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The Last Eden: The Development of a Regional Culture of Eco Spirituality in the Pacific Northwest

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THE LAST EDEN: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A REGIONAL CULTURE OF ECO-SPIRITUALITY IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

By

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ABSTRACT

The culture of the Pacific Northwest is formed by and around its natural environment. Cultural descriptions of the region usually highlight its spectacular scenery, its rich natural resources, and the connection that many residents feel with the land. Often, this connection takes on a spiritual quality, prompting some to identify a culture of nature religion in the region: a culture in which participants consider the natural world sacred, ordering their lives around its protection and conceptualizing their own welfare as inextricably tied to that of the environment. This thesis attempts to chronicle the development of such a culture of eco-spirituality from European exploration to present, locating today’s reality firmly in a historical context. I argue that the region’s history as a last frontier, dependence on natural resource extraction, and relative lack of institutional religious presence paved the way for a fusion of environmentalist activism and New Age spirituality in the 1980s. As spiritual concern infused environmentalism with ideological power, political battles intensified, publicity increased, and a new culture of eco-spirituality emerged to stamp itself indelibly on the face of the Pacific Northwest.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Whether due to its beautiful landscapes, varied topography, productive ecology, or perhaps something more elusive imputed to them, nature often takes center stage in the way journalists, authors, scholars, and residents alike conceptualize and experience the Pacific Northwest as a region. For example, historian Carlos A. Schwantes stresses the “simple and obvious answer” of “the region’s spectacular natural setting” as essential to the region’s distinctiveness.¹ In the opening essay of the 1998 edition of Fodor’s Pacific Northwest, Daniel Mangin writes of his hike in the Oregon Cascades: “I had not just connected with nature in some fleeting superficial way; I had melded with it. . . The sensation of being alone with nature, of being in the very cup of her hands, is something that is familiar to those who live in the Pacific Northwest.”² Professor of Religion Patricia O’Connell Killen writes that “the region’s unsurpassed physical grandeur and topographic variety pervade people’s experience, overwhelming and awing them.”³ Geographer Eric C. Ewert asserts that “much of [Pacific Northwesterners’] lifestyle centers on direct and indirect linkages to the natural environment” and that

This regional environmental connection is less ubiquitously strong elsewhere in the nation. Residents of the Midwest don’t get as excited over the fate of their prairies, nor do South Atlantic Coast denizens over the condition of their Piedmont. Residents of other parts of the country do perceive the Northwest in these terms, however. The Northwest is less well known for memorable cities or

notable cultural contributions than for national parks, outdoor recreation, fish, tall trees, and volcanic peaks – and perhaps coffee.\textsuperscript{4} Writers representing the region highlight images of primordial forests shrouded in mist and lofty, snow-capped peaks, while minimizing or ignoring the bustling metropolises, sage-brushed deserts, and irrigated farmland that also make their mark on the region’s topography. Peoples’ perceptions of the region’s environment influences migration to the region as well. According to Ewert, “newcomers surveyed for the reasons they chose to move to the Northwest always rate the natural environment near the top; they even select this at the expense of a well-paying job.”\textsuperscript{5} He also asserts that “natural landscapes are often at the core of [Pacific Northwesterners’] political, economic, and social debates.”\textsuperscript{6}

For many, this appreciation of nature takes on a spiritual quality, either overtly or more subtlety. William Dietrich exemplifies the lyrical descriptions of the region’s environment as sacred that have become common in journalistic articles, not to mention literature and poetry:

There are churches in the Northwest that have no walls, no pulpit and no pew. They are older than Notre Dame, as lofty as St. Peter’s and as boundless as faith. Their choir is running water. Their candle a green, filtered sunlight. Their prayer the creak and sigh of branches rocking in rhythm to a winter wind.\textsuperscript{7}

One resident wrote of the characteristic importance of nature in the region: “We joined Grace Memorial Episcopal Church, but we’re your perfect Oregonians. If it’s nice out we . . . take a hike instead . . . of going to church.”\textsuperscript{8} Others emphasize “a weekly sabbath for rest” or “family strolls through local parks” and time with nature to “help remind people of their core values.”\textsuperscript{9} These quotes indicate that, for good Northwesterners, communion with nature should take precedence over any other kind of communion. As one sociologist calls them, these are “rituals

\textsuperscript{5} Ewert, 8.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 7.
of leisure” that indicate a sense of the sacred for practitioners. Many writers and residents appropriate such religious language to talk about nature in the Northwest. From local reporters and activists to extra-regional observers, the environment of the Pacific Northwest is referred to as sacred, holy, spiritual, and divine. Environmentalists are “missionaries” and their campaigns are “crusades.” Recycling, buying locally, living sustainably, and thinking globally are moral imperatives. Whether always a conscious choice or not, Northwesterners portray their relationship to the land as personally and communally spiritual.

Sociologist Mark A. Shibley defines this power of the environment in the Pacific Northwest as a regional culture of nature religion in his chapter “Secular but Spiritual in the Pacific Northwest” published in Religion & Public Life in the Pacific Northwest: The None Zone in 2004, providing the only cohesive analysis of this cultural phenomenon to date. The volume is part of a series called Religion by Region, which focuses on the relationship between religion and region in America. The None Zone is the title of the volume on the Pacific Northwest, which references the region’s reputation as the least traditionally religious in the nation. However, the authors assert that there is a strong presence of non-traditional religion in the region. Shibley identifies three distinct “clusters” of alternative spirituality—New Age spiritualities, apocalyptic millennialism, and earth-centered spirituality—arguing that despite the lack of institutional religion, the region in fact is home to a vibrant culture of alternative spiritualities. His section on Northwest nature religion served as the impetus for this essay, providing a glimpse into the present-day culture of reverence for the earth, which he emphasizes at the end of the chapter as the most dominant “cluster” in the region and one that involves aspects of the other two. Shibley argues that “belief that nature is sacred, rituals that connect people to place, and movements seeking to protect the environment together constitute a widely held and vibrant civil religion in the Pacific Northwest.” While his use of the term “civil religion” goes largely unexplained and unsupported, Shibley successfully identifies a widespread culture of environmental concern that operates, at least in part, on a spiritual level. He also asserts that “nature religion” in the Pacific Northwest “is ubiquitous,” a statement that oversimplifies the reality but does indicate that for

10 Shibley, 156.
11 Ibid., 157, 142.
scholars and many residents of the region, nature religion dominates their perceptions of Northwest culture.\footnote{Ibid., 156.}

Shibley largely ignores questions of causality and instead provides an at times anachronistic snapshot of the region’s culture. Shibley does identify the 1980s as the time at which “the tone of environmentalism in the Northwest became more strident and invoked religious metaphors,” yet he does not explore the possible causes for this shift. Instead, as an explanation, he offers a two-paragraph summary of the counter-cultural revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, citing this disillusionment as the source of spiritual revolution in the 1980s. While Shibley is correct in identifying the 1980s as a pivotal time in the development of this distinctive nature-spirituality culture, the story of its development is a bit more complex. Furthermore, it is my belief that a look deeper into the region’s past provides valuable clues to its present reality. It is to fill this void—the question of how and why this culture developed—that this essay was imagined.

Shibley and the other authors of The None Zone do attempt to examine the region’s past prior to the 1960s, but their work is not primarily historical, and they identify only one contributing factor to the present proliferation of nature spirituality in the region. They argue that the historical absence of a dominant institutional religious presence in the region served to create ideological and social space for this present-day culture of alternative spirituality.\footnote{Ibid., 139.} Killen elaborates on this point: “No single denomination or religious community has been present for any period in numbers sufficient to constitute a dominant public force. . . This absence of a single, persistently dominant, strongly institutionalized religious reference group colors all individual and institutional religiousness in the region.”\footnote{Killen, 10.} Indeed, according to the study conducted by the North American Religion Atlas in 2000, 62.8% of Pacific Northwesterners do not affiliate with any institutional religion.\footnote{Shibley, 141.} However, the contributors to The None Zone are adamant, this does not indicate a lesser degree of spiritual involvement. Rather, Pacific Northwesterners express and define their spirituality in different terms. This group of “secular but spiritual” Northwesterners, Killen asserts, “grapples with what it means to be fully human and part of the region’s ecosystem,” defining the place in which they live and its implications for

\footnote{Ibid., 10.}
moral human behavior.\textsuperscript{16} Unhindered by pressure from any serious denominational presence, individuals “are freer to explore alternative spirituality.”\textsuperscript{17} Shibley argues that this ideological freedom has enabled the population to develop what he calls a “vibrant civil religion” based on the shared “belief that nature is sacred.”\textsuperscript{18} Shibley and Killen are certainly correct in their identification of the historical lack of institutional religion as a major factor that contributed to the development of today’s culture of nature religion. However, it is not the only factor. Today’s Pacific Northwest was formed by an intricate web of events, both local and national, that laid the groundwork for the eco-spirituality revolution of the 1980s and 1990s. It is the goal of this essay to make sense of the historical development of the region’s identity and complex relationship with nature leading up to the current culture of nature spirituality.

General histories of the Pacific Northwest abound, and they shed some light on the rich history of this region that \textit{The None Zone}, with its more sociological approach, leaves for the most part opaque. I relied most heavily on \textit{The Pacific Northwest: an Interpretive History} by Carlos A. Schwantes. The volume opens with a chapter that positions the region as “an American Hinterland,” built around the task of supplying the world with raw materials” yet always remaining “geographically remote” from the economic, social, and political centers of the nation and “chronologically distant” from national historical advancement.\textsuperscript{19} He then emphasizes the region’s “stunning” natural setting as primary for regional distinctiveness, noting that residents often refer to their home as “God’s Country” and making clear his perception of the importance of landscape to his telling of its history. In chronicling the discovery, exploration, settlement, development, and eventual industrialization of the region from the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century through the late 20\textsuperscript{th} century, Schwantes proved quite useful. However, published in 1989, his story stops just short of the major focus of my project. In his final chapter, “An Environment at Risk,” Schwantes establishes the dangers that faced the region in the late 20\textsuperscript{th} century, mentioning a few eco-political battles such as that over the Columbia River gorge in the early 1980s and Tom McCall’s efforts in the 1960s, but the explosion of environmental concern and conflict of the late 1980s remains unexplored in this volume, as does any sense of a spiritual history of the region.

\textsuperscript{16} Killen, 18.
\textsuperscript{17} Shibley, 140.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 141-142.
\textsuperscript{19} Schwantes, 2, 15.
What he does establish is that, because of the way the continent was explored and settled, the Northwest was part of the “last frontier”—the last portion of the nation to be penetrated and dominated by European civilization. As Schwantes writes, the Pacific Northwest was not significantly settled, apart from a few coastal towns, until the opening in the 1840s of the 2,000-mile Oregon Trail to the Willamette Valley. When the Golden Spike completed the transcontinental railroad in 1869, settlers, fur-trappers, and loggers finally flooded the region. The vast forests and plentiful rivers of the Northwest were viewed as rich, untapped material resources that would fuel the nation’s rapid industrialization, and exploitative extraction processes were commonplace.\(^\text{20}\) By the beginning of the 20\(^{\text{th}}\) century, when pollution, deforestation, and urbanization seemed to have consumed most of the “virgin” land in the continental U.S., many Americans looked to the West for remnants of that Edenic wilderness that once characterized the entire continent, and the Pacific Northwest became the last frontier once again, this time as a poster child for the budding wilderness and environmental movements. When they found this western Eden to be less wild than they had hoped, conservationists began to campaign for its protection. The destruction of the region’s “natural beauty” was the first sign of misplaced values for these early environmentalists, but decreased productivity, particularly with the region’s salmon industry, was the next indicator that something was amiss with the region’s “cut-and-run” policy of natural resource management. Eco-political battles continued for the next half-century, fought primarily by industry heads, politicians, and extra-regional environmentalists. The region’s economy struggled, and only minor changes were made in resource extraction methods. Because the region was so defined by its natural resources economically and culturally, and because those resources were being pursued so intensely at this time, Eastern environmental instincts found their greatest challenge in the Pacific Northwest, rather than in other relatively undeveloped regions, such as the Southwest. From Schwantes’ perspective, it is clear that the eco-political events of the 1980s—those he included in the volume and likely those he had not yet witnessed—had deep roots in the region’s history as an extraordinary producer of nature resources and a last frontier.

Also laying out this shift in the conception of nature in the Pacific Northwesterner from a wild resource to be conquered to a natural playground to be enjoyed, Eric C. Ewert’s “Setting the Pacific Northwest Stage: The Influence of the Natural Environment” published in Northwest

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 162.
Lands, Northwest Peoples: Readings in Environmental History provided a useful perspective regional identity.\textsuperscript{21} The volume contains essays on various environmental issues from and scholars in many disciplines, but most maintain too narrow a focus on a particular event or struggle to be of much use to the present project. Ewert’s chapter comments on the present-day perception of environmental importance in the region, but a sense of that importance as spiritual remains absent.

Equally important to this thesis, but in contrast to sources focusing on region, Catherine Albanese’s seminal work, *Nature Religion in America*, tells the history of earth-based spirituality in the United States. Instead, she argues that, starting with the continent’s first human inhabitants and continuing to the present era, “nature has provided a compelling religious center for many Americans” and that nature spirituality “is a form of religion that slips between the cracks of the usual interpretive grids—or that, more slippery still, evades and circumvents even adventurous ways to name it.”\textsuperscript{22} Though she does assert a level of unity for adherents to this religion, she also acknowledges American “nature religions” that often come into conflict with one another. While an insightful and foundational study, *Nature Religion* was published in 1990 at a time when, in retrospect, the contemporary environmental movement was just reaching its stride in American culture. Consequently, her book does not comment on developments in the last fifteen years. Yet her ideas are important to the present study because she argues that the sacralization of nature is neither a new nor an isolated endeavor. Rather, it is a deeply American spiritual practice with historical roots. With those considerations in mind, this paper draws upon Albanese’s work to argue that, in the present context, American nature religion has found its spiritual home in the Pacific Northwest where the sacralization of nature is much more common and experienced more intensely than on average in the rest of the country.

For many in the Pacific Northwest, this sacralization of nature occurs in precisely the way Albanese emphasized: through an overt though often non-institutional spirituality, perhaps engaging somehow in the practices and beliefs of neo-paganism, deep ecology, or another aspect of New Age spirituality. These eco-spiritualists would generally identify themselves as such, recognizing themselves as involved in a spiritual belief system and set of practices. Yet other scholars of nature religion also include those who may not see themselves as part of any religious

\textsuperscript{21} Ewert, 6.
or spiritual tradition yet whose respect for nature takes on a spiritual quality as they locate their sense of the sacred in wilderness, attach strong moral consequences to its treatment, use religious language to describe their environmental concerns, and/or ritualize their experiences with nature. Shibley is one such scholar, asserting that “much contemporary environmentalism in the Northwest is a religious system, not simply because it is sometimes dogmatic and moralistic but rather because its rituals and core beliefs distinguish between things sacred (wilderness) and things profane (all else, often including people).” He argues that for many environmentalists in the region alternative systems of meaning (such as deep ecology), symbolic rituals (tree-sits or scheduled nature walks), a compelling purpose (protecting the earth), community (other environmentalists), and “a mindful awareness of and reverence for the beauty, power and fragility” of the natural world combine to create a “religious experience.”

