



# Reckoning with History to Reimagine Land Management Columbia River Gorge Commission

June 10, 2025

aparna rajagopal (she/her)  
Cianna Carrillo Walker (she/her)

# Our work together



## DISCOVERY

Met with 10 of you to understand your perspectives and experiences



## VALUES WORKSHOP

Facilitated a session to begin building a set of shared values and community agreements



## DELIVERABLES

- Draft set of 6 values (transparency, sustainability, respect, equity, access, community)
- Draft community agreements to support you all in better working together
- Detailed report of themes from data gathering



# Agenda

**Part 1: HISTORY:** What are some important events in the histories of land use and communities in the U.S. generally, and in the Columbia River Gorge region?

**Part 2: IDEAS:** What are some of the ideas embedded in this history that continue to influence how land use management is done?

**Part 3: IMPACTS:** How have these ideas and historical events impacted Columbia River Gorge communities today, and how have they shaped the Commission's approach to land use management?

**Part 4: NOW WHAT:** How do we move forward in light of this history?



**The views presented here are those of the  
Avarna Group, and not the Columbia River Gorge  
Commission**

# Community Agreements

- **Learning and growth:** Stay humble and open to new information, experiences, and perspectives.
- **Constructive conflict:** Navigate disagreement with curiosity, compassion, and a commitment to resolution.
- **Respect:** Balance the need to honor diverse communication styles with the need to communicate with care and empathy.
- **Shared responsibility:** Support one another and recognize each other's collective role in the Commission's success.
- **Joy and purpose:** Stay connected to the passion and purpose that brings you to this work.

The background features a light blue grid of dashed lines. Overlaid on this grid are several wavy, organic lines in dark teal and light teal. Some of these lines form loops or swirls, particularly in the upper and lower quadrants of the page.

