

# NATIONAL FOREST MANAGEMENT: LDS VIEWS IN EASTERN ARIZONA

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Shortly after publishing *Boundaries of Our Habitations: Tradition and Theological Construction*, Delwin Brown penned his own criticism of his work. *Boundaries of Our Habitations* specified a three-stage process for academic theology that included systematic, empirical, and evaluative phases. In his subsequent article, Brown identified an inadequacy in this three-fold description. Even before systematic reflection, academic theology must begin with what might be called fieldwork: exploration of the lived practice of a religious community. At the heart of Brown's self-criticism is the recognition "that ideas mean nothing at all except in the context of lived practice, and what they mean actually depends, in part at least, on where they are practiced and how they are practiced there."

Such fieldwork does not replace the systematic, empirical, and evaluative phases of academic theology; it does, however, provide a necessary input to that larger project. "The effort to place ideas in actual believing communities is the beginning, not the end, of academic theological inquiry. It give[s] real-world reference to the theologian's systematic and empirical analyses, and real-world relevance to his evaluations."<sup>1</sup>

This manuscript is a modest contribution toward such an exploration of lived practice in believing communities, offered in service to the larger project of exploring and articulating Latter-day Saint (LDS) environmental theology. Toward the end of providing "real-world reference" and "real-world relevance" for academic theology, this manuscript presents voices of LDS members in eastern Arizona as they reflect on the connections between their religious beliefs and public land management. The data presented herein are part of a larger research effort addressing LDS and Roman Catholic perspectives on national

forest management. In this manuscript, I draw on transcribed interviews with Latter-day Saints in the White Mountains of eastern Arizona.<sup>2</sup> The data were collected during seventeen months of fieldwork (in 1998 and 1999) in and around the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests. While the perspectives expressed by LDS informants in this case study cannot be generalized to all LDS members in the White Mountains, to other geographical settings, or to the LDS faith generally, they do suggest how some LDS members draw upon their religious beliefs to interpret forest management issues. As an expression of lived practice, these comments must be interpreted in the context of western forest management in the late twentieth century and, more specifically, issues on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests.

National forests in the western United States have sustained recreational and productive (or extractive) uses for over a century, while also providing environmental services such as watershed protection and wildlife habitat. The American public has ranked these uses differently over time, with recreational and environmental values increasing in importance after World War II. Shifting public values—along with historic, ecological, social, political, and economic factors—both reflect and influence forest policy and management. Changing values, use patterns, and management decisions also express and generate land use conflicts. In recent years, various programs (referred to by names such as collaborative management, comanagement, or community-based forestry) have sought to increase local participation in forest management decisionmaking. Thus, contemporary national forest management is characterized by contested and conflicting uses; in some places forest managers seek to implement collaborative planning efforts in order to improve forest management and lessen the gridlock associated with polarized controversies. Set within this broad context, the research reported herein explored religious inter-

pretations of forest management conflicts as well as the potential for collaborative dialogue.

The Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests are located in eastern Arizona. Vegetation in the forest varies (with elevation) from semiarid grassland to pinyon-juniper woodland, ponderosa pine forest, mixed conifers, and finally alpine meadows. Historically, the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests have supported extensive ranching and logging activities. Recreational use also has a long history, as the high elevation forests have provided relief from summer heat for residents of Tucson and Phoenix throughout the past century. Late in the twentieth century, management for threatened and endangered species—including the Mexican spotted owl, Southwestern willow flycatcher, and Apache trout—became increasingly important, with consequent impacts on traditional logging and ranching industries. Finally, this area of eastern Arizona is the location of an ongoing reintroduction effort for the Mexican gray wolf.<sup>3</sup>

Given the shifting values attached to public lands—evidenced on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests as conflicts between ranchers, loggers, and environmentalists—and the political movement toward community-based or collaborative forest management, this research sought to identify religious perspectives on national forest management. The researcher's initial intuition was that religious perspectives would interpret forest management issues in ways that were relevant to both conflict and collaboration. With respect to resource use conflicts, LDS members who are affected at the individual, family, or community level by changes in resource management priorities may turn to their religious beliefs to reflect upon or justify specific forest uses. With respect to collaborative efforts, religious beliefs may influence an individual's willingness to work toward mutually agreeable decisions in a context characterized not only by conflict on substantive matters but also by the presence of diverse political and religious beliefs.

