pratique. Au final, bien que le contexte biophysique des parcs canadiens ait énormément changé depuis le tournant du 20^e siècle, l'idéologie de la nature sauvage demeure profondément ancrée dans les discours et les pratiques de conservation.

Mots-clés: milieu sauvage, conservation, décolonisation, Autochtones, Parcs Canada

Introduction: Canada's "Wilderness" Ethic

For better or worse, wilderness has long been emblematic of the Canadian national imaginary (Campbell 2011; Erickson 2011). Canada's park system began in the late 1800s as a fortress-style enclosure of awe-inspiring "wild" lands for the purposes of settler-colonial territorialization and tourism (Bella 1987; Binnema and Niemi 2006; Jago 2017). The earliest parks were located in western and southern Canada in areas inhabited by a number of distinct First Nations. Although colonizers understood wilderness to be people-free and separate from human civilization, the "wild" landscapes enclosed within park borders were in fact co-produced through the traditional livelihood practices of Indigenous nations (Braun 2002; MacLaren 2007). Nevertheless, Indigenous livelihoods were vilified as antithetical to wilderness conservation, and Indigenous nations were violently evicted or coercively displaced from the early southern parks (Loo 2001; Binnema and Niemi 2006; MacLaren 2011; Sandlos 2008, 2014). The Canadian settler-colonial approach to conservation, then, has historically involved a spatial separation of human civilization and "wild" spaces, with only specific ways of knowing and living in nature allowed within park boundaries, and nearly unbridled development and extractivism deemed acceptable without.

Cronon (1996) critiques this approach to conservation as being imbued by wilderness-thinking. In his essay, *The trouble with wilderness* (1996), Cronon traces the shifting ways in which American society invested wilderness with meaning throughout the 18th to 20th centuries. He argues that American society's understanding of wilderness went from deserted and savage, to a sublime landscape that brings one closer to God, to a symbol of the American frontier and the masculinism and rugged individualism it represents, and finally to a more civilized leisure destination for the upper-middle-class. In short, wilderness is not a meaningful ecological or biological category but rather reflects the broader hegemonic societal relations of the time, and has thus been commonly critiqued for its patriarchal, heteronormative, racist, and elite character (Braun 2003; Sandilands et al. 2005).

Society's continuously shifting relationship with wilderness, as well as the situated and multiple understandings of wilderness between different groups of people (e.g., between social classes, between settlers and First Nations, between urban and rural populations), make clear that the concept of wilderness is not natural, it is socially produced. How we understand wilderness will thus have implications for the policies we enact to protect it (Forsyth 2003). For example, imagining landscapes as pristine and people-free does violence to Indigenous people who have lived in and shaped those environments for centuries. It legitimates their expulsion for the benefit of settler-tourists and a colonial-capitalist relationship with nature (Alfred 2005; Coulthard 2014). Cronon (1996, 81) argues that by imagining wilderness as "Other" and as outside, locked away in parks far away from where we live, "we give ourselves permission to evade responsibility for the lives we actually lead." Framing conservation as something that happens "out there" obfuscates the ways in which we contribute to environmental degradation in towns and cities. Cronon therefore concludes that an environmentalism that does not see humans as an integral part of nature and the ecosystems of which we form part is doomed to failure.

We argue that wilderness, as critiqued by Cronon, encompasses three main problematic aspects: coloniality, social exclusion, and commodification. Wilderness is colonial in nature as it understands humans and nature as fundamentally separate, in contrast to many Indigenous traditions and ontologies that understand humans as integral parts of thriving ecosystems and do not see human use as inherently destructive to wilderness (Berkes et

al. 2000; McGregor 2009; Stevens 2014; Mulrennan 2015). Wilderness is socially exclusionary as a historically white, male, middle-class playground (Braun 2003; Sandilands et al. 2005). And finally, wilderness represents a denial of traditional livelihoods in favour of capitalist and leisure-based relationships with nature (Binnema and Niemi 2006; Coulthard 2014). Through an exploration of three contemporary Canadian case studies, this paper explores the extent to which the rescaling of conservation to include local and Indigenous communities, NGOs, and market-based actors represents a move away from these problematic aspects of the wilderness ethic. We argue that although the wilderness character of Canadian parks has shifted a great deal since the turn of the 20th century, the wilderness ethic remains deeply embedded within the park system, reinforcing problematic lines of thinking and praxis in a variety of ways.

Coloniality

The first key concept we explore in relation to the wilderness ethic is coloniality. Its manifestation in conservation in Canada has been roundly critiqued (Braun 2002; Nadasdy 2005; MacLaren 2007; Sandlos 2008, 2014; Baldwin 2009), as have the links between colonialism and capitalism in Canadian conservation (Alfred 2005; Binnema and Niemi 2006; Coulthard 2014; Youdelis 2016). As mentioned, the earliest parks in western and southern Canada displaced First Nations from park boundaries, and thus were mechanisms of colonial territorialization and primitive accumulation (Coulthard 2014). Many of these nations signed treaties with the government that protected their rights to keep hunting in their former territories; however, these promises were broken (Binnema and Niemi 2006). From the 1970s onwards, Parks Canada has moved towards greater inclusion of First Nations in newly forming northern parks. Many of the newly formed parks are located in areas not covered by formal treaties. Since the land is not under treaty, Parks Canada has had to navigate comprehensive land claims from First Nations, resulting in many of the newly formed parks being established with varying degrees of co-management between Parks Canada and Indigenous nations. Some of these arrangements allow First Nations to hunt, trap, and harvest within park boundaries, although in accordance with negotiated rules and regulations. There are thus major differences in the wilderness character of different parks in Canada, especially between northern and southern parks (Sandlos 2014).

There is debate around the extent to which co-management arrangements are indeed progressive, particularly since statutory authority rests with the Crown (Devin and Doberstein 2004; Spak 2005; Mabee and Hoberg 2006; Sandlos 2014). Clark and Joe-Strack (2018) argue that the debate has been damagingly one-sided, with academic critiques of co-management often erasing Indigenous agency in negotiating agreements that their governments wish to pursue and writing off co-management as hopelessly colonial. This, they argue, ignores the decades of progress that various Indigenous governments have made and fails to treat co-management as a process that is always context-specific. In contrast, several scholars and the Indigenous Circle of Experts—which was assembled in 2017 to advise the Minister of the Environment on Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) and on how to move towards decolonization and reconciliation in protected areas across Canada—argue that as veto power rests with the Crown, the role of First Nations can only be advisory at best, which falls short of true nation-to-nation, government-to-government, or Inuit-to-Crown relationships (Alfred 2005; Mabee and Hoberg 2006; ICE 2018). Indigenous scholar Glen Coulthard (2014) argues that co-management arrangements and land claims agreements are thus couched in the colonial politics of “recognition,” (Coulthard 2014) where Indigenous nations must seek the federal recognition of their rights and access to territory. In doing so, however, First Nations must implicitly concede that the Crown’s reign over Canadian territory is just and legitimate and that the Canadian state has the authority to either grant or bestow rights onto Indigenous nations. Canada’s assumed legitimacy and authority is based on the racist assumption that Indigenous peoples were too primitive to hold sovereign authority over their lands upon contact with European colonizers (Coulthard 2014). Indeed, many co-management boards have advisory status only, and aim to integrate Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) more effectively into existing state-led, science-based decision-making processes, not to reconfigure decision-making power itself (Devin and Doberstein 2004; Nadasdy 2005). While we affirm the importance of deferring to Indigenous nations and of not critiquing Indigenous governments for engaging in negotiations that are important to them, we also deem it important to keep a critical eye on the colonial system at large, which continues to circumscribe the parameters within which Indigenous nations can negotiate.

