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Unlikely Alliances: Treaty Conflicts and Environmental Cooperation between Native American and Rural White Communities

ZOLTÁN GROSSMAN

Native Americans and their white rural neighbors have long been archetypal enemies in conflicts over natural resources. In particular regions of the country in the late twentieth century, tribes fighting for their treaty rights dealt with local white farmers, ranchers, commercial fishers, or sportfishers as the main obstacle to securing treaty-guaranteed access to fish, game, or water. As the tribes secured these rights, many rural whites joined an anti-Indian movement to oppose tribal sovereignty.

Yet in some of these same resource conflict zones, beginning in the 1970s, members of Native and rural white communities unexpectedly came together to protect the same natural resources from a perceived outside threat. Environmental alliances began to bring together Native Americans and rural white resource users in areas of the country where no one would have predicted or even imagined them. In an evolution that has continued into the 2000s, some Native and rural white communities formed grassroots alliances that have become a key element in the protection of natural resources. By comparing case studies of these "unlikely alliances" in the states of Washington, Oregon, Nevada, Montana, South Dakota, and Wisconsin, I hoped to find reasons why these communities turned from conflict to cooperation.[1]

The evolution went through four general and often overlapping stages. First, Native Americans asserted their cultural autonomy and tribal sovereignty. Second, a backlash from some rural whites created a conflict around

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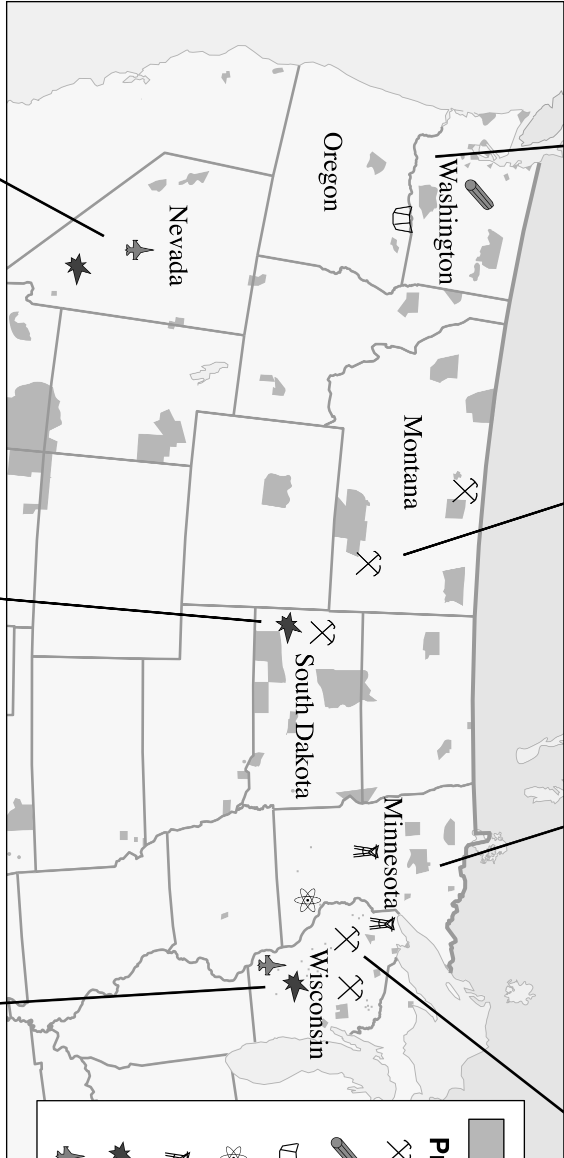
Examples of Native/non-Native Environmental Alliances

WASHINGTON/OREGON
Various tribes, sport & commercial fishers vs. dams and logging

MONTANA
Northern Cheyenne and ranchers vs. coal and gold mining

MINNESOTA
Tribes and farmers vs. nuclear plant and transmission lines

NORTHERN WISCONSIN
Ojibwe, Menominee, and sport fishers vs. metallic mining



U.S. Indian lands

Project or proposal
- Mining
- Logging
- Dams
- Nuclear plant
- Transmission line
- Bombing range
- Low-level flights

NEVADA
Western Shoshone and ranchers vs. missiles and low-level flights

SOUTH DAKOTA
Lakota and ranchers vs. uranium mining and bombing range

SOUTHERN WISCONSIN
Ho-Chunk and farmers vs. low-level flights and bombing range

©Map by Zoltán Grossman
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the use of land or natural resources. Third, the conflict declined in intensity, and the two groups initiated dialogue. Finally, the communities increased collaboration around the protection of their community livelihood and common natural resources. The neighboring groups believed that if they continued to contest the place, to fight over resources, there may not be any left to fight over. The stages of this evolution were complicated by divisions within both Native and white communities.

The phenomenon of Native/non-Native environmental alliances began in the West in the mid-1970s and gradually migrated into the upper Midwest. They have included alliances confronting mines, hydroelectric dams, logging, transmission lines, nuclear waste, military projects, and other perceived environmental threats. Natives and rural whites in each area took different paths from conflict to cooperation and experienced varied levels of success in improving relations between their communities. In certain instances a significant number of rural whites came to see Native American sovereignty and treaty rights as a legal tool to protect their shared space from a common "outsider" enemy and redefined their community of interest as including their Native neighbors.

It would make logical sense that the highest levels of cooperation would develop in the areas with the least prior conflict. Yet a recurring irony is that the highest levels of cooperation often developed in the areas that had experienced the most intense resource conflict, where tribes had asserted their rights the strongest and the ensuing white "backlash" had also been strong. In many of these cases the individual tribal members who had most strongly asserted their rights also became the initial bridge builders to their local non-Indian opponents.

