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The ECOLOGICAL INDIAN

Myth and History

SHEPARD KRECH III

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Chapter Seven

BEAVER

In 1637, Thomas Morton, the merchant, lawyer, and libertine, looked about Massachusetts Bay and described a "Catalogue of commodities"—trees, herbs, fruits, birds, stones, minerals, fish, and beasts. It is striking how often he and other Europeans construed North America's natural resources as commodities, giving them meaning as useful market products. Noteworthy objects were chief, rich, profitable, or potential commodities, valuable precisely because they could be exchanged for other products. Many objects lacking exchange value were ignored unless they were exotic or peculiar.[1]

Beaver appeared prominently on Morton's list. Their pelts, he proclaimed, were "the best marchantable commodity that can be found to cause ready money to be brought into the land."[2] In fact, the beaver pelt was arguably the most famous commodity in North America.

Like the white-tailed deer and buffalo, the beaver, *Castor canadensis,* was amazingly abundant in North America. The naturalist Ernest Thompson Seton speculated that in 1600 as many as fifty million swam in waters across the continent. Today, their traces can be read in the countless banks, creeks, runs, brooks, rivers, ponds, meadows, mountains, valleys, and towns bearing their name. Anthropomorphized and occasionally domesticated, beavers have attracted intense scrutiny over the centuries. Many authors have commented on the architecture and engineering of their dams and lodges, and on their character and mentality, enshrining them in a cloak of cleanliness, monogamous family values, and—as "eager beavers"—industriousness. Indeed, beavers are monogamous, local, and sedentary—the basic winter social group lives in a lodge and consists of a mated pair and their young from two

years—and like all rodents must chew, else their continuously growing incisors would curve fatally into their skulls.

If beavers did not construct dams, lodges, canals, dens, and escape tunnels, they would not have a suitable, secure living habitat near their food sources. Herbivores, they prefer aquatic plants and the leafy parts and bark of trees like aspen and poplar. They can fell six-inch-diameter trees in an hour; larger ones are sometimes collaborative projects. When they exhaust the food resources bordering their pond, they often excavate fifty-foot-long canals to nearby tree-lined ponds. Their lodges are free-standing or located in dams; some have multiple chambers and hunters have killed more than thirty-five beavers in such apartment complexes.

Beavers construct wood, stone, and mud dams over several nights, and given enough beaver power, a colony, which consists of the beavers associated with one dam, can erect impressively large dams—from twelve to eighteen feet high and from four hundred to eight hundred feet long. One dam reportedly was four thousand feet long! These are products of larger beaver colonies. Not surprisingly, beavers alter their habitat profoundly through all their activity, forming pond ecosystems when dams are built, and meadow ecosystems when dams are destroyed due to fast streamflow, flood, or abandonment.[3]

European explorers and fishermen became involved in a trade for beaver pelts the instant they put to shore in North America. The exchange started in the Northeast in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, grew to tens of thousands of beaver pelts annually by the early seventeenth century, and eventually became almost continental. Since the items exchanged for them cost little to manufacture and transport and the pelts brought handsome profits at home, it is easy to understand why Europeans pushed the trade. But Indians relished it also, eager to exchange common pelts, worth a trifling amount to them, for novel foods like bread, peas, beans, and prunes and for rare and useful manufactured goods like copper kettles, axes and knives, and cloth. In seventeenth-century New France, a Montagnais leader, knife in hand, jested to a Jesuit missionary, "'The English have no sense; they give us twenty knives like this for one Beaver skin.'" Some Indians might have been wary of the Europeans, some neutral, and others aggressive from knowing that these foreigners were dangerous—but few were reluctant to trade. In this atmosphere, can it be coincidental that complaints of a dearth of beavers poured in as early as the late seventeenth century?[4]

Europe, where otter, beaver, marten, and other furs were in popular demand, provided the predominant market for North American pelts. For centuries the beaver pelt was paramount in that market. It appeared as the emblem of the famed Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), which obtained a Royal Charter over a vast territory in North America in 1670, and became the standard of exchange as the Made Beaver, which was an average-size male pelt in prime condition. Merchants found beavers attractive not for their lustrous pelt, however, but for the underhairs held together by interlocking barbs when pressed together, a quality making them without parallel in felt hat production. The significance of the underhairs was reflected in the HBC's motto, *pro pelle cutem*, meaning "the skin for the fur or wool." For years traders literally traded furs known as coat beaver (*castor gras*) from Indians' backs. Worn for months as clothing, hair inside, coat beaver was primed for felting: friction from the wearer's body loosened the coarse guard hair roots and thinned the pelts, while sweat—a natural fulling agent in felting—and oils penetrated downy and absorbent underhairs.

The French defined the fashion for felt hats or *castors* until the mid–sixteenth century, when the English and others adopted it. Felt hats became an essential part of the male wardrobe throughout Europe for three hundred years. Once European beaver populations were decimated, hatters cast their eyes toward America. As imperial and colonial powers jockeyed for power and economic control, hunters killed millions of beavers. Hats went through many styles, and as fashion changed, so did the trade. A preference for smaller brims in the late seventeenth century, together with an influx of low-grade dry (*sec*) and summer pelts damaged the trade. In the 1840s, consumers accepted silk as a substitute for beaver felt in their hats, and the market for beavers shifted to fur coats and fancy furs, where they vied with martens and minks. From that time on, beaver trapping was never again as intense, yet merchants shipped millions of beaver pelts to London in the second half of the nineteenth century.[5]

As it moved inland, the beaver trade repeatedly obliterated beaver populations. A number of scholars proposed that hunters devastated

fur bearers and other resources in most places where the fur trade was carried on more or less permanently. Ultimately, this may have been the case but it did not happen in the same way everywhere. As Toby Morantz, an anthropologist, and others suggested, the trade was complicated by local circumstances; by migration, warfare, disease, middlemen, trespassers, and poachers; as well as by culturally determined and historically contingent attitudes toward animals, exchange, and accumulation.[6]

Thus there were many beaver trades, not one; and the narrative of the trade must account for both local variations and regional or continental patterns. Each region had its own history. In New England, for example (where beavers were not overly numerous to start with), the acquisitiveness was strong on both sides—for beaver pelts and for manufactured goods—and hunters all but exterminated beavers (and other animals) by the end of the seventeenth century.[7]

Beavers were scarce in the greater Northeast by this date. The Huron and Iroquois pressured these animals intensely; Gabriel Sagard, a Récollet missionary, was prophetic when he wrote after a visit to the country of the Huron in the 1620s that "I cannot think but that the end is in sight." By the mid-1630s beavers were almost gone in southern Ontario, and the Huron spent even more time as traders.[8] Over the next four decades, the five tribes that formed the Iroquois Confederacy killed most beavers nearby, "absolutely exhaust[ing]" their lands, and in trapping parties of hundreds of men, trespassed aggressively and successfully on the territories of their neighbors. As in the South, politics and warfare often affected both animals and the trade. In general, when hostilities raged, hunters left beavers alone and when peace reigned, they made war on beavers.[9]

Farther west the beaver trade took on a different narrative, as competing interests made some Indians desultory trappers, and religious reasons (perhaps stemming from the importance of medicines relating to beaver in prosecuting buffalo hunts) precluded trapping for others. This left the field open to the few foreigners daring enough to trespass and poach, and into the breach stepped trappers of European extraction, so-called "mountain men" who killed formidable quantities in the Rocky Mountains and elsewhere in the West, as well as Iroquois, hired by fur trade companies or on their own and the most renowned Indians for roaming far afield for beavers.[10] They and

many others used steel traps baited with castoreum, the powerful attractant from the glands of the beaver. Algonquian Indians had used castoreum since at least the seventeenth century, and merchants distributed steel traps widely after the mid–eighteenth century; in the nineteenth century, as mass production put millions of traps into circulation, both were commonplace. Lethal in combination, they hastened the decimation of beavers: Nineteenth-century trapping records of mountain men show tallies of 250 beavers in a season, and even 150 in a day.[11]

By the late nineteenth century, the beaver harvest was 10 percent of its level one century before, and beavers were scarce or locally extinct in North America. They disappeared from New Jersey by 1820 and New Hampshire by 1865. By 1890, they were rare or absent in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Minnesota, most of New York, many parts of Quebec and Ontario, and elsewhere.

