

# **Does Nature Have To Be Wild?**

ENG/ENV M30: Environment & Cultures

Prof. Heise

Lecture 4

13 April 2023

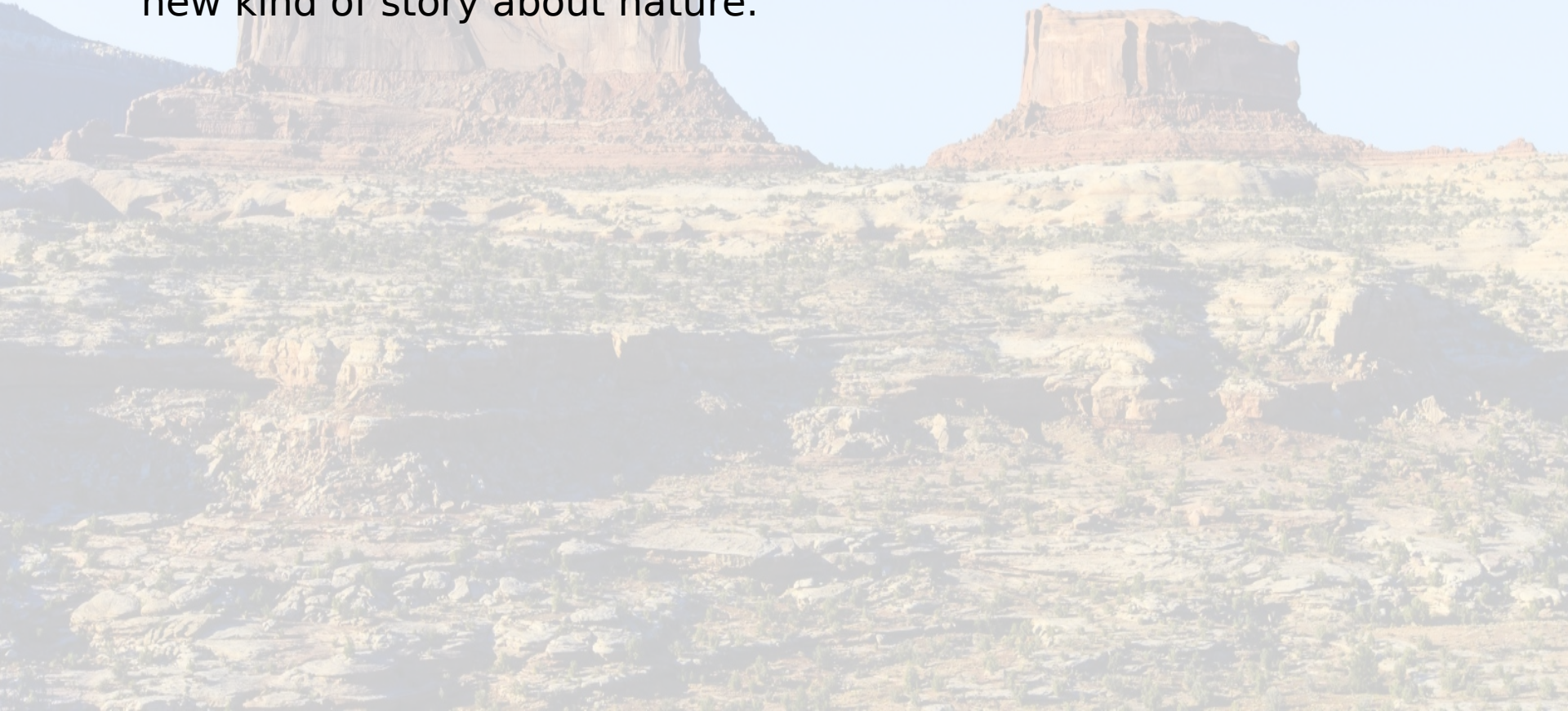
# Recap: Masterplot/Story Pattern

- A story pattern is a standard story, a default story: a familiar storyline we fall back on to explain both familiar and unfamiliar events.
- Environmental thinking and activism – like any other kind of social or political thinking – draws on particular story patterns, sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously.
- Muir's narrative of a single man venturing into wild nature and finding enlightenment and regeneration there is one such masterplot.



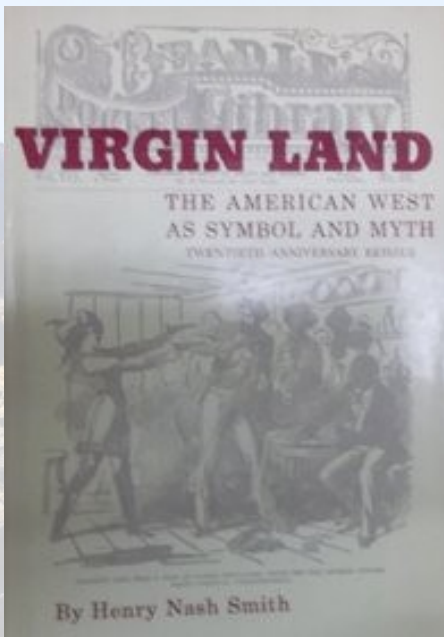
## Recap: The Wilderness Idea in America

- Under the influence of John Muir and other American nineteenth-century environmentalists, the idealization of rural nature typical of pastoral shifts to the idealization of wild nature and gives rise to a new kind of story about nature.

