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Reflection, Acknowledgement, and Justice: A Framework for Indigenous-Protected Area Reconciliation

Chance Finegan

York University, finegan@yorku.ca

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Abstract

Protected areas have been both tools and beneficiaries of settler colonialism in places such as Canada, Australia, and the United States, to the detriment of Indigenous nations. While some agencies, such as Parks Canada, increasingly partner with Indigenous nations through co-management agreements or on Indigenous knowledge use in protected area management, I believe such efforts fall short of reconciliation. For protected areas to reconcile with Indigenous Peoples, they must not incorporate Indigeneity into existing settler-colonial structures. Instead, agencies must commit to an Indigenous-centered project of truth telling, acknowledging harm, and providing for justice. I begin this article by outlining what is meant by *reconciliation*. I then argue for protected area-Indigenous reconciliation. I conclude with a framework for Indigenous-settler reconciliation within protected areas.

Keywords

protected areas, reconciliation, Indigenous Peoples, park management, settler colonialism

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In windswept Oglala Sioux territory, the United States National Park Service (NPS) operates Badlands National Park. Famed for its dusty, rust-colored earthen spires, the park is split into two distinct units: one north and one south. In the north unit, visitors encounter all the traditional trappings of a park: a visitor center, scenic drives, campgrounds, and hiking trails. In the south unit, visitors enter a landscape where “true roads are a rarity” (U.S. National Park Service, n.d., para. 7). The NPS has indirectly suggested that it is nearly impossible to visit this part of the park, writing, “With the exception of Sheep Mountain Table, those hoping to explore the Stronghold [south] District must obtain permission from individual landowners prior to crossing their land to reach the park . . . These landowners can be difficult to identify or locate” (U.S. National Park Service, n.d., para. 2).

To understand the difference between the south and north units of Badlands National Park, it is necessary to rewind to 1942, when the United States (U.S.) Army seized 94,000 acres of Oglala Sioux territory for use as a bombing range (Burnham, 2000; Zach, 2016). The Army promised to return the land after World War II. However, after the War ended, Congress decided the Oglala Sioux could only have their land “back” if they allowed the NPS to manage it as part of Badlands National Park. The Oglala Sioux may own the ground taken from them in 1942, but they do not exert sovereignty over it. Understandably, this history of land theft, destruction, and paternalistic management has not endeared the NPS to the Oglala Sioux (Lovell, 2014); friction persists in their relationship.

Across the settler-colonial world, but particularly in Canada, Aotearoa-New Zealand, and Australia, Indigenous nations and settler colonists¹ have become increasingly concerned with reconciliation. This article focuses on settler and Indigenous reconciliation in protected area² contexts in Aotearoa-New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and the United States, while drawing on examples from other locations. Deeply traumatic colonial events, such as Canada’s Indian Residential Schools and Australia’s Stolen Generations, have provided the impetus for official acts of and commissions for reconciliation in some settler colonies (Nagy, 2012; Short, 2003a). As a three-step process of truth-telling, acknowledging harm, and providing justice (Short, 2003b), reconciliation invites participants to reflect on the past and, importantly, identify ways to specifically address previous wrongs done to Indigenous Peoples.

As this article—and the origins of Badlands’ southern unit—illustrates, protected areas are both tools and beneficiaries of settler colonialism, often in violent ways. Given this history and context, it is important to ask whether parks can also be a locus of reconciliation efforts. I believe the answer is a resounding yes; more specifically, I contend that, for Indigenous nations and settler-colonial states to

¹ In this article, I use the term *settler colonist* to generally refer to non-Indigenous persons residing in settler-colonial nation-states (e.g., Canada, Australia, the U.S., etc.). This would include recent immigrants who intend to remain in these countries. However, I recognize that not all non-Indigenous people who live in these places are settler colonists (e.g., the descendants of slaves). For further reading on terms to describe non-Indigenous people in settler-colonial nation-states, see Vowel (2016, pp. 14-22).

² I use *park* and *protected area* interchangeably in this article. While I recognize that distinctions exist between these, I make this choice to ensure varied word use.

fully reconcile with one another, parks *must* be places of reconciliation given their historical and ongoing entanglement with settler colonialism.

I advance three key assertions in this article. First, I assert that protected areas need to reconcile with Indigenous Peoples. This does not mean park managers simply need to “work better” with Indigenous nations, as such an approach risks merely incorporating Indigenous Peoples into existing settler-colonial structures instead of challenging those structures. Reconciliation demands an Indigenous-centered agenda grounded in truth telling, the acknowledgement of harm, and the provision of appropriate, Indigenous-defined justice. Such a process offers parks the opportunity to advance the inherent sovereignty of Indigenous nations.

Second, I assert this reconciliation process will require difficult conversations. The south unit of the Badlands is not the only protected area situated on Indigenous territory that has been gained through violence or coercion. Approaching reconciliation in a parks context may be challenging because:

- a. Land, sovereignty, and cultural continuity are inseparable for Indigenous Peoples (Snelgrove, Dhamoon, & Corntassel, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2012), and
- b. Parks are, fundamentally, a means by which to exert control over who may do what on a given area of land (Kelly, 2015).

Yet, having difficult conversations and feeling unsettled are not necessarily negative; indeed, settler colonists *should* feel disquieted by the usurpation of Indigenous land and sovereignty that has been and continues to be done in their names. I acknowledge that public unease, coupled with the political nature of park management agencies, may pose challenges to reconciliation. Although I briefly discuss the political feasibility of the approach I outline in this article, my focus is on asserting the need for park–Indigenous reconciliation and outlining a framework for it.

Reconciliation must be driven by and accountable to Indigenous interests rather than a sense of political expediency. It cannot be achieved without dismantling the settler-colonial systems, including ill-gotten control over land and resources, that permeate and subtend states like Aotearoa-New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and the United States. To this end, I contend discussions about land tenure within parks are unavoidable if true reconciliation is the end goal.

Finally, I assert that while some park agencies (e.g., Parks Canada) have been moving towards reconciling with Indigenous Peoples, existing efforts are generally too hodge-podge and localized. Instead of working on a park-by-park basis, I argue, an Indigenous-controlled commission is needed to address park–Indigenous relations systemwide. Parks are not selectively entwined with settler-colonial structures; rather, they are part-and-parcel of broader efforts to create and maintain settler-colonial regimes. As such, efforts at park–Indigenous reconciliation must occur on and be coordinated at level of systems or agencies.

To support these three assertions—the need for reconciliation, the importance of difficult conversations, and the need for systemwide efforts at change—I begin with a broad discussion of reconciliation. Next, I demonstrate the connection between parks and settler colonialism, highlighting the resultant need for park–Indigenous reconciliation. Finally, I offer a framework for how parks might begin to reconcile with Indigenous nations.

What is Reconciliation?

I was initially hesitant and nervous about this project. For non-Indigenous people like me, it is particularly easy to bandy about words like *reconciliation* and *decolonization* in ways that feel good but do little to advance Indigenous interests. Such use of these words “placat[e] White guilt . . . by narrowing the focus [e.g., to parks] to avoid conversations about bigger issues” (Nagy, 2013, p. 53; see also Waziyatawin, 2009, p. 193). I will not pretend to have the perfect solution to the trauma Indigenous Peoples have suffered and continue to suffer in their interactions with protected areas. However, I believe it is important to develop a clear understanding of reconciliation before thinking about how it might be applied—rather than prioritizing expedient solutions to centuries of abuse and then applying a post-hoc label of *reconciliatory* or *decolonial* to them.