Concerned legislators passed laws designed to halt the destruction of beavers as they had with deer. Men and women active in the conservation movement that formed in the last three decades of the nineteenth century were appalled by the eradication of buffaloes, passenger pigeons, and other wildlife including beavers. New conservationists spoke of a "mad rush at the counter for fur and pseudo-fur" and the fashion for fur as a "craze." In the twentieth century, conservation sentiments and regulations had taken stronger hold and for beavers, the tide turned. Many understood with Roderick MacFarlane, long employed by the HBC, that "if let alone, or not much disturbed by hunting, the beaver will rapidly increase in numbers." In the first two decades of the twentieth century, restocking programs were instituted widely in the United States and Canada. Together with stringent laws restricting trapping, the programs succeeded—to the extent that within just a few years in the Adirondacks, where beavers had been extinct, New York's Conservation Commission called them "interesting but destructive," responsible for flooding highways and railroads. This success brought renewed trapping during fur booms in the 1920s and 1940s. Soon most states again allowed beaver trapping and the annual harvest in North America climbed to hundreds of thousands of pelts.[12]

Like white-tailed deer, beavers survived to recover much of their former range. Deer regained their place as a result of restricted sea-

sons, lowered hunting pressures, and greatly expanded edge habitats between grain fields and new forests. Beavers recovered as a consequence of trapping restrictions, restocking, changes in fashion, and conservation. In the 1990s, antifur lobbies and changing fashions have cast trapping as a pariah profession, leaving beaver populations unchecked. Anthropomorphized, beavers are loved in the abstract—until like deer their unbridled populations explode into suburban cultural landscapes as pests, attracting headlines like "Busy Beavers Gnaw on Suburban Nerves" and "Besieged by Beavers in Rural New York." As the millennium approaches, these "annoying overachievers" once again busily and eagerly are altering every conceivable habitat in North America.[13]

In Canada, the fur trade figures significantly in national identity and national history, and *Castor canadensis* has often been proposed for the nation's coat of arms. The trade was paramount in the eastern half of Canada. This is a vast region, containing hundreds of thousands of square miles of prime beaver habitat in lakes, ponds, and rivers in boreal and deciduous forests. Complex culturally, this region has been home for centuries to tens of thousands of people speaking Iroquoian and Northern Algonquian languages. Our interest here is in the latter, whom linguists classify as speakers of Ojibwa (in the south and west) and Cree and Montagnais (in the north). Through time these Northern Algonquians have used different names for themselves. Their group or band names came originally from natural features or territories. Then outsiders gave them names associated with trading posts, regions, or labels applied by their neighbors. With naming so clearly linked to identity and power, some today prefer the names with origins in traditional self-designations—for example, Innu ("human being"), not Montagnais (applied by seventeenth-century French to the people living in the mountains north of the St. Lawrence River); or Anishinaabe ("Indian, human being, ordinary man") rather than Ojibwa/Chippewa ("puckered up"—from the toe of a moccasin), which white people generalized widely beyond one specific group using the label for themselves.

The Montagnais and Cree speakers include the Montagnais/Innu, Naskapi, Attikamek, and various Cree groups; their lands extend

from the Labrador Sea and Gulf of St. Lawrence to central Alberta over two thousand miles west. To their south, Ojibwa speakers have a history of expansion, often at the expense of the Cree. Pushed by their neighbors the Iroquois, who threatened or initiated trade-related wars, and pulled by lands ripe for exploitation and middleman trade, Ojibwa speakers spread north and south of Lake Superior in the late seventeenth century from north of Lake Huron and Superior's east end, and Michigan's Upper Peninsula. By 1800 Ojibwa speakers occupied lands across Ontario and Manitoba and in northern Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota; in these places they were known as the Algonquin, Nipissing, Ottawa, Saulteaux, Ojibwa, and Chippewa.[14]

Before Europeans appeared, Northern Algonquians found beavers a vital source of food and clothing, and also used their prominent orange-enameled incisors as cutting, gouging, and sharpening tools, and their scapulas (stripped of their flesh) as instruments of divination. After the arrival of Europeans, beavers continued to be valuable in the domestic economy but they also obviously became commodities in the European marketplace, which altered through time their use in domestic contexts. Not surprisingly, against animals so important, Northern Algonquians have marshaled an impressive and changing battery of weapons including traps, deadfalls, snares, nets, clubs, spears, bows and arrows, axes, ice chisels, and guns.

They also have controlled the hunting of beavers (and other animals) in defined areas known as family hunting territories. The territory is a bounded piece of land, and the "family" in question is a group of people united by kinship, marriage, and other ties of social solidarity and led by someone in whom authority and management rights are vested. Both territory and authority descend from one generation to the next—often, but not always, from a man to his son. The family is especially likely to use the territory (and to exercise control over or manage renewable and nonrenewable, and sedentary and mobile, resources) from late fall through spring.

There is considerable variation in an institution so widespread—variation in the size, ecology, and resources of a territory, in the size and composition of the family, in the definition of trespass and sanc-

tioning of intruders, in the nature of "ownership" or management, in which resources are reserved to the family and which are not, and in what happens to the territory from one generation to the next. Despite differences, many Northern Algonquians distinguish the use of mobile animals important for subsistence from sedentary animals significant as commodities. Anyone can kill the former (caribou, for example) without consequence, especially when needy; but the latter (beavers, for example) are usually reserved for the territory's managing partners—unless a person is starving, in which case he can kill a beaver for its lifesaving flesh as long as he delivers the pelt to the rightful owners. Clearly, without territories, management—including efficient hunting or conservation—of sedentary animals is difficult, and with territories, management is possible; the animal most often managed is the beaver.

One question is whether territories resulted from the fur trade or were aboriginal. They do seem to have become increasingly prominent through time. Debate has raged for eighty years. Almost always cast as a choice between alternatives, the prevailing argument was initially that the territories were ancient. Then scholars identified the fur trade as the cause. This disagreement entered general debates in sociological and historical theory, because Marxist theorists denied that precapitalist hunting and gathering people could have private property, and if these Northern Algonquians did, through their family hunting territories, then where did that leave the general theory?

Today, that row seems esoteric, and most will agree that an institution so widespread and varying surely had multiple beginnings under specific historical and ecological circumstances.[15]

Although the decline of beavers in eastern and central Canada was widespread, we cannot assume that it is explained in the same way everywhere. Not all Northern Algonquians were equally enthusiastic participants in the trade, especially when it conflicted with traditional subsistence activities. Here, a series of single snapshots or frames of specific people, times, and places, each depending entirely on the existence of adequate historical evidence, will provide a range of opportunities to understand the history, culture, and behavior in specific locales as we seek answers to the question, Did Indians possess conservation ideals and family hunting territories prior to the onset

of the trade only to abandon them in the face of a seductive array of novel goods, or did they develop both as a result of outside influences?

The first snapshot is of the Montagnais in the 1630s. These people had probably been drawn into the transatlantic trade in the preceding century when European mariners put to shore to dry and process fish, but the near absence of documentation leaves the period hazy. In the seventeenth century, record-keeping Jesuit proselytizers arrived in New France and set down the first comments about the exchange and its impact on beavers. Like Europeans, these Montagnais seem to have relished the trade, one "jokingly" telling Father Paul Le Jeune, head of the Jesuit mission in Quebec, one day that "the Beaver does everything perfectly well, it makes kettles, hatchets, swords, knives, bread; in short, it makes everything."[16]

There was more than banter in these remarks. Montagnais and many other native people were indeed fond of items like copper kettles, clothing, metal tools, guns, and many other goods that rapidly took the place of bark containers, stone tools, and a host of traditional artifacts. They eagerly exchanged beavers for these objects, which may have had a rapid impact on beaver populations, for there is evidence for an immediate decline. By 1635, for instance, beavers were very scarce near Three Rivers and elsewhere along the St. Lawrence, evidently because of overtrapping.[17] The year before, Le Jeune spent the winter with a Montagnais band. He alluded vaguely to this group's "boundaries" and spoke of Indians who came "to hunt upon our very grounds, taking away our game and our lives at the same time" during a time of extreme hardship. This band (and others later in the century), it seems, lived in lands that band members considered theirs to exploit and perhaps manage. But when Le Jeune remarked that one goal of his mission was to settle Montagnais near Three Rivers so that they would hunt in specific territories—or cultivate the soil—he gave the impression that the families possessed no such territories.[18]

Le Jeune's remarks relating to conservation were emphatically negative. When the Montagnais he knew found a beaver lodge, they "kill all, great and small, male and female." Le Jeune prophesied that they "will finally exterminate the species in this Region, as has happened among the Hurons, who have not a single Beaver." The nearby

Mi'kmaq, similarly intent on trade, also possessed a "disposition," according to Nicolas Denys, a trader and governor of Acadia in the years following 1635, to "take all" beavers in a lodge, and "not to spare the little ones any more than the big ones." Involved in an exchange with Europeans for several generations, they treated all animals the same, killing "all of each kind" they captured; before Europeans arrived, Denys speculated, they took meat they needed and left skins on the ground.[19]

To prevent these Montagnais from following the example of the Huron, Le Jeune proposed "locating" specific families so that each would take "its own territory for hunting, without following in the tracks of its neighbors." He also thought of "counseling" them "not to kill any but the males and of those only such as are large." This way, Le Jeune thought, "they will have Beaver meat and skins in the greatest abundance." This not only represents one of the earliest recorded European designs to promote conservation and family-managed hunting territories in North America but implies that both were novel ideas.[20]

The second frame is of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Cree who lived on the East Main—a large area east and southeast of James Bay. The Cree in this region were initially associated with specific bands identified with inland or coastal regions, rivers, or individual leaders. They later drew a group identity from trading posts and their regional geographical location on the East Main or east of James Bay.

