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# Environmental Activism on the Ground: Small Green and Indigenous Organizing

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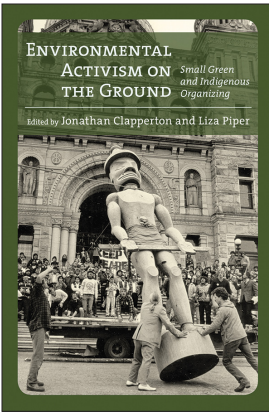
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**ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM ON THE GROUND:  
Small Green and Indigenous Organizing**  
Edited by Jonathan Clapperton and Liza Piper

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# ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM ON THE GROUND

*Small Green  
and Indigenous  
Organizing*

Edited by Jonathan Clapperton and Liza Piper



ENVIRONMENTAL  
ACTIVISM ON  
THE GROUND

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THE GROUND *and Indigenous*  
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Edited by Jonathan Clapperton and Liza Piper

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Cover image: First Nations raising a traditional welcome figure at the legislature during the Meares Island protest in October 1984. *Victoria Times Colonist* file photo.

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## INTRODUCTION

# In the Shadow of the Green Giants: Environmentalism and Civic Engagement

*Jonathan Clapperton & Liza Piper*

In 1970, three women living in Edmonton, with shared social and environmental concerns and alert to the belching refineries of east Edmonton, established a group called STOP: Save Tomorrow, Oppose Pollution. STOP engaged broadly with the environmental issues of the day, from air and water pollution in urban areas to the implications of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry. They put on puppet theatres for children, issued press releases, organized letter-writing campaigns, and generally engaged in the diverse practices and small-scale strategies possible with limited resources that characterize grassroots activism. Louise Swift, one of STOP's founders and later also a Raging Granny, described their tactics to the magazine *Alberta Views*. To raise awareness of the issue of phosphates in household detergents, for example, a seemingly prosaic but nevertheless pivotal environmental issue in Canada in the 1970s, Swift described how members "would stuff shopping carts full of groceries at Safeway and proceed to the longest checkout line, then make a loud scene when they 'discovered' they were buying a product with phosphates."<sup>1</sup> That 2004 issue of *Alberta Views* was dedicated to activism in Alberta: part celebration and part encouragement to Albertans to become involved in social and environmental issues and to "challeng[e] apathy head on."<sup>2</sup> The editorial



board described environmental activists, in particular, as fighting “an uphill battle every day”—a feeling no doubt experienced even more acutely three decades earlier by those of STOP in big-oil country.<sup>3</sup>

Edmonton is the capital of Alberta: current home to the oil (or “tar”) sands, long-standing centre of Canada’s oil industry, and widely perceived as barren ground for environmentalism. For our purposes, the creation of STOP is the exception that proves the rule: a wave of environmental consciousness transformed North America and places beyond in the 1970s, including supposed environmentalist backwaters like Edmonton and the rest of Alberta. STOP was by no means the only Alberta organization agitating for greater attention to environmental issues in this period. University of Calgary students came together in the wake of the first Earth Day to form the Calgary Eco-Centre Society. Funded by such diverse entities as the Alberta Fish and Game Association (a long-standing advocate for environmental protection across the province) and Dome Petroleum (a Calgary-based oil company), the Eco-Centre worked to disseminate ecologically minded educational materials among the wider public.<sup>4</sup>

The rise of environmentalist organizations in the 1970s provoked significant backlash in Alberta, as elsewhere. Industry lobby organizations, such as the Coal Association of Canada, might have been expected to dismiss what they called “the emotional desires” of advocates for more ecologically minded approaches to resource development.<sup>5</sup> But opposition was expressed even in seemingly more sympathetic quarters. W. H. (Wally) Hanson, the chief forester with the Eastern Rockies Forest Conservation Board (ERFCB) (a joint federal-provincial management board that sought to protect the ecologically sensitive Eastern Slopes of the Rocky Mountains), criticized the “environmentalist cult” and contrasted its provocations to his own and the ERFCB’s arguably more effective, and certainly more moderate, approach to conservation.<sup>6</sup> Both STOP and the Calgary Eco-Centre Society folded in the early 1980s, in part because the emergent professionalism of the environmental movement of that period left less room, and created at least the perception that there was less need, for the kind of amateur, grassroots activism so prevalent across different locales in the 1970s. Other organizations founded in the same period nevertheless endured. The Alberta Wilderness Association, founded in 1965, espoused a more explicitly preservationist ideology that harkened back to

early twentieth-century conservation efforts. It is now the oldest wilderness conservation group in Alberta. The Lubicon Lake Nation initiated its contemporary struggle with oil and gas development on their lands in northern Alberta in 1976, when the Nation, along with other affected groups, formed the Alberta Isolated Communities and filed a caveat against the Alberta government in an effort to forestall further industrial development.<sup>7</sup> It was not until October 2018, that the Lubicon Lake Band agreed to a final land claim settlement with the federal and provincial governments.

