**Climbing Ethics, Style, and Practice on the Public Resource**

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I: Introduction

Public land managers across the United States, at both the state and federal level, have long considered climbing to be a legitimate recreational activity on the public resource. From the soaring granite walls of Yosemite National Park to Austin’s Enchanted Rock natural area—climbers are often left largely to their own developmental devices and expertise. Land managers scrutinize this sort of laissez-faire management nationwide, with some demanding direct access and oversight into climbing development. As climbing increases in popularity—Oscar-winning documentaries and Olympic competitions alike—climbing as a practice will undergo even more careful examination.

This project concerns the climbing development conflict in the Bitterroot National Forest—across the Bitterroot-Selway Wilderness Area and the more general Forest Service Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS). Climbers, in part represented by the Western Montana Climber’s Coalition (WMTCC), often enjoy developing new crags and routes. This demands route cleaning, trail maintenance, and even fixed climbing protection and anchors. The Bitterroot National Forest (BNF), as the executive agency overseeing development and management of the public resource, is interested in effectively managing said resources and local recreation.

The core of this conflict concerns fixed protection. Should managers consider bolts permanent installations? If so, are they permissible to facilitate the act of safe climbing, which has historically been a viable activity on National Forest Service land and in federally designated Wilderness. Most historic bolting concerns—their existence, appearance, and frequency—have been answered by local communities through discussions of climbing style. I would like to especially illustrate the difference between community-normative style of ascent and more general climbing ethics—meaning a climber’s commitments humans, non-human a/biotic entities, and environments in which they recreate. Basically, style is how one climbs, whereas ethics pertains to the considerations climbers ought to have towards other people and the extra-human environment.

Some climbers might contend that their preferred method of climbing (traditional or sport, alpine or siege) is somehow ethically preferrable. One might argue for this on virtue-ethical grounds (i.e. traditional climbing is preferrable to sport, because of the cultivation of boldness, courage, or creativity, etc.), but they will have to do much philosophical work to be so convincing. It may be the case that one style of climbing is better for a climber than another, but that is somewhat difficult to intuitively ascertain. This is bolstered by the fact that very few climbers are stylistic purists, yet espouse the social, mental, and physical benefits of climbing regardless. What is simple to see, however, is that by climbing, we ought to consider other climbers, recreationists, biotic neighbors, and the environment in which we climb.

This project seeks to impact the trajectory of climbing in a large swathe of public land near Missoula. For nearly half a decade, climbers have been unable to legally develop their sport due to a forest-wide bolting stay. While negotiations continue between various interest groups, the questions surrounding the permissibility of bolts haunts the conversation. I hope to offer my expertise in the climbing practice, ability to analyze ethical arguments and positions, and schooling in effectively communicating complex philosophical points and articulations to positively benefit this great new climbing debate and assist with its eventual amelioration.

This project is important on two counts. Firstly, it is within the charge of the USFS to facilitate varied recreation and extractive opportunities across their holdings per the Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act and the 2012 Forest Planning Rule. It is vital we participate in conversations regarding National Forest use to both represent climbing as a practice and community, but also to help illuminate what uses are permissible on the BNF. If, at the end of years of negotiation, these conversations determine climbing is, in fact, impermissible, that is still something of a philosophical victory. Regardless, I will do my best to offer my particular expertise to discern a conclusion.

Secondly, it is important for land managers to gain buy-in from the climbing community if they are to effectively manage it. For land managers to secure cooperation from climbers, they must understand at least the difference between individual climbing style and ethics, and their position as land managers, not climbing aestheticians. Meaning, the BNF cannot demand particular means of ascent from climbers (i.e. traditional climbing, free-soloing, climbing entirely without bolts, etc.). The BNF might demand conscientious and measured impacts in certain land designations, but they should not champion one style over another.

The BNF lacks the resources to effectively police the many canyons and cliffs in the Bitterroot. Traditionally, climbers have been independent, even anti-authoritarian. If the BNF does not offer a solution to this controversy that a majority of climbers will support, and self-enforce, there is little hope climbers will abide by any deemed “unreasonable mandates”. I personally hope for an Executive-led amelioration to this conflict because I believe climbing possesses the legitimacy to legally exist on public lands. But, if a reasonable solution is not found between the BNF and western Montanan climbers, I highly doubt climbers will abandon their practice because of the risk of a ticket. Even then, it is unclear the legal grounds the BNF might have to sanction active route developers.

The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum

The Bitterroot NF has been somewhat insistent on utilizing the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) to manage climbing infrastructure. I will make frequent reference to the ROS throughout this document. It will benefit the reader to have some familiarity with this relatively obscure method of forest management.

The Six Rivers National Forest Planning Appendix outlines the ROS as “classifying and managing recreation opportunities based on the following criteria: physical setting, social setting, and managerial setting.”[[1]](#footnote-1) The ROS splits Federally managed land into six designations: primitive, semi-primitive non-motorized, semi-primitive motorized, roaded natural, rural, and urban. Most of these designations turn on an environment’s proximity to trafficked roads and apparent primitivity.

The “primitive” designation must be 3 miles from any and all roads and trails with motorized use and span 5,000 acres or more. The ROS describes the experience of a primitive designation: “[t]he setting is essentially an unmodified natural environment with some evidence of trails.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Conversely, semi-primitive non-motorized areas are only ½ mile from motorized roads and are generally between 2,500 and 5,000 acres, often serving as buffer zones to primitive areas. “The natural setting may have subtle modifications that would be noticed but would not draw the attention of an observer in the area”[[3]](#footnote-3); this description of a user’s experience allows for more obvious human impacts than the primitive designation—though even the USFS concedes some impacts are necessary for interaction with primitive recreation areas. As the reader can imagine, the ROS progresses to allow for more obvious human impacts and infrastructure. By the time the ROS reaches the rural and urban designations, they allow for substantial modification to the environment, a crowded social setting, and heavy use of motorized vehicles.

The ROS also gives users some prescriptive measures for their interaction with different designations. Primitive areas have few onsite controls and regulations; the enforcement of recreation happens mostly through permitting offsite. Additionally, users should limit group sizes and expect less than 6 parties on trails and only 3 parties visible from campsites. The “visual quality objective” (VQO) is preservation. The semi-primitive non-motorized expands use slightly, “[t]he social setting provides for 6 to 15 parties encountered per day on trails and 6 or less parties visible at campsites. Onsite controls are present but subtle. Interpretation is through self-discovery with some use of maps, brochures and guidebooks.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Its VQO changes from preservation to retention. As the designations continue, the VQO changes with it.

The ROS considers the subjective experiences of recreationists within various designations, bound mainly by the VQO. For land managers, the appearance of an area’s particular quality is what is at stake, not necessarily the actual fact of human presence in a place. The ROS, as a tool for recreation management, assumes human presence in a place and mainly concerns human experience.

II: Background Context and Plan

This project is both narrow and broad in scope. On one hand, I must consider and transcribe the history of American rock climbing style and ethics—a niche debate populated exclusively by the most impassioned rock climbers. On the other, I must give a plain-English philosophical primer to public land managers, how philosophers conceive of and construct ethical and aesthetic frameworks. Surely this will prove more difficult than a summary of climbing history, at least land managers understand the sorts of aesthetic and intrinsic landscape or land-based values climbers often recruit. More general metaethical concerns—what value is, how ethics are formed, etc.—are more difficult. Part of my presentation must focus on how to translate this facet of philosophy to non-academics, both the land managers and climbers.

Climbing’s Ethical and Stylistic Work

The vast majority of the climbing stylistic-ethical distinction has been delineated by climbers, particularly those heavily invested in their individual climbing scene. Though there have been some ethicists who also climb interested in this sort of work, most of those writing on the topic of style are heavily invested in one form of climbing or another. Lito Tejada-Flores, a Bolivian climber, skier, and general mountain athlete, penned “The Games Climbers Play” in the May 1967 Sierra Club mountaineering journal, *Ascent*. Within, Tejada-Flores describes the practice as a series of “climbing-games” all expressed by negative rules per the difficulty the mountain or rock presents in the particular game. Meaning, bouldering[[5]](#footnote-5) differs from expedition mountaineering[[6]](#footnote-6) by a series of more or less stringent artificial restrictions placed on the practitioners. These rules are somewhat hierarchical, with more restrictions applied to climbers attempting relatively smaller or simpler objectives.[[7]](#footnote-7) It is common practice to enlist the help of sherpas and aluminum ladders to ascend Everest—it would be silly to take a ladder to the top of *Rise of the Sleepwalker* and claim you’ve climbed V17.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Though Tejada-Flores claims to be answering ethical questions with climbing-games, he only describes ethical considerations comparative to other climbers in reference to chosen climbing-games, “[e]thical climbing merely means respecting the set of rules of the *climbing-game* that one is playing.”[[9]](#footnote-9) Tejada-Flores somewhat muddles the distinction between style, and ethics. If I were to climb El Capitan free,[[10]](#footnote-10) onsight,[[11]](#footnote-11) and in a day—one might claim I climbed in better style than the multi-day aid climber,[[12]](#footnote-12) not that I am a more ethical climber. In fact, it is sometimes difficult to say the act of climbing has any ethical implications itself. There is a common adage in climbing: “there is no such thing as cheating, only lying.”