While the East Main Cree took part in the fur trade in the seventeenth century, little is known of the central issues of conservation and control over beaver populations prior to the eighteenth. The evidence is simply too thin. It does seem, however, that in the southern parts of the region in south-central Quebec, the Cree used beavers extensively for food and clothing and pursued them with bows, arrows, deadfalls, and nets, and by breaking into lodges or burrows located with the help of dogs, and that native people in the northern parts of this region considered caribou more important than beaver for food and clothing. The Cree who traded at Rupert House in the southernmost part of James Bay evidently possessed hunting territories in the 1670s: Each spring they were said to decide how to adjust the boundaries of hunting

grounds and allocate them to "families" in the coming year. Even though this is a secondhand account written forty years after the fact, it does open the possibility that men negotiated hunting territories anew each year, with the entire band in mind.[21]

As for what form that management took, we are in the dark except for an enigmatic note from the 1650s to 1660s, in which Pierre Esprit Radisson remarked that some Crees who came south to the Great Lakes to trade were unlike other Indians in not killing young beavers. We know neither who these Crees were nor whether they left young beavers so that they might mature and reproduce the colony or acquire larger, more valuable prime winter pelts.[22]

From Eastmain, a HBC post on the southeast coast of James Bay, where beaver was by far the most valuable fur exchanged in the eighteenth century, comes evidence of lands hunted out. Probably as a result of French competition and Iroquois and other poachers, the number of pelts traded at this post declined sharply in the 1730s (and again in the 1760s). By 1730, lands in the southern parts of this region were "Drained of animals" and "ruined." One Jesuit wrote that beaver populations might rebound only if lands were abandoned, but that "would be asking The Impossible from the savages. They would travel ten leagues to kill a beaver a year old, summer or winter, if they could find it." In the following decades, trespass and poaching by outside Indians and the East Main Cree themselves continued to be an issue. In 1745, one East Main Cree reported restrictions on killing fur bearers "in one anothers Leiberty." Another Cree on whose lands he was hunting told him that he could kill and keep rabbits or caribou but not martens—thus distinguishing animals consumed from those destined for exchange (which is a sign of commodification) and signaling the existence of hunting territories (evidently also possessed by the Cree who traded at Fort Albany to the west), for which evidence becomes more marked in the second half of the eighteenth century.[23] Were hunting territories born in events like these? Did trespassers from outside the band or tribe initially cause resentment when they stripped the lands of resources newly transformed into commodities; and embittered, did people subsequently clamor for hunting territories over which they could exercise control when members of their own band emulated the outsiders?

For the next snapshot we move west to York Factory, the HBC post on the southwest side of Hudson Bay, in the period 1738–75.[24] Competition for the Cree trade was keen throughout the eighteenth century. Before 1763, the value of beaver, expressed as a percent of the total return, declined steadily and at times sharply at York Factory. The decline was due in part to gift giving and French competition but also to faunal cycles, disease, and a static demand for trade goods.

These Crees had a fairly inelastic need for goods. For each hunter each year the demand amounted to a gun (if the hunter's gun was broken beyond repair) plus powder and shot, a powder horn, two hatchets, an ice chisel, four knives, a fishing net, a file, six awls, one brass kettle, four yards of cloth, and over seven pounds of tobacco. To purchase these goods, a hunter required seventy beaver pelts or the equivalent in other furs. Andrew Graham, resident at York Factory for two decades in the second half of the eighteenth century, commented that a standard of trade adjusted "in favour of the natives, would ruin it all; for I am certain if the natives were to get any more for their furs, they would catch fewer." Graham thought this was because "one canoe brings down yearly to the Fort one hundred made beaver in different kinds of furs, and trades with me seventy of the said beaver for real necessaries. The other thirty beaver shall so puzzle him to trade, that he often asks me what he shall buy, and when I make an answer, Trade some more powder, shot, tobacco and hatchets etc., his answer is, I have traded sufficient to serve me and my family until I see you next summer; so he will drink one half, and trade the other with me for baubles."

The trade in brandy, as well as in other goods requiring measures that the traders might leave "short," resulted in tidy profits for the traders. But even when traders signaled a greater demand for furs in the prices (in goods) they were willing to pay, Indians did not respond by increasing the supply. Instead they brought the same number or sometimes less (producing what is known as a backward-sloping supply curve, contradicting the idea that "economic man" invariably responds "rationally" to heightened demand with a greater supply). Working against an increased supply were the limited capacity of canoes and human bodies, a mobile life, a greater interest in being generous by giving away than in accumulation for its own sake, and lavish gift giving on the part of European traders to offset temptation to trade with their competitors.[25]

According to Graham and his predecessor James Isham, the York Factory Cree hunted beavers during all seasons, and Isham thought it "a Little strange" that the animals did not "Diminish greatly considering the many thousands that is Killd. of a Year." Like the East Main Cree, the York Factory Cree distinguished the domestic from the commodity value of beavers. In Isham's words, "When Severall Indians is togeather, they have sett Rules to the Right of the Beaver skin, which is;—if one finds a beaver house, all the Rest goes with and assists him to Kill them, he that found the house having all the skins, and the flesh Equaly Divided, otherwise some wou'd gett all and other's none."

On measures designed to conserve beavers, neither trader is very helpful despite their combined five decades of residence. Isham remarked equivocally that "in some houses an Indian will Kill 15 or 20 beaver, and in other's not above 2 or 3"—surely inconclusive on whether beavers were deliberately left alive in a lodge. On the one hunt he witnessed, Graham reported that the Cree killed all the beavers they found in a lodge, which amounted to two. Following a single winter in residence at York Factory, T. F. Drage said in contrast that when the Cree "take a house" of beavers, "they generally leave two to breed." His comment is intriguing and perhaps linked to Radisson's report a century earlier on the Cree leaving young beavers to mature, perhaps to control multiple "harvests" of beavers from the same lodge. Yet in 1700, the soldier and author Bacqueville de la Potherie remarked that Indians who traded at Fort Nelson/York Factory marked beaver lodges, claiming the pelts within for themselves, but then went about their business destroying beaver lodges and dams and netting or killing beavers with spears and arrows seemingly without regard for the morrow.

In contrast to sedentary beavers, the hunting of which could be controlled in theory, caribou migrated rapidly through territories and across major rivers. Their numbers, as well as the carnage and waste hunting them, astounded the traders at York Factory. Isham remarked that the Cree "frequently" killed "scores" of caribou, taking "only the tongues or heads" and letting "the body or carcass go a Drift with the tide." Over a three-week period, they "Kill'd upwards of 1,000 Deer [caribou] by the Quantity of tongues I have Rec'd from them." Drage linked the assault on pregnant cows in spring for

their tongues to a recent decline in numbers of caribou and remarked that HBC traders "reproved" some Crees who "uselessly destroy'd" these caribou.

The great destruction and waste struck Graham also. He used almost identical language as Isham had in talking about the hunt for migrating caribou in May and September: The Cree killed "several score" at once and took only "the tongues, heads, hearts and feet, according as they choose; letting the carcasses go adrift in the river." Graham branded the coastal-dwelling Cree as indolent gourmands, yet argued that behavior "unaccountable to Englishmen" made sense to people who were mobile and carried their belongings. They killed the animals for their own use, and for tongues, fat, and other choice products to exchange for brandy and other trade goods. They then set the carcasses adrift. They killed more than they needed, and more than they used. Graham thought that they believed they could not kill too many. "They kill animals out of wantonness," he said, "alleging the more they destroy the more plentiful they grow."[26]

Graham's observations were largely for the years 1753–74. The period between roughly 1750 and 1830 was a watershed era for the development of conservation and family hunting territories. Before, their traces were fleeting, local, or absent. After, the evidence for both was widespread. There were two important reasons for the change: the great decline in the numbers of beavers and other mammals, and the active promotion of conservation and territories by the HBC.