Edmonton is where the workshop from which this book originated was hosted in 2014, and this snapshot of late twentieth-century environmentalism in Alberta highlights some of the core elements of our volume and its contribution to the wider literature on the history of North American environmentalism.<sup>8</sup> As the chapters here collectively argue, the efflorescence of small activist groups in the late 1960s, and into the 1970s, focused on local issues but attuned to national, continental, and global dynamics, served as more than just the building blocks from which larger, more powerful environmentalist organizations emerged. Rather, they represent a strand within the history of North American environmentalism, one in which workers, women, small businesspeople, Indigenous activists, and other often marginalized groups feature more prominently as compared to their roles in the largest green organizations: Greenpeace, the Sierra Club, the National Audubon Society, Earth First!, and the World Wildlife Fund. This volume focuses on the experiences of small-scale, localized environmental activists, including Indigenous activists, from the late twentieth into the twenty-first century, to emphasize the contributions and significance of these forms of small green activism within the larger movement as a whole. Readers will observe that the authors in this volume use a variety of terms to refer to Indigenous people in those instances where a collective noun is more appropriate than identifying the specific nation or group to which people belong. The different collective nouns (Indigenous peoples, Native peoples, American Indians) reflect the fact that the scholarship here is drawn from Canada, the United States, and elsewhere in the Americas where the normal terms are different. Although it is less consistent, the editors and authors felt it important that each chapter use the language meaningful to its specific context.

The first part of *Environmental Activism on the Ground* explores the processes and possibilities of small-scale and Indigenous environmental activism. The five chapters here consider the different ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists have worked from the ground up to achieve significant change in resisting exploitative and damaging resource development and in building parks, heritage sites, and protected areas that recognize the indivisibility of cultural and natural resources and work to protect both. This part also includes a methodological investigation of how historians can better probe the experiences of ordinary people (in contrast to scientists, politicians, and other elites) in the history of environmentalism. The second part of the volume then takes us more fully into the past and the era from the late 1960s into the 1990s, when the modern environmental movement flourished, to consider the character of small-scale environmentalism in this period. These chapters contextualize and deepen our understanding of some of the processes described in Part 1, “Processes and Possibilities,” and adopted by small green and Indigenous activists, and their consequences in Canadian history in particular.

Environmental history, a discipline that informs many of the chapters in this volume, is attuned to matters of scale. Typically this attention focuses on geographic scale, or scales of production and consumption; in this instance we have redirected the question of scale back on to the social movement of environmentalism itself. When it comes to evaluating the efficacy of environmental organizations and groups, studies of the environmental movement’s last six decades remain enthralled by those traditionally seen as prime history makers: the larger, (supposedly) more successful and powerful “Green Giants.” Implicit in such focus is the idea that the bigger the rock thrown in the pond, the greater the splash it creates. While the most renowned environmental organizations have been integral to the spread of the environmental movement, these organizations nevertheless represent but a fraction of the interests that shaped, and continue to shape, that movement and are far outnumbered by localized, often grassroots, environmental organizations that tend to fly below both academic and public radars. While small-scale and Indigenous organizations and collectives do not garner as many, or as sensational, media headlines, boast internationally renowned celebrities, or have financial pockets and political connections as deep as the “Green Giants,” they do,

by weight of mass, form a powerful transformational force; toss enough small rocks into the pond, and they, too, cause a significant stir. Using anthropological, historical, and sociological approaches to measure the splash of such environmental organizations, groups, and associations is a central objective of this book.

Environmental leader, as part of the environmental justice movement, have recognized the importance of “everyday” and “non-elite” peoples who are pushing forward the broader environmental movement’s agenda.<sup>9</sup> Popular books intended for a lay audience also encourage individuals to become “everyday environmental activists” without necessarily becoming members of environmental organizations.<sup>10</sup> Indigenous peoples struggling to resist enduring colonial pressures, and to protect their rights to cultural preservation and self-determination, have also acted as crucial participants in environmental struggles. In Canada and the United States, treaty rights have served as barriers to persistent and intense industrial pressures, even as other forms of legal protections for the environment have weakened. By bringing together research on Indigenous activism with insights into the role that ordinary members of society have played and continue to play in the environmental movement’s unfolding drama, this edited collection seeks to open new avenues for scholarship into small-scale activism and its successes.

The question of scale animates *Environmental Activism on the Ground* in two ways. First, it offers a central organizing principle, in that each chapter explores small green activism in a different context. From parks and protected areas across the Americas (Evans) to the rural landscapes of Nova Scotia (Leeming), each chapter offers insight into the diversity of organizations and the historical contexts in which small-scale activism appeared. Each chapter also illuminates common themes that run through the historical experiences of such activism: the need to make and maintain alliances with other groups, the struggles over objectives particularly where environmental degradation has followed from larger imbalances of power, and the connections between immediate, local concerns and wider, even global, changes.