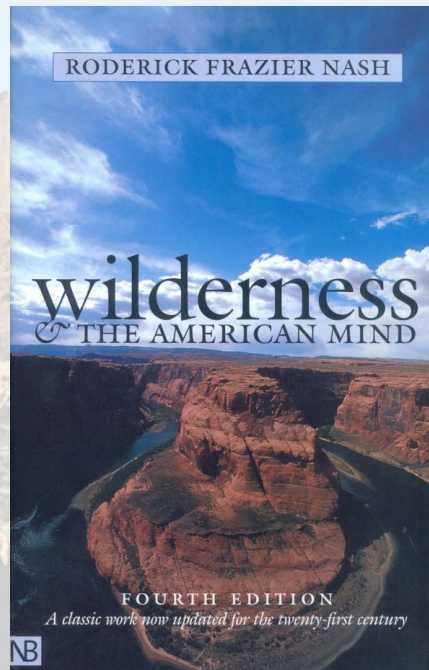




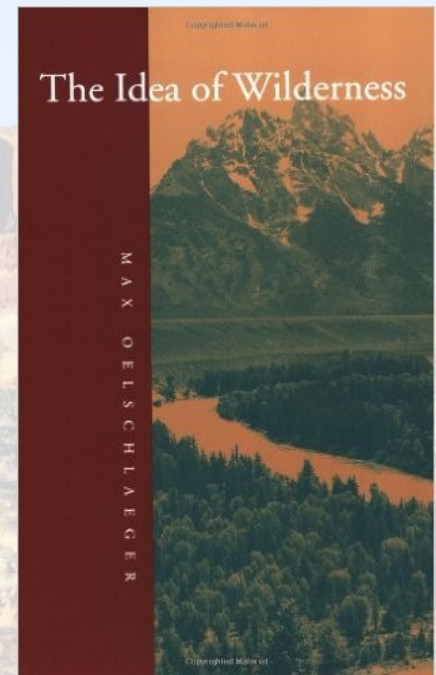
# Studies of Wilderness in the American Imagination:



1950



1967



1999



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- This conceptual shift entails a shift in environmental values and environmental storytelling: Nature is the more valuable the more untouched by humans it is, and putting people in touch with wild nature becomes one of the prime objectives of environmentalism.



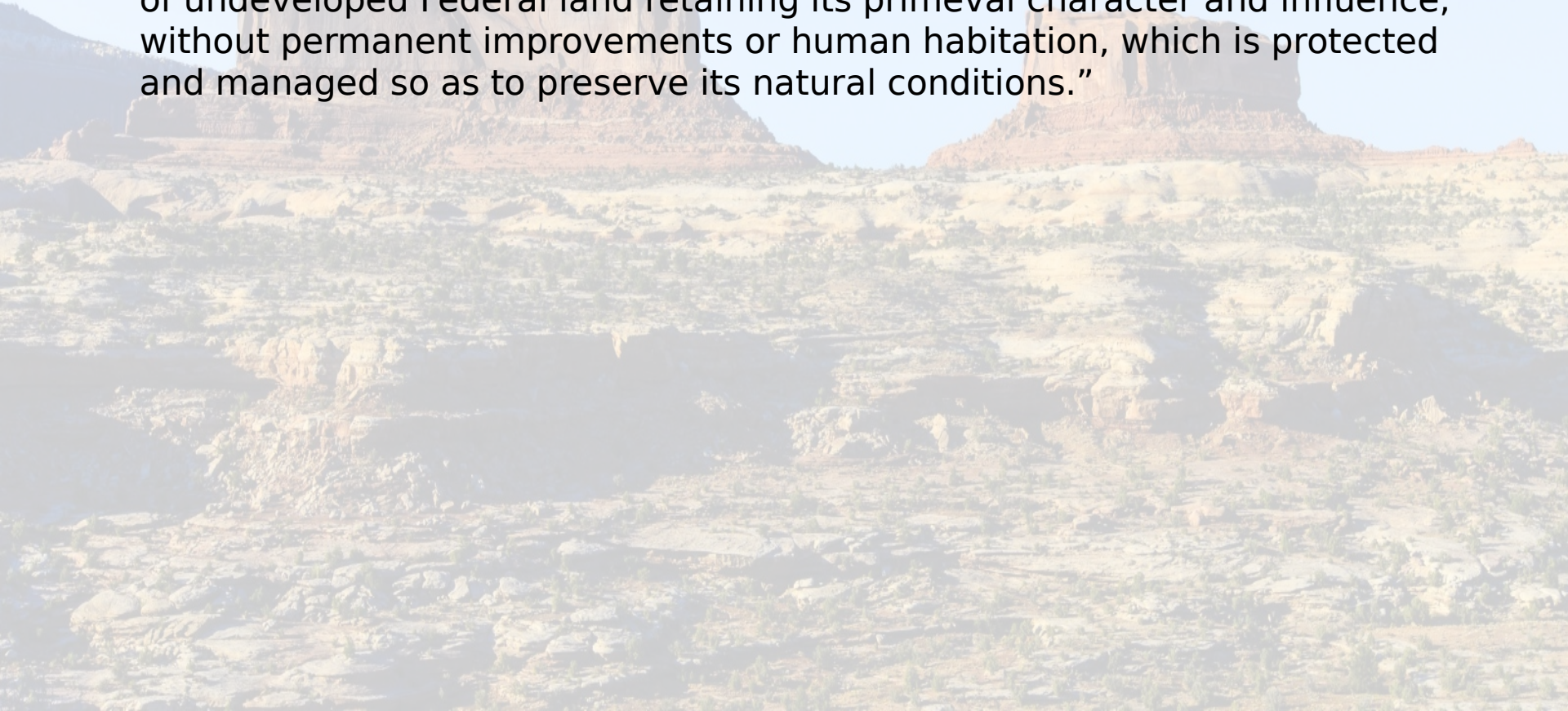
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- This conceptual shift entails a shift in environmental values and environmental storytelling: Nature is the more valuable the more untouched by humans it is, and putting people in touch with wild nature becomes one of the prime objectives of environmentalism.
- The idea of wilderness as articulated in John Muir's writings uses the language of religion and the language of the sublime to present wild nature as a secular experience of the divine that transforms and elevates the individual's spirit.