Rebecca Kneale Gould presents a similar argument for less overtly spiritual environmental concern as religion in her work *At Home in Nature*. Gould studies “homesteaders” who withdraw from society in order to pursue “a spiritual life” by “recentering the self amid the wonders (and resources) of the natural world.” These homesteaders, she argues, fashion a sort of religion for themselves to give meaning and legitimacy to their way of life. Relying on transcendentalist and agrarian literature, the homesteaders conceive of nature “as the ‘ultimate reference point’ or ‘ultimate concern’ by which good and evil, right and wrong, sacred and profane [can] be discerned.” They also employ, she argues, religious language that mirrors the conventional relationship between humanity and God: “They may depict nature as all-powerful and all-knowing, nature as beneficent parent, nature as the source of the mysteries of life and death, or nature as the ideal model of harmony, balance, and goodness.” With references to Albanese and the theologian Paul Tillich who originated the definition of religion as “ultimate concern,” Gould presents her homesteaders as practicing “a particularly intense version” of nature religion in America and makes a clear argument for such non-institutional sacralization of nature as a spiritual pursuit. Building primarily on these scholars’ examples, the present study includes both the more overt forms of nature religion and their subtler and less intentional counterparts.

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23 Shibley, 157.
24 Ibid., 159.
26 Ibid., 31.
Gould’s work was also useful as a contrast to the culture of environmental spirituality in the Pacific Northwest. It may be due to simple convenience that all of the homesteaders Gould studies live in the Northeast, close to her own home and place of employment, yet it seems a shame that she pays little heed to geography or region apart from the obvious necessity for homesteaders to have access to large stretches of uninhabited land. I believe her analysis would be enriched by an exploration of homesteading in other parts of the country; nevertheless, the geographic specificity of her study provides an interesting contrast to the participants in “voluntary simplicity” in the Pacific Northwest (detailed in Chapter III). One significant difference is found in the degree of separation from society deemed necessary by the participants. In Gould’s work, most of the homesteaders left one of the East Coast’s urban centers for a “simplified” life closer to nature, speaking of the culture left behind as one of “consumerism, industrialism, rampant individualism, and, more recently, environmental degradation” in which they felt “lost” and overwhelmed.\footnote{Ibid., 28.} To escape, they felt it necessary to withdraw completely from mainstream society, often living miles from any other families and becoming almost entirely self-sufficient. Many Northwesterners share this desire for simplicity and “closeness with nature,” but in contrast to Gould’s homesteaders, Northwesterners generally seem to feel they can achieve their goals without retreating from society altogether. In my view, this may indicate that practitioners of voluntary simplicity in the Pacific Northwest perceive of their regional culture as less corrupt or already “closer” to nature than do those in the east, and they therefore feel less of a need to distance themselves from that culture. Indeed, for some, simply moving to the Pacific Northwest is a step toward this desired environmental closeness.\footnote{Two examples of people moving to Oregon to get closer to nature are Jan Mitchell, “Breaking the Chains,” The Oregonian, 22 October, 1997, B1. (Newsbank); and Bron Taylor, “Earth and Nature-Based Spirituality (Part II): From Earth First! and Bioregionalism to Scientific Paganism and the New Age,” Religion. 31 (2001), 227.} Thus, Gould functioned to start me thinking about everyday choices regarding nature as forming a tangible nature spirituality and to provide a geographical contrast to the nature religion of the Pacific Northwest.

Also leaving questions of region aside, Adrian J. Ivakhiv presents another isolated look at nature spirituality in his 2001 work, Claiming Sacred Ground. This book focuses on two locations—Glastonbury, England and Sedona, Arizona—as “meccas” of the New Age spirituality movement, concentrating, like Albanese, on more overt forms of nature spirituality.
Ivakhiv’s study shows another interesting contrast to the present one in that Sedona stands as a bizarre anomaly in the otherwise Catholic, Mormon, or a-spiritual Southwest. The Arizona town is an oasis of New Age spirituality in an otherwise unfriendly land, whereas in the Pacific Northwest eco-spirituality is much more widespread, though still not “ubiquitous.”29 Though an interesting geographical contrast, Ivakhiv’s work did not prove especially useful in terms of his study of environmental culture. Instead, I relied on his introductory chapters for help conceptualizing the more overt eco-spirituality of contemporary New Agers. Ivakhiv defines two primary “streams” of New Age spirituality, one being nature based and the other being “otherworldly” in focus.30 He introduces James Lovelock’s “Gaia hypothesis” of 1979 and several major New Age events of the 1980s, providing thoughtful analyses of eco-spiritual philosophies.31 Yet his study lacks a sense of chronology, offering only a snapshot of his particular locations, and he does not explore environmentalism as a form of this nature spirituality.

In contrast, Thomas R. Dunlap’s work *Faith in Nature: Environmentalism as Religious Quest* focuses entirely on environmentalism and its ideological development into a spiritual endeavor. Dunlap argues that environmentalism “does not make sense without the deeper current of concern about the way humans are related to the world” and that its core is a religious impulse that must be embraced in order for the movement to survive and to succeed.32 In his view, the movement’s initial lack of intentional spiritual concern was one of the major causes for its sporadic character and near-extinction at the end of the 1970s. Initially, he argues, environmentalism was little more than crisis-control and another expression of the era’s anti-establishment fervor; when activists realized the battle would not be won, or lost, within their lifetime or even those of their children, environmentalism’s ideology had to be radically reshaped. This was a “slow-motion disaster” that would have to be lived with even as it was changed, so “to face this environmentalists needed not just principles but ways of living them over a lifetime, ways that would help them form emotionally significant and satisfying

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30 Ibid., 8.
31 Ibid., 19.
connections to nature while living in a hostile or indifferent society.” He argues that a conscious inclusion of spiritual meaning, embodied in language of faith (despite failure), symbols, icons, and literature (mythology), was essential to the movement’s successful rebirth in the 1980s.

Dunlap argues that environmentalism has always been innately spiritual in that it asks questions of “ultimate concern” and has always said something morally charged about the human race’s place in the world. Yet, Dunlap asserts, environmentalism did not fully embrace its spiritual foundation until the 1980s. Before that time, he writes, environmentalism “addressed ultimate, religious questions without the language or concepts of religion . . . relying on science to describe nature but seeking spiritual experience and emotional connections to the world.” Environmentalism without a clear spiritual orientation existed in a blurred space between secular and spiritual movements, replete with contradictions:

[Secular] environmentalists could not, as believers in supernatural faiths could, appeal to certainties beyond our understanding and a place beyond this world where all tears would be wiped away and all injustices righted, and they could not offer material blessings comparable to consumer society’s goods and gadgets. Despite searching beyond knowledge and reason for meaning, they could not rest their case on explicitly mystical or even spiritual ideas. Worse, their case required them to hold in tension the apparently incompatible perspectives of reason and emotion.

As it matured, according to Dunlap, the environmental movement had to discover more “solid” ideological ground to support its continued struggle in the face of limited success, strident opposition, and internal paradox. Dunlap calls this ideological structure “myth” and writes that it helped to bridge the gap “between faith and knowledge, mystery and understanding, the sacred and the profane” with which the movement had previously contended.

Dunlap’s argument that environmentalism is inherently religious and had only to embrace this spirituality to reach its potential is fascinating, but it is ultimately not quite right. While he is correct in identifying the moral consequences that environmentalist beliefs can attach to nearly

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33 Ibid., 125.
34 Ibid., xii.
35 Ibid., 46.
36 Ibid., 59.
37 Ibid., 59.
every action of daily life, often creating a “meditative attentiveness” to the state of the earth, this is not always the case, nor does this attentiveness necessarily indicate an ultimate concern.\textsuperscript{38} Both early environmentalism and the “green” fever that has swept the nation in the last few years exemplify the exception to this rule: in both cases, the “attentiveness” is actually to the well-being of the individual and of human life on earth, rather than to the well-being of the earth itself. The destruction of the earth is construed as important only because of its impact on human flourishing. For example, in the early movement, Rachel Carson’s \textit{Silent Spring} caused widespread environmental panic largely because she reported that toxic chemicals were entering \textit{human} bodies and threatening \textit{human} health. Today, the concern is primarily economic; with soaring gas prices and looming energy shortages, it has become economically smart to “go green,” buying hybrid and electric cars once considered cost-prohibitive by most, for example.

While this is not my project for this essay, I believe it is likely that the recent surge in demand for “green” technology and increase in conservationist consumer behaviors will prove to be short-lived if and when such environmentalism ceases to be economically advantageous. In these examples, environmental concern does not indicate a spiritual belief, because the environment is not held to be sacred; instead human life is sacred, and the earth should be protected only as a necessary provision for human flourishing.

In contrast, the environmentalists in the Pacific Northwest discussed in this essay sacralize nature by assigning it utmost importance, placing it over economics and even, in extreme examples, valuing it above their own lives. While also sometimes endangering others, the radical environmentalists of Earth First! who put their lives at great risk to sit in trees about to be felled or lie down in front of bulldozers are making the clear statement that the well-being of the earth takes priority over the well-being of humans and even their very lives. In a more subtle way, practitioners of voluntary simplicity, who may not be risking death, also believe they are making difficult choices that put the welfare of the earth before their own desires for comfort and convenience, whether or not it may be economically advantageous. Through their actions and through their explanations for their choices, both groups set the environment apart as ultimately important.

Thus, Dunlap’s work was instrumental to the framing of the present one, but I wish to offer a revision to his argument. Yes, environmentalism lends itself to a spiritualization of its

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., xii.
principles, but this does not mean it is innately and necessarily religious. Rather, I see, through my examination of the historical concurrence of the New Age spirituality movement with the environmental movement, a fusion of the two movements in the 1980s, in which New Age provided the struggling environmentalist movement with the staying power of religious faith and the means and language to sacralize that which they already desired to protect. Dunlap correctly identifies a spiritualization of the environmental movement, but he fails to recognize its source as external rather than as an intrinsic part of all environmental concern.

This paper argues that fusion of New Age spirituality and environmentalism occurred particularly intensely in the Pacific Northwest, creating a powerful cultural force that cemented itself onto regional identity. This spiritual element provided by the New Age movement infused the pre-existent environmental concerns of the Pacific Northwest with a new level of intensity that enabled them to coalesce into a dominant and cohesive regional culture. Through an exploration of the history of environmentalism and nature-spirituality in the Pacific Northwest, I attempt to discover how this perception of a “ubiquitous” nature-spirituality emerged historically. I am concerned not only with the real presence of a particularly intense, widespread, spiritually-tinged environmentalism, but also, and perhaps more so, with how that reality has acquired mythological significance in regional self-definition and national perspective, for it is this perception of significance that indicates a culture of nature spirituality.

Taking into account both region and history in a way unlike previous studies on this topic, this thesis argues that the region’s history as a last frontier, an extraordinarily productive source of natural resources, and a place without a dominant institutional religious presence prepared the way for the explosion of environmental and New Age activity in the 1980s. At first, environmental efforts and alternative spirituality practices in the region were largely unrelated, but as the 20th century drew to a close, the movements fused into something entirely new and much more significant than any of the individual efforts. They coalesced into a powerful culture of spiritual environmentalism that is tied specifically to the Pacific Northwest as a region. Prior to this time, the Northwest had been significant for its natural environment—first for its resources and then increasingly for its scenery—but this did not represent a cohesive culture of environmentalism. It was only with the addition of the spiritual aspect in the 1980s that this intermittent environmental concern developed into the dominant nature spirituality culture that characterizes the region today. As spiritual consequence permeated shared environmental
concerns in the 1980s, it provided a new level of ideological power that transformed nature-appreciation and protection in the Pacific Northwest into a regionally specific and regionally dominant culture of eco-spirituality.
CHAPTER II

THE LAST AMERICAN FRONTIER

In 1919, two outsiders—Madison Grant from New York City and Stephen T. Mather from California and later Washington, DC—began what might be considered the Pacific Northwest’s first environmentalist campaign. In a region where the doctrine of the day taught that both economics and identity depended upon the unfettered extraction of their “limitlessness” natural resources, Mather and Grant preached a different gospel—one of environmental appreciation and protection. They arrived together in Oregon ostensibly to improve and expand national parks, but they were deeply “disturbed by the rapid disappearance of the country’s scenery” and ultimately directed most of their efforts to scenic preservation. Unlike the vast majority of conservationists of their era who were “primarily interested in the efficient use of resources in order that the economy might be developed to its full potential,” Mather and Grant saw nature as inherently valuable, as an intrinsic and “priceless” part of America’s heritage, a “scenic asset of almost incalculable value.”

Grant and Mather were avid readers of transcendentalist nature writers such as Emerson and Thoreau who believed in nature as a seat of the sublime and had spent most of their lives working with various conservation efforts. Mather had worked with John Muir in the Sierra Club in the first decade of the century before heading to Washington, D.C. to found and direct the National Park Service. Grant, a prominent lawyer and anti-immigrationist, was also an active preservationist: co-founder of the New York Zoological in 1895 and its president from 1925-1937; co-founder of the American Bison Society in 1905; president of the Bronx Zoo for several years; co-founder and president of the Bronx Parkway Commission. Ostensibly, their goal in the Pacific Northwest was to garner support for Mather’s vision of a scenic highway that would link the West’s national parks in an accessible and attractive loop. However, the stump-covered hillsides of the intensely-logged Northwest did not offer quite the roadside view they had

40 Ibid., 179, 180, 182.
anticipated. Both men had seen first-hand the result of unchecked development in the urbanized East, so when they traveled to the Pacific Northwest, supposedly home to the last of the country’s unspoiled forests, they saw the land with, what was for that region, a futuristic eye. From their perspective, the stumps and bald mountainsides Northwesterners applauded as signs of progress were actually harbingers of the all but irrevocable destruction of natural scenery Grant and Mather knew only too well in the East. Speaking with his outsider’s perspective, Mather chastised: “You Oregonians are so accustomed to it that you do not realize the charm of your beautiful trees to visitors from less-favored regions.” Grant was “shocked” that Oregonians would leave “nothing but barren, unattractive slashings” where scenic forests so recently stood. These outsiders recognized what it would take Pacific Northwesterners several decades to realize: that this type of logging and the revenue it generated had a finite lifespan and that the region would have to eventually find another, less exploitive way to generate national interest and local income.41

Grant and Mather presented the forests of the Pacific Northwest as part of “America’s scenic heritage” for the first time, valuable for their aesthetics in addition to their timber. They founded the Save-the-Redwoods League in northern California and worked to form equivalents in Oregon’s Columbia Gorge and the National Parks Association of Washington. Shortly thereafter the governor of Oregon, quoted in Thomas R. Cox’s article, proclaimed it “the patriotic and civic duty of each Oregon resident to endeavor ‘to preserve our wonderful natural surroundings.’”42 Though they would take decades to bear fruit, the seeds of today’s environmentalism had been planted.