Older parks, such as Jasper National Park, have made strides towards reconciliation, and in Kluane National Park land claim agreements have recognized local Indigenous peoples’ rights to hunt, fish and collect edible plants. Interestingly, certain First Nations have also been strategically employing the language of wilderness in attempts to safeguard their traditional territories against development and/or resource extraction (Nadasdy 2003; Pojar 2006; Todd 2008; Parks Canada 2010; Neufeld 2011). While examples occur less in National Parks than in other areas (e.g., the Peel watershed, the Arctic, parcels of Crown land in western Canada), certain Indigenous nations are asserting wilderness values alongside Indigenous values and are employing wilderness as a tool to translate

their connections to the land into the language of Canadian settler-colonialism. How do these developments either subvert or reinforce wilderness-thinking in parks? To what extent is moving beyond wilderness possible under a state-led park system where the Crown retains statutory authority?

Wilderness as White, Male Playground

The second aspect of the wilderness ethic we explore with respect to Canadian parks is its exclusionary nature along racial, gendered, and class lines. Wilderness has historically been associated with lone white male heroes, conquering the wild (Cronon 1996; Sandilands et al. 2005). Wilderness-thinking is of course racist towards First Peoples, but it has also historically excluded non-white settlers (Braun 2003). Changing demographics in Canada have been inspiring Parks Canada to enact programs such as Learn To Camp, which teaches new Canadians (particularly non-white demographics) who may have different experiences with wilderness how to set up camp in the parks. They are also providing more comfortable options, such as ready-to-rent tent cabins called oTentiks, and they are entertaining private proposals for infrastructure and attractions that would appeal to families and people with less experience in the backcountry. To what extent are such changes making parks more inclusive and accessible? Who do these efforts include and who do they exclude? Do these efforts redress critiques of parks as playgrounds for the privileged?

Political Economy

Discussions of the wilderness ethic often focus sharply on coloniality but leave out analysis of political economy, despite the fact that colonialism and capitalism are intimately linked (Fanon 1961), particularly in the North American context (Alfred 2005; Coulthard 2014). Wilderness in North America was socially and spatially produced for commercial tourism (Bella 1987), emptying lands within the earliest parks (including Jasper) of Indigenous peoples and instead welcoming in well-off white settlers who would pay top dollar to the Canadian Pacific Railroad for a unique, sanitized wilderness experience. As Campbell (2011, 4) explains, “National parks were not imagined as a way of preserving nature from people, but as reserving nature for the people’s use.” Even mining was allowed within the early mountain parks for a time (Bella 1987). The production of wilderness was not a veritable attempt to separate humans from nature, but rather to construct *certain* humans and *certain* uses of nature as acceptable and conservation-friendly, and others not.

Wilderness conservation was therefore not merely an exercise in colonial territorialization, it also delineated an explicitly capitalist political economy of conservation. Traditional economies were painted as destructive to nature while capitalist townsites and consumptive hotels, which structure human relationships to nature as commodity, were considered best practice. Forced out of the parks and barred from practicing traditional livelihoods, this process also increasingly forced Indigenous nations into capitalist relations of production.

Cronon (1996) argues that if we do not understand humans as part of nature, our environmentalism is doomed to failure. What is absent from most discussions of the wilderness ethic, but implicit in Cronon’s argument, is that we need to create political economies of conservation that reflect a social, rather than external, nature (Braun 2002). There is ample empirical evidence in political ecology that neoliberal (and colonial) capitalist approaches to conservation and sustainability are based on the ill-considered notion “that capitalist markets are the answer to their own ecological contradictions” (Büscher 2012, 29). Fletcher and Rammelt (2017) explain that the notion of decoupling environmental degradation from the reproduction of a growth-oriented capitalist economy is both a systemic and biophysical impossibility. Policies that privatize, commodify, marketize, and/or financialize social natures often facilitate continued environmental exploitation or pollution for the wealthy elite or business interests, while dispossessing poor resource users who contribute the least to global environmental crises (Igoe and Brockington 2007). The colonial externalization of nature inherent to wilderness-thinking is also arguably the first step towards its commodification (Braun 2002).

This critique relates to some of the criticisms levied at Cronon’s (1996) concept of wilderness. The concept has been critiqued for being amenable to the kind of radical constructivism that may stymie efforts to build a progressive environmentalism (Cafaro 2001; Keeling 2008, 2013). Keeling (2008, 2013), for example, notes that Cronon himself was not against wilderness preservation. Cronon believed that setting aside large tracts of land from capitalist development was indeed necessary and beneficial, but took issue with our conception of wilderness and the implications it has for how we relate to the land and each other. Keeling argues that believing that humans are part of nature and that nature should be protected against unbridled development are not mutually exclusive. He asserts that the “alleged links between wilderness and misanthropy are false” and that “this is important because [it]... gives wilderness a bad name and illicitly undermines some of the support it might otherwise have, and is a common accusation of business-as-usual development interests that are hostile to conservation policies and wish to subvert them” (Keeling 2013, 387). Cafaro (2001) similarly argues that, taken to its extreme, the

critique of wilderness can lead to the unhelpful conclusion that every human development or activity in nature is natural because we are part of nature. Both Cafaro and Keeling note that humanity is not one undifferentiated mass, and that certain people and certain practices will be more responsible and sustainable than others (see also Braun 2002).

It is thus vitally important to bring the insights of political economy into the wilderness critique. If wilderness-thinking renounces traditional livelihoods in favour of commodifying nature as a wilderness experience, can we truly transcend wilderness-thinking through capitalist tourism development or new program offerings? While this aspect of coloniality is most relevant to the Jasper case study, as Jasper is one of the oldest parks with a great deal of private enterprise, the connection between wilderness and commercial tourism is salient in all three cases. To what extent do the tourism offerings in each case reinforce colonial lines of thinking that construct nature as a leisure-based commodity while eschewing traditional land-based lifeways?