It would also make intuitive sense that the areas where tribal governments had the best relations with non-Indian governments, such as state and federal agencies, the relationship with local white communities would be the easiest to develop. Yet in some instances explored in this study, such as western South Dakota and northern Wisconsin, the areas with the least intergovernmental cooperation also developed the deepest grassroots connections between Native and white communities. Bigger is not necessarily better, either in sociopolitical levels or geographic scales, and these grassroots alliances often had the greatest successes.

While this study utilizes many textual sources and regional histories, the bulk of the sources have been ethnographic interviews with people on their experiences in crossing racial lines in order to protect a common place. They include sportfishing group leaders and fishing guides, farmer and rancher group leaders, tribal government leaders, Native environmental organizers, and rural white environmental organizers, schoolteachers, small business owners, and others.[2]

The study looked at four primary sets of case studies: studies centered on fish, water, and dams in the Northwest; on military projects in Nevada and southern Wisconsin; on the mining of sacred sites in the Northern Plains; and on mining in northern Wisconsin. Each of the main case studies includes different interrelated stories of alliances in each region in the 1970s to the

present. The case studies do not merely represent stories of Native/non-Native alliances, but each represents different paths that any interethnic alliance might take.

Each case study also reflects larger theoretical questions that arise out of any study of interethnic relations anywhere in the world. They include the relationships between different geographical scales, between the state and social movements, between the assertion of "minority" rights and unity with majority group members, between place and cultural values, and between social "exclusion" and territorial "inclusion."

The success of a Native/non-Native environmental alliance can be defined not only by its ability to defeat a perceived environmental threat. The victory or defeat of the alliance may have reasons other than cooperation, though cooperation often improves the alliance's chances. An alliance does not necessarily have to "win" in order to claim some successes, though winning does help to solidify a positive relationship. The alliance can be successful if it sustains the relationships after its immediate environmental cause fades away. It can also be successful if it broadens relationships beyond environmental issues, to build more equal and stable political, economic, and cultural links between the communities.

The study focuses narrowly on the relationship between Native reservation communities and rural non-Indian communities that use natural resources, particularly white farmers, ranchers, and fishers. It does not closely examine the environmental issues themselves nor relations between tribes or urban Indians and urban-based environmental groups.[3] This study of interethnic environmental alliances is not primarily about organizations but about relations between neighbors, between local land-based communities in rural areas.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE ALLIANCES

Interethnic environmental alliances could be portrayed as quaint or irrelevant examples of common ground between two allegedly "disappearing" US populations: reservation Indians and rural whites who still value the land and its natural resources. But from another perspective the alliances may offer important lessons on overcoming divisions between ethnic or national groups historically at odds over territory. The popularized image of "cowboys and Indians" has been ingrained in the national (and global) consciousness as a cultural template of irreconcilable enemies.

Yet despite Hollywood's clichéd stereotype of cowboys eternally fighting Indians, many white ranchers and farmers see their lifestyle as endangered by modern economic trends, much as tribal members have seen their land-based cultures under siege. Native and white rural communities are confronted to different degrees by environmentally damaging projects that would not be tolerated in more populated regions. Both groups have a historic mistrust of state and federal governments that infringe on their rights.

Native/non-Native environmental alliances offer an opportunity to go beyond treatment of ethnic or racial conflict as a natural condition. Social scientists commonly examine racial or ethnic conflict, but few have studied

examples of cooperation based on common interests against an outside threat[4] or the complex relationship between conflict and cooperation.[5] Even fewer have looked at mutual community interests based on a common territorial identity or "sense of place."[6]

Local Native/non-Native environmental alliances negotiate interethnic tensions by using the concept of place as their primary tool. They redefine who is an "outsider" or an "insider" by emphasizing territorial identity. Geographers have studied "geographies of exclusion," or how social boundaries between groups are reflected on the landscape.[7] Yet few have speculated what "geographies of inclusion" might look like, how different groups might mutually include each other within a territorially defined place they view as a common "home." The Native/non-Native alliances do not "cross" social boundaries[8] but rather reconfigure those boundaries in the face of an outside environmental threat.

Much of the discourse about resolving or managing interethnic conflict has revolved around the state and using the mechanism of state citizenship to build a common identity. But indigenous nations stake their cultural survival not on a common citizenship but on boundaries and sovereign institutions that protect their distinctive identities. Most scholars either assume a stark choice between national self-determination and a common state citizenship, or they try to strike a compromise between the two. Fewer have explored ways to build common identities *outside* the state framework, by constructing or using common territorial identities and a "sense of place."

Native/non-Native environmental alliances exemplify an interethnic movement constructed not around a common state citizenship but around a common "place membership." The symbolic frame of place membership is based on people living in a particular naturally or culturally significant place rather than within a particular political boundary. The Native/non-Native alliances have begun to construct "geographies of inclusion" in the face of overwhelming historical odds against them.

Collaborative environmental alliances have not brought together everyone from Native and white communities, even if some have enjoyed local public majority support. They initially bring together certain parts of each community, particularly Indians who tend to have a more traditionalist or prosovereignty view and whites who tend to look upward (to corporate and government sources) to find the causes of their social, economic, and environmental problems. The most ardent tribal activists against white domination have ironically been some of the first Indians to build bridges to neighboring white communities. The alliances have tended to unite members of both communities who have the strongest bonds to the local landscape, even if those same ties to the land have at times brought them into conflict with the other ethnic group.

This study attempts to look at some of the best-known examples of US environmental alliances, not merely to document their histories but to use them to illustrate larger themes of interethnic conflict and cooperation. Each of these case studies appears as a prototype: of alliances that did not happen, of alliances that were initially successful but later floundered, of

alliances that achieved success in some areas but not others, and of alliances that seemed to meet most of their goals and even began to expand beyond environmental issues.