Second, several of the chapters (particularly Clapperton and Zelko) engage with the question of whether the shift to larger environmentalist organizations represents a significant change over time. In this regard,

*Environmental Activism on the Ground* undermines more linear narratives of the environmental movement, such as Robert Gottlieb's *Forcing the Spring*, Adam Rome's *The Genius of Earth Day*, and, especially, Kirkpatrick Sale's *The Green Revolution*, among others, which create a fairly standard periodization of the environmental movement's progression over time.<sup>11</sup> Rather, our volume collectively shows that the environmental movement's growth was unevenly felt across time and space.

Recent scholarly works on the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century North American environmental movement have characterized it as initiated as much by lower- and middle-class people as the powerful elite. From either side of the Canada-US border, Tina Loo and Chad Montrie respectively have sought to emphasize the crucial role of individuals and smaller organizations, such as union locals, in articulating an earlier environmentalist ethos.<sup>12</sup> Although much scholarly attention on the later, better-known environmentalism of the 1960s and 1970s remains focused on larger organizations or on state initiatives, such as Michael Bess's *Light-Green Society*, there is a growing body of work (some of which has been authored by contributors to this present collection), such as the recent edited collection *Canadian Countercultures and the Environment*, that examines local activism and its effects.<sup>13</sup> While every environmental campaign is local in a sense, and even large environmental organizations are headquartered in different local contexts, these are not what is intended by this book. Rather, we follow in the same vein as *Countercultures and the Environment* by identifying local activism as being that which involves people who are local/residents to a particular space/place. While a focus on local activism was one variable used to delimit the study, the other was a focus on those organizations that were small-scale.

Historical interpretation of twentieth-century environmentalism as a social movement has drawn attention to its social and cultural origins in suburban natures, youth activism, and late twentieth-century media cultures, and away from key figures who led major environmentalist organizations or state-based initiatives.<sup>14</sup> Some attention has been focused on the place of relationships between historically marginalized groups, such as Indigenous peoples and African Americans and Canadians, and their involvement in environmental activism, particularly within the environmental justice literature.<sup>15</sup> This volume pays attention to local and

small-scale activities, with particular attention to North American Indigenous experiences. This is an integration that rarely makes a substantial appearance in collections or histories of environmental activism. And it is an important aspect of how we aim to build on and further articulate a reappraisal of the environmental movement as a small-scale, ordinary activity as much as a large-scale and elite-driven one.

What is readily apparent from the contributions to this volume, as well as in present-day environmental activism in North America, is the role of Indigenous people as activists, and of Indigenous rights in enabling greater environmental protection than might otherwise be possible. Similarly, one of the fastest-growing bodies of literature on Indigenous peoples concerns their relationship to the environment; included in this is a growing literature on the popularized connection between Indigenous peoples and environmentalism, most notably epitomized, and to some extent sparked, by Shepard Krech's *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History*.<sup>16</sup> It should go without saying that Indigenous peoples are not uniform, and that while some individuals might also identify as environmentalists, arguably the majority seek to balance environmental stewardship with resource and industrial development. A case in point is the ongoing controversy in British Columbia and Alberta over the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain Pipeline expansion. While many First Nations along the pipeline's proposed path are opposed to the project, many others have signed on to benefit agreements and support the project.<sup>17</sup>

Unlike much of this discussion, however, our purpose in this volume is not to debate the extent to which Indigenous peoples are, or are not, conservationists or ecologists; nor, of course, is it to reduce all Indigenous peoples to automatic environmentalists. Rather, chapters in this volume highlight the diverse interactions Indigenous peoples have had in environmental activism, relationships—both cooperative and confrontational—with environmentalists or initiatives labelled as such, and developing and maintaining local power, as well as highlighting the possibilities for future activism and partnership. Chapters in this collection contribute to work done by E. Richard Atleo (Umeek), Raymond Pierotti, Daniel Wildcat, and others in showing the intertwined cultural and environmental heritage of Indigenous peoples, and the history of Indigenous rights in enabling and ensuring heritage and environmental protection of

valued places.<sup>18</sup> They also contribute to the ongoing conversation around Indigenous worldviews and how they affect Indigenous lifeway struggles, especially as they relate to Indigenous activism. Vine Deloria Jr.'s groundbreaking book *The Metaphysics of Modern Existence* describes the changes in how people thought about the environment as cultures moved from small, localized tribal groups to globalized, western European political forms.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, Emma S. Norman's article on Indigenous-led activism to protect water rights connects to Indigenous thought and leadership, and calls for reform in colonial governance mechanisms and structures.<sup>20</sup> Timothy Leduc's exploration of Inuit views on climate change shows that climate change (and environmental change more broadly) is inextricably linked to cultural change as well.<sup>21</sup> In this fashion, attention to environmental activism and understandings of environmental change that is taking place outside the Western mainstream likewise draws attention to themes that fall outside the mainstream of the historiography.

