

How Female Activists Shaped the Story of Indiana's Wetlands

Elijah Eckert

eeckert817@gmail.com

Huntington University, Senior

Of all the states in the United States, Indiana may be one of the states least known for natural beauty. Like many Midwestern states, the stereotype around Indiana is that it is all cornfields and pastures. This is especially true in northern Indiana, where you can drive from one end to the other and only see farmlands the entire way you go. Throughout the history of this region though, that couldn't have been further from the truth. In recent history, northern Indiana was known for something very different. Northern Indiana was known for its swamps. These swamps included Limberlost Swamp, the Great Black Swamp, and the Grand Kankakee Marsh. However, all these swamps, along with other marshes, bogs, and wetlands have been drained and dredged almost out of existence. Indiana, a land that was originally covered in wetlands, is now a land that isn't. Because of this draining, many changes have occurred on the landscape and to the ecology of this region, bringing benefits and causing damages to the people who inhabit it today.

One of the key reasons for this draining has been a battle around the perceptions of wetlands. In the past, wetlands were seen as a dangerous area, an area that needed to be removed to make way for civilization. Wetlands were considered to be inhospitable, much like the deserts of the West or the tundra of Alaska. In the modern era, this perception has evolved. Many now see the wetlands as an area that is vital for the ecology of the state. Wetlands are areas now considered to be worth protection and celebration. However, there are still challenges to the existence of wetlands in Indiana, and their relevance and importance to the modern world. In fact, many of the arguments against wetlands are not even new. Instead, they stretch back to the past, in the era where the wetlands were being drained and dredged at a rapid rate. This perception begs answers to the questions. What is the history of the wetlands of Indiana? What is the majority perception and why has it persisted? Who opposed the draining of the wetlands, and what is being done today to preserve them?

It is estimated that in the United States as a whole, 124 million acres of wetlands have been drained out of 215 million acres before European settlement. The most extensive of that drainage occurred in the Midwest.¹ In Indiana, 97% of wetland area was lost to drainage. Drainage was done by using ceramic pipes dug into the ground to channel water away from wetlands and restrict its flow. By restricting this flow of water through the wetlands they are destroyed. Most of the drainage happened between 1850-1930.² With the introduction of industrial production and machines, drainage could happen more rapidly and areas that could not be drained before were now able to be drained. An example is the steam dredge, which allowed for irrigation channels to be dug directly from the water which supplied wetlands into the fields to be used.³ One major reason for this drainage was economic. In his 1914 record of “Drainage and Reclamation of Swamp and Overflowed Lands” by Dr. Charles Kettleborough, legislative draftsman for Indiana, and he wrote a detailed account of the state of wetlands and dry lands in Indiana. In the selection, he says that “But even as late as 1910, upwards of 1,000,000 acres were still unreclaimed, unimproved and unproductive.”⁴ He estimates that the value of improving these lands would lead to over \$7,000,000 in yearly profits, which could pay for the expenses of the state for an entire year.⁵ This shows one of the motivations for drainage in the Midwest. Draining the wetlands would allow for massive amounts of new economic production, something that the new state desperately needed to attract new people. By adding hundreds of thousands of

¹ Mary R McCorvie and Christopher L. Lant, “Drainage District Formation and the Loss of Midwestern Wetlands, 1850-1930,” *Agricultural History* 67, no. 4 (1993), 13.

² *Ibid.*, 22.

³ Thomas E. Dahl and Gregory J. Allord, *History of Wetlands in the Conterminous United States*, United States Geological Survey Paper 2425. (US Geological Survey: 1997), 4.

⁴ Charles Kettleborough, “Drainage and Reclamation of Swamp and Overflowed Lands,” *Indiana Bureau of Legislative Information Bulletin*, no. 2, (1914), 14.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

acres of productive farmlands, the state could attract immigrants to come and farm on the land and produce economic value. Kettleborough makes it very clear in his writing that wetlands are unproductive lands. They are of negative value because they cannot be farmed or harvested for resources. Kettleborough also stressed that wetlands have impacts on the lands around them. He believed that wetlands were not drained sufficiently and adequately, and this lackluster drainage meant that arable land in Indiana was still not as productive as it could be, meaning that Indiana still required more drainage.⁶ With this extra drainage, you could by his word, protect Indiana's farms from seasonal and weather-related flooding, to which he credited wetlands.⁷