# Legal Consequences: The Wilderness Act (1964)

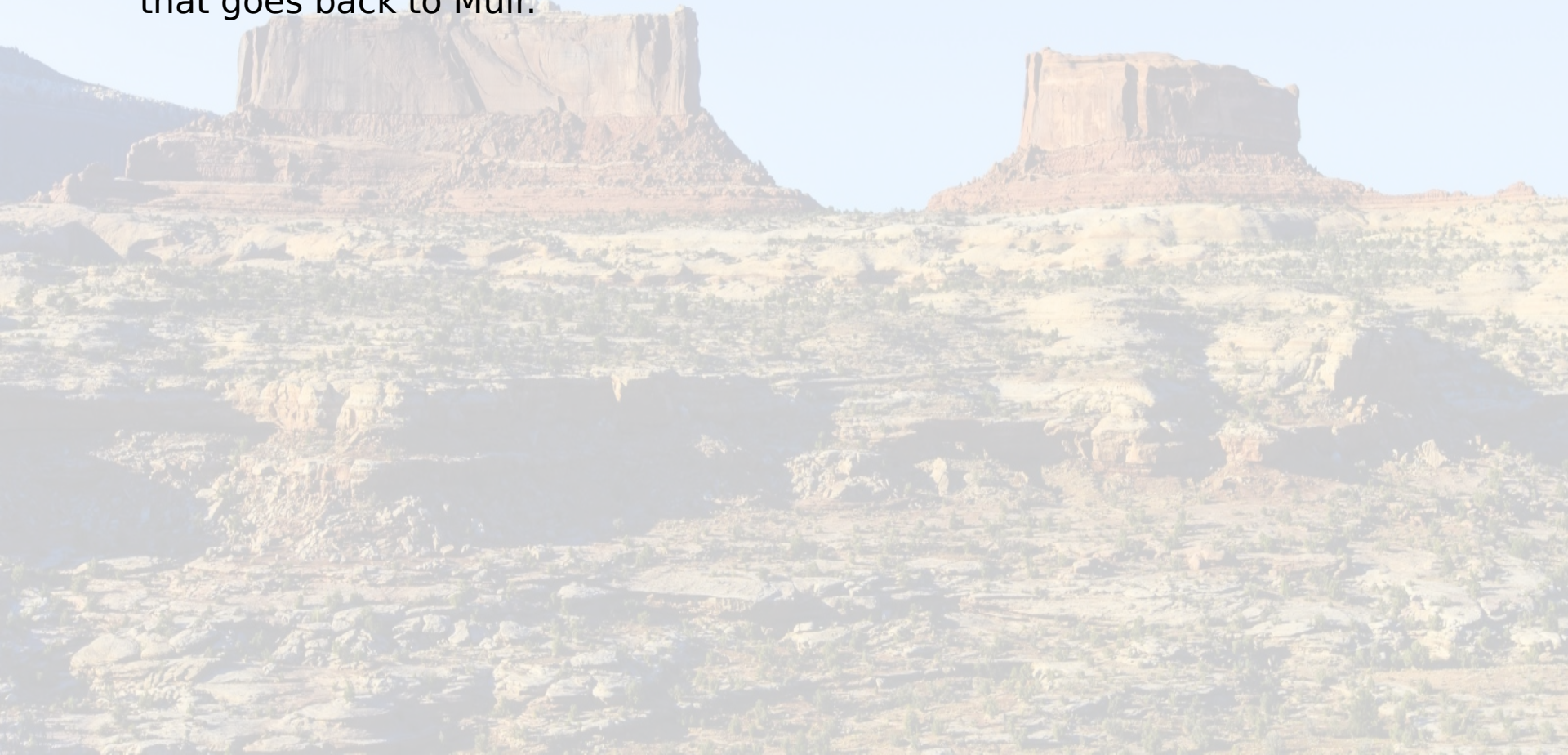
**DEFINITION OF WILDERNESS** (c) A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as **an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.** An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions.”





# Political Consequences: The Deep Ecology Movement

In the 1970s and 80s, some environmental movements in the United States emphasize “biocentrism” or “ecocentrism”: conserving nature for its own sake rather than its value for humans (for example, Friends of the Earth, Sea Shepherd). Some of their thinking adopts the emphasis on wild nature that goes back to Muir.







Ramachandra Guha  
Social historian, b.1958

Guha, "Radical American  
Environmentalism and  
Wilderness Preservation: A  
Third World Critique" (1989)



# Guha's Criticism of the Wilderness Idea

- In the developing world, the American wilderness story template can function like yet another colonial imposition: **“White Man’s Burden”**| **green imperialism**.