For this research, then, LDS informants—including ranchers, loggers, sawmill workers, and Forest Service employees—reflected on their faith and its influence on their understanding of forest management. It cannot be overemphasized that no one spoke for the Church; all spoke as individuals. Moreover, the reader must bear in mind that these comments cannot be generalized to all Church members in eastern Arizona or to the faith as a whole. Nevertheless, the views presented in this manuscript are not uncommon among Church members in eastern Arizona and they offer insights into how some Latter-day Saints interpret forest management through the lens of their faith. In this manuscript, I draw from transcribed interviews illustrations of how members articulated (1) the relevance of their faith for national forest management, (2) their interpretation of the type and quantity of environmental statements made by the General Authorities of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, (3) their perspective on environmentalism in light of conflicts on the national forest (especially with respect to endangered species), and (4) their reflections on collaborative efforts in a pluralistic context.

## Relevance

As stated above, I assumed religion had some relevance to national forest management; that relevance, however, had to be established for individual Latter-day Saints in eastern Arizona. If members had secularized their views of natural resource management—seeing it as determined solely by ecological, economic, and political factors—then subsequent questions regarding religious perspectives on forest management would be unwarranted. More importantly, if resource management were viewed as a strictly secular activity, then religious beliefs would be unlikely to have any influence on forest planning. Thus, the first issue was to discern whether members perceived a connection between their faith and resource management issues.

Some LDS informants drew immediate connections between their religion and forest management, especially with respect to human accountability for stewardship responsibilities, including not wasting natural resources. In this context, informants often made general reference to “the Creator” and “the Creation” and specific reference to Doctrine and Covenants 59. “Well, I believe that when God created the earth, he created it for man. And part of our purpose of when we were put on the earth was to be wise stewards of the land, and that it’s our responsibility to take care of it while we’re here. And to use it wisely” (male, Forest Service employee).

I feel like ranchers—Mormons in particular—have always seen the earth and its resources as something very precious, and something that we are responsible to, and our faith is pretty much adamant about saying, you know, you only take what you can use. You don’t waste. You don’t kill anything just for the sport or the pleasure of it. You use what you take. You grow a garden. You try to be resourceful with what you have. I think that’s just pretty much ingrained in most of the people that are rural. (female, rancher)

Not everyone, however, drew an immediate connection between their religion and environmental management.<sup>4</sup> For example, I was introduced to a stake president as someone conducting research on “religion and environment.” First he asked if he had heard correctly, then he noted quizzically that he did not see a correlation between the two realms.<sup>5</sup> At other times, casual conversations with people in eastern Arizona also evoked their puzzlement; forest management decisions should be based on economics, they suggested, and not religion. Such comments were directly opposed to a view in which a religiously defined worldview underlay all realms of human action. One LDS informant expressed this overarching view drawing on the example of *The Horse Whisperer* (a movie based on Nicholas Evans’s book of the same name):

To be good at it, it has to be your whole philosophy of life. It not only works for your horses: it also works for your dogs. It also works for your children. . . . And I think that's the way religion is. You cannot say, Okay, I'm just going to be a good Mormon, or a good Latter-day Saint, or a good Christian, and then I'm just going to beat the heck out of my horse every time I get on him or kick the dog every time I go by him. That's not being compatible with living a Christian life, of following the teachings of Christ, of being an upstanding kind of person. So I think it goes pretty deep into your moral being as far as a lot of these beliefs, as far as taking care of what God has created. And if you don't do that, then you are going to be held accountable. There's a flaw in your character development there somewhere that allows you to be cruel to animals or to be wasteful of the earth. (male, rancher)

In summary, not all Church members immediately perceived the relevance of religious belief to forest management concerns. Those that did grounded that sense of relevance in two ways. First, some members argued that religious belief must pervade all aspects of a faithful person's life. This all-pervasive quality of religious commitment would indicate, *prima facie*, that religious belief must have some relevance to forest management whether or not an individual could explicitly articulate what implications might follow. Second, some members explicitly related religious belief to resource management by reference to scriptural concepts of stewardship. Here, Church members affirmed that they had a God-given responsibility toward the Creation. In either case, the specific implications of religious beliefs for national forest management were not necessarily apparent. Additional guidance or reflection seemed to be necessary; for guidance, members turned to the General Authorities.