Following a brief Methods section, we explore these questions in three field sites: Jasper National Park, Kluane National Park, and the Peel Watershed. We conclude with a discussion of what looking at this cross-section of cases can start to tell us about the current state of the wilderness ethic in Canadian parks.

Methods

All authors of this paper are part of the Canadian Conservation in Global Context (CCGC) project, co-led by Robin Roth (University of Guelph) and Elizabeth Lunstrum (Boise State University). The CCGC project investigates the challenges of the rescaling of conservation practices to include local communities, national and transnational NGOs, neighbouring states, and private market-based actors in and beyond Canadian borders. Each of the first three authors has done grounded research in one or more of the field sites we reference. These case studies were chosen to compare progress being made across Canada's conservation network, with one older park (Jasper), one newer park (Kluane), and one non-park conservation area (Peel Watershed). In all three cases there are attempts to create less colonial and more social natures, with varying degrees of messiness and success. All three cases grapple with the three aspects of the wilderness ethic outlined above (coloniality, social exclusion, and commodification) in unique and interesting ways. Wilderness-thinking has been expressed, resisted, transformed, and taken up by various actors in all of these protected areas, and thus much can be learned about the current state of wilderness-thinking in Canada by putting them into conversation with one another.

Youdelis (MY) conducted fieldwork in Jasper National Park over a period of six months (May–October) in 2014, while living in the townsite of Jasper within the park. Her research focused primarily on two private tourism proposals—the Glacier Skywalk and Maligne Tours' hotel—and the extent to which the politics of austerity influenced public and Indigenous consultation mechanisms. To get a cross-section of perspectives, interviews were sought with current and former park staff, private business proponents, environmental groups and NGOs, academics, journalists, local business owners and citizens living in Jasper, and representatives from Indigenous nations whose traditional territories overlap with park boundaries. A total of 51 semi-structured interviews were conducted. To reach Indigenous nations with claim to territory in the park, letters were sent to all members of the Jasper Aboriginal Forum asking them to participate in an interview discussing their perceptions of the consultation processes for the two private tourism proposals (and more broadly with the park), and their perceptions of Jasper's moves towards reconciliation. MY spoke with two direct descendants of the original Métis families who resided in the park upon its establishment, an Elder from the Upper Athabasca Elder's Council, and representatives from eight different First Nations (Aseniwuche Winewak Nation, Stoney Nakoda Nation, Sucker Creek First Nation, Confederacy of Treaty Six Nations, Kelly Lake Cree Nation, Samson Cree Nation, Alexis Nakota Sioux Nation, and the Asini Wachi Cree Band). All interviews were conducted face-to-face when possible; interviews were conducted over the phone with respondents who were too far away to meet in person. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded using Dedoose software. Interviews were supplemented with document analysis of relevant materials. MY also engaged in observational activities at different events and protests of the private developments held by environmental groups.

Nakoochee (RN) conducted fieldwork in the Yukon Territory between June and August 2017, with a return to the study area in December 2017 to confirm direction of her study. Working with the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations (CAFN) and Kluane First Nation (KFN), her research evaluated how well a collaborative project (Healing Broken Connections), led in partnership by these First Nation governments and Parks Canada employees within Kluane National Park and Reserve, supported local First Nation peoples' understanding of what it means to be able to reconnect with land in the park and what project legacies can be supported to continue this healing process. The topic and direction of the study was scoped from meetings with managers and directors from within both Nations who reviewed and approved her topic, methods, and approach between January and May of 2017. RN spoke with Healing Broken Connections co-leads within each project partner's organization to understand what

activities project participants took part in and, with CAFN/KFN citizens and community members, to identify their understanding of reconnection with land and which project activities supported reconnection. A total of 18 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Interviews with key informants took place in Whitehorse, Champagne, Haines Junction, Silver City, Burwash Landing, and Lake Creek campground. An initial analysis of these interviews were supplemented by two focus groups with KFN citizens in December 2017 in Burwash Landing and reviewed by CAFN's Director of Heritage, Lands & Resources and KFN's Heritage Manager. The study was further supplemented by a document analysis of publicly-available materials describing the project and the co-management relationship between CAFN, KFN, and Parks Canada.

O'Neil (CO) conducted fieldwork in Yukon Territory for three months during the summer of 2016. During this time, the author lived in Whitehorse and conducted in-depth research there, as well as in Kluane National Park and the Peel Watershed. His research looked at the relationship between wilderness conservation and self-governing First Nations in Yukon, focusing primarily on the ongoing conflict over land-use planning in the Peel Watershed in northeast Yukon. Throughout his fieldwork, the author conducted interviews with local First Nations citizens and government employees, local conservation groups, tourism operators, Parks Canada staff, Yukon Government employees, and key members of the Protect the Peel conservation movement. A total of 28 semi-structured interviews were conducted. These interviews were recorded and transcribed by the author. CO supplemented these interviews with primary and secondary document analysis of conservation documents, First Nations land claims and government documents, land-use planning documents, and materials that directly concerned conservation in Yukon Territory. This research was designed and conducted by the author but was also continuously revised and reshaped throughout the research process. The author wishes to acknowledge the guidance, advice, and direction offered by many throughout the research, particularly those on whose land this research was conducted.

Case Studies

Jasper National Park

As one of the first parks in Canada (established in 1907), Jasper adopted the Yellowstone model common to the early southern parks (Campbell 2011). The original Métis families who had settled Jasper—the Moberlys, the Findlays/Finlays, and the Joachims— were evicted from park boundaries to create wilderness that would be sold as tourist attraction to white settlers, primarily the well-off customers of the Canadian Pacific Railway (MacLaren 2007; Murphy 2007). All other First Nations with claims to the park were similarly barred from entering and from practicing traditional livelihoods within protected space, as Indigenous land-based lifeways were vilified as 'destructive' to nature.

While customary practices and living off the land were vilified, white settlers were encouraged to develop modern capitalist townsites, as well as luxury hotels and high-end shops and restaurants to satisfy tourist demand. To this day, many settlers in Jasper and conservation authorities view Indigenous hunting, trapping, or harvesting of the forest as destructive to wilderness (Matthews 2017) but understand capitalist townsites to be relatively benign if development is regulated. In line with a colonial ontology that separates humans and nature, certain activities are discursively constructed as "natural" or "conservation-friendly" (e.g., leisure activities, hotel stays, conspicuous consumption), while others are constructed as threatening to wilderness (e.g., harvesting traditional medicines, hunting, trapping). Ultimately this particular vision of wilderness conservation was discursively and materially produced at the expense of Indigenous nations and in favour of colonial-capitalist accumulation via commercial tourism (Youdelis 2016).

