Once Upon A Millpond Dreary: A case study in the intersection between shifting cultural perceptions and ecological states

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Environmental historians segment US history into distinct time periods that coincide with prevailing cultural values and how these play out in the political arena. Likewise, ecologists view ecosystems in states that correspond to the degrees of human impact and manipulation. As this case study of a former lumber mill pond on the campus of Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington demonstrates, both ecological states and cultural perceptions of the environment occur along a chronological continuum in which the changing values of American society regarding the natural world correspond to shifting ecological states. Our research found four distinct ecological states, plotted on the left side that correspond to four distinct cultural values, plotted on the right.

Natural

For much of the 19th century, America venerated two conflicting visions of nature: Manifest Destiny and Romantic. During the 1860s in Spokane, while settlers envisaged the former, while Jesuit missionaries reflected the latter. Seeking to establish a college, in 1880, the Jesuits purchased 354 acres from the Northern Pacific. All along the north bank of the Spokane River, a couple miles upstream from the town. The Jesuits focused on the unspoiled nature of the site, shaped as they were by a spiritual tradition that recognized the inspirational power of beauty and nature.

Hybrid

In reaction to the excesses of industrial exploitation and urbanization, a rising ecological consciousness permeated American values in 1880s and 1900s. Spokane and Gonzaga were no exception to this new view of nature and emphasized the river valley’s natural beauty. After 1882, the Spokane river basin transformed from a straight industrial canal into a scenic asset.

1880s

The Jesuits initiated the campus pond as a site for reflection and contemplation. The construction of upriver dams, weirs, railroads, pollution, and seeing naturalness. The natural state corresponds to the establishment of Gonzaga and the Jesuit conception of nature as a place for reflection and contemplation. The construction of upriver dams, weirs, railroads, pollution, and seeing naturalness. The natural state corresponds to the establishment of Gonzaga and the Jesuit conception of nature as a place for reflection and contemplation. The construction of upriver dams, weirs, railroads, pollution, and seeing naturalness. The natural state corresponds to the establishment of Gonzaga and the Jesuit conception of nature as a place for reflection and contemplation. The construction of upriver dams, weirs, railroads, pollution, and seeing naturalness. The natural state corresponds to the establishment of Gonzaga and the Jesuit conception of nature as a place for reflection and contemplation. The construction of upriver dams, weirs, railroads, pollution, and seeing naturalness. The natural state corresponds to the establishment of Gonzaga and the Jesuit conception of nature as a place for reflection and contemplation.