FISH, WATER, AND ETHNIC-CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN THE NORTHWEST

Washington and Oregon are widely viewed in Indian Country as the earliest and most prominent examples of treaty rights struggles in the late twentieth century. The fishing conflict between western Washington tribes and the state government and white fishermen led to widespread conflict in the 1960s around Puget Sound. The 1974 "Boldt I" federal court decision recognized the tribal claim to "fish in common" and allocated roughly half the harvest to the tribes.[9] The decision laid the groundwork for ensuing court decisions elsewhere in the United States and led to a violent backlash by white commercial fishers and sportfishers who blamed the tribes for potentially depleting the fishery.[10] This backlash formed the template for other antitreaty movements around the country in the 1980s and 1990s.[11]

Not as well known outside Washington State is the "Boldt II" process, which established a tribal role in protecting fish habitat. If logging, construction, or dams destroyed the salmon and steelhead fishery, the reasoning went, treaty rights would be rendered moot. The legal power of the treaties pressured industries and state agencies to open dialogue over environmental protection of the fishery, outside the federal court process.[12] Billy Frank Jr., chairman of the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission (NWIFC), said, "The natural resources we all depend upon must be protected for future generations. Water must be protected for fish and wildlife. Rivers must be protected from the onslaught of urban sprawl. If our bridge into the next millennium is to bring us to a place where there is a quality of life and where Indians and non-Indians are to understand one another and work together, it is a bridge we must cross together."[13] Former NWIFC vice chair Joe DeLaCruz added that he "saw the 'Fish Wars' as a catalyst to bring people together."[14]

The government-to-government dialogue resulted in tribal and state comanagement not only over fish harvest regulations but over other natural resource policies outside the reservations.[15] In the early 1980s some non-Indian regional fishing groups began to rethink their opposition to treaty rights, and a few fishing groups even began to work together with the tribes to stop projects (such as small hydroelectric dams) that threatened fish habitat.[16] Puget Sound commercial fisher Lanny Carpenter says that "people who profit from resources use racism as a tool. . . . If there hadn't been treaty rights, there wouldn't be a resource. . . . Thanks to that there are fish."[17] Yet the relationship rarely developed beyond regional group leaders and government officials. Antitreaty groups, often led by white residents of Indian reservations, continued to organize against tribal sovereignty.[18]

In the Columbia Basin, notably in eastern Oregon and eastern Washington, the treaty rights tensions of the 1970s were largely replaced in the 1990s by the crisis of declining salmon stocks.[19] Tribes joined with regional commercial

and sportfishing groups to advocate the breaching of large hydropower and irrigation dams on the Columbia and its tributaries, which blocked salmon migration.[20] The executive director of the Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association, Liz Hamilton, believes that "if the federal government fails us, the tribes will use treaty rights to breach the dams. It could be treaty rights that save the salmon." She says of working with the tribes, "Natural resource management pulls the strangest people together. With strange bedfellows is the only way we're going to accomplish our goals. There are still going to be conflicts. . . . But what we have in common is love for the salmon."[21] The regional alliance (and related tribal plans for salmon restoration) improved relations between Columbia Basin tribes and some commercial fishing groups but resulted in only limited improvement with sportfishers.[22] New conflicts have also begun over the tribal use of hatcheries to augment salmon stocks.

Less publicized has been the unlikely cooperation between tribes and local white farmers and ranchers, who had often been at loggerheads over the contentious issue of water rights. To varying degrees tribes began to work in the 1980s with local white agricultural interests to repair salmon habitat and institute locally based watershed management.[23] A notably successful approach at Oregon's Umatilla Reservation mixed a strong assertion of treaty rights with a cooperative approach toward its neighbors.[24] As a backdrop some local white residents welcomed the return of Nez Perce tribal influence back into the Wallowa Valley (where Chief Joseph's band had been expelled a century before) and made links between Native and non-Native natural resource priorities.[25]

The Northwest case studies represent intense treaty rights conflicts that resulted in strong government-to-government relations between tribal and non-Indian state and federal agencies but only limited improvement in relations between Native and rural white communities. The "top-down" cooperation often did not trickle down to the local level, though (in some cases) "bottom-up" cooperation did influence relations between government officials. Local-scale cooperation between tribal and county governments (with the tribes backed by federal trust responsibility) did influence local interethnic relations.[26]

The geographic scale of the cooperation may have affected its success. While regional scale cooperation between tribal and commercial fishing group leaders met some success, it did not succeed as well in bringing together tribal fishers and white sportfishers, who continued to disagree about resource priorities. In the United States some limited improvements have been made in relations between tribal and state governments (with Washington comanagement as perhaps the most advanced example). Yet many state officials have grown more intransigent in matters of tribal sovereignty, particularly around issues such as jurisdiction and gaming.[27]

In the Northwest the most successful and lasting reconciliation seemed to start at the local level, between the Umatilla tribes and white farmers and ranchers, even though differences are most evident between racial/ethnic communities at the local level.[28] Perhaps the differences could not be bridged at the more abstract regional or governmental level, but the gap could be narrowed where it was most obvious—in everyday life.[29]

Lessons from the Northwest case studies reflect larger critiques emerging from the growing field of ethnic conflict management. Efforts to improve interethnic relations only at the governmental or large-scale level are often unsuccessful in improving relations at the social or local-scale level. The top-down approaches can actually backfire because they tend to increase resentment at the base of both ethnic communities against their respective leaders.[30] In any case, discussions between sovereigns often do not prevent future conflicts from arising between communities.