Kettleborough reasoned that draining of the wetlands turned land with no purpose into highly productive land that could be used more efficiently. Of course, especially in the Midwest, where there was great soil and weather for farming. There was also a health benefit to drainage. Kettleborough describes the atmosphere as being humid, the drinking water contaminated, and swamps having venomous reptiles and insects.⁸ Malaria was also endemic to the region at the time, contributing to many deaths. Kettleborough estimated that malaria deaths accounted for \$10,200,000 of loss annually in 1913 in the United States.⁹ Drainage of swamplands deprived mosquitos a habitat, because these malarial mosquitos live and thrive in wetland environments. Wetlands are major habitats for these animals that Kettleborough was describing, so naturally by removing their homes, you could be rid of the pests that existed in the wetlands. Kettleborough connected ridding Indiana of the wetlands' pests as a way to protect its citizens and increase economic viability and production in the state.

⁶ Ibid., 45.

⁷ Ibid., 45.

⁸ Ibid., 16.

⁹ Ibid., 17.

Kettleborough clearly outlines the conventional thinking about wetlands in the state of Indiana. Kettleborough describes the wetlands in a solely negative manner. The wetlands are seen as an obstacle at best, and a source of death and destruction on the state and its people at worst. This perception caused the draining of 97% of the wetlands within the state. No one was speaking out to oppose the drainage because people also agreed with him. Kettleborough mentions in his report that public sentiment towards drainage must be altered and aroused to emphasize the economic value of drainage and to provide a convenient instrument by which to carry out a drainage program.¹⁰ Wetlands became targeted by governments around the United States as areas to foster a negative public opinion about. By fostering this negative public opinion, drainage advocates had no obstacle to creating more arable land. Generating this arable land would lead to more profits, therefore proving the need to drain wetlands, and sustain this line of thinking until the eventual eradication of all wetlands in the Indiana.

Kettleborough's perception of the wetlands expressed the perception of the Indiana government and businesses leaders who wished to build and develop an agricultural economy in the state. For these entities, economic concerns are always their top priority. Anything standing in the way of economic development was something to be brushed aside to make space for productive business. Because of this, people like Kettleborough played an important role in Indiana in giving the wetlands the negative reputation with which they became synonymous. The wetlands were perceived as a land that was dirty, a poison, inhospitable, and obstructive. Therefore, the necessity of purging them by any means necessary became prudent. Of course, many citizens in Indiana agreed with this sentiment too. Cleared wetlands would be potential farms that could start with extremely fertile soil. These lands offered the promise to make

¹⁰ Ibid., 23.

themselves a good living. Kettleborough's argument appeared hard to resist when you take in all these factors are taken into consideration. Kettleborough's argument would also come from precedent set-in other states and set precedent for later draining across the country.¹¹ The United States, and the people of Indiana, would become addicted to drainage and removing wetlands from their environments.

The whims and opinions of the public can change quickly though. Ideas are a not static and unchanging. Kettleborough described how prior to 1860, there was widespread opposition to drainage.¹² Many of those who already lived in the region relied on the animals, plants, and resources that they harvested from the wetlands. Destruction of these areas spelled an end to their way of life. In his time, another person provided a voice for these people. Gene Stratton-Porter, a famous Indiana author, wrote extensively about Indiana in the early 1900s. Stratton-Porter made most of her money off her best-selling romance novels, but she was also a committed environmentalist. Stratton-Porter learned this from her family, who encouraged her to experience and play in her natural environment.¹³ She took up an interest in nature from her experiences, became a wildlife photographer, and a writer of magazine stories about birds she watched. This was her entrance into the world of nature writing. Stratton-Porter used these experiences in these natural environments in her books to provide a background for her novels. For her, nature was a peaceful refuge for life, a place of beauty and tranquility. Stratton-Porter moved to Geneva, Indiana later in life. This area was adjacent to the Limberlost Swamp.¹⁴ Limberlost had a profound impact on Stratton-Porter. She saw this area as a natural wonder of inspiring beauty.

¹¹ Ibid., 9-11.

¹² Ibid., 12.

