

## Module

# 2

## Lesson

# 1

# History of Public Lands

## Lesson at a Glance

### Timeline Activity (30 min):

Participants will examine public lands and social history events and share initial reactions.

### Debrief of Timeline Activity (25 min):

Pair and big group discussions with question prompts.

### Conclusion (5 min):

Review of concepts and feelings.

## Learner Outcomes

### Participants will:

- Learn about important events in the history of public lands.
- Understand that the federal public lands system was created in the context of complex social and historical movements.
- Recognize the importance of social history in defining access and stakeholders in the creation of public lands.

## Getting Ready

**Participants:** any

**Time:** 1 hour

**Materials:** Timeline events, paper for additions to timeline

**Preparation:** Lay out timeline events

**Location:** A large, flat space

**Objective:** To understand the history of public lands and waters in the context of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access.

## Timeline Activity (30 min)

1. Identify the area to create the timeline and identify one end as Time Immemorial, and the other end as today. Lay out 25-30 relevant events, making sure to include both environmental and social history.
2. Highlight some of the events that participants may know. Ask participants for any other events they would like to add and write them on a piece of paper to add to the timeline.
3. Have participants walk through the timeline. Ask students to do the walk silently and read each event.
4. As people have finished perusing the material, ask them to pair up and discuss their initial impressions and what surprised them until everyone has had an opportunity to review the timeline.

## Debrief of Timeline Activity (25 min)

After reading through the timeline together, allow participants to reflect independently through writing or silent contemplation:

*What is your immediate reaction to the timeline?*

Participants' feelings run the gamut from "mind blown!" to "guilty" to "tell me something I didn't know" to "no reaction" to "confused." Remind participants that all reactions are valid and in some ways representative of our relationship(s) to history and public lands.

*Is any of this information new? How is this representation of history the same or different from what you have read or have been taught?*

### Discuss these questions in pairs, then as a whole group:

*How are social conditions like slavery related to public lands?*

Mention that public lands creation, expansion, and management did not happen in a vacuum. The creation of public lands is reflective of attitudes past and present, for better or for worse. For example, although slavery may seem tangential to public lands management, the legacy of slavery impacts Black and African American perception, experiences, engagement, and participation in public lands management.

*Who created public lands and for whom were public lands created and protected? Who was excluded? What events in the timeline illustrate exclusion in the public lands and conservation movement?*

*How might the inability to vote have impacted everyone but white men? How might this have prevented these people from participating as decision makers in the birth of the public lands movement?*

Before 1965, African Americans, while they had the right to vote based on the ratification of the 15th Amendment on February 3, 1870, often times they did not have the ability to vote or participate in any public lands management decisions, because during most of this timeline they were fighting for basic rights due to slavery and the subsequent Jim Crow Laws.

Women of all races, on the other hand, did not have the right to vote until the 19th Amendment was ratified in 1920, so they too could not participate in public land management decisions prior to 1920. The ratification of the 19th Amendment opened up participation opportunities for white women, however, African American and Indigenous women were still not guaranteed the right to vote until much later.

Many groups like African Americans, Asian Americans, Latinxs/Chicanxs, Indigenous people, women, LGBTQ people, and non-Christians had concerns outside of public lands related to their physical and cultural survival. At the same time, policy makers actively prevented many such groups from being a part of the decision making processes. Some of these concerns facing groups who were not white European American males include slavery, genocide, forced removal/ internment, and legalized discrimination.

*Given the exclusive nature of the public lands and conservation movement, what are some of the impacts of these events on public lands management and people's connection to land?*

- a. **Indigenous Dispossession:** Dispossession of Indigenous land resulted in small parcels of often non-arable land sectioned off for Indigenous peoples.
- b. **Erasure:** Most public lands are touted as “untrammeled, pristine, and untouched” with no discussion of Indigenous peoples who lived or currently live on these lands. Indigenous peoples are relegated to the status of a relic. Additionally, some public lands overlie areas that have become culturally important or sacred to African Americans, including former plantation lands and cemeteries, refuge maroon colonies, and newfound sacred sites for the religions (some still practiced today) carried over by enslaved Africans.
- c. **Distortion of Indigenous presence:** To the extent Indigenous peoples are mentioned, their narrative is distorted (e.g. Ahwahneechee/Miwok people were allowed to remain in Yosemite Valley if they performed native art for tourists).
- d. **Cultural appropriation:** Camps and outdoor programs often appropriate Indigenous culture, symbols, or other icons such as totem poles, feathers, and teepees, while simultaneously distorting or erasing the history of the Indigenous peoples.