Bottom-up relations are certainly more difficult and complex, but "people-to-people" ties can result in deeper and longer-lasting cooperation. These community ties initially are constructed around short-term common threats but have the potential to extend beyond them. They seem easier to construct on a local scale, such as a single watershed or mountain range, than at a regional or national scale, though different local experiments can be fused into a regional or national project. Some of the strongest alliances are set apart from or in opposition to state or federal government development policies.

People-to-people relations are not simply an alternative to government-to-government relations, but each can form a parallel track that strengthens the other. If community leaders actually bypass tribal sovereignty, they can undermine Native political strengths and threaten future cooperation. The impetus toward greater tribal sovereignty started on the local level, with tribal activists asserting their rights and jumping scales to bring their grievances to the federal (and sometimes global) level.

Although some scholars are beginning to view a common state citizenship as an overrated basis for ethnic conflict management, few have begun to consider what better approaches might be available. Approaches that stress a common state citizenship often ignore the histories of the states and how they have benefited the dominant ethnic or racial group.[31] Modern states are also too large in scale to construct people-to-people ties at the local level.

Interethnic environmental alliances are taking an approach that does not rely on political or social boundaries but on common places of environmental, economic, or cultural value to their residents. These multiethnic places, within a defined territorial area, engender local or regional identities that can provide a bridge between ethnic communities.

Studies of ethnic conflict tend to concentrate on national-scale "state citizenship" mechanisms to bring together ethnic or national groups but less often explore options of local-scale "place membership" strategies. If two groups begin to construct local-scale common territorial identities, they will inevitably confront entrenched majority racial identities, as the next set of case studies demonstrates.

MILITARY PROJECTS AND "WHITENESS" IN NEVADA AND WISCONSIN

When tribes in Nevada and Wisconsin allied with white agriculturalists to oppose bombing ranges and low-level flight ranges, the strength of their alliances was of concern to the US military. Yet the Western Shoshone in Nevada and the Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) in southern Wisconsin could not convince

many of their white allies to stand by them when the military singled them out. The alliances achieved some limited successes but did not extend beyond the immediate environmental threat, and sharp differences remained on local resource control issues.

In Nevada the Western Shoshone had worked with some white ranchers and townspeople in the late 1970s to stop the proposed MX missile system.[32] When the military dropped the plan, the alliance ended. In the 1980s the alliance revived to oppose new military plans for low-level flight ranges and expanded bombing ranges, with mixed results.[33] Western Shoshone opposition to nuclear weapons testing on the tribe's ceded territory was not joined by white ranchers.

The Western Shoshone did not receive support from their white allies for their treaty rights, even though those rights would have provided a tool to stop the military projects. As the tribe's treaty claims were turned down in federal court (partly because of national security considerations), the tribe had fewer legal tools to offer their allies. The alliances opposed "alien" military projects but did not change reality on the ground for Nevada Indians and whites.

In Wisconsin the Ho-Chunk joined with white farmers in the mid-1990s to oppose Air National Guard low-level flights and a bombing range expansion.[34] The flights were planned all over the farming valleys in the southwestern region of the state, while the more localized bombing range expansion primarily affected nearby Ho-Chunk communities.[35] Ho-Chunk Nation legislator Ona Garvin told white landowners that "the reason we had empathy for those people was the government policies that the Indian nations always had to follow, which meant the loss of land. Now it's the Department of Defense that's taking your land. So we understand where you are. . . . That's what really hit them. . . . That did a lot more for cultural understanding than if we had sat there and talked to them until we were blue in the face."[36]

In the end, however, the Air National Guard met the demands of white farmers not to expand the flight ranges but continued to pursue expansion of the bombing range. Many of the farmers claimed victory and dropped their demand to oppose bombing range expansion, effectively splitting the alliance.[37] The pending expansion of the bombing range, however, could easily set the stage for a revival of flight range plans.[38]

The Ho-Chunk have also reclaimed former treaty lands around a former dam project and comanage them with a state agency. This joint ownership of a protected natural area was accepted by environmental groups and local non-Indians, and efforts to exclude a tribal role in land use management have generally failed. This recognition of tribal influence led to more successful environmental outcomes than in the antirange alliance, and the limited land return helped strengthen the tribe's position.[39] A similar claim is pending on a closed munitions base.[40]

For the most part the case studies of military projects in Nevada and Wisconsin represent oppositional alliances that did not extend beyond the "outside" threat and failed to build a lasting improvement in relations between Native and non-Native communities. Many white farmers and ranchers who participated defended their own interests rather than the overall interests of the

Native/non-Native alliance. As their tribal powers were weakened, tribes had less ability to defend the land or to educate non-Indians about treaty rights.

Lessons from the military projects case studies reflect larger critiques around interracial "unity" strategies, particularly in the field of environmental justice. US alliances between whites and people of color are often based on the assumption that "minority" communities will set aside their particular concerns for the common universal good. Yet the mere concept of "unity" is not adequate if it is applied to unequal players, and "lowest-common-denominator" politics will generally not succeed in building closer community ties. A successful assertion of "minority" rights is a necessary prerequisite to unity with the majority around common concerns. A process of equalization, in political, economic, and cultural life, can help level the playing field between the communities.