# **Part 1**

**Some historical moments related to people  
and their land relationships**



# Better Known U.S. Land History

**1849:** Department of the Interior



**1864:** Yosemite Land Grant Act



**1905:** Forest Service



**1986:** National Scenic Area Act

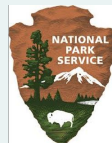


**1876:** Appalachian Mountain Club



**1862:** USDA

**1916:** National Park Service



**1933:** Civilian Conservation Corps



**1946:** Bureau of Land Manager

**1964:** The Wilderness Act

**1935:** The Wilderness Society



**1951:** The Nature Conservancy



**1812:** General Land Office



**1872:** Yellowstone National Park

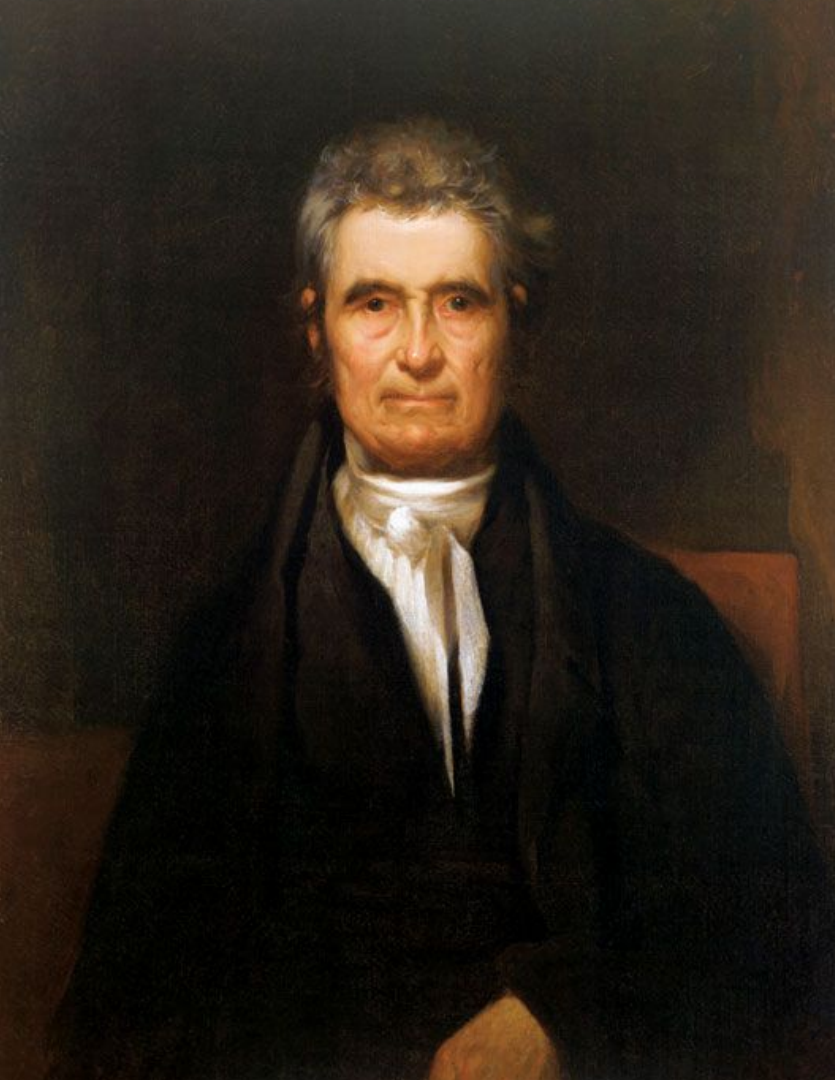


**1892:** Sierra Club  
**1894:** the Mazamas



Big feelings are ok! Take care of yourself





# 1823:

## Johnson v. M'Intosh

“The Indians were ... the rightful occupants of the soil, with ... claim to retain possession of it; . . . but their rights to complete sovereignty, as independent nations, were necessarily diminished, and . . . Discovery gave exclusive title to those who made it.”

- Chief Justice John Marshall

# 1830-55:

## Transcendental movement

Shifted how settlers thought about the land from something scary that had to be tamed to something beautiful where one could experience spiritual and aesthetic inspiration where one could get closer to the divine.



Henry David Thoreau

Ralph Waldo Emerson



Margaret Fuller

# 1850:

## Donation Land Claim Act



Samuel Thurston, First  
Congressional Delegate from  
the Oregon Territory

White men or partial Native Americans (mixed with white) who had arrived in Oregon before 1850 could legally claim 320 acres of land (640 for married couples).

As for full-blood Native people, Thurston successfully lobbied Congress to authorize the president to appoint commissioners who would negotiate treaties with Native groups "for the extinguishment of their claims to lands lying west of the Cascade Mountains."

# 1850s

Oregon treaties  
unratified, Oregon Trail  
of Tears



# 1859:

## Black Exclusion Codified in Oregon Constitution

added to the Bill of Rights, and shall be part of this constitution :

“Section ——. No free negro or mulatto, not residing in this State at the time of the adoption of this constitution, shall ever come, reside, or be within this State, or hold any real estate, or make any contract, or maintain any suit therein ; and the Legislative Assembly shall provide by penal laws for the removal by public officers of all such free negroes and mulattoes, and for their effectual exclusion from the State, and for the punishment of persons who shall bring them into the State, or employ or harbor them therein.”

This wasn't repealed until 1926;

Black exclusion language remained in the constitution until 2001

# 1862

## Homestead Act

*asc*

**HOMESTEAD.**

Land Office at *Bronnville Neb*  
*January 20<sup>th</sup> 1868.*

CERTIFICATE, } APPLICATION,  
*No. 1* } *No. 1*

It is hereby certified, That pursuant to the provisions of the act of Congress, approved  
May 20, 1862, entitled "An act to secure homesteads to actual settlers on the public domain,"

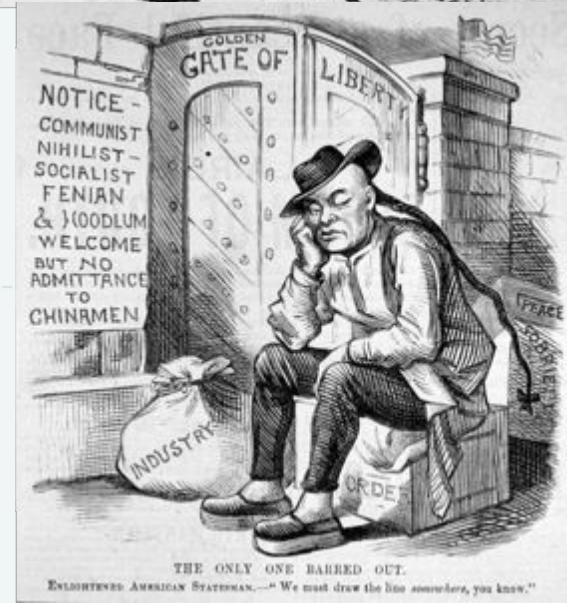
*Daniel Gruman* has  
made payment in full for *the NW 1/4 and SW 1/4 of NE 1/4* of  
Section *Twentieth (20)* in Township *fourth N*  
of Range *five (5) E* containing *160* acres.

