The Competition to Shape America's Greenspaces

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by

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On my honor as a university student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment as defined by the Honor Guidelines for thesis-related assignments

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Even prior to the first Earth Day in 1970, greenspaces like municipal parks, greenways, preserves, and national parks were generally understood to have significant benefits beyond sightseeing and leisure. Ecological economists have found that greenspaces can improve surrounding air quality, protect drinking and irrigation water, promote tourism, and increase property values (Loomis et al., 2024; Mansor et al., 2017). Economically, American homes within 2km of a major open space—like a national park or state forest—have sold for 9.8% higher on average than those further away (Loomis, 2024). In communities containing or near greenspaces—particularly topographically and biologically diverse places—rates of diastolic blood pressure, salivary cortisol, diabetes, and other chronic ailments are lower (Wheeler, 2015; Twohig-Bennet, 2018). These health benefits likely stem from the environmental impact of greenspaces, which have been found to improve surrounding air and water quality primarily via carbon sequestration and pollution filtration, respectively (Mitsch, 2023; Xie, 2019). The benefits of greenspaces even extend to mental health and societal stability, as urban parks in Philadelphia, PA; Chicago, IL; and New Haven, CT reported lower levels of criminal activity in neighborhoods containing parks (Wo, 2024). Planned greenspaces are shaped by various and often competing human dynamics. Understanding how social groups influence the development and implementation of greenspaces is to know the means by which greenspaces are established, means that can be used for or against new greenspaces.

Influential participants include policymakers, corporations, and citizen advocates, all of whom are represented in the three case-scenarios explored in this work. Adirondack Park was shaped by different social groups in different eras. In the 19th century the New York State Legislature, the merchants of the Erie Canal, and the New York electorate were the most influential groups, while in the 1970s the influential forces were Governor Nelson Rockefeller's

administration, Adirondack developers, and groups that favored or opposed the Adirondack Park Agency. At the contested Bears Ears National Monument, the debate has included Utah and national wings of the Democratic and Republican parties, the Biden and Trump administrations, Energy Fuels Resources Incorporated, and cattle ranchers and the region's six Native American tribes. Lastly, the establishment of Green Springs National Historic Landmark District saw Virginia's Holton administration, members of the Byrd Machine, W&R Grace Co., and the Green Springs Association (later Historic Green Springs Inc.) all rise for or against the first rural historic district in the United States. Across these three instances, it was observed that—in relation to the establishment of greenspaces—policymakers, corporations, and citizen advocates act in the interest of economic or resource security, profits, in accordance with personal values or interests, respectively.

Review of Research

The contents of this report are a natural progression of the existing academic research concerning the socio-economic dynamics that influence the formation of greenspaces. Existing works, such as Brian Balough's *Not in my backyard: How citizen activists nationalized local politics in the fight to save green springs* or Brad Edmondson's *A Wild Idea: How the Environmental Movement Tamed the Adirondacks*, explore the roles that policy makers, corporations, and citizen advocate had in their respective individual cases. Additionally, there exists extensive academic research into how greenspaces affect the aforementioned social groups once they have been established, such as J. C. Wo's look into how greenspaces reduce crime, Q. Xie's research on the improvement of air quality that comes with major urban greenspaces, or Harold Perkins findings on the increase in corporate profits that comes with employee access to green amenities (Wo, 2024; Xie, 2019: Perkins, 2010). The most similar query to the one in this

report is Chris Boulton's *Factors shaping urban greenspace provision: A systematic review of the literature*, which explores the various means through which governments provide greenspaces to the public and how policy changes could enable governments to better match actual park provision with planned park provision (Boulton, 2018). What these works have in common is that they all focus on either single social group, like Wo, Xie, Perkins, or Boulton, or focus on multiple social groups in a single case-scenario, like Balough and Edmondson.

However, what separates this publication from those that preceded it is the attention it gives to multiple social groups across multiple case-scenarios. An additional degree of differentiation comes from this work's endeavor to identify patterns and trends in how and why various social groups influence the establishment of greenspaces, rather than focusing on individual motives within individual groups within individual scenarios. The breadth of this paper, however, does not divorce it entirely from the previously mentioned writings. Indeed, the arguments presented in this work use the narrative tools and structure employed by Balough and Edmondson, and do not deny or disagree with any of the points made in the other research papers. This paper does not resolve any points of scholarly disagreement, but rather, extends the findings of these and other works by comparing their selection of primary sources and identifying differences and commonalities between them.

