A Century of National Park Conflict: Class, Geography, and the Changing Values of Conservation Discourse in Maine

Adam Auerback
Bates College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal

Part of the Public History Commons, and the United States History Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal/vol52/iss1/6

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Maine History by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.
A CENTURY OF NATIONAL PARK CONFLICT: CLASS, GEOGRAPHY, AND THE CHANGING VALUES OF CONSERVATION DISCOURSE IN MAINE

BY ADAM AUERBACH

Conservation interests have been promoting the creation of a national park in Maine’s North Woods for over one hundred years. Past park proposals featured Mt. Katahdin, the Allagash River, and the greater North Woods region, and each inspired fierce debate amongst Mainers. Most recently, Maine’s North Woods have been gripped by a fervent debate surrounding a proposal by Elliotsville Plantation, Inc. to create a small national park to the east of Baxter State Park. What can the national park controversies of northern Maine’s past teach us about the most recent debate? In northern Maine, the national park controversies played out predominantly along the lines of class and geography. Further, these social and geographic dynamics manifest through value conflicts that transcend mere economic concerns. However, economic development arguments increasingly dominate the public justifications of both park supporters and opponents, uniquely framing the current debate. The near-exclusive focus on economics in the most recent debate narrows both sides’ collective engagement with the more complex value dynamics that linger below the surface and in some ways carry over from the region’s historical park debates. Adam Auerbach is a 2016 graduate of Bates College in Lewiston, where he studied environmental studies and American history. This piece is an abridged version of his honors thesis of the same title, available online at http://scarab.bates.edu/honorstheses/181/. He has held positions as an environmental educator in Colorado employed at Rocky Mountain National Park, Chatfield State Park, and Boulder County Parks and Open Space.

Introduction

IN 2001, Gail Fanjoy, chairwoman for the Millinocket, Maine, town council, unveiled the surprising contents of a 1937 time capsule originally buried underneath the town post office. The capsule contained a
statement from the Millinocket Chamber of Commerce supporting the creation of a national park surrounding Mt. Katahdin. Millinocket, in 1937, was over twenty years into public debate surrounding the first in a series of contentious national park proposals to confront Maine’s North Woods region. Over the next eighty years, similar proposals for the creation of a national park in northern Maine surfaced, with each proposal capturing local and national attention and inspiring fierce discourse. The most recent rendition of the area’s national park saga seemingly concluded on August 24, 2016 when President Barack Obama designated the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument during the last months of his administration, finally establishing a national conservation site in the North Woods after over one hundred years of efforts from conservation interests. Park supporters’ time for celebration, however, was short lived. President Donald Trump, shortly after taking office, ordered his Secretary of the Interior, Ryan Zinke, to “review” Katahdin Woods and Waters, in addition to twenty-six other national monuments, with an eye for potentially reducing the size of—or rescinding—some monuments. With Maine’s new national monument only months old, its fate became unclear, and northern Maine found itself plunged once more into a fervent park debate. ¹

Northern Maine’s first park debate, featuring Mt. Katahdin, began in the 1910s and concluded by the late 1930s. National park controversy struck the North Woods again in the 1950s and 1960s surrounding the Allagash River. Then, during the 1990s, a group called RESTORE: The North Woods began promoting a 3.2 million-acre park proposal that they still strive for today. Finally, over the last five years, a much smaller national park proposal stemming from a group called Elliotsville Plantation, Inc. (EPI) captured the public’s attention in northern Maine. What can the national park controversies of northern Maine’s past teach us about today’s recently re-opened debate? In northern Maine, the national park controversies played out principally along the lines of class and geography. Further, these social and geographic dynamics have manifested through value conflicts that cannot be reduced simply to economic concerns. However, economic development arguments increasingly dominate the public justifications of both park supporters and opponents arguing their respective positions in the most recent park discourse. The near-exclusive focus on economics in the current debate narrows both sides’ collective engagement with the more complex value dynamics that linger below the surface and in some ways carry over from the region’s historical park debates.
Mt. Katahdin

The first national park proposal in the North Woods centered around Maine’s highest and most iconic peak, Mt. Katahdin. In 1913, Frank Guernsey, a Republican congressman from Dover–Foxcroft, Maine, introduced a bill in Congress to create a national park around the mountain. This bill, and a similar one he introduced three years later, died in committee.²

The existence of a competing state park proposal soon colored the Katahdin controversy. In 1919, Percival Baxter proposed a Mt. Katahdin Centennial State Park to commemorate Maine’s one hundredth anniversary of statehood in 1920. Baxter’s measure never passed largely due to firm opposition from the Great Northern Paper Company, the owner of much of the land surrounding the summit. Two years later, after being elected Governor, Baxter pressed again for a state park, but the president of Great Northern, Garrett Schenck, held no interest in selling the land. After Schenck’s death in 1928, the company became more open to the idea of a state park. Baxter, unable to convince the state legislature to buy land for a park, utilized his personal wealth and took on the task of conservation personally. He purchased 5,760 acres from Great Northern in 1930, including Mt. Katahdin. Then, after Baxter deeded the land to the state, Baxter State Park officially came into existence in 1933.³

That same year, a conflicting vision for a federal park gained traction. Many believed the state did not possess the resources to manage the mountain, and during 1933, Mainers voiced various proposals for a national forest or park. Governor Louis J. Brann advocated a one-million-acre Roosevelt National Park; at his prompting, the state legislature passed a bill that allowed the federal government to purchase land in the region for a national forest and park. This plan, however, never received serious attention from the federal government because the bill upheld Maine’s rights to watersheds, dam sites, and water storage facilities on land slated for the park.⁴

After this development, in 1936 and 1937, the park debate intensified. During these years, Brann’s national park plan found a significant public advocate in Myron Avery, a resident of Lubec considered to be the country’s leading expert on Mt. Katahdin. He served as president of the Appalachian Trail Conference and is today seen as the father of the Appalachian Trail, which reaches its northern terminus on Mt. Katahdin. With the weight of the Appalachian Trail Conference behind him, Avery authored many articles promoting a national rather than a state park op-
tion for Mt. Katahdin. Baxter, who wished to safeguard and grow his fledgling state park, persisted as the chief opponent to Avery and other proponents of a national park in the region.5

Early in 1937, Avery found a crucial ally in his quest to create a national park: United States congressman, Ralph Owen Brewster. Brewster, a former Maine governor, remained a fierce political rival of Baxter and introduced federal legislation to create a national park at Katahdin on March 23, 1937. The debate surrounding the National Park bill pitted the two most prominent outdoor organizations in the Northeast against one another: the Appalachian Trail Conservancy supporting Avery, and the Appalachian Mountain Club supporting Baxter.6

Class and geography inextricably shaped the debate surrounding the fate of Katahdin. Maine political elites like Percival Baxter and Owen Brewster, as well as elite environmental interests like Myron Avery of the Appalachian Trail Conference and Ronald Gower of the Appalachian Mountain Club, dominated the Katahdin park discussion. Local working-class people are absent from the historical record during the 1930s debate. Despite possible significant ramifications for these individuals, choosing between two conservation proposals inspired little interest, perhaps creating a lesser-of-two-evils choice. As Congressman Brewster put it:

> Everyone is agreed . . . that Mount Katahdin and the wild region surrounding it and all the beautiful vistas that are afforded across the hundreds of miles of Maine lakes and forests should be preserved unaltered for posterity. . . . The only question is the best method by which this may be accomplished and its preservation guaranteed.