¹³ Gene Stratton-Porter, *A Little Story of the Life and Work and Ideals of "The Bird Woman"*, Page & Company, (New York: 1926), 10-13

¹⁴ Ibid., 30-31

Her avid birdwatching, and the swamp's plethora of birds for her to see that were unique to that area made Limberlost of enchantment to her. Limberlost was to Stratton-Porter an example of the perfection in nature that should be celebrated. This passage is from one of her best-selling books, *A Girl of the Limberlost*:

“Elnora walked by instinct, for her eyes were blinded with tears. She left the road where it turned south, at the corner of the Limberlost, climbed a snake fence and entered a path worn by her own feet. Dodging under willow and scrub oak branches she came at last to the faint outline of an old trail made in the days when the precious timber of the swamp was guarded by armed men. This path she followed until she reached a thick clump of bushes. From the debris in the end of a hollow log she took a key that unlocked the padlock of a large weather-beaten old box, inside of which lay several books, a butterfly apparatus, and a small, cracked mirror. The walls were lined thickly with gaudy butterflies, dragonflies, and moths.¹⁵”

In this passage, we see Stratton-Porter's love affair with everything about Limberlost. She loved the plant life. She loves the insects. She loved the peace and escape from society. Throughout this novel, Limberlost depicted as a place of refuge for the main character, Elnora. It also becomes her livelihood, a place to learn, a place to love, and a place to grow. Much of this, of course, reflects Stratton-Porter's own experience of growing up and living around Limberlost. Further on, in another passage, a character discusses the value of the animals of Limberlost, and the impact of the swamp on the way people lived their lives.

“Yes,” said the Bird Woman, “I will buy them, also the big moth caterpillars

¹⁵ Gene Stratton-Porter, *A Girl of the Limberlost*, (Gutenberg Press: 2006), 3

that are creeping everywhere now, and the cocoons that they will spin just about this time. I have a sneaking impression that the mystery, wonder, and the urge of their pure beauty, are going to force me to picture and paint our moths and put them into a book for all the world to see and know. We Limberlost people must not be selfish with the wonders God has given to us. We must share with those poor cooped-up city people the best we can. To send them beautiful book, that is the way, is it not, little new friend of mine?"

"Yes, oh yes!" cried Elnora. "And please God they find a way to earn the money to buy the books, as I have those I need so badly."¹⁶

These two passages show us a bit of insight into the way that Stratton-Porter herself viewed Limberlost. In the second passage, she is both Elnora and the Bird Woman. She saw the value of Limberlost in her own unique way that combines these two perspectives. She both saw the beauty, and the people who relied on Limberlost for their livelihood. The crucial detail is, though, that her writing about Limberlost is not only unique in her time, but also especially unique for a woman to be writing about the beauty of a swamp. This contradicts the norms of the period, where swamps are demonized to be anti-human. It also contradicts the notion of what a woman should like. A woman shouldn't appreciate a wasteland like Limberlost. A woman should prefer trimmed gardens and parks. Swamps did not have the reputation of being beautiful like these cultivated areas. She should not be willing to immerse herself in unkept and untamed nature, because that is a man's role. And what a man should do in that nature is conquer and destroy it if he finds himself within it. Stratton-Porter subverted these expectations though and

¹⁶ Ibid., 77.

instead revealed a different reality. In this different reality, women are just as connected with the land as men.

In some cases, women are more connected to the land than men. This different reality can be seen in the real environmental movement in America in this period and after, where women in the Audubon Society spearheaded protection of wildlife and wilderness, and Jane Adams and Alice Hamilton fought for protections of the environment in cities.¹⁷ Stratton-Porter was this period's Jane Adams of the wetlands. She joined groups and advocated publicly on the behalf of the preservation of wetlands. One of these was Marjory Stoneman Douglas. She was a resident of Florida, who wrote a piece of admiration for the wetlands of the Everglades. She wrote on the first page, "There are no other Everglades in the world."¹⁸ Her book and further activism in her life led to the movement to protect and preserve the Everglades that we are familiar with to this day.

Of course, writing novels was not the only way that women advocated for the environment. When Limberlost started to come under attack, Stratton-Porter fought for protection of the land through petitioning the government, her writings, and public appearances. In this way, she differed from most women of her time. Her arguments for protection were more like the modern arguments that we see today, based on science, ecology, and aesthetic beauty. She did not just sit by and let an important feature of her childhood and her novels be destroyed completely without having her say. In 1922, she joined the Izaak Walton League, a group that would grow to over 75,000 members. This group took up the battle of fighting to be the defenders of soil, vegetation,

¹⁷ Florence M. Bailey, "Florence Merriam Bailey Recalls the Early Audubon Women, 1900," *Major Problems in American Environmental History*, Caroline Merchant, 353-354; Robert Gottlieb, "Industrial Pollution and Reform," *Major Problems in American Environmental History*, Caroline Merchant, 407-408.