### **Guidance from Church Authorities**

In many religious traditions, the upper levels of the institutional hierarchy produce educational materials or develop programs explicitly related

to environmental concerns. The guidance produced may be substantive (advocating specific positions on particular issues) or procedural (articulating principles for decisionmaking on resource management issues). Even in the absence of a centrally coordinated program or office, substantive and/or procedural guidance may be conveyed via less formalized channels. Hence, as members sought to articulate specific faith-based positions related to contemporary conflicts in forest management, they sought to recall guidance they may have heard from the Church's General Authorities.

LDS informants were asked if they could recall specific teachings from the General Authorities regarding natural resource management or the environment. A majority quickly recalled the same story:

I can remember the talk. President Kimball, who was our prophet at the time, gave a talk about "don't shoot the birdies; don't shoot the little birdies." And his whole talk was about how animals and fowl are for the use of man, but for a specific use. Don't just go out and kill them just for the sheer fact that you enjoy killing them. Don't do that. I remember that talk as plain as I'm sitting here. I remember him saying that—"Don't shoot the little birdies." (male, professional)

Asked if he was surprised that he couldn't recall more statements from the General Authorities regarding natural resource management, a Forest Service employee replied: "In some ways it surprised me, and in some ways it doesn't. I think that if you're living right, if you are living the gospel right, then you will naturally have a respect for nature and the resources that we have around. And so it should follow that if you are living the principles of the gospel right, then being conservation-minded should follow." Others also noted the importance of general gospel principles, in light of Latter-day Saint beliefs about agency:

I know that one of the things that we've been taught and counseled by the leaders of the

Church is our responsibility to teach proper principles and leave room for people to make their own choices as part of their free will. That's the kind of view that they take on a lot of issues, is to teach proper principles and allow people to make the right choice. (male, rancher)

Informants were generally unable to recall specific teachings (as distinct from general principles) with the exception of the one story about killing birds. One male informant (a Forest Service employee) commented that the lack of specific guidance from General Authorities allowed LDS members to hold divergent perspectives on forest management issues: "Maybe because the Mormon Church hasn't spelled it out as much as maybe some other religions, you get people anywhere from where they believe that we should have dominion over the earth to that we need to take care of every living creature." The lack of specific guidance regarding environmental issues was also attributed to an intentional effort to avoid conflict within the Church, often in deference to more important goals. "There are people on both sides of these arguments that are passionate about their beliefs. And the fact of the matter is, the Brethren want people to believe in Jesus Christ and want them to keep His commandments. And, when it comes right down to it, I think that is their concern" (male, logger). A male rancher gave this explanation for the relative lack of specific statements about natural resource management:

If the Church comes out with a statement, say, about taking cattle off of the public lands, for example, well, there's going to be a group of people on one side, within the Church, that's going to applaud that action. There's going to be another group, the ranchers, that are going to feel like their faith has turned against them. That's an exaggeration, but I think that's another reason that they believe in teaching proper principles and allowing people to make the right choice. Now, obviously they're going to teach to be good stewards of the land, and they are not going to condone overgrazing. On the other hand, they are not going to come out and say,

Don't graze cattle. Now [as another example], maybe they could come out and say, Okay, well, people should use plastic sacks instead of paper sacks to save the forests. Well, that's probably going to alienate people that work in timber industries, whose jobs are being taken out, and those people are going to feel pretty upset that their church has come out and said something against them. So I think they're pretty careful about not coming out pro one deal, and they try to stay out of politics.