Brewster’s observation that “everyone” agreed that the region required conservation status oversimplified the situation. As previously indicated, Baxter’s earlier attempts to create a state park at Mt. Katahdin initially met fierce resistance from paper companies and, one would assume, their workers. However, given that the state park already existed, the debate centered around what model of conservation should be employed in the Katahdin region, a conversation of interest mainly to conservation-minded elites.7

Conservation-minded elites with similar values dominated both sides of the Katahdin debate, and both sides appealed primarily to the value of wilderness recreation. The main point of contention persisted on whether the National Park Service or the Baxter State Park Commission could better manage the land and mountain. Both sides contended that their model provided the best quality of recreational experience for parkgoers. For ex-
ample, national park supporters argued that the state had poorly executed stewardship of the land thus far and did not possess the financial resources to properly do so in the future. They contended that the area faced ruin under inadequate state management against ever increasing visitation. Avery deplored that, “No expenditure has been made by the state in connection with the area... There is no custodian or anyone in the park area to represent law or authority or to prevent depredations.” He continued, “The stranger who is drawn to the region by its extensive publicity is astounded to find an utter lack of any public accommodations.” Avery also noted that, under state management, the mountain’s trails had received no maintenance and the park remained wholly unequipped to handle the four hundred expected visitors over Labor Day weekend.8

Avery and Brewster painted a torrid picture of Mt. Katahdin under state management and suggested that only National Park Service management would improve the situation. Brewster explained, “A very modest request of two thousand dollars to provide a caretaker for the Katahdin area at this session of the [state] legislature was turned down because of the limitations of finance in the present precarious financial conditions of the state.” Brewster then speculated that the state did not wish—or have the means—to set a precedent for adequately funding the park. He offered this thought in contrast to the situation in the recently established Acadia National Park where the federal government provided “fifty to a hundred thousand dollars” to care for the park. For Brewster and Avery, only the federal government contained the financial infrastructure to steward the Katahdin region properly.9

National park opponents, on the other hand, argued that the federal government would overdevelop the area and spoil its wilderness qualities. For instance, Baxter exclaimed, “To commercialize this magnificent area, to desecrate it with ‘great hotels’ with their noisy social life, their flaming signs, the roar of motor cars and airplanes coming and going to break the peace of that great solitude would be nothing less than sacrilege.” Ronald L. Gower, editor of the Appalachian Mountain Club’s Katahdin Guide and another vocal national park opponent, agreed with Baxter that a national park would ruin the mountain with overdevelopment. He argued:

It should always be borne in mind that this region has not yet been set apart for the type of use and development that exists in the National Parks. This is a wilderness area from which motor cars and all that they mean are forever barred by the terms of the gift to the state. No highways, no great log hotels, no skyline drives, no summit roads, no noisy social life, no flaming signs, no semi-commercialized recreation, no roar of civilization, no orders from Washington.
Gower’s words also signal a dislike or distrust of the federal government, a value that, as we will see, Mainers held throughout a century of national park discourse.10

Editorials also frequently expressed an anti-development sentiment. Opponents disdained national parks, in particular, for the hotels and hot-dog stands they believed would arrive with national park creation. For example, one 1937 editorial read:

This position [of opposing a national park] is based upon sincere love of Mt. Katahdin and upon perception of the fact that a ‘developed’ national park with hotels, hot-dog stands, trailer camps, postcard emporia, and all the other paraphernalia for catering to popular taste as exemplified in the Yellowstone, the Yosemite, and other national parks would spoil the sylvan solitude and majestic aloofness of Maine’s great mountain.

In addition to disputing whether the state or National Park Service would better manage the wilderness experience on the mountain, the elite figures in the debate also quarreled about whether management of Mt. Katahdin should exist primarily for a national or Maine audience. National park supporters argued that the region transcended local significance and, therefore, needed to be managed in the best interest of people across the country. Avery authored an article, which appeared in the 1937 edition of *Nature Magazine*, extolling the reasons he believed Mt. Katahdin to be of national significance. He pointed to many features of the area, including wilderness characteristics, geology, floral and faunal life, and historical associations with Henry David Thoreau. Avery explained that he viewed the national park bill as a matter of whether:

in central Maine, we shall create, while yet we may, a large area to be forever preserved as a wilderness, as symbolic of this country in its earliest days, as a heritage of the American people, and for the benefit of the United States as a whole and not for the particular county or state in which such an area is located.

Elsewhere, Avery made this sentiment more explicit. He wrote, “Katahdin and the Katahdin area belong not only to the people of Maine but to the United States.” Despite being born and raised in Maine, Avery believed Katahdin should be managed for a national audience.11

National park opponents disputed Avery’s interest in inviting those from away to enjoy Katahdin. Generally, they liked that a state park did not encourage access to the area by out-of-state tourists and that local officials managed the mountain for Mainers. Further, national park oppo-
ments often showed interest in keeping the federal government out of the area. Baxter himself said, “This mountain is the property of the people of Maine forever to be held by the state for their benefit.” Baxter continued by explicitly outlining that his vision for the mountain contained no place for federal presence: “As donor of this area I wished to do something that for all time would benefit my native state. . . . In planning for this over all those years my sole interest was in the state of Maine, not in the national government.”

Similarly, Ronald Gower advocated a state rather than national park because “the control of a Maine park w[ould] remain in the hands of Maine people.” Gower criticized national park supporters:

Now comes a group of people, most of whom live outside of New England, and practically all of whom are non-residents of Maine, who have decided that this, Maine’s mountain, shall forthwith be a national park, and they are determined to cram this national park bill down the throats of the Maine people whether they like it or not.

State park proponents like Gower saw national park advocates as outsiders wanting to usurp control of one of Maine’s natural treasures from local residents.

In sum, Maine elites contested the Katahdin park debate and appealed primarily to the values of wilderness and recreation to justify their positions in relation to the proposed state and national parks. Further, these elites appealed to the conflicting values of managing the mountain principally for a Maine audience or for a national audience. These values—wilderness recreation and a preference towards management for a local or national audience—remained a theme in northern Maine’s later park debates. In the end, Baxter’s state park model trumped the national park concept for the protection of Mt. Katahdin. Despite a spirited public debate, Congress adjourned in June 1938 without considering Brewster’s bill. Shortly thereafter, Baxter and Brewster mended their political relationship, and Brewster agreed not to reintroduce the bill. Baxter, victorious, continued to purchase land around Katahdin with his personal fortune, donating land to the state park until 1962. Today, the park stands at 209,644 acres, a manifold increase on the near 6,000 acres Baxter purchased in 1930.