Standing in the way of ethnic/racial equalization in the United States is the institution of white "privilege," or what can more accurately be termed white "advantage." In US history racism has been used not only for repression of "minority" groups but also for social control of the white majority, as a long-standing deflection from its members' other interests.[41] US whites often exhibit a "dual consciousness" of their own racial loyalty and loyalty to more inclusive values. The relative advantage of whites strengthens their racial self-interest and in turn serves to prevent or split interracial alliances.[42]

Theories of white advantage are usually applied only to hierarchies within the US working class to examine the racial "pecking order" in the labor market.[43] Yet the privileged "positionality" of whites can also help us to examine obstacles to environmental justice for "minority" communities.[44] The modern environmental justice movement not only opposes the conscious corporate placement of toxic wastes in communities of color but the white advantage to avoid or move away from environmental threats.[45] Companies or government agencies can use an ostensibly geographical "shell game" to shift environmental burdens away from white communities. By accepting short-term self-preservation, white communities are preventing long-term solutions to environmental problems. Alliances can be racially divided if white participants do not defend the interests of both communities instead of accepting "out of sight, out of mind" outcomes and failing to prioritize their place membership over their racial identity.

MINING AND SHARING SACRED LAND IN THE NORTHERN PLAINS

If place membership is a key aspect of building interethnic environmental alliances, we need to unravel how and why each ethnic group values a significant place. They may value it in very different ways but have enough of an overlap to make connections between their concerns. In eastern Montana and western South Dakota some of the earliest alliances in the United States between Indians and white ranchers confronted mining corporations and later bombing ranges and toxic wastes. They defended lands viewed as sacred by Native peoples and as culturally or environmentally "significant" by white agriculturalists.

In the 1970s Northern Cheyenne tribal members joined with white ranchers to oppose plans for new coal mines and coal-fired power plants. After winning some victories, the alliance contracted, and the historic economic animosities between the communities returned.[46] Yet the 1970s alliance made new alliances easier to form against new coal projects in the 1980s and 1990s.[47] In general, the most traditionalist and protreaty Native activists were the first to build bridges to their white neighbors. Alliances between tribes, environmentalists, and white farmers/ranchers tended to gain more than alliances between tribes and urban environmental groups alone, as shown by the very different results in Montana alliances against gold mines in the sacred ranges of the Little Rocky Mountains and the Sweet Grass Hills.[48] Third-generation wheat farmer Richard Thieltges observed of the successful fight to protect the Sweet Grass Hills, "Farmers-ranchers, Native Americans and environmentalists are three sides of a natural alliance. We are the only people who truly have to bear the burden of what's happened to the land. So the mining industry tries to drive wedges between us."[49] Yet despite joint efforts by Indians and non-Indians to protect Montana lands, the antitreaty movement continues to organize against Native sovereignty.[50]

In South Dakota in the 1970s and 1980s, similar alliances grew between the Lakota and white ranchers, despite intense racial tension between Native and white communities. It was, in fact, some of the most "militant" Native activists, those who strongly valued the Black Hills as a sacred Lakota homeland, who initiated the alliances.[51] Rancher Marvin Kammerer said, "I've read the Fort Laramie Treaty, and it seems pretty simple to me; their claim is justified. There's no way the Indians are going to get all of that land back, but the state land and the federal land should be returned to them. Out of respect for those people, and for their belief that the hills are sacred ground, I don't want to be a part of this destruction."[52]

The Black Hills Alliance (BHA) successfully stopped uranium exploration in the Black Hills in 1981, and the subsequent Cowboy and Indian Alliance (CIA) halted a proposed bombing range in 1987.[53] BHA organizer Madonna Thunder Hawk observes that the white residents came to understand that the treaty could help to prevent uranium mining: "They realized how helpless they were in the face of eminent domain. But Indian people had treaty rights—they could *stop* things!"[54] Black Hills rancher Cindy Reed said of the bombing range project defeat, "This is not Indian versus white. It's a land-based ethic versus a profit-oriented motive. This is a beautiful place. There's no reason to begin to ruin it."[55] The poignantly named "CIA" was recently resurrected to fight a coal train proposal.

After each alliance Indian-white tensions would resurface, but each alliance made the next one easier to form.[56] While relations between local rural communities improved in some cases, the same cannot be said of relations between tribes and non-Indian governments. Racial tensions festered in the 1990s and 2000s, as Lakota communities clashed with institutional barriers to their rights, particularly with white police and state government agencies.[57]

The Northern Plains case studies represent a series of oppositional alliances that have made steady but uneven progress, making later alliances

easier to form but not extending relations beyond environmental issues. Each environmental alliance represented two steps forward in relations, which were followed by one step backward as interethnic tensions resurfaced, followed by another alliance that took relations again two steps forward. Native activists used a "carrot-and-stick" strategy of strongly asserting their tribal rights while building bridges to white ranchers/farmers on land-based values that they hold in common.

The irony of the Northern Plains case studies centers on the conceptions of sacred or significant lands held by Native and non-Native residents. Around the world, notably in sites such as Jerusalem, sacred places tend to be viewed as sources of religious contention, of ethnic identity and exclusion. Yet the sacred sites of the Northern Plains, such as the Black Hills and Sweet Grass Hills, have been sources of the strongest alliances.

Both conflict and cooperation are presented by their proponents as the defense of place against a threat to the natural environment. The sacredness of the landscape can either frustrate an alliance—if one community's land-use practices do not correspond to the other's notions of sacredness—or facilitate and even deepen an alliance between two communities that discover they hold common notions of the sacredness or cultural significance of natural features.

Differing views of sacredness can enable an alliance to go beyond an environmental issue to build greater cultural understanding. But this happens only if both communities view the sacredness in a nonexclusive way and if private lands are not a point of contention between them. Whether or not they view the land as sacred, many local white residents value the land more than corporate or governmental "outsiders" and can therefore make some common links with Native values. Two neighboring communities fight over a place because they both value it highly, but that same value can be used to defend the same place against a threat from outsiders who do not share their values.