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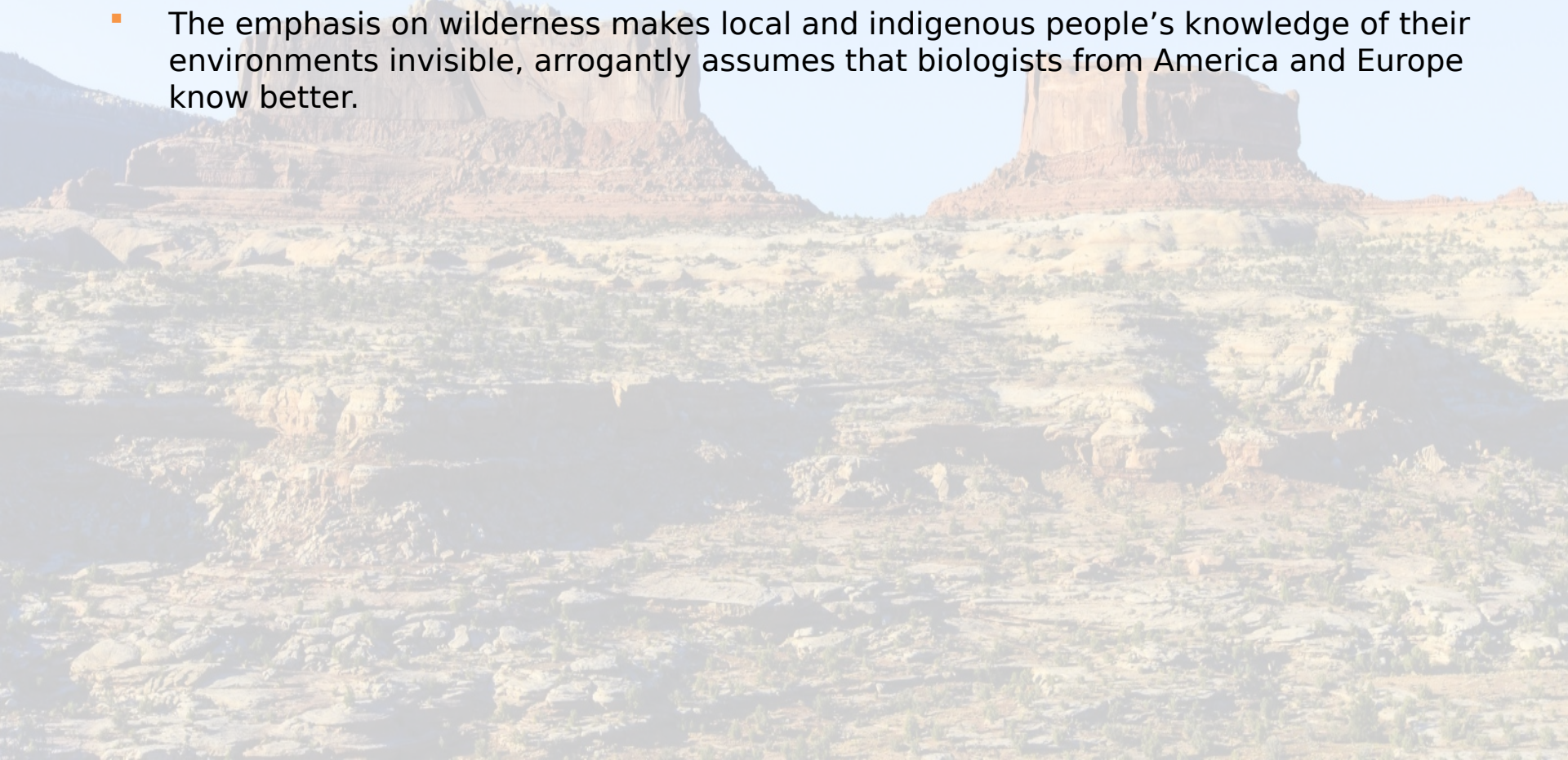
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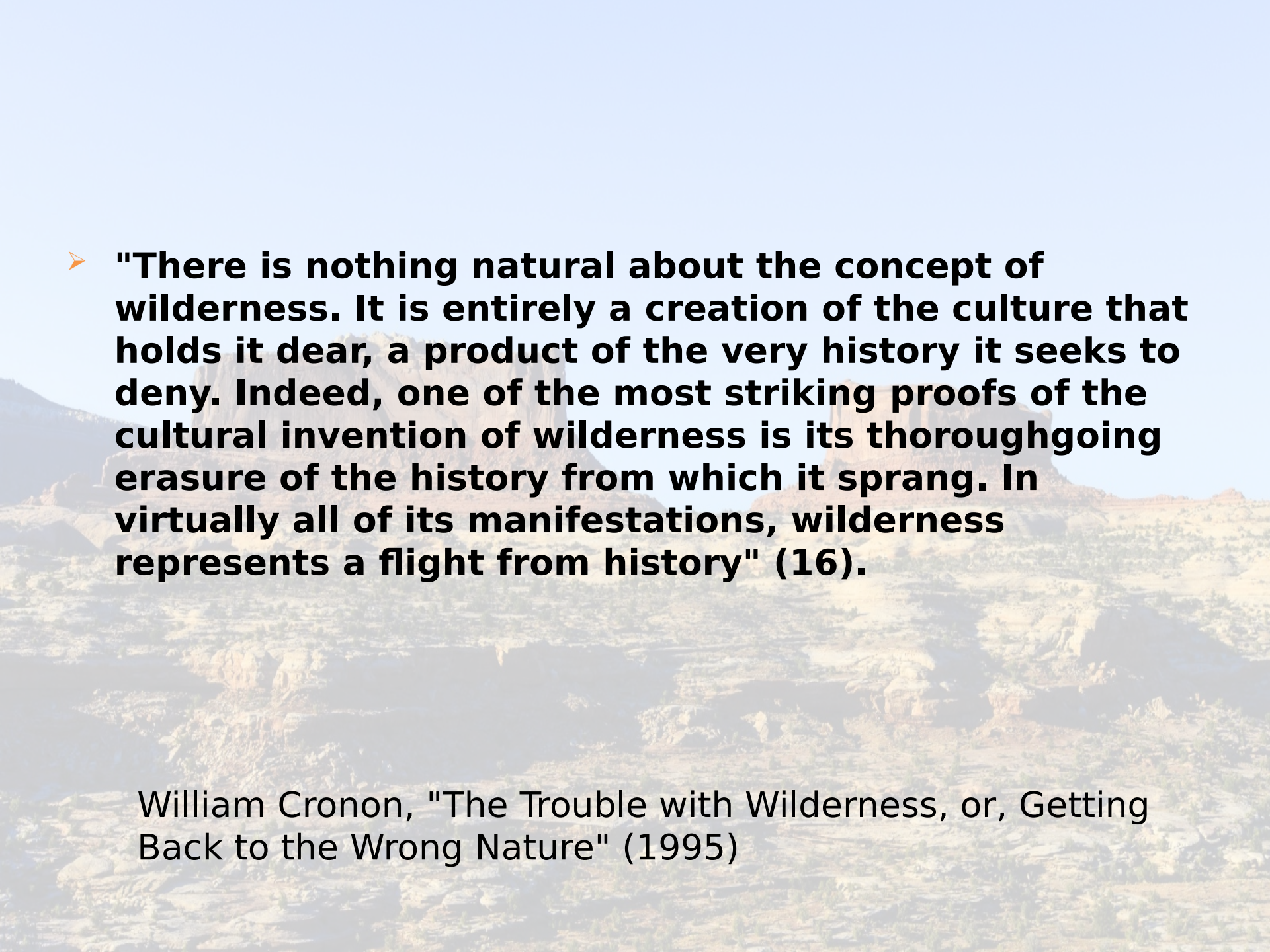
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- Environmental issues need to be connected with issues of social justice: **environmental justice.**