This volume is interdisciplinary, as it presents different kinds of scholarship—from history, public history, anthropology, geography, and sociology—to assess the past, present, and future. In this regard, we aim not only to engage with scholarly debates about the character of late twentieth-century environmentalism but also to draw on a range of disciplinary perspectives to better understand the ongoing evolution of environmental activism and the role of small green organizations in how this takes shape. The chapters present analyses of late twentieth- and early twenty-first century environmentalism from Canada and the United States (and, in Evans' chapter, comparison with Latin America), with particular attention to the local and small-scale, with the aim of understanding historical interconnections between geographically diverse initiatives. While the environmental movement (as with the environment itself) transcends national boundaries, the overwhelming majority of studies on it persist in using the nation-state as the principal analytical lens through which to frame important events and processes. Our central methodological strategy, therefore, was to approach the topic from different geographical perspectives. In particular, almost all of the chapters in the first part of this volume compare case studies across regions, from Anna Willow (British Columbia and Ontario, Canada) to Zoltán Grossman (the Pacific Northwest), Jessica DeWitt (Canada and the US), and Sterling Evans (the Western

Hemisphere). Otherwise, most chapters focus on a single province, region, or even environmental feature, including those by John Welch (the White Mountain Apache's land in Arizona, USA), Tobasonakwut Peter Kinew (northern Ontario, Canada), Jonathan Clapperton (southwestern British Columbia, Canada), Mark Leeming (Nova Scotia, Canada) and Mark McLaughlin (New Brunswick, Canada). With the exception of Frank Zelko's chapter, which starts local but moves internationally, following on the growth of Greenpeace as an organization, the place-based approach shared by the chapters in this volume serves to highlight both the importance of the local to small-scale organizations, and the important comparisons that can nevertheless be drawn between—at times—geographically very distant places.

Most of the chapters adopt a transnational analytical frame, drawing in similar issues and mapping the connections between environmentalism and environmentalists from myriad places, in effect considering the perspectives and sensibilities of recent debates in transnational and global history.<sup>22</sup> That is, each author recognizes and makes the connections between the fact that the movements of people, ideas, and non-human nature flow across multiple boundaries, and that *global* and *local* are always intimately entwined. However, our book also collectively weighs the degree to which globalizing processes do not necessarily erase the local but rather local efforts resound on varying geographical scales. There are themes common to historical experiences in Canada and the United States especially, but the Americas more broadly (and with which Evans, in particular, engages), that emerge clearly in this collection. Put another way: this book seeks to emphasize local diversity and uniqueness without forgoing identifying general principles, common forces, and shared experiences that have made environmentalism appealing around the world to peoples separated by radically different backgrounds. The real strength of the environmental movement, as noted elsewhere, lay in its diversity.<sup>23</sup>

We sought to provide new forays into the topic of small green activism by addressing a number of critical questions, and the chapters are connected by providing answers to each of the following questions: How have the dynamics of environmental organizations changed or remained the same over time and space? What pressures, both internal and external, have shaped and directed their policies, and how did they make



themselves heard among the many voices claiming to speak for the environment, including the much louder national or international environmental organizations, or “Green Giants”? How have these environmental organizations recruited and kept members and how has their support changed over time? Such issues are all currently underdeveloped within the existing literature on the environmental movement in North America and even more so across the rest of the globe. In addressing these questions, individual chapters also make important contributions to the more specific literatures within which each can be situated.

## The Chapters

The chapters in “Processes and Possibilities” use, for the most part, comparative case studies to dissect important processes that shape small green activism, and to assess the possibilities for change that are thereby enabled. Anna Willow’s opening chapter, “Strategies for Survival: First Nations Encounters with Environmentalism,” helps to frame some of the key dynamics that animate other chapters in the collection. Willow draws on her own, long-term experience of working with Indigenous communities, in this case with the Grassy Narrows First Nation, Ontario, and West Moberly First Nation, British Columbia. She focuses on partnerships between First Nations residents of Canada’s boreal forest and environmentally concerned non-Indigenous peoples—a thread also picked up by Grossman, Welch, and Evans—in highlighting the relationship of Indigenous environmental activism to broader efforts at social and political change. Much of Willow’s contribution appraises the important lessons that both First Nations and environmentalists have learned in collaborating with one another, and she concludes with insights into what those of us who study environmentalists and environmentalism can take from them. Grossman similarly examines alliances of Indigenous peoples with a diverse mix of environmental and climate activists, farmers, and even ranchers (“cowboys”) in their opposition to the extraction and movement of fossil fuels in North America. He contends that these interconnected and numerous Indigenous/non-Indigenous alliances function as a “thin green line” between North American fossil fuel basins—the Alberta Tar Sands, the Powder River Coal Basin, and the Bakken Oil Shale Basin—and

Asian markets. Grossman's discussion has important similarities to John Welch's chapter, where he finds how tribal sovereignty can be strengthened by, rather than diminished through, partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists.