During this eighty-year era, the assault on beavers was continuous and the decline in beaver populations ubiquitous. Competition for furs was stiff throughout the eighteenth century. The French and English vied with each other on Hudson Bay and inland, with especially keen competition in the two decades before mid-century. In 1763, the English emerged victorious but in the Northern Algonquian trade, free market conditions ruled widely. Trading companies, with the HBC and North West Company as the main antagonists from the 1780s onward, and the XY and other short-lived companies in supporting roles, intensified the struggle for pelts. They waged bitter contests for fur in the final decades of the eighteenth century, and after the end of the first decade of the nineteenth, traders voiced sharp complaints about the "great scarcity of Beaver"

everywhere east of the Rocky Mountains. Beavers were decimated in most productive boreal forest, deciduous forest, parkland, and river-bottom tall grass prairie habitats. Few remained in southwestern Ontario, southern and central Manitoba, or central Saskatchewan; these and other regions were "nearly exhausted in Fur bearing Animals," and to find beavers Indians had to go farther afield every year. There is no doubt that persistent and aggressive trapping, fueled by competition and an influx of new trappers who were mainly Indian but also of European descent, were principally responsible for the decline. Abetting them were drought, lodge-destroying fires, mismanagement, and—twice—disease, which one time left beavers "red and bloody about the heart" and caused great mortality.

In the last decade of this period, traders urged that conservation measures and a territorial system be developed in order to curb the carnage of beavers. The pivotal moment occurred in 1821 with the merger of the HBC and North West Company, which marked the end, for the time being, of fierce competition in lands that drained into Hudson Bay. With George Simpson at the helm of the newly amalgamated firm, the victorious HBC faced lands over which it asserted monopoly control but which with rare exception were depleted of furs. Beginning with Simpson, few doubted that action was needed if beaver were ever again to be traded. Determined to reverse the course, he called upon traders to conserve the severely depleted populations. His twin priorities were to "nurse the country," that is, not to hunt it and allow beavers and other depleted fur-bearing animals to "recruit" or recover; and to encourage native people to develop hunting territories in which they could conserve beavers. "Nursing" included halting the trade in pelts from young and summer-killed beavers, whose pelts were small or inferior in quality; dissuading the use of steel traps, "the scourge of the Country"; and installing a quota system in districts where animals were especially depleted. The policy was reiterated in formal resolutions at HBC council meetings in the 1820s to 1830s. Hunting territories were also seen as part of the solution. By "alloting certain tracts of the country to the different bands," Simpson thought it possible to control hunting and allow animal populations to recover.

The results were admittedly uneven. Simpson did report later that the attempt "to confine the natives throughout the country now by

families to separate and distinct hunting grounds" seemed "to take among them by degrees." But, skeptical of the reach of his authority, he also confessed that "it is a difficult matter to change the habits of Indians" even when they "may see the ultimate benefit" of action. Two problems linked to subsistence intervened: Some Indians depended on beaver flesh and others had to search widely for food of any kind. Given this, Simpson realized that it was not entirely practical to expect all people to confine themselves to certain localities or to refrain from killing summer or small beavers. Success in curtailing the summer hunt was sometimes impermanent. "By entreaties and threats," Simpson reported that he succeeded in curbing some destructive summer hunts of roaming Indians but that in the winter they returned to kill beavers in lodges they discovered the previous summer. Even if one could persuade hunters to leave beavers to breed or mature, an adverse season would undo that success. But the results were not entirely bleak. In some instances, where muskrats were an acceptable substitute for trade and subsistence, beavers recovered, and when trading posts closed, all fur-bearer populations rebounded.

Despite its monopoly, the HBC did not conduct the trade in identical fashion everywhere, nor was its control absolute. Traders varied in their willingness to enforce policies. They could not prevent Indians from dealing with competing American and Métis traders on the border with the United States, nor could they control the inroads of "free traders" not in their employ, who filtered north as the nineteenth century wore on. Neither native people nor traders seemed able to develop a renewable harvest of beavers, and the decline in these animals continued until the 1840s, when the HBC introduced more stringent measures against trapping, as well as premium prices for other furs. In combination, they relieved pressure on the beaver populations, which rebounded. Then almost immediately silk hats replaced felt hats, and the most intense action shifted away from beavers to other furs. Thus, market forces in combination with HBC policies and perhaps other factors led to the eventual recovery of beaver populations.[27]

The next three snapshots in quick succession are of the Cree near Lake Winnipegosis from the 1790s through the 1820s, the Cree on the East Main in the period 1820–50, and the Northern Ojibwa in northern Ontario from the 1790s through the 1840s.

Like some other regions, Lake Winnipegosis was the scene of fierce and escalating competition involving the HBC and North West and XY companies in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. David Thompson, the HBC surveyor who was among the Western Woods Cree in the 1790s, spoke generally about the destructive consequences of the era of intense rivalry, and especially of the lethal combination of castoreum (the product of a set of paired glands near the beaver's anus), whose seductive properties had been known to some Algonquian-speaking Indians since the seventeenth century, and steel traps, which became available in the eighteenth. By the late eighteenth century, trappers combined both in the beaver hunt, and here, as elsewhere, beavers disappeared rapidly.

According to Thompson, one old Cree linked the decline to his tribesmen's desire for manufactured goods, to the lack of control over hunting, and to the attitude of a Cree creator. That old man said that for some reason, the "Great Spirit"—probably Kihcimanitōw, the benevolent creator—twice became "angry" with beavers. The first time was long ago when beavers lived on land as ancient people and were wise and powerful until Kihcimanitōw ordered Wīsahkēcāhk, a trickster-transformer being, to "drive them all into the water and there let them live, still to be wise, but without power; to be food and clothing for man, and the prey of other animals. . . ." The second time, Kihcimanitōw determined that beavers "are now all to be destroyed" and Wīsahkēcāhk subsequently showed the Algonquin and Nipissing the "secret of the destruction"—castoreum—of which beavers were "more fond . . . than we are of fire water." The old man concluded, "We are now killing the Beaver without any labor, we are now rich, but [shall] soon be poor, for when the Beaver are destroyed we have nothing to depend on to purchase what we want for our families, strangers now run over our country with their iron traps, and we, and they will soon be poor." Thompson remarked, "For several years all these Indians were rich, the Women and Children, as well as the Men, were covered with silver brooches, Ear Rings, Wampum, Beads and other trinkets. Their mantles were of fine scarlet cloth, and all was finery and dress." But predicated on an endless supply of beaver, this consumption could not last. "Every intelligent man saw the poverty that would follow the destruction of the Beaver, but there were no Chiefs to controul it; all ways perfect liberty and equality.

Four years afterwards (1797) almost the whole of these extensive countries were denuded of Beaver, the Natives became poor, and with difficulty procured the first necessaries of life. . . ."[28]

These Crees obligingly hunted beavers. If they possessed territories, they resisted complaining about or taking action against trespass. Others surely trespassed and poached during this period. Outsiders like Mohawk trappers and "Freemen," who were former employees of Canadian fur companies, poured into Cree territory. They and the Cree reaped the benefits of steel and castoreum. One trader complained that Iroquois had "dispersed all over where ever a beaver was known to be which will finish the Destruction of the Country as they leave nothing wherever they come."

After 1821, HBC traders pushed conservation policies at Cumberland House northwest of Lake Winnipegosis. While some Crees did evidently lay off the summer muskrat hunt so that these animals might raise their young, most Crees continued to bring in summer beaver pelts, against HBC policy. When one trader said five years later that he was willing to cut the price for beaver by 50 percent in order to "allow" them "to increase," the Cree responded "very coolly" by stating that "Beaver meat was too good to let Pass when there was any chance of killing it." With great ambiguity, this trader remarked that "Sacrificing" beavers "is the preservation of the Lives of the Indians." Did he mean merely that the flesh was a food on which the Cree depended? Or that the pelts were sacrificed? Or that in sacrifice they somehow assured a continuing supply?[29]

Some distance away from Cumberland House, the Cree who lived on the east side of James Bay and traded at Rupert House had a different history of development of territories and conservation. As Toby Morantz showed, the development of hunting territories among the James Bay Cree could not have originated with George Simpson's policies. These Crees had restricted hunting in one another's areas as far back as the mid–eighteenth century. They possessed loosely organized territories one decade before the amalgamation of the HBC and North West Company, and the Rupert House Cree were said to be "tenacious of their Property in their Lands and are not pleased when other Indians encroach on them" only two years after the HBC

monopoly began. For this reason, perhaps, when traders asked them the next year to spare "Cub Beaver," they responded that it was "perfectly accordant with their own Ideas on the subject and their Desires of not impoverishing their Lands."