This early instance of the now commonplace, though not ubiquitous, preservationism of the Pacific Northwest stands as a lonely occurrence in the region’s history pre-1980. Not only was this the first time Northwestern scenery had been publically championed apart from its potential extraction, it would take another 40 years before anyone would receive recognition for doing it again. Furthermore, though their fervor took on a so-called religious intensity—Thomas R. Cox writing in 1968 called them “missionaries for the preservationist cause” on a “crusade to save Oregon’s scenery”—Grant and Mather did not cite spiritual significance among their reasons for preservation; rather, their approach remained every bit as utilitarian as that of the

41 Ibid., 180-181.
42 Ibid., 179, 180, 181, 186.
region’s loggers and miners, only this time concluding that standing trees could generate revenue in addition to felled ones. Thus, prior to the 1980s, the culture of nature spirituality that has come to define the Pacific Northwest for so many today did not exist in any kind of cohesive manner.

As was true in Mather and Grant’s case, the preservationist ethos now so characteristic of the Pacific Northwest was largely imported from the East. The old-growth forests of the Pacific Northwest were constructed as important to the nation in relation to the destruction in the East, and it was often Easterners, who had witnessed first-hand the depletion of scenery and wilderness, who initiated many of the environmental movements in the Pacific Northwest. Today’s environmentalism in the region is not some spontaneous, natural expression of the spirit of the land; rather it is the product of the complex history of human interactions with and constructions of the landscape and resources of the Pacific Northwest, on both a local and a national scale.

Indeed, though nature was not deemed worthy of protection in the region until relatively recently, the land has always been central to Pacific Northwesterners’ understanding of their region and to Americans’ understanding of the region’s role in the national narrative. For the first 200 years of Anglo-European presence in the region, the environment of the Pacific Northwest was considered vitally important variably for its status as a mysterious and promising last frontier, its abundant natural resources, its fertile soil for farming, and its ability to serve as an economic and social outlet for the over-crowded and over-developed East. All of these purposes helped to fix the Pacific Northwest’s environment in the national psyche as vitally important to the region and to the nation as a whole, perhaps even as the most important body of land in the country. Yet rarely was the natural landscape valued simply for its presence—as more than a resource to be harnessed. Because nature had always been at the fore of both activity and thought in the region, when preservationism did surface, it encountered intense opposition from many groups in the Northwest, which in turn provided an opportunity for sensationalism and publicity. Consequently, the Northwest became a symbolic site for the national preservationist hope to protect whatever portions remained of the American Eden.

Though the Romantic era and its 19th century descendent Transcendentalism helped define the region as an earthly Eden and assign spiritual connotation to its topography, the Pacific Northwest stands alone in American history as the only region without a significant religious infrastructure. Whereas the settlement of the rest of the nation could be charted
according to religion—the Atlantic coast characterized by various religious groups including Puritans, Quakers, and other Protestants groups escaping European intolerance; the Midwest by Lutheran and Methodist European agriculturists; and the Southwest by Mormons and Spanish missions—the Pacific Northwest made its place in American culture first and foremost through its reputation for wild mountains full of material riches available to any man brave enough and rugged enough to claim them. Starting with Cook’s inaugural landing in the Puget Sound, the Pacific Northwest has always been distinguishable from the rest of the country in part by the significant absence in its history of a dominant religious tradition. In place of a religious-based identity, individualism, commerce, and natural resources classified the region at its foundation, and those would continue to be its defining characteristics until the last decades of the 20th century. This lack of institutional religion in the region, some scholars argue, left ideological and moral room for other convictions of a spiritual, and in this case, environmental sort.

The example of Mather and Grant’s preservationist crusade stands as an isolated precursor to the fervor that swept the region 60 years later. Though cultural and scientific changes altered some aspects of the ideology behind the activism by the 1980s, Mather and Grant’s example introduced some of the defining characteristics of the Pacific Northwest’s environmentalist history, namely the valuation of the region’s land through comparison to the East’s, the importation of preservationist concerns, the intensity of their expression, and the intensity of their opposition. The changeable, contestable, yet ultimately fundamental role of the environment in the Pacific Northwest’s history, along with the region’s construction as a last frontier and its relative lack of religious infrastructure, paved the way for the spiritual renovation in the 1980s of the region’s environment into something fundamentally and intrinsically valuable.

**Discovery: The Last of the New World**

Credited as the first European to methodically explore the region, James Cook reached the Pacific Northwest coast in March of 1778. An impossibly mountainous and mysterious coastline greeted him, shrouded in mist and the promise of the unknown. The date of this

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43 Shibley, 139.
encounter illustrates the region’s “geographical and historical remoteness” for European settlers in comparison to the rest of the continent; while colonists fought for independence on the East Coast and the Spanish finished their third century of missionary presence in the Southwest, the Pacific Northwest remained an enigmatic blur on European maps. The aura of promise and adventure associated with the thrill of “discovery” still pervaded European and even North American preconceptions of the region at a time when three centuries of exploration had rendered most of the New World familiar. As Carlos Schwantes writes, “geographical isolation fundamentally shaped the course of Pacific Northwest history” because it allowed the region to absorb outsiders’ desire for a mysterious New Land, the idea of which had been driving exploration and fueling hope of a “new life” for centuries. Indeed, “the interior of the Olympic Peninsula was first entered by white explorers only in 1890, well after their counterparts had penetrated into the heart of Africa.” Even the deserts of the Southwest had been conquered by railroads and irrigation by this time; the interior forests of the Pacific Northwest would truly become America’s last frontier.44

Though Cook failed to find the Northwest Passage the British commissioned him to seek, he did find a land of thick forests overflowing with animals whose fur was “softer and finer than that of any others we know.” After hearing Cook’s reports, explorers and traders from Russia, Spain, France, the United States, and Great Britain penetrated the coast, motivated by curiosity, conquest, and commerce. As Cook predicted, commerce quickly became focused around the maritime fur trade, and the profitability of this enterprise cemented the importance of the region into the minds, and economics, of first the British and then the Americans. Indeed, though their specifics would change, the importance of natural resources would remain central to the value of the Pacific Northwest for over 150 years.45

44 Schwantes, 22, 24, 19, 384. It should be noted that, as was the case in the rest of the continent, the region was already well-settled by the time Anglo explorers set foot on the Northwestern coast, in this case, by about 125 American Indian tribes. Hunters and gatherers who lived mainly off the resources of the sea and rivers, their population was decimated by white contact; some scholars estimate that as much as 90 percent were killed by the host of diseases – smallpox, malaria, measles, influenza – carried by the Europeans. Though descendents of the survivors endure to this day and their existence, past and present, influences Northwestern culture, particularly as reluctant poster-children for the nature-spirituality movement, Europeans (and later, Americans) began to dominate the production and dispersion of culture almost immediately upon their arrival and so are the focus of this section. While the first explorers were wrong in their assumption of an uninhabited, virgin forest, their followers were nearly correct, as so little of the original Native American population survived the first wave of European contact. See Schwantes, 27-36 for more on pre-European history in the region.

According to Schwantes, “the fur trade era inaugurated the role of the Pacific Northwest as a colony whose natural resources were ripe for outsiders to exploit.” The fur trade was “the first large-scale corporate enterprise in North America,” and it catapulted the continent beyond subsistence agriculture and into the world of international trade. At precisely the time this wealth of fur was discovered in the Pacific Northwest, demand rose in Europe with the bourgeoning middle class and supply dwindled from other exporters. Thus the forests of present-day Oregon and Washington became the world’s primary source of fine furs, making for quite a lucrative business.\footnote{Ibid., 66, 53.}

The Hudson Bay Company dominated the trade in the Oregon Country for several decades, but in the 1820s independent trappers unaffiliated with any company began to work the Northwest. An American, General William Henry Ashley, headed several expeditions of such free agents into the west, one of the few instances of American presence in the region at the time. His men, and others like them, who called themselves “mountain men,” represent one of the first expressions of the rugged individualism which would come to characterize the West. While they did contribute to geographical knowledge of the region, Americans built up the mountain men as brave entrepreneurs who cleared the way for civilization, and American dominance, of the West, contesting the Hudson Bay Company’s “corporate paternalism” and its British monopoly. Thoroughly romanticized, the mountain man epitomized the spirit of the Northwest in the minds of Americans for over a century: Northwesterners were rugged individuals, unfettered by corporate trappings, willing and able to conquer nature’s dangers in order to extract the fullness of their regions’ wealth for the glory of the nation. This picture displays both the origins of a culture intimately connected to the natural world and a distinctly different type of relationship with nature from that exhibited today: one based primarily on conquest and extraction rather than conservation and spiritual valuation.\footnote{Ibid., 64.}

The prominence of the “mountain man ethic” in the Pacific Northwest highlights the distinct absence of religion in the early construction of the region’s identity. Not only was the element of religion missing as motivation for the exploration and later settlement of the Pacific Northwest in comparison to that of the Spanish Catholics in the Southwest or the formerly
persecuted Protestant groups in the East, no religious tradition was able to establish much of a presence in the region at all.

Some groups did attempt to bring religion to the wild Northwest. In the early years, French Catholics had mixed with the region’s Indians, leaving some of their beliefs and practices behind, along with a few missionaries. More intentional missionary activity began in the 1830s as the Protestant reviveral fervor of the 1820s from the eastern side of the Mississippi found its evangelical outlet in the Oregon Territory Indians. Beyond general conversion, the missionaries aimed to save these Indians from their “barbaric” practice of “flattening their babies’ foreheads,” which had won them the name “Flatheads.” Drawings of their malformed foreheads filled the papers, and a “call went forth for all good Protestants to help the poor, misguided, deformed Indians.” By 1850, there were six Methodist, four ecumenical Christian, and about two dozen Roman Catholic missions in the region. However, the missionary era lasted only two decades, perhaps due to interfaith conflict and only mediocre success with the Indians as some scholars suggest, and the religious fervor faded into the background again as pioneer settlement took the foreground.48

The brevity and ineffectuality of organized religion’s campaign in the Pacific Northwest meant that a religious infrastructure such as those in other parts of the country—most notably the Southwest and the Northeast—never developed in the Oregon Territory. Lacking religious definition or identification, the region’s cultural construction consequently has emphasized other aspects, particularly the environment and natural resources. Furthermore, this unusual lack of institutional religion left a great proportion the population open to other forms of spirituality when they emerged in the late 20th century. But until then, the pursuit of enterprise, particularly through the extraction of natural resources, took on a zeal that one might say verged on religious, beginning with the extraction of fine furs.

The fur trade introduced the Pacific Northwest to the American mind as a land of treasure and adventure, yet it could not last forever. By the late 1840s, fashions changed in Europe, lessening demand and lowering prices, and overtrapping in the Northwest’s forests made furs so hard to come by that even a mountain man could not find sufficient compensation to continue living off the fur trade.49 This exemplifies a trend particularly strong in the region: over-

48 Ibid., 78, 80, 84.
49 Ibid., 66.
extraction of a seemingly ever-abundant resource to the edge of extinction. While once the supply of fine pelts and the population of furry animals that provided them seemed beyond imagination, in only half a century that population had dwindled so sharply as to never recover. Looking back with a 21st century perspective, this appears to be the first in a long line of wasteful overuses of the region’s natural resources. But at this early stage, the end of the fur trade only seemed to make way for a new era: pioneer settlement.

In the early 1800s, President Thomas Jefferson had embraced the country’s expansionist fervor by purchasing the Louisiana Territory from France and financing the Lewis and Clark expedition to the Pacific Northwest, again in search of a route to the sea. Though unsuccessful in that goal, the maps and stories Lewis and Clark brought back to the rest of the nation planted the region firmly in the American imagination again as a place of wild environs, unknown beauty, and economic potential, but this time accessible and conquerable for any determined settler, not only for fearless mountain men.50

Development: Paradise Used

During the 1800s, Oregon enthusiasts thrilled at the thought of the region’s potential for material wealth and its suitability for settlement. Soon called “Oregon fever,” this conviction that the Oregon Territory was “the most valuable of all the unoccupied parts of the earth,” as one would-be colonizer put it, dominated the region’s reputation and came to position it as the last American Eden: “paradise on earth.”51 Unlike the Southwestern U.S., which was filled with conflict—with Mexico over borders and with Mormons over polygamy and territory—and which threatened would-be settlers with eviscerating heat, an often-deadly lack of water, and the impossibility of agriculture without irrigation systems, the Pacific Northwest was perceived, despite its daunting mountains, as a verdant natural wonderland where any settler’s hard work could quickly transform the wilderness into a lush and lucrative homestead. The lyrics to a popular folk song of the day proclaimed the common sentiment: “And now that I’m used to the

50 Ibid., 48, 53.
51 Ibid., 79.
climate, / I think that if man ever found / A spot to live easy and happy, / That Eden is on Puget
Sound.”\(^{52}\)

However, Americans approached this “paradise” quite differently than today’s environmentalists, with a distinctly utilitarian emphasis; instead of something to be experienced gratefully and preserved intact, it was viewed as the ideal setting for the rapid development which America so desired. Indeed, as Dunlap writes, “nineteenth-century Americans made the romance of enterprise a national dream, and the conquest of the West, where the dream was to be lived, the center of a national myth.”\(^{53}\) Because of its environmental superiority to the arid Southwest and its increased potential due to its late entrance into the nation’s economy (compared to California, for example), the Pacific Northwest could prove the most fruitful region of the entire country. This fecundity—both what was actually produced and what was imagined the region would generate—would come to define the region, placing it at the center of interpersonal and national debates about the purpose and limits of nature’s offerings, though that conversation would not become dominant for over century. Until then, the Oregon Territory and the states it was subsequently divided into represented only promise: of wealth, health, and the American dream of building one’s future up from the ground.

The first pioneer family rolled across the Oregon Trail in 1841, followed by more than one hundred people in 1842. The longest overland journey attempted by American settlers at 2,000 miles, the Oregon Trail took advantage of an “easy” crossing discovered in the Rockies to enable pioneers to travel by foot and wagon from the Missouri river to the Oregon Territory in about seven months. Though the journey was perilous, about fifty-three thousand pioneers completed the journey between 1841 and 1860, providing a steady stream of settlers for the region.\(^{54}\)

These pioneers’ principal motivation was the hope of economic improvement. Since America was still an agrarian society, the ability to own large amounts of fertile land was the prerequisite for wealth, and this was exactly what the Willamette Valley possessed. Wheat was their staple crop, requiring little initial investment and durable enough to be shipped outside the West Coast without refrigeration. When the Gold Rush hit California in 1848, the flood of gold


\(^{53}\) Dunlap, 33.