Now, therefore, be it known, That on presentation of this Certificate to the  
COMMISSIONER OF THE GENERAL LAND OFFICE, the said *Daniel*  
*Gruman* shall be entitled to a Patent for the Tract of Land above described.

*Henry M. Atkinson* Register.

# 1882, 1924

## Chinese Exclusion & Immigration Acts



**1900s**

**Migration of Sikh  
Punjabis to Northern  
California and the PNW**



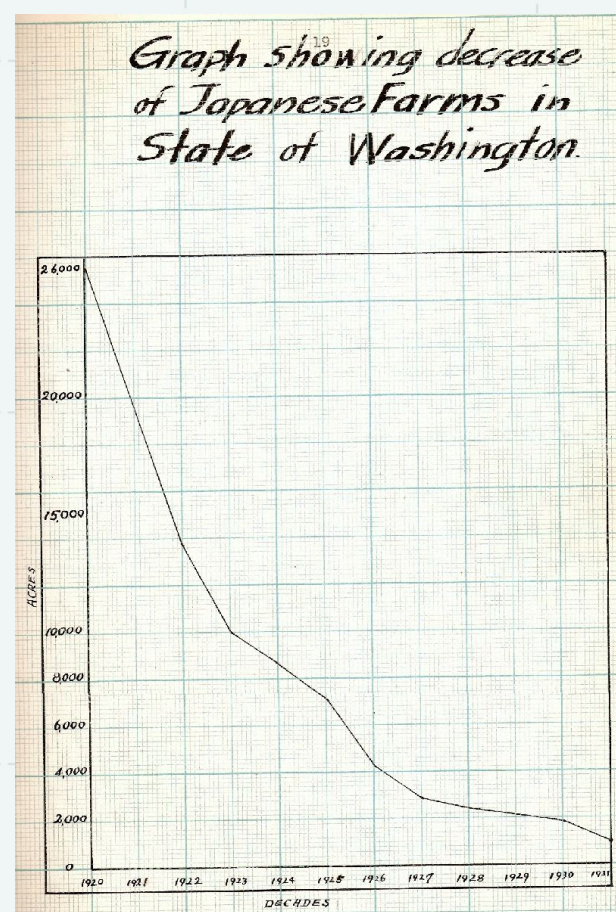
1910

Japanese immigration  
and farming in the West



# 1921, 23

**WA, OR Alien Land Laws Bar Chinese and Japanese from owning or Leasing land; South Asians follow after *Bhagath Singh* *Thind* decision**



Map created in 1926 by John Nishinoiri, UW grad student

# 1942

## Japanese internment during World War II



Women interned at the Portland Assembly Center  
(which imprisoned Japanese residents of the  
Gorge)

# 1943

**Bracero Program  
established during WWII  
to bolster the workforce  
and “orders for imported  
Mexican workers”**



## **Mexican Workers Wanted in October**

Farmers and orchardists in Washington state have placed orders for approximately 6000 imported Mexican workers for the month of October, according to reports sent to

Figure 14. A description of the demand for Mexican laborers (Source: Northwest Farm News, September 9, 1943).

# 1948

**Vanport flood destroys  
Oregon's most racially  
integrated city,  
displacing thousands  
of Black families who  
weren't warned**



# 1954

**Operation Wetback;  
largest historic mass  
deportation**



# 1960s-70s

Eminent domain used  
to displace largest  
Black community in OR  
(Albina) to build  
I5 & I84



Charles Maxey's Barbershop, which was destroyed and his family displaced during urban gentrification and displacement (1953)

# Today

## Tribes to advocate for federal recognition



Chinook Tribal Chairman Tony Johnson sings during a rally for federal recognition outside the Federal Offices in Vancouver, Washington. Credit: Amiran White