Reconciliation has been described as a process of formerly opposed parties moving towards some sort of forgiveness or coming-to-terms with one another (Corntassel, Chaw-win-is, & T’lakwadzi, 2009; Short, 2005). Reconciliation has also been conceptualized as a process of “restoring and rebuilding relationships” in “novel and context-specific ways” (Short, 2005, p. 268). Both offer good starts but are somewhat vague, with the first presuming that forgiveness is the end goal of reconciliation. I prefer to follow Short’s (2003b) model of reconciliation, which he has articulated as a process involving truth-telling, acknowledging harm, and providing appropriate justice. This three-step process both:

- a. Provides clear guidelines for what constitutes reconciliation, and
- b. Focuses its goal (i.e., justice) on Indigenous Peoples rather than on settler colonists’ feelings (i.e., their desires for forgiveness).

Importantly, reconciliation is about “both the past and the future” (Rice & Snyder, 2008, p. 48). Short’s (2003b) inclusion of both truth-telling and the provision of justice speaks to reconciliation’s Janus-like nature as a process that simultaneously looks forwards and backwards. For reconciliation to succeed, participants must seek to understand and document the past while focusing on settler colonialism’s ongoing structural inequities. This focus on the present and future is critical; Indigenous Peoples have criticized current reconciliation efforts in Canada, for example, by noting their tendency to overemphasize past errors at the expense of beginning a more fulsome discussion about the country’s perpetuation of settler colonialism (Querengesser, 2013). A firm commitment on the part of park agencies to providing justice may help to address such criticisms.

Reconciliation is a call to understand how settlers remain privileged because of their ongoing complicity in settler colonialism. Unfortunately, recent moves towards reconciliation in Canada and Australia³ suggest that settlers tend to view themselves not as modern beneficiaries of ongoing structural genocide,⁴ but merely people who have inherited the legacy of past wrongs. Reconciliation demands that settlers recognize how they continue to inflict grievous harms on Indigenous Peoples. In this way,

³ For example, Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Australia’s Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and Justice.

⁴ Wolfe (2006) writes that the term *structural genocide* recognizes that settler colonialism is not an event but a structure that requires the elimination of Indigenous Peoples. It also avoids the qualified nature of terms like *cultural genocide*.

reconciliation is not an exercise in warmth, coziness, or security for settlers who have decided to “face up to” the sins of the past. Instead, reconciliation is a process of dismantling of oppressive structures and coming-to-terms with how settlers continue to benefit from, enable, and perpetuate settler colonialism.⁵

Framing reconciliation as what it is not can also be helpful. Its goal cannot be to legitimize settler colonial seizure of Indigenous territories and resources. Rather, its goal should be appropriate, restorative, Indigenous-centered, and community-designed forms of justice. Agencies cannot begin reconciliation with the goal of “moving on” from the past, because the past shapes the present and future. Approaching reconciliation with the assumption that “the past is over and reconciliation is about forgiveness and moving on” (Nagy, 2012, p. 360) is the wrong approach. Instead, reconciliation calls participants to:

- a. Focus on how the past is still very much a part of peoples’ lived experiences, and
- b. Build a new relationship, rooted in restorative justice, to atone for wrongdoing.

Reconciliation is not an exercise in addressing “the Indigenous problem” faced by parks precisely because there is no such thing as an Indigenous problem. Rather, Indigenous Peoples confront protected area problems for which park agencies and settler-colonial governments are responsible. Moreover, as the following discussions of co-management and Indigenous knowledge should make clear, incorporating Indigenous Peoples into settler-colonial structures and institutions should not be the end goal of any reconciliatory process.

If gaining legitimacy, “fixing the Indigenous problem,” or “moving on” are the primary motivation(s) behind reconciliation, then it will fail. To avoid this, park managers should consider their motivations for pursuing reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. Have they (i.e., the managers) centered their own desires and goals, or have they started this difficult work because they wish to provide justice for those harmed by their profession? Are they willing to recognize and attempt to end systemic, ongoing harm and parks’ role in perpetuating it? As with other things in life, it is important to start with heart. In this instance, if one’s goal is to serve Indigenous interests, one’s heart is likely in the right place.

There have, however, been significant criticisms of reconciliation—particularly as a framework for improving settler–Indigenous relations. Cornassel and Holder (2008) have noted, for example, that reconciliation can place the onus on victims to become accustomed to their social, economic, and political disempowerment. Similarly, Nagy (2013) has affirmed that victim centering can shift social focus away from interrogating settler colonialism as a system of continuing oppression. Martin (2009) suggests that it is easy to conflate reconciliation with “resolution, a term which also evokes the end of a conflict” (p. 52). Such conflation mistakenly presumes an end or closure to settler colonialism, which is impossible for something that is both a structure and ongoing relationship.

Reconciliation calls upon settler colonists to understand how Indigenous Peoples have been and continue to be systematically oppressed by settler colonialism. Focusing exclusively on the resultant

⁵ To offer a very brief example of the distinction between “facing up to the past” versus thinking about settler colonialism more broadly, the Keeseekoowenin Ojibway were forcibly removed from their homes to create Riding Mountain National Park in 1936 (Sandlos, 2008). Reconciliation would entail an apology for this, yes, but more importantly, it means confronting the ways in which settlers continue to benefit from this violent dispossession.

harms, however, would be a disservice. Reconciliation’s goal should not be to proffer a newfangled “solution to the Indian problem” in place of existing policies; Martin (2009) has explained that “as the state attempts to leave the past behind . . . it fails to notice that every new Indian policy risks echoing the . . . goal of finally getting rid of the Indian problem” (p. 58). For example, Canadian efforts at reconciliation have largely asked Indigenous Peoples to come to terms with Canadian sovereignty, instead of the other way around (Querengesser, 2013).

Why Do We Need Reconciliation Between Indigenous Peoples and Park Management?

Historically, protected areas have been overt tools of settler colonialism, serving to systematically extend state control over land to the detriment of Indigenous Peoples (Mar, 2010; Sandlos, 2007). To create some parks, such as Riding Mountain National Park in Manitoba, Canada, settler-colonial governments violently evicted Indigenous Peoples.⁶ As discussed below, other parks have benefitted from settler colonialism without deeply engaging with the past. This also points towards the importance of reconciliation between parks and Indigenous Peoples, as both types of relations—parks as agents and parks as beneficiaries of settler colonialism—should compel park leaders to seek reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.

Locating protected areas within broader settler-colonial structures is key to understanding the need for park–Indigenous reconciliation. Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernandez (2013) have noted that settler colonialism is primarily concerned with “replacement, which aims to vanish Indigenous Peoples and replace them with settlers, who see themselves as the rightful claimants to land” (p. 73). As Veracini (2011) has written, settler colonialism requires a ceaseless attempt to extinguish Indigenous Peoples and their histories.

Consider the case of Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina and Tennessee, U.S.A., which occupies about 293 square miles of the Cherokee Nation’s traditional territory. Over the winter of 1838 to 1839, the United States government forcibly evicted the Cherokee from their traditional territory, including in the region that would become Great Smoky Mountains National Park. This was an act of violent ethnic cleansing; roughly 20% of the entire Cherokee Nation died during the eviction (U.S. National Park Service, 2015).