The concern that LDS members might be alienated if the General Authorities took specific positions was complemented by a reflection on how controversial positions on natural resources might affect the Church's missionary goals. "The forces that control [the Church] and the Brethren that we consider prophets do not get involved in political issues for the very reason that, if they did, it would eliminate some people taking a strong look at the Church. And they don't want that to happen" (male, forest products industry). The preceding two quotes characterize forest management issues as political issues. One informant explicitly stated that environmental issues were not moral issues, and therefore the leaders of the Church would not speak on them. "The Mormon Church, the leadership, . . . are not going to get involved in an issue unless it becomes a moral issue. [Interviewer: And nothing that we do in terms of natural resources, or caring for creation, is viewed as a moral issue, as far as you're concerned?] Not as far as I can see" (male, forest products industry).

A final reason offered for a relative lack of specific statements from the General Authorities on forest management issues is a general trend—reflected both in the Church and society as a whole—over the past century from a rural to an urban society. The same rancher who gave the quote in the preceding section, about the all-pervasiveness of accountability, noted that such a view "has been a big part of 'old' Mormon families for many generations. I think we've reached the point now where that's starting to

get diluted in some respect. But still there's a certain amount of respect for farming and the environment and the interplay between the two." The suggestion that a religiously grounded view might "get diluted" refers to societal transitions from a rural to urban lifestyle. Asked whether the LDS Church had shifted from an agrarian to a more urban focus over the past century, one informant responded:

Well, obviously the Church has grown, and the Church, a lot like nineteenth-century society, was farm-based. And so, as society has changed, and as we get more modern conveniences, our self-reliance goes down, and so our skills as farmers and our reliance on the land goes down. . . . We're getting away from [rural values] in an urban society and we need to kind of refocus and look back at things and kind of scale back and look at what is really important. (male, professional)

The frequency with which people recalled President Kimball's talk about shooting birds illustrates the compelling and memorable character of specific substantive guidance given by the General Authorities. The comments presented above suggest three explanations for the apparent scarcity of such specific guidance. First, beliefs in agency and accountability make plausible a claim that the General Authorities would advocate general gospel principles rather than specific substantive guidance regarding environmental policy. Second, the scarcity of specific guidance may reflect an intentional silence on environmental matters in deference to other Church goals. This explanation is suggested by comments that characterized resource management issues as political rather than moral concerns or that suggest the Church's membership goals (retaining existing members and attracting potential members) are of greater importance than the Church's direct response to environmental concerns. Third, some comments suggest the scarcity of specific substantive guidance may reflect a general lack of interest in land management issues (rather than intentional silence) as the Church—along with society as a whole—urbanizes. Not-

ing in passing that this third explanation stands in some tension with the previous section's claim for the all-pervasive relevance of religious faith, we turn now to explore LDS members' responses to specific forest management conflicts in eastern Arizona.

## Forest Conflicts

As mentioned in the introduction, management of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests for threatened and endangered species has affected traditional logging and ranching industries; direct and indirect impacts result for both family livelihoods and the economic health of rural communities. Thus, management of the forest to meet the requirements of the federal Endangered Species Act is a concrete point of conflict. Moreover, endangered species protection has been raised as a stewardship concern in Church publications. On February 17, 1996, the *Church News* published the following statement:

It is no small thing to be made caretakers of the Lord's house and overseer of His creations. We may not be doing very well in that regard. Last month, a thousand scientists from more than 50 countries produced a Global Biodiversity Assessment. It concluded that at least 4,000 plants and 5,400 animals are now threatened with extinction, and the rate of extinction in recent years is 50 to 100 times that of the past.<sup>6</sup>

I shared this quote with a ranch family, provoking the following response from the husband and wife:

Male: I would read a statement like this, again, as a Mormon, a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, if I read this right here, first thing, it would get my rancor up just a little, or get my ire up a little. It would irritate me a little.

Female: And this probably wasn't a Church authority [that wrote this].

Male: That's the thing. Even within the Church, again, all of us are human and make mistakes. I don't say this is a mistake, necessarily. But I think a high-ranking General Authority would be very careful. I would be very surprised

if a General Authority would say a statement like this right here because, again, it threatens members of the Church. Now, yes, some may applaud that, but others it's going to make a little irritated. I'd be one of them. Now it obviously was in the *Church News*; I don't know who said it or anything.

