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Humanizing the Seas

A Case for Integrating the Arts and Humanities
into *Ocean Literacy and Stewardship*

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Plastic Catch • Susan Schultz
porcelain and wood sculpture

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I appreciate Betsy Gaines Quammen's comments on my paper (Gaines Quammen 2020b). As with many policy issues, the historical perspective she brings to the discussion reminds us that the more things change, the more they stay the same. The swings in perceptions toward our large North American predators she highlights are a case in point. For decades their populations were decimated, but then the attitudes of many people changed, and a long string of successful conservation measures followed. Today, the policy out of the administration with respect to our public lands and their wild inhabitants is one of unbridled energy development with a renewed bias toward privatization. Many on the political right seem not to understand the far-reaching drivers of the amenity economy I identify in my paper and that Gaines Quammen alludes to in her comments. If not reversed, one expects these trends may not end well for grizzly bears.

Gaines Quammen points to a recent decision by the 9th Circuit US Court of Appeals that affirmed a 2018 federal district court ruling requiring the US Fish and Wildlife Service to place grizzly bears back on the endangered species list. Despite these rulings—which clearly indicate that, in the courts' judgment, the species needs more help to recover—Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt recently announced that grizzly reintroduction to Washington's North Cascades will not move forward under his watch. His decision will continue the genetic isolation of disparate bear populations due to fragmented landscapes and may forestall recovery efforts of the Yellowstone population. Nevertheless, two steps forward, one step back is still progress, of a sort.

Resource issues such as the trade-offs inherent in grizzly conservation are inherently difficult for democracies to resolve. Our political system is designed to seek a balance between limited government, human pros-

perity, and (responsible) liberty. As a political culture, we historically embrace neither a strongly centralized regulatory state nor unrestrained personal greed and self-centeredness. In the not-so-distant past our political institutions seemed up to the task of balancing the two; now one is not so sure. Walking this tightrope depends on meaningful political discourse and compromise. Both are in short supply in this political moment. This is understandable.

The unfortunate consequence of the transition to an amenity-based economy is that not everyone is left better off. Those who work in traditional industries are often left jobless or underemployed in the new economy. Skillsets do not easily translate. The reality is that efficient and environmentally sustainable industry, such as value-added agriculture (wheat to pasta) or timber harvest (trees to furniture), can and should be considered to be a viable component of an emergent amenity economy. Diversification makes good economic sense.

Conservation is more than ecology or political activism. Rural sociologists and economists, human geographers, and economic development specialists all have a role. Land grant universities' extension services should be at the forefront of these efforts. Ignoring those left behind in the transition is a recipe for political division. Gaines Quammen has written about this challenge in her book *American Zion: Cliven Bundy, God & Public Lands in the West* (Gaines Quammen 2020a). It is a primer for the broader discussion of public lands conservation and the potential downside of economic exclusion.

It is important that we not overstate the lessons of bear recovery in the GYE. Conditions were such that conservation could opportunely coexist with human prosperity. The same is true in other locations, such

as the Elwha Dam removal in Olympic National Park where the recovered salmon runs will inevitably lead to greater human well-being. The Elwha story is also a win for our national parks. Other efforts, such as those associated with the reintroduction of grey wolves, may not offer the same prospects. No general model yet exists for when conservation effects are additive to nature and humans alike, but we can recognize it when we see it. If we are to export lessons from Yellowstone, we need a more comprehensive understanding from which to draw conclusions. There is increasingly a positive role for historians, social scientists, and students of public policy in this effort.

References

Gaines Quammen, B. 2020a. *American Zion: Cliven Bundy, God & Public Lands in the West*. Salt Lake City, UT: Torrey House Press.

Gaines Quammen, B. 2020b. Response to “Grizzly bear restoration and economic restructuring in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.” *Parks Stewardship Forum* 36(3). [This issue.]