Today, Great Smoky Mountains National Park is home to no fewer than four significant facilities⁷ at which the park interprets its settler-colonial history. These facilities include preserved historic log cabins and other settlement-era structures. The park does not, however, have a single facility dedicated to interpreting Cherokee histories of and perspectives on the park and/or the land. As a result, Great Smoky Mountains National Park does little to aid visitors in better understanding Cherokee histories or perspectives. This is made even more frustrating by the park’s physical location: It is directly adjacent to the Qualla Boundary, a land trust held for the Eastern Band of the Cherokee.

⁶ The Government of Canada marched the Keeseekoowenin Ojibway out of their homes at gunpoint and burned their residences to the ground in order to create Riding Mountain National Park (Sandlos, 2008).

⁷ Cades Cove Loop Road and the Cable Mill Historic Area, Roaring Fork Motor Nature Trail, Mountain Farm Museum and the Mingus Mill, and the Cataloochee Valley Historic Area.

The park's lack of Cherokee-centric facilities clearly demonstrates Veracini's (2011) assertion that settler-colonist societies inherently eradicate Indigeneity from the land. Put another way, Great Smoky Mountains "supports the claiming of space and place" by ensuring that visitors engage in a process of "forgetting of our own histories"⁸ (Snelgrove et al., 2014, p. 20). Until the park makes a serious commitment to returning the Cherokee to the landscape and interpreting Cherokee heritage and perspectives, the park is complicit in the Cherokee's removal.

In Virginia, U.S.A., Cape Henry National Memorial marks the site of the first landing of the Jamestown settlers in North America. An interpretive wayside panel at the park's only parking lot describes this event, focusing on the actions of the settler colonists. Its only mention of Indigenous Peoples is: "Near the end of the day [4/26/1607], an encounter with Indians left two of the party [of settler colonists] wounded." This is a stunning erasure of Indigenous Peoples' perspectives on the arrival of newcomers to their lands. Can a park credibly claim to interpret a first contact story when it does not even deign to name one of the two present parties,⁹ much less present their account of the event?

Elsewhere, at Cape Cod National Seashore in Massachusetts, U.S.A., park staff completely omit Indigenous nations from the "people" menu of the park's website (U.S. National Park Service, 2017c). The narrative of Pilgrims building a city on a hill in Massachusetts obscures Indigenous Peoples to this day. Despite this erasure, the park has identified Indigeneity as a reason for the area's significance: "Cape Cod was the site of early contact between native and European cultures. The national seashore encompasses archeological sites that document more than 9,000 years of occupation, including use by Wampanoag Indians that continues to this day" (U.S. National Park Service, 2017a, p. 5). Can a park preserve Indigenous histories while it expunges Indigenous Peoples from its story?

Parks continued centering of settler colonists on waysides, websites, and visitor facilities points towards the ongoing nature of colonialism, showing it is not an event confined to the past (Snelgrove et al., 2014; Tuck & Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2013). Particularly in cases where parks purport to interpret colonization, their disregard for Indigenous Peoples lays bare their ongoing complicity in settler colonialism.

Snelgrove et al. (2014) have described settler colonialism as "temporality without end" (p. 7). As referenced above, the south unit of the Badlands is supposed to, at some nebulous point in the future, be returned to the Oglala Sioux, but no firm plans are in place for the Sioux to even co-manage the property with the NPS, much less exercise sovereignty over it (Tupper, 2015; Zach, 2016). Such permanently temporary parks call for reconciliation.

Protected areas often manage sacred sites or places of significance to Indigenous Peoples (Beltrán, 2000; Milholland, 2008; Nie, 2008, such as Uluru-Kata Tjuta (Australia), Devil's Tower (U.S.A.), Bear Butte State Park (U.S.A.), Pakasaivo and the Kirkkopahta Seida Rock (Finland), and Mount Tongariro (Aotearoa-New Zealand). Managers of these sites work in a difficult environment. On the one hand, they might be expected to, for example, allow public access to a site while also responding to Indigenous

⁸ That is of settler colonialism in the mountains.

⁹ That is give the name of the Indigenous nation the settler colonists encountered.

Peoples’ desires for a restriction of access. The need for reconciliation between parks and Indigenous Peoples is painfully apparent in such places.

At other sites, it is possible that managers have no immediate controversy or problem to address, but a lack of conflict does not relieve administrators from their moral duty to engage with Indigenous Peoples. For example, Great Smoky Mountains National Park desperately needs to re-think its relationship with the Cherokee, given how it interprets Cherokee heritage and perspectives. Reconciliation need not always be prompted by an immediate disagreement or conflict. Indeed, it can come from park management simply recognizing that they need to be more inclusive.

Extensive scholarship notes that protected areas are complicit in settler-colonial dispossession of Indigenous land across the world¹⁰ (Brockington & Igoe, 2006; Burnham, 2000; Dowie, 2011; Keller & Turek, 1998; Mar, 2010; Sandlos, 2008). As previously mentioned, at some places—such as Riding Mountain National Park (Canada)—parks were born of a spasm of state violence. In other places, like Yosemite National Park, eviction has been more insidious.¹¹ Regardless of the level of violence attendant to land dispossession, the process alone suggests that reconciliation is necessary.

Admittedly, removal for conservation’s sake has been poorly researched; it is not clear precisely how many people have been removed from their lands to facilitate the creation of protected areas (Agrawal & Redford, 2009; Brockington & Igoe, 2006). Estimates range from 10-20 million worldwide (Agrawal & Redford, 2009) to 14 million in Africa alone (Dowie, 2006). Agrawal and Redford (2009) have noted, however, that “the use of force is typically critical” to eviction and that removal for conservation has caused “social disarticulation and political disempowerment” (p. 5). Importantly, expulsion-for-parks is not a process confined to the past. In Colombia, for example, the early 2000s saw residents forcibly evicted to create Tayrona National Nature Park (Bocarejo & Ojeda, 2016).

It may be a stretch to claim all parks created in settler-colonial nation-states have unequivocally benefitted from and maintain the dispossession of Indigenous lands. Yet, it is not difficult to suggest the number of protected areas that have not or do not is quite short. Consider the number of protected areas that fit within one or more of these categories:

- a. Located on treaty-ceded land,¹²
- b. Located on land taken by force by settler colonists,
- c. Either prohibit outright or do not encourage Indigenous Peoples to engage in traditional activities on their traditional territories, and/or

¹⁰ I recognize that not all who have been dispossessed by protected areas are Indigenous. Good examples of non-Indigenous dispossession include the removal of Acadians to create Kouchibouguac National Park (Canada) and Ozark National Scenic Riverways (U.S.A.). However, this article is focused narrowly on settler–Indigenous reconciliation, not on settler–settler reconciliation, nor on an exhaustive discussion of expulsion for park creation.

¹¹ There has never been a direct, violent assault on Indigenous Peoples at Yosemite for park creation as there was at Riding Mountain, but the Ahwahneechee and other Southern Sierra Miwok were slowly squeezed out of the valley through NPS policies that made it impossible for them to remain there (see Spence, 1996, for a good overview of this history).

¹² The different understandings held by Indigenous Peoples and settler colonists at treaty signings is worth contemplating (see Miller, 2009, for an overview of this issue in Canada).

d. Act to extend settler-colonial authority over a given area or resource.