Tom Higgins, one of the most prolific climbing writers of the 60s and 70s, takes such an approach. Higgins kept a fundamentalist fervor for traditional climbing; meaning ascending a route from the bottom-up, with all protection placed while free-climbing, and climbing the route in a single push. Higgins would balk at the idea of rappelling into a route to pre-inspect its difficulties, place protection bolts, or to “hang-dog”[[13]](#footnote-13) up a route. He names those who adhere to his style “traditionalists”; those who employ tactics outside of his conservative articulation receive the pejorative “tricksters”.[[14]](#footnote-14) Higgins, though, only thought that those climbing outside of this stylistic sphere fell into the realm of ethics when they employed these tactics onto *first ascents*. Climbers ought to consider the availability of first ascents on the account of other climbers when choosing a particular style of development.[[15]](#footnote-15) Because new routes are an essentially limited resource (at least until wind erosion exposes a new band of sandstone, or volcanic activity creates basaltic columns—mechanisms which might take millions of years), traditional climbing should take developmental precedent, because their practice is more difficult, less sure of success, and a higher athletic and mental achievement.[[16]](#footnote-16) His consideration of first ascents applies to previous first ascensionists as well: “even the long-standing agreement to respect the protection style of the first-ascent party is weakening: a bolt was recently added to an established route on Daff Dome.”[[17]](#footnote-17) Higgins is primarily concerned with the effects climbing and development has on other climbers.

Higgins has two obvious blind-spots in his ethic. First, he claims that climbers must participate in responsible route-development only insofar as it pertains to other climbers. In certain cases, climbers should consider non-climbers when partaking in their practice. Take the consideration of indigenous cultural practices displayed by climbers in the case of Bear’s Lodge in Eastern Wyoming[[18]](#footnote-18) and Australia’s Uluru.[[19]](#footnote-19) Additionally, climbers and developers should consider aesthetic value for other recreationists—for example, the Arches NP parkwide ban on white climbing chalk to preserve color of its famous red rock.

Second, Higgins fails to consider the rock itself during the climbing game. Later in this paper, I will offer ethical reasoning why it might be in the purview of route developers to consider the rock, or at least general environment, affected by route development and the climbing practice. For now, we might consider seasonal raptor closures to particular cliffs in the Bitterroot, or the leave-no-trace education enforced by Yosemite’s big-wall climbing permits. These biocentric considerations are ways climbers and recreation managers might better consider the extra-human environment, and are already implemented across a variety of climbing areas.

Overall, it is a misnomer to use “ethic” to describe the self-implemented stylistic restraints of various climbing games. Climbers ought to be more careful of their language when describing the considerations climbers ought to have to others—both in the human and extra-human realm. Next, we will consider the local history of the Bitterroot National Forest’s Climbing Management Plan.

Local History – The Climbing Management Plan

The draft “Bitterroot National Forest Climbing Management Plan” was mostly developed in tandem with a local wilderness advocacy group, the Friends of the Bitterroot (FOB), rather than any knowledgeable climbers. To illustrate this, under “Definition of Terms”,[[20]](#footnote-20) all climbing terminology, USFS definitions, and even the term “sacred site” are defined in one or two sentences while “wilderness” takes up nearly half a page. This could either be because of the particular philosophical sophistication of the term “wilderness”, or a result of the focus of such a wilderness advocacy organization. Either way, the document over-focuses on federally designated Wilderness and traditional preservationist philosophical concerns. Interestingly, the document cites many protective USFS mandates and Congressional Acts, but nowhere makes note of the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act nor the 2012 Forest Planning Rule, both of which highlight the variety of uses permissible on USFS lands. Again, this focus on preservation policy highlights the interests of the wilderness advocacy group who helped prepare this document. By incorporating documents which describe necessary preservation as opposed to mandates and rulings which legitimize recreational uses, the climbing management plan over-focuses on preservationist concerns—as opposed to describing the various ways in which the forest is Congressionally mandated to offer recreational, extractive, educational, and wildlife-centered opportunities.

While the document offers valuable insights into safeguarding wildlife and vegetation, proper waste disposal, and a relatively robust overview of the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum—it fails to properly understand the particularities of climbing practices. Later in the paper, I will describe my philosophical justification for ethical-stylistic distinctions. The document routinely attempts to manage for climbing’s stylistic considerations, rather than the more widespread ethical concerns that I outlined previously. For example, under "Fixed and Temporary Climbing Hardware” the draft suggests, “[a]ll temporary or removable climbing equipment and hardware will be removed from NFS lands. Removable climbing equipment and hardware is defined as but not limited to, slings, stoppers, nuts, chocks, cams, big bros, hooks, pitons etc.”[[21]](#footnote-21) Climbers around Missoula, and internationally generally, make a less stark distinction between fixed-temporary and purposefully permanent gear. Oftentimes, if natural, non-bolt protection is available but difficult to place or clean, a route developer will leave the gear for subsequent parties. Fixed pitons and nuts are standard practice on *traditionally* developed climbing routes—a practice the draft CMP champions in other places in the document. Oftentimes slings are placed for rappel anchors off of boulders, trees, or even bolts themselves in the place of chains. Rappel anchors are often impossible to retrieve but necessary to descend a rock feature. Climbers tend to assume that they will be able to return to the ground after climbing up a route—without leaving gear it may be impossible for them to do so.

The failure of the stylistic-ethical distinction most obviously shines throughout the draft CMP’s “Recreation Opportunity Class and Climbing Area Development”[[22]](#footnote-22) section. While the previous section gives a brief yet robust overview of the ROS generally, its application to climbing development best practices obviates the BNF and FOB’s lack of expertise. For example, under the ROS Primitive designation, it’s heading reads, “Traditional Climbing; Fixed Anchors allowed only in emergency situations.”[[23]](#footnote-23) This brings a few issues to head. First, Traditional (or “Trad”) climbing is a stylistic choice of the means of ascent for a climber. Basically, trad climbing means a climber starts at the bottom of a piece of rock and climbs to its top without any prior rehearsal, protection, or inspection. This has no essential bearing on the presence of bolts or any other sort of fixed anchor. Many of the most famous trad climbs in the world are entirely bolt-protected run-out slab climbs, yet are still considered traditional. Secondly, based on the aforementioned distinction the BNF makes between temporary-fixed (nuts, slings, pitons, etc.) and permanent anchors (bolts), seemingly such fixed anchors only allowed in emergency situations would be bolts. This brings to question what constitutes an “emergency”. Is large runout, risking injury or death in the case of a fall, a sufficient emergency? If so, how large of a runout would count? Do they mean only utilizing fixed anchors in the case of retreat? If that is the case, what is the difference in terms of placement and distance between rappel anchors for retreat and belay anchors for the upward progress of a route? Once such anchors are placed, they may be used in the future per the “Fixed & Temporary Climbing Hardware” section of the document.

In this context of such a misunderstanding, the document also misconstrues the connection between the ROS and climbing management, stating: “Climbing infrastructure development is non-existent as the Primitive Class is incompatible with types of climbing that are fixed anchor protected.”[[24]](#footnote-24) The Primitive ROS class pertains partially to infrastructure or human activity, but mainly to the appearance of human presence. Further, ROS designations hinge on the presence of roads—not the presence of trails, nor bolts. A camouflaged bolt or a route on a remote tower deep in the Bitterroot would have no bearing on the Primitive designation’s “remoteness from the sights and sounds of human activities, management, and development.” The concerns of Primitive ROS is party size and the individual user’s subjective feeling of remoteness—the presence of bolts does not necessarily affect either.

Similar Controversies

Other popular climbing areas previously faced similar development controversies to the Bitterroot. The Black Hills climbing community became embroiled in a righteous struggle between climbing styles in the 1980s and 90s. To satisfy this inter-climber conflict, the community designated styles of ascent to two different climbing areas.[[25]](#footnote-25) The schism between ground-up and rappel-assisted ascents became a spatial one: Custer State Park, the home of the crystal-studded Needles, was saved for traditional style climbing while Mount Rushmore National Monument allowed climbers to rappel down its faces in search of more difficult (albeit safer) routes. With a plethora of bullet-hard, accessible rock, Black Hills climbers found valid compromise across various managing agencies. The issue for the Missoula climbing controversy, however, is that a majority of the quality rock in the region lies within the Bitterroot NF. And too, the Black Hills compromise was determined internal to the community, along stylistic lines, by those with the expertise and experience to determine impact, harm, and best practices—not by land managers. The climbing controversy was not over bolts, but fundamental adherence to different climbing styles.