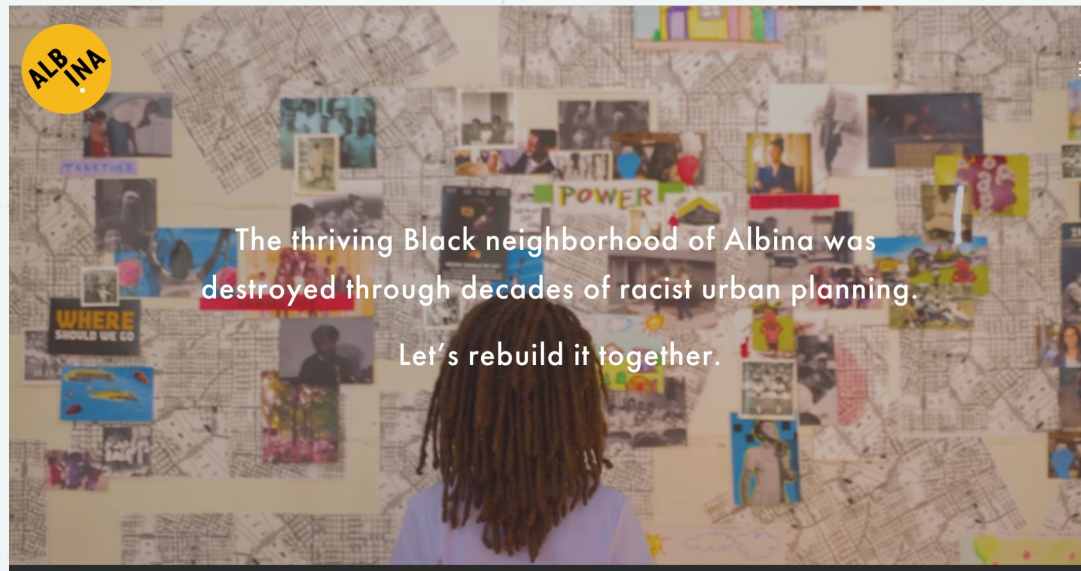
# Today

**PCUN (Forest and  
Farmworkers' Union)  
continues to support  
farmworkers**

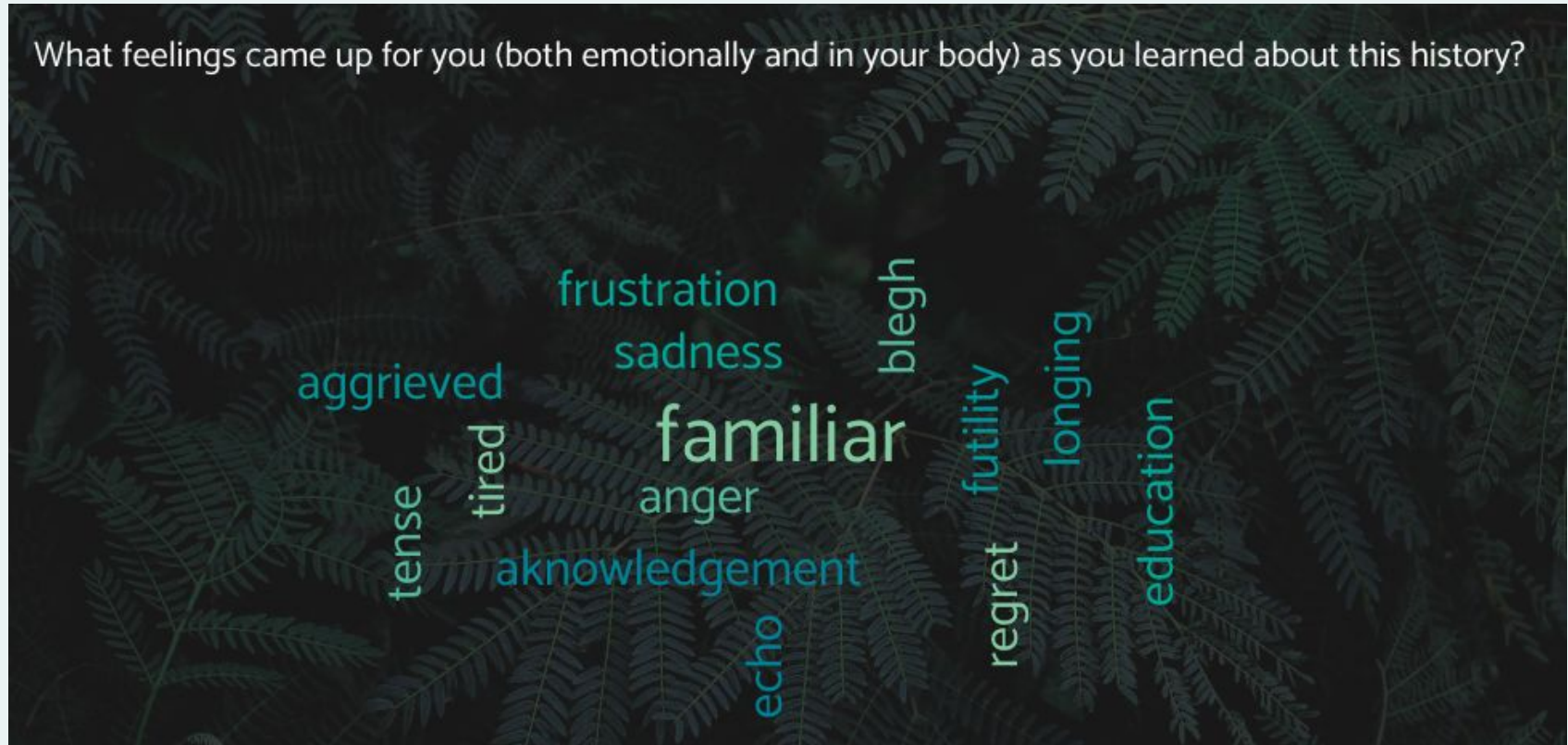


# Today

**Albina Vision Trust  
leading efforts to  
rebuild Albina**



What feelings came up for you (both emotionally and in your body) when you learned about this history and some of the ideas embedded in this history?



# Discussion:

## What other history would you add related to people and land?

- 1800s: Deportation of Chinese onto boats; pogroms
- 1860: Joseph Lane was pro-slavery; southern Democrats; his great nephew became Portland mayor and US Senator speaking out against the mistreatment of Native Americans and Black communities
- Owyhee River named after Hawaiians often pressed onto ships to stay in OR Territory
- Slays, Vietnamese immigration is evident in tourism number; anecdotally it is clear there are more people of color visiting and it's heartening to know we are making the Gorge more accessible to people outside of "White REI crowd." Mitchell Tunnel is more accessible (lower barriers)
- Treatment of Nisseis and Japanese when Japanese names were removed from honor list; incarceration as well. Some took advantage to take Japanese land; others agreed to farm land until Japanese owners returned from incarceration. There were also known safe/unsafe businesses. Historic reconciliation occurred in Hood River to honor advocates
- International narrative; historically many communities oppressed abroad were welcomed here. Nuanced understanding of history and culture and class is important.
- Difference between federal government's relationship with tribes and federal recognition; treaties with reserved rights were not honored; rights were taken; we have tribes today with extensive histories and are not recognized. Complexity of tribal relations is used as excuse not to authentically engage.
- Dams! These are due to eminent domain and have massively impacted Columbia River Natives
- History of volunteers related to CA mining and genocide is obscured because people involved were condemned, but when they went to get pensions, history was rewritten.
- Boarding schools: intention to remove land relationship, intern and abuse children, break passage of cultural practices and familial teachings; intersection with military history. Federal government has engaged with boarding school recognition, but not as evident.
- In Albina; blues and jazz was part of the eminent domain history
- The idea of Native people being occupiers and less than human has also been used in land management
- Not having these histories visible is a way to silence the truth