¹⁸ Jack E. Davis, *Everglades Providence: Marjory Stoneman Douglas and the American Environmental Century*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009.), 11.

water, and wildlife.¹⁹ Stratton-Porter used these groups, and her public persona and influence, to try to convince those who occupied powerful positions to pass preservation laws to safeguard the land and its natural beauty. She fought for preservation around the United States. However, she was unable to save her beloved Limberlost, and it was eventually drained almost in its entirety. Stratton-Porter once came home to her old home in Limberlost destroyed and plowed over.²⁰ Because of this, Stratton-Porter ended up leaving Indiana, and died in Los Angeles later in the 1920s.

Like Stratton-Porter, Marjory Stoneman Douglas also joined groups and committed to organizing to get the Everglades protected. She attempted to raise awareness of the increasing encroachment of society into these essential biomes.²¹ One example of this was her fight against Ludwig Enterprises and their attempt to put an oil rig in the Everglades watershed. This oil rig and other developments would have caused significant damage if the plans were put into place. However, efforts from Stoneman Douglas and the Safe Progress Association stopped the plans and got laws passed to make sure that Florida's environment was protected.²² Stoneman Douglas was the Stratton-Porter of the Everglades, and because of her efforts, the Everglades are still a treasure of the nation. Without women like her and Stratton-Porter, America's swamps would be even less existent. Women always were at the forefront of environmental protection, and the influential and key role that women played with their writing and its style are directly responsible for a new way of seeing these wetland areas.

¹⁹ Katherine E. Rasche, "Success in the Limberlost: Concepts of nature and the successful Success in the Limberlost: Concepts of nature and the successful life in the Limberlost novels of Gene Stratton-Porter life in the Limberlost novels of Gene Stratton-Porter," (College of William & Mary – Arts & Sciences: 1982), 37-38.

²⁰ Ibid., 38.

²¹ Ibid., 319-321.

²² Ibid., 322.

Stratton-Porter and other women though left an important legacy in the history of environmentalism in Indiana and the nation at large. Her legacy is a legacy of active participation in nature, and protection for not just the benefit of the animals and plant life in these areas. This legacy is a guideline for how to participate in environmental activism. While Stratton-Porter had extensive knowledge of the plants and animals that inhabited Limberlost and cherished them deeply, the important thing to notice about both her writings and her activism is her insistence on living within the environment, not apart from it. Because of this, the movement that followed from her in Indiana became a movement that emphasized coexistence with the environment that we are meant to protect. Stratton-Porter didn't want human beings to have their hands completely off of the environment and to sit by the wayside. Instead, she wanted humans to be in these great lands and live in kind with what existed in them. She fought the idea that industrialization and urbanization needed to be dominating of everything around them and people needed to consume everything that they touched. She did not argue against industrialization or for a return to a more primitive way of life. This differentiates her from other, more militant environmentalists. It also has left a legacy to Indiana environmentalists in the modern era, who were inspired by her ideas and notions about nature and its beauty.

Stratton-Porter and Kettleborough outlined the debate around wetlands in Indiana in their time. The debate centered around the multiple values of the land. Kettleborough saw the land only for its economic values. Because of this, Kettleborough made arguments against the existence of the wetlands and saw them as something to be eliminated for the benefit of the people of the state of Indiana. This is contrasted by Stratton-Porter. Stratton-Porter saw the wetlands as something with an aesthetic and natural value. She saw them as defining the people of Indiana and its culture. Without the wetlands, Indiana would not have been Indiana to

Stratton-Porter. Both saw the wetlands as a resource though, in contrast later writers and thinkers like Aldo Leopold, who developed the idea that nature was an end in of itself, in his 1949 book *Sand County Almanac*. He believed that nature demanded our respect and didn't need a human value placed on it for it to be special, a modern take on environmentalism that was not prevalent at the time of Stratton-Porter and Kettleborough. Both Stratton-Porter and Kettleborough saw the wetlands as something that humans must interact with and take value from, whether it be the extrinsic economic value of Kettleborough, or the intrinsic aesthetic and natural value of Stratton-Porter.

These sentiments are mirrored in the modern day. Even though the raw amount of wetland in Indiana is much lower than it was in the past, wetlands are vital to Indiana. Wetlands may be even more vital because of the loss during the late nineteenth century. Because of this significance, there is much debate in the state government on what to do with and how to develop Indiana's wetlands. As government has matured over the years, and its reach has been expanded, this means that legislation became necessary to make an attempt to protect the state's wetlands. An example of this is Governor Eric Holcomb's New Indiana Wetlands Law.