The Allagash

Before Baxter purchased his final addition to Baxter State Park in 1962, another North Woods national park controversy arose. The debate sur-

Rounding the Allagash River represented more complex social and geographic issues than simply deciding whether the river should be home to a national or state park. The Allagash issue, spanning the late 1950s and early 1960s, involved competing dam proposals, three unique overtures from the National Park Service, and various models of conservation based on state management or state–federal partnership.

The Allagash controversy began in 1955 after the Army Corps of Engineers proposed a hydroelectric power dam at Rankin Rapids on the St. John River. The Rankin Rapids Dam project aimed to create a reservoir in both the upper St. John and nearby Allagash Rivers. In the face of this threat, the Maine State Park Commission called for protection of the Allagash by state ownership in 1956. That same year, the Maine Fish and Game association suggested an undeveloped national park to protect the wilderness corridor along the river. A year later, the National Park Service responded by creating a proposal for a 750,000-acre Allagash National Park. The Park Service reviewed this plan internally and shared it with Maine state agencies, but eventually decided to withdraw the plan and never officially released it to the public.15

In 1960, after canoeing the Allagash, Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas tried to enlist an aging Percival Baxter to support the protection
of the Allagash under the Baxter State Park Authority, because Douglas believed Mainers likely would resist federal management. His proposition never gained any serious consideration; however, it did introduce the idea of state protection of the river to the public. The National Park Service, in 1961, made public plans for a 246,000-acre Allagash National Recreation Area to “make sure that the wilderness character of the finest canoe route in the Northeast is preserved.” The same year, State Senator Edward Cyr of Madawaska introduced a bill asserting a different wilderness vision for the Allagash. His bill embraced the idea of a “working wilderness” favored by the landowners in the area, which maintained state control and allowed for more timber harvesting than a national park.16

The 1963 introduction of another National Park Service proposal and two more proposed dams complicated this situation further. The new Park Service plan called for a smaller 150,000-acre Allagash National Riverway than the 246,000-acre national recreation area proposed two years prior. The new federal Dickey–Lincoln dam proposal modified the earlier Rankin Rapids proposal, calling for a dam on the St. John, but in an alternate position that would flood the St. John and leave the Allagash unaffected. The second dam proposal of 1963 introduced a state-controlled dam option. This option, called the Cross Rock Dam, would provide revenue to the state, but at the cost of transforming the Allagash, as one environmentalist explained, into a “vast deadwater reservoir with stinking mud flats and barren gravel bars.” By the end of 1963, Maine faced the choice between three dam projects, the most recent National Park Service plan and various state and private working-wilderness solutions for the Allagash River.17

The 1963 state legislature considered a weak bill influenced greatly by industrial lobbyists. It aimed to create tax programs promoting vague “wilderness” easements that did not forbid harvesting timber or extracting minerals. Crucially, it also did not restrict flowage rights, meaning the Cross Rock Dam still persisted as a possibility under this bill. The environmental protection the bill afforded the Allagash remained so minimal that Secretary of the Interior Steward Udall contacted Maine Governor John Reed letting him know that, should the bill pass, the federal government would intervene. The question of the Allagash remained unanswered.18

Meanwhile, the promoters of the Cross Rock Dam, knowing the project would ruin canoe recreation on the Allagash, announced their intentions to build a new twenty-thousand-acre recreation park to draw hundreds of thousands of visitors to camp near, and boat on, the artificial reservoir created by the dam, deemed the Grand Allagash Lake. The complex would
offer infrastructure, such as marinas, trailer parks, boat launches, and cottages. Now, in addition to the slew of economic and conservation schemes for the Allagash, the public grappled with the question of what kind of recreation and tourism to allow in the area. Protection of the Allagash would continue to offer a rugged wilderness canoe excursion accessible to a limited class of experienced outdoorspeople on a naturally flowing river. The Cross Rock proposal, on the other hand, offered the possibility of mass tourism and recreation on an artificially created lake.19

Unlike the debate over the management of Mt. Katahdin, the discourse regarding the Allagash significantly included the voices from the forest products industry and local working-class people that opposed government conservation measures, especially from the federal government. Additionally, local elites did not drive support for a federal park on the Allagash; instead, the park idea originated and found its most ardent support in the Department of Interior.20

National park supporters, like those in the Katahdin debate, appealed primarily to the value of wilderness recreation. The National Park Service proposal made it clear the value of a national riverway involved recreation. It defined the Allagash as “a major recreation resource of great potential significance to the Nation,” and indicated, “the purpose of an Allagash National Riverway would be to insure an area in the eastern United States of sufficient size and quality where present and future generations may experience a primitive North Woods canoeing adventure.” The national riverway and recreation area proposals extolled the recreational value of the Allagash. The recreation area proposal, for example, highlighted the fauna an Allagash paddler could spot: “To traverse Allagash trails and waterways is also to encounter birds and animals of many kinds, for this lake-filled land is a reservoir of northern wildlife.”21

The Park Service also justified federal protection based on threats to the wilderness recreation experience if the state allowed the creation of dams. The riverway proposal decried:

The alternative to public protection and preservation of the area . . . is to leave it to private commercial interests. Such a decision offers no real assurance to the public that the river, lakes, and natural environment of the Allagash will not eventually be encroached upon by diverse industrial demands.

The national recreation area proposal made it clear exactly what value the proposed park intended to protect: leisure in a wilderness setting. The last page of the proposal reads:
Leisure experience in wilderness is among the most deeply refreshing and stimulating forms of outdoor recreation, yet opportunity for it is vanishing under the impact of technology and population growth. There are few places left where one can live in, study, and enjoy the earth in its natural design, and there is only one Allagash—one such resource of its character and magnitude left in the East. It can, by default, become another casualty in the ‘march of civilization,’ or it can be preserved as an unspoiled country of adventure, a unique wilderness canoe route into an age-old dimension of human experience.22

Park opponents, on the other hand, appealed to a different value, that of economic development. Opponents attacked the park proposals for their perceived negative impact on Maine’s economy. For example, Ben F. Pike, of the Association for Multiple Use of Maine Timberlands, an organization that adamantly opposed a federal presence in the region, argued:

If the Allagash is to be administered by the National Park Service, which would control access to and from the area, then the entire forest resources of northern Maine would be seriously affected and wood-using industries of the state, which account for one-third of our economy would be in jeopardy.23

A similar article opposing a federal park argued, “it would result in a loss of substantial timber resources and destroy the woods industry of northwestern Maine, thus crippling the pulp and paper industry of the entire state.” Opponents also argued in more specific terms, noting:

It is estimated that the railroads and trucking industry alone would stand to lose over $1,000,000 annually, if the Allagash were closed; and local saw-mills, individual woods contractors, farmers, chemical suppliers, forest machinery companies, would all be affected by taking this large area out of timber production.