Policymakers: In pursuit of economic security

When proposing, responding to, or opposing the formation of a greenspace, policymakers generally take positions based on a greenspace's effects on tax revenues or the preservation of resources. The establishment of the America's first state park, Adirondack Park, is no exception.

The loudest voices in favor of an Adirondack park were not the likes of New York Secretary of State, Joel Headley, who romanticized the region in *Adirondack; or, Life in the Woods*. Instead, it was the fiscally pragmatic likes of Superintendent of the Adirondack Survey, Verplanck Colvin. Colvin. A staunch advocate for the 1894 state constitutional amendment to establish Adirondack Park as "forever wild", he contended in an 1870 report that the Adirondack wilderness was the source of "our principal rivers, and the feeders of our canals", and that mass logging of the forests was drying out the region (Cox, 2024; Smith, 2000). Subsequently, he noted, "Each summer the water supply for these rivers and canals is lessened, and commerce has suffered" (Cox 2024). Colvin would conclude that state commercial interests "demand that these forests should be preserved" as "an Adirondack Park" (Cox, 2024). Colvin was not alone in this utilitarian assessment, as his 1894 "forever wild" amendment passed unanimously among his audience of delegates and approved by New York voters that same year. (Smith, 2000). It would take eighty years for the conversation around the Adirondacks to shift from resource conservation to environmental preservation, though more on this later.

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Of course, not every greenspace is perceived as economically sound in the eyes of policymakers, as is the fraught case of Bears Ears National Monument. Spanning 1,351,849 acres in San Juan County, Utah, Bears Ears was established by President Barack Obama via presidential proclamation 9958 on December 28, 2016 (Obama, 2016). The monument was established to stop the theft and destruction of Bears Ears' indigenous artifacts and burial grounds, most notably the attempted theft of a petroglyph with a stone saw (Issacson, 2016). Its establishment was celebrated by national Democrats and the local Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition, with the latter being invited by the President to develop a management plan for the site. In contrast, Utah Republicans lambasted the new monument. Utah Senator Mike Lee called

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it an “arrogant act by a lame-duck president” (Isaacson, 2016). Similarly, local Utah State Representative, Phil Lyman, equated the park to “grand theft” (Turkewitz, 2017). The Republican repudiation of Bears Ears stemmed from the uranium deposits that would become inaccessible with its creation. This backlash would—following lobbying by Colorado-based Energy Fuels Resources Incorporated (EFR)—materialize as an 85% reduction of the monument by the first Trump Administration (Eilperin, 2017). Amidst a review of Bears Ears’ status by the Department of the Interior (DOI), EFR—who operates a uranium mill near the monument’s initial boundary—sent a letter written by COO, Mark Chalmers, requesting the DOI to consider the importance of local “uranium and vanadium deposits” during its review of the monument’s boundaries (Eilperin, 2017). Republicans would temporarily have their way, until the subsequent Biden Administration would restore Bears Ears to “the boundaries and protections provided by Proclamation 9558” on October 8, 2021 (Biden, 2021). In this case, both supporting and opposing policymakers viewed the park as a means to protect the resources they valued the most. Political proponents of Bears Ears favored the protection of cultural resources, while political opponents favored the protection of mineral resources.

Sometimes, the economic potential of a greenspace comes not from what can be extracted, but rather, what can be added. Such was the conversation surrounding Green Springs National Historic Landmark District leading up to its designation in 1974. Situated in Louisa County, Virginia across 14,000 acres, Green Springs was the nation’s first rural historic district, a distinction achieved despite the wishes of then Governor and Louisa County native, Linwood Holton. A reformist toward crime, Holton believed that Virginia should “restore the criminally convicted to society” rather than demanding criminals “behave or be confined”, opining that incarceration neglected the root of crime: poverty. (Balough, 2024). Holton proposed building a

state-of-the-art “reception and diagnostic center” that could both initiate a reform of Virginia’s penal system and bring jobs to his impoverished Louisa (Balough, 2024). Local leaders, like county administrator Dean Agee, felt that this diagnostic center and its 200 jobs could “solve a lot of ills” (Balough, 2024). However, the center ever materialized, as the Green Springs Association, led by local Rae Ely, would mire it in lawsuits that halted its construction. The courts ruled that the Holton Administration had neglected environmental and historical reviews required by the Environmental Protection Act and the National Historic Preservation Act, reviews that would balloon the project’s budget. The additional loss of federal funding in 1971 made the diagnostic center financially infeasible, leading to its cancellation in 1973. Holton’s attempt to generate economic output from the now preserved Green Springs would not be the last, however.