The tourism and business industries in Banff-Jasper grew a great deal over the 20th century, especially during the 1960s and 1970s (Bella 1987; Campbell 2011). Austerity politics throughout the past few decades exacerbated the power and influence of these private businesses. The 1998 *Agency Act* turned Parks Canada into a special agency that could retain its own revenues. This combined with major budget cuts in 1993 and 2012 (totalling \$209 million) put acute pressure on parks to recoup costs by relying more heavily on private revenues. This led to several heated public controversies around private tourism development proposals in Jasper, including Brewster Travel's Glacier Skywalk attraction, Maligne Tours' luxury hotel proposal, and a proposal to privatize the Miette hot springs (Youdelis 2018). Proponents argued that these attractions would help Canadians move beyond the problematic separation of humans/nature characteristic of wilderness-thinking, and would attract new Canadians and urban youth and make parks more accessible to disabled and elderly tourists, which would also subvert the typical construction of wilderness as a predominantly white, male playground.

The private business proponents also tried to entice Indigenous communities to support the projects by suggesting the possibility of employment or opportunities to sell crafts by the attractions, which never came to fruition. One descendant of the original Métis families in the park said that they tried to “pull the wool over Elders’ eyes” by taking them up in helicopter rides and offering them gifts or privileges. The respondent from Aseniwuche Winewak Nation explained that after the Elders rejected Maligne Tours’ proposal to build a luxury hotel and tent cabins at Maligne Lake, the company asked everyone if they would be interested in selling crafts or leading canoe trips if the project did go forward. “I did feel like this was a bit manipulative of the community,” she said, arguing, as others did, that incentives such as these sow division between and within nations. “I mean, we’d be happy to participate in [discussions about opportunities] at some other point, but one of the difficult parts is we can’t say ‘No, we don’t support any of this. But if it goes forward, we’ll sell our stuff there and tell some stories.’ Right?”

As it stands, there are no Indigenous people working or selling items within the park, and Indigenous nations receive none of the profits accrued by multinational corporations who continue to profit from the ongoing state-enforced alienation of Indigenous nations from their traditional territories. Wilderness here was produced for commercial tourism, and not much has changed. Traditional livelihoods remain vilified while consumptive townsites and mass tourism operations are considered best practice with regard to sustainability, despite serious ecological impacts such as the increased CO₂ emissions generated from daily diesel buses running to and from the Glacier Skywalk (Golder and Associates 2012). Instead of moving beyond the colonial human/nature dualism, these proposals reproduce an understanding of nature as outside—a place for leisure, but not a home. Nature remains externalized, commodified, and alternative sustainabilities are precluded.

The rescaling of conservation in Jasper involved an increased role for private interests, but also increased participation from Indigenous peoples in the area, though many argue that this “participation” has merely been tokenistic. The Jasper Aboriginal Forum was formed in 2006 as a way to improve relations between park authorities and the approximately two dozen nations with claims to the park. The forum meets twice a year to discuss park-related issues, and each Indigenous community with claims to the park is allowed to send two representatives (Youdelis 2016). While the forum attempts to reconcile some of the exclusions faced by First Nations in classic colonial wilderness-based models of conservation, it unfortunately replicates and more deeply entrenches problematic colonial-capitalist inequalities.

Indigenous nations in the Jasper area are extremely dissatisfied with the efficacy of the forum. Elsewhere Youdelis (2016) argues that Jasper authorities, under fiscal pressure, employ a series of antipolitical strategies to remove political debate from the public sphere, contain and disavow Indigenous dissent, and create the appearance of consent for private development projects that benefit government and industry, but not Indigenous nations. For one, authorities attempt to use the forum meetings themselves as consultation, which eschews the park’s responsibility to meet the Crown’s Duty to Consult and to accommodate First Nations whose Aboriginal or Treaty rights may be impacted by development. The respondent from Stoney Nakoda Nation said:

They did a brief presentation on what they wanted to do with the Glacier Skywalk and asked for some feedback. The first thing that I remember one of the members saying was, “This meeting is not consultation. It’s not regarded as consultation.” What Jasper likes to do is have one or two meetings and say that’s consultation.

The Forum process is “interest-based”, which means that only those nations with the capacity to seek out consultation have the opportunity to engage, and the rest are not followed up with regardless of whether the development in question will impact their rights.

Further, park authorities refuse to engage in any discussions around Treaty rights in the park during Forum meetings, and they dictate the terms and agenda of those meetings (Youdelis 2016). The respondent from Confederation of Treaty Six Nations said:

We were there for appearances. We weren’t there with a legitimate voice to be considered, because everything was prescribed. The discussion is framed by them, the issues are chosen by them, the agenda is set by them, so we have to speak on their terms or we don’t speak at all.

This approach falls far short of true nation-to-nation or government-to-government relationship-building, and consultation therefore reflects the colonial politics of “recognition” (Coulthard 2014). Statutory authority rests with the federal government, and ultimately Indigenous nations have to accept the legitimacy of Parks Canada as the primary decision maker in their traditional territories.

It is thus clear that contemporary conservation trends in Jasper do not transcend the colonial separation of humans/nature, nor the construction of wilderness for commercial tourism. Proponents of new private attractions argue, however, that they may help us to move past the white and male-centric aspects of wilderness by attracting

new Canadians and urban youth. Proponents of both the Glacier Skywalk and Maligne Tours hotel proposals pitched these as attractions that would draw these demographics (Golder and Associates 2012; Maligne Tours 2013). That these companies felt that framing their attractions as racially inclusive would give legitimacy to their proposals indicates that this aspect of wilderness-thinking is certainly being rethought. Making wilderness more inclusive is an important and long-overdue pursuit, and marks a welcome change in Jasper's approach. However, Indigenous habitation and alternative lifeways remain prohibited, and access to wilderness as playground remains a middle-class enjoyment, albeit a more diverse middle-class (Parks Canada 2012). The target audience for Jasper is described as "middle-aged achievers" who are "affluent couples in their 40s and 50s with school aged children who are living in major urban areas" (Parks Canada 2012). Across Parks Canada, the three over-represented types of park visitors are "middle aged achievers," "prosperous parents" (older couples with teenage children), and "fledgling families" (who, although described as fledgling, are younger families with mid-scale incomes). Opponents of private development argue that free park-run programs like Learn to Camp are better ways to reach new demographics and make parks more inclusive. Justin Trudeau's Liberal government has taken a different approach to increasing visitation and made parks free to the public for one year in 2017, and free for youth indefinitely. This certainly helps to make parks more accessible and inclusive, but the concurrent support for private attractions within parks results in many nature experiences being cost-prohibitive.