In this exchange, we see again the importance ascribed to General Authorities' statements as well as assumptions about what the General Authorities might say. Regardless of whether LDS members were aware of statements by the Church regarding endangered species management, the concept of agency and the need to make decisions based on gospel principles motivated members to reflect on how their faith informed their views on endangered species protection. Thus, reflections on this specific conflict illustrate how LDS informants drew upon their religious beliefs to interpret conflicts between environmental concerns and traditional land use activities. I present their comments on this issue before turning to more general reflections on conflicts between environmentalists and logging and ranching interests.

Latter-day Saints in eastern Arizona frequently interpreted endangered species extinctions in light of their understanding of evolution and their beliefs about the resurrection. "In my mind, I do not believe that evolution is necessarily in contrast with being a Christian. I believe that evolution is an ongoing process, and that some animals are going to go extinct, regardless of whether we were here or not, regardless of what we do. There are some that probably are being speeded up because of what we do" (male, rancher). Given this general framework that sought to interpret human responsibility in an ongoing process of evolution and extinction, LDS informants interpreted differently the goal of preventing species extinctions. One man expressed reservations about the goal itself: "If we're going to have a goal that we are going to protect every species of plant and animal, I think that there are more species coming every day of the world—

and subspecies—and that it's an impossible task and it's one that God must laugh at" (male, forest products industry). Another informant suggested that, while preventing extinctions was a laudable goal, no species was ever really lost:

My take is that I think that every animal has a value because it is a living thing. And that an endangered species, because by definition it's not very common and its existence is threatened, that it maybe has more value, that we should try and conserve it. At the same time, I also believe that we have an afterlife and that everything that is on this earth now will be resurrected. And so, if something's lost, then it's not really lost. Nothing is really lost forever. But I think that our Heavenly Father would want us to take care of every living thing as well as we could. (male, forest service employee)

Some informants posited that extinction was merely an indication that a species had fulfilled "the measure of its creation." There was no clear consensus, however, on what "the measure of one's creation" might mean with respect to endangered species. One informant interpreted it less as a quantitative extent of a species' (or individual's) temporal existence and more as a qualitative evaluation of how well one fulfilled divine commandments. For this person, "filling the measure of their creation" meant "doing everything they've been commanded to do. Plants, everything else, is doing as Heavenly Father commanded. We on the other hand, exercising our agency and paying the price for bad choices, I'm sure we're trying Him pretty severely" (male, sawmill worker). Another informant spoke of the "full measure of its [earth's] creation and what it is here for." I asked what that meant.

We believe that the earth was created by Jesus Christ for man to inhabit, and the animals and the trees, and that He created everything and they were all special and put here for a purpose—not necessarily just for man's purpose, but for their own, by their own right to be here. But the purpose of the earth being here is for us all to live here, to get along, for the earth to produce. And that is sort of man's challenge to,

you know, you take like the Great Salt Lake or whatever . . . and you turn it into a Garden of Eden. (female, rancher)<sup>7</sup>

Endangered species protections are a contentious issue in eastern Arizona; they are, however, just one aspect of a broader environmental movement. We turn now to general reflections by Church members on the conflict between environmentalists and logging and ranching interests. The term “environmentalist” carried many connotations in eastern Arizona. At times, LDS informants commented that ranchers and loggers were the true or real environmentalists. This meaning was opposed to comments about “radical” or “extreme” environmentalists. When speaking of the extreme environmental movement, some LDS informants drew religious interpretations that characterized environmentalism as anti-God because it refused to consider human beings as more important than other species. “I think that the extreme environmental movement is also an anti-God movement. . . . I think that segment of society, for whatever reason, has moved away from worshiping the Creator to worshiping the created” (male, forest products industry). “I think the basic difference between the environmental movement per se and, say, Christianity is that they want to worship the earth itself as being better and grander than human life or anything else. Human life is very expendable to the very radical environmentalist type. A wolf cub is more precious than a human baby” (female, rancher). One informant related his encounter with a well-known ecosystem management advocate who had asserted that Christianity’s arrogance in failing to consider human beings as equal with other species was the root cause of environmental problems. Relating this story, the LDS informant then indicated that he responded by saying,

Christians are not taught to desecrate this earth. It’s not part of the doctrine and teachings. And even under the law of Moses, they had to rest the land every seven years. Adam was told to take the garden and dress it and take care of it.