But because beaver continued to be important for subsistence, it had been necessary to ask. To help the Cree resist the temptation, the traders lowered the tariff on fishing tackle and ammunition—but not uniformly. In the southern parts of the region where competition lingered, the HBC did not discourage the use of steel traps or killing young and summer beavers, but developed a scorched-earth policy to encourage the trade to them, not to their competitors, even if it meant killing all animals.

The potential for conservation in family hunting territories was clear. In "alternate years" in the early 1840s, the Rupert House Cree hunted "different sections of their lands, leaving such to recruit two or even three years"—a rotational practice that would have conserved beavers. If they had not done so, one trader speculated, "Long ago their lands (particularly the Coast Indians whose beaver grounds are so limited) would have been exhausted." The HBC nevertheless felt the need to curtail further the beaver pelt trade in that decade. The Rupert House Cree complained that Indians from other posts trespassed on lands they had deliberately left idle and, to the east, the Mistassini Cree had identical complaints about poachers who killed beavers during the summer and other seasons. That decade the HBC also established beaver preserves on two islands in James Bay to go along with the rules against hunting young or summer animals. When restrictions were lifted, the total value of beavers traded at Rupert House almost doubled within a decade, a visible sign of newly robust populations.[30]

The story of the Northern Ojibwa who moved into northwestern Ontario in the eighteenth century is familiar: Indians unhesitatingly exchanged mundane beaver pelts for rare and useful European technology, competition fueled exchange, and beavers became scarce. At the start, beavers were up to the pressure, by one report "so plentiful" between Lakes Superior and Winnipeg that Indians "place little value on it and only collect the large skins which they send to the

English." At first, many Northern Ojibwas threw smaller pelts away and folded the quest for furs into their primary hunt for moose and caribou. But later in the century, the fierce competition between the HBC and North West Company left a lasting impact on beavers, and after the turn of the nineteenth century, the trade deteriorated rapidly. Over the next two decades, traders on both sides reported "impoverished," "barren and poor," or "exhausted" country; scarce, few, or absent beavers; and plummeting profits. At Osnaburgh House, an HBC post, the number of large pelts dropped by 50 percent in one year and by 90 percent in a decade. Caribou also declined greatly and moose disappeared entirely, and starving Indians increasingly turned to fish for subsistence, and rabbits for food and clothing.[31]

Prior to the nineteenth century there was no sign of conservation or territoriality among the Northern Ojibwa of Osnaburgh House-Lac Seul, as Charles Bishop, an anthropologist, showed. In the 1790s, beavers were still so plentiful that Indians continued to throw small pelts away. Then, moose, caribou, and beaver (in the wake of competition) declined in numbers. In these conditions, an indigenous system to control the hunt for beaver was born. Previously, lands were allotted to specific individuals by consensus or group leaders. Now, Ojibwa hunters, more focused on sedentary resources than ever before, started to mark beaver lodges as their own. HBC traders might have influenced this effort to claim lodges and territories because it coincided with developing HBC policy to get the Osnaburgh House-Lac Seul Ojibwa and other Indians to conserve beavers and exert firmer control over where they hunted. In the 1820s traders alerted the Northern Ojibwa to beaver-hunting restrictions, refused cub or summer-killed beaver pelts at some posts, and attempted to outlaw the lethal steel traps.

Lodge marking notwithstanding, trespass loomed as a major impediment to conservation in the 1820s. One trader complained, "One tribe pays no attention to the mark of another." Indians commonly trapped territories considered by other bands as their own; they killed beavers "when they see them." Territoriality was not firmly institutionalized everywhere; "it is very hard if not impossible to prevent the Natives from killing every little animal they see as well as the larger," one trader remarked, "so long as the ground is common among them." The Northern Ojibwa roamed and poached

and with familiar results, "[flew] upon everything they can catch even beavers of a span long," and "destroyed all the Furred animals."

The Northern Ojibwa sometimes stepped up their own kill as a management strategy as well as to combat poachers. In the late 1830s one Ojibwa "almost ruined his lands," evidently by overtrapping, but then moved to a different area "to let his Beaver recover." Some eight years later, he was using the same strategy but this time when he returned to a river he had deliberately not hunted for three years in order to let beavers recover, he discovered that "Strange Indians" armed with steel traps had trapped it out. He was determined not to let poachers gain advantage over him again—but the only option he had was to trap out the lands himself.

The Northern Ojibwa adopted territories and conservation haltingly. For two decades, HBC traders pushed the conservation policy but did not enforce it in the same way everywhere. Ignoring traders, some Indians continued to eat beavers and bring summer and cub beaver pelts to posts. If these pelts were refused, they simply traded them to other Indians who in turn took them to less discriminating traders whose regions held more beavers. Trespassers were uninterested in conservation, and Indians who preemptively stripped their own lands ahead of poachers apparently could not afford to be interested themselves. In the 1830s, the evidence for family hunting territories becomes clearer and finally abundant, and by mid-century, complaints against trespass declined, perhaps signaling a general acceptance of territorial boundaries and rights. In the ensuing decades, family hunting territories with sanctions against trespass were common among the Osnaburgh House Ojibwa.[32]

From having been rare in the teens, beavers recovered in the 1830s, and for the rest of the century, their populations fluctuated from scarcity (1840s) to abundance (1870s to 1880s) to scarcity again (1890s), a pattern produced mainly by alternating conservation and overtrapping and by the mid-1840s substitution of silk in the manufacturing of hats. In the final decade of the century, Indians once again "exterminated" beavers; "annually driven further back by the encroachment of hunters from other places," they evidently "no longer spare a few animals for breeding, even on their own lands, as has hitherto been their custom." The trader who reported this was right: Beavers were again being hunted out. But if by "hitherto" he

meant at some primordial pre-European time, he produced no evidence (and we have none); the origins of that custom, an artifact of historical circumstances that began some seventy years before, were already obscure.[33]

Thus far we have six frames of Northern Algonquians from the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries. In the first three—the Montagnais in the 1630s, the East Main Cree in the period from 1650 to 1745, and the York Factory Cree from 1738 to 1775—the concept of conservation seems to have been largely absent; most Indians—but not all—had no interest whatsoever in it. These Indians killed as many beavers as they needed to satisfy their desire for trade goods and domestic consumption. And while some staked claims to beaver lodges or hunting territories, others evidently did not honor those rights. Perhaps family hunting territories emerged where people wished to repel trespassers and manage their own beaver lodges to produce renewable commodities; perhaps outsiders like Le Jeune had some sway over conservation attitudes; perhaps Northern Algonquians felt toward beavers, as the York Factory Cree did toward caribou, that "the more they destroy the more plentiful they grow."

The last three frames—the Cree near Lake Winnipegosis in the 1790s to 1820s, the Cree on the East Main in the 1820s to 1840s, and the Northern Ojibwa in northern Ontario in the 1790s to 1840s—took place during a period of intense fur-trade company competition followed by monopoly; of dedicated trapping and consumerism; of steady destructive pressure on the beaver populations; and of stated interest on the part of traders in the conservation of beavers and territorial behavior. The Cumberland House Cree, needing beavers for food, paid no attention to the calls for conservation. The Rupert House Cree, in contrast, appear to have had a tradition of both conservation and hunting territories. And while some Northern Ojibwas developed both conservation and territorial systems at the same time as, and seemingly in response to, new HBC regulations, others lived by trespassing and poaching.

Conservation and territoriality in this vast region clearly were affected by local variations in ecological, demographic, social, cultural, and historical circumstances.[34] As among Ojibwa speakers[35] and other Algonquian speakers[36] farther south, population pressure, fur-

trade company competition, game depletions, and fur traders concerned that destroyed commodities would erode their profits hastened the moment that conservation and territoriality became concrete for the nineteenth-century Northern Ojibwa, and perhaps for the eighteenth-century East Main Cree and others.