Bighorn National Forest, encompassing the massive granite spires of Beaver Creek and Ten Sleep’s infinite dolomite, might be a better analogue to the troubles in the Bitterroot. With the increased popularity of sport climbing nationwide, the Tensleep’s world-class pocketed walls saw a massive spike in traffic in the mid-2010s. Social trails, heavy impacts at the base of climbs, and new users overloading the delicate area to untenable levels stressed the local community to a breaking point. When community members discovered the heavy manufacturing practices[[26]](#footnote-26) some particular climbing developers began to employ to create more aesthetic, beginner and gym-friendly routes—the community shattered. In response, some climbers chopped or smashed rival developers’ bolts, placed padlocks on the first bolts of climbs, and wrote impassioned open letters to national climbing publications.

In July 2019, Bighorn NF management placed a moratorium on new bolts, climbing trails, or routes in general. While this development ban seems to have cooled the fires in the canyon somewhat, it set concerning precedent for the rest of the country. The Powder River Ranger district, where Tensleep sits, has planned to draft a Climbing Management Plan since 2005; with the controversy and subsequent ban, they decided to finally begin the process. The district planned to release an Environmental Analysis—a key step in the NEPA process—the fall of 2021, but such analysis has yet to materialize. This too, mirrors the Bitterroot—where bolting was to be reinstated upon the assumption of a proper CMP, and that CMP being postponed seemingly indefinitely.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Plan Going Forward

To assist in this conflict, I hope to improve upon an existing story-map to help illuminate the particular challenges surrounding climbing as a developmental activity with its own style and ethics. A story-map is a narrative and presentational tool, often incorporating multi-media and GIS mapping to illustrate a position or point. My story-map will recount historical stylistic changes in the sport, and delineate questions of climbing style from those of climbing ethics. Primarily, however, I will help draft a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to outline a new cooperative relationship between the WMTCC and BNF. MOUs are standard USFS-NGO collaborative documents, yet demand a certain level of clarity and sophistication to construct well. Finally, I will facilitate a meeting among local route developers to better understand the stylistic and ethical norms of development in the Bitterroot. From this meeting, I hope to draft a best-practices document along ROS designations to present to the BNF to perhaps incorporate with their draft Climbing Management Plan (CMP).

Dane Scott—former University of Montana W.A. Franke School of Forestry professor, climber, and President of the WMTCC—and I have planned a preliminary meeting with the BNF on March 2nd. In which, we hope to iron-out the content and context of the next series of meetings to help clear some confusion which has stymied the process thus far. We plan for these meetings to begin with a presentation—one considering the ethical/stylistic distinction, another consider ROS utilization—before an open roundtable forum of climbers within the community. The purpose of these meetings, partially, is to voice opinions from within the community, but more essentially, to transcribe the philosophical concepts I am working on in practical and understandable ways.

III: Theoretical Applications

**Issues in the Anthropocene: Artificiality and Wildness**

One facet of my intellectual work regards the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum’s prescriptions concerning climbing management. What exactly that might entail in the BNF is amorphous and varied, though route concentration and group size might be concerns. Most comments in meetings and Forest Service documentation thus far concerns bolts and other fixed anchors. As mentioned previously, bolting has historically been a controversial issue within the climbing practice. More recently, land managers across the United States have been forced to consider bolting issues—either because of errant climber-led development programs or public inter-climber/user group conflicts.

Informing my particular understanding of ROS structure, influence, and applicability is Stephen Vogel’s book *Thinking Like a Mall*. Meant to dissuade environmental philosophers of human-nature dualism, Vogel spends much of his thesis delineating artificiality and wildness, showing how both concepts permeate every entity. Wildness might be familiar to readers of Thoreau, Muir, and the other early environmental geriatrics. To them, it signifies the grand Sierra Nevada mountains, a loon swimming in Walden Pond—the extra-human world.[[28]](#footnote-28) To Vogel, wildness designates the realm beyond human intention, something he describes as “the gap”.[[29]](#footnote-29) He contends that all objects have some amount of wildness within them, but agrees that some things are more wild than others: “we can distinguish between things that humans make and things they don’t…we can even distinguish among various ‘degrees’ of human-madeness”.[[30]](#footnote-30) In opposition to wildness, he uses the term “artificiality” to describe the comparative degree of human-madeness and intentionality. Vogel’s anti-dualist claim is two-fold.

First, because of global climate change and pervasive human impacts, there is no such thing as “pristine nature”. Everything on Earth is now a human artifact to some extent, what Vogel calls “the artifactuality of nature”.[[31]](#footnote-31) Global capital has dug its claws into nearly every profitable inch of land on the planet—pumping oil from the northern coasts of Alaska to mining diamonds on the ocean floor. Anthropogenic climate change has directly affected the Earth’s climate—meaning things so natural as storms and seasons now bear some mark of artificiality. Historically, humans have cultivated the environment to some extent regardless of their technological sophistication; neolithic hunter-gatherers may have led to the extinction of most of North America’s megafauna over 10,000 years ago. Pristine nature is impossible wherever humans have transformed the land to such an extent.

Vogel makes the claim of nature’s inseparability from humanity more essentially. Chapter 2, “The Social Construction of Nature”, argues that our concept of pristine nature is simply that, a concept. Referring to Kant’s understanding,[[32]](#footnote-32) and Heidegger’s insistence[[33]](#footnote-33) of the impossibility of phenomenological access to noumenal “things-in-and-of-themselves”, Vogel expands this to the concept of wild nature. Meaning, if pristine nature does exist somewhere “out there”, conceptually bounding it transforms it into an artifact. Moreover, epistemology is an active, not a passive, enterprise. The only way we can know something is through our active engagement and concern with it in the world itself. Participation in the world, which allows for knowledge, demands engagement, which changes the world. The environment is constituted by the effects entities have upon it—including us, active and concerned in our effects.[[34]](#footnote-34) For someone to say, “nature is only a social-construct”, does not only mean that it is a concept that humans apply to the world outside of them, lacking ontological weight. “Social construct” here also means the actual construction of the world around us through our knowledge byways and social practices.[[35]](#footnote-35) Even if there was such a noumenal entity as “pristine nature”, we could never epistemically access it; once we did, our effect would make it lose its pristine naturalness.

Second, even our most engineered artifacts are somewhat beyond our intentions, somewhat imbued with wildness. The plants popping up through the cracks in the sidewalk are evidence of extra-human nature’s tenacity. The crumbling of an old railyard, train cars rusting to nothingness shows wildness’s indomitable spirit. Even such anthropocentric structures as economic markets possess some qualities beyond our control and understanding—a sort of inherent wildness to humanity’s creations.[[36]](#footnote-36) There is a degree of wildness imbued in everything—from Shishapangma to the Sears Tower. All entities exist on this wildness-artificiality spectrum.

Teleology and Wildness

There’s some muddiness whether or not Vogel means for us to take him at face value; he is noncommittal to what acceptance of the inescapable artificial-wildness spectrum means for an normative environmental ethic: “I don’t want to suggest for a moment that failing to change the oil in one’s car is immoral in the way failing to feed one’s child would be, or even failing to feed one’s cat.”[[37]](#footnote-37) Simultaneously, he salvages his previous work: “[b]ut an automobile is not nothing, I want to say; it’s more, in a certain sense, than a rock is, and if not more than a cat then at least also something quite remarkable.”[[38]](#footnote-38) He meant to develop a criticism of a “natural-centric” environmental ethic, not the basis for a new one. For my purposes, better understanding how to apply an environmental ethic to our engagement with the extra-human, partially abiotic world of climbing ethics, it seems best to take Vogel seriously. Everything does have some sort of extra-human processes, a wildness—whether more obvious or less.

By an entity’s extra-human processes, I mean simply its actions and trajectory beyond obvious human utilization. For biotic entities, it is somewhat intuitive—a sunflower’s ability to process sunlight into glucose or a wolf’s freedom to range, hunt, procreate, and raise pups. A living organism’s processes give us a normative path through its apparent will to survive and procreate—a right to life or reproduction. Abiotic entities are harder to discern; a rock’s processes are less intuitively normative. Much of a cliff’s processes are determined by the geologic rock-cycle—allowing for its chemical materials to break down and reform into new formic instances. This would give us little normative direction when considering a rock-incorporated ethic, however; if all its teleology is, is to be broken down and eventually reformed into a new structure, we might as well deface cliffs and dynamite mountains.[[39]](#footnote-39)

This understanding seems similar to Holmes Rolston III’s insistence on the teleological weight of genetic material,[[40]](#footnote-40) but my understanding is less functionalist and specific than Rolston’s contention. I argue that an entity’s degree of wildness, understood as those extra-human processes, give us a rough estimation of proper treatment. The specificity of exactly how we ought to treat various entities per their different extra-human processes is muddy and often controversial—ideals of ecological health, niche, etc. are not sketched in entirely satisfactory ways. What is important is the apparent distance from human creation and implementation. There seems to be some sort of prescription we can derive from an entity’s wildness—we ought to fix and upkeep malls and domiciles, we would not claim the same responsibility to caves and mountains. There is some extra-human quality that seems to demand moral consideration from us, and we ought to listen to it.