Within each of these categories, parks have effectively displaced Indigenous Peoples and livelihoods from the land that the parks now protect. As Short (2003a) has explained, there is a direct link between “structurally entrenched social disadvantage and the dispossession of land and loss of autonomy” (p. 299). Protected areas are not the *sole* cause of Indigenous Peoples’ continued marginalization, but they are certainly an impactful one.

Indigenous Peoples have shown they are not totally powerless to resist eviction efforts. Consider, for example, the Łutsël K’e Dene First Nation (LKDFN). In 1969, Chief Pierre Catholique was “accidentally sent the minutes of a meeting” about a possible national park on LKDFN traditional territory; after he began to ask questions, he was flown to Ottawa and presented with a document to sign for the park’s creation (Bennett, Lemelin, & Ellis, 2010, p. 108). Catholique refused and the LKDFN remained on their land.¹³ Other examples of Indigenous resistance include the Timbisha Shoshone’s tenacious residence in Death Valley National Park in California and Nevada, U.S. (Burnham, 2000), the Havasupai’s continued dwelling in the Grand Canyon (Keller & Turek, 1998), and Métis Jackie Vautour’s¹⁴ efforts to remain within Kouchibouguac National Park in New Brunswick, Canada.

Indigenous attempts to resist park creation have also occurred through international bodies. For example, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN) 1975 Kinshasa Resolution—passed because of Indigenous activism—has forbidden forced evictions for conservation (Colchester, 2004). The Durban Accord and Action Plan, passed at the 2003 World Parks Congress, required that park agencies respect Indigenous rights and provide for full, free, and prior informed consent behind the creation of parks (Brosius, 2004). As with the Kinshasa Resolution, Indigenous Peoples were the driving force behind the Durban Accord and Action Plan. Indigenous Peoples have also pressed the IUCN for a formal redress process for grievances against protected areas. The Whakatane Mechanism, created in 2011, is supposed to do this, but it has only been used on a trial basis (Colchester, 2014).

Moreover, it is worth noting that not all parks owe their existence directly to violent land expropriation. Consider Australia’s Bunya Mountains National Park, situated on the traditional territory of the Jarowair, Wakka Wakka, and Barunggam peoples. Australia gazetted the park well after these communities had been ejected from their land (Mar, 2010). Bunya Mountains National Park did not cause their dispossession—though it has undeniably benefitted from and, perhaps more crucially, *maintained* it.

Bunya Mountain’s website blandly describes Jarowair, Wakka Wakka, and Barunggam dispossession as a time when “Aboriginal people left or were removed from their country” (Queensland Government Department of National Parks Sport and Racing, 2017, para. 4). This call to mind Shklar’s (1990) observation that parks have been “passively unjust” (p. 40) or willing to quietly accept injustices rather

¹³ Interestingly, in 2001, then-Chief Felix Lockhart reopened discussions with Parks Canada after a (failed) land claim process in the region highlighted encroaching natural resource extraction (Bennett et al., 2010).

Negotiations and planning for Thaidene Nëné National Park Reserve are ongoing.

¹⁴ It should be noted that claims of Eastern Métissage are the subject of significant debate (Gaudry & Leroux, 2017).

than attempt to remedy them because addressing problems would cause political difficulties. It is easier to write that Aboriginal people “left or were removed” (Queensland Government Department of National Parks Sport and Racing, 2017, para. 4) from their homeland in the Bunya Mountains than it is to talk about the “the putrefaction of [Aboriginal] corpses” or “large pits . . . full of dead blackfellows” in 1870s Queensland (Mar, 2010, p. 6). By doing this, protected areas sidestep their entanglement in structural genocide to attend to visitor carry capacity, ecological integrity, and maintenance backlogs.

The park’s website demonstrates its ongoing maintenance of and complicity in Australian settler colonialism. It is hard to believe that park staff and managers are ignorant of both the White-on-Aboriginal violence that has characterized Queensland’s history (Bottoms, 2013) and the history of White Australians asserting control over the Bunya Mountains. Rather than face this history, however, park staff have chosen to gloss over it.

Beyond forcing Indigenous Peoples from their homes and towns, protected areas have also usurped Indigenous Peoples’ resource-use rights. Consider the case of the Sturgeon Lake Ojibway (today part of the Lac La Croix First Nation). The Sturgeon Lake community was promised its winter hunting camps in the Hunter’s Island region of the Quetico (Ontario, Canada) would be left undisturbed after the signing of Treaty 3 in 1873. But in 1910, Ontario evicted the community from Hunter’s Island after including the area in the new Quetico Provincial Park (Killan, 1993; Manore, 2007).

In Wood Buffalo National Park in Alberta, Canada, officials systematically excluded Indigenous hunters from the park despite agreements that stated they could continue to hunt there (Sandlos, 2007). This conflict continues to this day (Britneff, 2018). At Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario, Canada, the Golden Lake First Nation (GLFN) “has been denied any real influence in the use and management of the park” (Hodgins & Cannon, 1998, p. 58) even though GLFN has not ceded the land within the park. Algonquin Provincial Park has become “a space inaccessible to its former inhabitants . . . a place they could not enter to pursue their traditional lifeways” (Manore, 2007, p. 135).

In addition to excluding Indigenous Peoples, protected areas also represent a deeply held philosophical difference between settler colonists and many Indigenous Peoples. A fundamental principle underpinning Western-style protected area management is that nature and people exist separately; there are spaces for nature and spaces for civilization (Braun, 1997; Cronon, 1996; Nash, 2014). This stands in contrast to Indigenous understandings of human and non-human relations, in which a distinction between the two is not necessarily carved out (Adams & Hutton, 2007; Braun, 1997; Nash, 2014; Stevens, 2014b; Turner, 2012; West, Igoe, & Brockington, 2006).

Parks Canada (2014) highlights this in its guide to “building effective partnerships” (p. 1) with Indigenous Peoples:

When the English version of sign text [for the Nuu-chah-nulth Trail in Pacific Rim] was being translated into Nuu-chah-nulth, the Elders stumbled over the word “wilderness” and arrived at the conclusion that there is no equivalent word or description for “wilderness” in their language, there is only “home.” This initially straightforward discussion led to a more comprehensive understanding of the philosophy that the Nuu-chah-nulth have for their traditionally used lands. (p. 13)

It is not my intention to dwell on the cultural constructions of wilderness; there is extensive literature on the subject.¹⁵ The profoundly different understandings of land and nature is an important challenge for protected area agencies to consider if they are to reconcile with their Indigenous partners.

In the United States, for example, the human–nature divide has been codified into federal law through the Wilderness Act, which proclaimed that wilderness is a place where “man does not remain” (88th Congress of the United States, 1964, para. 1). Similarly, Aotearoa-New Zealand has forbidden structures, roads, trails, machines, livestock, and vehicles from entering designated wilderness areas (Cessford & Reedy, 2000). New South Wales, Australia, defines wilderness as a place that, “together with its plant and animal communities, in a state that has not been substantially modified by humans and their works or is capable of being restored to such a state” (Landers, 2008, p. 33). These articulations of wilderness conflict with the longstanding relationships that Indigenous Peoples have with the land in these countries.¹⁶ Moreover, Muller (2003) has explained that an imposed human–nature divide “denies the fundamental role of Indigenous land management in the creation of these ‘natural’ landscapes and excludes Indigenous people from areas of economic, cultural, and spiritual importance” (p. 4).