\(^{54}\) Schwantes, 86.
seekers stimulated the demand for wheat, initiating Oregon’s first economic boom as a settled territory. Thus, wheat became the Pacific Northwest’s second major natural source of wealth, replacing fur, and it was produced as voraciously as the first, with no concern for the possibilities of erosion or soil exhaustion.\(^5\)

In the 1840s, another national shift reinforced the essential role of the Pacific Northwest’s land: Manifest Destiny. Though this concept had existed since the nation’s inception, the term became popular in the 1840s because it helped identify and justify the country’s expansionist mood. Manifest Destiny claimed that “it was the nation’s God-given destiny to expand to the limits of the continent” and often beyond. Domestically this meant the “re-annexation of Texas and the re-occupation of Oregon,” as James K. Polk called for in 1844. While America went to war with Mexico over what would become Texas, Polk negotiated with Britain to push the northernmost boundary of the Oregon country further north against British counterclaims, drawing the border along the forty-ninth parallel. Oregon quickly became an official territory of the United States, and it earned statehood as the 33\(^{rd}\) state in 1859. Washington lagged by 30 years, having fallen behind in settlement and development. With Manifest Destiny in the mid-19\(^{th}\) century, the Pacific Northwest again found itself at the center of national identity construction: the setting for America’s assertion of her sovereignty in the continent and the world.\(^6\)

The Civil War drew attention away from the Northwest Territories, but the completion of transcontinental railroads in the 1870s and 1880s enabled expedient and secure transportation to and from the region, initiating a second round of excitement. Not only a convenience for settlers, the railroads were considered “a vast machinery for the building up of empires,” in the words of one Washington governor. Now goods of all sorts could be shipped across the country within days, enabling rapid commercial growth in the region. The railroads were the key to unlocking the region’s potential, not only for local development, but for national industrial significance.\(^7\)

Largely uninhabited in the 1870s, by the end of the century “the Pacific Northwest experienced a rate of growth seldom equaled in other regions of the United States,” increasing its population by as much as 260 percent from 1880 to 1890. Promotional publications for the region conveyed that the Pacific Northwest was a region of “boundless resources” and “get-rich-

\(^5\) Ibid., 91-92.
\(^6\) Ibid., 97, 99, 104.
\(^7\) Ibid., 139.
quick opportunities.” Schwantes describes the typical boasts of such literature, highlighting the common notion that the region’s natural qualities were ideal for human flourishing:

The coal deposits of Washington . . . were the “largest in the United States,” the soil of the Willamette Valley was literally inexhaustible, and crop failures were virtually unknown. Another pamphlet claimed that it would “scarcely be possible to exaggerate the extent and value of the forests of the Pacific Northwest. Promoters portrayed the region as a health seekers’ paradise, filled with hot springs and mineral baths, the nights “cool and conducive to sound slumber.” To this paradise, they urged any person with drive and determination to migrate.58

These pamphlets were published in many languages and distributed both domestically and internationally. Immigrants flocked to the region from other parts of the country, most notably from the Mid West, and from other countries including those of Scandinavia and Asia. Between 1890 and 1910, the region’s Japanese population increased dramatically, from only a handful in 1880 to almost 18,000 in 1910.59

Rapid urbanization ensued; the region boasted two cities—Seattle and Portland—with populations over 200,000 by 1910, with Spokane over 100,000 and Tacoma over 80,000. This growth depended upon a natural resource-based economy that in the “vast and unspoiled” territories of the Pacific Northwest seemed to require no boundaries or limits. Pacific Northwesterners wanted to provide for their families and to prove to the rest of the country that theirs was a region of value, an asset to the nation as a whole. In part, their motivation was pride; but another goal was to encourage immigration to the area to build up towns and boost the economy, which was still primarily based on the unfettered harvest and extraction of nature’s wealth.60

As the economic focus shifted and mountain men made way for farmers and gentlemen, the forests once essential to the fur trade began to be felled to make way for houses, towns, roads, and fields. Clearing the forest was the first step toward success for settlers, a prerequisite for civilization. Indeed, as Schwantes writes, “tree stumps symbolized prosperity to nineteenth-century Pacific Northwesterners, because felling trees was often associated with activities that connoted growth and progress.” At this stage, the reverence for the forests now so characteristic

58 Ibid., 186.
59 Ibid., 184-187.
60 Ibid., 192, 162.
of the Pacific Northwest was entirely absent. Rather, the forest was a resource to be extracted at best and an obstacle to be overcome at worst: trees were only good when they were horizontal.\textsuperscript{61}

At the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the region’s economy also rested firmly on fish, grain, fruit, ore, and livestock. Salmon was the most valuable of the sea’s offerings, and they were fished aggressively and indiscriminately. “Cutthroat competition and unsound practices, like stringing traps and nets across river mouths so that few adult fish survived to spawn” quickly affected the salmon population and lowered catches significantly. Yet it would not be until the middle of the century that the tremendous impact of hydroelectric dams on the salmon population would begin to elicit demands for conservation.\textsuperscript{62}

Mining and farming were also important to the early economy of the Pacific Northwest, but it was logging that came to dominate popular conceptions of the region. The Northwest became synonymous with massive forests and plaid-shirted lumberjacks, and for good reason: “In 1910, when Washington was the nation’s number one lumber-producing state, 63 percent of its wageworkers depended upon the forest products industry for jobs.” That percentage stayed significantly high for decades. Before the innovation of the railroad in the 1880s, logging companies could only access timber near tidewater, but as narrow-gauge logging railroads began to be built in nearly every county, the Northwest’s potential for extracted timber increased exponentially. The region’s inland forests again seemed in possession of inexhaustible resources, this time the trees themselves.\textsuperscript{63}

At the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, America still appeared to be in possession of vast quantities of land in the West, and all thoughts went toward progress, development, expansion, and national prosperity. According to the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, this land had been appointed to America by God for her people’s use and enjoyment. This mentality was particularly visible in Pacific Northwest as America’s “last Eden” was consumed at an astonishing rate with little concern either to the possibility that these resources might not last indefinitely or to the affects of their practices on the future productivity of the land.

This disregard was epitomized by the method for logging in the region. Schwantes writes that logging was approached much more like mining than agriculture: “Here was a natural resource only to be exploited, with little thought given to conservation or sustained yields.”

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 162.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 165.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 175, 177.
Known to some as the “cut and run” era, in the early twentieth century the region’s forests seemed so limitless that logging companies opted to save time by cutting trees 10-20 feet above ground level, even though that left thousands of board feet of lumber sitting unused in the stumps. The question of whether these acres of stumps might be ugly, let alone wasteful, went largely unasked. Schwantes writes that these practices not only led to “tremendous waste” but also caused “social dislocation” and “community instability” as each mountainside was logged bare and business moved on to the next hot spot, leaving locals to pick up the pieces. Yet these side-effects—from (what we might consider) unsightly stumps to wasted timber to local economic insecurity—went mostly unrecognized because at the time logging, and by association stumps, was “equated only with money and jobs, prosperity and growth.” With the exception of Mather and Grant, it would be another 30 years before concerns would arise regarding wasteful logging practices and another 50 before questions of intrinsic value would garner large-scale support. For now, nature was there to fuel development as quickly and easily as possible.\textsuperscript{64}

Meanwhile, America had joined the First World War, which affected the Pacific Northwest much like it did the rest of the country. Many Americans were disillusioned by the enormous cost in human lives on the battlefields and unsettled by the continued presence of communism in Europe and the Soviet Union, perhaps even within American borders. The pandemic of Spanish Influenza that swept the country in 1918 killed ten times more Americans than the war itself, and the enthusiasm of the war effort quickly gave way in the face of illness, inflation, and low wages.\textsuperscript{65}

In much of the nation, the economic boom of the early 1920s assuaged, or at least distracted from, the disillusionment of the Great War. But the prosperity of the Jazz Age had little positive effect on the timber and agrarian based markets of the Pacific Northwest, because wartime demands had caused loggers and farmers to “buy land on credit and expand their capacity to produce far beyond what a peacetime world could consume.” Land value dropped dramatically with the end of the war, and bankruptcies followed. The Great Depression hit the Pacific Northwest along with the rest of the nation in 1929, spiking unemployment rates even further.\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 175, 375, 162.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid., 284.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 289.
President Roosevelt’s New Deal in the mid 1930s shifted the nation’s hope again to the undeveloped lands of the West. The region proved itself a frontier once again, ripe for the construction projects—dams, roads, bridges—the government sponsored in its effort to combat the spiraling unemployment and despair of the Depression. As Richard L. Neuberger wrote in Our Promised Land, quoted by Schwantes, the New Deal represented “the first conscious attempt of the government to utilize for all the people the vast, untapped resources of the frontier. . . Never again can the natural riches of the hinterlands be left as undeveloped as they were in the years before the New Deal.” The West, particularly the portions last to be developed, such as the Pacific Northwest, were again central to the success of the nation. Its importance lay in its lack of development, but only because of its potential to be developed. Again, the “unspoiled” lands of the Pacific Northwest were valuable only for what they could provide materially to mankind, a process which precluded repetition.67

Because it had lagged behind the rest of the nation in terms of technological and industrial development, the Pacific Northwest underwent more rapid and dramatic change during the era of the Second World War than most other regions. The modern era burst upon the region as production shifted to include defense equipment, notably Boeing aircraft. Social changes occurred as well, as the Japanese population came under suspicion, national patriotism reached a high, and Pacific Northwesterners, because of their proximity to Pacific conflict, lived in fear of invasion and air raids. Yet the economic character of the region remained relatively stable: “For all the lasting changes that the Second World War brought to the Pacific Northwest—including the enlargement of Boeing and the development of a regional aluminum industry—the economic well-being of the region remained closely tied to the fate of its forest, mining, fishing, and agricultural industries.”68

Thus, almost 200 years after Cook’s initial voyage, the Pacific Northwest had been defined continuously and primarily by the extraordinary richness of its natural resources and its inhabitants’ ability to harvest them with record success. Religion had been but a blip on the historical radar, no tradition ever establishing either a cultural or a physical presence in the region. Because it all started so late in comparison with the rest of the nation, everything happened in fast-forward for the Northwest—exploration, settlement, agricultural and industrial

67 Ibid., 288.
68 Ibid., 327, 340.
development—and little time was left to consider another possible rapid development: the exhaustion of the region’s natural resources.

**Industrialization: Opposing Purposes**

While the region’s economic identity remained stable through the 1960s, the industrial advancements of the Second World War did introduce some important changes in Northwesterners’ mindset toward nature. Though substantive changes in the region’s economy and culture would not be affected until decades later, Pacific Northwesterners began to realize that some of the assumptions upon which their regional identity had been based were in fact false, or at least mutually exclusive. In the 1960s, it started to seem that the development that Northwesterners had so desired for the last 50 years might now make the region economically valuable but at the expense of environmental health, natural beauty, and cultural distinctiveness. The era introduced a debate that would become paramount in the following decades: how and if to proceed with development and preserve the regional economy in the face of decreasing yields and increasingly obvious signs of environmental degradation. Different groups had different ideas about how this should be done, and conflict about the proper use of the environment began to simmer, building up decades of pressure to fuel the eruptions of the 1980s.

Apart from the aforementioned early case of Grant and Mather, the first majorly publicized environmental debate began in the early 1960s. Then future-Governor Tom McCall produced a documentary called *Pollution in Paradise* that criticized the contamination of the Willamette River, showing that pollution represented a real threat to the Pacific Northwest. In early 1966, *Time Magazine* ran an article titled “The Northwest: Pugetopolis” that explored the industry boom in Washington state that then-Governor Daniel Evans deemed “second in significance only to that during the gold rush of 1898.” The article presented the Puget Sound as paradise found for the region’s settlers and asked “whether, in the process of industrialization, their paradise [would] be lost.” Governor Evans phrased the question this way: “How can our state grow with grace? . . . We have not suffered the silt and smoke of over-industrialization—yet. We have not succeeded in completely obliterating the beauty of our countryside or polluting
our waters—yet. But time, which has been on our side, is rapidly running out.”⁶⁹ Elected Governor of Oregon in the fall of 1966, McCall made “Thou Shalt Not Pollute”—his so-called “eleventh commandment”—his primary platform, and his efforts resulted in over 100 environmental protection measures.⁷⁰

McCall endeavored to limit industry where it led to pollution, which his critics claimed stunted the growth of the region. By 1971, industrial and union leaders formed an alliance called the Western Environmental Trade Association to “fight the ‘environmental hysteria’ they claimed was hurting the state’s economy.” But McCall’s supporters claimed their state was “growing anyway because where we live is so beautiful.” In sharp contrast to Oregon’s earlier motto of “development at any cost,” McCall claimed that Oregon “wanted industry only when that industry was willing to want what Oregon is.” McCall asserted that “the Northwest’s age of environmental innocence was past” and that Northwesterners would have to make a choice about the role of the natural environment in their region.⁷¹

This choice McCall defined spoke to the core of regional identity in the Pacific Northwest. Would theirs be a region of paradisiacal natural beauty in the Romantic tradition sustained by tourism and strictly limited industry? Or would regional identity stem from the prosperity and national significance of their extracted natural resources? For a century, the region’s inhabitants had expected nature to provide both aesthetic pleasure and economic profits, but in the latter half of the 20th Century, it became clear that these purposes were many times mutually exclusive. Their notion of their region’s natural exceptionalism began to be exposed as romantic myth, and Pacific Northwesterners began to realize that pollution and over-extraction were not problems confined to the land east of the Rocky Mountains. Their fecund forests and pristine mountaintops were perhaps not as immune to human corruption and exhaustion as settlers had once imagined.⁷²

Northwesterners had seen warnings of the limits of nature’s resources for the last century—lower salmon runs, massive soil erosion from overgrazing, polluted rivers and bays—but it was the threat of a depleted timber supply that sparked the most concern. The “cut and run” philosophy of the timber industry had led to problems from the beginning, but the thought that

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⁷⁰ Schwantes, 319.
⁷¹ Ibid., 345, 317, 322, 325.
⁷² Ibid., 368, 318.
one day the trees might run out for good had “a profound and unsettling” impact. As Schwantes writes, regional identity in the Pacific Northwest had always been intimately tied to the natural environment. As the Pacific Northwest’s “endless, inexhaustible, and spectacular” nature began to fail in the post-war era, leading to unemployment, diminished yields, and economic distress, Northwesterners felt a sense of confusion that for many bordered on betrayal: “Coming face to face with nature’s limitations—a confrontation especially traumatic in the forest products industry in the late 1970s and early 1980s—produced unease and something of an identity crisis in a region where economic well-being had long been rooted in nature’s largess.” The Pacific Northwest without its snow-capped mountains, fog-blanketed forests, and plaid-shirted loggers was “as unthinkable as New England without a Puritan heritage, the South without the Lost Cause, the Midwest without its agricultural cornucopia, or California without its gold rush mentality.” Thus, the cessation of logging would alter the region’s identity perhaps equally as much as the obliteration of scenic forests. The Pacific Northwest’s identity, and the livelihoods and desires of its inhabitants, depended on the coexistence of two philosophies of land-use that each sought, at least to some degree, to eliminate the other. Therein lay the conflict that would take center stage in the last two decades of the 20th century.73

Yet one thing remained clear: the environment was of central importance in the Pacific Northwest. One hundred fifty years of natural resource extraction and Romantic reporting had burned the significance of the region’s land indelibly on the national consciousness as well as Pacific Northwesterners’ economic infrastructure. Questions of nature’s ideal role in human life, and the degree of protection it required, became more and more widespread in the 1960s and 70s, often eliciting very different answers from peoples of different socio-economic classes and geographic locations. Rural logging communities had one idea about appropriate forest use, while urban Northwesterners and extra-regional immigrants often had quite different ideas. As the next chapter will explore more fully, these disparities produced intense conflict between individuals and groups, as well as within individuals, where interests proved mutually exclusive and claims to control over nature’s use began to be couched in moral terms. Simultaneously, early environmentalism swept the country with an intensity caused by predictions of the imminent collapse of the earth’s ecosystem, and several scientific discoveries brought the Pacific Northwest to the forefront of the national environmental movement’s focus. Combined with the

73 Ibid., 375, 368-369.
above-mentioned duality of intense emphasis on natural resource extraction and the continued
eexistence, nevertheless, of more “unspoiled” forest than most parts of the country—still a “last
frontier”—the Northwest became the locus of one of the most publicized and protracted
environmental battles of the era.