I do not mean to solve the problem of intrinsic value outlined by any single environmental philosopher. I am unsure of the particular quality that confers moral considerability to extra-human entities—whether it is DNA, function/teleology, etc.—and I do not seek to discern it. I am still somewhat committed to intrinsic value as a concept. Intrinsic value tells us important things about how we value particular entities and it gives us distinction among the various valuing attitudes we can have towards different entities.[[41]](#footnote-41) Rather than engaging in the dragged-out-beat-down intrinsic value debates that for so long dominated environmental philosophical discourse, I would rather appreciate the value of the concept and act accordingly. We ought to care about the things we value whether we know exactly why or how we value them—I am willing to bite that philosophical bullet.

While Vogel soundly deconstructed any sort of human-nature divide, he still allows for difference of degrees between the wild and artificial. This allows us to consider the degree of independence from human aims when treating different entities—treating a husky drastically differently than a wolf even though they have similar behaviors, physical characteristics, and genetic makeups. Though the specificity of different entities’ teleologies are at times difficult to discern, by understanding an entity’s wildness, we gain some understanding of the proper treatment of that entity in broad terms. Meaning, different entities’ degree of independence from humans demands different degrees of permissible intervention. It does not matter what an entities’ particular function is, we need not be so specific—we simply need to give an entity more independence, room to breathe, per its artificiality and wildness.

The ROS Spectrum

What would a “thing-centric” environmental ethic look like, in which we treat *all* entities in part, per their degree of wildness? One way we might think of such spectrum-scrutable treatment is by human, somewhat democratic mechanizations like the ROS. On Forest Service land, it might not only be proper per Executive jurisdiction, but on the way to proper ethical treatment of the extra/human world.

The ROS designation is meant to guide both land managers and recreationists. It considers the history, logistical constraints of management, and pre-existing infrastructure to guide the future development and use of a particular environment. For land managers, it is a way to plan infrastructure and other development projects. It serves as a designation of permissible recreational pursuits for visitors. It is a spectrum, with theoretical pristine nature on one hand and absolute management on the other. No ROS designation, however, abides by either pole—there is always some amount artificiality and wildness present in each designation.[[42]](#footnote-42)

It is simple to see how the ROS designations might guide climbing development practices. On one end of the spectrum, under rural, roaded natural, and semi-primitive designations (more artificial)—the BNF might allow for heavy and obvious bolting, trail development, and a high concentration of routes (i.e. a sport-climbing crag). At the other end, the primitive designation might demand less-obvious fixed gear and little to no developed impacts at the base of climbs (i.e. alpine climbing). Diversity of style and a spectrum of permissible impacts are entirely possible within a national forest and climbing community. Seemingly, it is already accounted for in the management plans for the National Forest itself. Effectively, the ROS might inform climber impacts, visible improvements, or ethics concerning treatment of extra-human members of the National Forest community. Even then, it is hard to glean any information on the broad im/permissibility of bolts from the ROS. Much of the point of such designation is on *visible* impacts; if climbers were to successfully camouflage bolts from non-climbing recreationists, even heavy bolting might be permissible under the primitive designation.

All this to say, Vogel’s concurrent dismantling of human-nature dualism and admission of wild-artificial spectrum allows for the act and associated infrastructure (rappel anchors, fixed gear, cleaning) of climbing to different degrees across the public land resource. There is no possibility of “pristine nature”, whether because of material or epistemic indivisibility. This is not to say that any extra-human entity cannot be considered by its own function or means—but the opposite. Everything, even heavily constructed artifacts included carry some degree of wildness; those entities’ farther from obvious human influence should be treated differently than those closer. For climbing management, the ROS might offer degrees in which we should conceive of permissible impacts—but it should never *entirely* preclude climbing or bolting based on supposed wildness *alone.[[43]](#footnote-43)*

**Environmental Aesthetics: Style and Practice**

A significant focus of my communicative project aims to develop a distinction between climbing ethics and style. This distinction is essentially a difference between ethics and aesthetics. There are many philosophical accounts of this distinction—two fields often described and explored by different philosophical thinkers. It is clear why we should make a distinction between aesthetics and ethics in philosophy—how we appraise a painting is quite different from how we appraise a person or action. Moreover, ethics is normatively motivated—we want to understand how best to act, think, or value. Some thinkers have, and still, conceive of aesthetics as a similarly normative pursuit, but I—for reasons articulated later in this section—think such accounts are misleading. Even those thinkers who believe in a sort of universalized aesthetic paradigm—Immanuel Kant, Clive Bell, Edmund Burke, etc.—would hardly say the metrics for right aesthetic appreciation are indistinguishable from ethical concerns. It is uncontroversial to say: different philosophical fields are different within philosophy.

Does this distinction hold true for recreational practices? Should we, along with Tejada-Flores, conflate climbing’s ethical concerns to merely stylistic ones—claiming that all ethics is, is to subscribe to the stylistic restraints of one’s chosen climbing practice? For two reasons, I think it important to maintain such a distinction for climbing, or any aesthetic practice.

Climbing is an Art

First, climbing is itself an aesthetic practice, but one which at times carries ethical concerns. From C. Thi Nguyen’s “The Aesthetics of Rock Climbing”:

climbing is something like dance – not just in skill, but in aesthetic reward. You can hear the similarity when you listen to some climbers talk about their climbs. They talk about climbs with nice movement, with good flow, with interesting moves. They’ll talk about ugly climbs, beautiful climbs, elegant climbs, gross climbs. At first you might think they are just talking about the rock itself and how it looks. And sometimes they are; every climber loves a clean crack up a blank face, or bold jutting fin to climb. But if you interrogate a climber, and watch as they explain where the beauty in the climb is – with arms out, legs in the air, imitating the odd precise movements of the climb – you’ll figure out that what so many of them care most about is the quality of the movement – about how it feels to go through the rock, about the glorious sensations in the body, and the subtle attention of the mind.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Climbing is an activity in which the qualities of the practice are appraised on aesthetic grounds—meaning, in a basic sense, having something to do with beauty. Climbing is a practice concerned with beauty, we seek out beautiful climbs or locales in which to climb—a splitter crack in stark red Wingate against a blue sky, a bold line striking up the middle of a big wall. Climbing is also a practice of beauty—the actual experience of the climb is often described in aesthetic terms. Climbs can even be considered ugly—either because of the makeup and quality of the rock or the nature of the climbing itself (whether it’s “thuggy”, or “grunty”, or physical). To be an aesthetic practice does not necessitate gracefulness. Nguyen goes on to describe climbing as a dance because of the internal embodied experience of the climber and the appreciation others might have of a climber’s experience determined by their own. Meaning, I empathize with a climber’s aesthetic description of a climb partially because I can appreciate what it would feel like to similarly engage. Nguyen argues that this aesthetic appreciation is best understood by climbers themselves. It is easier for insiders to appreciate the aesthetic considerations of a practice than those with no experience.

If we buy Nguyen’s account of the aesthetic concerns of climbing—how might we differentiate its aesthetic concerns from its ethical ones? Simply put, climbing is a game: “the voluntary attempt at overcoming unnecessary obstacles.”[[45]](#footnote-45) This sounds exactly like Tejada-Flores’s various distinctions in “The Games Climbers Play”.[[46]](#footnote-46) Nguyen expands such game playing beyond the purely physical:

“what constitutes game-playing is not the physical movement, but the intentional state of the player towards that action. In short: in ordinary practical activity, we take the means for the sake of an independently valuable end. But in gaming activity, we can take up an artificial end for the sake of going through a particular means.”[[47]](#footnote-47)

Climbing is a game not only because of its physical playfulness, but because of its artificial restrictions which propel particularly engaging action. This distinction follows through from the aesthetic action of climbing to the stylistic conversation and concerns of climbing. Climbing aesthetics can be discerned from climbing ethics insofar in that ethics here is a *practical* activity—we go through the means of its discourse to conclude about correct or incorrect actions, intentions, or attitudes. Stylistic conversations do not hold the same sort of weight—there is no “right” answer to which style of climbing is “best”—regardless of whatever old-timers might say. Famously, the only thing climbers like more than climbing, is spraying[[48]](#footnote-48) about climbing.

Climbing is a Game

Nguyen expands the game playing associated with climbing to the pursuit of aesthetics in general in “Art is a Game”. He makes a distinction between process-oriented aesthetic discourse with result-oriented scientific discourse: “In science, we care about actually getting the right answers. But with art appreciation, we care most about engaging in the activity of trying to get it right.”[[49]](#footnote-49) The struggle of aesthetic discourse is the point—that’s why we argue over Oscar nominees, oil paintings, and Radiohead. This aesthetic discourse holds for much of climbing conversation as well—whether the genre-stylistic discourse (between traditional and sport climbing) or individual climb discourse (what is the world’s most classic climb? What is the best 5.12- finger crack in Indian Creek?). “We engage with art for the satisfactions of the struggle—for the pleasures of careful attention, interpretation, and evaluation. In this way, art appreciation is like a game. In a game, the goals and restrictions shape the gaming activity, fine-tuning it into just the kind of struggle we wish to be absorbed in”—climbers engage in climbing debates for the dis/agreement itself. Various restrictions of category, reason, etc. are placed on climbing debates to guide conversation and engagement in certain ways.