The next three chapters in Part 1, from John Welch, Sterling Evans, and Jessica DeWitt, focus on parks and heritage conservation in Canada and the United States, with Evans also considering Costa Rica and Brazil. In particular, these chapters pay attention to the role of Indigenous peoples (Evans and Welch), small businesspeople (DeWitt), and tourists (all three authors) in shaping parks and their environmental objectives. By turning attention away from the best-known, iconic national parks to smaller, local heritage organizations and state and provincial parks, these chapters deepen our understanding of the enduring place of nature and heritage conservation and preservation within the wider environmental movement. Parks history, at this scale, is not just about symbolism, policy, and standards of management but about the negotiations that shape the protection of local places, and by extension the diversity—natural and cultural—that they enshrine. In his chapter, "Conserving Contested Ground: Sovereignty-Driven Stewardship by the White Mountain Apache Tribe and the Fort Apache Heritage Foundation," Welch draws on his three decades of experience working for, and with, the White Mountain Apache Tribe in Arizona. Welch reveals how the Western Apache, partnering with other small-scale bodies—Indigenous nations, non-profit organizations, and local citizens—gained control of the buildings that were previously the base for colonizing Western Apache lands and peoples—Fort Apache and the Theodore Roosevelt School—and retooled them to advance conceptions of their sovereignty while simultaneously protecting the environment.

Evans' geographically diverse case studies in chapter 4, "From Southern Alberta to Northern Brazil: Indigenous Conservation and the Preservation of Cultural Resources," illustrate a changing relationship between states and nature whereby historical and contemporary Indigenous rights are reflected in acknowledging an Indigenous sense of place and the importance of Indigenous access to land regardless of its protected status. Protected places are likewise at the heart of chapter 5, "Parks For and By the People: Acknowledging Ordinary People in the Formation, Protection, and Use of State and Provincial Parks." DeWitt demonstrates how—by

drawing on diverse historiography and both conventional and innovative source materials—historians can study the role of ordinary people in the management of state and provincial parks in the United States and Canada respectively. This is a methodological chapter that identifies a process for bringing the history of small green activist organizations (and their conservationist allies) to light and, in so doing, to better understand their influence within green activism.<sup>24</sup>

The first three chapters in Part 2, “Histories,” focus on the relationships between environmental and Indigenous activism in Canada’s past. Piper’s chapter analyzes the magazine *Alternatives* in the 1970s as a forum from which it is possible to discern how Indigenous concerns and perspectives intersected with mainstream environmentalism in Canada, and Ontario in particular. Piper’s chapter serves to introduce Kinew’s chapter on the Marmion Lake Generating Station, which is reprinted from *Alternatives* and was originally published in 1978. Kinew was Chief of the Sabaskong Reserve at the time and wrote about efforts by Treaty 3 chiefs to resist resource development and its damaging environmental impacts. Clapperton’s chapter on Clayoquot Sound illuminates the complex character of Indigenous-environmentalist advocacy in the 1990s. These three chapters taken together highlight the central significance of conflicts over natural resource development in providing the occasions for environmentalists and Indigenous activists in Canada to work together and to come into conflict, a point also made recently by Lianne Leddy.<sup>25</sup> These chapters historicize the role of Indigenous rights in providing leverage for environmental activism: they demonstrate that there was nothing inevitable or automatic about these alliances in Canada, and that they rather were contingent on debates, legal decisions, and the evolution of political rights and discourse in the 1970s and 1980s in particular.

Each chapter in the second part of the volume presents a different historical episode, primarily drawn from Canadian examples, that sheds light on the processes identified by the authors in the first part, and applies some of the approaches suggested by DeWitt, to deepen our understanding of how small green activism changed and influenced change over time. Mark Leeming’s study of rural environmentalism, “Local Economic Independence as Environmentalism: Nova Scotia in the 1970s,” draws on the insights of Ramachandra Guha and Juan Martinez-Alier, who focused

on the “environmentalism of the poor” in Peru, Ecuador, Indonesia, and India, and applies these insights to the Canadian province of Nova Scotia. Leeming gives particular attention to the economic dimensions of environmental activism, particularly as rural economies declined relative to urban ones. He demonstrates the diverse roots of rural environmentalism, as well as the alliances, including with Indigenous activists, necessary to achieve shared objectives. These themes resonate closely with the case studies presented earlier by Willow and Grossman.