Sure, he was also told in other scriptures that he should have dominion over the earth, but. . . . man did not put himself above the other species; God did. God put him there. (male, forest products industry)

The preceding comment was made by the same man who asserted that environmental issues were not moral issues. He also articulated a commonly held view that if people lived well with respect to moral matters, God’s promise and blessing would ensure natural resource sustainability.

Well, when you grow up with the knowledge that God said on this earth there is enough and to spare, I don’t get concerned about population control. I don’t get concerned about destroying our resources because I think a free people create more resources than they destroy if they’re truly free. And so you don’t have a feeling of panic. You have a feeling of all is well, and the Lord is in control, and we’ll be okay if we just treat our brothers as we should and if we’ll live the golden rule and if we’ll serve and be willing to share. So when you have that attitude, it’s hard to be concerned about the forest not being a renewable resource. You know that those trees will come back. (male, forest products industry)

Two summary observations seem warranted. First, general gospel principles do not determine specific positions on forest conflicts in any determinate way. The endangered species example illustrates how individuals must balance (1) understandings of the temporal connections between evolution, extinction, and resurrection, (2) religious responsibilities to care for Creation, and (3) diverse other goals (including family livelihoods, community stability, and political ideals). Within this complexity, the potential exists for diverse, and perhaps contradictory, inclinations. Second, the political rhetoric around environmentalism may obscure potentially overlapping goals of loggers, ranchers, and environmentalists, a matter reflected on further in the following section.



## **Collaboration in a Pluralistic Culture**

In the preceding section, I noted that some LDS informants asserted that loggers and ranchers were the true environmentalists as opposed to more extreme environmentalists. The rhetorical positioning around the term “environmentalist” suggests the two groups may share a common ground of concern for the proper stewardship of resources, while simultaneously disagreeing on specific activities or even fundamental philosophies underlying that proper stewardship. The introduction noted the increasing prevalence of efforts to bring diverse parties together to seek consensus on forest management. The success of such efforts is often predicated on the establishment of common ground upon which to build mutually acceptable solutions to resource management problems. In this final section, I present the faith-based reflections of LDS members regarding their participation in collaborative planning efforts.

LDS informants often expressed distrust when asked about working with environmentalists, Forest Service employees, and others to negotiate mutually agreeable management plans for the national forests. They questioned the motives of environmentalists, suggesting that there was a hidden agenda to remove people from the public lands and residents from rural communities. They expressed frustration with government agencies that they claimed held public meetings not to gather input but rather to present decisions that had already been made. One woman, from a ranching heritage, said: “Not to be cynical, but I’ve been around politics and these things long enough to know that when they have the public forum, the decision has already been made elsewhere.” A male rancher expressed a similar disillusion with the process:

One reason I’ve become so disillusioned on the whole process—I’ve been to I don’t know how many meetings, umpteen of them, probably hundreds—and I cannot remember a single

issue I ever felt like I was listened to fairly and something done, something positive ever come out of it. All you do is talk and write letters and talk. There can be congressmen there. There can be chief of the Forest Service there. There can be whoever there. But all you do is talk and you hear the same old rhetoric over and over.

Such comments can be ascribed to political differences, without reference to religious faith. However, LDS informants also drew upon millennial beliefs when reflecting upon their participation in forest-planning efforts. One logger stated:

We are all going to endure to the end. We’re going to endure until we die. That’s the end. But it’s how we endure. You endure in faith. You endure in righteousness. . . . And I think part of that is not giving in. It would be real easy to just say, hey, this is way bigger than I’m able to affect at all, and so I’m just going to crawl into my little hole over here. But I don’t want to do that.