While parks are ostensibly set aside from humanity, protected areas have long served commercial interests. In Queensland, Australia, in the 1890s, policy makers justified parks in “carefully expressed terms of economic utility” for the emerging settler-colonial nation (Mar, 2010, p. 83). Similar arguments were made for parks in the U.S. and Canada (Binnema & Niemi, 2006; MacEachern, 2011; Runte, 1997). Policy elites have continued to rely on the logic of parks as economic engines: On Honduras’ north coast, ecotourism development, biodiversity conservation, and Indigenous dispossession have gone hand-in-hand (Loperena, 2016). As in Queensland, Indigenous people have been blamed for allowing natural resources to go undeveloped and underutilized (Loperena, 2016). Rooted in Lockean philosophies (Carroll, 2014; Mar, 2010; Tuck & Yang, 2012), this blame has sought to justify Indigenous dispossession and the promotion of conservation and tourism.

The idea of parks-as-economic-drivers has merit, particularly in economically distressed areas, but this can systematically oppress and marginalize Indigenous communities. If protected area agencies and managers begin to appreciate the connections between their work and larger, unjust systems, then the need for park–Indigenous reconciliation would become increasingly apparent.

Are Parks not Already Reconciling with Indigenous Peoples?

Before considering what reconciliation between protected areas and Indigenous Peoples might look like, I offer one final reason for engaging such work: existing efforts to draw parks and Indigenous Peoples closer together do not go far enough. The emerging “new paradigm” (Stevens, 2014a, see pp. 53–55) for protected area management relies on tools like co-management and engagement with Indigenous (sometimes called traditional) knowledge to “decolonize” park management (Stevens, 2014b). However, these tools are both inherently problematic and insufficient in their scope.

¹⁵ See Catton, 1997; Cronon, 1996; Harvey, 1991; and Nash, 2014.

¹⁶ In Australia, for example, “Aboriginal people have been actively managing the land for at least 50,000 years” (Muller, 2003, p. 4).

Consider the use of Indigenous knowledge for park management. I have noted that a shorthand definition of reconciliation is identifying truth, acknowledging harm, and providing appropriate justice (Short, 2003b). Incorporating Indigenous knowledge into protected area management does not advance any of these components of reconciliation. Doberstein and Devin (2004) have traced the use of Indigenous knowledge in resource management to the resumption of treaty making in Canada in the 1970s. Indigenous knowledge, they write, was first seen as a way to document land and resources for the treaty-making process (i.e., to create a historical record), but it is now viewed as a tool to ensure equitable management practices (i.e., making “right” decisions informed by “involving” local residents).

Treating Indigenous knowledge as a “special sauce” to mix into pre-existing plans or structures along with Western knowledge is deeply troubling. Nadasdy (1999) has explained:

Since it is scientists and resource managers, rather than Aboriginal hunters and trappers, who will be using this new “integrated” knowledge, the project of knowledge integration actually serves to concentrate power in administrative centers, rather than in the hands of Aboriginal people. (p. 1)

The use of Indigenous knowledge by park agencies *might* lead to reconciliation and an end to the supremacy of Western knowledge; it *could* be one part of a broad reconciliatory agenda, but, in and of itself, it does not resolve underlying settler-colonial power structures.

Similarly, co-management arrangements in which Indigenous Peoples and agencies share management authority over parks do not contribute to reconciliation in a meaningful way. Berkes (2009) has suggested that co-management asks agencies to “look beyond government, toward public–private–civil society partnerships, as a way of dealing with the shortcomings of single agency, top-down management” (p. 1692). This leaves something to be desired, however—particularly in Canada, where the federal minister responsible for Parks Canada still holds final authority for park management decisions (Langdon, Prosper, & Gagnon, 2010). This co-management approach does not necessarily lead to partnership, nor is it the best way to address the problems created by the eviction of sovereign nations from their homelands.

Sandlos (2014) has scathingly critiqued co-management as something that “asks us to accept as a radical innovation the mere inclusion of Aboriginal communities [in the decision-making process] who maintained absolute sovereign control over northern wildlife populations only a generation or two ago” (p. 146). Co-management is not a vehicle for Indigenous Peoples to reclaim authority over their traditional territories, nor does it identify truth, acknowledge harm, or provide restorative justice. Rather, co-management co-opts Indigenous Peoples into existing, settler-dominated government structures and processes.

Conversations about the shortcomings of co-management and the use of Indigenous knowledge within parks recall Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernandez (2013), who have suggested that one of the goals of White settler society is “absorbing” Indigenous knowledge so that:

Actual participation by Othered bodies is not necessary. Like Natty Bumppo,¹⁷ the whitestream can integrate what it needs—once the [W]hite settler learns to dance like the other, learns to eat like the other, learns to dress like the other, and to consume and even to make objects like the other, the other is no longer needed, discarded, replaced. (p. 82)

Co-management and the use of Indigenous knowledge for parks mirrors Natty Bumppo's internalization of the knowledge he needs to survive from Indigenous people. In this sense, protected area agencies are not engaged in reconciliation when they seek Indigenous knowledge or to work with Indigenous "co-managers" in an advisory role.

Parks are instead absorbing Indigenous knowledge so meaningful participation by Indigenous Peoples is not necessary. They are listening to Indigenous management advice so they can better learn to be like Indigenous people, not to cede real authority and power to Indigenous Peoples. Without lasting change to settler-colonial power structures, co-management structures and Indigenous knowledge use in parks are neither reconciliatory nor decolonial.

Indigenous Peoples, particularly in Canada, have used the land claims and modern treaty process to create new protected areas. Yet, I am not convinced this represents reconciliation for two reasons. First, this process necessarily entails the modern treaty table, which Clark, de Costa, and Maddison (2016) have noted "entrenches" Indigenous dispossession (p. 9). The Canadian comprehensive land claims process is defined and controlled by the government, is burdensome for Indigenous Peoples to participate in, and is ultimately "microscopic and painstaking" in its approach (McHugh, 2011, p. 328). As McHugh (2011) has noted, Canada's modern treaty table is dysfunctional due to both its complexity and its costliness. Second, I argue that creating new parks—however well-managed they may be—at the treaty table does not address the management of existing parks. Reconciliation between protected area managers and Indigenous Peoples cannot happen if only newly created parks affirm Indigenous rights. Yes, the parks coming from the treaty table are steps in the right direction, but if existing parks are neglected then reconciliation is not happening.

Some protected area-focused international mechanisms and institutions seek to protect Indigenous rights, but they are not reconciliatory in and of themselves largely because they have not been fully implemented. They do, however, articulate and summarize the justification for reconciliation. For example, the Convention on Biological Diversity commented in 2012 that "less than a third of countries report significant progress towards participation [by Indigenous Peoples] in protected areas" (Colchester, 2014, p. 45).

Additionally, the International Expert Workshop on the World Heritage Convention and Indigenous Peoples (2012) has released a "call to action" regarding the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and parks. The call to action noted the existence of "past and ongoing injustices, and chronic, persistence human rights violations . . . as a result of the establishment and management of protected areas" (para. 14). Similarly, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (2011) noted its "deep concern" about the creation of World Heritage sites "without obtaining the free, prior, and informed consent," explaining that many World Heritage sites in Africa have "management frameworks

¹⁷ The protagonist of James Fenimore Cooper's series, *The Leatherstocking Tales*.

[that] are not consistent with the principles of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” (para. 9).