- e. **Failure to acknowledge the trauma of racism in outdoor spaces:** Even well-meaning people may assume that the historic connections to land and artifacts of nature are universal; in fact, for many African Americans (especially older African Americans), spaces like formerly segregated parks, groves of trees where people may have been lynched, or mentions of things like hunting may recall painful and traumatic memories of racist violence.
- f. **Assumptions about environmental connections and what it means to “recreate” in nature:** Some assume that there is only a single way to connect to nature, namely, the John Muir-style solitary escape into “pristine” wilderness. The reality is that different communities connect in different ways based on their culture and history.
- g. **Myopic environmental and conservation curriculum:** The traditional narrative not only doesn't mention Indigenous people, People of Color, LGBTQ people, and to some extent women, but presents a narrow point of view generally held by notable white men from the 1800s and early 1900s, people such as John Muir, Theodore Roosevelt, Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Gifford Pinchot, and Aldo Leopold.
- h. **Myopic understanding of protection and conservation:** Organizations often do not include communities' needs in the protection and conservation decision-making. Protection is often in service of the health of flora and fauna, or for traditional forms of recreation. Specific needs like Indigenous subsistence hunting and fishing and spiritual practices are not considered. In addition, conservation movements rely on science and may not value or consider traditional ecological knowledge or other ways of knowing.

## Conclusion (5 min)

1. Ask the participants to describe in one word how this activity made them feel. Acknowledge feelings of guilt, sadness, and anger.
2. Ask and allow for silent reflection, then group share:  
*How can we take pride in and advocate for our public lands without ignoring the complicated history surrounding them?*
3. Conclude on a hopeful note: there is a lot that we can do to bring to light a more complex and inclusive narrative: listening and learning, creating an welcoming experience on public lands, advocating for all voices to be heard in decision-making processes.

## Adapt the Lesson

Add in locally relevant events to the timeline.

To promote group work, allow students to order the events without looking at the dates.

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# Early Attitudes and Perceptions of Wilderness

## Lesson at a Glance

**Journal Activity (10 min):** Participants will reflect on their own values and perceptions of “wilderness” and discuss.

**Word Clouds Activity (20 min):** Participants will read passages describing foundational concepts of North American colonization and early land-based values and will create group ‘word cloud’ visuals.

**Small and Large Group Debrief (20 min):** Groups will discuss connections between foundational concepts and early values in small groups, then combine with other groups to share ideas. Large group will converge to review concepts.

**Journal Activity and Conclusion (10 min):** Participants will consider how Manifest Destiny, settler colonialism, and early wilderness values are reflected with their own perceptions of wilderness.

## Learner Outcomes

### Participants will:

- Review the concepts of Manifest Destiny and settler colonialism and explore early land-based values.
- Understand how foundational concepts of European colonization of North America connect to early land-based values.
- Connect personal perceptions of wilderness to historical concepts.

## Getting Ready

**Time:** 1 hour

**Materials:** paper for journaling, seven large pieces of paper, printed cards for word cloud activity, markers and pencils

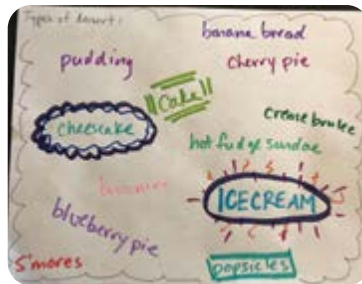
**Location:** A space to sit in a circle and move around

**Objective:** To understand how the connection between foundational concepts of European colonization and early land-based values have influenced current day perceptions of wilderness.