His wife added:

It would be easy to just give up and say, I can’t affect anything, but we each have to stand for what we know is true and what we know is right—no matter how small that is. Whether it’s faxing your congressman, you have to keep trying. And we’ll be held accountable for what we knew and what we did or didn’t do. And I don’t think it’s going to get better. I think it’s polarizing, you know. There’s more goodness over here, more evil over here. And it will just culminate in a final battle . . . until He comes and restores the peace.

Another LDS informant expressed a similar view:

My personal belief is that it’s going to take the coming of the Lord to solve it. I think it will get worse and worse and worse. And I think some terrible things lie ahead. And we’ll see revolution like we’ve never seen it before. I believe that the only answer is the teachings of the gospel. . . . I have talked until I’m red in the face to the extreme environmental groups, and I’ve never converted anyone—not to the gospel but to “there is enough and to spare.” They’re all concerned about overpopulation. . . . The reason

I'm involved is I think it's important to show what side you're on, and whether—I'm not sure we can change it and the direction it's going—but I think it's going to be important for me to be able to stand and say, yeah, I fought the fight; I tried in my own way. I think that's important, rather than just to give up. (male, forest products industry)

Although the preceding comments are pessimistic about collaborative planning processes, informants also drew upon their LDS faith for consolation as the logging and ranching industries continue to undergo a difficult time of transition.

It [our faith] does give us a little bit of sanity from the standpoint that there are more important things to us. Yes, you can lose your ranch, you can lose your livelihood, but there is something else that we can look forward to. And we can do something else to make a living if we have to. . . . We might lose this particular battle, but we're going to win the war later on. (male, rancher)

As the last comment suggests, religious beliefs may provide some consolation for families undergoing societal transitions that affect their livelihoods. However, millennial beliefs that predict increasing conflict and discord prior to Christ's Second Coming seem to fuel an attitude of struggle and endurance rather than one of collaboration in forest planning efforts. Such a pessimistic outlook, if brought into a collaborative planning context, may overwhelm any hope for mutually agreeable solutions built upon common concerns for forest health.

## **Conclusion**

The preceding reflections present a particular view of the natural resource management implications of Latter-day Saint belief and tradition, as expressed by Church members in eastern Arizona. Albeit unofficial and perhaps not always orthodox, these are LDS perspectives in the sense that they come from members who sought to reflect upon resource management issues from the perspective of their faith. These reflections repre-

sent the lived practice and current understanding of Church members living in and near the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests and experiencing the effects of shifting public valuations of national forest landscapes; as such, they suggest the real-world reference and real-world relevance that academic theology must address. I do not mean to suggest that this is the only setting from which academic theology must derive real-world relevance and reference. Latter-day Saints in eastern Arizona reflect on resource management in the context of resource use conflicts that threaten their traditional logging and ranching livelihoods. Members who live in less politically conservative areas or whose livelihoods are less directly connected to traditional forest use industries would be expected to have different attitudes toward contemporary forest management practices and policies.<sup>8</sup>

While the perspectives addressed herein cannot be generalized to the LDS faith as a whole, connections can easily be drawn from these comments to existing literature regarding LDS environmental theology. For example, some statements made by LDS informants in eastern Arizona illustrate arguments that Thomas G. Alexander has clearly articulated, including a distinction between stewardship and entrepreneurial traditions and a historic shift toward "teachings about individual morality and piety rather than politics and business."<sup>9</sup> Alexander has also argued that an early environmental theology taught by Joseph Smith and Brigham Young was ignored by later LDS adherents.<sup>10</sup> David Grandy makes a similar claim about what he terms the LDS reverence-for-nature tradition, noting that LDS members

are generally able to affirm and dismiss it all in one doublethink. There is a poetic truth about it, but most people today let scientific truth guide their thinking, and science teaches us to regard the earth as a lifeless object. . . . This is not to say that Mormons are less environmentally responsible than other groups, only that their environmental consciousness no longer embraces some of the creative teachings of their early leaders.<sup>11</sup>