Overall, while certain aspects of wilderness-thinking are being challenged or ameliorated, wilderness-thinking continues to structure conservation in Jasper in significant ways. There is more engagement with Indigenous nations, there is effort to reach new demographics, and one nation (out of approximately two dozen) was granted permission to do a controlled hunt in the park (Muzyka 2017). However, Indigenous nations remain alienated from their land-bases for commercial tourism for the middle-class, colonial relations are maintained, and a problematic human/nature dualism underlies the conservation paradigm. While progress has been made, unless Indigenous nations are able to exercise control over their territories and this colonial-capitalist conservation paradigm is seriously challenged, it is unlikely that any of these moves will lead to progressive sustainabilities.

Kluane National Park

There are very few places you will so easily access the diverse characteristics of wilderness conserved within Kluane National Park and Reserve of Canada, according to Parks Canada (Parks Canada, 2020). Like all other national parks in Canada, Kluane National Park and Reserve (KNP&R) is managed with ecological integrity as the top priority (*Parks Act* S.C. 2000). What makes KNP&R unique within the national system is its recognition of First Nation cultural reintegration as an indicator of ecological integrity, although it has yet to develop monitoring measurements for this newest indicator of ecological integrity. However, the 2010 Management Plan states "a strong First Nation presence in the park will enhance the visitor experience, ecological integrity, and cultural heritage of the park" (Parks Canada 2010, viii), creating opportunity for policies that support increased use of the park by citizens of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations (CAFN) and Kluane First Nation (KFN). Their comprehensive land claim agreements protect their citizens' right to harvest for subsistence within their respective traditional territories, including parcels now encompassed by KNP&R.

While sustaining ecological integrity is a priority, KNP&R's "wilderness character" remains an important value in managing visitor experience, creating expectations that can promote wilderness-thinking inconsistent with CAFN and KFN harvesting rights defined by their Final Agreements and the value of their presence within the landscape of the park. The 2010 Management Plan describes "wilderness character" as "the sense of being immersed in the natural environment," including, "the opportunity to enjoy peaceful campsites with little sign of other recreational use, opportunities for solitude and natural quiet, and quality experiences on the land" (Parks Canada 2010, 55). This emphasis on solitude as a valued experience is where a strong wilderness ethic rooted in a human-free view of nature is promoted. This is especially evident in monitoring targets indicated by the number of "encounters with other parties" (Parks Canada 2010, 79) during trail use. In this case, the ability for tourists to experience wilderness is formally defined by how many other humans they encounter, reinforcing a leisure-based relationship with nature that is not necessarily compatible with traditional livelihoods and pursuits. What these conflicting values mean for supporting an increase in the number of CAFN and KFN citizens who practice their right to harvest as part of Cultural Reintegration is unclear, but recent interest in ecotourism developments within each nation's territory in KNP&R are firmly framed in wilderness experiences for park visitors.

KNP&R was established in 1976 after Parks Canada took control over a large portion of the existing Kluane Game Sanctuary. The original protected area was implemented in 1943 as the state's response to the over-hunting associated with an influx of settlers after completion of the Alaska Highway in 1942. The area was managed using exclusionary conservation practices consistent with the Yellowstone model. This model banned hunting and trapping within the boundaries of the Sanctuary, greatly reducing the livelihoods and traditional economies of Southern Tutchone families who hunted and trapped in the region for both subsistence and trade (Zanasi 2005).

The state's effort to protect wildlife in this manner reflected the view that human use of an area is not compatible with preserving wilderness (Kalamandeen and Gillson 2007), therefore the displacement of Southern Tutchone families could be justified within the wilderness ethic and colonial paternalism.

Since the implementation of their Final and Self-Government Agreements, the nation-to-nation relationship between CAFN, KFN, and Parks Canada has improved significantly, but the visitor-local relationship is still in question. The Healing Broken Connections project played a significant role in enhancing the Indigenous-state relationship, which had both First Nation governments and the conservation agency partner to hold culture camps in the park to heal CAFN and KFN citizens' relationship with the land they were ostracized from for 50 years (Henry et al. 2008). Parks Canada (2015) acknowledged the myth of the "pristine wilderness" as being damaging to Indigenous land practices and knowledge systems, but how this translates to visitors of KNP&R is not clear. A past example of this uncertainty lies in a troubling interaction in the park between tourists and a group of First Nation citizens, recounted to the author during an interview. In this story, a group of citizens and a park warden pulled their boats onto the shore of a well-known lake in the park that a group of visitors were camping on:

[Our first boat] pulled up on the beach . . . and there was some tourists at the beach on the other end . . . they were totally offended that we would dare to show up and interfere with their wilderness experience. They got straightened out fairly quickly and evicted from where they were trying to camp. That was just the belief that was being promoted at the time within Parks Canada that these are wilderness areas and you don't need to expect—you won't encounter people. That's the wrong perception. So, Healing Broken Connections really worked on changing that perception.

Fortunately, in this encounter the group was able to inform the tourists about the importance of the Southern Tutchone relationship with KNP&R and Parks Canada has now largely moved away from the promotion of wilderness as human-free, thanks, in part, to the Healing Broken Connections project. Most marketing and informational materials about KNP&R that are accessible to visitors speak clearly to the role of CAFN and KFN in park management and to the importance of traditional practices for conservation. Indeed, KNP&R is managed cooperatively through the Kluane Park Management Board, in which representatives of CAFN, KFN, and Canada can make recommendations to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change related to KNP&R's management and development (CAFN 1993; KFN 2003). Although the Board is advisory in nature and power rests with the Crown, it mandates local First Nation perspectives within conservation, a tremendous shift from how this protected area was managed historically.

Currently, CAFN, KFN, and Parks Canada are engaged in assessing the feasibility of establishing private ecotourism developments that promise wilderness experiences. The proposed Matanana Resort at Kathleen Lake (CAFN territory) and the developing proposal of a backcountry lodge at Bighorn Lake (KFN territory) would allow CAFN and KFN to access the ecotourism market, and both nations have stressed the importance of the employment opportunities they will provide (CAFN 2017; KFN 2017). One Yukon First Nation citizen shared the following opinion when asked about potential ecotourism developments:

So traditional trail use, taking people through guided tours in the winter where it's First Nations that are doing it. Not some guy from Ontario who's come up and says "Oh, this is a great place. I'm putting in a permit application to take people on guided tours through a national park which I have no freaking connection to!"

Moving away from the wilderness ethic, these tourism ventures would also provide CAFN and KFN with the ability to act as interpreters. The citizen also stressed the importance of allowing local citizens to tell their own stories about the park's history and teach visitors about the interconnection between humans and nature:

But in my mind, it could have such a huge benefit to our Nation and neighbouring Nation as well. Or just economic development for the region . . . they'd be doing guided hikes with the local interpreter. They'd learn plants and animals, names in Southern Tutchone, they'd learn the history of the area. There'd be activities for children . . . There would be opportunities to sit down with an Elder and learn some storytelling, or learn the stories of the area and have their full, immersive experience with an Indigenous culture. And then go back to their lives afterwards having being transformed through that experience.

