

From Forest to Field: Nature, the State, and the New Deal in Rural Wisconsin

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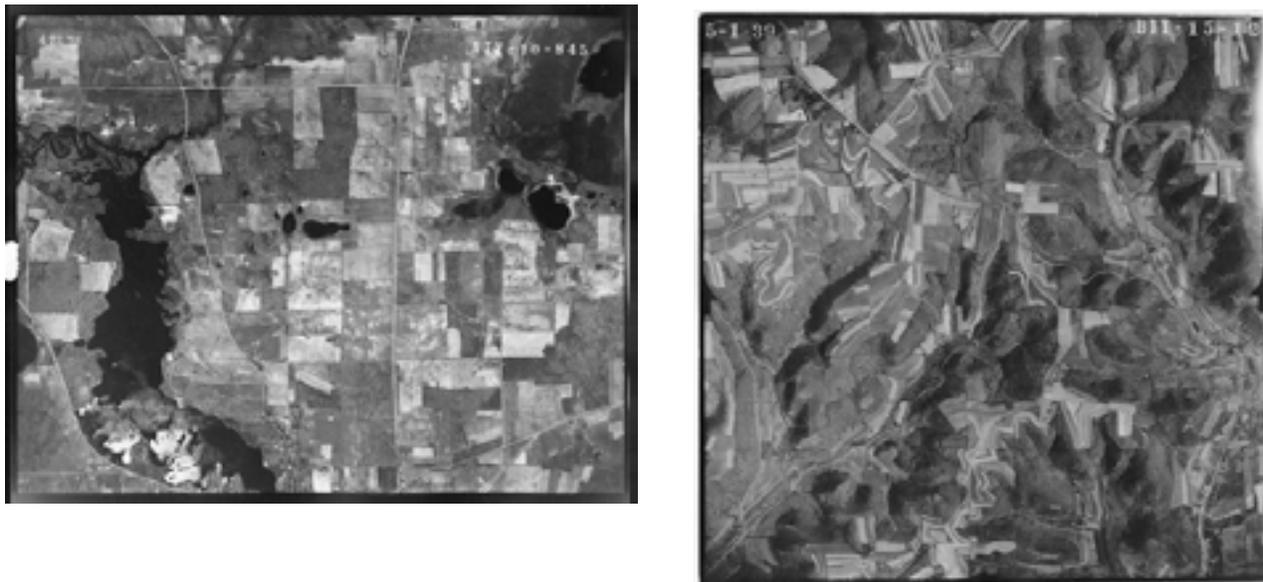


Figure 1: An aerial photo of the outskirts of Montello in Marquette County taken in 1938 (left), and an aerial photo of the outskirts of Coon Valley in Vernon County (right) illustrate the topographical and land use differences between the areas; Left: United States Department of Agriculture, “Marquette County Wisconsin 1938, AIX-10-845” [aerial photograph] 1:20,000, Salt Lake City UT: Aerial Photography Field Office, 1938; Right: United States Department of Agriculture, “Vernon County Wisconsin 1938, B11-15-12” [aerial photograph] 1:20,000, Salt Lake City UT: Aerial Photography Field Office, 1939. Courtesy of Wisconsin Historic Aerial Image Finder.

The Great Depression in America prompted massive upheavals in citizens’ relationships with employers, aid giving institutions, and the government. The Depression’s impacts were especially severe for the rural populace, which at the time constituted 47.1% of Wisconsin’s 2,939,006 residents.¹ Franklin Roosevelt’s administration was acutely aware of the plight of rural America during the Depression and provided economic relief through legislation such as the Agricultural Adjustment Act and Rural Electrification Act. Though these policies resulted in significant landscape and economic changes in rural Wisconsin, they were reflective of an even more dramatic shift in rural Wisconsinites’ relationships with both nature and the federal government. Specifically, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) and Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) drove a political shift in the Driftless Region of the state. They helped build a new rural-Midwestern Democratic coalition that was not averse to a large federal government regulating markets and giving aid. Additionally, the CCC helped to systematize the philosophies of Nature² that linked human and natural welfare, thus propelling the popular rise of ecology.