Indiana environmental groups in the tradition of Stratton-Porter are fighting to protect more of Indiana's wetlands so they cannot be developed and destroyed. One example of this is activism is the Save the Dunes council, who fought to protect the unique ecosystem of the Indiana Dunes.²³ Because of advocacy like this, there is motivation for lawmakers to address the concerns of these groups and pass a law addressing Indiana's wetlands and their status.²⁴

Holcomb therefore introduced and passed the New Indiana Wetlands Law. This law, which was

²³ Jeffery B. Webb, *Ed Rough's Glimpse of the Wild at the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore*, (Fredericksburg, Virginia: University of Mary Washington, 2018.), 3-5.

²⁴ Indiana Department of Environmental Management, *State Regulated Wetland Class Determination* (State of Indiana Department of Environmental Management: September 2021.), 1.

signed in 2021, was an alteration to a prior wetland law that Republican lawmakers in the Indiana legislature were looking to get rid of entirely.²⁵ It provides for wetland designation, what qualifies a wetland for protection, asserts the need for protecting Indiana's wetlands, and attempts to address concerns of environmental groups. Because of this broad scope, this bill was debated heavily, took lengthy path to enactment, and ended up satisfying none of the interested parties.

For starters, the bill was supposed provide a definition for a wetland. The problem with this is that wetlands come in many different shapes, sizes, and forms. Perhaps the most famous example of a wetland is a swamp. Swamps are wetlands that grow trees and form large forests, like the bayou in Louisiana and other southern states. There are a few of these swamps in southern Indiana, but by and large, swamps do not make up most Indiana's wetland areas. Indiana's wetlands are more typically marshes, and more rarely bogs. Marshes are wetlands that are made up of grasses instead of trees. These might also only be inundated for parts of the year, and other parts of the year remain dry. Bogs are wetlands that receive a majority of their water through rainfall. These wetlands therefore will be chains of small pools of water during rainy times, and pools of mud during dryer times. Examples of both of these kinds of wetlands can be found by Lake Michigan at the Indiana Dunes National Park, where there are both bogs and marshes because of the geography. This leads to difficulties in defining wetlands in Indiana. Since wetlands can be seasonal and not permanent, it can lead to arguments about whether a certain area is actually a wetland, or is just a floodplain, or both. While there may be scientific

²⁵ Sarah Bowman, "More than 100 groups ask Holcomb to veto controversial wetlands bill. He signed it into law," (IndyStar: 2021), accessed at: <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/environment/2021/04/29/gov-holcomb-signs-indiana-wetlands-bill-into-law/7401949002/>

consensus on what comprises a wetland, that does not mean that politicians will listen to those recommendations, and instead will make their own rules up to serve their own interests.

Another problem that arose was the debate on what should qualify a wetland for protection. It would not be possible politically to protect every single area that qualifies, no matter how narrow you make the definition. The reality is that wetlands typically are not a small area of land and therefore inevitably come into contact with human society to some extent, whether that contact be through farming, industry, road construction, or any number of modern demands. Therefore, it was important during the drafting and debating of this law to come up with a proper qualification for protection. To obtain protection, the US Army Corps of Engineers must determine if the land has wetland or water features. If these are present, then a determination is made to see if they are Waters of the Nation, meaning they would fall under federal protection, or Waters of the State, meaning that protection is up to the State of Indiana.²⁶ Then, the State of Indiana decides to a certain extent what protection will be provided. Indiana then further divides wetlands into classes. Class III wetlands, the highest tier, are defined as wetlands that are rare and ecologically important that are located in a setting undisturbed by human activity and development and supports wildlife or aquatic habitat or hydrologic function. Class II wetlands support moderate habitat and hydrologic function, is dominated by native species, but doesn't have endangered or threatened species. Class I wetlands are wetlands that already are disturbed by human activity and also do not host many species or any endangered species.²⁷

These provisions leave a lot of wetland environments out of protection based on the regulations. It also views some wetlands as more ecologically important and vital than others,

²⁶ Indiana Department of Environmental Management, *State Regulated Wetland Class Determination*, (State of Indiana Department of Environmental Management: September 2021.), 1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

allowing for some of Indiana's rare wetlands to be deemed of lesser ecological value to continue to be eroded and destroyed. Because of this, drafting of this portion of the law proved to be difficult. Difficulty arose because of different values placed on the land and the perceived need to protect Indiana's wetlands. These values heavily reflect the same sort of arguments of 150 years ago about draining lands in Indiana for farmland.