Corporations: in the pursuit of profits

As far as greenspaces are concerned, corporations will act in whatever capacity is most beneficial to their bottom line be it short or long term.

Returning to Adirondack Park, among the park’s earliest proponents were business interests on each end of the Erie Canal, who feared that the excessive logging of the North Country’s woodlands would spell doom for the waterways that fed the canal. Most notable among these voices was that of businessman, statesman, and—in the eyes of some—America’s first environmentalist, George Perkins Marsh. Marsh. Remembering the effects of deforestation he once observed in the French Alps, Marsh predicted that the loss of the Adirondack’s trees would reduce its mountains to “loose and friable soils” that during rainstorms would result in “increasing obstructions to the navigation of the Hudson” (Marsh, p. 203-205, 1864). For Marsh, this all but guaranteed “serious injury to the commerce… of that river” (Marsh, p. 205, 1864).

Breaking with the cutthroat, extractionary nature of business during the First Gilded Age, the merchantmen of New York realized that they could only take so much from the Adirondacks before the Adirondacks would seize their commerce altogether, hence their broad willingness to support Adirondack Park.

In a contrary case, EFR—as most corporations tend to do so—saw its commercial interests threatened, not protected, by the establishment of Bears Ears National Monument. In addition to their aforementioned requests to the DOI, their opposition to Bears Ears was conveyed in their actions following President Trump's reduction of the monument. From the reduction in December 2017, to its restoration in October 2021, EFT staked 14 uranium claims in Bears Ears and even reactivated the previously decommissioned Easy Peasy Mine in 2018 (Peterson, 2021). One miner at Easy Peasy expressed in a 2021 interview with the Washington Post that the restoration of Bears Ears would create a "blanket of red tape" that would "make Easy Peasy hard — if not impossible" (Peterson, 2021).

Similarly, the second threat to Green Springs would come in the form of a mining company, W&R Grace & Co., seeking to exploit the area's vermiculite deposits. Used for insulation and cat litter, the discovery of vermiculite in Louisa drew the interest of Grace whose primary vermiculite mine in Libby, MT, was already devolving into the most notorious case of mass asbestosis. Grace's hope was that the Louisan vermiculite in the 200 acres it bought would lack the deadly asbestos fibers that poisoned dozens of miners and processors at Libby (Balough, 2024). Upon hearing the news of Grace's intent, the members of Historic Green Springs Inc. (formerly Green Springs Assoc.), lobbied the National Park Service to admit Green Springs into the National Register of Historic Places and protect from both this new mine and the embattled diagnostic center. Similarly, Grace directly pressured then Secretary of the Interior, Rogers

Morton, to reject the historic designation of Green Springs on the basis that it ""would have an immediate adverse effect on the value of Grace lands" and that Federal government had no standing in a "purely local affair" (Balough, 2024). In spite of Grace's petitions, Green Springs would be granted national historic landmark status in 1973, dashing Grace's vermiculite hopes in Louisa County.

Citizen Advocates: In support of their values

Citizen advocates, whether they are activist groups or outspoken individuals, vary the most widely in how they respond to greenspaces; however, their actions are guided by their personal values and what value a particular greenspace has to them.

As was alluded to in the first paragraph concerning Adirondack Park, the initial conversations around the park—centered on commerce and held by merchantmen—would reorient themselves toward the growing environmental movement of the 1960s. The debate, now between residents of Adirondack Park and visitors from outside the "Blue Line", concerned the proposal of then Governor Nelson Rockefeller to establish an Adirondack Park Agency (APA) that could enforce environmental protections and regulations on both public and private Adirondack land (Edmondson, 2021). The sentiments of those in support and opposition to the APA were embodied by native sons Peter Paine Jr and Frank Casier, respectively. Paine, born to a wealthy family with deep local ties, was appalled by what he called the "smash-and-grab" development game in neighboring Vermont and nearby Maine that was then a "looming catastrophe" over the Adirondacks (Mann, 2017). His familial wealth put him in the close orbit of Rockefeller, close enough to be placed on the Temporary Study Committee that in 1968 would decide the future of Adirondack Park. In this capacity, Paine would not only convince the governor to pass the Adirondack Park Agency Act of 1973 but also be "the last word" on the