- 
- **"There is nothing natural about the concept of wilderness. It is entirely a creation of the culture that holds it dear, a product of the very history it seeks to deny. Indeed, one of the most striking proofs of the cultural invention of wilderness is its thoroughgoing erasure of the history from which it sprang. In virtually all of its manifestations, wilderness represents a flight from history" (16).**

William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness, or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature" (1995)



# **Cronon's Criticism of the Wilderness Idea**

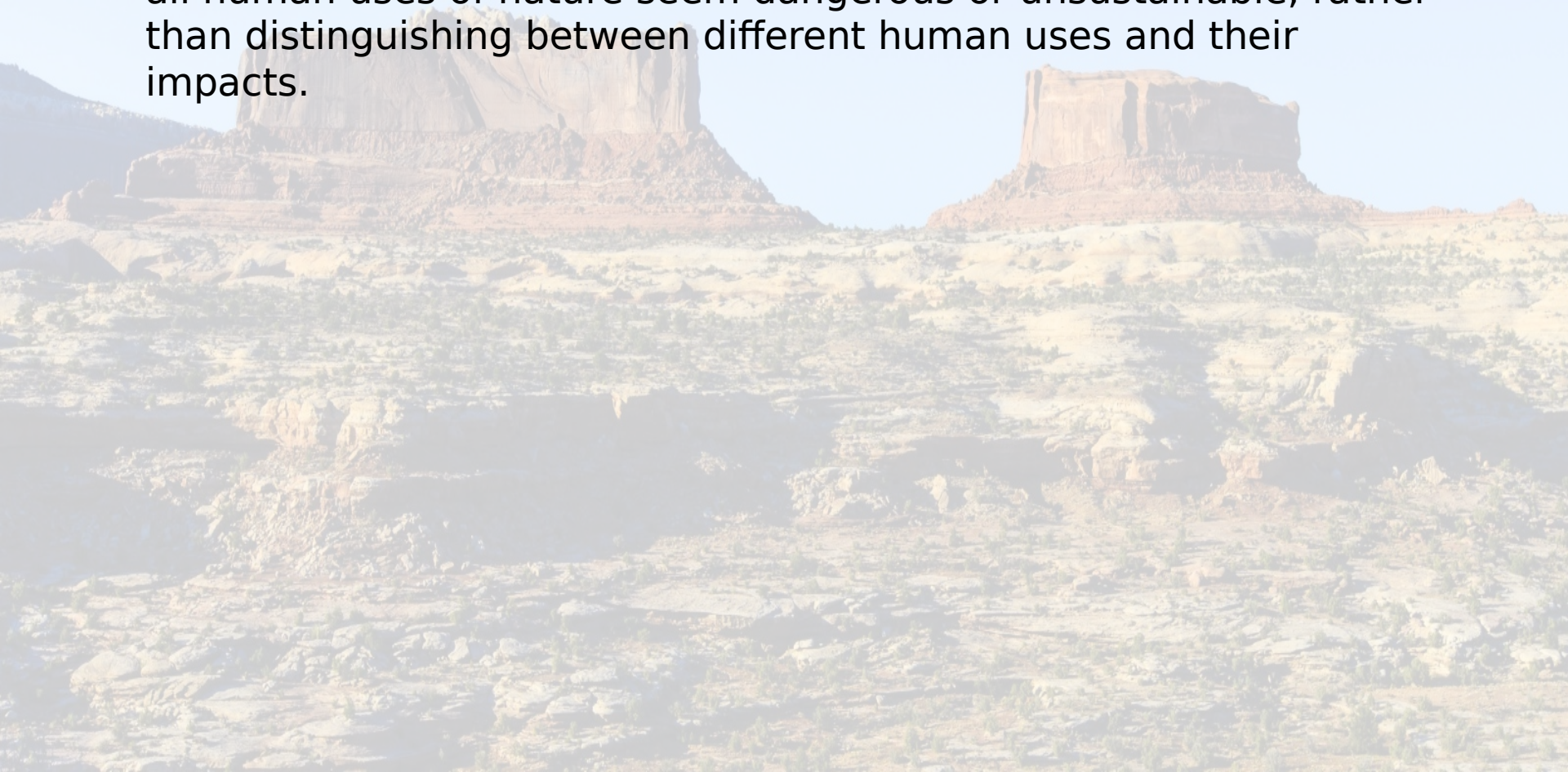
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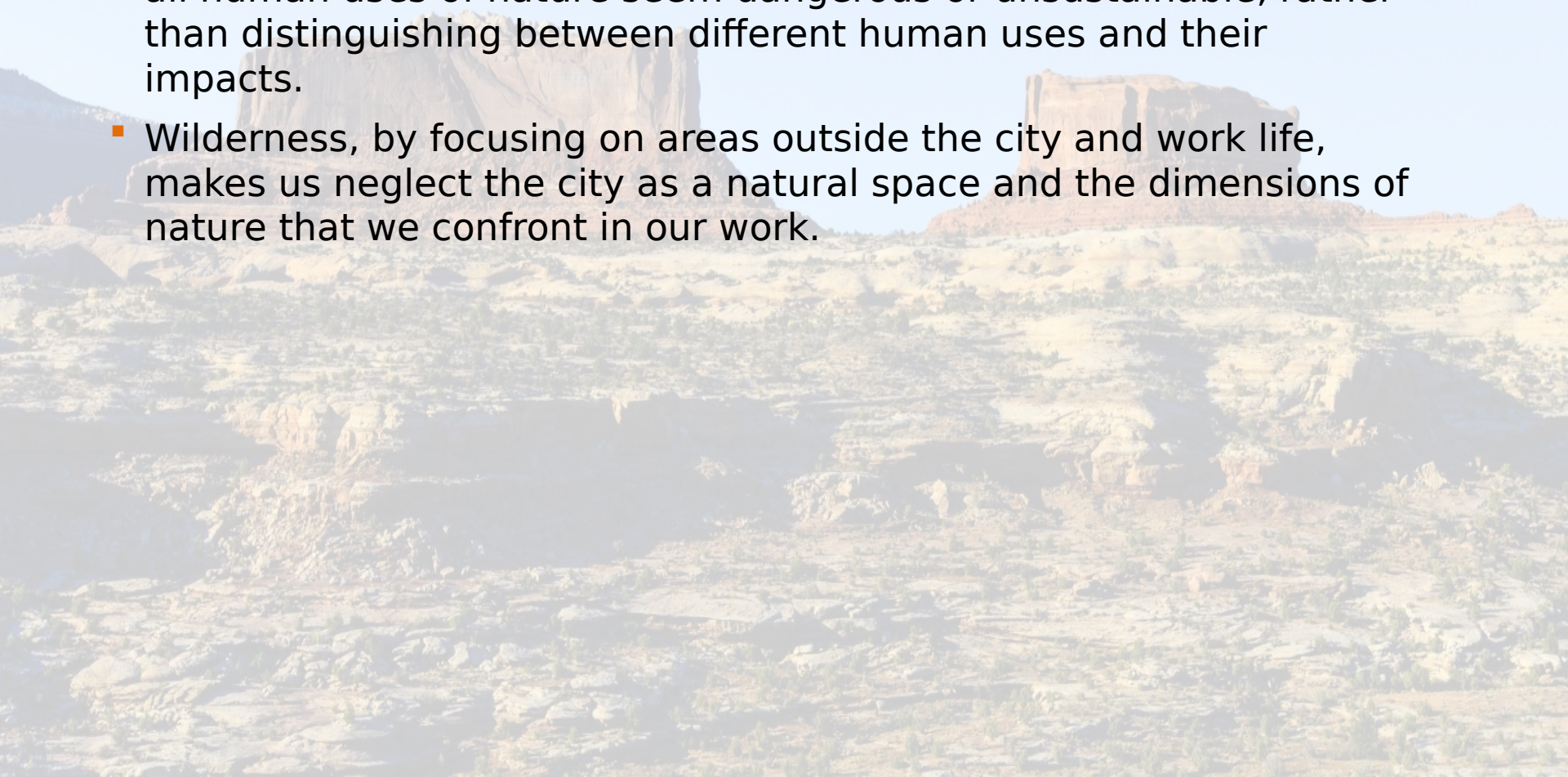
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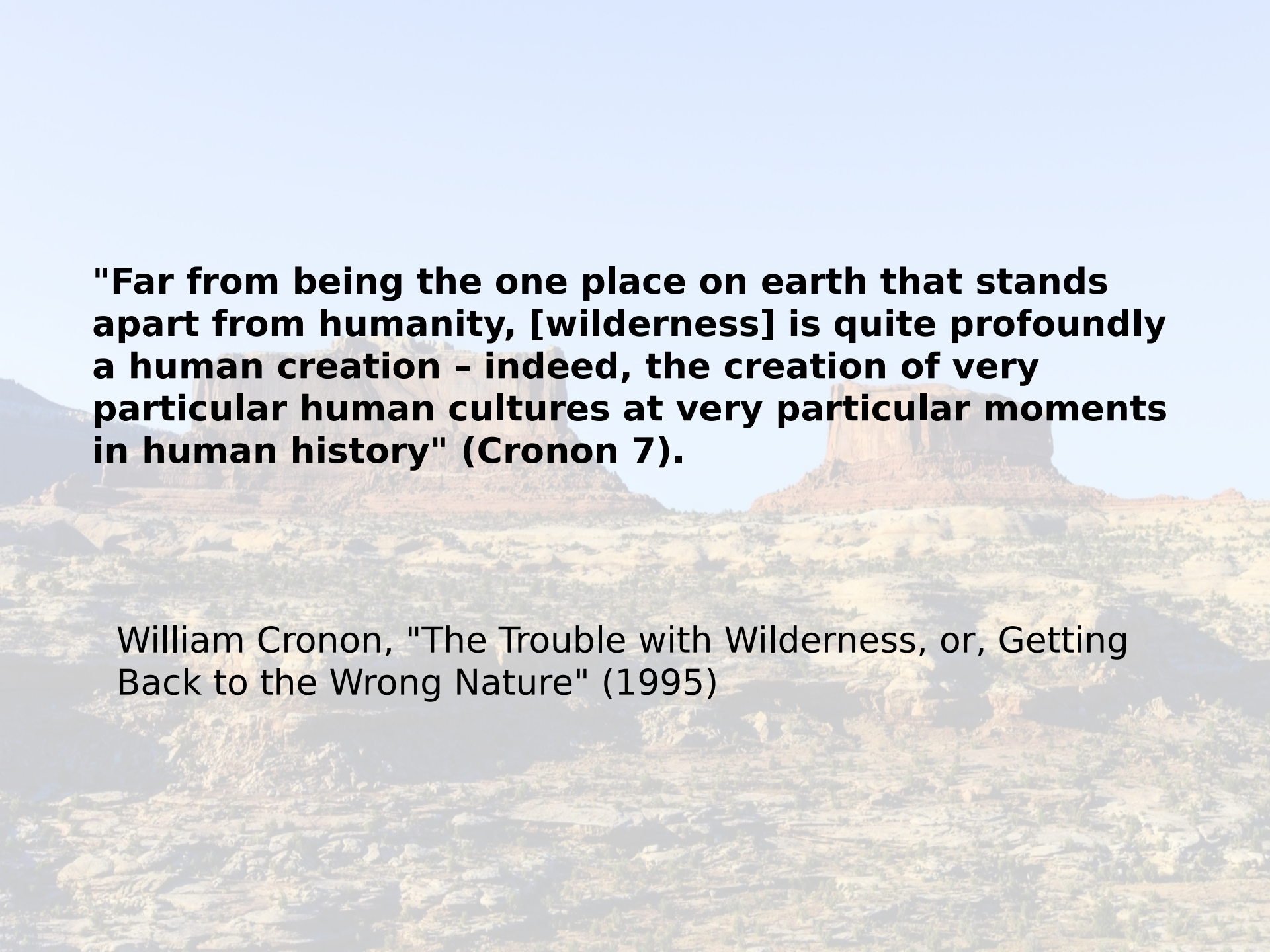
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- Wilderness as an environmental ideal erases the history of our own and others' involvements with and transformations of nature.