Environmentalists stress the needs of wetlands being congruent with the needs of Hoosiers. Wetlands provide not just habitats for animals when left undisturbed, wetlands also are effective as flood prevention. Indiana's geography, especially in the north, comprise vast river valleys that are prone to flooding. These valleys were caused by glaciers, which cut rivers through the mostly flat plains of Indiana. These rivers became like scars from glacial receding across the stretches of land in Indiana.²⁸ Rivers are surrounded by miles and miles of flat plains, meaning that if a river in Indiana overran its banks, it was caused a massive flood. This meant that cities and farms in Indiana, which are centered around the extensive river system, are prone to flooding. When it rains in Indiana, since the rivers are the drainage point for most water in Indiana, rivers can overrun their banks quickly. This is where wetlands can help. Wetlands are stores of water. They are a place where water can collect that is not a river, reducing the likelihood of a river overrunning its banks and flooding a city. Wetlands are also helpful if located adjacent to riverbanks in soaking up water overflows and keeping water constrained within the wetland, instead of in farmlands and cities.

Another benefit of wetlands to humans is water quality. Wetlands are excellent filters. Because of the various plant life that exists in wetlands, water traveling through these areas goes

²⁸ Jerry Wilson, *How the Ice Age Shaped Indian*, (Wilstar Media: 2008), 14.

through a natural filtration process. This filtration purifies water leaving wetlands.²⁹ Wetlands are vital to preserving water quality in Indiana. Indiana has horrible water quality. In fact, 24,395 miles of Indiana's rivers and streams are deemed not to be safe for recreation, topping the list of all states.³⁰ Destruction of the wetlands is part of the problem, because as explained before, it means that all water that lands on the ground in Indiana drains into its rivers and streams. This water picks up pollutants from the ground and carries it into Indiana's waters. In Indiana, this waste is mostly comprised of farm runoff. Chemicals sprayed onto crops and in fertilizer dissolve into rivers and contaminate the waters in which we drink, bathe, and swim in. Therefore, there is an incentive to protect wetlands for the benefit of public health. Wetlands are a vital line of protection against the hazards of farm runoff and water pollution.

While these might be sufficient reasons to prove the need to protect wetlands, they are not sufficient reasons for other groups who wish to remove what they consider obstructions contained in the Indiana Wetland Protection Law. The most vocal and influential group funding a change to the law is the construction and building industry.³¹ In its eyes, as per the IndyStar, wetlands get in the way of development of land into housing, industry, and infrastructure. In their view, wetlands would be better used as drained land with productive buildings and roads to fuel Indiana's economy and provide jobs. In the Indiana Senate, the debate between those who wish to protect the environment and the natural beauty of Indiana and those who wish to economically develop Indiana and make it into a more robust economy continues to rage. Governor Holcomb is a pro-business Republican, echoing Charles Kettleborough, and usually would be willing to

²⁹ INDEM, *State Regulated Wetland Class Determination*, 3.

³⁰ Courtney Bernhardt,, Keene Kelderman, Paul MacGillis, Tom Pelton, Ari Phillips, and Eric Shaeffer. *The Clean Water Act at 50: Promises Half Kept at the Half-Century Mark*. Environmental Integrity Project. (Environmental Integrity Project: March 17, 2022), 5.

³¹ Bowman, "More than 100..."

make concessions to businesses. However, in this instance, Holcomb made his opposition to the initial pro-industry drafts of the bill clear.³² In this era of very partisan politics, and in a state as red as Indiana, what makes sense is Holcomb agreeing with whatever his party supports and following through with it. Holcomb instead chose to hold off and endeavor to make changes to the legislation, showing shades of Stratton-Porter.