Simultaneously, the New Age dawned on the western world, and alternative spirituality
gained immense popularity in the Pacific Northwest, where the region’s conspicuous lack of
institutional religious infrastructure had created a more “open” population. Perhaps in part
because of the mental and emotional endurance required to sustain such a lengthy struggle as the
environmental one soon demonstrated itself to be, New Age spirituality fused with
environmentalism in the Pacific Northwest, lending an even deeper sense of purpose to
environmentalists’ efforts and creating the dominant culture of nature-based spirituality that has
come to define the region today.
CHAPTER III
THE SPIRITUALIZATION OF ENVIRONMENTALISM IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

On October 31, 1979, in Index, Washington, Pete Pathfinder Davis decided to found what many consider the first official neo-pagan congregation in the Pacific Northwest, and perhaps in the country. Davis had grown weary of the “ignorant neighbors [and] suspicious authorities who did not understand their benevolent nature worship practices,” so he and a group of friends deemed it best to retreat to a secluded spot 50 miles outside of Seattle where they could worship free from criticism and harassment.74

Self-described practitioners of “The Old Religion, sired of time and born of the Earth Mother,” commonly called neo-paganism or Wicca, Davis and his friends practiced “nature-oriented pre-Christian era spirituality,” worshipping primarily “the Mother Goddess and her consort, the God of the Forests.” Central to their faith was a “close connection with nature and respect for the earthly environment” as well as an emphasis on the right of the individual “to formulate [his or her] own belief system and structure, free from imposed dogma or doctrine” and define his or her own existence.75

Although Davis’s initial intention was only to “establish a small Wiccan retreat in the mountains near Seattle for local area Pagans to worship unmolested,” his small group of worshipers quickly grew into the Aquarian Tabernacle Church (ATC), which currently boasts over 300 members. The ATC now offers monthly worship services timed with moon cycles and season changes, education classes for the public on pagan spirituality, their own seminary and ministerial degrees, psychic healing festivals, a lending library, and SpiralScouts—a pagan-oriented alternative to Boy/Girl scouts—among other services. Believing that the larger culture’s “frenzied lust for what we call progress” has led to the “plundering and contamination of our limited natural resources”—leaving society and the earth on the “brink of disaster”—they see a

“spiritual imperative” to live “in step” with nature. Their description of their church property on their website focuses on its proximity to the cornerstones of Northwestern nature: they are nestled in the Cascade Mountains between two 5,000 foot peaks, on the banks of one of the nation’s last “wild rivers,” where “bald eagles and ospreys nest nearby and soar in the rising wind currents.” Respect and reverence for nature permeates every aspect of their enterprise, from the location of their facilities and focus of their worship to daily sustainable living practices and the organization of the church calendar around lunar and seasonal cycles.\(^\text{76}\) Thus, the ATC serves as one example of the nature-based spirituality that has come to define the Pacific Northwest in recent years.

This example demonstrates particularly that a spiritual concern for the environment has not always been commonplace in the region. Evidenced by Davis’s perception of harassment for their nature-spirituality, prior to the 1980s, at least some people in the Pacific Northwest were hostile to neo-paganism, and the culture was far from dominated by such ideologies. Before the shift that began in the 1980s, earth-based spirituality was still a strange sight in the region as elsewhere in the nation. Consequently, one of the goals of the ATC was to raise public awareness of what their spirituality entailed and establish its legitimacy as a religious tradition. In 1985, Davis was retained as an expert witness in a case regarding the practice of Wicca by inmates; through his testimony, paganism was recognized by the Department of Corrections as a valid religion. In 1988, the ATC received governmental recognition as a tax-exempt religious organization. By 1992, Davis, as Wiccan priest, was elected president of the Interfaith Council of Washington State. Davis’ journey from harassed outsider to respected authority demonstrates that in a mere 13 years paganism in the region had gone from marginalized to mainstream.\(^\text{77}\)

The development of the regional eco-spirituality culture in the Pacific Northwest that this essay attempts to chronicle was not a spontaneous or inevitable outcome of some ever-present environmental exceptionalism of the region. Rather, the concurrence of the national environmental and New Age spirituality movements combined with key environmental discoveries in the Pacific Northwest and the fertile ideological atmosphere created by the region’s history detailed in the first chapter resulted in a fusion of environmental concern with spiritual imperative. The relative weakness of institutionalized religion made this spiritual

\(^{76}\) Ibid.
\(^{77}\) The Aquarian Tabernacle Church web page, “Branches of the Pagan Tree: the History of the Aquarian Tabernacle Church.”
development more visible and therefore influential in regional culture as these various forms of nature worship offered compelling and religiously unchallenged prescriptions for right relationship between humans and their surroundings. As moral and ethical questions became primary, spirituality lent a deeper significance to the existing environmentalism that provided the ideological strength and ritualistic structure necessary for nature-based spirituality to become a dominant and lasting cultural presence in the region today.

The Movements Begin

Though the fusion of New Age spirituality with environmentalism did not reach fruition until the 1980s, both movements trace their origins in American culture to the counter-cultural movement that began about 20 years earlier. A brief exploration of the early movements reveals both their initial separation and the instances that foreshadowed their eventual synthesis.

The condition of the environment began to be a source of conflict and activism on a national scale in the politically charged culture of the 1960s and 1970s. Some historians have traced its explosion into popular consciousness back to the 1962 publication of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, serialized in *The New Yorker*, which “crystallized public fears about environmental problems, exposing the dangers from pesticide residues in body fat and even human milk.” In the radical culture of the era, new evidence of environmental degradation made it seem “that either the world’s ecosystems or industrial society would collapse in the near future.” Suddenly, the environment’s fragility was evidence of its likely imminent destruction, barring human intervention. The speed with which public consciousness changed had all the markings of a fad, like tie-dye or free love: “When *Silent Spring* appeared, only scientists were using the word ‘environment’,” but eight years later, marked by the first Earth Day, millions of people, and the national government, designated environmental protection as a top priority.\(^78\)

Environmentalism began as a political movement in response to a perceived immediate threat to human life, looking to science for evidence and to politics for solutions, for the most part making personal change secondary and leaving spiritual questions aside:

\(^78\) Dunlap, 95, 10, 96.
The environmental movement began with a concern for what was happening at the time—with DDT in our body fat and organochlorines in our drinking water and the awful environmental news of the late 1960s that economic development and population growth threatened wilderness and even the world’s ecosystems. In the spring of 1970, when a quarter-million people rallied in Washington, D.C., for the first Earth Day and many more at teach-ins and protests across the country, they wanted to change the laws, not discuss humanity’s deep ties to the world.79

Activists focused on the government’s role in protecting or degrading the environment, and achievements of the early movement were largely legislative: the passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964; the creation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1969; and the passage of the Endangered Species Act in 1973, among others. Environmentalists passed between 20 and 30 major bills a year in the 1970s, including the Clean Air Act in 1970 and the Clean Water Act in 1972.80 This legislature was aimed primarily at protecting nature for the continued benefit of the American populace. At this stage, nature was still considered valuable for what it could provide humans, so the perceived crisis was that environmental destruction would impede human flourishing, whether in terms of physical health threatened by dangerous pollutants or in terms of aesthetic experience limited by the extinction of animal species or the devastation of beautiful landscapes. Notions of nature’s intrinsic value apart from human life would not gain large scale credence for many more years.

The concept of “wilderness” also emerged around this time, still positioning nature as useful to humans, only this time emphasizing its aesthetic value. The increased time for leisure that the general population experienced after World War II pushed Americans outside their homes and cities. Outdoor tourism began to be a viable source of revenue in western states, and a growing number of Americans began to believe that nature might also be useful to humans for its recreational and aesthetic value, in addition to its economic worth. Many also realized that development might reach the lands they wanted to enjoy before they did, which sparked concern over natural resource extraction and development. Americans rediscovered their country’s

79 Ibid., 14.
natural beauty, and wilderness, as a place for human recreation and a part of national heritage, became a popular cause.\(^8^1\).

One early, pivotal battle for wilderness occurred in northern Arizona in the late 1950s and early 1960s with the construction of the Glen Canyon Dam on the Colorado River. Designed to provide hydro-electric power to large parts of the Southwest, the dam would, and did, flood what was then Glen Canyon, reportedly a natural playground of spectacular beauty. The Sierra Club opposed the building of the dam, as did many local naturalists including author Edward Abbey who later wrote his most famous work, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, about a plot to blow up the dam and return the river to its natural state.\(^8^2\) This book and the Glen Canyon Dam inspired Dave Foreman to form the radical environmental group EarthFirst!, which in the 1980s made its home in the Pacific Northwest, as we will soon explore. The conflict over the damming of the Colorado marked one of the first times that activists began to value the environment’s aesthetic qualities over its economic potential, though the latter ultimately prevailed in this case.

After its submersion, the canyon was idolized in the 1963 Sierra Club book entitled *The Place No One Knew*, illustrated by seventy-five of Eliot Porter’s photographs of the area and narrated by texts that attempted to place the reader within that “intimate canyon” where the river is “life-giver” and “moderator” and human visitors are “hypnotized” by its beauty and overwhelmed with “wonder.”\(^8^3\) The language in this book bordered on spiritual, personifying nature and locating it as a source for human transcendence, anticipating the direction many environmentalists would turn, though not for over a decade. This book became a classic within the movement, yet it was also an anomaly in that era when more tangible concerns, like burning rivers and skies blackened with smog and tangible solutions in the form of policy change were center stage.

The political successes of the 1970s—the first Earth Day and the founding of the Environmental Protection Agency in 1970, the Water Pollution Control Act of 1972, the Endangered Species Act of 1973, among others—briefly fanned the flames of environmentalist fervor, but ultimately they proved to be empty victories, bellied by the continued state of environmental degradation documented in the following years. These early policy changes were

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\(^8^1\) Dunlap, 70.
\(^8^3\) Eliot Porter and David Ross Brower, *The Place No One Knew: Glen Canyon on the Colorado* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1968).
often weakly enforced or provided too many loopholes so that after a decade, most had done little to alter the state of that which they aimed to de-contaminate or protect. As Dunlap writes, many environmentalists began to feel that despite all they did, “pollution continued, population grew (though a bit more slowly), extinction rates rose, and wilderness dwindled,” leading some to conclude that the movement had failed. The crisis mentality that had fueled much of the prior activism also wore off, as the world had not yet come to an end despite little in the way of change. Some environmental activists gave up or moved on to new causes, yet others began to search for a fresh way to conceptualize their struggle, asking deeper and more personal questions about the meaning of nature and the proper place of human life within it.

In the Pacific Northwest, as in most of the country, concern about the environment was most evident in conflicts over its proposed usage: logging or tourism, pollution control or unchecked industry. Not until the 1980s would environmental concern reach new levels of intensity and profundity, ones that would draw blood and question the very nature and purpose of human life.

New Age spirituality also developed out of the Vietnam era’s sense of disillusionment with dominant institutions, most notably the government and organized religion. The generation that reached adulthood in the 1960s and ‘70s, now known as the baby-boomers, faced a world of contradictions: the “chosen” nation fighting, and losing, an unjust war; persistent inequalities of race, class and gender in a country founded on principles of equality, highlighted by the civil rights movement; mass materialism in the midst of ecological crisis; and churches seemingly unable to answer their burgeoning questions. Ultimately, baby-boomers began to think that institutional forms of religion were not only limiting, but often dangerous and even morally wrong.

As Shibley argues, the “anti-establishment rebellion in the 1960s led to spiritual exploration and alternative religious movements” in the 1970s and 1980s. Beyond the obvious motive of disillusionment with institutional religions, some baby-boomers may have turned to alternative spirituality for a more complex reason. Recalling Dunlap’s argument (detailed in the introduction) about environmentalism’s lack of immediate success leading to a spiritualization of

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84 Brulle and Jenkins.
85 Dunlap, 122-123.
86 Shibley, 147.
87 Ibid., 147.
its principles, it could be argued that a similar spiritualization occurred with the counter-cultural movement in general. As baby-boomers began to see that American culture and world-wide conditions remained relatively unchanged despite their passionate political protests, they had either to admit their defeat or to find a new methodology. The latter occurred, largely through a turn to a more individual approach to world transformation: rather than expecting governments to affect change, baby-boomers began to believe that the path started with self-discovery and inward transformation. The hope was that social transformation would follow, leading to a “new age” where imbalances of all sorts, from gender to economics, would be righted.

Self-actualization became the primary goal for most practitioners of New Age spirituality, and self-definition required that they define their own spiritual realities as well, employing what Adrian J. Ivakhiv calls a “do-it-yourself form of epistemological individualism.” Drawing on beliefs and practices from a huge array of ancient and modern philosophies and religions—from Buddhism and Hinduism to classical pantheism and astrology—New Age became a term that referred to a loose set of beliefs and practices that varied hugely in their specifics. Metaphysical practices like psychic consultations, spirit channeling, and new-shamanism mixed with longstanding religious practices like meditation and the self-help teachings of the burgeoning pop-psychology industry. Building on the transcendentalist notion, as Amanda Porterfield describes it, that “attunement to oneself and confidence in the authority of one’s feelings and intuitions ushered one into a deep kinship” with the flow of divinity present in all things, New Agers saw the self as the pathway to, if not the location of, the divine. They awaited “large-scale change in human consciousness and a utopian era of peace and harmony,” which would be achieved through each person’s exploration and actualization of the self.

This spiritual revolution did not become defined as a movement until the 1980s, but its origins stand firmly in the 1970s. The 1967 musical *Hair* opened with the song “Aquarius” containing the now-famous line, “This is the dawning of the Age of Aquarius,” which references the supposed astrological shift from the age of Pisces to that of Aquarius in the late 20th century. Though not particularly New Age itself, the play popularized the idea of a new era of spiritual

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88 Ivakhiv, 7.
harmony. In 1973, David Spangler published the first version of one of the “foundational texts” of the New Age movement called *Revelation: the Birth of a New Age*, which he based on information channeled from an entity he identified as “Limitless Love and Truth.” Another early metaphysical occurrence began in 1977 in Tacoma, Washington when J.Z. Knight, a housewife, claimed that Ramtha, a 35,000 year-old warrior “made himself known” to her, “delivering the message that ‘the Kingdom of Heaven is within you.’” By 1980, Margaret Ferguson published the first comprehensive work about the movement, *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, whose title uses the word conspiracy in the root sense of “breathing together” and which speaks of a new millennium of “love and light.” USA Today called it the “handbook of the New Age,” and it quickly became a best-seller.