Vitally, Nguyen specifies that, regardless of the impossibility, we have to appear as if we want to arrive at “correct” aesthetic judgements. There is an inherent tension in aesthetic discourse—we seem to want to arrive at correct answers but also want to arrive at those answers ourselves.[[50]](#footnote-50) The point of the discourse is engagement with the discourse, not simply having correct opinions. Were that the case, we would look to arbiter aestheticians to help us align with correct aesthetics.[[51]](#footnote-51) We need to arrive at these positions ourselves, regardless of others’ experience or expertise, and regardless of the likelihood that correct aesthetic positions actually exist. This describes many climbers’ apparent passion or surety when they speak about stylistic considerations. If a climber makes an impassioned diatribe against the evils of rappel bolting a granite wall in Yosemite, it is because of this necessary appearance, not necessarily that there are objective metrics which determine correct climbing style.

Inaccurate conflation between style and ethics might cause confusion for others exterior to the climbing community. For outsiders to the climbing practice such subtlety between ascent-ethics (style) and consequential-environmental-ethics (ethics), might be hard to discern. There seems a difference in scope, consequence, or importance between concerns insular to the particular recreational community and decisions which impact those outside of the community—both human and extra-human entities. Exactness of language is important for conversation, and especially important for those who are not well-versed in the particularities of such conversation.

Responsibility

If climbing is an aesthetic practice, with aesthetic concerns, who is responsible for outlining the proper aesthetic orientation climbers should have? Bence Nanay, in his essay “Unlocking Experience”, claims that we participate in aesthetics not simply to levy judgements or impress others or be entertained, but to have aesthetic experiences. We enjoy aesthetic experiences for their own sake, in addition to any other benefit we might get from such. One obvious benefit is the sociability of having aesthetic experiences alongside others. We seek out others to have aesthetic experiences with, and pontificate over those experiences. Nanay conceptualizes aesthetic experience as a sort of achievement—appreciating an experience in the correct way takes a certain amount of attention and work. We care about others achieving in the same way because it somehow validates our achievement, and solidifies the bond we have with other people: “Aesthetic experiences can bring us closer to each other. Listening to the same music can be a binding experience, as long as you both have the same kind of experience. And nothing can be as alienating as having radically different aesthetic experiences when listening to the same music or watching the same film.”[[52]](#footnote-52) Appreciating experiences has the added benefit of relationship building. This is doubly true in climbing—sharing a rope with someone on an incredible alpine climb not only solidifies the experience as aesthetically worthwhile, but associates your climbing partner with such an experience. Climbing has a long history of powerhouse partnerships, experiencing with others as well as for yourself. Climbing is a social aesthetic practice. Jim Bridwell, Yosemite pioneer and dirtbag ringleader noted this social benefit of shared aesthetic experience: “I don’t need to solo, I got friends.”[[53]](#footnote-53)

Dominic McIver Lopes’s “Getting Into It” describes aesthetic appreciation as a sort of exploration—the vast diversity of aesthetic life allows us to go forth and discover new and interesting aesthetic practices and communities. People aesthetically appreciate widely different things and experiences for aesthetic reasons—skydiving, oil painting, free jazz, chili dogs. Lopes describes this as the “Venture Account”: “aesthetic engagement contributes to our lives going well by equipping us to venture forth and explore.”[[54]](#footnote-54) Finding differences between, and solidarity with, various aesthetic experiences and judgements gives us an ability to perform some sort of exploration. This diversity applies to opinions as well as aesthetic values. We do not agree with everyone over aesthetic judgements, nor should we. Nor do we only subscribe to one set of aesthetic values—“nobody has just one song in their playlist.”[[55]](#footnote-55)

Key to this ability to venture forth and explore in the aesthetic realm is the creation and maintenance of aesthetic practices by communities—what Lopes names Insiders. “When it comes to aesthetic practices, insiders engage the values in the practice. They act on the values and, by acting on the values, they keep the practice going”.[[56]](#footnote-56) Without a community of practitioners, there would be no practice; There would be no climbing without climbers. Lopes calls these actions by Insiders within their practice “engagement”. Outsiders are the rest of us—those looking at aesthetic communities without experience of their aesthetic values. This alternative to engagement is acknowledgement. Some outsiders lack any ability to appreciate the values that insiders engage with, but there are strategies to acknowledge novel aesthetic experiences while venturing in the ether. We can appreciate alien communities through tangential experiences—appreciating D.C. hardcore music as an impassioned death metal fan, for example. Importantly, no one is born an insider. Through effort and education, outsiders might be able to become insiders—a sort of aesthetic achievement per Nanay. Such aesthetic overlap allows for each of us to engage in the aesthetic community, to become insiders ourselves.

These accounts of aesthetic achievement, exploration, community, and practice explains why the climbing conversation in the Bitterroot has been so fraught. Understanding aesthetic experiences—and thereby communities and values—is a difficult thing. We should understand that differences between practices matter, and that engagement is more attentive than acknowledgement. As a climber, I might be able to acknowledge Danny MacAskill as a radical and bold mountain-biker, but I lack the familiarity with the practice to say why he is or otherwise identify with his cycling itself. It follows that land managers should avoid aesthetic management unless they are insiders. Designating the Bitterroot as a stylistically traditional climbing area is a markedly different act than compelling climbers to engage in leave-no-trace ethics. It all comes down to style and ethics.

**Environmental Philosophy: Deep Ecology, a Rejection Letter**

One of the more radical and controversial branches of environmental philosophy manifests itself as a collection of related thinkers, activists, and monkey wrenchers. Deep ecology, while attractive to some environmental firebrands, is generally self-absorbed, exclusionary, and ineffective. In part a reaction to deep ecology’s masculine and monist principles, ecofeminism is “the theory that the ideologies that authorize injustices based on gender, race, and class are related to the ideologies that sanction the exploitation and degradation of the environment.”[[57]](#footnote-57) Whereas deep ecology is exclusive, ecofeminism is inclusive; while deep ecology seeks to subsume otherness into the viewer; ecofeminism acknowledges and celebrates the differences in the coalition of the human and extra-human environment.

The Birth of Deep Ecology

Not all articulations of deep ecology are so reactionary. One of the movement’s founding documents, Arne Naess’s “The Shallow and the Deep”, pits deep ecology against what he deems “shallow ecology”: the “[f]ight against pollution and resource depletion. Central objective: the health and affluence of people in the developed countries.”[[58]](#footnote-58) These two sentences are shallow ecology’s full definition. This anthropocentric and classist orientation serves as a foil to the tenets of the deep ecology movement. Naess claims an attempt to classify the two movements, but the depth and sophistication of the classification of deep ecology over the next six pages offers a convincing argument for thinking deeply about our environments.

Naess’s description of deep ecology seems equitable and inclusive; it considers “Biospherical egalitarianism”, meaning “the equal right to live and blossom”[[59]](#footnote-59) between human beings and other forms of life. Naess describes deep ecology, first and foremost, as relational. Opposed to an anthropocentric outlook, deep ecology espouses a “relational, total field image. Organisms as knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations.”[[60]](#footnote-60) Here, deep ecology acknowledges and celebrates the differences and interconnections between entities in the environment. Moreover, Naess describes deep ecology’s focus on “diversity and symbiosis”: “‘Live and let live’ is a more powerful ecological principle than ‘Either you or me.’”[[61]](#footnote-61) Deep ecology even assumes some seemingly leftist “anti-class posture”—acknowledging and challenging inequality, subordination, and alienation. Deep ecology, so understood in this original articulation, seems emancipatory, egalitarian, and caring. Some points in this document seem more akin to ecofeminist principles than to the contemporary deep ecologist line.

Contemporary Deep Ecology

Deep ecology, in its more contemporary articulations, has two major problems: one easy to identify and one more nuanced. First, deep ecology cares so much about the extra-human world—it often is apathetic, even antagonistic, towards human beings. Misanthropy, whilst deeply unsettling, can nearly be understood under the gross weight of global climate change—if one accepts the (somewhat elementary) claim that: “[w]e know what the problem is. The problem is what we are all doing. The humans. Not just the rich, not just the poor, not just the West, not just the East. Not just the bad elites or the bad presidents. Not them. Us. All of us.”[[62]](#footnote-62) Here, Paul Kingsnorth identifies the climate crisis with the whole of humanity. This not only dismantles the anti-class sentiments which Naess insists upon, but also levies blame to the whole coalition of environmental and economic lived realities. Now, were Kingsnorth understand not only the difference in scale of emissions and waste, but attempt to address the historical context of third world pollution, he might come to different conclusions.