Additionally, park opponents argued that the Allagash region remained an economically valuable forest, and therefore conserving it for recreation was inappropriate. Articles noted that relatively scarce spruce–fir stands occupied the Allagash region and that “the economic importance to Maine of the spruce–fir stands in the Allagash far exceed[ed] the relative area involved.” Further, opponents argued conservation measures would diminish timbering access to woods west of the Allagash. Publicity materials produced by the Association for Multiple Use of Maine Timber Lands articulated, with an Allagash park, “working access to the west would be very
difficult” and that “continued access to and productivity of this land [wa]s vital to Maine industry and to the general economy of the State.” John H. Hinman, the honorary chairman of the board of the International Paper Company, claimed an Allagash park “would effectively block an additional million acres of productive forest land from economic use by Maine industry.”

Park opponents also argued that Maine remained a relatively poor state and that taking any timberlands out of the resource basket could prove disastrous. For example, an anti-park article read, “Maine is not a wealthy state. Its economy sorely needs the harvests from its 17 million acres of timberlands which provide for a $500 million industry and employment for 32,000 citizens.” This points towards another economic argument frequently used by park opponents, that of jobs. One Lewiston Journal Magazine article scathingly noted, “There are no jobs in the wilderness.” The same article went on to argue that the timber in the proposed park area could support 500 million jobs annually and an annual payroll of $5 to $6 million.

The economic argument deployed by park opponents relates to the social and geographic dynamics of the debate. National Park Service management would primarily confer benefits in wilderness recreation to people from away, who would gain ready access to the region. Northern Maine locals, the people most likely to be park opponents, already had ready access to the Allagash and felt it wasteful to spend tax dollars to expand infrastructure to promote visitorship. However, the larger national audience did not feel as comfortable making a trip into the area with its peculiar ownership scheme, dearth of publicity, and lack of the reassuring brand and facilities of the National Park Service. Clearly, the debate revolved not around access, but access for whom. Private ownership, as established, provided adequate access for local people and furnished jobs. Therefore, private ownership seemed to confer more benefits for locals, while the Park Service catered to those from away. The debate also concerned a struggle around the proper way of valuing the Allagash region: on the one hand, as a resource for the local economy and, on the other, as a unique wilderness recreational experience for a national audience.

In 1964, the Maine Legislature created the Allagash River Authority to deliberate and make suggestions for management of the river. The agency consisted of state officials and a University of Maine forestry professor. After much consideration, in 1965, it announced its solution: the Allagash Wilderness Waterway. Under this plan, the state controlled both recreation and commercial activity on 145,000 acres of land and water. The State Park
and Recreation Commission, not the National Park Service, maintained management of the corridor. That same year, promoters dropped the Cross Rock proposal after Congress approved funding for the more environmentally friendly Dickey–Lincoln Dam. With the dam situation clarified, in 1966 the Allagash Wilderness Waterway proposal passed. Officials utilized an equal split of state and federal funds to acquire the 145,000 acres outlined in the Allagash River Authority’s proposal.26

**Recent Park Proposals**

Today’s park debates began to take shape during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Many groups, including the National Parks Conservation Association, the Wilderness Society, and the Natural Resources Council of Maine, offered up multi-million-acre conservation proposals for the North Woods region. Only one, however, received serious long-term consideration. This proposal came from RESTORE: The North Woods. Wilderness supporters founded RESTORE in 1992 to promote conservation amidst massive upheaval in the ownership patterns of Maine’s North Woods. The approximately 10.4-million-acre region historically was privately owned by approximately a dozen paper companies throughout the twentieth century. This stability was undermined between 1980 and 2005, when a total of 150 transactions involving approximately 20,091,000 acres of timberlands—or 88.7 percent of the state—changed hands.27

In 1994, RESTORE announced its plan for a 3.2-million-acre national park in the North Woods. Larger than the state of Connecticut, the proposed park included such features as Moosehead Lake (the largest lake in New England), the Allagash Wilderness Waterway, and the “100 Mile Wilderness” section of the Appalachian Trail. The proposed park surrounded Baxter State Park and stretched all the way to the border with Quebec. RESTORE’s vision tried to take into consideration the interests of northern Maine’s people by including a national preserve that allowed traditional activities like hunting, fishing, trapping, and snowmobiling, activities typically not allowed in national parks. Also, RESTORE specified that under their proposal the government would acquire land for the park from willing sellers only with no landholders being forced off their property by eminent domain. RESTORE estimated that the land would cost taxpayers between $320 and $960 million, or less than the price of one B-2 stealth bomber.28

Despite RESTORE’s efforts to design their proposal with a variety of
interests in mind, local opposition was fierce. People in the Greenville–Millinocket–Patten area tended to oppose the idea of federal ownership, viewed the loss of commercial forest lands as a danger to local jobs and Maine culture, and disliked the idea of people from away dictating restrictions on recreation in the area. Groups like the Maine Sportsman’s Alliance and the Millinocket Fin and Feather Club soon joined the fight against RESTORE’s proposal.  

The debate played out along these lines for several years as RESTORE generated significant news coverage and some grassroots support throughout the 1990s. By 2000, polls showed that almost two-thirds of Mainers supported the park. However, while the population of southern Maine strongly supported the park, local opposition in the North Woods remained relentless, and RESTORE did not appear significantly closer to realizing their goal. Then, in 2000, Roxanne Quimby inserted herself into the saga. In that year, Quimby, who had made her fortune co-founding the cosmetics company Burt’s Bees, made her first of many significant conservation land purchases in Maine. Quimby’s partnership gave RESTORE something they previously lacked: the financial power to begin buying land for the proposed park. In 2000 and 2001, Quimby bought five properties totaling 8,667 acres for the proposed national park.  

However, soon after her first conservation purchases, Quimby’s relationship with RESTORE began to strain. Quimby, intensely independent, did not like having to work within the confines of RESTORE’s mission. According to Jym St. Pierre, Maine Director of RESTORE, Quimby thought her association with RESTORE might slow down the achievement of her conservation goals. Given these differences, Quimby chose to create her own landholding organization, Elliotsville Plantation, Inc. (EPI). In 2003, Quimby formally resigned from RESTORE’s board of directors, and, by 2004, her relationship with the organization ended.  

Shortly thereafter, the public temporarily lost some interest in the park debate. In 2005, Plum Creek Timber, a significant landowner in the region, proposed rezoning 426,000 acres near Moosehead Lake for residential lots (including lakefront homes), a nature-tourism area, a lodge facility, an industrial timber-processing site, campgrounds, storage, and a store. The proposed development lay within the bounds of RESTORE’s proposed park, and Plum Creek’s proposal, rather than RESTORE’s, became the most pressing threat to existing land-use patterns in the area. The public debate thus shifted its focus to Plum Creek and away from the proposed park.  