The final three chapters offer insights into the tensions around size, scale, and impact that shaped histories of environmental activism and activist groups from the late 1960s into the 1980s. McLaughlin’s chapter keeps attention on the east coast of Canada. He examines the history of the Conservation Council of New Brunswick (CCNB), that province’s first and foremost environmentalist group, founded in 1969. He notes that the “Holy Grail” for many environmentalists (of any scale) is meaningful engagement with government officials, but, of course, officials are not always receptive, and environmentalist groups have at times been ineffective in building such ties. Welch’s study offers one perspective on these struggles. McLaughlin’s chapter provides another. Here we have a case study that highlights how figures within government and individual personalities can make the difference between effecting change or being pushed aside and becoming irrelevant. Clapperton’s chapter, “The Ebb and Flow of Local Environmentalist Activism: The Society for Pollution and Environmental Control (SPEC), British Columbia,” moves to a highly urban setting on the west coast of Canada. His case study examines the internal and external politics of SPEC, traces how it got big, then shrunk, and how it maintained relevance by returning to its roots as a smaller, much more localized environmental organization that continues to be active in Vancouver. One of Clapperton’s key insights is to reveal that many of the practices that contemporary environmental proponents point to as new kinds of environmentalism predicted to revitalize the current environmental movement actually have historical antecedents with small green activist groups. Although SPEC rose up to be, within a few years, the largest environmental organization in the province, and, likely, the country, it has received scant scholarly attention, in part because of another Vancouver-based organization, Greenpeace, and its rise to prominence shortly

thereafter. Zelko's study of Greenpeace, "From Social Movement to Environmental Behemoth: How Greenpeace Got Big," is fittingly the subject of the final chapter of this collection. While many of those in SPEC, such as Bill Darnell and Bob Hunter, went on to be involved in Greenpeace, Zelko asks how a small band of Vancouver-based anti-nuclear protesters created such a high-profile organization, and focuses on the genesis and early years of the organization before it "got big." Zelko not only traces the path that Greenpeace took to become big but also points out that there were many other possibilities: Greenpeace could have become simply a social movement rather than a professional organization, and could have easily been one more failed environmental organization after its first campaign.

## Cautious Optimism for our Environmental Futures

Stories of decline are a persistent feature of both environmental activist rhetoric and of environmental history. Indeed, the very nature of environmentalism—concern for the natural world and a heightened awareness of threats to it—seems to demand a declensionist narrative. Environmental movements were born out of the identification of past and present environmental ruination, along with the prediction of future catastrophe. George Perkins Marsh, in *Man and Nature: Or, Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action* (1864), explained the collapse of Mediterranean civilizations as the result of environmental degradation, and warned his nineteenth-century American contemporaries that the same trend was perceivable in the United States. Marsh's ideas are widely considered to have inspired the subsequent conservation movement, with David Lowenthal labelling him a "prophet of conservation," and the US National Park Service identifying him as the "father of the American conservation movement."<sup>26</sup> Nearly a century later Rachel Carson, in *Silent Spring* (1962), documented the widespread, damaging impacts of pesticides in the environment, industrial deception about the harm pesticides caused, and government complicity in ignoring clear signs of environmental degradation. A groundswell of public outrage followed thereafter, and Carson, oftentimes referred to in popular discourse as the "mother" of environmentalism, is credited for sparking the modern environmental

movement.<sup>27</sup> Such tragic narratives as those told by Marsh and Carson no doubt served as catalysts to galvanize otherwise apathetic or indifferent publics into action. It is unsurprising that the activists hoping to achieve the same success as the above two progenitors would employ their own environmental narratives using the same trope.

Yet, after warnings of catastrophic environmental decline for decades, challenges to the continued relevance and effectiveness of such stories have emerged. All of these refutations claim that “doom-and-gloom” narratives are no longer inspiring public activism to the same degree as they once did, or, even worse, that they are actually counterproductive and now produce a general public that is desensitized, hopeless, indifferent, burnt out, and at times even hostile to such messages.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, a central feature of Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger’s 2004 essay, and subsequent book, on “the Death of Environmentalism” was its unfavourable comparison of environmentalists, for their apocalyptic and complaint-based approach, with Martin Luther King Jr.’s positive “I have a dream” vision. Nordhaus and Shellenberger called on environmentalists to “replace their doomsday discourse with an imaginative, aspirational, and future-oriented one.”<sup>29</sup> The “old politics,” the authors polemically claimed, “has taken us as far as it can.”<sup>30</sup> Hyperbole, we might add, is not helpful either, though such critique is useful for strategically thinking about how to reframe the environmental movement.

Negative campaigning continues to influence efforts to forestall ecologically harmful developments, such as the Dakota Access Pipeline, and warnings of extinction-level catastrophe as a result of climate change undoubtedly motivated delegates at the 2015 UN Climate Change Conference in Paris to produce concrete results. Nevertheless, the authors in this collection agreed during the workshop from which this volume emerged that a hopeful and optimistic book was not only more welcome as a contribution to larger debates but was also a more accurate reflection of the recent history of small green and Indigenous activism than a book that measured their failures. As the chapters here detail, small green activism (perhaps a misnomer considering the role it has played in shaping history) has been, and continues to be, relevant—possibly now more than ever.