Kingsnorth’s solution to the environmental problem is “[t]he collapse of the industrial economy [which] is, in all likelihood, the only remaining way to prevent the mass destruction of life on Earth.”[[63]](#footnote-63) Kingsnorth has empirical backing (and some sympathy from this author) for this claim. Global emissions have lessened their indominable march only during times of immense economic struggle. In the past twenty years, only 2009, 2016 (only barely), and 2020 measured fewer total emissions than their previous years.[[64]](#footnote-64) These each were marked with economic downturn—either significant failings inherent to global economic hegemony (the 2008 financial crisis) or extraneous factors impacting production (the COVID-19 pandemic). In what Kingsnorth deems “The Horrorcene”—an epoch measured by the hopelessness of the human condition at the end of the world—“[a] thing is right when it tends to obstruct the progress of the industrial economy. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”[[65]](#footnote-65) Intent in action or its consequences towards humankind has no bearing on morality. Cries Kingsnorth: “I would amputate all my fingers if I thought it would save another species from extinction. I would not lift a finger to save this civilization from collapse.”[[66]](#footnote-66) Such misanthropy, in Kingsnorth and others, unfortunately often materializes in forms of xenophobic, racist and hierarchical thinking,[[67]](#footnote-67) not the anti-capitalist expressions wishing for total economic collapse might suggest.

While Abbey and Kingsnorth’s misanthropy, at times, materializes and the directly hierarchical thinking that feminism generally despises, there is another more nuanced philosophical misstep that ecofeminism starkly critiques. Whilst deep ecologists claim some sort of sympathy with the extra-human world, at times to the point of discounting human environmental actors, Noel Sturgeon identifies this sympathy as a sort of subsumption of the individual over the environment. While seemingly diverse and pluralist, the aforementioned “The Shallow and the Deep”, showcases a dangerous self-importance, according to Sturgeon. Naess’s conception, and therefore the field’s, of this philosophy is a particular brand of self-realization—a self-in-nature.[[68]](#footnote-68) Connected to Eastern understanding of *atman*, the self in deep ecology does not enter into relationship with a diverse coalition of others, but expands to a Self—an expanded Self, beyond the egoistic and physical trappings of an individual and a body to the world around it. It is an attempt to close the distance between self and Other, a way to understand the world exterior to the individual. This attempt to reach the Other, however, tends to lead to poor understanding of others—it conflates the differences in the world around us.

Such a Self tends to flatten the particularities in qualities and proper treatment of other members of the environmental community. If you expand yourself to incorporate the totality of the world around you, that tends to lead to poor consideration of the interests of others. Furthermore, this sort of centered individual expansion is an effect of the Androcentrism of western thinking, not the Anthropocentrism that deep ecologists claim to rage against. Were these thinkers to identify the male-centeredness of the philosophical claims, they might better avoid this blunder. Without attending to the hierarchical discourse within deep ecology—the field fails to reach its goal of biocentrism or egalitarianism laid out in Naess’s inciting document.

The Ecofeminist Response

Karen Warren’s landmark article, “The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism”, describes how both environmental ethics and feminism are incomplete philosophies without the other. Environmentalism, without the hierarchical analysis of feminism, fails to account for the full causes and effects of the environmental crisis. Without expanding itself to incorporate extra-gender hierarchical concerns—racism, classism, etc.—feminism will fail its generally assumed charge to end sexist oppression.[[69]](#footnote-69) Such an expansion demands the consideration of environmental degradation and hierarchy. Simply put, it is “the position that there are important connections—historical, experiential, symbolic, theoretical—between the domination of women and the domination of nature.”[[70]](#footnote-70)

Warren considers the systemic and structural domination of women and the environment, and offers solutions based on our defining relationships with the extra/human world. For Warren—and other feminist thinkers like Donna Haraway and Marti Kheel—we must consider our position within a web of environmental relationships. This demands a consideration of particularity and difference, an empathy towards the extra-human and human others, and genuine relationship with those beyond us.

Such work, for Warren, cannot only be done between academics writing in peer-reviewed journals and thinking in their university offices. Sandwiched between logical proofs and rigorous analytic-tinged philosophy, Warren describes the importance of first-person narrative in developing a relational environmental ethic. Interestingly enough, she decided to employ an experience she had rock climbing in Minnesota:

On my second day of climbing, I rappelled down about 200 feet from the top of the Palisades at Lake Superior to just a few feet above the water level… I looked all around me—really looked—and listened. I heard a cacophony of voices—birds, trickles of water on the rock before me, waves lapping against the rocks below. I closed my eyes and began to feel the rock with my hands, the cracks and crannies, the raised lichen and mosses, the almost imperceptible nubs that might provide a resting place for my fingers and toes when I began to climb. At that moment I was bathed in serenity. I began to talk to the rock in an almost inaudible, child-like way, as if the rock were my friend. I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude for what it offered me—a chance to know myself and the rock differently, to appreciate unforeseen miracles like the tiny flowers growing in the even tinier cracks in the rock's surface, and to come to know a sense of *being in relationship* with the natural environment.[[71]](#footnote-71)

Warren argues that first person narrative is important to ecofeminism for four reasons. First, narrative gives voice to empathy and sensitivity difficult to describe over traditional philosophy. There is often difficulty transcribing feminist ideations of difference, coalition, and being-in-relationship in academic philosophy—narrative allows an author to better transcribe these ideas. Second, narrative allows an author to describe a variety of ethical attitudes often left out of western ethics—friendships and relationships we might have with the extra-human, even abiotic world. For Warren, this is emblemized in her consideration of the rock as a friend, rather than as something to conquer—a thread in common with climbers in Missoula and around the world.[[72]](#footnote-72) Third, narrative highlights the emergent properties of ecofeminist ethics. Ethics, here, is not a rationalist framework constructed and then applied to the real world, but an understanding emerging from material reality. For climbers, proper route development and ethical considerations are determined by the rock itself—one considers and develops a thousand-meter granite cliff differently than a sandstone boulder. This is emblemized by an oft-repeated phrase: “the rock is destiny”. Fourth, narrative has significant argumentative weight. Narrative can give an example and evidence of what is a proper ethical attitude to have in a situation.

The Friends of the Bitterroot

This philosophical takedown of deep ecology as an environmental theory informs my dealings with various non/governmental organizations within the Bitterroot National Forest—specifically the local wilderness advocacy group: the Friends of the Bitterroot. I will give a small amount of context to describe their role in this conflict.

The organization began in 1988 to combat extreme logging ravaging the various canyons in the Bitterroot, the “Friends of the Bitterroot’s mission is to preserve the wildlands and wildlife and to protect the forests and watersheds of our region as we work for a sustainable relationship with the environment”[[73]](#footnote-73)—a laudable charge. They led letter writing campaigns, presented policy proposals, published independent journalistic pieces condemning private and governmental practices, and even committed environmentally-motivated sabotage. Overall, they defended the Bitterroot during a period of intense commercial exploitation.

Unfortunately for climbers, a half-decade ago the FOB determined that climbers were the enemies of the Bitterroot. No doubt, more people means more impacts, though the specificity of climbing’s impacts are not necessarily worse than that of hikers, hunters, or backcountry equestrians. The FOB took to smashing bolts, demolishing climber trails, even eroding hillsides next to cliffs to make access difficult. Such controversy led the BNF to institute its current bolting moratorium, disallowing further route-development in the range. Simply put, there would be no climbing controversy in the Bitterroot without the FOB, and there would be no FOB without deep ecology.

Members of the FOB have often espoused exclusionary, hierarchical, and self-expanding philosophies. I personally have heard many members refer to areas of the BNF as “my Bitterroot”, “my Mill Creek”, “my wilderness”, etc. These ownership descriptors emblemize a wider issue with deep ecological philosophical commitments—if I have expanded myself to incorporate the natural world around me, I can claim ownership to my favorite landscapes as I can own my own body. An ecofeminist understanding of the interdependence and differences of the coalition of the environment would hardly convey the possession of landscapes they live in. When asked about the legitimacy of Indigenous sacred sites in a public meeting, a white, settler, unidentified member of the FOB retorted, “well, the Bitterroot is sacred to me too. Why shouldn’t I know where your sacred sites are?” Whilst this section is not focused on Indigenous sovereignty nor worldviews, I would hope the reader can see how this insensitivity is problematic, if not blatantly bigoted. Without these deep ecology influenced ideas of exclusion, Self, and ownership—I would not be participating in this project, because it would not exist.

IV: Actions Taken

The exact aim of my project changed over the course of the program. In the earliest planning stages, I considered completing route surveys to assist in forest planning or to organize a climbing guide. I also, for a time, planned to organize a public-facing crag meetup to describe route development and allow newcomers to participate in the sport in a friendly and safe environment. Plenty of ideas came and went—the defining variable was that the work would be beneficial to the western Montana climbing controversy writ large. I am one of the only climbers still working on the BNF—most others have simply burnt out.

December of 2022, I spent much of winter break planning and organizing my eventual CEP work. I realized there were some important clarifications useful to the BNF and WMTCC; mainly, the distinction between environmental ethical considerations surrounding rock climbing and climbing style. I elected to focus on this issue: to offer distinctive critique during meeting with the BNF and to write some sort of popular and accessible ethical-aesthetic distinction to publish on a story map written and organized by Christopher Mackay, a former graduate student in the Franke College of Forestry. I completed this task in early April. Afterwards, I planned to offer help with substantive climbing management either through a second draft of the Climbing Management Plan or similar document.