Holcomb's opposition to the initial, more radical drafts shows the dilemma in Indiana regarding its wetlands and natural beauty. This dilemma is the legacy of early thinkers like Kettleborough and Gene Stratton-Porter. Both people encapsulate the relationship that Hoosiers have with the land they inhabit. Indiana is a state with a lot of natural beauty in the places where nature has been allowed to be untouched. The rolling hills and forests of Southern Indiana are cut by creeks and cascading waterfalls. These features give the region an appearance that is very unique even within the United States. Northern Indiana is dotted by lakes, both small and large, cut through the glaciation period and remaining to this day. Northwest Indiana has a stretch of sand dunes surrounding Lake Michigan that are now a National Park. To Hoosiers, all of these areas are what we think of when we think of the major aspects that define Indiana's natural beauty. The wetlands are also a part of this, both historically and to this day. So, of course to any Hoosier, some sort of protection of the wetlands should be a priority. In George Perkins Marsh's essay on the relationship between Man and Nature, he describes nature as having a stability.³³ Man comes in and disrupts this stability, thereby permanently altering the land away from its initial state.³⁴ He says, "The Earth was not, in its natural condition, completely adapted to the use

³² Ibid.

³³ George P. Marsh, "George Perkins Marsh Discusses the Relationship of Man and Nature, 1864" in *Major Problems in American Environmental History*, Caroline Merchant, 314.

³⁴ Ibid., 316

of man, but only to the sustenance of wild animals and wild vegetation.”³⁵ Marsh describes in detail why Hoosiers might feel a sense of responsibility to protect the wetlands. We know that we have altered our home substantially and now we must live in kind with what we have left before we risk losing it all. However, in the present day, there are still human needs that must be met by the land. Humans need land to be productive to sustain themselves, and as the nation becomes more and more a highly consumptive society, industry needs to produce goods more efficiently in a looping cycle to meet people’s needs. These needs will clash inevitably with our longing to protect nature and our homes. This situation means, there will be times that tough decisions must be made either one way or another.

Holcomb decided when he passed the bill after amendments in 2021 to try to run down the middle of the aisle. Holcomb’s bill did change wetland protection in Indiana and remove protection from some wetlands.³⁶ It did not completely satisfy the desires of the construction companies either which were lobbying for the bill to be passed.³⁷ Holcomb of course ended up pleasing no one with this bill. Our modern-day Stratton-Porters and Kettleboroughs left the experience upset. The debate around what Indiana should do with its wetlands continues to this day. In 2023, wetlands again came under attack. Lawmakers tried to attach redefining of wetlands into a bill that was addressing septic and sewer systems. This bill would have again tried to make getting wetlands protected more difficult.³⁸ The language ended up getting dropped from the bill, a win for the Stratton-Porters. In the future, Indiana’s wetlands will continue to be under attack.

³⁵ Ibid., 316

³⁶ Bowman “More than 100...”

³⁷ Cate Charron, “Legislation cutting wetland protections in Indiana dies, Democrats celebrate victory,” (IndyStar: April 2023.), accessed at: <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/environment/2023/04/20/indiana-wetlands-lawmakers-drop-environmental-protections-cut/70103158007/>

³⁸ Ibid.

It won't just be Indiana's wetland too. As global warming increases, and fresh water becomes scarcer, wetlands around the world will be targeted for their large reserves of water. This water can be drained from these areas and used to provide water for other uses. Around the world, we will see more and more wetlands being targeted as sources of water. This will present a whole new challenge to the preservation of wetlands, as they will become even more critical to humans as a necessary natural resource. Governments will have to take more steps in deciding whether they want to preserve their wetlands as they are currently, or they want to use the water in them to sustain life in communities that need it.

The dance around wetlands, their role, and their protection will most likely be ever present and continue for many generations to come. Not much about the core of the argument has changed in over 150 years, but the examples that we see present new challenges to wetlands. Wetlands will always be seen as a resource for humans to tap into. Women like Gene Stratton-Porter and men like Charles Kettleborough show us that the debate over what to do has been raging on for a very long time, and will continue to go on. Their arguments for what the purpose of the wetlands was and why we should appreciate them continues to be relevant to this day. Wetland preservation now can be seen as a battle between continuing development or extending natural preservation. Now and in the future, major wetlands around the world are at risk of being destroyed. Sadly, when wetlands disappear and are removed, they are at risk of never coming back in the way that they once were. Destroying them for now is likely a permanent decision, so great caution needs to be taken no matter what purpose we see in wetlands to make sure they still are a piece of nature that we continue to inhabit. However, we have a voice, and strong women like Gene Stratton-Porter and Marjory Stoneman Douglas have showed us the way to make changes in our governments to protect our cherished natural environments. If we follow in the

footsteps of these women, we can leave behind a world in which our children can appreciate the natural beauty of Earth we get to appreciate.

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