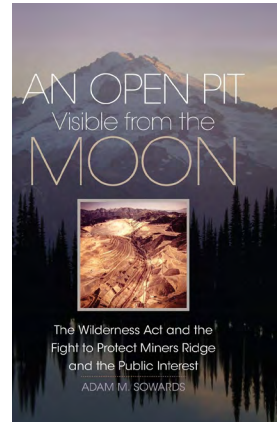


BOOK REVIEW

An Open Pit Visible from the Moon: The Wilderness Act and the Fight to Protect Miners Ridge and the Public Interest

Adam M. Sowards. 2020. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, USA. 236 pages (hard cover). \$34.95. ISBN: 978-0-8061-6501-1



Adam M. Sowards tells the tale of a successful effort to prevent development of an open-pit copper mine in the Cascade Mountains of northern Washington. This book relates an intriguing story of a struggle to overcome what some perceive to be inconsistencies within The Wilderness Act (hereafter, Act) of 1964. Sowards relates in detail the efforts of those involved who, for personal or political reasons, worked diligently to prevent Kennecott Copper Corporation's effort to establish and operate a mine on Miners Ridge, as provided for by the Act. In 1966, shortly after passage of the Act, the effort to halt Kennecott's proposed mine was grounded in a true grassroots movement; had it been 2020, however, lawyers would be lined up behind the various 'not-for-profit-organizations' to sue the federal government over technicalities or procedural discrepancies. In such a scenario the nexus, and resulting payments, to those filing such challenges would have been a direct function of the Equal Access to Justice Act, legislation that provides almost unlimited opportunities to recoup expenses for successful lawsuits filed against the federal government (Lofthouse et al. 2014).

Dr. Sowards has produced an intriguing, well-researched and well-documented historical accounting of the fight—initiated at the most basic level of American society—to prevent development of an open-pit mine in a relatively unspoiled area. The author is not entirely removed from emotional arguments to prevent Kennecott from developing the mine, however, in that he and his family maintained strong personal connections to the Cascade Range. Thus, I found the frequent use of the term 'conservationist', or various derivatives thereof, to be a bit overwhelming. In total, I tallied 277 such occurrences in 158 pages of text ($\bar{x}=1.75/\text{page}$, $SD=1.67$). With virtually a single exception that root word, or a derivative thereof, was used to describe individuals or organizations, and actions by those actively opposed to Kennecott's legal right to mine, despite that activity clearly being permitted by the Act. By default, those favoring the mine or having more moderate views were relegated—albeit perhaps unintentionally—to the status of being enemies of 'conservation'.

The book consists of 11 chapters distributed among three sections, a separate introduction, and a final conclusion. Part one (Bedrock) provides the background for the book, and emphasizes the standoff among competing agencies (U.S. Forest Service and the National Park Service), the local populace, and industry, "...in a context where laws and traditions, forged in public and through time, tested their ability to achieve their incompatible goals for Miners Ridge and the larger North Cascades landscape." In Part two (Challenges), Sowards

relates the many scenarios centered on the issue of Kennecott's legal right to mine, as well as government prerogatives. Part three (Resolution) identifies the reasons that the mine did not open. Indeed, copper prices never got high enough to warrant the mine and, when combined with largely grass-roots opposition to the proposed mine, these factors in large part explain the outcome. Kennecott Copper eventually sold its claim and abandoned the project, the North Cascades National Park was established, and the Glacier Peak Wilderness Area remained under the administration of the Forest Service.

I found the text to be extremely well-written, and very well edited; I noted but two typographical errors in the entire text. Further, the amount of research, documentation, and clarification that support the work are astounding. For example, 579 notes in the text refer to the 9 archival collections, 6 government documents, 20 periodicals, or the 196 books, chapters, articles or websites consulted and that appear in the terminal bibliography. With that information, Adam Sowards has told an intriguing story that occurred at a time when public advocacy, at a considerably basic level when compared to that existing today, was a moving force. When compared to the 'environmental industry' that currently is dominated by multi-million-dollar organizations overseen by high-paid executives with access to legions of lawyers that are more than happy to litigate, the outcome was an amazing accomplishment. Although economics played a substantial role in the ultimate decision of Kennecott to abandon its legal right to extract copper, details of the dedication and efforts of a concerned citizenry makes this a fascinating read.

Ironically, the history of Miners Ridge was referenced nearly 25 years after the controversy began and, in my opinion, represents a classic example of the "bureaucratic inertia and interagency competition" identified by Grumbine (2000:127) as being primary obstacles to conservation. When combined with the politics and promises of confounding legislation, those factors further thwart meaningful imperatives, particularly as they relate to wildlife conservation (Bleich 2005). Thus, I paraphrase the late Jack Ward Thomas (2004): *environmental legislation, as created by Congress, has become a mess, and it is a mess that only Congress can fix*. Given the political constipation that characterizes the federal government, I am unconvinced the needed repairs will occur anytime soon.

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