Twentieth-century Northern Algonquians have shown an abiding concern for conservation, preventing waste, and managing hunting in family territories. In the first two decades of the century the signs came from all directions. Montagnais who lived at Lac St. Jean "regulated" the hunt in territories that descended from fathers to their children in order to consume "only the increase" and leave enough animals "to insure a supply for the following year." Timiskaming Algonquin hunting territory leaders made beavers "the object of the most careful 'farming,' " keeping careful track of the numbers and ages in each lodge in order not to "deplete the stock." The Temagami Ojibwa had similar concerns. To promote conservation, they ideally hunted just one-quarter of their territory each year and left the center entirely alone until needed. Trespass could undermine these practices, especially among the Mistassini Cree and Lac St. Jean Montagnais, who did nothing against a trespasser because they believed that he would sicken, have an accident, or starve; in contrast, trespass was a serious crime for the Timiskaming Algonquin, who once were said to punish it with death.[37]

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, white trappers, loggers, and others placed Northern Algonquian lands under increasingly relentless pressure. Like the HBC earlier in the nineteenth century, several outsiders demonstrated a heightened interest in helping relieve the pressure. Filling a similar role taken by HBC traders in the 1820s to 1830s was Frank Speck, an anthropologist. In 1908, Speck began three decades of ethnographic observations among the Cree, Montagnais, Naskapi, Ojibwa, and other Algonquian people. From the 1910s through the 1930s, he was the single most influential proponent of the primordial nature of conservation and hunting territories. An anthropologist-activist dedicated as much to helping native people articulate their political causes as to the analysis of culture, Speck helped native people develop strategies to protect themselves from outsiders who wanted their lands. As Harvey Feit, an anthropolo-

gist, revealed, Speck, drawing liberally on a letter by Armand Tessier, an Indian Affairs governmental employee, claimed that Indians possessed "instinctive" understandings of nature and that conservation was a "natural law" among them. In opposition—here was the relevant context for his remarks—hypocritical white intruders "often accused" native people "of being improvident as regards the killing of game," and of being wasteful and thinking only about the present, and sought restrictions on Indian hunting and control over Indian lands.[38]

Northern Algonquians had discovered their own political voice some time before. In 1915, in reaction to accusations that they were "improvident," the Lac St. Jean Montagnais issued a conservation manifesto in which they argued that from a dietary perspective, the beaver was to them as "the bison to the Plains Indians, or the reindeer to the Arctic tribes"—or as pork was to white people. The Montagnais hunter, they maintained, "instinctively . . . understands how to operate with a natural law, which no game commission can improve upon, and to maintain the beaver there for his subsistence. He understands, moreover, that he cannot abuse his opportunity. Thus it is that the Indian, obeying a natural law of conservation, which is worth more than any written law to him, never destroys all the members of a beaver family. He knows enough to spare a sufficient number for the continuation of the family and the propagation of the colony."

Adding that Indians owned the land and that families used their individual territories "in the beginning of time," Chief Aleck Paul of the Temagami Ojibwa confirmed this conservationist sentiment: "So these families would never think of damaging the abundance or the source of supply of the game, because that had come to them from their fathers and grandfathers and those behind them. . . . We would only kill the small beaver and leave the old ones to keep breeding. Then when they got too old they too would be killed, just as a farmer kills his pigs, preserving the stock for his supply of young." In contrast, Chief Paul noted, was the white man "who needs to be watched. He makes the forest fires, he goes through the woods and kills everything he can find, whether he needs the flesh or not, and then when all the animals in one section are killed he takes the train and goes to another where he can do the same." Except for the ending, the imagery and language were largely Speck's (and Tessier's). Chief Paul showed that he could co-opt the language and imagery of private property and conservation to score points against outsiders who threatened. To achieve their goal—control over the exploitation of resources—all three mounted an argument based on primordial possession of private property and conservation principles. The Cree and Montagnais co-opted a similar imagery. That their land "ownership" might have been more in the form of a stewardship shared with others who possessed collective-use rights, or that they trapped beavers so as to prevent white trappers from hunting them was far less important than countering the external political threat against their lands, which was simply too dire to bother with ambiguous or conflicting details.[39]

Faced once again with depleted beaver populations and with low fur prices and an influx of aggressive white trappers in the 1930s, the HBC, Quebec, and later, Ontario and the federal government joined forces to institute beaver preserves. Before they were finished, the preserves had grown to over 100,000 acres in northern Quebec and Ontario.

A trading post manager and his wife, James and Maud Watt, pushed the design to restock depleted areas and institute conservation measures; to restrict the annual take to the estimated population increase; and to reserve beavers for native people. Small booklets printed and distributed at Rupert House showed graphically with small images of beavers and a text in Cree syllabics how these animals, left alone, would increase naturally, and how many could then safely be harvested. In the Rupert House preserve, the number of beavers increased from 25 to over 15,000 in fourteen years.

Yet while many Indians emphasized throughout this period that they were not supposed to, and did not, waste, there seemed no unanimity on how to perpetuate beaver populations. In the 1930s, the Attikamek "systematically conserved" beavers on family hunting territories by leaving younger beavers alive to breed (for other fur bearers, they left a central portion of their territories untouched as a reserve). They considered poaching beavers as "the supreme crime" yet (as explained below) left sanctions to so-called animal bosses who punished hunters for improper behavior. At mid-century, Western

Montagnais left two beavers in each lodge in sharply defined territories, but in contrast, the Natashquan Montagnais killed all the beavers they found, reasoning that since both hunters and beavers moved around (and beavers would eventually return to repopulate the habitat), there was no point in leaving any animals behind in a lodge. Even in the context of increasing suggestions from all sides that beaver conservation was a good thing, there were local variations.[40]

Northern Algonquians have continued to hunt beavers to the present day, and over the last three decades the story of conservation has been inseparable from the all-embracing political and economic movement to control Northern Algonquian lands and energy. Since 1970, the Cree, Ojibwa, Innu, and other First Nations people—the collective ethnonym used today by Canada's native people—have struggled to reaffirm their political and economic rights, settle outstanding land claims and treaty issues, and keep at bay or control the large-scale exploitation of timber and energy resources.

For the Cree (and Inuit) in northern Quebec, the paramount defining event was the decision in 1971 to dam and harness their rivers for hydroelectric power. Facing one of the largest construction projects of all time, these native people demanded recognition of their aboriginal rights and compensation. In 1975 they signed under extreme pressure the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA or the Agreement), in which the Cree (who are the focus here) agreed to relinquish aboriginal title and allow Hydro-Quebec, the power company, to proceed, in exchange for $137 million, lands reserved for exclusive subsistence rights, and other privileges. None of these benefits has relieved the Cree of the feeling that from that time forward, they have been under monstrous assault. In short order, Hydro-Quebec built two hundred dams and dikes, moved and poured two hundred million cubic yards of fill, and flooded forty-five hundred square miles of land. The ecological and social effects of these and related projects are demonstrable: At least one massive drowning of caribou, mercury poisoning of fish, deforestation, and community relocation. Moreover, a planned second phase—James Bay II—has loomed threateningly periodically during the 1980s and 1990s.[41]

The JBNQA gave the Cree great authority and control over issues that were paramount to them: hunting, trapping, and fishing rights.

Increasingly, the Cree and other First Nations people stressed that they should have control over the management of beavers and other animals. Many have argued that they, not outsiders, have a historical and cultural right to decide resource and conservation issues. In the 1970s, Billy Diamond, Chief of the Grand Council of the Crees and an indisputably successful political leader at a critical moment in the history of his people, remarked that the Agreement "guarantees that we can continue to live in harmony with nature."

Diamond's view has prevailed in published reports on the James Bay Cree. Today, almost one-quarter century after the Agreement, the Cree take care to assert that "nothing is wasted" and that nothing ever was. Matthew Coon-Come, the current Grand Chief, proclaimed that "we have hunted and fished, in balance with nature, for more than 300 generations." Remarks like these do not stand alone. In northern Quebec, the comments are aimed against massive energy development projects and the culture of waste associated with industrialism and a consumer society. They are linked to charges of environmental racism levied against Quebec and to the charge that "the Whiteman," in contrast to the Cree, "has no feeling of love for all life on the earth."[42]

Several anthropologists and natural scientists who have written extensively on the impact of the JBNQA on renewable resources like Cree fisheries, goose hunting, and beaver and caribou hunting have echoed the rhetoric of harmony, balance, respect, and conservation used by Billy Diamond and Matthew Coon-Come. The most prolific is Harvey Feit, who started to collect extensive information on Waswanipi Cree hunting and conservation ideology in the late 1960s and has been a strong advocate of helping native people articulate policy goals and implement change. Over the last twenty years, the separate interests have often fused in his work, when, for example, he proposed that hydroelectric engineers emulate the Cree or framed Cree management of natural resources—so-called "self-management"—in the context of global environmental problems.

In the 1960s to 1970s, the Waswanipi Cree hunted in territories managed by bosses with extensive practical and cultural knowledge of the land and its resources. According to Feit, senior hunters possessed detailed understandings of animal behavior, population

dynamics, and long- and short-term ecological trends, which were filtered culturally: Hunters who showed respect in how they "hunt, butcher, consume, and use" animals were given more animals by God, the north wind (as the helper of Jesus), or other spirits. Hunters showed respect especially by ensuring that animals did not suffer and by "not over exploiting" animals. A hunter should not kill "more than he is given"—knowledge difficult to divine but arrived at by interpreting dreams, closely observing environmental and animal signs, and possessing profound knowledge of ecological relationships and systems (in which animals may be understood as persons). This knowledge, Feit argued, promoted conservation—as did built-in practical flexibility and a propensity to hunt different sections of one's territory from one year to the next, thereby resting sections and allowing animals to recover.