The movement gained momentum in the 1980s with widely publicized events like the Harmonic Convergence of 1987 and actress Shirley McClain’s New Age awakening, first documented in 1983 in her autobiography, *Out on a Limb*, and popularized in the TV movie of the same name in 1987. That year, the Harmonic Convergence focused the attentions of the burgeoning numbers of New Agers across the county and internationally on various sacred sites, in the U.S. most notably Mt. Shasta in Northern California. This astrological event, described as “a trigger for an incredible spiritual re-birth on our planet . . . involving bonding to mother Earth,” brought thousands of New Age devotees to spiritual sites to channel the spiritual energy of these places to help bring about the spiritual enlightenment of the world. By 1988, channeler Knight had achieved international recognition in the New Age community and established Ramtha’s School of Enlightenment in Yelm, Washington. One testament to the advancement of the movement is that popular figures like Knight and McClain were already being criticized by others, including Spangler, as “talkshow-channels” more concerned with sensationalism than spiritual development; the movement had grown large enough to start housing factions, out of which various strands of New Age spirituality began to emerge.

One thread of this multi-faceted and immensely varied New Age spirituality focused on a reverence for the earth. Ivakhiv defines this strand, sometimes called eco-spirituality or earth

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92 Shibley, 144.
94 Shibley, 144.
95 Hanegraaff, 38.
spirituality, as centering on a belief that the earth is “an embodiment, if not the embodiment, of divinity” and includes neopaganism, neoshamanism, pantheistic nature mysticism, and feminist spiritualities under its umbrella.\(^{96}\) Much of this nature-based spirituality stemmed from or at least incorporated James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis’s “Gaia Hypothesis,” advanced in the early 1970s, which argued that the earth “is a single, dynamically self-regulating organism.”\(^{97}\) This idea of the earth being alive was easily combined with notions of an Earth Mother pulled from Native American beliefs or an Earth Goddess drawn from ancient paganism.

One relatively organized form of nature spirituality called *ecofeminism* dates back at least to 1980. Catherine Albanese writes in *Nature Religion in America* that the concept of Gaia—the earth as a living (female) being—is primary for ecofeminists, who first announced their belief in the “importance of women’s energy in healing the earth” at an inaugural conference at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.\(^{98}\) Ecofeminists place themselves as part of the larger feminist movement but emphasize the earth as a fellow female, oppressed and abused by mankind and in need of liberation. Most of the early earth-focused strand of New Age came from feminists who rediscovered ancient pagan beliefs about the Goddess and earth worship and incorporated them into the self-defining, anti-institutional framework of New Age thought. One example of such is Starhawk, who published the bestselling book *The Spiral Dance: a Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess* in 1979. Originally from St. Paul, MN and born Miriam Semos, Starhawk re-located to San Francisco in the 1970s where she began publishing and organizing around earth-based spirituality. She wrote about the need for women to reclaim the parts of themselves they have lost by finding their inner Goddess and redeveloping their intimacy with the earth.\(^{99}\)

While earth-worship certainly played a part for some New Agers from the beginning of the movement, there were few connections between nature-spirituality and environmental activism until the 1980s. Though many involved in early New Age spirituality may have located at least one connection with the divine in nature, they generally acted on this reverence through personal forays into “special” locales as earth-focused rituals, not political activism or public protest. Environmentalists in the 1970s primarily turned to science for their motivation and

\(^{96}\) Ivakhiv, 8.
\(^{97}\) Ibid., 19.
\(^{98}\) Albanese, 176.
justification, but as the science proved somewhat ambiguous and victory less immanent, activists began to find spiritual explanations for their protracted struggle just as New Agers became more activist in their earth-based interests. The forests of the Pacific Northwest provided the principal backdrop for this interlocking.

The Stage Is Set in the Pacific Northwest

The Pacific Northwest proved unusually suitable for the development of New Age alternative spirituality and environmentalism as well as their fusion. Some evidence of the unusual success of New Age in the region can be found in a shift in book sales during this period. As reported by Shibley, by the beginning of the 21st century, Powell’s Books in Portland had to reorganize its “religion” titles to allot entire aisles each to categories like holistic health, earth-based religion, and other spiritual themes. Shibley argues that not only were alternative spirituality books extremely popular in the Pacific Northwest, many of the books’ authors either originated in the region or relocated there. Evidence of the particular popularity of environmentalism in the region is easily found in a scan of the major environmental events of the period: the overwhelming majority occurred in the Pacific Northwest, and the publicity they received was immense.

The scarcity of institutional religion in the region was a key factor in the proliferation of New Age in the Pacific Northwest. New Agers encountered much less social disapproval in the Pacific Northwest than they would have in intensely religious regions like the South. Furthermore, the region contained a large population of spiritually open and experimental individuals who would have likely been more receptive to new forms of spirituality. The location of eco-spiritual “hot spots” in the region—such as Mount Shasta, the “old growth” forests, and Mount Rainier—combined with the perception of the region as open-minded and ideologically unconstrained drew nature-based New Agers to the Pacific Northwest, sometimes as on a pilgrimage, and often to stay.

100 Shibley, 142.
101 Ibid., 141; Killen, 11.
The national counter-cultural movement of the 1960s also proved particularly enduring in the Pacific Northwest. As the initial fervor faded nationally in the late 1970s the movement became more isolated, and eventually it became confined to certain towns and campuses, particularly as Reagan era conservativism set in. In the west, radical counter-culturalism “drifted steadily up the coast,” as Shibley describes it, as its proponents fled “the material culture of southern California in search of a simpler, more fulfilling lifestyle.” Places like Eugene and Bellingham in the Pacific Northwest, which had been “at the center of counter-cultural rebellion” at its height, became some of its last bastions in the 1980s, and the associated spiritual revolution found continued fertile ground there as well, years after a more conservative ethos had pervaded much of the rest of the country.102

The long-standing tradition of intense extraction of natural resources in the region combined with its conception in American consciousness as a last frontier made environmentalism particularly popular and controversial in the Pacific Northwest. When environmentalists turned their conservationist eye toward the region as one of the nation’s last “untouched” landscapes, they encountered strident opposition from the rural population of the region who had been making their living through natural resource extraction for generations. As discussed in the previous chapter, the environment of the Pacific Northwest elicited strong emotions and opinions for all residents of the region, though they often differed dramatically. The late start of urbanization and industry in the region, due to its comparatively late discovery by Europeans, meant that a larger portion of the economy was still dependent upon natural resources by the 1980s, that natural resource extraction was still occurring there at a rate far more intense than in other regions, and that the region offered the greatest possibility for preservation, since there was more “unspoiled” nature left there to save. Thus, the region’s history set the stage for the environmental battles of the 1980s and the spiritualization of such activities that eventually occurred. A look at some of the early environmental and spiritual events in the Pacific Northwest reveals the seeds of their fusion.

As it did nationally, environmentalism gained hold in the Pacific Northwest before New Age spirituality became popular there. The first ten years of what we might call modern environmentalism in the region were characterized by a new regard for nature as something that might enrich human life by being left intact, as opposed to only by economic benefit through

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102 Shibley, 147.
extraction. McCall ran for governor of Oregon in 1967 partly on a platform of environmental conservation—his so-called 11th Commandment. In 1968, Lyndon B. Johnson signed the North Cascades Act to create the Cascades National Park complex in northern Washington State, 93 percent of which would be designated as wilderness with the Washington Parks Wilderness Act of 1988. In 1973, Governor McCall called for Oregonians to examine the way they conceived of their state, positing the notion that “quantitative and qualitative measurements of ‘success’ in the Northwest might, in some circumstances be mutually exclusive” because the environmental degradation produced by unlimited growth directly impacted quality of life.103 As explicated in the previous chapter, McCall urged Oregonians to redefine their regional identity, counting its natural beauty highest among its natural resources. In 1974, the World Fair was held in Spokane, Washington, and its theme was “Celebrating a Fresh, New Environment.” The Fair’s credo began, “We believe that the universe is a grand design in which man and nature are one,” voicing a conception of nature that was more than functionalist. The Fair centered around the Spokane River Falls, an area which had become polluted and industrialized almost beyond recognition in previous years but which was turned into a green park for the event. With over 5 million visitors, sleepy Spokane gained a place on the national environmental radar. These early environmental events were not overtly spiritual in ideology; that would come only later. Nevertheless, McCall’s 11th Commandment, the focus on the value of wilderness, and the exhortations of Spokane’s World Fair all began to use spiritual language and ideas in their expression. While still more implicit than explicit, a sense of nature as intrinsically valuable and of the intimate relationship between humans and their environment began to emerge in the Pacific Northwest in the years from 1967-1974.

Yet, as late as 1979, explicit nature-based spirituality was far from commonplace; indeed, it often attracted criticism and distrust, as evidenced by the aforementioned experience of Pete Pathfinder Davis outside Seattle who founded a secluded New Age worship organization in order to protect his fellow practitioners from perceived persecution. While respect for nature and even vague, unfocused reverence was becoming acceptable and even fashionable in the region, demonstrated by public assertions made by McCall and the Spokane World’s Fair, New Age

spirituality had yet to become a part of this environmentalist tendency. For example, the Cascades National Park complex was designated in 1968 to be a “showcase of natural beauty” and protected as an aesthetic natural resource for the nation, in the words of Senator Henry M. Jackson, the bill’s chief architect.\footnote{The National Park Service, “1968 to 1978: the Making of a New Park,” http://www.nps.gov/archive/noca/adhip2.htm (accessed July 26, 2009).} It wasn’t until 1988, with the passage of the Washington Parks Wilderness Act that a more intrinsic value for that landscape would be articulated. Yet, eco-spirituality had already begun to influence the language and ideologies many environmentalists used to express their motives for protecting nature, and this tendency would become more intense and more explicit with the events that unfolded in the 1980s and 1990s.

### The Movements Intensify in the Pacific Northwest

The Pacific Northwest is home to the giants of the tree family: redwoods, sequoias, giant Sitka spruce, Douglas-fir, and red cedars. In the early 1980s, these trees—the largest ones surpassing 200 feet in height, 60 feet in circumference, and 2,000 years in age—became legendary as they were classified as some of the last remaining “old-growth” forest in the nation, untouched by European or American saws. Mature forests had once covered much of the eastern coast as well, but by the late 20th century, logging for the construction of cities and factories had left few mature trees standing. The East Coast’s forests today are made up of relatively young trees, generally less than one hundred years old. The Pacific Northwest proved to be the last frontier once again: this time the last stand of the nation’s ancient trees.

Until this point, forest was forest and trees were trees for environmentalists, but in 1981, a comprehensive ecological study, the first of its kind, asserted that the old growth forest of the Pacific Northwest was an ecosystem far more unique, ecologically rich, and more important to the ecological balance of the planet than anyone had thought:

> The most productive old growth forest [in the Pacific Northwest], it was learned, exceeded the most productive tropical rainforest in biomass per unit area by a ratio of seven to one. Moreover, the Pacific coastal forest was found to store more
carbon per unit area than any other ecosystem thus far measured, making it crucial to the world's climate in the face of the growing greenhouse effect.\textsuperscript{105} Simultaneously, environmentalists were realizing that these last remaining old growth forests in the Pacific Northwest were being cut for timber at a rate of 70,000 acres a year, leaving less than 20 percent of the region’s original estimated 20 million acres of old-growth forest.\textsuperscript{106} This information redefined the forests of the region as more than aesthetically pleasing. Rather, they began to be identified as ecologically unique, essential to the planet’s ecological health, and incredibly vulnerable to obliteration.\textsuperscript{107} Consequently, these forests took on emotional and political significance and drew many to the cause who previously may not have been involved.

Beyond scientific importance, a perception of the forest as ancient evoked a sense of awe for many. With trees claimed to be 3,000 years old, dating “back to the Roman Empire” and the time “when the carpenter Jesus walked the earth,” as one writer described it, many experienced the forest as primordial and edenic – a separate world where humans come and go but the trees endured in the stillness of centuries.\textsuperscript{108} The trees were often anthropomorphized by their admirers, and age was usually a predominant aspect of their “personalities.” Reporter William Dietrich described the cedar’s “droopy” appearance as seeming “burdened with age and wisdom,” and quoted author Hilary Stewart in her book Cedar: Tree of Life to Northwest Indians as depicting the cedar as “weepy and woebegone. . . the lackadaisical giant with the softer heart.”\textsuperscript{109} Brenda Peterson, another Northwestern author, wrote of the trees as her “elders,” commenting on the inadequacy of plans to replace old-growth through replanting:

In a pre-industrial or agrarian society, the death of an elder was cause for great sorrow and ceremony. In our modern-day arrogance, we equate youth with value. If my Granddaddy were one of those old Douglas firs I saw being trucked out of the forest, would he really be equaled by a tiny sapling? Old trees like old people survive the ravages of middle-age competition for light, or limelight; they give

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{107} Dietrich, 14.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
Peterson, and likely many Northwesterners, conceives of the present world as having strayed from an idyllic past, and the ancient trees of the Pacific rainforest function almost like messengers from that past – teachers and living examples of another way of life superior to that of modern culture.

Peterson links her reverence for these trees to the type of relationship she believes Native Americans and other ancient cultures maintained: “Our pagan ancestors believed trees were more important than people because the old forests survived and contributed to the whole for many more than one human lifetime.” A story she tells of the intensity of that relationship emphasizes her belief in the interconnectedness of humans and trees; she writes, “Cutting down a sacred oak, for example, meant the severest punishment: the offender was gutted at the navel, his intestines wrapped around the tree stump so tree and man died together. When we recognized that our fate was directly linked to the land, trees were holy.” For Peterson and others like her, the destruction of these holy trees carried the moral weight of murder.111

She also refers to a Nez Perce Indian woman who told her of an ancient burial tradition involving the entombing of tribal elders inside “great trees.” “If you cut those ancient trees,” the woman told her, “such loneliness is unbearable.” From these stories, it is clear that Peterson idealizes both the trees themselves and a conception of ancient Native American relationships with the trees, a primitivist fetish for Native American traditions characteristic of many New Age spiritualities and many of the Northwest’s eco-spiritualists.112 Peterson draws on these narratives to inform her construction of the trees as sacred and to reinforce what is for her a clearly spiritual relationship. She writes, “On some spiritual level our human entrails are still wrapped around the trees, like an umbilical cord.”113 For her, spiritual health cannot be achieved without these ancient trees of the Pacific Northwest.

William Dietrich also refers to the trees, specifically the cedar, as sacred, calling it “one of the spiritual cores of our Northwest,” the “magic tree,” and the “tree of life.” He writes of the “secrets” and “spirit power in dark groves of tress so old.” “Spiritually,” he writes, each

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110 Peterson, A17.
111 Ibid.
112 Ibid. For another example of Native American influence see Ann Wall Frank, “Sun Worshipper: Homing Instincts,” The Sunday Oregonian, June 17, 1990, 26 (Lexus Nexus Academic).
113 Peterson, A17.
surviving grove is a sacred place as venerable as a gothic cathedral.” Like Peterson, Dietrich traces this reverence to the “original inhabitants” of the region who understood the value, spiritual and material, of the cedar long before Europeans caught on. In both these examples, a sense of the trees as a source of wisdom, a connection to an idyllic past, and a spiritual center for the idealized Native American population imbues the trees with meaning.