This essay seeks to explain how and why these ideological changes occurred and will only hint at their complex implications, which stretch much further into the modern era. In so doing it will first contrast changing attitudes towards the federal government between the Driftless and Central Sands Regions of Wisconsin (figure 2), focusing on agricultural and rural relief programs. Second, it will examine the role of the CCC in transforming ideas of Nature through conflicts between governmental, popular, and scientific views of conservation. Ultimately, this paper aims to locate Wisconsin in the debates around conservation and the welfare state, as well as to show the implications of these disputes, both statewide and nationally.

We shall begin our narrative with a general sketch of the national and statewide socio-economic contexts that fashioned the New Deal, a necessary prelude to fully comprehend its impacts. The Great Depression struck rural America much earlier than the urban areas, beginning in 1920 with a price slump in agricultural commodities as a result of post-World War I overproduction.³ During that era, 49% of the country met the census definition of rural, a statistic that is skewed by the more urbanized Northeast region.⁴ The dominant form of economic activity in rural

¹ U.S. Census of Population, *Urban and Rural Population: 1900 to 1990* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1995).

² When I refer to Nature with a capital ‘N’ I am referring to ideas of wilderness and the environment.

³ R. Douglas Hurt, *Problems of Plenty: American Agriculture in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 42-45.

⁴ U.S. Census of Population: *Urban and Rural Population*.

America differed countrywide, but for the most part constituted various forms of agriculture or forest cultivation; regionally, cotton dominated the South, grain cultivation the Midwest and West, vegetable production on the West Coast, and dairying in the upper Midwest.⁵ These cash crops accordingly impacted the severity of the Depression by locale. The South, with massively depressed cotton prices, a large percentage of sharecroppers and a population that was 65.9% rural, felt some of the harshest impacts.⁶ The Depression was so severe in the South that a section of the 1933 Agricultural Adjustment Act was devoted solely to cotton, which was not the case for any other commodity.⁷ The rest of the country, though not in as dire straights as the South, was still faring poorly and the Agricultural Adjustment Act served the purpose of much needed support.

The Agricultural Adjustment Act was a key piece of relief legislation proposed in Roosevelt's "Hundred Days," which was signed into law on May 12, 1933. The act created the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA), an organization whose purpose was "to establish and maintain such a balance between production and consumption of agricultural commodities and [...] give to such commodities sold by farmers their pre-war purchasing power."⁸ In practice, this objective resulted in an attempt to reduce the amount of land in production by paying farmers not to plant seven basic commodities – cotton, wheat, corn, rice, tobacco, hogs, and dairy – using revenue generated by a tax on commodity processors. A radical departure from previous agricultural policy, the AAA (unconstitutionally) placed the government in the role of directly paying farmers to alter production choices instead of repeating prior attempts to manipulate tariffs or calling for voluntary production controls.⁹ The act was born within the ideological framework of progressive principles of societal and land use planning, and with good reason. Many of the policymakers who were central in forming the AAA, such as Lewis C. Gray, studied at University of Wisconsin–Madison's Land Economics Department under progressive professors like Richard Ely, Henry Taylor, and Benjamin H. Hibbard.¹⁰ Because of this, the AAA was also formed with a distinctively Midwestern worldview, which led it to favor successful commodity growers and displace many sharecroppers and tenant farmers.¹¹ While detrimental in the South, this policy actually proved fairly successful in Wisconsin, as many of the farmers were landowning cultivators.