The challenges are clear for those seeking to articulate and advocate a doctrinally grounded LDS environmental theology. The richness of LDS tradition must be made relevant and compelling for contemporary practice. LDS environmental theology must draw on nineteenth-century tradition while speaking to twenty-first century contexts. The success of efforts to give LDS environmental theology a real-world relevance will depend in part on the ability of such efforts to speak in a compelling way to Church members similar to those whose reflections are presented in this manuscript. Members in eastern Arizona often noted that they had not reflected deeply about the relevance of their faith to their forest practices. They also expressed a willingness to lessen the disparity between their beliefs and their behaviors. One man, attending a Church fireside discussion regarding this research, said: "So, as I see it, our obligation then, as having dominion over the earth, is to do the best we can, wherever we're at. I've been very lackadaisical about that personally, and I've got a lot to repent for, I know. I think it puts a lot of things we do into an entirely different light."



## Notes

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1. Delwin Brown, *Boundaries of Our Habitations: Tradition and Theological Construction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994). His self-criticism was published in Delwin Brown, "Believing traditions and the task of the academic theologian," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62 (1994): 1175, 1177.

2. All interviewees quoted in this manuscript are Latter-day Saints from the White Mountains area. Most but not all of these people signed informed consent forms authorizing this author to attach their

names to their statements. Nevertheless, all informants are treated confidentially in this manuscript and are identified only by brief demographic information. Transcriptions and interview tapes remain in the author's possession.

3. Latter-day Saint settlement in this area—the upper reaches of the Little Colorado River basin—is documented in William S. Abruzzi, "Water and Community Development in the Little Colorado River Basin," *Human Ecology* 13, no. 2 (1985): 241–69; Abruzzi, "Ecological Stability and Community Diversity During Mormon Colonization of the Little Colorado River Basin," *Human Ecology* 15, no. 3 (1987): 317–38; Abruzzi, "Ecology, Resource Redistribution, and Mormon Settlement in Northeastern Arizona," *American Anthropologist* 91, no. 3 (1989): 642–55; Abruzzi, *Dam That River! Ecology and Mormon Settlement in the Little Colorado River Basin* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993); and Mark P. Leone, *Roots of Modern Mormonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

4. Language use may be a complicating factor here. White Mountains area residents sometimes reacted differently to potentially equivalent phrases due to the varying connotations attached to the terms used. In other words, people sometimes reacted differently to comments about "religion and environment" versus "religion and natural resource management," especially upon first meeting this researcher. Once they came to know me, however, they ceased drawing such unintended distinctions on the basis of mere language.

5. Field notes, August 9, 1998. In author's possession.

6. "Dominion Over the Earth," *Church News*, February 17, 1996, p. 16.

7. Compare the interpretation of "measure of its creation" offered by Sheldon Greaves, "Cosmos, Chaos, and Politics: Biblical Creation Patterns in Secular Contexts," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 31, no. 3 (1998): 164, 165. "The measure of its creation allotted to any one species, man included, is that limit within which that species ought to propagate. . . . Mormons learn in the temple ceremony that all forms of life have a 'measure of their creation,' that is, a portion of the biosphere that is theirs to fill wherein they can find joy. A partial description of the 'measure of man' is that sphere within which human activity will not significantly interfere with other species while they fill the divinely ordained measure of their creation."

## *Stewardship and the Creation*

8. Cf. Aaron Kelson, *The Holy Place: Why Caring for the Earth and Being Kind to Animals Matters* (Spotsylvania, VA: White Pine Publishing, 1999); Brooke Williams, *Halflives: Reconciling Work and Wildness* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1999); and Terry Tempest Williams, William B. Smart, and Gibbs M. Smith (eds.), *New Genesis: A Mormon Reader on Land and Community* (Salt Lake City, UT: Gibbs Smith, 1998).

9. Thomas G. Alexander, "Stewardship and Enterprise: The LDS Church and the Wasatch Oasis

Environment, 1847-1930," *Western Historical Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (1994): 358.

10. Thomas G. Alexander, "Sylvester Q. Cannon and the Revival of Environmental Consciousness in the Mormon Community," *Environmental History* 3, no. 4 (1998): 488.

11. David Grandy, "Heaven-Earth Wedges: The Mormon Experience," *Proteus: A Journal of Ideas* 15, no. 2 (1998): 59-60, 64.