State Land Master Plan that largely governs the park to the present-day (Mann, 2017). Both the APA and its Master Plan were met with outrage from individual landowners, who went as far as to threaten burning down Paine's home (Mann, 2017). Rallying the opposition was Casier, a local developer and furniture store owner, who referred to Rockefeller his environmentalist supporters as "new brand of robber barons" going after the rights of "the average citizen" (Edmondson, 2003). While Casier was not against the regulation of public lands, the notion that the state could also regulate the private lands that constituted 60% of the park made him literally shake with anger, often remarking: "private property is private" (Edmondson, 2021). Casier and other like-minded residents banded together to establish the "Abolish the APA Movement", featuring custom hats, shirts, a song, and a newspaper that were all funded by Casier and other affluent members (Edmondson, 2021). The abolishment movement would fizzle out after 1975 when attempted arson on an APA barn by two abolishment supporters would irreparably tarnish the movement's reputation with locals (Edmondson, 2021). Both men of means and connections, Paine and Casier's thoughts on how Adirondack Park should have been managed were determined by what they valued. Paine valued the preservation of the landscape that defined the Adirondacks while Casier valued property rights of residents.

In the case of Bears Ears National Monument, citizens' reactions and responses to its establishment were shaped by what the monument would entail for them. For Native Americans in San Juan County like Navajo member James Akdai, the establishment of Bears Ears meant his people had "Won the century-old fight" (Turkewitz, 2017). This victorious sentiment was especially strong considering that it was alliance of the local Hopi Tribe, Navajo Nation, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Zuni Tribe, and Ute Indian Tribe who had convinced President Obama to establish the monument (Turkewitz). Meanwhile, non-native locals such as fifth-generation cattle

rancher Lacey Ivins argued that the establishment of Bears Ears may as well have been a letter saying, “your way of life is done”, despite its associated proclamation making no ban on grazing (Piper, 2016). Henceforth, the participation of each Utahn in the years’ long controversy of Bears Ears was determined by what the monument meant to them. For the Native Americans, it was the long-awaited protection of their cultures’ patrimonial lands and sites. For the non-natives, it was federal overreach that threatened the ease of which they could make a living.

More so than the previous cases, the effort to protect Green Springs was entirely led and sustained by individual citizens and their neighborhood groups. Leading the resistance to both Holton’s diagnostic center and Grace’s mine was Rae Ely. Having moved to Green Springs from the sprawling, car-choked exurbs of New Jersey, Ely was determined to save her newfound paradise and property value after learning of plans to place a prison on her literal doorstep (Balough, 2024). Initially laughed at by lawyers for her attempt to litigate its construction, Ely—realizing that the Green Springs Association stood in the face of “a real problem” and they perhaps “wouldn’t just get a lawyer and stop it”—drove down to Richmond and convinced its most renown lawyer, Emmanuel Emroch, to take up Green Springs’ case at a discount (Balough, 2024). Gleaning from Emroch’s legal expertise to add to her ability to woo her neighbors and the press, Ely quickly rose to the presidency of the Association, putting its “lovely elderly ladies” to work in bake sales, meeting with politicians and corporate executives, historic house tours, and food drives that garnered Green Springs favor in eyes of the press, academics, and most importantly the US Federal Courts (Balough, 2024). Ultimately, the ladies of the Association would convince the courts of Green Springs’ historical significance, landing it the national historic district that protects its 14,000 acres to the present day.

Conclusion

While being a look back into multiple pasts, the above work presents great value to the present and the future. Humans are creatures of habit, and while history rarely repeats it most certainly rhymes with regularity. Taking note of the behavioral trends and common strategies utilized by each case-scenario's actors, those who have read this work in full are henceforth armed with the knowledge on how greenspaces on the federal, state, and local level are created even in the face of a multi-faceted resistance. Just as likely, this greenspace playbook may be used by those who oppose them and may do so by developing counters to the tactics of the past.

The true fruits of this report hang upon the long-stretching branches of the tree of time.

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