The Bighorn Lake development would offer “premium, multi-night accommodation” (KFN 2017, 5), limiting the wilderness experience to the upper-middle class and above. In reality, accessing its location involves navigating difficult terrain, making expensive, fly-in accommodation necessary. This area is also an important cultural site and a feasibility study in 2017 gave KFN citizens and staff the opportunity to complete archeological assessments with Parks Canada.

The CAFN, KFN, and Parks Canada relationship has improved to one of greater respect and trust for each party's roles and responsibilities within park management. Co-management of KNP&R is advisory at best, but products of their partnership show potential for initiatives that can provide economic opportunities to First Nation citizens, while allowing them to educate visitors on the importance of the First Nation relationship with land. This could reduce the chance of visitors having negative reactions to citizens expressing their right to access all parts of their traditional territories and to maintain their relationship with land through harvesting. However, while literature aimed at visitors published by KNP&R demonstrates a move away from wilderness-thinking that is damaging to First Nation harvesting rights, formal monitoring indicators of wilderness character may contribute to visitors lacking a same respect for First Nation presence within the landscape. While the Cultural Reintegration indicator for ecological integrity supports an ongoing healing process between Southern Tutchone peoples and land, a colonial and leisure-based wilderness ethic is still enshrined in the Wilderness Character indicator that places desired limits on visitors encountering other humans within the park. Wilderness ethic is also still at the forefront of new economic developments within KNP&R that target the upper-middle class, but rather than being used to displace Indigenous families from their homelands, it is supporting their rights outlined in their Final and Self-Government Agreements.

The Peel Watershed

Unlike Jasper National Park and KNP&R, the Peel Watershed is not a national park. Yet the Peel has been making conservation headlines and reigniting decades-old environmental debates for years. Most recently, the legal case against the Yukon Government by three Yukon First Nations and two Yukon conservation groups over land-use planning in the region was heard by the Supreme Court of Canada. In the end, the court ruled in favour of conservation and First Nations. But what conservation in the Peel means for the wilderness ethic is still very much in question.

The Peel Watershed comprises 67,431 square kilometers of land in northeastern Yukon Territory, at the northern end of the Rocky Mountain chain. With only the Dempster Highway skirting its western edge, the Peel Watershed is, for most Canadians and many Yukoners, the definition of a remote wilderness: accessible only by float plane, open to tourism three months a year, and without permanent human inhabitants and relatively little evidence to indicate a human presence. Few outside of Yukon Territory know where the Peel Watershed is and most will never set foot in it. But, of course, for First Nations in northern Yukon Territory, the Peel Watershed is not a wilderness at all; it is home, a place they have used, occupied, and connected with for generations, and one that continues to sustain them.

The Peel Watershed is the traditional territory of four First Nations—the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, Na-Cho Nyak Dun, and Vuntut Gwitchin First Nations in Yukon Territory, and the Tetlit Gwich'in Council in the Northwest Territories. Together they manage 2.7% of the land through their Final Agreements, while the remaining 97.3% is held by the Yukon Government but managed cooperatively with First Nations (Staples et al. 2013).

Land-use planning in Yukon Territory, like First Nations Final Agreements, comes out of the Umbrella Final Agreement (UFA), signed in 1993 between Canada, Yukon Territory, and the Council for Yukon Indians. The Peel Watershed Planning Commission (PWPC) was established in 2004 to develop a land-use plan for the region (Staples et al. 2013). In 2011, the PWPC released its *Final Recommended Plan*, calling for 55% of the watershed to receive permanent protection, with 25% receiving interim “Wilderness Area” protection and 20% left open for development (Protect the Peel 2015). All parties engaged in the planning process accepted this plan except the Yukon Government, who returned with modifications that altered the designated percentage of land to be protected to 29%, with 71% of the region being opened up for potential development (Protect the Peel 2015). These modifications by the (then) Yukon Government's openly pro-development agenda led to years of legal hearings by the Yukon Supreme Court and the Supreme Court of Canada, while the publicity generated by the legal hearings and by environmental conservation groups in and outside of Yukon Territory inserted the Peel into an oft-seen environmental-political duality (conservation vs. development, mining vs. wilderness). In reality, the issue was more about the interpretation of First Nations Final Agreements.

Because the Peel Watershed is not a protected area but a land-use planning region, debates over conservation and development, tourism and traditional livelihoods, and climate change and the economy have run freely and, at times, heatedly since the early 1990s. In Yukon, these debates have evolved with conservation debates across Canada, from the hard-lined and sometimes militant eco-activism of the early 1990s to the co-management agreements and market-based conservation of recent years. But they have also retained uniquely Yukon characteristics, with First Nations' government involvement and a large degree of public input and investment.

The wilderness ethic has played a central role in conservation in the Peel Watershed. Like conservation across Canada, the wilderness ethic in the Peel Watershed is tied to the concept of coloniality. The "un-peopled emptiness" of the Peel Watershed emerged from a particular understanding of nature that ignored the colonial processes of European settlement and trade, disease, residential schools, and the emergence of capitalist resource-based economies such as mining. But the perceived emptiness that draws adventure-seekers from around the world is unknown to First Nations; it is a construction of Canadian settler-colonialism.

For First Nations of the Peel Watershed, the watershed has never been empty, nor is it today. Throughout fieldwork for this case study, First Nations citizens whose traditional territory lies within the Peel Watershed continuously emphasized that it is only in the very recent history that people have not lived in the Peel Watershed. Interview participants spoke of the Peel Watershed in ways that reflect historic connections and challenge the construction of the watershed as empty. They spoke of familial connections with other First Nations, sometimes across vast distances and into modern-day Northwest Territories or Alaska. In both interviews and casual discussions in Mayo, Yukon and Fort McPherson, Northwest Territories, Elders spoke of the historic winter route that connected their communities, separated by many days of travel by dog-team and later snowmobile. Traditional routes connecting the Tetlit Gwich'in at the mouth of the Peel River to the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in in present-day Dawson were used by RCMP officers traveling from Fort McPherson to Dawson in the early 20th century. It was on this 760-kilometre route in 1911 that the fabled *Lost Patrol* carried on without their Gwich'in guides and became lost and died before they could return to Fort McPherson (Peepre and Locke 2008). The memories and stories participants shared about traditional camps, travel routes, and connections to the land and people reveal the extent to which the Peel Watershed was used and occupied by Indigenous peoples; and yet the Peel, as much as any region in Canada, is continuously constructed as an empty, un-peopled wilderness, a myth perpetuated through tourism and, at times, conservation.