As Indigenous Peoples and international bodies continue to express, the relationship between protected areas and Indigenous Peoples is difficult. Dispossession for conservation, a longstanding entanglement with non-Indigenous business interests, and the privileging of settler colonists in interpretation and education efforts have not led to positive park–Indigenous relationships. Settler colonists claim and exploit Indigenous land and resources, and, as settler-government institutions designed to control who may do what within a given space, protected areas are a tangible manifestation of settler colonialism. As such, park managers need to reconcile with Indigenous nations.

Before moving on, I wish to recognize that protected areas have their benefits. At Great Smoky Mountains National Park, for example, the mountains were largely a clear-cut, muddy wasteland at the time of the park’s creation. Today, the area is one of the world’s greatest temperate rainforests and biodiversity hotspots, providing ecosystem services and acting as an economic engine in a traditionally poor region. I am neither unaware of nor deliberately ignoring the benefits of parks; however, protected areas “trying to the right thing” for one context does not undo the damage they have wrought for others. Good intentions will only take one so far in life; as Muldoon (2005) wrote, redemption comes from accepting responsibility for the past and seeking to right previous wrongs.

What Might Reconciliation in a Parks Context Look Like?

Truth telling is the first step to reconciling Indigenous Peoples and protected areas. Indeed, it seems difficult to reconcile without knowing why it is necessary. There are micro-truths (e.g., an Indigenous person being arrested for exercising their treaty rights within a park) and macro-truths (e.g., the fact that parks charged with preserving resources may have a hard time honoring treaty rights to harvest resources within parks). Different scales of truth can be difficult to grasp at the level of individual parks. This difficulty, together with the broad, ongoing nature of settler colonialism, point to the need for a systemwide structure for approaching Indigenous–park reconciliation. Reconciliation should not be an ad-hoc process left to the discretion of individual park units or managers. Agencies need broad, top-level commissions charged specifically and solely with reconciliation, because of both the amount and scale of the work involved in reconciliation as well as the nation-to-nation relationship Indigenous Peoples have with many (but not all) settler-colonial nation-states. An agency-wide commission would necessarily respect such nation-to-nation relationships and protocols.

Designing a park–Indigenous reconciliation commission will require careful thought and planning. The body should be Indigenous oriented, driven, and accountable, mirroring the broad characteristics of reconciliation overall. If the commission serves settler-colonial interests or ignores the ongoing nature of settler colonialism, it will falter. The willful framing of settler colonialism as finished business, coupled with a general blindness to the inherent sovereignty of Indigenous Peoples, directly led to the failure of Australia’s Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (Short, 2003a), for example. If the commission narrowly addresses only parks’ effects without considering the ongoing nature of settler colonialism and the denial of this nature by settlers, it may fail to advance reconciliation (Rice & Snyder, 2008).

To help avoid these problems, a park–Indigenous reconciliation commission should be designed by Indigenous Peoples and serve their needs. As an example, Canada’s 2017 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) Commission of Inquiry has not fully succeeded in part because the inquiry’s terms of reference do not unambiguously address discrimination against Indigenous Peoples by Canadian law enforcement (Glowacki, 2017; Talaga, 2017). While Indigenous Peoples have long identified discrimination as a key problem that the MMIWG inquiry should directly address (Talaga, 2017), an overt recognition of this is missing from the present inquiry’s mandate. Park–Indigenous reconciliation processes and commissions need to address the range of problems that Indigenous Peoples have identified. Importantly, the burden of this work and its costs should fall on settler, not Indigenous, shoulders. Settlers should not be asking those they have oppressed “to do the work of reconciliation” for them (Stanton, 2012, p. 94).

How should a commission operate? First, it needs to build societal interest and support for itself. Canada’s recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to address the Indian Residential School System started not because of societal pressure, but rather because of a legal settlement. The TRC had to convince non-Indigenous Canadians to participate in a process they did not start, which posed a major challenge for the inquiry (Stanton, 2011). A parks commission will have to work to avoid this problem.

A parks commission would do well to follow the example of Thomas Berger’s MacKenzie Valley Pipeline Inquiry. As Stanton (2012) has explained, Berger leveraged the inquiry to increase Canadians’ understanding of northern issues. A parks inquiry should follow a similar model. Berger explicitly referred to his events in Toronto as “travelling teach-ins” (cited in Stanton, 2012, p. 96) that he used to engage non-Indigenous Canadians. Given that many people are likely unaware of parks’ impacts on Indigenous Peoples, a similar focus on education would be useful for a parks commission.

Listening to and documenting Indigenous Peoples’ stories of how parks have affected them would also be wise. Elders, leaders, and community members should all be invited to give their testimony. The commission should seek to learn about the effects of parks, Indigenous Peoples’ conceptions of appropriate justice for the oppression they have endured, and how parks and Indigenous Peoples can together transform their relationship and advance Indigenous, not settler, cultural and economic interests and sovereignty.

Public processes of truth seeking and truth telling both creates space for Indigenous Peoples to speak and be heard and improves existing understandings of the park–Indigenous relationship. This is important work; Agrawal and Redford (2009) have articulated that understandings of this relationship should include:

- A knowledge of how particular management objectives have led to displacement for conservation,
- Determining the exact number of people displaced for park creation,
- The full social impacts of eviction and displacement,
- How governments should address those impacts, and
- How economic displacement compares to physical eviction from protected areas.

While this is an expansive list, I would add that any inquiry should place its concerns within an explicit settler-colonial context, building a narrative that extends beyond simply counting the number of people displaced or identifying what has been lost through dispossession. As Hughes (2012) noted, a fundamental problem with Canada’s TRC was that it essentially “drew a line” in the sand and declared “all this in the past was bad, we [settler-Canadians] are sorry, and we have stopped” (p. 102). This was insufficient since settler-colonial structures and systems remain in place in Canada. Inquiries need to gather data related to their mandates, but situating that data within larger, systemic contexts is key (Nagy, 2013; Stanton, 2012).

As Corntassel et al. (2009) have argued, truth-telling should go together with community-centering actions for stories and truths to have meaningful effects. Such a focus on “actions beyond stories” can facilitate the move from truth telling to acknowledging harm, which is the second stage of reconciliation. Acknowledging harm can entail a variety of strategies, one of which is formal apologies. In 2008, for example, the Government of Canada apologized to Indigenous Peoples for its residential school system; likewise, the Government of Australia has apologized (also in 2008) for the Stolen Generations (Johnson, 2011).

I suggest that protected area managers should begin the second stage of reconciliation by giving their own apologies. Apologies present challenges, for they are “performative” acts designed for perpetrators to latch onto as a sign of “progress or impending change” (Martin, 2009, p. 50). States, not victims, tend to choose the time, manner, and nature of apologies (Corntassel & Holder, 2008; Gibney & Roxstrom, 2001). In this way, apologies can work to advance state stability instead of addressing the underlying causes of a problem (Querengesser, 2013). Apologies of this nature do not require that Indigenous Peoples to respond or even accept them—instead, they center the feelings and perspectives of settlers, who seek to “lift reconciliation out of the political mire and into national affect” (Johnson, 2011, p. 193). However, despite apologies’ limitations, I remain convinced protected area leaders should apologize for the profound harm they have sometimes caused.