## Notes

- 1 For the importance of laundry detergent to the history of Canadian environmentalism, see Jennifer Read, “‘Let Us Heed the Voice of Youth’: Laundry Detergents, Phosphates and the Emergence of the Environmental Movement in Ontario,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 7, no. 1 (1996): 227–50; and Ryan O’Connor, *The First Green Wave: Pollution Probe and the Origins of Environmental Activism in Ontario* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014). The interview with Swift appears in Dan Rubinstein, “Activists Among Us,” *Alberta Views*, March/April 2004, 37–43.
- 2 Editorial board, “Activism in Alberta 2004: Justice Politics Environment Peace,” *Alberta Views*, March/April 2004, 16.
- 3 Editorial board, “Activism in Alberta,” 18.
- 4 For long-standing environmental advocacy of fish and game clubs in Alberta, see George Colpitts, *Fish Wars and Trout Travesties: Saving Southern Alberta’s Coldwater Streams in the 1920s* (Edmonton: AU Press, 2018).
- 5 Coal Association of Canada, “Submission to Public Hearings Conducted by the Environment Conservation Authority,” p. 2, 21 December 1971, File M-8393-1361, Coal Association of Canada fonds, Glenbow Archives.
- 6 W. R. Hanson, *History of the Eastern Rockies Forest Conservation Board* (Calgary: Eastern Rockies Forest Conservation Board, 1973), n.p., section 9.8.
- 7 Darlene Abreu-Ferreira, “Oil and Lubicons Don’t Mix: A Land Claim in Northern Alberta in Historical Perspective,” *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 12, no. 1 (1992): 12.
- 8 This edited book emerged from papers presented at a three-day interdisciplinary workshop titled “Environmentalism from Below: Appraising the Efficacy of Small-Scale and Subaltern Environmentalist Organizations,” held in August 2014. Although narratives of decline are prevalent in environmental history, one of the themes that emerged from this workshop was that this is not the whole story. We read papers and heard from presenters who provided numerous success stories and were (cautiously) optimistic about our collective environmental futures. Additionally, these chapters form one of two outlets, designed to complement each other, for the discussions held at the workshop; the other is a collection of articles in the Rachel Carson Center’s *Perspectives* journal, published in 2016.
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- 10 Michael Norton, *The Everyday Activist: 365 Ways to Change the World* (Oxford: Pan Macmillan, 2007).
- 11 Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1993); Adam Rome, *The Genius of Earth Day: How a 1970s Teach-In Unexpectedly Made the First Green Generation* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2014); Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Green Revolution: The American*

- Environmental Movement 1962–1992* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993); Philip Shabecoff, *A Fierce Green Fire: The American Environmental Movement* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993); Hal K. Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation? Environmentalism in the United States Since 1945* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1998).
- 12 Chad Montrie, *A People's History of Environmentalism in the United States* (New York: Continuum, 2011); and Tina Loo, *States of Nature: Conserving Canada's Wildlife in the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006).
  - 13 Michael Bess, *The Light-Green Society: Ecology and Technological Modernity in France, 1960–2000* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Colin M. Coates, ed., *Canadian Countercultures and the Environment* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2016); Robert D. Lifset, *Power on the Hudson: Storm King Mountain and the Emergence of Modern American Environmentalism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014); O'Connor, *The First Green Wave*; Pradyumna Karan and Unryu Suganuma, *Local Environmental Movements: A Comparative Study of the United States and Japan* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008); Marco Armiero and Lise Sedrez, eds., *A History of Environmentalism: Local Struggles, Global Histories* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014); Mark McLaughlin, "Green Shoots: Aerial Insecticide Spraying and the Growth of Environmental Consciousness in New Brunswick, 1952–1973," *Acadiensis* 40, no. 1 (2011): 3–23; and Mark Leeming, "The Creation of Radicalism: Anti-Nuclear Activism in Nova Scotia, c. 1972–1979," *Canadian Historical Review* 95, no. 2 (2014): 217–41.
  - 14 See, for examples: Christopher Sellers, *Crabgrass Crucible: Suburban Nature and the Rise of Environmentalism in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Rome, *The Genius of Earth Day*; Finis Dunaway, *Seeing Green: The Use and Abuse of American Environmental Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).
  - 15 See, for examples: Julian Agyeman et al., eds., *Speaking for Ourselves: Environmental Justice in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009); Ronald D. Sandler and Phaedra C. Pezzullo, *Environmental Justice and Environmentalism: The Social Justice Challenge to the Environmental Movement* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007); Anna J. Willow, "Re(con)figuring Alliances: Place Membership, Environmental Justice, and the Remaking of Indigenous-Environmental Relationships in Canada's Boreal Forest," *Human Organization* 71, no. 4 (2012): 371–82; Anna J. Willow, "Collaborative Conservation and Contexts of Resistance: New (and Enduring) Strategies for Survival," *American Indian Culture & Research Journal* 39, no. 2 (2015): 29–52; M. Paloma Pavel, ed., *Breakthrough Communities: Sustainability and Justice in the Next American Metropolis* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009); W. Malcolm Byrnes, "Climate Justice: Hurricane Katrina, and African American Environmentalism," *Journal of African American Studies* 18, no. 3 (2014): 305–14.
  - 16 Shepard Krech III, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999). See also Michael Eugene Harkin and David Rich Lewis, eds., *Native Americans and the Environment: Perspectives on the Ecological Indian* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007); Kimberly TallBear, "Shepard Krech's *The Ecological Indian*: One Indian's Perspective," *International Institute for Indigenous Resource Management*