Since the JBNQA was signed in 1975, the Cree have been guided by its provisions for game management and conservation. The Agreement defined conservation as pursuit of "optimum natural productivity" and protection of "ecological resources" in order to "protect endangered species." According to Feit, this definition converged with Waswanipi Cree historical practice. It was "consistent with present Cree practises which include a wide range of cultural rules for hunting in ways that maintain ecological systems, and cultural rules for limiting harvests when species populations decline or are endangered." These practices—including family hunting territories, percipient managers, and conservation—he asserted, "extend back several centuries," that is, into the 1600s, and "plausibl[y]" even "before contact with Europeans."

In this view, history legitimates the Cree authority, rather than provincial or federal authority, to manage natural resources. Yet the historical evidence is lacking for conservation until long after the arrival of Europeans, and is quite equivocal and mixed for a family territorial system. At times, the Cree and other Northern Algonquians seemed eager to kill as many animals as they could find. Even today, conservation is problematic despite its asserted importance in the Agreement. At the time of the Agreement, most James Bay Crees lived in towns and depended on welfare and summer labor for income; since signing, almost half have taken advantage of an income security

program subventing hunting, fishing, and trapping in bush camps—a program that newly energized bush life despite real uncertainties about the development of new dependencies. In the 1970s to 1980s, discussions focused on the need to set quotas and bag limits and to educate young hunters who have mainly known town-based life on how to behave properly. More recently, a "steady flow" of conservation problems, including overhunting, has been reported in Cree communities. According to Feit, however, these problems are minor, local, and—given the resources for enforcement—solvable.[43]

The emphasis placed by the contemporary Waswanipi Cree on showing respect to animals as a requisite to hunting success is a reminder of the importance of the meanings given by Northern Algonquians to beavers and other animals. They often parallel those associated with white-tailed deer in the South: Beavers and other animals figured in people's narratives of long-ago times when distinctions between animals and men were often blurred; they participated then and now in social relations with human persons; and they were sentient and animate. This explains why the elder Alexander Henry could record in the 1760s that following the death of a bear, Ojibwa hunters took its head "in their hands, stroking and kissing it several times; begging a thousand pardons for taking away her life; calling her their relation and grandmother. . . ." This exact behavior might not have extended to less powerful animals than bears but the personal, affective relations capture broader understandings of animals and "nature" that set Northern Algonquians apart from many (but not all) people of European descent for whom there were sharp differences between animals and men.[44]

Northern Algonquians said that animals made themselves available to hunters who treated them properly but did not give themselves up to hunters who treated them poorly by breaking, knowingly or unawares, certain rules. The rules were expressed as both dictates to follow and taboos to avoid, and have been widely described among Northern Algonquians for over four hundred years. For example, a seventeenth-century Montagnais whose dogs found and ate the bones of beavers, or who spilled a beaver's blood on the ground, might no longer have success killing beavers. But if he burned beaver bones

carefully or returned them to water, or cut the tips of tails from beavers and strung them together, then his success would continue. Montagnais told the missionary Le Jeune that beavers knew what men did because "before the Beaver was entirely dead . . . its soul comes to make the round of the Cabin of him who has killed it, and looks very carefully to see what is done with its bones; if they are given to the dogs, the other Beavers would be apprised of it and therefore they would make themselves hard to capture. But they are very glad to have their bones thrown into the fire, or into a river; especially the trap which has caught them is very glad of this." At the same time that they recorded this treatment of beaver bones, Jesuits also registered "astonishment" at the "waste of meat."[45]

Three hundred years later (in the 1920s), the Parry Island Ojibwa admonished, "Do not throw beaver and bear bones to the dogs, but place them in water or hang them to trees; for the beaver and bear will use these bones again when they are reincarnated. If you violate this taboo," they said, drawing their imagery from the logging camps where many of them worked, "the boss beaver and the boss bear will be offended." What they called (in English) "boss," others have referred to commonly as a species "master" or "owner." According to the anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell, the Ojibwa sometimes called the species masters, sun, moon, four winds, Thunderbirds, and High God, some stones, animals, and trees, and other "other-than-human persons" collectively "our grandfathers." The Parry Island Ojibwa thought that a species master was larger and whiter than ordinary members of the species, and that its mastery consisted of the power to regulate local population numbers and to punish human persons who broke taboos.

Punishment generally took the form of hunting failure. As Hallowell remarked, a grandfather offended because a hunter has not treated an animal in the right manner "will not allow those animals to be caught." The Parry Island Ojibwa believed that a person who tortured an animal will "surely meet with misfortune," such as his "child will fall sick." The hunter who happened to "kill a porcupine idly and throw away its meat" ran the risk that "its shadow will harm [his] children." Both cruelty to wild animals and waste of porcupine meat could be punished by disease. The Ojibwa understood that it was "necessary . . . for men to kill animals in order to live" but felt

that it was "wrong . . . to cause them unnecessary suffering." Ideally, as their ceremonies have reflected, their lives were marked by moderation, sharing, and balance in relations between human persons and other-than-human persons.[46]

Social relations involving humans and beavers were ideally marked by mutual affection and good thoughts. In the late nineteenth century, the Southwestern Ojibwa related a story about a long-ago time when a woman married a beaver and then returned to human society and told people, "Never speak you ill of a beaver!" If they did, she warned, they would never kill another one. The storyteller remarked, "Therefore such was what the people always did; they never spoke ill of the beavers, especially when they intended hunting them. Such was what the people truly know. If any one regards a beaver with too much contempt, speaking ill of it, one simply (will) not (be able to) kill it. Just the same as the feelings of one who is disliked, so is the feeling of the beaver. And he who never speaks ill of a beaver is very much loved by it; in the same way as people often love one another, so is one held in the mind of the beaver; particularly lucky then is one at killing beavers." Through narratives like this, the Southwestern Ojibwa confirmed their emotional and social relationship with beavers. They knew that beavers were willing to give themselves to those who loved them. Waste or conservation did not affect the willingness of beavers one way or another. Although it is not obvious in this story, they also understood that death was not final but a prelude to rebirth.[47]

Throughout the twentieth century, many Crees and Innus have continued to place a special emphasis on treatment of the beaver carcass after death, carefully placing, for example, beaver skulls in trees or on poles. Earlier in the century, Lac St. Jean Montagnais reserved shoulder and pelvic bones and forelegs for purposes of divination, and teeth for cutting and sharpening tools, but threw the rest of a beaver's bones and its eyes into the water, and the Mistassini Cree spoke about the "proper disposal of animal remains" as "obligatory" else hunting might fail.[48] In recent years, the Mistassini Cree have continued to believe that animals give themselves generously to hunters who respect them. Respect, according to the anthropologist Adrian Tanner, is the most important general injunction and is demonstrated by not making fun of animals; by wearing charms and decorating one's clothing; and especially by treating bones, intestines,

blood, and other parts of animals killed in a prescribed manner. They should display land-animal antlers, scapulas, and skulls in trees and carefully place the bones of beavers and other water animals in water. Animals treated well in this manner will come to hunters who have demonstrated their friendship. But if a hunter breaks a rule or taboo, the species master (whose relationship to the species is conceived by the Mistassini Cree today as an owner's to his "pet") causes starvation by withholding game.[49]

Thus there is abundant evidence that beliefs about animals, taboos prescribing behavior, and a system linking events with their causes (a hunter fails to kill animals because he has behaved improperly) existed from the sixteenth up to the twentieth century. But that does not mean that the rules making up the system have remained unchanged or that new ones have not emerged. Neither the system nor the rules exist outside of history.

In fact, what is striking about the taboos—especially for those who accept Feit's conclusion about their several-century time depth or the historian James Axtell's assessment that Indians abandoned "ancient taboos," one of which was a "conservation ethic that preserved a minimal breeding population for the next year's hunt"[50]—is that they apparently had nothing to do with waste and the conservation of animal populations until recently. The seventeenth-century Montagnais and Mi'kmaq did not have rules about waste or exterminating beavers in a lodge or region; one need only recall the Jesuit "astonishment" at the Montagnais' "waste of meat," or the lack of taboos or beliefs concerning killing too many beavers among the nearby Mi'kmaq. These Indians were only supposed to heed the typical regulations about treatment of bones to prevent beavers from deserting a region.