The most significant impacts of the AAA in Wisconsin, however, were not brought to bear on the physical landscape or in agricultural markets, but rather in the ideological realm, by eroding rural suspicions towards the federal government. Distrust of the state, and similarly of scientific experts, was embodied by the Wisconsin Society for Equity (WSE), an organization founded in 1903 whose membership peaked in the twenties. It was fairly ambivalent towards government, but included members who had a strong dislike of the UW–Madison College of Agriculture's scientific "Book Farming."¹² The rural distaste for a controlling government is also apparent in state voting records. In Vernon County, the conservative Republican Warren Harding won the 1920 election with an 89% majority. Likewise, in Marquette County, Harding took the election with a 79% majority.¹³ Harding's landslide victories were in character with rural Wisconsin's voting record. Though Wisconsin was a Republican stronghold, rural Wisconsinites typically supported populist, progressive Lafollette Republicanism, which, granted, was still grassroots-based.

With the onset of the Depression, this aversion towards government began to deteriorate as rural Wisconsinites looked to government to solve their economic distress. Though this shift was evident across Wisconsin, it differed



Figure 2: Map of Wisconsin's Driftless and Central Sands Regions. Vernon and Marquette Counties are illustrated as well. Courtesy of Colin Taylor Higgins.

⁵ U.S. Census of Agriculture 1935: Chapter VI: *Crops, Field Crops, Fruits, and Vegetables*. Washington D.C: Government Printing Office, 1939.

⁶ Hurt, *Problems of Plenty*, 68.

⁷ Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, H.R. 3835, 73rd Congress (1933).

⁸ Conference Report to accompany the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, H.R. 3835, 73rd Congress (1933).

⁹ Hurt, *Problems of Plenty*, 68-71.

¹⁰ Jess Gilbert and Ellan Baker, "Wisconsin Economists and New Deal Agricultural Policy: The Legacy of Progressive Professors," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 80, no. 4 (Summer, 1997): 304.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 284.

¹² Paul W. Glad, *The History of Wisconsin Volume V: War, a New Era, and Depression, 1914-1940* (Stevens Point, WI: Worzalla Publishing Company, 1990), 175-176.

¹³ James R. Donoghue, *How Wisconsin Voted: 1848 – 1972* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Institute of Governmental Affairs, 1975), 73.

markedly between the Driftless and Central Sands Regions of the state. By and large, the Driftless Region viewed the federal government more favorably than did the Central Sands. The key driver of this desire for government involvement, as we shall see, was the relative severity of the Depression, especially with regard to agricultural markets. The variance in markets resulted from regional differences in crop production, since some commodity prices declined more steeply than others.

Economic hardship took a large toll on farmers in Wisconsin, with statewide farm ownership dropping by 15,000 families (roughly 9%) between 1925 and 1930.¹⁴ Importantly, declining farm ownership was not distributed evenly across the state. Vernon County's farm tenure decreased 10% over this period, while Marquette County's fell only 6%.¹⁵ Though rates were high in both counties, Vernon County's situation was comparatively worse since it had triple the population of Marquette County, and thus more families losing their farms. This further increased Vernon County's need for aid on a scale that could not be provided on a state level. These figures likewise help explain why Marquette County was not receiving any federal relief in 1935, but do not divulge any factors for its reduced farm loss.¹⁶

Agricultural practices underlay the disparity in farm ownership between the two counties during this period. Vernon County's top farm products in the thirties were dairy, tobacco, corn, and oats, whereas the top crops in Marquette County were corn, potatoes, oats, and rye.¹⁷ Of these crops, the AAA directed its efforts at only three – dairy, tobacco, and corn – all of which were more vital to Vernon County's economy than Marquette County's. The AAA targeted commodities with the most intense price slumps. Thus we can see that Vernon County's economy suffered more from the agricultural depression, as it relied largely on AAA-targeted cash crops. Marquette County relied on other commodities partially because of its residents' planting choices, but these were mostly influenced by the slightly shorter growing season and sandier soils of the region.¹⁸ By shaping chief agricultural products, the environmental factors of soil and climate affected the degree with which the federal government involved itself in the agricultural markets of the county.