While the public spotlight cast its focus away from the national park issue, Quimby evaluated her goals for her land holdings in northern
Maine. In 2003, she purchased the first significant tract of land, 24,083 acres, between the eastern border of Baxter State Park and the east branch of the Penobscot River. Quimby continued buying land in this area, and, by 2007, she owned most of the land bordering the east side of Baxter State Park. In 2011, Quimby announced her plan to donate more than seventy thousand acres of land in this area to the federal government as a national park. Now, with competing park proposals from RESTORE and EPI, the national park issue returned to the forefront of the public’s attention.  

Also in 2011, Quimby made an effort to reach out to park opponents. She expressed her intention to purchase land for an equal-sized national recreation area that would allow traditional uses like hunting and snowmobiling if opponents supported her in creating the national park. Despite the compromise effort, local opposition remained ardent. Quimby faced a ferocious public backlash after giving an interview in Forbes magazine in which she claimed that the way of life northern Mainers practiced did not work and suggested they denied the need to seek alternatives to the paper mill economy. Further, Quimby insulted locals by articulating that, in Maine, “we have the most aged population in the country . . . . I believe we have one of the highest adult obesity rates in New England. We have . . . oxycontin abuse . . . [and] Maine’s the largest net receiver of federal funds, even though we supposedly hate the Feds . . . it’s a welfare state.” Understandably, locals did not appreciate being called elderly, overweight, drug-abusing, welfare recipients. In the fallout of this interview, Quimby realized she could not continue to be the public face of the national park campaign. She became widely hated in the region, and her association with the park allowed opponents to fight the park via personal attack. 

Quimby stepped out of the public spotlight and her son Lucas St. Clair took the reins. As a Maine native, fisherman, hunter, and snowmobiler, locals found St. Clair a more palatable figure. He reworked the park proposal to better suit local interests, and his relatable personality helped him come across as more conciliatory than his mother. St. Clair unveiled a proposal for a seventy-five-thousand-acre national park on the west side of the east branch of the Penobscot, and an equal-sized national recreation area to the east side of the river. The recreation area would allow traditional uses like hunting and snowmobiling, while the national park would not.  

During the years since St. Clair became the public face of the park, several high-profile opponents became supporters and groups like the Katahdin Area Chamber of Commerce and the Penobscot Nation have announced their backing of the park. Despite the upswing in public support, Congress remained disinterested in creating another national park in Maine. Realizing the inevitability of congressional inaction, St. Clair and
park supporters lobbied for national monument designation in 2016 as a stepping-stone toward the eventual creation of a national park. National monument designation only requires an executive order from the President rather than legislation from Congress. President Obama, by 2016, had already designated more national monuments than any other United States President. In August, 2016, he chose to extend that record, designating Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument.  

In 2017, President Trump ordered a national monument review and re-opened the controversy in the North Woods. Soon thereafter, St. Clair and other park supporters got some unexpected good news as Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke, the man tasked with carrying out the monument review, announced during a visit to Katahdin Woods and Waters that he might recommend that Congress upgrade the monument to a park. Should Zinke do so, the controversy, already reinvigorated by the review, would surely reach new heights.

As of June 2017, Zinke had not yet delivered his recommendations to the President or the public regarding the monument review. He has implied that he is not inclined to reduce the size of or rescind monument designation for Katahdin Woods and Waters. However, he left open the possibility of size reductions or management changes to some national monuments, which may eventually impact Katahdin Woods and Waters.

Lastly, it is important to recognize that, while the EPI park received considerably more attention in recent years, RESTORE remains active, and they still promote their vision for a 3.2-million-acre park surrounding Baxter State Park.

Geographic and social conflict characterized this most recent park debate ever since the early years of RESTORE’s proposal. In 2000, Bonnie Docherty wrote an article on the RESTORE debate, which brought up environmental justice concerns surrounding the proposal. She explained that park supporters came “most frequently from southern Maine or from other states.” Further, she highlighted that “RESTORE, the driving force behind the park is based in Massachusetts, and its Maine office is located in Hallowell, just south of Augusta and far south of Maine’s ‘Mason–Dixon line.’” Park opponents, Docherty explained, most often resided in northern Maine. She wrote, “Northern Mainers repeatedly complain that the project is the creation of outsiders imposing their values and desires on an unresponsive audience.”

Docherty pointed out that the geographic nature of the debate also involved class conflict. The environmental justice model should be applied to the park debate, she argued, not because supporters targeted racial minorities, but because the park proposal “targets one of the poorest regions
of the state.” Docherty contrasted this with southern Maine, where park supporters often come from, as a place with “more people, more jobs, and more money.” Docherty’s interest in applying the environmental justice model to the early years of the RESTORE debate indicates that, like the Allagash discourse, the most recent park debate began as a social and geographic conflict. This reality extends into the current debate around the smaller national monument donated by EPI, as support is strongest in wealthier southern Maine and beyond, while working-class locals bordering the park appeared most likely to be opposed to park creation.40

While the class and geographic dynamics of the current park debate changed little over time, the way park supporters and opponents advanced their positions regarding the two recent park proposals changed significantly. When RESTORE first began advocating for a national park in the early 1990s, park supporters appealed primarily to ecocentric values. Park supporters presented the forests of the North Woods as damaged by centuries of logging and offered a park as a way to recover lost wilderness and return the forest to a healthier, more pristine condition. In a 1996 editorial in the Bangor Daily News, RESTORE’s Maine Director, Jym St. Pierre, wrote that, “Maine’s North Woods represent the greatest second chance wildland area in our country. That the problem we face is not bad people deliberately trying to destroy our forest, but a continuing loss of crucial wilderness due to the cumulative actions of many reasonable men and women.” St. Pierre continued that, while Maine “lost a great deal . . . it is not too late to protect the best of what is left and recover some of the wilderness that is gone.”41

During the early years of the RESTORE debate, park supporters also promoted the park based on its ability to protect wildlife. In 1995, RESTORE’s founder Michael J. Kellett wrote an article that exclaimed, “Four short centuries of careless exploitation have almost ruined [the North Woods].” After explaining the twentieth-century threats to the North Woods, Kellett articulated, “there is still time to restore this unique ecological region.” Kellett continued his ecocentric argument by pronouncing that RESTORE:

has a vision of the North Woods as it once was and can be again. We see a diverse, native landscape, where towering white pines preside over vast ancient forests: wolf and moose, cougar and caribou roam the wilderness in the timeless contest between predator and prey; and salmon, sturgeon, and grayling spawn in free-flowing rivers. We envision a healthy, self-sustaining forest that is the summer home for countless tropical birds, an immense reservoir of fresh water, a natural recycler of air, and a storehouse for carbon that would otherwise fuel global climate change.
Kellett offered the proposed Maine Woods National Park as crucial to realizing this vision of the North Woods as a wildlife sanctuary.42