**Part 2:**  
**What ideas are embedded in this  
history?**

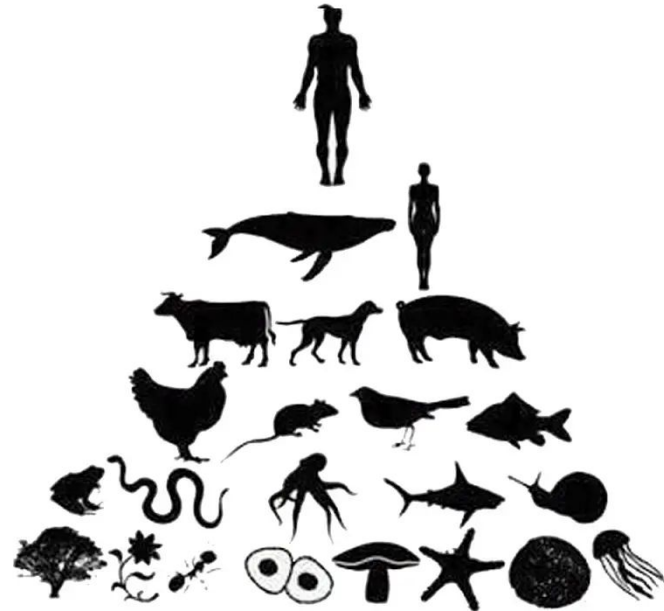


Humans are separate from and have dominion over land, water, and wildlife

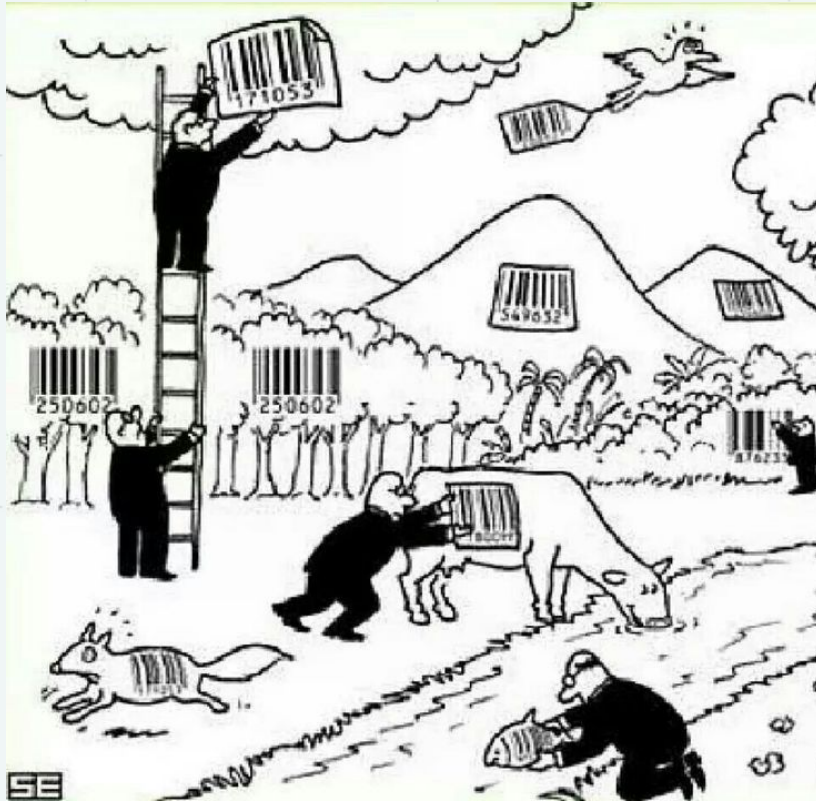
# ECO



# EGO



# Land is a thing, a natural resource to be exploited and commodified in service of humans (versus kin and part of an interconnected web of relationships)



Those whom my ancestors called relatives were renamed natural resources . . . In the settler mind, land was property, real estate, capital, or natural resources. But to our people, it was everything: identity, the connection to our ancestors, the home of our nonhuman kinfolk, our pharmacy, our library, the source of all that sustained us. Our lands were where our responsibility to the world was enacted, sacred ground. It belonged to itself; it was a gift, not a commodity, so it could never be bought or sold.

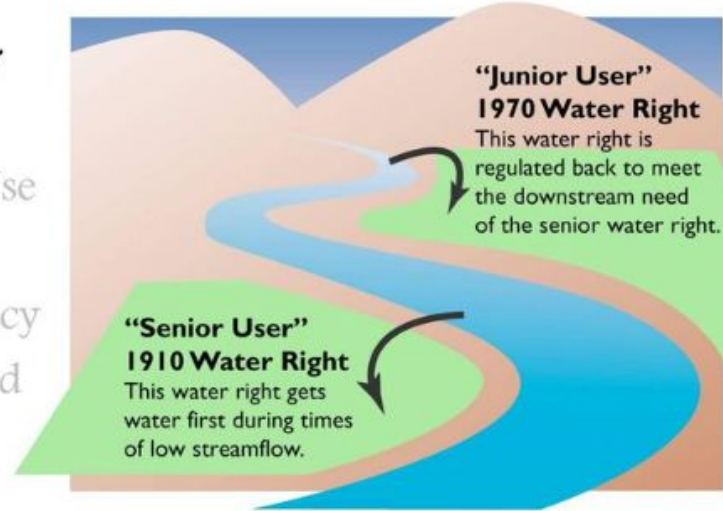
- Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*



Prior appropriation: the first in time have the first in right to the land and water (except Indigenous peoples)