Furthermore, the comparatively larger dairy economy of Vernon County – a product of hilly topography unfriendly towards grain cultivation – allowed farmers to have increased input on how the AAA operated, since the dairy branch of the AAA had one of the most democratic bureaucracies.¹⁹ Finally, Vernon County had a larger population, which increased the sheer amount of federal aid entering the county. To reiterate, the volume of aid reaching each county hinged upon the local severity of the depression, which was influenced in many ways by each counties' physical environment.

In addition to the AAA, the federal government made pathways into rural Wisconsin through public works projects, especially through the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). At its height, the CCC operated 45 different camps throughout the state in 1938. Many of the camps, however, were located in the north and west.²⁰ This resulted largely from federal conservation priorities favoring soil and forest management. The CCC never had a camp in Marquette County, as its flat topography, sandy soils, and reliance on agriculture did not result in the soil and forest degradation problems present in the north and west of the state. This was yet another way the county remained removed from federal operations, stemming mainly from geography and conservation ideals. Vernon County, on the other hand, housed the nation's first soil conservation site in the Coon Creek Watershed in 1934.²¹ The steep unglaciated hills combined with thin soil, numerous streams, and its residents' row-crop style farming made the Coon Creek Watershed ripe for soil erosion.²²

The Coon Creek project was exemplary of many CCC projects, involving the CCC boys working as federal employees, with UW–Madison experts and local farmers to control the landscape and conserve the soils. This involvement, though not originally welcomed, ended up spreading rapidly throughout the valley.²³ It not only yielded a massive shift in land use, changing the farming practices to contour plowing and foresting the steep slopes (figure 3),

¹⁴ U.S. Census of Agriculture – Wisconsin, 1935: *Farms, Farm Acreage and Value, by Color and by Tenure*. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939.

¹⁵ Ibid. Calculated by taking the difference in the population of full owners between 1930 and 1935 and then dividing by the 1930 population.

¹⁶ Ellis Lore Kirkpatrick and Agnes M. Boynton, *Wisconsin's Human and Physical Resources: A Graphic Presentation of Conditions Affecting Rural Rehabilitation* (Madison, WI: Research Station, Resettlement Administration Region II, 1936), 23-24.

¹⁷ U.S. Census of Agriculture – Wisconsin 1935: *County Tables*. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939.

¹⁸ Wisconsin Cartographers Guild, *Wisconsin's Past and Present: A Historical Atlas* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 43.

¹⁹ Hurt, *Problems of Plenty*, 80.

²⁰ Glad, *The History of Wisconsin Volume V*, 494; Civilian Conservation Corps, U.S. Sparta District, WI, *Sparta CCC District, Sixth Corp Area Annual* (Baton Rouge, LA: Direct Advertising Co., 1937), 1.

²¹ Neil M. Maher, *Nature's New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press), 119-123.

²² John B. Marks, "Land Use and Plant Succession in Coon Valley, Wisconsin," *Ecological Monographs* 12, no. 2 (April 1942): 115; Aldo Leopold, "Coon Valley: An Adventure in Cooperative Conservation," *American Forests* 41, no. 5 (May 1935): 206.

²³ Leopold, "Coon Valley," 207-208.