Park opponents, on the other hand, during the early years of the debate, appealed primarily to a working-wilderness vision of Maine’s woods as an inhabited landscape that humans improved rather than degraded by logging and enjoyed through traditional recreation activities such as hunting and snowmobiling. While park supporters saw the North Woods as a damaged ecosystem that needed protection from human influence to return it to its rightful wild state, park opponents viewed those same woods as part of their home, a place not degraded but improved by human management, a space for people to earn livelihoods and recreate.43

One of the best examples of the working-forest narrative of park opposition came from a 1999 letter to the editor of the Bangor Daily News, written by Jimmy Busque, the President of the Fin and Feather Club of Millinocket, which opposed the RESTORE proposal. Busque wrote:

As for their plan to turn much of Maine into a national park, we cannot support the establishment of a federal park that steals the assets and heritage of the people. This park would erect gates, charge fees, destroy roads, stop hunting and trapping, and stop snowmobiling and float plane use. In this proposed park there are 366,000 acres of public land, 300,000 acres of land under great ponds and all of the fur, fish, fowl, and game that will be taken from the people of Maine. A private, working, sustainable forest in northern Maine will continue to provide needed renewable resources for all, and many good jobs which accompany them, as well as quality public recreational opportunities for all.44

Another anti-park argument stemmed from a similar ideology of the North Woods. Stephen Schley, president of Pingree Associates, Inc., a Bangor forest products company, wrote in a Bangor Daily News article that Mainers did not need a national park, because:

Maine’s public enjoys boundless public recreation opportunities under a multiple use, private system of ownership that combines recreation, wildlife management, conservation, and economically viable timber harvesting in a sustainable system that supports rural Maine economies and a way of life.45

At first, the RESTORE debate, like the earlier Allagash debate, manifested as a clash of values. Park supporters appealed to preservationist values, while opponents appealed to conserving the working-wilderness ideal. However, over time, both sides evolved to focus more on the economic
impacts of park creation to justify their positions. Stephanie Welcomer wrote that, after 2000, the narrative espoused by park supporters “no longer emphasized romantic wilderness values to the same extent.” Instead, Welcomer noted that “the park narrative underlined economic benefits and stakeholder legitimacy,” and “while ecocentric values were still very much present in the later years of the RESTORE debate, they were no longer the primary focus.” Park opponents, too, shifted their focus to arguments based on economic development rather than the working-wilderness ideal.46

An example of the growing ascendancy of economic arguments comes from Jonathan Carter, the director of the Forest Ecology Network in Augusta. In 2000, he wrote a pro-park editorial that focused exclusively on the economics of the proposed park. Carter began by claiming that, “the Maine Woods National Park and Preserve proposal could be a part of the solution to the economic revitalization of northern Maine.” Carter then outlined the economic declines in farming and forestry, the traditional economic activities of the area. He wrote:

In the woods product sector we have witnessed an alarming loss of fifty-four percent of our logging and thirty percent of our mill jobs. In 1960, one in eleven people was employed in the forest industry. Now it is closer to one in twenty-three. The Maine Department of Labor forecasts employment in this sector will decline by as much as seven percent by 2005 and the U.S. General Accounting Office projects a decline of twenty-seven percent over the next fifty years.

Carter, typical of park supporters in this new phase of the RESTORE debate, offered a national park as the solution to northern Maine’s economic woes.47

A year later, in 2001, RESTORE funded Thomas Power, an economist at the University of Montana, to complete an independent economic report on the proposed park. The report concluded that the creation of a park could provide a “new source of economic vitality” that would “help to offset the unavoidable declines in the forest products sector.” Specifically, Power predicted that a national park likely would lead to an additional one-percent annual growth in employment in adjacent regions, equal to about 100 new jobs per year immediately after the creation of the park, and about 300 additional jobs per year twenty years later. Further, Power predicted about 3,600 total new jobs and noted that average income in the area would likely increase. While Powers did predict that the proposed park would create an economic benefit, he carefully pointed out in an article
he wrote for the Bangor Daily News that, “the proposed park would neither do significant damage to the northern Maine economy nor would it lead to a boom that would transform the region. Both sides in the debate over the proposed park tend to exaggerate the economic impacts.” Despite Power’s qualifications of the findings of his report, park supporters used the report as ammunition for the economic argument for park creation.48

Park opponents responded to this heightened focus on the economy from park supporters by moving somewhat away from justifications for opposing the park based on the working-wilderness ideal and toward economic development justifications of their own, often by calling into question the perceived economic benefits of the park. In 2002, for example, John Simko wrote an article entitled, “National Park Would Damage Local Economy.” Simko served at the time as Greenville’s town manager and the chairman of the Maine Woods Coalition’s steering committee. The Maine Woods Coalition formed in 2000 in Greenville to fight the national park proposal. Simko’s article pointed out that snowmobiling brought over $300 million in sales-tax revenue each winter to Maine, a figure that would decrease if a park restricted snowmobile trails. Similarly, Simko noted that over fifteen percent of workers in Piscataquis County were employed by the forest products industry and that these jobs would end with the creation of a national park. Further, Simko claimed that, when one tallied the “truck drivers, the wood cutters, the mechanics, the diesel fuel delivery drivers, the saw shops and logging equipment suppliers,” the number of impacted jobs in the county would reach over 1,700.49

Simko argued that technological advancement and new investment in forestry, not park creation, would spur economic growth in the area. He pointed to $30 million of pending private investment in two new lumbering operations in Dover–Foxcroft and Greenville that would create over one hundred jobs. Simko also referenced a wood composites business incubator that planned to open in Greenville in 2003 and a “world-class advanced wood structures laboratory located at the University of Maine in Orono” as developments that could revitalize the industry. Simko concluded that, “the potential loss of 3.2 million acres of productive timberland would ruin all of these prospects.”50

Particularly in the years after 2000, the social and geographic tensions of the park debate came into the spotlight. Park opponents renewed their insistence that northern Maine locals should be the only actors in deciding the fate of the North Woods. These opponents painted park supporters as southern Mainers or people from away with no legitimate say in the matter. In this later phase of the park debate, park supporters, more than ever, be-
Photograph of Elliotsville Plantation, Inc.’s proposed park lands, 16 August 2015. Courtesy of by Adam Auerbach.