Accompanying the colonial notion of empty wilderness is a particularly masculine narrative of nature, emblematic of colonial conservation across Canada. Here, the white-male hero sets out into wild lands, on horseback, foot, or canoe, to conquer or survive, to behold the grandeur of the land and assert his dominance over it. In the Peel this can be most easily identified in tourism, where outfitters and guiding companies offer the chance to hunt icons of the Canadian wilderness such as moose and bear or paddle down the wildest, most remote rivers in Canada.

Resembling both Jasper and Kluane National Parks, it is both the coloniality of the wilderness ethic and the connection of wilderness to a specific racial, gendered, and class-based narrative that led us to the recent paradoxical relationship between wilderness and market-based conservation. In the Peel, the commodification of wilderness offers conservationists an economic argument to contend with the jobs and financial benefits promised by the mining industry. And while tourism in the Peel is by no means solely dependent on colonial constructions of wilderness or white-masculine narratives of a final frontier, people from around the world visit the Peel and support its protection with this wilderness ethic in mind.

Yet for some First Nations in the Peel Watershed, the tourist appetite for wilderness offers opportunity, in both the economic and the cultural sense. Speaking about *Youth for the Peel*, an organization started to connect First Nations youth to the Peel Watershed, Dana Tizya-Tram (then head of Youth for the Peel, now Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Chief) commented excitedly:

We want to connect the First Nations to get them to develop a tourism business so that once our guides are coming out of the other end, that they'll have summer work by guiding through [the Peel Watershed]. And then that will work to help foster those connections with the tourists that come through, because they are missing a completely hidden dimension of all of that land. When you show the connection and how much it is responsible for the vibrancy of Yukon culture, it completely changes everything. And it will help to educate people about the environment as well.

As Dana reveals, the First Nations' connection to the land often does not align with tourist connections or expectations. And as more people visit the watershed in search of an experience in one of the most undeveloped places in North America, the opportunity to connect with people who call the Peel home may allow them to connect to the watershed in a whole new way.

The way that the wilderness ethic has been utilized, criticized, and examined in the Peel Watershed is far from straightforward. The high degree of political autonomy held by Yukon First Nations ensures that conservationists, government, and the mining industry both know of the importance of the Peel to First Nations and attempt to work with First Nations in decision-making processes, albeit within the complicated framework of TEK and the colonial politics of recognition. Conservationists in the Yukon Territory, whether they are settlers or Indigenous, know that the Peel is used and occupied by First Nations peoples. Yet their conservation efforts have long depended on the wilderness ethic to draw support within and outside of Yukon.

For conservationists, protecting the Peel is not solely about protecting wilderness. Conservation groups, First Nations, and independent activists constructed a well-rounded campaign in support of protection of the Peel Watershed, drawing upon scientific, cultural, economic, ecological, and spiritual arguments, with the hope of reaching as many Yukoners and Canadians as possible. When the wilderness ethic could be inserted into this campaign—such as the promotion of the Peel as an “untouched wilderness” (Fusion 2014), the last wilderness (Clifford 2003), or “one of the largest intact and unsettled wild places left on Earth” (Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative 2015)—it was simultaneously embraced and critiqued by both First Nations and non-First Nations peoples.

Primarily, the wilderness ethic is employed strategically in the Peel, used to advance a conservation agenda and mobilize support from individuals and groups who may still connect to colonial, masculine constructions of nature. For some non-Indigenous peoples in Yukon Territory, wilderness is used to articulate a spiritual connection to place that they cannot articulate through religion. For others, it explains the biodiversity of the watershed and the landscape connectivity that they see as fundamental to protect in a drastically changing world. And some have attempted to compromise and reconsider their understanding of wilderness, such as can be seen in one CPAWS, Yukon document that states that “wilderness in the Yukon includes people and their traditional activities” (Pojar 2006, 21).

The uncritical acceptance of the wilderness ethic in Yukon Territory seems to be declining (even in the four years since this research began) and there has been an increasing reluctance to use the word “wilderness” in discussions about the Peel Watershed. But for many people it still holds a place. And so when Chief Justice Thomas Berger, the lawyer representing conservation groups and First Nations against the Yukon Government in the Supreme Court hearings, stated that the Peel Watershed “is a wilderness that is sacred to the First Nations” (Berger 2016), the comment is taken in stride, revealing the complex, contentious, and enduring place of the wilderness ethic in the Peel, in Yukon, and in Canadian conservation.

Discussion

Collectively, the three case studies in this paper demonstrate strides made in each of the three worrisome aspects of wilderness-thinking: coloniality, white and male-centrism, and commercialization. In terms of coloniality and the ontological separation of humans and nature, KNP&R appears to have made more progress than Jasper and many southern parks, with its recognition of First Nation cultural reintegration as an indicator of ecological integrity and with land claims agreements ensuring CAFN and KFN citizens the right to harvest for subsistence within their respective traditional territories. Of the three, this represents the most significant move beyond a conservation ethic that views humans as inherently destructive to nature and rather supports an Indigenous worldview in which humans are part of natural ecosystems and cycles (Berkes et al. 2000; McGregor 2009; Reo and Whyte 2012). Signage in the park and the visitor centre also educate visitors that the park is indeed a homeland, not a people-free wilderness. Jasper has not made such strides, as traditional lifeways remain barred and local First Nations do not have easy or free access to the park, other than in rare cases where this is stipulated in Memorandum of Understanding agreements. First Nations are more involved in decision making today than they were a century ago, but Jasper’s process remains colonial and does not meet the Crown’s Duty to Consult (Youdelis 2016). Crucial here is that Jasper is an older park in territory covered by Treaties. Absent the comprehensive land claims present in newer parks such as Kluane, Indigenous nations in Jasper are barred from resuming habitation and traditional livelihoods within the park. Thus there is much work to be done in the older southern parks with respect to reconciliation and land reclamation, compared to newer parks such as Kluane and non-park protected areas like the Peel Watershed where there is some degree of co-management. While conservationists in the Peel worked with First Nations to emphasize the cultural and spiritual significance of the region in their campaign, the colonial white and male-centric vision of wilderness is still invoked to garner support for conservation and factors into tourist imaginaries. First Nations have, however, been reclaiming the term to assert their rights, and there is growing recognition that the Peel is indeed a home and not a people-free wilderness. In all three cases, however, the Crown retains statutory authority, and so all of these processes embody the colonial politics of recognition described by Coulthard (2014). By consequence, they fall short of the vision of conservation built from nation-to-nation relationships in the spirit of “two-eyed seeing” (learning to weave

Indigenous knowledge systems with western science in such a way that each system maintains its integrity and one does not carry more weight than the other), deemed imperative for decolonizing conservation by the Indigenous Circle of Experts (ICE 2018).