but also made formerly private land a public resource.²⁴ It did this by involving private landowners in practices conserving shared resources, linking each individual farmer's agricultural practices to the commons, which in this case were the soils and streams. Along with slowing erosion, this program ultimately benefited the farmers' crop yields and property values, and thus economic standing.²⁵ Because of its large successes and benefit to farmers, the Coon Creek project combined with the agricultural aid of the New Deal to create regional support for the Democratic Party. Moreover, the nature soil conservation helped lead to an acceptance of university experts who were historically seen as suspicious figures in rural Wisconsin. This manifests itself most clearly through the Coon Creek community's continued involvement with federal soil conservation services, and its 1939 decision, passed by popular vote, to become a federal soil conservation district.²⁶ Additionally, the electoral behaviors of Coon Creek and thus Vernon County's residents evidence this change. Though Vernon County did not in fact vote for Roosevelt in the 1940 or 1944 elections, the increased federal presence resulted in an increased Democratic constituency in the area. The 1940 and 1944 elections saw Roosevelt receive 46% and 49% of the popular vote, contrasted to the county's overwhelmingly Republican trends in the twenties and to the 28% and 27% Democratic vote in Marquette County.²⁷ While this inter-county partisan polarization did occur, Wisconsin held a unique political position because of Robert La Follette's legacy. Though the counties had large disparities in their presidential voting patterns during this era, they both overwhelmingly elected Progressive party candidates for Senate.²⁸



Figure 3: The photo on the left is the town of Coon Valley in 1934, with a CCC camp in the middle of the photo. The hills in the background illustrate the extent to which farmers were cultivating on very steep slopes. Also illustrated is the strip cropping on the hills.²⁹ The picture on the right is an areal photo of Coon Valley in 1955. The contour plowing promoted by the Soil Conservation Service, which continues to this day, is visible in this picture.³⁰

Nonetheless, by engaging rural Wisconsin in locally specific and economically beneficial ways, the New Deal was able to address the rural community's needs and bring about a favorable view of federal government and the Democratic Party. Vernon and Marquette counties provide a good illustration of this contrast. Vernon County experienced large amounts of aid from the government in the form of subsidies and public work that noticeably improved the quality of life. Marquette County on the other hand did not experience either of the beneficial federal involvements. The changes in party support were mostly influenced [by the economic benefits that rural Wisconsinites received from the government, and only pertained to presidential elections. The material consequences of this shifting acceptance of the state are illustrated in the ways that the counties voted in the 1940 and 1944 elections and split along geographical boundaries. This political division is one that would have persisting consequences, both electorally and ecologically.

Environmental changes certainly occurred in Wisconsin during the Great Depression, especially as a result of CCC-style conservation. These significant changes were also drivers of larger shifts in people's concepts of Nature. The ideological changes transpired in three broadly defined arenas: the governmental arena, the scientific arena, and

²⁴ Maher, *Nature's New Deal*, 124-125.

²⁵ Maher, *Nature's New Deal*, 128.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 131. Admittedly, another reason for this was likely the access to federal funds but the regulation by locals as opposed to bureaucrats.

²⁷ Percentages calculated from Donoghue, *How Wisconsin Voted*, 74.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁹ Unknown, *A Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) Encampment in Coon Valley, Wisconsin 8/19/34, 1934*, [Database on-line] (USDA – NRCS, accessed April 9, 2013); available photogallery.usda.nrcs.gov, image ID NRCSWI01006.tif

³⁰ Irwin C. Cole, *An Areal View of Farmland in Coon Valley Wisconsin, 1955*, [Database on-line] (USDA – NRCS, accessed April 9, 2013); available photogallery.usda.nrcs.gov, image ID NRCSWI01002.tif

the popular culture arena. Though each field influenced the other to some degree in the period before WWII, their interaction became particularly important in creating the postwar environmental movement. Because of the entanglement of viewpoints, it is difficult to directly follow the changes in ideas of Nature on a specific, statewide level over the Great Depression.

To properly understand changes in attitudes towards Nature, a philosophical context for New Deal conservation policy is necessary, as the policies had progressive ideals at their heart. The AAA, as previously discussed, was influenced heavily by the progressive UW–Madison Land Economics Department. The CCC, however, had much less glaring progressive ties. Though still an issue of debate, the corps' conception was undoubtedly influenced by Franklin Delano Roosevelt's (FDR) values. His beliefs, familiar to the world of environmental thought, harkened back to the turn of the century. Roosevelt's views generally followed the philosophy of progressive forester Gifford Pinchot in providing "the greatest good for the greatest number in the long run."³¹ Pinchot was the first chief of the U.S. Forest Service from 1905 to 1910 and advocated for the scientific conservation of forest resources. Pinchot, like many progressive conservationists, conceptualized the natural world as composed of resources. A utilitarian, he was not opposed to the harvesting of these natural resources for human use, but rather opposed to their unscientific – synonymous, he would say, with unwise – use. We may note that these views have humans at the center.