Photograph of Elliotsville Plantation, Inc.’s proposed park lands, 17 August 2015. Courtesy of by Adam Auerbach.
came classified as outsiders unjustly interfering in the livelihoods of northern Mainers.51

An excellent example of this phenomenon came from Charles Horne, a park opponent and news director at a radio station in Bangor. In 2000, Horne wrote an article satirically advocating for a wilderness park in southern Maine that would evict people from their homes and businesses and destroy their economy and way of life. Horne made it clear that this is precisely what he believed southern Mainers and out-of-state people were trying to do to northern Mainers with RESTORE’s proposal. Horne classified RESTORE as a “Massachusetts-based group” and claimed that the only Mainers “enthused about establishing a three-and-a-half-million-acre wilderness park in northern Maine” resided in the southern part of the state. He called park supporters “the ecological elite,” making clear the class distinctions between north and south. Horne concluded, “just as the Southern Maine Wilderness Park overtaking Windham and Scarborough is an unworkable illusion, so too is the Northern Maine Wilderness Park.”52

Eugene Conlogue, town manager of Millinocket, reflected Horne’s sentiment in a popular bumper sticker he designed in 2000. The sticker read, “RESTORE Boston: Leave our MAINE way of life alone.” This sticker, like Horne’s article, suggested that if environmentalists from away wanted a wilderness preserve, they should be willing to live with the consequences of locating it in their own backyard rather than in northern Maine.53

Park supporters contested this vision by appealing to national interests, as had Katahdin national park supporters in the 1930s, suggesting that the park question remained a matter of importance to a much broader community than only northern Mainers. As Welcomer wrote of the post-2000 phase of the RESTORE debate, for park supporters, “the band of legitimate actors [was] widened, highlighting the park’s local, regional, national, and global significance for those of all socioeconomic backgrounds.” Proponents argued that the issue transcended northern Maine and, thus, outsiders deserved a say in the matter. RESTORE ultimately desired to create a national park, which, by their estimation, validated participation from a national audience.54

In the immediate aftermath of Roxanne Quimby’s smaller park proposal going public in 2011, ecocentric justifications for park creation resurfaced. Matt Polstein, the owner of the New England Outdoor Center in Millinocket and a park supporter, said “Roxanne’s principal interest was on the preservation side. She wanted more land preserved for the people of the United States, and managed by a good steward, the National Park Service. So she came about it more from the environmental and preserva-
tion perspective.” As Polstein articulated, “while Roxanne clearly knew [about economic benefits] intuitively, it wasn’t her focus.” As park opponent Anne Mitchell, the President of the anti-park Maine Woods Coalition, put it, Quimby’s “early efforts to rally support for a national park in Maine were laden with language encouraging conservation, preservation, and protection of these lands for future generations of Mainers.” In an interview, Mitchell claimed that, in essence, Quimby’s plan originally called for a national park to “save the environment from the damage of logging.”

Understandably, this type of reasoning did not resonate with northern Maine locals who traditionally based their livelihoods around the forest products industry. In 2012, Quimby took her national park proposal off the table, and park supporters abandoned the return to ecocentric discourse. When the new proposal for a national park and national recreation area reemerged in 2013, the economics-first narrative established during the later years of the RESTORE debate became dominant once more. Quimby’s son, Lucas St. Clair, replaced his mother as the public face of the park and marshaled the narrative of park support away from ecocentric values and toward economic development arguments. Eliza Donoghue of the Natural Resources Council of Maine, a group that in recent years supported the park, explained it in the following terms:

“This whole economic argument is one that was a part of what Roxanne had to say, but I think it has become a much bigger part of the conversation with Lucas [St. Clair] at the helm, and I think that people are thinking about this project not just from a land conservation perspective, but also from an economic opportunity perspective.

Similarly, Anne Mitchell wrote, “environmentalism is no longer the leading argument, replaced by promises of an economic boost and increased jobs.” More candidly, in an interview, Mitchell exclaimed, “here comes Lucas in place of his mother with the ‘new’ plan. It’s not a new plan. It’s the same plan, just different packaging. This time they’re doing it, quote, ‘for the economy,’ instead of saving the environment.”

Much of the economic focus that materialized after St. Clair entered the spotlight rested on a pair of independent economic studies commissioned by EPI in 2013. Headwaters Economics, a Montana nonprofit research group, completed both studies. One of the studies analyzed the existing economy of Penobscot and Piscataquis counties, the two counties closest to the proposed park. The researchers concluded that creating a national park and recreation area would likely not harm the local forest products industry, and that “as an economic development strategy a [national
park and national recreation area] has the potential to stimulate tourism and attract new migrants, including a younger population.” The other study focused on the economic performance of “peer regions” that hold similar characteristics to northern Maine, but also contained a national park or national park and national recreation area. This study concluded that the economies of the peer regions with parks or parks and recreation areas grew faster in all cases than the economies of northern Maine’s Penobscot and Piscataquis counties from 1970 to 2010. Overall, the report predicted EPI’s proposal would create 450 to 1,000 jobs.

Park supporters deployed the Headwaters employment figures as a principal justification for park creation. For example, EPI created a publicity pamphlet that focused exclusively on the economics of the park proposal. The pamphlet began by stating that, “two peer-reviewed economic studies looked at the impact a new national park and recreation area would have on the Katahdin region and found that the combination of the two would help create up to one thousand jobs in the region without any significant negative impact on Maine’s timber industry.”

After St. Clair became the public face of the park, newspaper editorials also focused more intensively on the economy. A June 2015 editorial from Avern Danforth, the manager and past chairman of the Millinocket Town Council, typified this period by treating the park proposal as an exclusively economic issue. Danforth’s first sentence stated, “We need a serious conversation about jobs and how we can create more of them, particularly in northern Maine.” Danforth proceeded to explain the reality of high unemployment in the towns surrounding the proposed park, and he offered as the solution the 450–1,000 jobs expected as a result of a national park.

Park opponents responded to this type of argument by voicing economic arguments of their own. They called into question the employment figures in the Headwaters reports. For example, a flyer circulated by the Maine Forest Products Council featured a heading that read, “1,000 jobs? Unbelievable!” The flyer noted that Baxter State Park, larger than the proposed national park and national recreation area combined, only employed 21 full time and 40 seasonal workers. Further, the flyer referenced a University of Maine study that concluded Baxter State Park’s economic impact equated to 87 full-time jobs. This number paled in comparison to the 38,000 forest products industry jobs statewide. Aroostook County, the flyer claimed, underwent a forest products industry driven economic revival. The flyer’s authors asserted, “that could happen here—if businesses aren’t scared away by the restrictions imposed by a national park.”