Yet acknowledging harm should not stop with government statements or apologies. Imagine, for example, if park maps and brochures contained a call-out text box that acknowledged the origins of the park. Great Smoky Mountains National Park’s might read: “Great Smoky Mountains National Park occupies land violently, illegally seized from the Cherokee Nation in the winter of 1838-1839 by the U.S. Army. Some Cherokee, descendants of the survivors of this ethnic cleansing, continue to reside in the mountains, on a small piece of their traditional territory adjacent to the park.” An acknowledgment for Bunya Mountains might note “Bunya Mountains National Park is situated on unceded territory belonging to the Jarowair, Wakka Wakka, and Barunggam peoples. The park recognizes that it benefits from their dispossession, which was often violent, to this day. The Jarowair, Wakka Wakka, and Barunggam peoples continue to inhabit part of their ancestral homeland in this region.” Notice that such acknowledgements would explicitly state the problematic nature of the park’s creation, specifically name the relevant Indigenous communities, and call attention to communities’ continued presence. These three aspects are key for meaningful land acknowledgments.

Strong language such as “ethnic cleansing” and “unceded territory” may provoke some visitors; indeed, it should. As Marche (2017) has stated: “At least the [land] acknowledgment has shifted the question of the Indigenous crisis, from ‘What is wrong with them [Indigenous Peoples]?’ to ‘What is wrong with us

[settler colonists]?” (para. 17). It is necessary to assert the problem is part of settler colonist, not Indigenous, society. Land acknowledgments that do not foster reflection on harms inflicted by settlers are merely platitudes. An acknowledgment of harm and territory should unsettle histories and stories currently free from Indigeneity.

The third aspect of reconciliation is providing appropriate justice. This can take different forms in different contexts. A helpful way to think about justice-in-reconciliation is as deep, meaningful, community-centered and -driven healing processes (Corntassel et al., 2009). Corntassel et al. (2009) have offered the story of a community that designated a day to collectively demolish a residential school and then hold a feast as an example of justice.

For parks, justice could involve any or all of the following:

- Respecting, preserving, and ensuring continued Indigenous access to sacred sites within parks. This would include restricting or forbidding certain visitor activities, if desired by Indigenous Peoples.
- Fostering settler–Indigenous learning and dialogue through meaningful interpretation of Indigenous histories and perspectives on equal footing with settler-colonists’ stories.
- Permitting traditional use of parks and their resources, with parks always honoring existing treaty rights.
- Setting and achieving Indigenous hiring goals, especially for interpretation and visitor education staff. Indigenous Peoples, not settlers, should be sharing Indigenous stories and perspectives behind parks and the lands upon which they are situated.
- Prioritizing Indigenous enterprises in park contracting and concessions, so that Indigenous Peoples may continue their longstanding economic relationships with their traditional territories.
- Offering park programming and materials in Indigenous languages (given the importance of language in cultural maintenance; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Multilingual materials would also serve as a reminder to settler colonists of the continuation of Indigenous Peoples and cultures.¹⁸
- Working with Elders to help Indigenous youth reconnect with their heritage and traditions. For example, Katannilik Territorial Park in Nunavut, Canada, facilitates a knowledge camp for Inuit youth to visit the park and learn directly from Elders about Inuit heritage and lifeways (Canadian Parks Council, n.d.).
- Fully implementing the Whakatane Mechanism worldwide.
- Designing new management paradigms that reflect the moral and legal rights sovereign Indigenous nations have with respect to their traditional territories.
- Ensuring that no new protected area is created on Indigenous territories without the full, free, prior, and informed consent of the affected nations.

¹⁸ This is already being done at some sites, such as Kakadu National Park (Parks Australia, 2018) and Auyuittuq National Park (Parks Canada, 2010).

The key to reconciliation is not necessarily the form that appropriate justice takes, but rather that Indigenous Peoples themselves identify and drive the process. Agencies need to directly ask Indigenous Peoples: “What is justice in this case? How can we recognize the past and create space for a better future?” As noted above, reconciliation must be accountable to Indigenous Peoples and their futures; Indigenous Peoples, not settler colonists, must make decisions about and approve final forms of justice. Only then is reconciliation possible.

Careful readers may note an omission relating to land in the above list of justice options. Justice and reconciliation are fundamentally about land and sovereignty. This is, I stipulate, the most vexing question before protected areas. But it is a Pandora’s box that must be smashed open. Recall that Australia’s reconciliation process has stalled due to failure to address issues of land. There is no escaping the fact that protected areas in settler-colonial nations have been both the direct cause or incidental beneficiary of land seizures that were, at worst, violent and illegal and, at best, contested.

Potential land tenure changes are understandably troubling for some and may be difficult to achieve, given the public nature of protected area politics.¹⁹ As Wilson (1991) has noted, public agencies are partially guided by their employees’ professional norms and peer-group expectations. As such, if those are not favorable towards Indigenous Peoples, reconciliation may be elusive.

Peters and Andersen (2013) have noted that social norms and expectations are particularly salient in highly urbanized societies like Canada; Clark et al. (2017) have offered a similar interpretation, noting that “a significant minority” of settlers want to “do something” towards reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples (p. 382). Yet, living in urban areas tends to make settler colonists more likely to stereotype Indigenous Peoples and believe that reconciliation ought to be delegated to a third party (Clark et al., 2017; de Costa & Clark, 2016). Protected area managers and agencies in urbanized places like Canada and Australia may thus find themselves caught between competing interests to reconcile with Indigenous Peoples and to avoid land tenure changes for the benefit of park clients.²⁰ Wilson (1991) has suggested that, in such cases, agencies will be “held erect,” doing little due to the pressure coming from all sides (p. 78). Clark et al. (2017) have offered advice on avoiding agency do-nothingness, highlighting the need to “[cultivate] a wider sense of ownership of and responsibility both for unfinished business and for contemporary inequalities” (p. 394). These issues reinforce the usefulness of Berger’s inquiry-as-travelling-teach-in model for a commission regarding park–Indigenous relationships.

If, through the truth-seeking process, Indigenous Peoples state they wish to have their land returned, park agencies must be prepared to have difficult conversations about land tenure changes. If parks choose not to have these conversations, then they are not reconciling with Indigenous Peoples. True reconciliation is not a feel-good effort to wash away guilt caused by the past with minimal cost. Instead, meaningful reconciliation requires both a willingness to acknowledge the privilege accumulated through settler colonialism and, perhaps more importantly, to relinquish that ill-gotten privilege and thereby advance Indigenous sovereignty, nationhood, and self-determination. A failure to engage in good faith with Indigenous demands surrounding land and resource claims after truth telling and acknowledging

¹⁹ Parks are generally governed by public agencies and are subject to client politics and capture by public interest groups (Wilson, 1991).

²⁰ For example, the tourism industry, environmentalists, visitors, etc.

harm would reveal those actions to be hollow. Tuck and Yang (2012) have articulated this failure as settler colonists' "moves towards innocence" (p. 3), in which settlers attempt to reduce their guilty feelings while simultaneously reinforcing and sustaining settler-colonist hegemony.

Moreover, if Indigenous Peoples demand the return of land taken from them for park creation, those demands should be addressed through nation-to-nation dialogue grounded in good-faith, a desire to provide justice, and an accountability to Indigenous futures. As Huyse (2003) has written: "Peaceful coexistence, trust, and empathy do not develop in a sustained way if structural injustices remain" (p. 21). I do not stipulate that land tenure reform is inherently part of reconciliation, but rather that reconciliation demands park managers listen to Indigenous Peoples and be accountable to their goals, which may include land tenure changes.