The CCC, too, operated within this anthropocentric framework, and promoted itself in a 1941 publication as fighting "a war on unemployment and a war on natural disorder."³² Two ideals central to the CCC's predilections are evident in the pamphlet's phrasing. First, the militaristic rhetoric illustrates that the Roosevelt administration viewed unemployment as a national security issue. More relevant to this paper, the rhetoric applied equally to natural disorder. From this language, two fundamental Depression era ideals of nature can be gleaned. Most clearly manifested is the Promethean ideal of human superiority to nature, melded with Pinchot's progressive quest for efficiency and scientific improvement of nature.³³ An environmental construct remaining from the propaganda of the WWI Committee on Public Information is also evident. This paradigm portrayed nature as savage and disorderly, so as to transform killing from a moral into a natural issue.³⁴ These two constructs resulted in the CCC's attempt to provide order to nature and had tangible consequences. The CCC delivered this stability by fighting forest fires, stocking fisheries, damming rivers, controlling tree insect pests, and managing mosquitos, the last requiring newly developed organic pesticides.³⁵

The second essential belief demonstrated by the CCC in their publication is the linkage of human and natural resources. This idea, too, is rooted in early twentieth century progressivism with strands tracing back to eighteenth century Jeffersonian ideals. Exemplified by late nineteenth century urban planner Frederick Law Olmstead, this view asserts that unindustrialized environments created model citizens; Olmstead's proposition for an ideal society was one in which Nature and town were synthesized, and he created the conceptual framework for the suburb.³⁶ Moreover, President Theodore Roosevelt held a similar ideal, that of "the strenuous life," whereby men, and thus the nation, get their vigor from time in the wilderness.³⁷ Olmsteadian and Rooseveltian lines of logic both linked a non-urban environment with the creation of the ideal American citizen and are examples of the deeply engrained national agrarian myth that romanticizes independent farmers as the source of American democracy.³⁸ The echoes of this ideology are also seen in the CCC. This is because FDR weaved the progressive version of the romantic agrarian myth into Pinchot-style conservation to form a concrete program to solve the nation's unemployment crisis. In so doing, he linked human to natural welfare while paradoxically expanding government and appealing to the Jeffersonian cultural currents of the agrarian myth.

Though the philosophical underpinnings of the CCC were important, popular views were more integral to the resulting change. Many Wisconsinites during this time period shared views of nature with the Roosevelt administration, but with some nuances. The predominant view of nature in Depression-era Wisconsin was of people civilizing a savage nature. A 1936 article in the *Wisconsin State Journal* about Monroe, Wisconsin, writes "starved in a soil made sterile by too much usage [...] and tortured by drouths [*sic*] these industrious, thrifty Swiss were hard put to make a bare subsistence."³⁹ Likewise, an article in the *La Crosse Tribune* from two years earlier provides a scenic description

³¹ Maher, *Nature's New Deal*, 20–27.

³² Civilian Conservation Corps, *The CCC at Work: A Story of 2,500,000 Young Men* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1941), 30.

³³ Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 267.

³⁴ Edmund Russell, *War and Nature: Fighting Humans and Insects with Chemicals from World War I to Silent Spring* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 46.

³⁵ National Association of Civilian Conservation Corps Alumni (NACC), *Civilian Conservation Corps: The way we remember it 1933-1942* (Kentucky: Turner Publishing Company, 1990), 10.

³⁶ In fact, he planned one of the first suburbs in Riverside, IL. For a more in-depth discussion of this see: Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of The United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 79–82.