Changing Frames

As it turned out, many substantive decisions the BNF might have to make—from bolts in federal Wilderness to climbing infrastructure over the entire national forest—will most likely be decided by national players and interests. Introduced in early March by Representatives John Curtis (R) and Joe Neguse (D), the “Protect America’s Rock Climbing Act” seeks to legitimize and direct management for climbing in wilderness. Mostly focusing on fixed anchors, the act would make unilateral bolting bans—such as the one now impacting the BNF—illegal. Furthermore, there is still some hope that USFS national directives will come out at the end of the year. In light of these two developments, Dane Scott (WMTCC President) and I thought it prudent to pivot from substantive management measures to draft a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the WMTCC and the BNF. Such a document would explicate the relationship between climbers and land managers and allow each organization to benefit from the resources and expertise of the other. Such an MOU seems more possible, in part, because of the deteriorated relationship between the Friends of the Bitterroot and the BNF. This greatly changed the dynamic between climbers and land managers in subsequent meetings.

I participated in two private meetings with Scott Brown, District Ranger, and Caleb George this semester. In which, we discussed collaborative paths forward, the frustrations and lessons of the initial draft CMP process, and interests of both the BNF and WMTCC. The WMTCC held one final meeting—a roundtable discussion I facilitated discussing climbing development with climbers in Missoula and the Bitterroot Valley—on April 27th, 2023. In addition, Dane, Caleb, and I finished a draft MOU by that date. The aim was that through cooperation and exposure, we can better understand one another’s interests. Effectively, the WMTCC will offer labor and expertise to complete raptor and erosion surveys, as well as eventually publish a sort of catalogue of climbing routes to give to the BNF, and incorporate such into a guidebook. In return, the WMTCC hopes to receive support and legitimacy for a variety of infrastructure projects—from creating climbing trails and landings for routes to lifting the bolting moratorium in the national forest.

V: Accomplishments and Lessons Learned

In some ways, I think I learned more from the Civic Engagement Project than many of the courses I took during my tenure at the University of Montana. Though it lacked the academic content of a more traditional thesis, the CEP offered an opportunity to cultivate practical skills. I learned how to organize an event, draft engaging emails, translate philosophical concepts to the public, etc. I am convinced I made real headway in the Bitterroot climbing controversy and am optimistic for climbing’s survival in the BNF going forward.

Accomplishments

Perhaps the greatest accomplishment of my project was the rebuilt relationship between the WMTCC and the BNF. For obvious reasons (the bolting moratorium and seemingly overlooked route vandalism on the part of the FOB), the WMTCC had little trust and regard for forest management. Conversely, the BNF felt the WMTCC was an unruly, unregulated, and argumentative bunch. No doubt, climbers in the wider community continue to develop routes and place bolts throughout the moratorium. The tension was warranted on both sides.

After the series of meetings I organized with the BNF, it seems the relationship is far more amicable and respectful. Now, instead of black looks and bull-headed arguments, participants at the table consider others’ opinions with respect. I am sure part of this change in relationship has to do with the fallout between the BNF and FOB—but I think my meager facilitation helped too. Over the course of these meetings, we were able to identify and communicate our interests in the public resource, rather than simply jockeying back and forth over positions. No doubt, the persistence of Dane Scott and Katie Williams of the WMTCC, as well as Eric Murdoch from the Access Fund displayed to the BNF that we were reasonable recreationists, willing to work with the BNF on difficult management issues. All in all, the BNF and WMTCC have a new, healthier relationship—one I am sure will lead to better management outcomes for all parties in the future.

Second, the WMTCC and BNF were able to reach a series of agreements regarding route development on the National Forest. It seems both parties agree on the nature of development on the opposing poles of the wildness-artificiality spectrum—being federally designated wilderness and heavily developed sport climbing areas. Climbers in the Bitterroot have long abided by previous wilderness mandates—barring motorized drills, using bolts sparingly, leaving approaches and descents to climbs unimpacted and unmarked, etc. I believe we expressed that to the BNF, and because of our newfound relationship, they took the community at its word. Further, the WMTCC is making moves towards a “highly impacted climbing crag registry”, to offer a list of areas with high climbing traffic for the BNF to consider impacts to the natural resource, as well as historical and cultural resources. The hope is to eventually create a climbing guidebook, which would lend legitimacy and give instruction for climbing in the Bitterroot.

Third, I created three documents that will benefit negotiations with the BNF in the future. Firstly, Caleb George and I finished a draft MOU. This somehow codifies the relationship building work all parties participated in over the past year or so. Secondly, I added a section considering the historical debate, as well as contemporary conception, of climbing ethics and style to Christopher Mackay’s Climbing Management Story Map. Third, I completed a draft of the Best Practices for Route Development in the Bitterroot. The hope is that this document will serve as a prescriptive manual for responsible route development on the BNF and will live in the Appendixes of the next Climbing Management Plan draft. I hope these documents to be useful and lasting pieces of philosophical work for the community.

Lessons Learned

As it turns out, community organizing is difficult. Regardless of the direction I thought conversations and negotiations should have gone, other parties often disagreed. Rarely would representatives state their interests, or even positions, explicitly. On more than one occasion, while meeting the BNF directly, representatives of the WMTCC seemed more of a roadblock to our own goals than an ally in the struggle. The most important lesson I learned over this project was: you cannot control people, nor can you predict them. Even if I thought I had a good understanding of the argumentative landscape during a particular meeting, I was often surprised. Even if a committee member and I spoke about strategy and talking points before the meeting, we would often go off script. Conversations are more difficult when there are stakes—a negotiation over substantive consequences feels very different than a purely academic debate.

Another lesson: substantive work on legal issues demands attention to many quickly moving parts, as well as patience for a laughingly lethargic legislative system. It seemed that nothing changed on the national landscape of climbing management until everything did in March 2023. In that month alone, it seemed at first that the preservationist wing of the Department of the Interior might attempt to ban bolts outright. Then, shortly after, legislation was introduced in the House of Representatives to permanently legitimize bolts on the public resource. After that, we received word that we might expect national mandates from the Department of Agriculture regarding climbing management on the National Forest. Before that, we had heard naught from any executive agency, legislative branch, or judiciary for years.

From this, I have learnt that if I want to work in public land policy, I must possess great patience, an attention to detail, and immense flexibility. The ability to pivot my aims from substantive suggestions to more relational goals saved my project. Without this learnt flexibility, I would have floundered far more this semester.

Conclusion and Acknowledgments

Overall, I count this CEP a success—both for the Bitterroot climbing controversy and my own education. I feel I have learnt much over the past semester professionally, and the last two years academically. The CEP was a valuable process, with different ends than a more traditional master’s thesis, no doubt. I am optimistic for my career moving forward and for the success of the WMTCC and BNF.

I would like to thank my Graduate Advisor, Soazig Le Bihan; the co-Chair of the graduate program, Christopher Preston; as well as the other professors involved in the program. Your work made the program—without your instruction, there would be no Environmental Philosophy MA whatsoever. I appreciate your insights, expertise, questions, and challenges. Most of all, I would like to thank my cohort. Without you, I would be twice as dumb and doubly confident.