*Water Code:*

1. Beneficial Use
2. Priority
3. Appurtenancy
4. Must be used



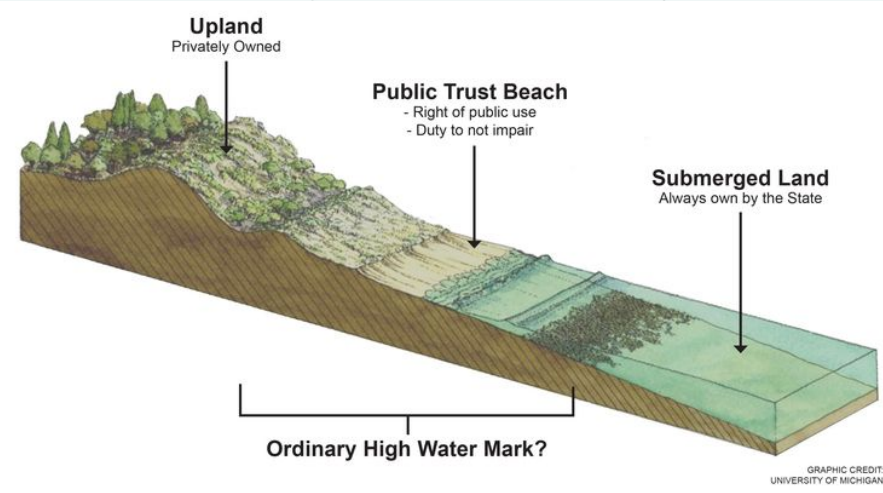
Junior water rights are regulated to meet the entitlement of senior water rights.

*prior appropriation:  
“first in time, first in right”*

# (Some) people know what is best for land, water, and wildlife



**Human Exceptionalism**



**Public Trust doctrine**  
(sovereign knows what's best)

**Eminent domain**  
(the government can take private land for public interest)

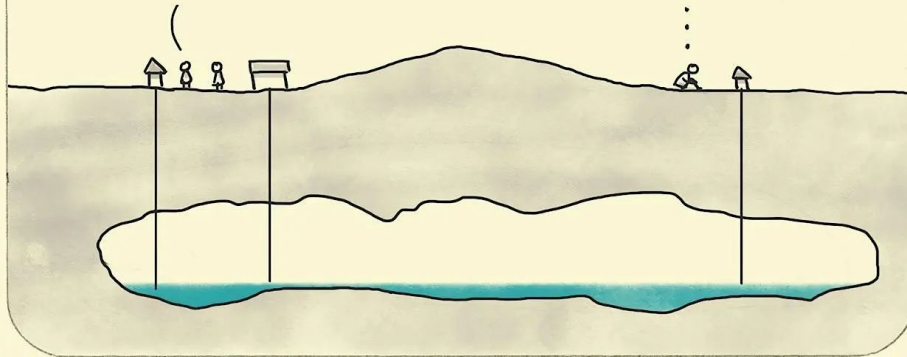
# (Other) people cannot be trusted to care for land, water, and wildlife

## THE TRAGEDY OF THE COMMONS

WHEN SHORT-TERM SELF-INTEREST LEADS TO TRAGEDY FOR ALL

WATER BELONGS TO  
ANYONE. I TAKE AS  
MUCH AS I WANT

SEEMS THERE'S LESS  
AND LESS THESE DAYS



sketchplanations

Garrett Hardin, *Tragedy of the Commons* (1968)



Too many visitors = categoric harm to natural ecosystems

**Opinion: We're Loving Our National Parks to Death**

A reservation system could help the struggling national parks system manage crowds and protect our public lands from overuse, according to this article.

NEWS

**LOVING OUR PARKS TO DEATH**

By Robert Cross and Tribune Staff Writer

**'We can accidentally love our parks to death': How to protect crowded national parks**

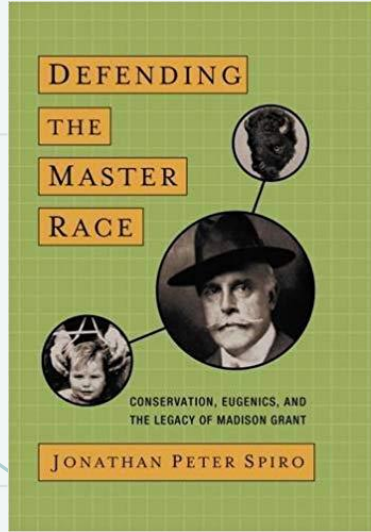
The best way to care for land, water, and wildlife is to restrict access or keep people out entirely