**"Far from being the one place on earth that stands apart from humanity, [wilderness] is quite profoundly a human creation - indeed, the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history" (Cronon 7).**

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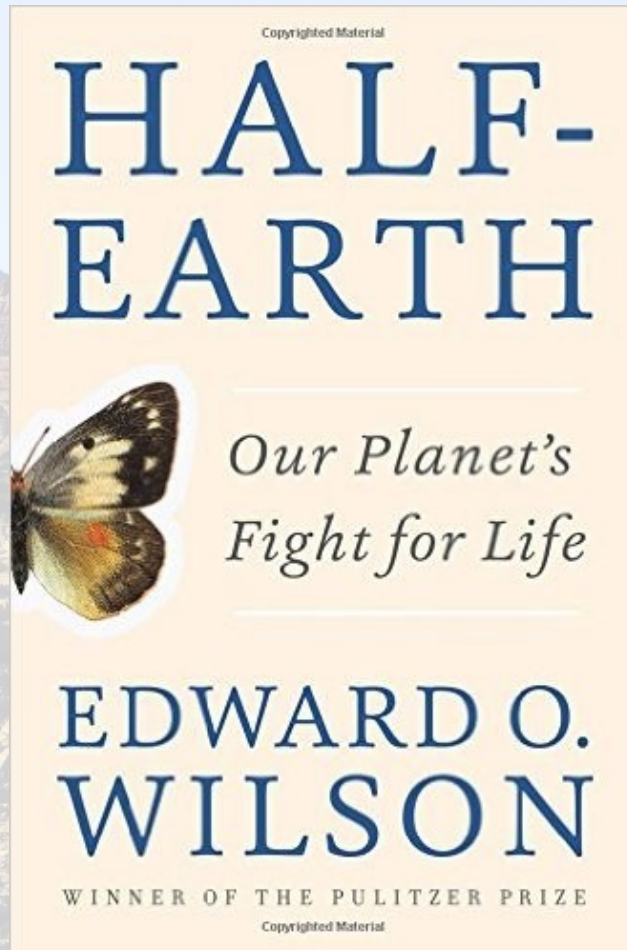