Park–Indigenous reconciliation is fundamentally an exercise in seeking restorative justice and a dismantling of persistent settler-colonial structures. If Indigenous futures and goals permeate reconciliation efforts, the process may succeed. This may require park managers to reconsider parks' place and function. After over a half-millennium of settler–Indigenous conflict, it is time to be courageous, seek truths, acknowledge harm, and work to provide Indigenous-centered forms of justice.

Examples of Existing Park–Indigenous Reconciliation

Park managers might find reconciliation to be intimidating or disquieting, but it is not a zero-sum game that must end with the dissolution of parks. So long as reconciliation is guided by and accountable to Indigenous Peoples and their futures, reconciliation can take different forms in different places. I will end this article by highlighting a few cases in which park managers have started transforming their relationship with Indigenous Peoples.

Indigenous protected areas (IPAs) reimagine protected areas as institutions governed by and responsive to Indigenous Peoples themselves. Canada's 2018 federal budget includes \$1.3 billion CAD for conservation efforts and "puts Indigenous people in charge of protecting land" (Galloway, 2018, para. 1) with dedicated funding for IPAs. This builds on a 2017 announcement that the Labrador Inuit will direct the management of 380,000 square kilometers of the Labrador Sea, which will include marine protected areas (Galloway, 2017).

In Australia, IPAs started in 1997 (Ross et al., 2009) and have been described as a source of "pride in what has been achieved in a short time and with a small government investment" (Szabo & Smyth, 2003, p. 7). Australian IPAs are fully voluntary, and the level of non-Indigenous support is up to individual IPA managers—although a condition of outside support is that management plans must center conservation (Bauman & Smyth, 2007). Roughly 17% of protected area land in Australia is part of an IPA (Szabo & Smyth, 2003). Szabo and Smyth (2003) have noted the significant advantages that Aboriginal peoples see in Australian IPAs, including: "getting Traditional Owners back on country . . . transferring knowledge between generations and strengthening languages . . . re-establishing traditional burning practices . . . providing training and employment . . . [and] promoting renewed interest about caring for the country" (p. 7). IPAs in both Canada and Australia are, so far, succeeding at centering and affirmatively supporting Indigenous rights and aspirations.

Meanwhile, in the United States, Fort Laramie National Historical Site protects a 19th century fur trading and military outpost where the Northern Plains Indian Nations and the U.S. negotiated the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie. The treaty is a milestone in U.S.–Indigenous relations, as it essentially created the modern reservation system (U.S. National Park Service, 2017b). Moreover, the park “continues to be regarded by American Indian tribes as the gathering site for negotiations” (U.S. National Park Service, 2017b, p. 8).

In 2014, Thomas Baker became superintendent of the park (Scottsbluff Star-Herald Staff, 2014). Before his tenure, the park primarily focused on the Fort’s role as a fur trading center and military post along several east–west colonization trails (U.S. National Park Service, 2016). Since assuming his position, Baker has brought the park’s role as a site of settler–Indigenous negotiations into the park’s foundation statement, which guides all management and programming at the park. Under Superintendent Baker’s leadership, the park has worked with 25 affiliated treaty tribes on a bicentennial commemoration of the 1868 treaty signing, an event that will highlight “the resilience of the tribes” (U.S. National Park Service, 2016, para. 9). Importantly, the U.S. National Park Service (2016) has affirmed that “the park wishes to provide logistical support for the tribes to permanently tell the complete story of Fort Laramie, not just the military story that has been interpreted since its establishment in 1938” (para. 9).

Fort Laramie is a good example of a park moving towards reconciliation without being compelled by the need to solve an immediate conflict. Superintendent Baker has chosen to attempt to undo of the park’s disregard for Indigenous stories and perspectives, challenging the settler-colonial desire to erase Indigeneity and claim space and stories.

Roughly 2,200 miles northeast of Fort Laramie is Torngat Mountains National Park in Labrador, Canada, which preserves 3,700 square miles of Arctic mountains, fjords, and tundra. As a fly-in-only park with virtually no visitor facilities, the park might seem to be a wilderness without people, but it is not. Labrador Inuit continue to inhabit and use this land. With support from Parks Canada, Labrador Inuit are sustaining their cultural identity and sovereignty in the Torngats.

The Canadian Crown and Labrador Inuit negotiated the *Labrador Inuit Land Claim Agreement* in the early 2000s. During these negotiations, the two parties agreed to jointly create and manage Torngat Mountains National Park. Unlike many other World Heritage Sites, Canada gazetted Torngat Mountains with the full, free, prior, and informed consent of the affected Indigenous nation. Though this case is an exception to common practice (Disko & Tugendhat, 2014), it could serve as a valuable example for the creation and management of other parks.

Additionally, Torngat Mountains is an important source of economic opportunity for the Labrador Inuit, who have preference in park hiring and contracting (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2008). As much as possible, the park leases physical assets from Inuit corporations rather than purchasing items outright. Park visitors engage the services of Inuit-owned guides and concessionaries (Fugmann, 2012). This ensures that Labrador Inuit continue to economically benefit from their traditional territory.

Finally, the park is cooperatively managed by Parks Canada and the Labrador Inuit via the Torngat Mountains Cooperative Management Board. This arrangement is not immune from criticism,²¹ but LeBlanc and LeBlanc (2010) have noted that the management board has a unique ability to “speak directly to the management and staff of the park” (p. 24). The fact that park employees are mostly Inuit reinforces Inuit power over the park. In the Torngats, criticisms of Parks Canada are somewhat less persuasive than they are elsewhere. However, it would be too much to say that Parks Canada deserves unqualified accolades for their work at Torngat Mountains. Yes, much has been achieved— but this progress is rooted in talks conducted at a bargaining table for the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement. The day that parks like Torngat Mountains exist without a land claim behind them will be a day to celebrate.

Concluding Remarks

Deciding to write about park–Indigenous reconciliation filled me with anxiety: Can settler-colonial parks ever hope to reconcile themselves with Indigenous Peoples? Is there a clear path forward? Can “reconciliation” be more than a trendy, feel-good buzzword?

I have argued that the answer to each of these questions is an emphatic yes. There are many avenues through which protected area agencies may work towards reconciliation, so long as they allow themselves to be guided by and held accountable to Indigenous Peoples. Reconciliation does not mean no new parks, nor does it entail the wholesale condemnation of parks as inherently evil institutions— Torngat Mountains, for example, demonstrates this.

Reconciliation offers park managers and Indigenous Peoples the opportunity to confront their shared past and address it by moving forward together in fraternal, rather than paternal or exclusionary, relations. For reconciliation to succeed, non-Indigenous peoples must recognize and actively support Indigenous Peoples’ sovereignty. Indigenous futures should be the guiding light for this work. If the end goal is not to provide restorative justice, then it is hard to see how reconciliation will allow for the settler-colonist–Indigenous relationship to be reset or create space for healing.

Reconciliation is, I believe, at its core a humbling act. The protected area profession must accept responsibility for past harms. Reconciliation asks settler colonists to turn a critical eye on themselves and their institutions, reflecting on how they treat and have treated those who have been their friends, neighbors, and hosts for centuries. It calls settlers to relinquish their privilege and focus on advancing Indigenous sovereignty, rather than continuing to blithely assert settler-colonial control over land and natural resource management.

²¹ That is, Parks Canada retains final decision-making power and is accountable to the Government of Canada, not to Inuit.

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