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  - 18 See E. Richard Atleo (Umeek), *Tsawalk: A Nuu-chah-nulth Worldview* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006); E. Richard Atleo, *Principles of Tsawalk: An Indigenous Approach to a Global Crisis* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011); Raymond Pierotti, *Indigenous Knowledge, Ecology, and Evolutionary Biology* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Daniel Wildcat, *Red Alert! Saving the Planet with Indigenous Knowledge* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 2009); Julie Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005); David Neufeld, “Kluane National Park Reserve, 1923–1974: Modernity and Pluralism,” in *A Century of Parks Canada, 1911–2011*, ed. Claire E. Campbell (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2011), 235–72; Jonathan Clapperton, “Desolate Viewscapes: Sliammon First Nation, Desolation Sound Marine Park and Environmental Narratives,” *Environment and History* 18 (2012): 529–59; Jocelyn Thorpe, *Temagami’s Tangled Wild: Race, Gender, and the Making of Canadian Nature* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012); David Rich Lewis, “Skull Valley Goshutes and the Politics of Nuclear Waste,” in Harkin and Lewis, *Native Americans and the Environment*, 304–42; Hans Carlson, *Home is the Hunter: The James Bay Cree and Their Land* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008); Richmond L. Clowe and Imre Sutton, eds., *Trusteeship in Change: Toward Tribal Autonomy in Resource Management* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2001); and Jeanette Wolfley, “Reclaiming a Presence in Ancestral Lands: The Return of Native People to the National Parks,” *Natural Resources Journal* 56, no. 1 (2016): 55–80.
  - 19 Vine Deloria Jr., *The Metaphysics of Modern Existence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979).
  - 20 Emma S. Norman, “Standing Up For Inherent Rights: The Role of Indigenous-Led Activism in Protecting Sacred Waters and the Way of Life,” *Society & Natural Resources* 30, no. 4 (2017): 537–53.
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  - 22 Bernhard Gissibl, Sabine Höhler, and Patrick Kupper, “Introduction: Towards a Global History of National Parks,” in *Civilizing Nature: National Parks in Global Historical Perspective*, ed. Bernhard Gissibl, Sabine Höhler, and Patrick Kupper (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 2; and Warren Magnusson and Karena Shaw, eds., *Political Space: Reading the Global Through Clayoquot Sound* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).
  - 23 Patrick F. Noonan, “Foreword,” in *Voices from the Environmental Movement: Perspectives for a New Era*, ed. Donald Snow (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1992), ix.

- 24 For brief examinations of the similarities and differences between conservationists and environmentalists, see: Thomas Dunlap, "Conservationists and Environmentalists: An Attempt at Definition," *Environmental Review* 4, no. 1 (1980): 29–31; Robert Gottlieb, "The Next Environmentalism: How Movements Respond to the Changes that Elections Bring – From Nixon to Obama," *Environmental History* 14, no. 2 (2009): 298–308.
- 25 Lianne C. Leddy, "Intersections on Indigenous and Environmental History in Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* 98, no. 1 (2017): 91–93; See also work by Daniel Sims, "Ware's Waldo: Hydroelectric Development and the Creation of the Other in British Columbia," in *Sustaining the West: Cultural Responses to Canadian Environments*, ed. Liza Piper and Lisa Szabo-Jones (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2015), 303–24.
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- 28 Benjamin Kline, *First Along the River: A Brief History of the U.S. Environmental Movement* (Toronto: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 129–46; Eddie Yuen, "The Politics of Failure Have Failed: The Environmental Movement and Catastrophism," in *Catastrophism: The Apocalyptic Politics of Collapse and Rebirth*, ed. Sasha Lilley, David McNally and Eddie Yuen (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012), 15–43; Jamie Horgan, "Doom and Gloom Environmental Scenarios Have Led to Apathy," *New York Times*, 8 May 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/05/08/climate-debate-isnt-so-heated-in-the-us/doom-and-gloom-environmental-scenarios-have-led-to-apaty>. Paul Sabin's *The Bet: Paul Ehrlich, Julian Simon, and Our Gamble over Earth's Future* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013) offers an interesting exploration of the competing pull of optimistic versus pessimistic visions of the future.
- 29 Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger, *Break Through: From the Death of Environmentalism to the Politics of Possibility* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2007), 2.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 5.



## PART 1



## PROCESSES AND POSSIBILITIES