Thus, in the early 1980s, sparked by the groundbreaking ecological study of 1981, the old growth forests of the Pacific Northwest were first conceptualized as ecologically priceless and then romanticized as demi-gods who bore ancient spiritual wisdom into the lost world of the 20th century. This spiritualization of the trees was encouraged and perhaps even prompted by the burgeoning nature-based New Age movement of the time. As Dunlap argues, environmentalism had been asking religious questions all along, and New Age spirituality provided answers, or at the least language with which to better ask such questions. As New Age became increasingly popular, its language proved particularly elastic, lending itself to use by many other arenas. For example, athletes began to speak of “centering” and getting “in the zone.” Psychotherapy, whose work on personality undoubtedly contributed much to New Age, in turn began to incorporate semi-spiritual concepts like meditation and the search for the inner self. And environmentalism found rich metaphor in New Age’s language and ideas about the sacred. By conceptualizing trees and nature as sacred, environmentalism was at once able to participate in a hot new cultural trend—New Age spirituality—and to provide deep-seated justification for continued and intensified activism.

Though it is difficult to chronicle in these early years when the movement was only beginning to take hold in isolated individuals and small undefined groups, it was in these years that the tender shoots of the vibrant eco-spirituality movement formed in the Pacific Northwest. One example from this time can be found in 1983, when a group of women (referred to as the Founding Mothers), founded Women In Constant Creative Action (WICCA) in Monmouth, Oregon. Distinguishing themselves from Wiccan spirituality, which is both a larger and more defined brand of spirituality, WICCA women believe in the “sanctity of Mother Earth” and call their group “a church of the Goddess.” In 1984, WICCA became incorporated by the state of Oregon and applied for church status, which they received. Norma Joyce, one of the Founding Mothers, who holds a Master's Degree in Religious Education and Counseling, became

114 Dietrich, 14.
authorized to perform marriages in the state of Oregon and remains their High Priestess to this
day. In, 1985, they organized the first Festival of Women's Spirituality in the Pacific Northwest,
which was attended by over 300 women. They moved their headquarters to Eugene in 1989 and
changed their name to Women In Conscious Creative Action in 1996 to emphasize their self
determination. Like the ATC, WICCA also made it a priority to counteract negative stereotypes
of pagan and feminine spirituality. They assert that they are not witches or occultists, saying that
there “is no dark side” to what they do.¹¹⁵ WICCA stands as one of the earliest organized
expressions of the eco-spirituality movement in the Pacific Northwest, and their success attests to
the popularity such beliefs gained in the region.

Meanwhile, in 1985, one of the most (in)famous radical environmental groups, Earth
First!, took up the Willamette National Forest as their primary focus, implementing the form of
civil disobedience called tree-sitting.¹¹⁶ Earth First!, which made its start in the American
Southwest with the Glen Canyon Dam controversy, explicitly rejects institutional religion but
speaks about the need to “resacralize” nature in the process of defending it. They believe in
“biocentrism,” that idea that “the life of the Earth comes first,” meaning that human lives do not
take priority over the wellbeing of the planet.¹¹⁷

Dave Foreman, founding member of the movement, is quoted as saying that
monkeywrenching—a term based on Edward Abby’s novel about committing acts of civil
disobedience aimed to protect nature—is “a form of worship toward the earth” and a “very
spiritual” experience.¹¹⁸ Disillusioned with what he saw as the pretense and ineffectiveness of
political environmentalists, such as the Sierra Club, Foreman opted for a more hands-on
approach wherein he worked beyond the political and legal system to bring about the change he

¹¹⁵ Will Wyer, “Hallomas Is a Far Cry from Tricks and Treats,” Oregon Daily Emerald, October 27, 2000,
the Goddess,
http://www.wiccawomen.com (accessed July 27, 2009); and Women in Conscious Creative Action:
¹¹⁸ Bron Taylor, “Earth First!: From Primal Spirituality to Ecological Resistance,” in This Sacred Earth: Religion,

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desired. Though Earth First!ers see theirs as its own movement, they feed from and contribute to various eco-spiritual threads including ecofeminism’s focus on Gaia and deep ecology’s idea that “human beings are not meant to exert dominion over the earth.”

In a 1985 interview for *Mother Earth News*, Foreman articulated one of Earth First!’s priorities for near future: “to protect all the remaining old-growth forests in Oregon,” particularly “in the Middle Santiam and Cathedral forests in western Oregon” where there still remain “300-foot-tall Douglas firs . . . the last significant block of such giant old-growth trees of that species anywhere in the world, second in biomass per acre only to certain redwood forests.” By the end of the decade, Earth First! had become the most well-known radical environmentalist group, subject of countless articles, several lawsuits, death threats, and an FBI investigation for terrorism. As one member later said, Earth First!’s quest to protect the environment had taken on the intensity of a religious war: a “jihad” for nature. In Earth First!, the eco-spirituality movement of the Pacific Northwest had found its extremists. For some, such fundamentalism proved that environmentalists were not to be taken seriously, but for many, the sensationalism of the efforts of those like Foreman made the movement all the more exciting, and thereby appealing.

The now famous activities of Earth First! to save old-growth forests in Oregon started in the early 1980s with another group, the Corvallis-based Cathedral Forest Action Group (CFAG). Their object was the Willamette National Forest’s ancient Douglas fir stands, and they employed non-violent tactics including public forums, debates, and blockages of logging roads. According to Earth First!, while well-intentioned, CFAG’s efforts were minimally effective. Simultaneously, another group, the Bonnie Abbzug Feminist Garden Club, was setting tree spikes “with random precision”: driving six-inch spikes into trees scheduled to be cut, a tactic Earth First! quickly incorporated. Buried into and under the bark, the spikes were invisible to loggers’ eyes, only to be found by their saws, which would be destroyed by the unexpected

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contact with metal.\textsuperscript{122} Tree spiking in the Oregon forests had become common enough by the end of 1985 to prompt an article in the \textit{New York Times}. The article reported that though no injuries had been incurred thus far, loggers worried that tree spiking to could lead to death or serious injury “by jolting a saw out of a logger’s hands or by shattering sawmill blades.” The article quotes Foreman as saying that tree-spiking “is an entirely legitimate way to protect environmental diversity,” while his critics called it “environmentalism gone mad.” Despite its initial success, this method proved ineffective once loggers took to inspecting trees with metal detectors before cutting, removing the spikes with crowbars.\textsuperscript{123}

A new method had to be developed, and this time they hit on the ecotage (their contraction of ecological sabotage) jackpot, the tree-sit, which aimed to “make it impossible to harvest timber without harming a human being.”\textsuperscript{124} Ron Huber, one of the core members of Earth First! who was arrested on July 20, 1985 for his own tree-sit, documented the first American tree-sit on May 20, 1985 in the Willamette National Forest in an article in the Earth First! Journal, published in Eugene. He narrates with the language of war (Foreman explicitly labeled their struggle as such), detailing the first use of their now infamous tactic. Mikal Jakubal’s climb into a tree scheduled for cutting at 4 am, each step of his ascent chronicled by Huber: “Tink! Tink, tink, tink, tink! [Jakubal] pounded home the first nail, seven feet up the trunk of a fine, aged Douglas fir, sending an electric shock through us all.” Describing Jakubal once he had ascended his chosen Douglas fir left standing on the edge of a “stumpland,” Huber writes, “he looked like General Grant in repose on the battlefield after Gettysburg or some similar atrocity.” Though Jakubal’s sit lasted less than 24 hours—he climbed down that evening to survey “the freshly killed stumpland around his tree” and was apprehended by a U.S. Forest Service ranger—the fact that his tree was left untouched during the day’s clear cut “validated” the tree-sit as a valuable weapon in their ecotage armory.\textsuperscript{125}

Over the next few years, tree-sitters became heroes of the environmental movement in the Pacific Northwest. In 1986, the Save the Redwoods League founded by Madison Grant and

\textsuperscript{125} Huber.
others in 1918 began to organize acts of civil disobedience to save what was left of the “virgin” redwood forest of Humboldt County in northern California. Motivated by the “awe and peace” the trees inspired, they staged numerous tree-sits and tree-spikes, tangling with the Pacific Lumber Company over proposed logging. In 1987, mill worker George Alexander was nearly decapitated by an exploding saw that had hit a hidden tree spike, and several of the activists were physically assaulted, sparking greater controversy. In 1990, they planned Redwood Summer, which aimed to explicitly revive the activist spirit of the 1960s by renewing a focus on legislative measures and renouncing more aggressive tactics. They hoped to pass The Forest and Wildlife Protection and Bond Act of 1990, affectionately called the Forests Forever initiative, which would ban clear-cutting and “authorize $710 million in bonds to purchase unprotected ancient redwoods, starting with Pacific Lumber’s 3,000-acre Headwaters Forest.” Yet their ecotage activities had already branded the movement as extremist. In May of that year, two of their leading organizers and members of Earth First! who had already received multiple death threats were injured, one severely, when a pipe bomb of nails exploded in their car. Alleging that they planned to use it against their opponents and that it had detonated accidentally in their own car, the FBI arrested the two activists for knowingly transporting the bomb. While they were eventually exonerated, the violence and their arrests served to polarize the struggle even more, bringing a “sense of urgency, solidarity and total commitment” to the planned Redwood Summer. Over the course of the summer, over 3,000 flocked to the forests in protest and over 150 participants were arrested, but ultimately Redwood Summer failed to attract the publicity of more dramatic Earth First! efforts and failed to accomplish their goal of forcing the cessation of logging in the region. The Forests Forever initiative was defeated solidly in the legislative vote that November. Nevertheless, the activities of the Save the Redwoods League and Earth First! in the old-growth forests were certainly successful in at least one respect—that of cementing the

130 Ibid., 1.
131 Gabriel, 34.
Pacific Northwest in the mind of the nation as the home of the most controversial, and therefore most valuable, both economically and ecologically, natural landscape in the continental U.S.

Many environmentalists wrote of the tree-sitters in reverent tones, awed by the “patience and dedication” of the “very special type of person” who could withstand weeks on end up a tree, eating “dumpstered” food, drinking unfiltered stream water, suffering from “dysentery and persistent staph infections.”132 The tree-sitters were willing to put their “bodies on the line,” making themselves “vulnerable to any kind of suffering [the logging companies] want to inflict on us.”133 In contrast, those who made their livelihoods by logging the Pacific Northwest’s forests viewed the tree-sitters and -spikers as terrorists, according to the FBI’s definition of terrorism as “a crime intended to coerce, intimidate or change public policy.”134 Other acts of vandalism also occurred regularly: setting fire to machinery, pouring sugar in gas tanks, etc. Chairman of a pro-timber industry group, Bruce Vincent said of Earth First! activists, “there's no telling how far these people will go to get their point across,” saying he and the law enforcement had to be “ready for action, if it comes down to that.” Even mainstream environmental groups, like the Sierra Club and the National Wildlife Federation, began to consider Earth First! extreme and dangerous, calling their tactics “counterproductive” and often labeling them “eco-terrorists.”135 Logging industry representatives quickly began to consider the activists beyond reason and asserted that the industry was becoming more “environmentally aware” without the help of extremists, forming organizations of their own to assert their concern for sustainable logging.136 As previously mentioned, it was not uncommon for entire rural economies to depend on logging, so the industry’s employees “saw themselves as caring deeply about trees and the environment” because of their intimate and economic relationship with the land.137 Thus, both sides articulated a fundamental claim to the land and deep-seated, yet mutually exclusive, philosophies for its proper use. The intense resistance to extremist environmental efforts, buttressed by the region’s history of dependence on the forest as a natural resource, served to

133 Brooks.
135 Gabriel, 34.
136 Maria Goodavage, “At Loggerheads in California; Timber Interests, Activists Poised for Redwood Summer,” *USA Today*, June 20, 1990, 3A (Lexus Nexus Academic).
137 Schwantes, 490.
polarize the region, adding to the sensationalism and publicity their stand-offs received. Martyrs for the environmentalist cause, tree-sitters drew publicity and followers to this new confrontational, hands-on style of activism, and they drew them to the home of the last American stands of old-growth forests: the Pacific Northwest.

As environmentalism embraced New Age ideology and became more accepting of its extremist members, it found itself reentering the political scene from the far left. With conservative president Ronald Reagan in the White House, a Republican majority in the Senate for the first time since 1952, and the Cold War still raging, environmentalism thrust itself into a highly polarized political arena in which, its opponents said, it shared a bed with communists, feminists, and other rabble-rousers. Traditional religion was already involved in this struggle, opposing environmentalist efforts. Conservative Christians had burst upon the political scene in 1976, what Newsweek called the “year of the evangelical,” and one of their primary targets was environmentalists who they said cited “anti-Christian” rhetoric, such as evolution, to back their “eco-socialist” agenda. Conservative Christians of the time were reacting to several perceived threats to their way of life, not the least of which was New Age spirituality. When environmentalism joined up with New Age, it effectively sealed its fate as a liberal and controversial movement. Not until 20 years later would traditional religions begin to legitimize environmentalism by finding biblical basis for conservationist action. The rise of extremist environmentalism fueled by spiritual underpinnings—epitomized by Earth First!—served to further polarize the politics of environmentalism, confirming for many that these nature lovers were irrational, dangerous, anti-Christian, and even anti-American liberals. More conservative environmental groups like Sierra Club and the National Wildlife Federation began to find themselves lumped together with extremists on the far left of the political spectrum, and they often spoke out against those extremists in an effort to separate themselves in the eyes of the nation, even though they often shared similar goals.

In the Pacific Northwest, peaceful eco-spiritualists often found themselves thrown in with Earth First!ers and other extremists, subject to intense opposition primarily from members of rural communities who made their livelihoods through natural resource extraction. However, in this relatively un-religious region, the polarization of the struggle stemmed less from questions of biblical and/or spiritual validity and more from issues of personal property and economics. Anti-environmentalists cited such conservative values as the rights of the individual and the
unfettered economic growth of their county or state and construed environmentalists as the opposite—liberals who desired government intervention and valued nature at the expense of human welfare. The extremist spiritual beliefs with which environmentalists were becoming increasingly associated served to polarize the struggle because such beliefs—that nature was more important than humans—implicitly threatened many rural Northwesterners’ wellbeing. Simultaneously, as environmentalists developed their spiritual ideologies, they became less willing to compromise, and conflict deepened.

Thus, the 1980s saw environmentalists in the Pacific Northwest fighting their political battles amidst great controversy. In 1986, after a series of petitions and bills, President Reagan signed the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area into existence, protecting the river and canyon that runs along the Oregon-Washington border. This act specified that “anything built in the gorge would have to be ‘visually subordinate’ to the natural landscape,” which continued to stir up tensions because the land was mostly privately owned. Many locals were outraged by the federal intervention in their local politics and personal property rights; the local county courthouse flew its flag at half-staff for a week in mourning and protest. Viewed as a victory for environmentalists, this act publicly defined the natural landscape as more important than individual human desires, a designation that speaks to the shift in valuation of the environment at this time.