³⁷ Maher, *Nature's New Deal*, 32–33.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 158.

³⁹ State Journal News Service, "Nature's Whim Ruined a Crop and Started a Five Million Dollar Industry," *Wisconsin State Journal*, February 09, 1936. Accessed online at www.wisconsinhistory.org, on April 10, 2013.

of the environment and then proceeds to describe the village of Coon Valley as “entrapped as in a Kettle,” continuing with “there seems to be no escape [except] for one winding road.”⁴⁰ These articles, though from different areas of Wisconsin, both present a menacing and unforgiving nature that with human industriousness has been made more livable. This mindset taps at once into the agrarian myth and the frontier myth of wilderness. In short, the frontier myth romanticizes American frontier life, and most important, sets up a boundary between civilization and wilderness.⁴¹ The CCC contained many ideals of the frontier myth of wilderness as well, both in its advertisements and in its aims to “help more people enjoy the most awe inspiring scenery in the world.”⁴²

There was, nonetheless, a primary divergence between public and governmental imaginings of nature. The government believed in a more progressive form of conserving resources – both human and natural – so it focused conservation efforts on soil, forests, and national parks. However, Wisconsin’s rural population used nature to make a living and was more concerned with making the land profitable and less about conserving resources. Though these goals were sometimes reconcilable, as in the case of soil conservation, they set a precedent of people conserving resources only when it was in their economic interest.⁴³ Additionally, both the governmental and public views were predicated upon humans controlling nature, a view echoing the calls of Pinchot-style conservation, and tracing their way back to early Christian doctrine and the ancient Greek myth of Prometheus.

Though, by and large, progressive conservation was the era’s dominant ideology, there was pushback against this viewpoint. This dissent stemmed from Thoreau’s romantic views of nature and the preservationism of John Muir. This biocentric perspective was profoundly opposed to the anthropocentric view of nature, and maintained that the natural economy was not created exclusively for man’s benefit.⁴⁴ This biocentric understanding combined with the burgeoning science of ecology to form a field that was more than just natural resource management, an idea that was spearheaded by Aldo Leopold.

Though Leopold did not create this new ideology of a combined conservationist and preservationist ecology, he was certainly one of the most ardent and most visible advocates. Leopold was a forester by training, going to the progressive Yale School of Forestry and working in Pinchot’s forest service. At this point, he subscribed to the progressive conservation mindset and viewed nature as a resource. In his book *Game Management*, he wrote “game management produces a crop by controlling the environmental factors which hold down the natural increase, or productivity, of the seed stock.”⁴⁵ The goal he sought, as articulated in this book, was to make nature more efficient at producing game for humans. Though published in 1933, the book was the product of his earlier days in New Mexico’s Gila Forest, and by 1934 he became increasingly uncomfortable with some of his written ideas.⁴⁶

The discomfort with progressive conservation that Leopold began to feel was influenced by his experiences with the CCC. Leopold moved to Wisconsin in 1924, eventually becoming a professor at UW–Madison and working with the CCC in Coon Valley. In his essay “Conservation Economics,” a lecture ironically first given at the Taylor-Hibbard Economics Club, he was critical of the CCC’s progressive conservation. Mentioning “the ecological and esthetic limitations of ‘scientific’ technology,” he goes on to critique the CCC’s inability to integrate the multiple aspects of conservation, instead taking a “single-track approach.” He points out the flaws in this approach with an example of Congress “[taxing] duck hunters to restore the marshes which its own agents have caused to be drained.”⁴⁷ Though his remarks may be hyperbolic, they illustrate an important shift in his opinion away from progressive conservation. Leopold began to see the importance of viewing ecological phenomena in a systemic light, and not as atomized factors. Implicit in this strain of thought is the fusion of Muir’s breed of biocentric naturalism to resource conservation. Additionally, Leopold was critiquing the placement of economic value on individual aspects of nature without looking at the systemic consequences. This lecture was a watershed moment for Leopold’s career, as it made visible the new systemic view he would continue to apply to nature, which would profoundly influence future ecological thought. It was mainly through his experiences partaking in and watching the implications of New Deal progressive conservation that he developed these strong critiques and began to look towards a new view of nature. It was thus the dissent that resulted from the CCC’s actions, particularly those in Wisconsin, which planted the seeds for a new facet of environmental thought.