## **But:**

- The wilderness narrative has mobilized a lot of people for conservation, so it shouldn't just be dismissed
- Wilderness as a concept allows us to perceive the otherness of landscapes and nonhuman species, and to leave space for nonhuman needs



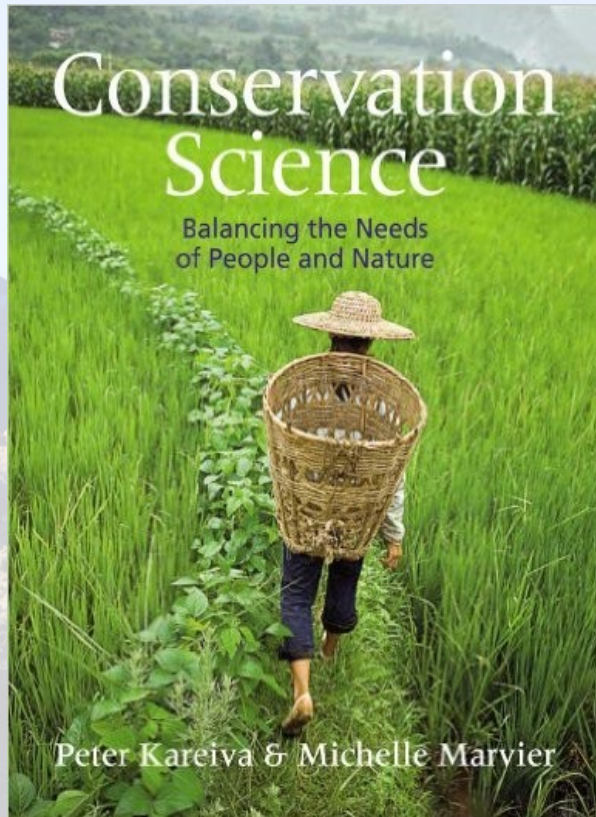
## The Wilderness Controversy Today:



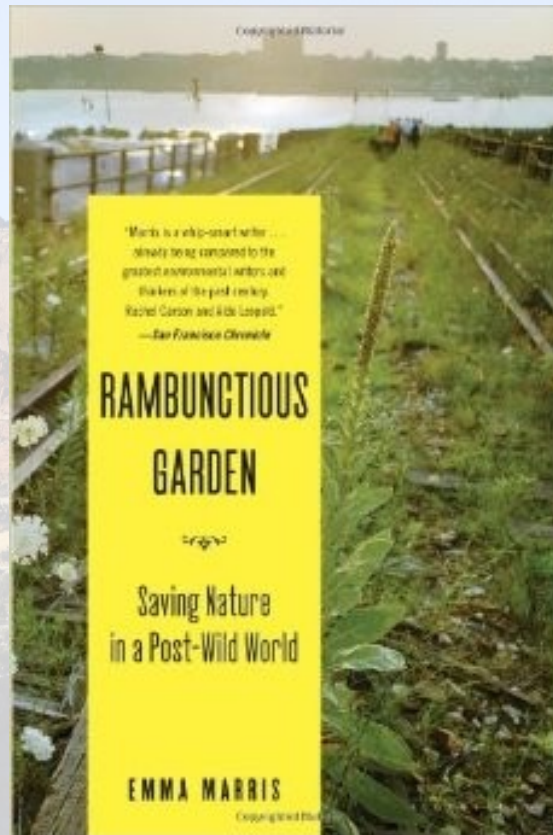
2016



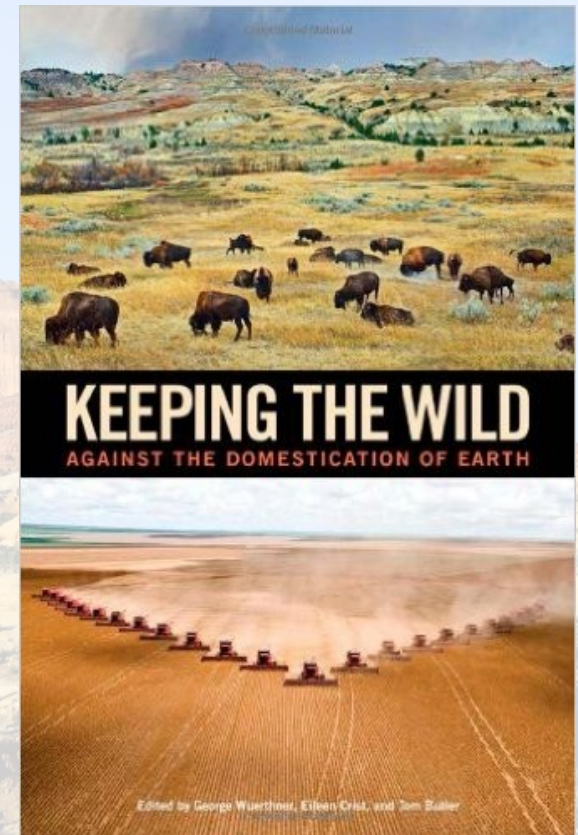
# The Wilderness Controversy Today:



2010



2011



2014