## Journal Activity (10 min)

1. Ask participants to think about the word “wilderness.” What thoughts, ideas, emotions, and images come to mind? Take five minutes to journal silently. This can be in the form of a paragraph, words and phrases, and/or drawings.
2. Bring the group back together and take a few minutes to share and discuss responses. Create a ‘word cloud’ of the group’s responses- a visual way to call attention to repeated topics, themes, and concepts. As participants share, note common words and concepts on a large piece of paper. If a word is mentioned more than once, emphasize the word or concept in some way on the paper ie. add more color to words that are repeated, make the font bold.

Word cloud example: *What is your favorite dessert?*



3. Note any trends that you’re seeing.
4. **Ask:** *Where do you think our perceptions of wilderness come from?*
5. **Conclude:**

The concept of ‘wilderness’ and our public lands system is rooted in the foundational values that drove the colonization of North America. We’re going to explore these early wilderness values and other topics in more word cloud activities.



## Word Clouds Activity(20 min)

1. Break participants into six groups. Give each group a large piece of paper and one of the cards explaining Manifest Destiny, settler colonialism, and four early wilderness values. Ask each group to create their own 'word cloud' based on the concepts on their cards.
2. After 10 minutes, ask the groups to use the remaining 10 minutes to visit other concepts and add to the word clouds, either by adding a new word or concept or highlighting one already identified.

## Small and Large Group Debrief (20 min)

1. Ask the group to come back together and explain that settler colonialism and Manifest Destiny provided the foundation for European settlement of North America and, ultimately, is the foundation on which the conservation movement and early wilderness values was created. Briefly review the 6 concepts, identifying the main concepts noted below.

*Foundational Concepts of North American Colonization:*

- **Settler colonialism:** settlers intend to stay, replace original populations through violent domination, legal actions and assimilation. The settlers believe they are racially superior to Indigenous people.
- **Manifest Destiny:** belief that American settlers were destined to expand across North America. 3 themes- that American people and institutions were inherently special; that an agrarian and domesticated America is an ideal state; expansion was irresistible, essential, and was the will of God. Preserving landscapes in their natural states wasn't a part of this- natural landscapes were considered evil, chaotic, and sinister, dangerous places that were empty and needed to be converted to productive places.

*Early Land-Based Values*

- **Transcendentalism:** wilderness as a place where one could commune with God through appreciating beauty. Though wilderness was still a potentially dangerous place, facing its challenges was a noble endeavor. A person could be closer to God, improve themselves, and find a true home in the wilderness.
- **Preservation:** wild spaces should be protected from any human impact.
- **Conservation:** wilderness had resources that humans were entitled to extract and use. Conservation advocates for extracting resources responsibly so that they will be available for future generations.
- **Rugged individualism:** connection to nature fosters and encourages rugged individualism to combat the ease of city life and the dangers of "eroding masculinity" presented by industrialization.

2. Divide the group into small discussion groups (2-3 people) and ask them to respond to the following questions:

*What connections do you see between the foundational concepts of North American settlement (settler colonialism and Manifest Destiny) and early land-based values? What are some similarities or common themes in the word clouds?*

*How are the land-based values different from the foundational concepts of North American settlement (settler colonialism and Manifest Destiny)? What words and themes in the word clouds highlight differences?*

3. Ask each small group to combine with another, share their thoughts, and discuss common themes. After 5 minutes, ask for a few volunteers to share with the big group.

## Journal Activity and Conclusion (10 min)

1. Ask participants to take 5 minutes of quiet reflection to revisit their journal entry about what wilderness means and pose the following question:

*How are these concepts (settler colonialism, Manifest Destiny, transcendentalism etc) reflected in your own perceptions of wilderness?*

If time, ask participants to consider completing a final word activity cloud in their journal and offer this quote:

*"Mother Earth is not a resource. She is an heirloom." David Ipina, Yurok Tribe*

2. Offer space for participants to share their thoughts on the journal prompt or the final word cloud. Note that these values discussed are the basis for the current day system of conservation and land management. Pose these questions for discussion.

*What voices are missing? What other values and ways of knowing should we consider?*

Conclude with the importance of including the perceptions and values of all people in the conservation movement, especially those that have been historically excluded and erased.