FISHING, MINING, AND INCLUSION IN NORTHERN WISCONSIN

The concept of insiders and outsiders forms the core of two major conflicts in the recent history of northern Wisconsin: over tribal off-reservation treaty rights and over corporate proposals to mine metals in the lands ceded by the treaties. In both cases the main point of contention was fish. A dispute over fish allocation divided Indians from non-Indians in the 1980s, but a new dispute united Native spearfishers and white sportfishers to protect the fish from mining projects in the 1990s.[58] For many residents the fish (and other natural resources such as wild rice) represented the territorial identity of northern Wisconsin, and the conflicts fundamentally reflected who belonged and did not belong in the place.[59]

The spearfishing conflict began in 1983 after federal courts recognized Ojibwe (Chippewa) treaty rights to harvest resources outside Wisconsin reservations. Antitreaty groups told white sportfishers and business owners that the Ojibwe would harm the fishery and cause an economic disaster in the tourism-dependent region. Thousands of white residents demonstrated

at northern boat landings in the late 1980s and early 1990s to protest against spearfishing (with signs saying, “Save a Walleye—Spear an Indian”), harass spearfishers and their families, and in many cases physically attack them with thrown objects, bat and vehicle assaults, and in some cases pipe bombs and sniper fire.[60]

The Ojibwe responded that the spearfishers harvested only 3 percent of the highly prized walleye. They welcomed support from non-Indian Witnesses for Nonviolence to monitor and document the harassment and violence.[61] The Ojibwe bands claimed that the state government was “scapegoating” the Ojibwe for declining fish stocks and appealed to northern whites’ historic mistrust of state resource agencies.[62] While two of the Ojibwe bands strongly asserted their off-reservation spearfishing rights, another band decided to accommodate state requests to avoid conflict by limiting its spearfishing.

By 1992 the antitreaty movement dramatically declined in strength and influence. Northern whites had gained some understanding of fish biology and Native cultural traditions or had been intimidated by a federal court injunction against racial harassment. But in addition, some sportfishers began to see new mining plans as potentially endangering the fishery, or at least posing a greater threat than Ojibwe spearfishing.[63] Tribes presented their treaty rights, and their on-reservation sovereign rights, as legal obstacles to the mining plans. Instead of arguing over the fish, white anglers began to cooperate with tribes to protect the fish, recognizing as useful for their own interests some of the same tribal rights that they had earlier fought. Spearfisher Walter Bresette had predicted during the treaty rights crisis that northern Wisconsin whites would realize that environmental and economic problems are “more of a threat to their lifestyle than Indians who go out and spear fish. . . . [W]e have more in common with the anti-Indian people than we do with the state of Wisconsin.”[64]

Yet the emerging alliance developed in different ways in different parts of the ceded territory. In the area where the Ojibwe did not assertively practice off-reservation spearfishing, the alliance failed to stop a copper mine from opening in 1993.[65] Bresette concluded of the loss, “Where you don’t have Indian rights, non-Indians lose.”[66] Yet the areas where the Ojibwe had strongly pushed their spearfishing (between Lac du Flambeau and Mole Lake reservations) were the same areas where the strongest alliance was built with sportfishers. Lac du Flambeau spearing leader Tom Maulson says that the treaty rights conflict had offered “an education on everybody’s part as to what Indians were about. It needed a conflict to wake them up.”[67] Sportfishing group leader Bob Schmitz says that a “mutual love” of the Wolf River brought together angling groups and tribal members to fight Exxon’s proposed Crandon mine next to Mole Lake.[68] The Menominee learned from this episode and creatively mixed their assertion of treaty rights with bridge building in order to join white sportfishers to oppose mining.[69]

The counterintuitive outcome of the Ojibwe and Menominee case studies is that the areas where the treaty conflicts had been the most intense are where the later environmental cooperation developed to the deepest extent. The alliance against the proposed Crandon mine achieved successes using

local, state, tribal, and federal laws, and it inspired the development of other Native/non-Native alliances and cultural programs.[70]

The increased community contact and equalization was helped by the concurrent growth of the tribal gaming economy but was not dependent on economic growth. Mole Lake and Potawatomi reservations enhanced their sovereign environmental regulations under the US Environmental Protection Agency's Treatment-as-State program, with support of non-Indian Wisconsin residents.[71] In October 2003 the antimine alliance not only defeated the Crandon mine, but the Mole Lake Sokaogon Chippewa Community and Forest County Potawatomi purchased the 5,939-acre Crandon mine properties for $16.5 million.[72]

The northern Wisconsin case studies represent local oppositional alliances that achieved some successes, particularly in areas of the greatest treaty conflict, and extended environmental gains into cultural and economic cooperation. The tribal assertion of Native rights helped to equalize Native and rural white communities, while an outside threat helped to build a shared sense of local place and purpose. The level of the treaty rights conflict actually seemed to affect or shape the later level of environmental cooperation.

The assertion of tribal legal powers helped to equalize the tribes with white "border" communities. The assertion of cultural traditions helped educate local whites about previously invisible tribal cultures. Tribal environmental and economic powers began to be viewed as benefiting non-Indian communities. This "bottom-up" cooperation began to create better "government-to-government" ties and joint economic development projects. Anti-Indian prejudice continued to exist, but organized anti-Indian groups were soundly defeated.

Lessons from the Wisconsin fishing and mining case studies reflect larger issues of exclusion and inclusion, or how people are defined as outsiders or insiders in a place. Geographies of exclusion are based on social/racial definition of place, which identifies a landscape with the ethnic group that lives there (or "should" live there). In this view Ojibwe spearfishers can be seen as outsiders transgressing on white land, and non-Indians can be viewed as outsiders on reservation lands. Antitreaty protesters, for example, had chanted, "White Man's Land," and the poignant demand, "Indians Go Home!"

