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Wilderness & Protected Lands

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Wilderness Philosophy

I am in the forests of Grand Teton National Park. Fluffy snow surrounds me. Two skis lie between myself and a mountain bigger than any human can create. As I flow down the mountain, I interrupt a baby moose, invested in eating the woody plants of the forest. It looks up at its alien visitor only for a moment. We both return to our unique experiences, undisturbed by the others presence. The mountain and I become a single entity, gravity pulling me down as I control the drops into wild snow banks and undisturbed powder.

This is my wilderness. A place left to do as it will. Trees that may or may not be burned in the sweltering summer fires. Beasts reproducing at will, unbridled by the wants of man. I am a passerby in this quiet place. It lacks the steady hum of cars, of machinery, of production and greed. From anywhere else, I cannot find the quiet mental state that these woods provide. Wilderness is the place where I become myself in the purest form. Focused yet relaxed, finding intensity and serenity. Places untouched and seemingly undiscovered are true wildernesses. In the eyes of Aldo Leopold, I am experiencing “every edible bush and seedling browsed, first to anemic destitute, and then to death. I have seen every edible tree defoliated to the height of a saddlehorn” (Leopold, 1949). While I live in a time where each majestic tree is seen as another lawn chair to add to the domesticated domain, I find peace with the cycles of protected forests. If we fail to protect these places, the destruction which Leopold speaks of will surely befall our wild places.

I associate best with the theme of wilderness as a place for renewal and inspiration as well as physical and mental challenges. In addition to the challenge of these wild places, I view wilderness as a sanctuary for ecological wellbeing, diversity and shared heritage. Living as a descendant of great lizards,

I feel that wild places offer a home where I can coexist, not simply exist. In the words of Rachel Carson, I feel that “the more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for destruction”. By becoming a part of our wilderness, we realize that we were never separate from it and the destruction of it can only mean a destruction of the self. Carson’s push to protect our wonders influences my own mentality on wilderness protection. The connection we share with the Earth is inseparable and preservation rather than conservation is the way to protect this connection.

In my opinion, the less human impact on natural systems, the better. I believe that the “biocentric philosophy of management (stewardship) could result in the most appropriate protection” for our priceless wilds (Dawson & Hendee, pg. 26). There should be places in the world where humans do not reap the rewards of logging, hunting, or changing of the natural ecology. These should be fully protected and only enjoyed through minimal impact recreation. Sadly, skiing is most likely not included. In *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau teaches to “Live in each season as it passes; breathe the air, drink the drink, taste the fruit, and resign yourself to the influence of the earth.” I feel as if this is how we should experience the wilderness. We should live in it without pushing our means upon it. Thoreau’s view that the wilderness is vital to human happiness and growth is similar to my own. I find value in coexisting with nature.

References:

- Dawson, C. P., & Hendee, J. C. (2009). *Wilderness management: Stewardship and protection of resources and values* (Forth Edition). Golden, CO: Fulcrum.
- Thoreau, H. D. (1908). *Walden, or, Life in the Woods*. London: J.M. Dent.
- Quotes from Aldo Leopold, John Muir, and Rachel Carson