⁴⁰ Mrs. Edwin Evans, “Coon Valley Lies in the Heart of a Great Watershed, ‘entrapped as in a kettle,’” *La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press*, February 09, 1934. Accessed online at www.wisconsinhistory.org, on April 10, 2013.

⁴¹ William Cronon, *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995), 73-75.

⁴² Civilian Conservation Corps, *The CCC at Work* (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1941), 54.

⁴³ Sarah T. Phillips, *This Land This Nation: Conservation, Rural America, and the New Deal* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 9-11.

⁴⁴ Worster, *Nature’s Economy*, 185.

⁴⁵ Aldo Leopold, *Game Management* (New York: Scribner, 1933), 21.

⁴⁶ Worster, *Nature’s Economy*, 284-85.

⁴⁷ Aldo Leopold, “Conservation Economics,” *Journal of Forestry* 32, no. 5 (May 1934): 540-541

While Leopold's addition to ecology laid important groundwork for the postwar environmental movement, he was only one expert – not representative of society-at-large. The mass acceptance of new ecological thought also stemmed from the CCC and federal government. The corps made millions of trails in the new federally owned national parks, which, combined with the miles of roads they laid, allowed for democratic access to nature. In addition, the CCC brought millions of urban youth the positive experience of laboring in nature, and formed a new mostly working-class demographic of wilderness appreciators.⁴⁸ Most important, though, the CCC popularized the linkage of human and natural welfare. Further research, including oral histories and especially those from minority viewpoints, is needed to comprehensively assess the ways the New Deal impacted environmental thought in Wisconsin. However, it is likely that changes in thought followed the borders of the political divisions; the Driftless Region was more likely to accept scientific experts' views, and when those became ecological it is probable that residents followed suit.

To some extent, the political splits in rural Wisconsin stemmed from New Deal relief programs, primarily the CCC and AAA. It was the locally specific public and economic aid provided by these programs that drove the Democratic Party's regional support. Moreover, it was the New Deal's emphasis on particular commodities and resources that caused the support to fall, if unintentionally, along geographical contours. Furthermore, the CCC fused two previously disparate strains of progressive environmentalism, linking human and natural welfare. The corps' extreme "single-track" approach towards conservation in Wisconsin pushed Aldo Leopold to propose a new systemic approach to ecology, and in so doing started to bridge the gap between preservation and conservation. However, initial tensions within New Deal rural policy had not been resolved. During and after WWII the federal government put increasing pressure on farmers to industrialize their operations and "get big or get out."⁴⁹ In Wisconsin, this resulted in an average increase in farm sizes in the Central Sands Region, almost double the magnitude of that in the Driftless between 1940 and 1950.⁵⁰ This was once again a result of the Central Sands' relatively flatter topography providing a greater ease of expansion. Ideologically, this pressure upheld the precedent of encouraging farmers to practice conservation only when it was profitable. At best it maintained the "single-track" conservation of which Leopold was so critical, and at worst it discarded rural conservation aims entirely. It would not be until the late 1950s that the ideas of ecology and interlinked human and natural welfare would resurface in a grassroots challenge to this paradigm.

⁴⁸ Maher, *Nature's Economy*, 113.

⁴⁹ Phillips, *This Land, This Nation*, 236-237.

⁵⁰ U.S. Census of Agriculture 1954 - Wisconsin: Statistics for Counties: *Farms, Acreage, Value and Farm Operators* Washington D.C: Government Printing Office, 1958.