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1. Six Rivers National Forest, *Land and Resource Management Plan*; “Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS)”, Plan Appendix I-1 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The practice of ascending extremely difficult small rocks with only one’s hands and feet, without a rope or any artificial aids. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Large, high-altitude climbing in the world’s Greater Ranges, so defined by a lack of rules, nearly any strategy and technology is permissible for the climbers to ascend the mountain. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. “The higher one goes on the scale, the more inaccessible and formidable become the climber’s goals, and, in consequence, he need apply fewer restrictions to conserve the full measure of challenge and satisfaction inherent in the *climbing-game* he is playing.” Tejada-Flores, Lito; “Games Climbers Play”; *Alpine Journal,* 1968; p. 47 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Rise of the Sleepwalker*, an extension to Jimmy Webb’s *Sleepwalker* in Red Rocks, NV, was first climbed in 2021 by Daniel Woods. It is one of the few boulder-problems in the world suggested to be V17, the hardest grade yet conferred to a boulder-problem. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid; p. 49 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Using only one’s hands and feet for progress up the wall, but using rope and hardware for protection. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Climbing without any prior experience or knowledge of a particular route. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Using points of artificial aid (bolts, cams, pitons, etc.) to help in the actual ascent of the wall, as well as protection in case of a fall. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Resting on the rope after falling on a climb and attempt the difficult sequence again to discern the particular move or moves. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Unlike Tejada-Flores, Higgins notes the importance of stylistic honesty in the climbing game: “Whereas climbers once agreed to report their first-ascent style openly, now information about style is not readily forthcoming. Some tricksters simply refuse to say how they did a climb, perhaps believing the style of ascent is no one's business.” “Tricksters and Traditionalists”; p. 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. “these agreements safeguard the climbing enjoyment of others.” Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. “There were once plenty of new routes for climbers to "hunt"; so it didn't matter that some people used "bows" and others used "guns" to do the coveted climbs. Plenty of "game" existed for each. But now that game is scarce, climbers employing different styles are in competition for new routes much more so than in the past. A first ascent accomplished by preplacing bolts or pitons on aid or rappel removes the opportunity for another party to make the first ascent without using these techniques. The same is true for first ascents done by rehearsing or resting on protection.” Ibid.; p. 4 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid.; p. 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Also known as Devil’s Tower, climbers often acquiesce to the voluntary June climbing closure respecting Indigenous American spiritual rituals. Even “[t]he Access Fund, a climber advocacy and access organization, supports compliance with the voluntary June climbing closure as a means to: [p]romote understanding and encourage respect for the culture of the numerous Native American tribes who are closely affiliated with the Tower as a sacred site. Promote and advance self-regulation by climbers rather than more restrictive options.” <https://www.nps.gov/deto/planyourvisit/currentclimbingclosures.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Named Ayer’s Rock by Australia’s white colonizers, Australia’s most famous natural monument was closed to climbers in 2019 “because of the spiritual significance of the site, as well as for safety and environmental reasons.” https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-50151344 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. p. 24 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid.; p. 15 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid; p. 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid; p. 12 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. For more information, see The Black Hills Climber’s Coalition website: <https://www.bhclimbers.com/>. Also, Andrew Burr’s 2012 piece for *Climbing*, “Monumental”, on his personal interaction with the history of climbing in the Black Hills of South Dakota. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Meaning the use of hammers, chisels, and glue to manipulate and sculpt existent rock for climbing holds. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See: Klinsporn, Katie; “Bighorn forest puts Tensleep climbing plan on hold”; *WyoFile*; <https://wyofile.com/bighorn-forest-puts-tensleep-climbing-plan-on-hold/>. “Climbing”; USDA Bighorn National Forest; <https://www.fs.usda.gov/activity/bighorn/recreation/climbing>. And “Best Practices for Climbing and Climbing Management on the Bighorn National Forest”; USDA; <https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd855358.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Though, there may be reason to believe that Thoreau’s “wildness” is more an ideal quality accessible to human beings and extra-human entities alike. See Thoreau, Henry David; *Essays*; “Walking”; p. 269: “I rejoice that horses and steers have to be broken before they can be made the slaves of men, and that men themselves have some wild oats still left to sow before they become submissive members of society. Undoubtedly, all men are not equally fit subjects for civilization.” [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. “There is a *gap*, in the construction of every artifact, between the intention with which the builder acts and the consequences of her acts, a gap that is ineliminable and indeed constitutive of what it is to construct something; and in this gap resides something like what I earlier called wildness.” Vogel, Steven; *Thinking Like a Mall*; p. 113 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ibid; p. 169 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Ibid.; p. 97; italicizations omitted [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. “Knowledge, Kant Realized, had to be understood as active. The subject does not receive knowledge but rather constructs it” Ibid; p. 49 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. “My concernful involvement in the world is thus prior to any conceptual or representation “knowledge of it; indeed, that sort of knowledge itself requires and depends on my previous involvement.” Ibid; p. 52 and “To know something is still to *do* something, still involves active engagement—is still, that is, a mode of being-in-the-world.” Ibid; p. 53 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. “The right model is of an active bodily participant in the world…necessarily and always already engaged in concrete physical practices that change that world, whose knowledge of the world arises and is expressed within those practices.” Ibid; p. 54 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. “Thus, although it is doubtless true that people have “seen” or “understood” or “conceptualized” nature differently at different historical moments and in different cultures, the deeper point is that they have acted different at different historical moments and in different cultures, and so have transformed the environment they inhabited in different ways—and so have in a quite literal sense inhabited different environments, all of which have been…socially constructed.” Ibid; p. 57 [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. “Yes, it was the result (in part) of human intention, but being physical meant it was subject to physical forces and had physical properties, just like Leopold’s mountain and she wolf…the clearest indication of the fact that the mall was independent of humans, subject to its own developmental process in ways that no humans could ever fully grasp or predict lies in the fundamental fact about City Center: it failed.” Ibid; p. 142 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid; p. 163 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. The upshot here, as I am sure readers understand, is that I intuitively think we ought not to do so. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. “We begin to pass to value when we recognize that the genetic set is a normative set…The physical state that the organism seeks, idealized in its programmatic form, is a valued state. Value is present in this achievement. Vital seems a better word for it than biological. We are not dealing simply with an individual defending its solitary life but with an individual having situated fitness in an ecosystem. Still, we want to affirm that the living individual, taken as a "point experience" in the web of interconnected life, is per se an intrinsic value.” Rolston III, Holmes; “Challenges in Environmental Ethics”; *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*;p. 133 [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. For more on this see: McShane, Katie; “Why Environmental Ethics Shouldn’t Give Up on Intrinsic Value”; *Environmental Ethics*; Vol. 29 [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. For more information on the ROS, a reader should peruse “Appendix F: Recreation Opportunity Spectrum” and *An Assessment of Frameworks Useful for Public Land Recreation Planning*; McCool, Stephen et. Al. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. There are plenty of other reasons we might not want to develop particular pieces of rock—species’ welfare concerns and cultural sensitivity to indigenous groups are two that immediately come to mind. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. *Philosopher’s Magazine*; https://www.philosophersmag.com/essays/170-the-aesthetics-of-rock-climbing#:~:text=The%20aesthetics%20of%20climbing%20is,and%20the%20challenges%20they%20meet. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. From Ibid: “playing games involve taking up artificial goals and imposing inefficient means on ourselves, because we want to create a new kind of activity.” I.e. the Expedition Climbing Game imposing nearly no restrictions because of the difficulty inherent to the environment versus the Bouldering Game imposing nearly every obstacle imaginable to create an interesting activity. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Spraying: Idle or arrogant, often over-descriptive talk about climbing accolades, strategies, or experiences. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. *Forum for Philosophy*; https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/theforum/art-is-a-game/ [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. “Elsewhere in intellectual life, our interest in correctness usually trumps the demand for independence. When we want to get it right, we usually defer to experts. I defer to my doctor about what medicines to take; I defer to my mechanic about which repairs my car needs. Even the scientific experts need to depend on thousands of other experts. So: if we really care about getting things right with art, shouldn’t we also defer to experts there, too?” Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Though there may be an argument that some might engage with aesthetics in this way—championing writers’ opinions from *Pitchfork* or Anthony Fantano—the reasons for doing so may not be aesthetic. Perhaps the cultural benefit of identifying with cool, hip, or trendy opinions is really the aim—the ability to belong to some sort of aesthete group. Furthermore, whether or not individuals earnestly subscribe to exterior opinions, they are still engaging in a discourse without obvious effects, aims, or ends. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. *Aesthetic Life and Why it Matters*; p. 29 [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. “Solo” here simply means climbing alone, whether free, aid or rope solo. Raleigh, Duane; “Jim Bridwell, Founder of YOSAR and Big Wall Godfather, Dead at 73”; *Rock and Ice*; https://www.rockandice.com/climbing-news/jim-bridwell-founder-of-yosar-and-big-wall-godfather-dead-at-73/?utm\_source=Email\_marketing&utm\_campaign=Friday\_March\_25\_2016&cmp=1&utm\_medium=HTMLEmail#\_reg-wall [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. *Aesthetic Life and Why it Matters*; p. 61 [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Ibid.; p. 63 [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Ibid.; p. 68 [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Sturgeon, Noel; “Movements of Ecofeminism”; *Ecofeminist Natures: Race, Gender, Feminist Theory and Political Action*; p. 23 [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. In *Inquiry*; vol. 16; p. 95 [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Ibid; p. 96 [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Ibid; p. 95 [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Ibid; p. 96 [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Kingsnorth, Paul; “Life Versus the Machine”; *Orion* [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Tiseo, Ian; “Annual global emissions of carbon dioxide 1940-2021”; *Statista* [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Kingsnorth, Paul; “Life Versus the Machine”; *Orion* [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. See Kingsnorth’s “The West Needs to Grow Up”, Amy Irvine’s *Desert Cabal*, “Lies of the land: against and beyond Paul Kingsnorth’s volkisch environmentalism” from *Out of the Woods*, and David Orton’s “Ecofascism: What is It?” [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. “Ecosophy T [Naess’s name for his biocentrism] has only one ultimate norm: Self-Realization!” From Sturgeon, Noel; “Movements of Ecofeminism”; *Ecofeminist Natures*; p. 42 [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. “It is by clarifying this conceptual connection between systems of oppression that a movement to end sexist oppression—traditionally the special turf of feminist theory and practice—leads to a reconceiving of feminism as a movement to end all forms of oppression.” Warren, Karen; “The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism”; *Environmental Philosophy: From Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*; p. 328 [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Ibid; p. 322 [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Ibid.; p. 329; author’s italics [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. “I realized then that I had come to care about this cliff which was so different from me, so unmovable and invincible, independent and seemingly indifferent to my presence. I wanted to be with the rock as I climbed. Gone was the determination to conquer the rock, to forcefully impose my will on it; I wanted simply to work respectfully with the rock as I climbed.” Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. The Friends of the Bitterroot; “About Us”; https://www.friendsofthebitterroot.net/ [↑](#footnote-ref-73)