Twelve hundred miles west and one century later, the York Factory Cree voiced similar taboos as crucial to success in the hunt. If the taboos were followed, animals would make themselves available to be killed; if not, animals would not. While the evidence on beaver hunting is ambiguous, there was no check on killing too many caribou, as James Isham, Andrew Graham, and others reported of the eighteenth-century Cree who believed they could not kill too many.[51]

One can only speculate on the consequences of such beliefs for conservation. If caribou or other animals made themselves available to

be killed no matter how many had been killed, then why stop killing them? For the Rock Cree of northern Manitoba at this time—Robert Brightman, an anthropologist, argued from ethnographic and historical evidence—failure to kill animals who offered themselves to the hunter might have constituted an offense. If beavers disappeared from a region, the disappearance had nothing to do with hunting too many and everything to do with a deliberate or inadvertent taboo infraction. The reappearance of beavers was contingent not on adjusting how many animals one killed in the future but on exercising far greater care obeying the taboos. One reason to change tactics and, say, leave two beavers per lodge to produce the next generation, is if one started to doubt the wisdom of killing all beavers in the destructive synergy of competition and commodification (and if one was not starving). If a hunter could protect his ground from trespassers and poachers, then this new "rationality"—leaving a breeding core undisturbed—might influence how he managed beaver populations on his territory. Perhaps this is what was happening at York Factory at Drage's time in the mid–eighteenth century.[52]

Why would the York Factory Cree allege that "the more they destroy the more plentiful they grow"? As in the South, belief in reincarnation is ancient among Northern Algonquians, and has continued to exist in the twentieth century alongside alternative beliefs. "Everything," a Parry Island Ojibwa remarked in the 1920s, "trees, birds, animals, fish (and in earlier times human beings also) return to life; while they are dead their souls are merely awaiting reincarnation." As long as hunters placed beaver bones in water, beavers could use them "when they are reincarnated." The Parry Island Ojibwa debated (perhaps always) precisely how this happened. One man thought that a beaver's soul used any beaver bones it came across and was thus reborn, and another that a beaver's soul used its former bones: "When I was young old hunters would sometimes cut a cross in the leg-bone of a beaver and place it in a creek or somewhere away from the dogs. Later they would kill a beaver with exactly the same mark on its leg-bone. Plainly it was the same beaver that had come to life again, and reassumed the same bones."[53]

Most Northern Algonquians possessed ideas about reincarnation and like the Parry Island Ojibwa, many probably have debated the particulars. The twentieth-century Cree, Naskapi, and Montagnais

have all treated bones with respect so that reincarnation might occur. In recent years the Chisasibi Cree seem not to have a concept of reincarnation of animals, but the Waswanipi Cree who show respect to animals are "appreciated by the animals, whose souls survive to be reborn again." And Mistassini Cree hunters who respectfully and properly place beaver bones in water find more beavers who give themselves up to be killed because they have disposed of the carcass in a proper manner. This "assures the continued appearance of animals," according to Adrian Tanner, either because new animals take form as flesh grows onto discarded bones, as stated in myth, or because—the "more commonly-held belief"—the bones are returned to a species "bank," and animal masters are pleased.[54]

Apparently, today's conservation ethic and practices were largely absent among Northern Algonquians until certain historical conditions emerged in the wake of the arrival of European outsiders mainly interested in controlling Indians economically and spiritually. Before the nineteenth century the conditions were local and nascent, as was the interest in conservation. During the nineteenth century they became widespread, as did the interest in conservation.

Conservation ultimately became of such obvious practical importance that it was widely incorporated into native systems of thought, including taboos, and action. By the time Frank Speck worked among Northern Algonquians, conservation of caribou was a recurrent motif among the Naskapi and conservation of fish of signal importance to the Naskapi and Innu. For native people at Speck's time, conservation found expression mainly in new prohibitions against waste. The Naskapi, for example, said that they could kill caribou only if they used the entire carcass—meat, bones, and skins—in domestic consumption. Caribou were then scarce and almost impossible to kill, the Naskapi believed, because hunters had slaughtered great numbers and the caribou master, informed by caribou offended by the stench of the bones of the dead, took umbrage and would not let caribou make themselves available to hunters. The Innu believed that moose-fly punished fishermen who wasted fish by withholding fish from those men. South of the St. Lawrence, the Mi'kmaq and Maliseet linked their failure to kill caribou to earlier waste of meat. These taboos against waste were important expressions of a growing and

changing conservationist sentiment; one hundred years earlier, the Naskapi in northern Quebec took only the skins and choice parts of meat from the caribou they killed, but thought that if they wasted a skin and a particular spirit found out, he would refuse out of anger to release the caribou from their winter abode.[55]

But it is one matter to sanction waste, and another to be attentive to population dynamics and take measures to prevent or correct the decline of animal populations. To ensure reincarnation, it was necessary only to follow the rules that Western ecologists would argue are unrelated to breeding success and conservation. A tension emerged between this ancient system of belief and behavior rooted in reincarnation and taboos, and the new one expressed in Western principles of biology and animal behavior. To judge from evidence for the belief in reincarnation as well as for leaving beavers in lodges in order that they might breed, separate understandings about the perpetuation of beavers have coexisted for a long time among Northern Algonquians. The ones linked to Western game management practices seem to have emerged as a result of thoughts about beavers and family hunting territories traceable to the Western commodification and historical decline of beavers and the initiation—by Jesuits, the HBC, the Watts, anthropologists like Speck, and native people themselves—of new measures designed to allow beaver populations to recover.

In some communities this tension persists. In the 1960s, the Northern Ojibwa argued that trappers should leave two beavers in each lodge so they could reproduce, but some maintained this was unnecessary because God gave beavers to man whenever he needed them. The contemporary Manitoba Rock Cree, in Robert Brightman's careful estimation, hold a similar range of beliefs. Some hunters do not conserve, arguing that conservation "is unnecessary because animals will be reborn." Others do conserve, giving reasons identical to those that Western game managers might give. Still others show what Brightman calls a "creative synthesis" of Cree and Western beliefs in defining lack of conservation as equal to the infraction of a taboo.[56]

The Cree and other First Nations people who claim the right to decide resource and conservation issues often base their claim on a natural right stemming from their relationship to the environment, which, in opposition to large-scale development projects, they present as bal-

anced and harmonious. For Quebec's Innu, a literal translation of the verb they use when speaking to their posture toward the natural world is "attending" to it mentally or "paying attention" to it in order to match or fit it to their thinking—in order to have control over it, as a parent has over a child, a band chief over band members, a master spirit over animal species, or God over man. Matching or fitting the environment to one's thinking involves keeping watch over, taking care of, conserving, preserving, and looking after it. The relationship is conceived as reciprocal: The land supports them and they in return, as guardians, "must look after it and be careful not to deplete or destroy it." They therefore reason that they, rather than governmental or private interests, should be responsible for environmental management.[57]

The Wemindji Cree use similar imagery. In their spring goose hunt in the 1980s, hunters emphasized the importance of avoiding waste, resting and rotating among hunting sites, and stopping the kill when they sensed they possessed as many geese as they should, all by way of showing respect to geese. It mattered not at all that the hunt contravened international Migratory Bird Conventions (MBC), as well as the JBNQA, which allowed the Cree and Inuit to hunt at any time and place if allowed by the MBC and conservation regulations. In the 1980s, Chisasibi Cree elders blamed the failure of caribou to appear on some hunters who, the year before, shot more than they could use and did not conceal (by burning or burying) what they wasted; these hunters had not "taken care of the caribou."[58]

Some might be tempted to argue that if conservation is a recent phenomenon, then native people have no right to manage their natural resources today and nonnative resource managers should have that right by default. But there is no logical basis for this argument. In the Canadian and Alaskan North, there is great emphasis today on "co-management" of natural resources, which means management directed jointly by indigenous organizations with strong community support, on the one hand, and nonindigenous state agencies, on the other. The old way of management amounted to control imposed by government agencies alone, usually uninfluenced by indigenous opinion. Agreements like the one forged on James Bay have cast the old way onto the dust heap and opened the door for new arrangements informed and determined by native knowledge of animals and habitats.

For no one doubts that native people who spend their lives hunting, fishing, and trapping possess the ability to understand animal behavior and population dynamics. No one disputes that senior hunters have gained a detailed and sophisticated understanding (albeit cultural) of their surroundings and the animals they have pursued during their lives. When beaver hunters read population health and breeding success in minute signs like incisor marks on trees and uterine placental scars, their knowledge parallels if not exceeds that possessed by many wildlife biologists. Moreover, an ideology permeated by the hope of reciprocity deeply embedded in native social and natural relations also parallels the ideological predispositions of many Western ecologists and wildlife biologists. Although neither community is single-minded in outlook or behavior, each can usefully complement the other.[59]