In terms of addressing the historically exclusionary nature of wilderness, protected areas in Canada are attempting to attract new demographics to parks, particularly new Canadians and urban youth (Parks Canada 2012a). This was a particularly salient narrative in Jasper, where private industry argued that their proposed attractions could help the park attract people from these demographics. Parks Canada, as an organization, is attempting to attract a more diverse public, in part by modifying their accommodation selection and urbanizing their marketing. While diversifying access to protected areas is a progressive goal, if parks are primarily understood as revenue generators within a national framework of austerity, then park access will remain exclusionary in that nature-based recreation will remain cost-prohibitive. This does not challenge the externalization and commodification of nature at the expense of Indigenous peoples and their territories, and maintains protected areas as playgrounds for the middle-class, albeit a more diverse middle-class (Parks Canada 2012). Within the context of austerity and remaining relevant to Canada's population, Parks Canada now has an internal mandate for a 2% increase in visitation per year, according to an interview with a former superintendent of Jasper. A senior manager in Jasper said that this is "the first time that's happened in my career and to my knowledge." In his 27 years of experience, Parks Canada "has been passive about visitation, so this is new," he said. Thus the push for inclusion stems, at least in part, from the fiscal necessity to continually increase visitation within this political economy of conservation.

If actualized, Indigenous-led eco-tourism in KNP&R and the Peel Watershed would exemplify more progressive offerings than tourism in Jasper, as, particularly in KNP&R, tourism would not displace Indigenous nations nor would it be occurring at the expense of First Nations' inherent rights to harvest. Rather, tourism could be complementary to traditional livelihoods and used to inform a broader public about alternative relationships with the land and one another. As it stands, however, commercial tourism in all of these protected areas maintains problematic colonial-capitalist relationships and is structured by tourist demand for wilderness. This, therefore, does not represent a progressive vision of an alternative human-nature relationship that puts people and ecosystems above profits, and rather furthers an unsustainable growth-oriented political economy of conservation. If humans are only tourists in nature and not animals integral to ecosystems, we will continue the tradition of locking up parcels of land away from where we live and continuing our unsustainable lifestyles adjacent to those areas. This is the very conservation paradigm critiqued by Cronon (1996), and the kind of disconnected relationship with our environments critiqued by ICE (2018). We argue that any real transcendence of the wilderness ethic will have to involve a significantly alternative political economy of conservation.

Beyond the scope of this paper, but fundamental to moving beyond wilderness-thinking in Canada, is public education. Wilderness-thinking is not confined to conservationists alone, but also saturates the general public's understanding of places and parks in Canada. Because this colonial-capitalist conservation paradigm structures human-nature relationships around for-profit tourism—and because, particularly in contexts of austerity, increasing visitation is a structural necessity—tourist expectations factor significantly into park offerings and how conservation areas garner buy-in from citizens. This was clearly demonstrated in the Kluane case study, with the example of tourists being resentful of having Indigenous presence on the land ruin their wilderness experience. In Jasper, public expectations very much structure offerings and local citizen groups attempt to influence park policy based on wilderness-thinking. For example, local citizens and conservation groups came out fiercely against Jasper's allowance of the Simpcw First Nation to carry out a controlled hunt in the park. Only six animals were harvested in line with Simpcw rights, however park authorities received a great deal of pushback from local non-Indigenous citizens (Matthews 2017). In the Peel, conservationists struggle to reconcile the understandings and expectations of tourists, who come for wilderness and support wilderness protection, and the values of First Nations, for whom wilderness-thinking is inherently destructive. In addition to respecting nation-to-nation relationships and pursuing alternative political economies of conservation, then, moving beyond wilderness-thinking in parks will also require public education campaigns above and beyond conservation policy.

Conclusion

Although wilderness-thinking continues to structure conservation in Canada in certain problematic ways, the emerging Indigenous-led conservation movement gives us hope for a post-wilderness conservation practice. The Indigenous Circle of Experts was assembled to advise the Minister of the Environment on how Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) could contribute to Canada's international Target 1 commitment under the Convention on Biodiversity to conserve at least 17% of land and waterways by 2020. ICE spent a year traveling across Canada consulting with Indigenous nations and produced a landmark report in 2018, offering 28 concrete recommendations for how to effect reconciliation through conservation, both in terms of supporting the establishment of new IPCAs and in terms of developing "collaborative governance and management arrangements

for existing federal, provincial and territorial parks and protected areas” (ICE 2018, 59), as well as Indigenous-led cultural programs to educate the public on Indigenous occupation and natural laws. ICE argues that all protected areas should be governed practicing the principle of “ethical space,” which “respects the integrity of all knowledge systems” (ICE 2018, 7) and views them as equal, with no knowledge system having more weight or legitimacy than others.

Tribal parks, which are IPCAs that are self-declared and managed primarily by Indigenous governments, offer a glimpse at a conservation paradigm that truly transcends the colonial politics of recognition, as First Nations are not looking to their colonizers for rights but are rather asserting sovereignty and their inherent rights to manage their territories in line with their own Constitutions and Natural Law. Several new IPCAs also serve as progressive examples, such as the Thaidene Nene National Park Reserve, in which the Lutsel K’è Nation similarly asserts inherent use rights within the park which are non-negotiable, and where the Crown does not hold veto power. The ICE report and this new paradigm of conservation represents an exciting opportunity for Canada to finally move beyond a paradigm born from wilderness-thinking and begin to move towards an environmentalism that treats human presence and active participation as integral to thriving ecosystems, and fundamentally re-imagines the kinds of relationships that people have with their ecosystems. In other words, an environmentalism that re-internalizes nature and does not replicate the colonial-capitalist exploitation and exclusion characteristic of the Romantic wilderness ethic.

As we’ve shown, in all three cases progress has been made in remedying some of the worrisome aspects of wilderness-thinking. More work needs to be done, however, and further research is necessary to explore the potential of the IPCA movement in Canada in order to lead to a decolonized conservation and more sustainable environmental stewardship. We believe that the ICE report is a decisive first step, and that each conservation area we have outlined should take the initiative to connect with local First Nations and ask how they can support the implementation of the ICE recommendations in the spirit of ethical space. In Jasper, Kluane, and the Peel this will require a great deal of openness, a substantial reorganization of management processes, an overhaul of final decision-making authority, a more just understanding of territorial sovereignty, and elevating Indigenous knowledge systems and natural law to hold equal importance to western science in decision making, among other things. As Danika Littlechild, co-chair of ICE, explained at the North American Congress on Conservation Biology conference in 2018, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is not an aspirational document, it is the bare minimum required for respecting Indigenous rights. UNDRIP represents the floor, not the ceiling. By critically analyzing the state of wilderness-thinking in present-day conservation in Canada, we are able to better outline the floor for a post-wilderness conservation practice, and hopefully inspire conservationists and critical scholars alike to continue pushing the height of the ceiling.

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