In addition to questioning the quantity of jobs created by the proposed park, opponents also admonished the quality of the jobs the park would
create. Opponents quickly pointed out the likelihood of low pay and the seasonality of the jobs created by the tourism industry compared to those created by the forest products industry. For example, a 2013 editorial by Mark Marston, the co-chair of the East Millinocket Board of Selectmen and vice chair of the anti-park Maine Woods Coalition, exclaimed, “these forest products jobs pay a living wage, unlike the tourism jobs that ranked among the lowest-paying in the region, according to the [Headwaters] economic study.” Marston, who typified the ideology of park opponents, pointed to planned investment in the forest products sector as evidence that forestry jobs could once again sustain the region.61

For both park supporters and opponents, a focus on the economic impacts of national park creation came to dominate the public framing of the debate prior to the monument designation. In an interview, St. Clair confirmed that the way people supported and opposed the park shifted more toward economic impacts, exclaiming, “yeah, I think the strongest argument has been around the economics, and the economic benefits that parks bring.”62

Now that President Trump has reopened the park debate with his administration’s monument review, economic development arguments once again take center stage. Articles and editorials published in the wake of the review being announced point to the economic growth and investment in the region since the monument’s designation. A piece by Patten Selectman Richard Schmidt III, in honor of the one-year anniversary of the monument’s designation, even featured a poignant visual representation of the economic focus of the discussion: the image accompanying the article was a tree holding a birthday cake with a giant green dollar sign for a candle. In the article, Schmidt pointed to new businesses that moved in to the area, recent investment from existing businesses, and the uptick in the real estate market. Schmidt wrote:

In the first five months of 2016, real estate transactions in Patten totaled just over $528,000. Contrast that with the four months immediately following the monument’s designation, when there was $1.4 million worth of real estate sales. The first five months of 2017 saw nearly $1.027 million in sales—a nearly 100 percent increase over sales during the same period in 2016. Much of this is directly attributable to the monument.

Clearly park supporters’ arguments changed little after the monument’s designation.63

Governor Paul LePage remains the primary high-profile park opponent since monument designation, and it appears likely that his lobbying of the
Trump administration is responsible for Katahdin Woods and Waters being included in the monument review. (The other monuments in the review are all significantly larger western parks.) LePage authored a letter to Trump asking him to rescind the monument “before economic damage occurs and traditional recreational pursuits are diminished,” and also testified before Congress to advocate for the same.64

Opponents, including LePage, still largely couch their position in economic arguments. For example, one anti-monument editorial, which appeared in July, 2017 in the Bangor Daily News began, “We’re being told the economy of northern Penobscot County is on the mend thanks to the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument. Truth is it’s up just a little. If we’re willing to settle for such a small improvement, let’s sign up now.” The author, Doug Thomas of Ripley, Maine, argued that, over the long run, northern Maine could do “so much better” by investing in the forest products industry instead and that federal land management in the area would foster disease, insects, and fire that could spread to neighboring land owned by private individuals and corporations, crippling the area’s wood-based economy. As Thomas’s editorial suggests, the language of the debate did not change much post-monument review, with both sides still primarily appealing to the value of regional economic development.65

Conclusion

Why is the current near-exclusive focus on economic arguments noteworthy? This narrow focus hides the more complicated dynamics that underlie the park debate. National park conflicts in northern Maine, played out along lines of class and geography over the past century, continue to tread familiar ground in spite of whether justifications are primarily economic or value oriented in nature. In the past, both proponents and opponents expressed these dynamics through value conflicts, and those conflicts persist and continue to drive the current debate in spite of the increasing tendency for both sides to couch their positions in the language economic of development. To ignore this is to misunderstand the foundations of the current debate.

Although they go largely undiscussed, the types of values beyond economic development that undergirded northern Maine’s historical park debates are key to understanding the nuance of today’s park conflict. The value of wilderness recreation was essential to the elites who contested both sides of the Katahdin debate of the 1930s. These elites differed, how-
ever, in their valuing of Katahdin as a space meant to serve Maine or national interests. The Allagash debate of the 1950s and 1960s was characterized as a social and geographic conflict, pitting the value of the river for wilderness recreation against that of economic opportunity through the forest products industry. Similarly, the early stages of the RESTORE debate—ultimately a class and geographic conflict—pitted ecocentric values justifying the park’s creation against a working-wilderness ideal that delegitimized the idea of a park. Park supporters today continue to be motivated by the values of wilderness protection, recreation, and land preservation for a national audience. Likewise, park opponents remain motivated by the working-wilderness ideal, a desire to keep land in Maine managed by and for locals and to keep the federal government out of the North Woods. Though these clashing value systems continue to inform people’s positions on the park, supporters and opponents have limited the discussion to the shared language of economic development, obscuring many of the reasons people feel so strongly about this issue.66

This narrow framing carries with it serious negative consequences. By focusing wholly on economics, neither side adequately engages important questions like whether the land in question is worthy of a national park or if federal land management actually creates ecological “good,” given that EPI’s private ownership held the land in a state of conservation. As national park opponents pointed out in the Katahdin debate, national parks often bring development and high-use to wilderness areas. Eighty years ago, conservation-minded individuals levied this argument in opposition to national park creation in the North Woods, yet, surprisingly, to date, no major conservation voice has questioned federal land ownership in the most recent debate.

Most significantly however, under today’s economic framing, neither side allocates the space necessary to discuss the full range of values that motivates its members beyond economic development. The near-exclusive focus on economics ignores the value differences between park supporters and opponents and prevents the possibility of meaningful discussion and compromise as neither side can properly express why they feel so strongly. Only by expanding the park discourse beyond this narrow framing and incorporating the full range of values at play can decision makers in northern Maine work toward a model of conservation for the North Woods that will work for both park supporters and opponents, locals and people from away.
NOTES


5. Rolde, Interrupted Forest, 308.


14. Gower, “In the Northern Wilderness” (first and second quotation); As pointed out by Avery, Gower himself was not from Maine, but Newton, Massachusetts; “Myron H. Avery, “Katahdin National Park Plan Is Separate,” Portland Sunday Telegram, 31 July 1938.


20. Judd, “‘A Last Chance for Wilderness,’” 9–10

21. During the Allagash debate, Muskie was governor of Maine (1955–1959) and a United States senator (1959–1980). While neither a primary national-park supporter nor an opponent, he was an integral to the Allagash discussion. For more, see Edmund S. Muskie Papers, Edmund S. Muskie Archives and Special Collections Library, Bates College, Lewiston, Maine.


30. Austin, Queen Bee, 16–18.
32. Austin, Queen Bee, 268, 271, 290.
34. Austin, Queen Bee, 278, 301, 310–311.
36. Austin, Queen Bee, 327.
51. Simko, “National Park Would Damage,” (first and second quotation)
52. Welcomer, “Reinventing Vs. Restoring,” 68.
56. Matt Polstein, unpublished interview by Adam Auerbach, 16 October 2015, recording and transcript in possession of Adam Auerbach (first and second quotation); Anne Mitchell, “Maine Should Reject a National Park,” Ellsworth American, 3 April 2015 (third quotation); Anne Mitchell, unpublished interview by Adam Auerbach, 9 October 2015, recording and transcript in possession of Adam Auerbach (fourth quotation).
57. Eliza Donoghue, unpublished interview by Adam Auerbach, 20 October 2015, recording and transcript in possession of Adam Auerbach (first quotation); Mitchell, “Maine Should Reject,” Ellsworth American, 3 April 2015 (second quotation); Mitchell, interview by Auerbach, 9 October, 2015 (third quotation).
64. Richard Schmidt III, “It’s Only Been a Year, but the Monument is Already Benefitting the Katahdin Region,” Bangor Daily News, 22 August 2017 (quotation).