In 1988, controversy began about the threatened status of the northern spotted owl in the region, which made it to the cover of Time Magazine in 1990. The accompanying story described the owl as “docile” and “vulnerable” and the “timeless” forests in which it makes its home as living victims of man’s insatiable appetite. The author refers to the Pacific Northwest as an “ecological frontier whose deep shadows and jagged profile are all that remain of the land as it was before the impact of man,” whose “seemingly endless bounty” had sustained a way of life deeply tied to regional identity. This way of life—lumberjacking and mill towns—would be threatened by the proposed protective measures (that were eventually passed). According to the article, over 30,000 jobs would be lost in the next decade and local economies would crumble. It was a dilemma of “epic” proportions about the place of man in nature: “Are the forests—and by

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extension, nature itself—there for man to use and exploit, or are they to be revered and preserved?" According to Dunlap, the spotted owl, with its cover-worthy cuteness, functioned as “a symbol of the complex [web] of plants and animals that made the ancient forests a holy cause.” The Pacific Northwest remained the stage for the drama of America’s environmental debate.

At the same time, the region was also quickly becoming the center of the New Age movement in America. In 1987, the aforementioned Harmonic Convergence focused New Age attentions in the U.S. on Mount Shasta in Northern California. By 1988, J.Z. Knight had achieved international recognition with Ramtha’s School of Enlightenment in Yelm, Washington. In 1990, a widely-circulated pamphlet titled “Stop the Chainsaw Massacre” defined the region’s forests as most important for their spiritual value, putting in print what a growing majority of environmentalists in the region already cited as their one of their primary motivations. In 1991, the Washington Post published an article on the Institute for Spiritual Development that formed in a small town in the conservative northwest part of the state and taught members that they had the “power to create any reality they wish[ed].” In 1992, Pete Pathfinder from the ATC was elected president of the Interfaith Council of Washington State after serving as an expert witness in 1985 and attaining governmental recognition of Wicca as a religion in 1988. Between the years of 2000-2002, the women’s spirituality group called WICCA was the subject of five supportive articles in the University of Oregon’s Oregon Daily Emerald. Shibley reports that between 1991 and 1998 non-bible religious books more than doubled the market share of the “religious category, forcing many bookstores, including Powell’s Books in Portland to create entire sections of their shelves for various alternative spirituality themes.” With the advent of the internet, web sites rapidly became hubs for New Age

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140 Ibid.
141 Dunlap, 140.
142 Shibley, 144.
145 The Aquarian Tabernacle Church web page, “Branches of the Pagan Tree: the History of the Aquarian Tabernacle Church.”
146 Wyer; Lieberth.
147 Shibley, 142.
communities in the region, offering everything from online instruction in New Age meditation to pagan community directories and “Wisdom Groups.”

As the conservative ethos of the Reagan era settled on the country, the region began to be seen once again as a frontier, only this time as a last frontier for spiritual and political deviance to which many chose to escape. The 1990 census showed that the majority of Seattle’s 2.6 million residents had been born outside the state, and as much as 35 percent of Oregonians had resided in the state for fewer than ten years. It should also be noted that a large portion of the environmental activists at work in the region migrated to the Pacific Northwest as adults or were the children of extra-regional parents; most native Northwesterners, particularly rural inhabitants, tended to locate themselves on the pro-logging, anti-environmentalist side of the conflict. As mentioned in Chapter II, the conservationist ethos was largely an Eastern American import. Many of these newcomers, flocking in from over-crowded California, Midwest, and East Coast cities, cited the region’s natural beauty and “simplicity” as primary attractors, even at the expense of their careers, feeling the need to withdraw from a culture they described as “harried,” commercialized, “workaholic,” “materialistic,” environmentally damaging, and hungry for “meaning.” The Pacific Northwest seemed to represent a refuge from this culture, despite the fact that most newcomers moved to one of the region’s bustling cities. Some scholars cite the perception of the cities’ proximity to picturesque nature as a major factor. Likely, the region’s long history as the country’s wildest, most untouched region played a role in the minds of immigrants. The distinctive paucity of institutionalized religion also contributed to the sense of the region as free from the cultural and moral trappings of the rest of the nation. As the 1998 Gallup poll found, Washington was (and continues to be) the least churched state in the country. A Washington Times article announced these results with relish in January of 1999, calling this lack of institutional religion “the ethos of the Pacific Northwest” and attributing it in part to the region’s history of attracting “political mavericks and freethinkers who have rejected ties to established institutions.” Instead, the Times wrote, residents prefer to “spend their weekends exploring Washington’s mountains, beaches and waterways.” The article goes on to paint the

148 Ibid., 144.
149 Schwantes, 511-512.
150 Ewert, 8. Two examples of people moving to Oregon to get closer to nature are: Mitchell; and Taylor. Also see Kennedy; Leeson; and Connie Koenenn, “Disenchanted Americans Look for Simpler Lives,” The Journal Gazette, August 17, 1996, 6D (Newsbank).
151 Ewert, 6-7.
region as a “recreational paradise” whose “spiritual satisfactions from the scenery and nature” offer far more than the average church service in the minds of most residents. Thus, the Pacific Northwest’s reputation for unparalleled natural beauty and cultural individualism constructed it in the minds of many as the wildest, both ecologically and ideologically, region in the country.

**The Lines Blur**

As the century drew to a close and environmentalism and New Age spirituality celebrated over a decade of public activity in the region, the lines distinguishing the movements began to blur. Environmental groups increasingly cited the spiritual value of nature, and alternative spirituality groups included nature as a major source of divine inspiration more and more. Often, the concept of nature as spiritual had become so commonplace that it was barely remarked upon in articles on environmentalist efforts. The moral, and often thereby spiritual, implications of one’s relationship with nature simply became an accepted part of reality with which each person had to grapple.

For example, Julia Hill made national news in the late 1990s for her method of righting herself with the natural world, yet her endeavor gained notoriety not for its spirituality or originality but instead for its simple longevity. In league with Earth First!, Hill spent 738 days 180 feet high in a redwood tree, climbing down finally in December of 1999 at 25 years old, having broken the record for the longest, highest tree-sit. After what in retrospect appears only a measly five months, Hill’s sit was documented in an article in *Time Magazine*. The article describes her as a “chirpy New Ager” whose life was radically redirected after a near-fatal car accident. Enduring such reported hardships as being bombarded with air horns and floodlights to disrupt her sleep, blockades to stop her supply lines, and even attacks by helicopter with blades “churning the branches” of her tree, Hill’s experience became the subject of dozens of articles and radio programs, thousands of pieces of fan mail, and a documentary film. Hill named her tree Luna and spoke of becoming “one with this tree and with nature” through the experience. Indeed, she related that the tree “spoke” to her one night during a violent storm with “a beautiful,

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very calming, powerful female voice.” After Pacific Lumber agreed to sell Luna and a 200-foot ring of trees around it into an environmental trust, Hill climbed down from her perch, landing instantly on the front pages of newspapers worldwide. It is hard to ignore the role that gender may have played in the massive publicity of her feat, but whatever the reasons, Hill’s sit, and her intimate connection with the trees of the Pacific Northwest, were broadcast to the world.

That Hill’s spiritual motivations were less newsworthy than her endurance should be no surprise, as spiritual connections with trees had been making the news already for several years. For example, Brenda Peterson’s article about the trees as her “elders” was published in 1993 and William Dietrich’s article about the cedar as one of “the spiritual cores of our Northwest” was published in February of 1999. The region’s mountain peaks also elicited spiritual responses. Midwesterner Charles Honey, on a trip to Washington State to investigate the spiritual claim of the legendary summit, called Mount Rainier “the spiritual center of the Pacific Northwest” and wrote that he “could detect God’s glory glancing off Rainier’s snowy peak.” Far from bizarre or unconventional, these types of spiritual encounters with nature became a familiar mantra around the end of the 20th century.

The connection between nature and spirituality became so strong that even institutional religions began to incorporate environmentalist tendencies, reports of which date back to as early as 1990 but increase as the new century unfolded. Faith-based environmental groups such as Care for God’s Creation, Christians for Environmental Stewardship, and Interfaith Network for Earth Concerns grew out of this time, asserting that “religion should not be seen as the enemy of the environment, but as a moral force for people learning to live a more ecologically sound life.” They pushed against groups like the Christian Coalition that cited Genesis 1:28 as a mandate from God for humans to “take dominion” over the Earth, which became, environmentalists said, an excuse to exploit it as a commodity. Instead, these groups

155 Peterson, 14.
interpreted Genesis as commanding “stewardship” of the Earth, and they understood its preservation to be a “religious mandate.”\textsuperscript{159} A religious movement with “a strong Northwest presence” whose “adherents [came] from virtually every faith,” these conventionally-religious nature lovers often mixed practices from their traditions with those associated with New Age, such as “sunrise celebrations,” meditation, drumming, and “American Indian prayer.”\textsuperscript{160} One reporter likened their emphasis on social change based on religious principles to the civil rights movement of the 1960s, noting the “sense of transcendent duty” their spirituality lent to environmentalism.\textsuperscript{161} These groups encouraged participants to consider both their “spiritual connection” to nature and their “ethical responsibilities to one another,” working within the traditional religious structure.\textsuperscript{162} Many felt this action from the churches was long overdue, noting that “twenty years after the first Earth Day, churches have barely touched on the subject.”\textsuperscript{163} It may be that religious groups began to co-opt environmental concerns as a means of evangelization. Or perhaps religious individuals already involved on personal levels in the eco-spirituality of the region finally began to convince their leaders that environmentalism was not sacrilege—that faith and nature concerns could coexist.

Another ethically motivated, though not always overtly spiritual, movement became common in the Pacific Northwest in later years: sustainable living. Northwestern practitioners of “voluntary simplicity,” as writer Duane Elgin named the movement in his 1998 book of that title, chose to incorporate “environmentally friendly” practices into their everyday lives.\textsuperscript{164} They expressed a deep dissatisfaction with mainstream culture, defined for them by “reckless consumption, wealth over ideals, and economic and technological advances heedless of environmental impact.” Seeking to separate themselves from that culture by taking steps to live in a way more aware of their effect on others and the world, they did so by implementing practices from finding a job closer to home thereby reducing their commute to growing their own

\textsuperscript{160} O’Keefe, A1; “Author, Religious Scholar to Lecture, Teach at St. Bartholomew’s Church,” \textit{The Oregonian}, April 19, 1990, 3 (Lexus Nexus Academic).
\textsuperscript{161} O’Keefe, A1.
\textsuperscript{162} Michelle Cole, “Religious Leaders Seek Spiritual Link to the Earth,” \textit{The Oregonian}, 5 February, 2000, C1 (Newsbank).
\textsuperscript{163} David Ortman, quoted in Gilmore, C9.
\textsuperscript{164} Koenenn, 6D.
food to composting. The ethical and emotional significance they assigned to these choices and the “ritualization,” or “sustained patterns of symbolic action,” of their pursuit denote a spiritual quest, a “search for spiritual grounding,” as one journalist put it. Respect for nature, expressed through eco-friendly lifestyle choices, represented an integral part of this spirituality. Practitioners consciously tried to enhance their connection with nature by spending more time immersed in it, eating organic foods, gardening, and encouraging “quietness” by limiting or eliminating television and other modern distractions.

While this was a national movement, it was particularly strong in the Pacific Northwest, and many of its prophets either originated from the region or moved there. In 1975, Earnest Callenbach, resident of Northern California, published a prescient novel called Ecotopia in which the area consisting of Oregon, Washington, and Northern California seceded from the rest of the United States to form a nation focused on sustainable living and “a Zen relationship to nature,” what the New York Times later called “the novel that predicted Portland.” Gary Snyder, sometimes called the “poet laureate of deep ecology,” published numerous books throughout the 1960s, ‘70s, and ‘80s detailing his life in the Pacific Northwest and his intense connection with nature. In 1992, Janet Luhrs published the first issue of the Seattle-based quarterly newsletter Simple Living: the Journal of Voluntary Simplicity. By 1995, The New York Times published an article on the “mushrooming” phenomenon of sustainable living, citing the Pacific Northwest as its center and referencing “Americans’ growing environmental awareness” as lending power to this spiritual trend with roots in the ideologies of “Buddha, Jesus, the Puritans and Henry David Thoreau.”

As the nation as a whole has trended toward a more ecologically sustainable mindset in recent years, the voluntary simplicity and environmental activism of the Pacific Northwest has begun to seem less unusual. But in the 1980s and ‘90s, the region stood out as the originator of

166 Shibley, 159; Oldenburg, D5.
167 Kennedy, 8.
170 Oldenburg, D5.
such passionate environmentalism. Furthermore, today’s widespread environmental awareness stems largely from the economic impact of conservation, reuse, and other “green” habits, influenced heavily by the tightening of the national economy in 2008. In contrast, the Pacific Northwest’s environmentalism distinguishes itself by the spiritual connection its residents feel with nature and the moral motivations they cite for its protection. Thrift may come into play, but saving money comes second to correct relationship with the earth. Though only time will tell, it is likely that when the economic imperative for today’s “green” frenzy subsides, the Pacific Northwest will once again stand as the primary location of eco-friendly culture, and this will be due in no small part to the spiritual underpinnings of the region’s environmentalist bent.

In conclusion, the spiritual and environmental events of the last 25 years demonstrate a fusion of the New Age and environmentalist movements in the Pacific Northwest. Alternative spirituality provided an ideological intensity and endurance that enabled the environmentalist movement in the region to evolve into a dynamic and charismatic culture that has stamped itself indelibly on regional identity and national and regional politics. This culture of eco-spirituality grew out of the history of the region as a last frontier, deeply dependent on natural resource extraction and relatively devoid of institutional religious infrastructure. The perpetual importance of the environment to regional identity and to residents’ livelihoods throughout the last 200 years located mankind’s relationship to nature at the center of political, economic, and eventually spiritual debates. The environment, and usually a spiritual connection to it, became paramount in outsiders’ conceptions of the region, local concerns and political battles, and media coverage of the region, serving to cement eco-spirituality as an essential part of the Pacific Northwest’s identity. Ultimately, the development of the Pacific Northwest’s distinctive culture of nature-based spirituality is a story that speaks to the power of spirituality to affect deep-seated cultural change and forever alter the face of a region.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Mara Eller was born in San Francisco, CA and moved at age nine with her mother to southeastern Utah. She attended Vassar College, receiving a BA in Latin American Studies in 2004. After travelling in Spain and Western Europe, Mara moved to Tallahassee, FL to explore one of the distinctive cultural regions of her native country. Out of this interest, she decided to pursue a Master’s degree in American Studies at Florida State University. The religious culture of 20th-Century America immediately attracted her attentions, but it was when she started taking classes in American Religious History that her interests began to coalesce. She developed and taught a course called “Personalized Religion: The Search for Spiritual Satisfaction in American Popular Culture” that explored alternative spiritual expressions in America from the 1920s to present. As her coursework came to a close, the unique religious culture of the Pacific Northwest captured her attention and grew into this thesis. After completing her degree, Mara will be staying with her husband in Tallahassee. This fall, she will begin teaching history, literature, and writing to 7th-10th graders, and in her spare time she will continue writing about American religious culture.