Geographies of inclusion, on the other hand, are based on a territorial definition of place, which identifies all people who live there with the land. In this view Native and non-Native neighbors at odds over natural resources can see mining companies as new and more threatening outsiders. Native and local white residents can begin to define each other as insiders on a naturally defined landscape, such as a valued river's watershed. Whereas before the Natives and rural whites saw each other as outsiders transgressing social boundaries, in the face of an outside threat they could start to see each other as insiders in a territorially defined community. Mole Lake tribal member Frances Van Zile describes this shift in consciousness when she says that many local white residents now "accept Mole Lake as part of home. It's not just my community. It's everybody's home. . . . [W]hen it's your home you try to take as good care of it as you can, including all the people in it. . . . It's not just my responsibility. . . . [E]veryone in the community takes care of home."[73]

This process of mutual inclusion in a place is different from crossing social boundaries or shifting political jurisdictions. It means reconfiguring the mental boundaries of "community" and "home." In northern Wisconsin it means tribal powers extending outside reservation boundaries to both harvest and protect natural resources. A common outside threat necessitated larger defensive boundaries that encompassed former adversaries as "place members" in a common watershed. Community members began to redefine their meaning of "home" to include other ethnic groups living on the same landscape. This common concept of home may seem fleeting and difficult to solidify, but it stands in stark contrast to the exclusionary and often harsh ethnic boundaries that predominated before the alliances formed.

CONCLUSIONS

Participants in the environmental alliances do not simply tell a story about relations between Native Americans and rural whites against a temporary threat to their livelihoods or values. They also shed some light on how the differences between people do not have to undermine the similarities between them, and can under certain conditions even reinforce those similarities. The Native assertion of treaty and sovereign rights was in the short term a barrier to interethnic communication but actually helped in the long term to facilitate linkages with the rural white community.

Cooperation would have certainly been possible without prior conflict, and conflicts do not inevitably lead to collaborative projects. But certain conflicts—in a particular form and met with a particular response—serve as an embryo from which cooperation can emerge. Prospects for cooperation can be embedded within conflicts, and under certain circumstances even harsh interethnic conflict may ironically serve as an opportunity for improving relations between ethnic communities. "Place membership," based on a local-scale multiethnic territorial identity could be an alternative or parallel strategy to "state citizenship" in ethnic-conflict management. Place may often serve as an arena of contention and exclusion, but it can also be transformed into a force for inclusion.

Environmental alliances have not caused rural white and Native communities fundamentally to overcome their historic divisions. No matter how much their rights have been violated, white rural residents have been afforded an advantageous social position relative to Native peoples and have not experienced the same levels of land dispossession, cultural domination, and outright genocide as Native nations. In most cases in the United States cooperation has not developed between Native and white rural communities, and conflict continues over issues such as treaty rights and tribal jurisdiction. In some cases Native peoples are locked in a conflict with antienvironmental forces, such as in the dispute between salmon fishing and large-scale agriculture in the Klamath Valley of Oregon and California.[74] Anti-Indian organizing has reached new constituencies, fueled by recurrent cultural conflicts over school logos/mascots, whale hunting, or the recreational uses of sacred places (such as Bear Lodge Butte/Devil's Tower).[75] Since the 1990s, anti-Indian organizing has expanded into new issues such as opposition to tribal gaming.[76]

Environmental alliances do, however, pose a significant challenge to common assumptions about the inevitability of interethnic conflict and the impossibility of lasting interethnic cooperation. The Native/non-Native alliances need certain circumstances or preconditions to succeed. First, they must build a sense of a common place or a common bond to the landscape. The geographic setting obviously establishes the communities' priorities, based on their proximity to a perceived environmental threat. But their perception of the landscape's sacredness or cultural significance also makes construction of an alliance between them more likely, as opposed to a merely economic view of natural resources. The sense of a common place also forms the basis of mutual cultural education, as both communities learn about their neighbors' land ethics.

Second, the alliances are founded out of a sense of common purpose in legal, political, or economic fields. A common political adversary, usually an outside corporation or government agency, provides an "enemy" to focus the anger or resentment of community members outward instead of only at each other. In some case studies the new tribal gaming economy or other local economic development also helps level the playing field between the communities.

Third, the alliances can also be built on a sense of common understanding—a more difficult concept to grasp or define. Some members of the Native and rural white communities in conflict over natural resources were forced to search for a way out of the conflict, and an alliance seemed like a convenient vehicle. In these cases conflict mediation or the goal of ethnic conflict resolution was a motivating factor to build an alliance. Conflict can lead to cooperation in this manner only if the players consciously seek common goals.

Even given these prior conditions, an alliance may be formed yet still fail to achieve its goals. It may also achieve its initial goals but then disband and leave no lasting impression. The case studies offer reasons why alliances may succeed or fail and by so doing offer insights into larger questions of why interethnic relations improve or worsen.

The Northwest case studies show that an alliance built solely on institutional cooperation at the governmental level may not be enough to affect relations between Native and non-Native communities, unless it also builds cooperation at the grassroots level. The Nevada/southern Wisconsin case studies show that mere interethnic unity around common issues may not be enough to overcome centuries of oppression of Native people, unless it also attempts to equalize the two communities by respecting Native political, cultural, and economic self-determination.

The Northern Plains case studies show that a common state citizenship is not an adequate basis for an alliance but that overlapping values that celebrate the land (even in different ways) can help build bridges between cultures. The northern Wisconsin case studies show that alliances cannot be built around places that are socially defined because they will reinforce geographies of exclusion. Alliances that are built around a territorial definition of place will reinforce geographies of inclusion and help to build a common place membership.