## Fortress Conservation

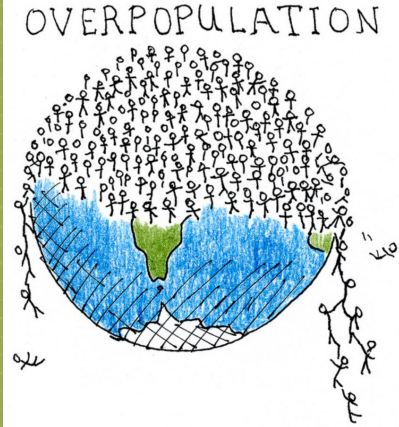
- Fences
- Firearms
- Fees



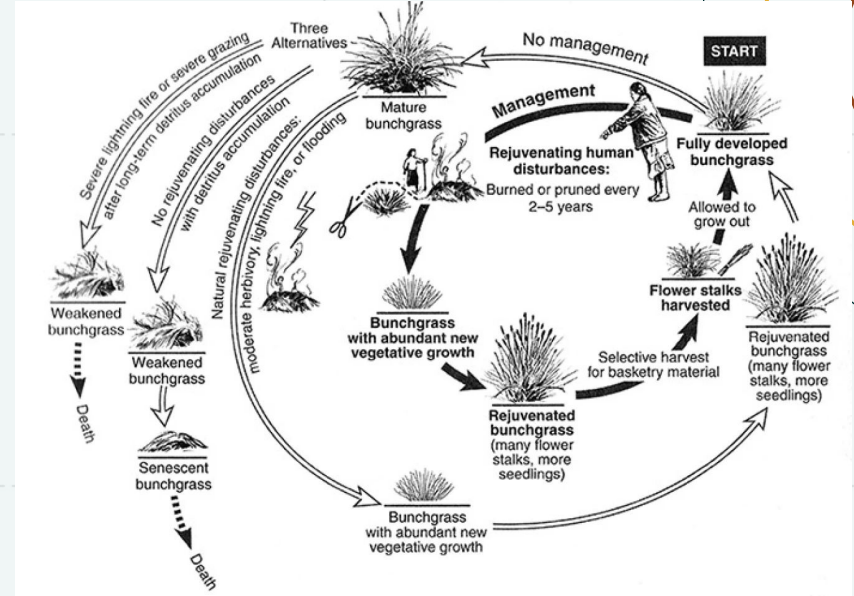
# Land, water, and wildlife should be managed through Western science (rather than Indigenous and community knowledge)



**Eugenics**  
Madison Grant,  
*Defending the Master Race*



**Myth of Overpopulation**  
Paul Ehrlich, *Population Bomb*



Traditional deergrass management built on natural processes that resulted in healthier plants. | Illustration from: *Tending the Wild* by M. Kat Anderson

People should only relate to  
land, water, and wildlife in certain ways



Image by jcomp on freepick



Nature should be valued for its scenic and awe-inspiring values

Natural Beauty & Geography - Columbia River Gorge

rugged breathtaking  
scenic  
wild  
majestic  
expansive  
towering dramatic  
lush  
pristine  
verdant  
windswept  
cascading

IDEAS

# Wildlife and recreation are more important than ancestral Indigenous land connections

## Climbing Routes Closed for Nesting Falcons

**NORTH FACE** climbing routes are CLOSED.  
Closure effective on **May 30, 2024**.

Climbers should be aware of territorial aggression from nesting falcons. If falcons exhibit defensive or distressed behavior, descend off the Tower at the next safe opportunity and report the incident to a ranger or other park employee.



Closure will be strictly enforced pursuant to 36 CFR §1.5(f). Violation of closure can result in a mandatory court appearance and/or a fine.

Routes including and between Adrenaline Surfer and Daredevil Index are CLOSED.

Ask a ranger for more information.

List of Closed Routes

## Devils Tower officials implement a voluntary climbing closure to honor Indigenous peoples

Wyoming Public Radio | By Hugh Cook

Published June 5, 2023 at 2:13 PM MDT





## **Part 3**

**How does this history impact your work?**

## How do these ideas show up in CRGC's approaches, tools, and outcomes?

- **Humans are separate** from and have dominion over land, water, and wildlife
- **Land is a thing**, a natural resource to be exploited and commodified in service of humans (versus kin and part of an interconnected web of relationships)
- Prior appropriation: **the first in time have the first in right** to the land and water (except Indigenous peoples)
- **(Some) people know what is best** for land, water, and wildlife
- **(Other) people cannot be trusted** to care for land, water, and wildlife
- **Too many visitors = categoric harm** to natural ecosystems
- **The best way to care** for land, water, and wildlife **is to restrict** access or keep people out entirely
- Land, water, and wildlife should be managed through **Western science** (rather than Indigenous and community knowledge)
- People should only **relate** to land, water, and wildlife **in certain ways**
- **Nature** should only be **valued for its scenic and awe-inspiring values**
- Wildlife and **recreation are more important than ancestral Indigenous land connections**

The background features a light gray dashed grid. Overlaid on this grid are several wavy, organic lines in black and light blue. Some of these lines form loops or swirls, particularly in the upper and lower quadrants. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern.

## Part 4

**Now what: How do we move forward in light  
of this history?**