It is remarkable that widely disparate regions of North America experienced the development of Native/non-Native alliances over a rather short period of two decades. The development of the alliances reflected shifts taking place within Native societies, within the dominant white society, and within global politics and economics. As economic globalization makes peoples (and places) more and more similar, and ethnic nationalism seeks to emphasize the differences between peoples (and places), the interethnic alliances recognize difference and similarity as mutually reinforcing conditions.

The interethnic alliances offer important insights into the relationship between "particularism" and "universalism." In the contemporary US context particularism asserts the *differences* between ethnic/racial groups or other groups based on other social identities. (In the United States particularism is often termed "identity politics" or the "politics of recognition.")[77] Universalism asserts common ground or the *similarities* between distinct groups that claim inherent differences. For example, universalism can be based on common class consciousness, a common state citizenship, international human rights standards, or a human tie to the environment.

Most scholars and activists assume that particularist movements (such as assertions of racial, ethnic, or national difference) automatically contradict universalist movements emphasizing similarities in human experiences—such as environmental concerns. Particularist ethnic and localist movements around the world are usually depicted as barriers to greater interethnic understanding. Scholars and activists often ask so-called minority groups to subsume their identities within a universalist framework in the interest of interethnic unity or the greater good of the earth and humankind.

Yet particularity and universality are not necessarily always in contradiction. Many universalist movements—such as the global human rights and environmental movements—had their origins in particularist or localist settings.[78] Other present-day movements—such as the Zapatistas in Mexico or protesters against corporate globalization in Bolivia—successfully mix particularist appeals to end the oppression of indigenous peoples with universalist class-based appeals to members of the dominant population.[79] Particularist movements face the risk of local isolation and a failure to confront national or global systems that are the ultimate source of their problems. Universalist movements face the risk of abstracting or homogenizing local differences and locking in ethnic inequalities. Although the two concepts are linked in creative tension, they can be interwoven in order to emphasize the strengths and overcome the shortcomings of each.[80]

Real unity between minority and majority groups around larger causes necessitates a process of equalization between them. Ethnic/racial rights movements can help level the playing field between the communities, in effect using particularism as a prerequisite to successful universalism. These movements are not only fighting for their own rights but represent a commitment to wider social change.[81] To achieve unity, the majority needs to recognize and respect difference and understand how doing so can benefit universal values. Native/non-Native environmental alliances are examples of movement that (consciously or not) has creatively negotiated the tensions

between particularity and universality and has attempted to interweave them by backing tribal sovereign rights as a way to protect the land for everyone.

The alliances point not only toward reconciling particularity with universality but toward harnessing the power of past particularist divisions to drive new universalist projects. The alliances do not represent new models to improve interethnic relations temporarily within the constraints of state and global institutions. They represent new ways of framing histories and constructing places that have the potential to alter relationships. As national minorities around the world face the stark choices between globalization and local reaction, and between harsh conflict or unwanted assimilation, interethnic alliances provide a different direction. Defending the places that have been contested between ethnic groups can become a means to defuse interethnic conflict.

The state of Indian-white relations in the twentieth century was cogently summed up by Felix Cohen in his "miner's canary" analogy, in which the limitation of Indian rights "marks the shift from fresh air to poison gas in our political atmosphere."[82] Yet in the twenty-first century tribes are in a position to serve as a different sort of precedent for the larger society. Using a greenhouse analogy, tribes can begin to "grow" their own forms of social organization and environmental sustainability, at least partially shielded by treaty rights, sovereignty, and their federal trust relationship. Some tribes are starting to use their traditional values to solve modern problems in ways that benefit Indians and non-Indians alike. Reservations can become testing grounds for new ways of relating to the land, through land purchases (as at the Crandon mine site), sustainable agriculture and energy projects, and tribal environmental laws that also protect non-Indian neighbors.

The greenhouse process can be aided by the new gaming-related development on some reservations. Economic growth encourages urban tribal members to return home and provides employment to local non-Indian communities, increasing cooperation with non-Indian local governments and businesses. Yet the changes in places such as Wisconsin, Montana, and South Dakota cannot be explained by tribal casinos alone but by the Native cultural renaissance brought about by a strong assertion of treaty rights and sovereignty.[83] In demonstrating self-determination and innovative development on their reservations, tribes can serve as models for their non-Indian neighbors and for the rest of North American society. The growth of Native/non-Native environmental alliances is only one early sign that can mark a "shift from poison gas to fresher air" in our political atmosphere.

NOTES

1. This article is excerpted from the introduction to my doctoral dissertation, under the same title, at the University of Wisconsin, Madison (2002), completed with the help of fellowships from the Udall Foundation and U. W. Foundation. Related links are at http://academic.evergreen.edu/g/grossmaz/diss.html.

2. From 1997 to 2002 I interviewed more than eighty members of these Native/ non-Native alliances. These individuals serve as living "primary documents," who

can speak in their own words about their personal and community transformations. Through the interviews I found common patterns of the development of Native–rural white alliances, as well as differences among the case studies. I asked interviewees a series of questions in three categories. First, how and why did Native and non-Native communities evolve from confrontation to cooperation? What motivated Native peoples and white fishermen, farmers, or ranchers to work together? How did the level of interethnic cooperation affect the success of the alliance? Did cooperation last beyond the environmental victory or defeat, and did it extend beyond environmental issues? Second, would the interethnic cooperation have been possible without the initial conflict? Did the assertion of Native sovereignty weaken or facilitate such alliances? Were attempts made to prevent or weaken interethnic cooperation or to mask Native participation? Did the alliances actually lessen racial divisions or merely gloss over cultural and socioeconomic differences? Third, how did cultural perceptions of the value of a place affect the outcome? Did a common veneration of a specific natural resource or place help ease the way for an alliance? Were members of the other community viewed as "outsiders" who violate social boundaries or as "insiders" in a common, territorially defined "home"?

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