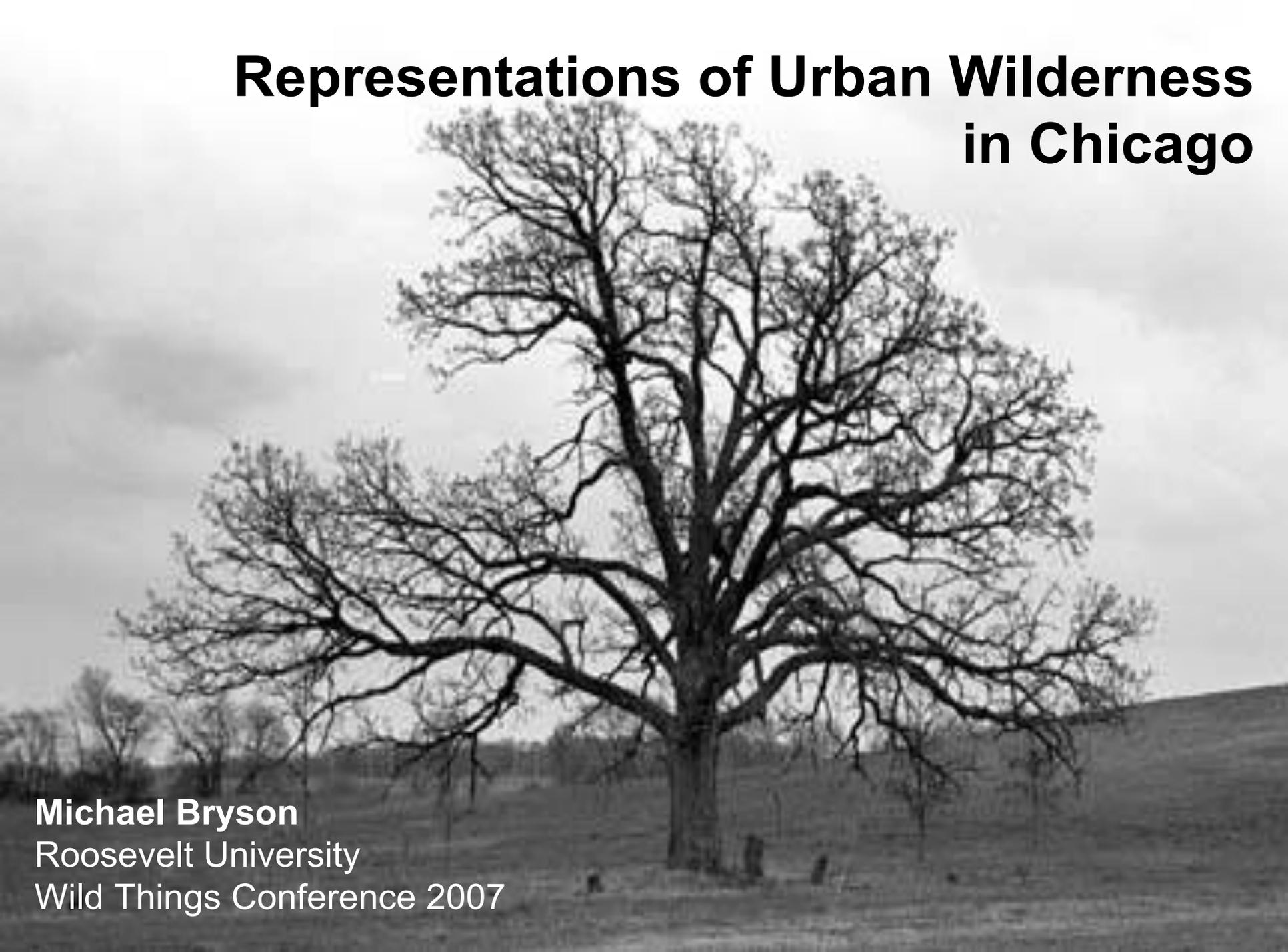


Representations of Urban Wilderness in Chicago

A black and white photograph of a large, leafless tree in a field. The tree is the central focus, with its intricate, bare branches spreading out against a cloudy sky. The ground is a flat, open field with some smaller, distant trees and a low hill in the background. The overall mood is quiet and somewhat desolate.

Michael Bryson
Roosevelt University
Wild Things Conference 2007

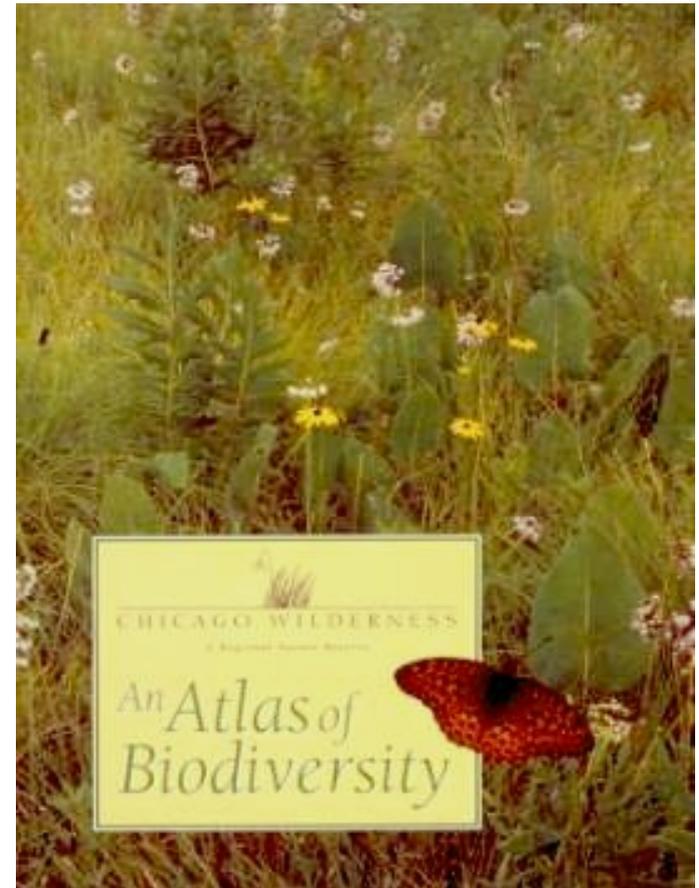
The Strangeness of Urban Nature

Tales from the Outdoor Classroom (BGS 391)



The Significance of Chicago Wilderness

- Increasing size and improving quality of natural lands
- Grassroots work and organizational coalition-building
- Environmental education, outreach
- Impact on public planning and policy . . .



A Discourse of Urban Wilderness

The phenomenon of Chicago Wilderness is changing the way we think of "wilderness" in the broadest terms by challenging old ideas and assumptions, and by proposing new formulations on the relation between nature and its human citizens.

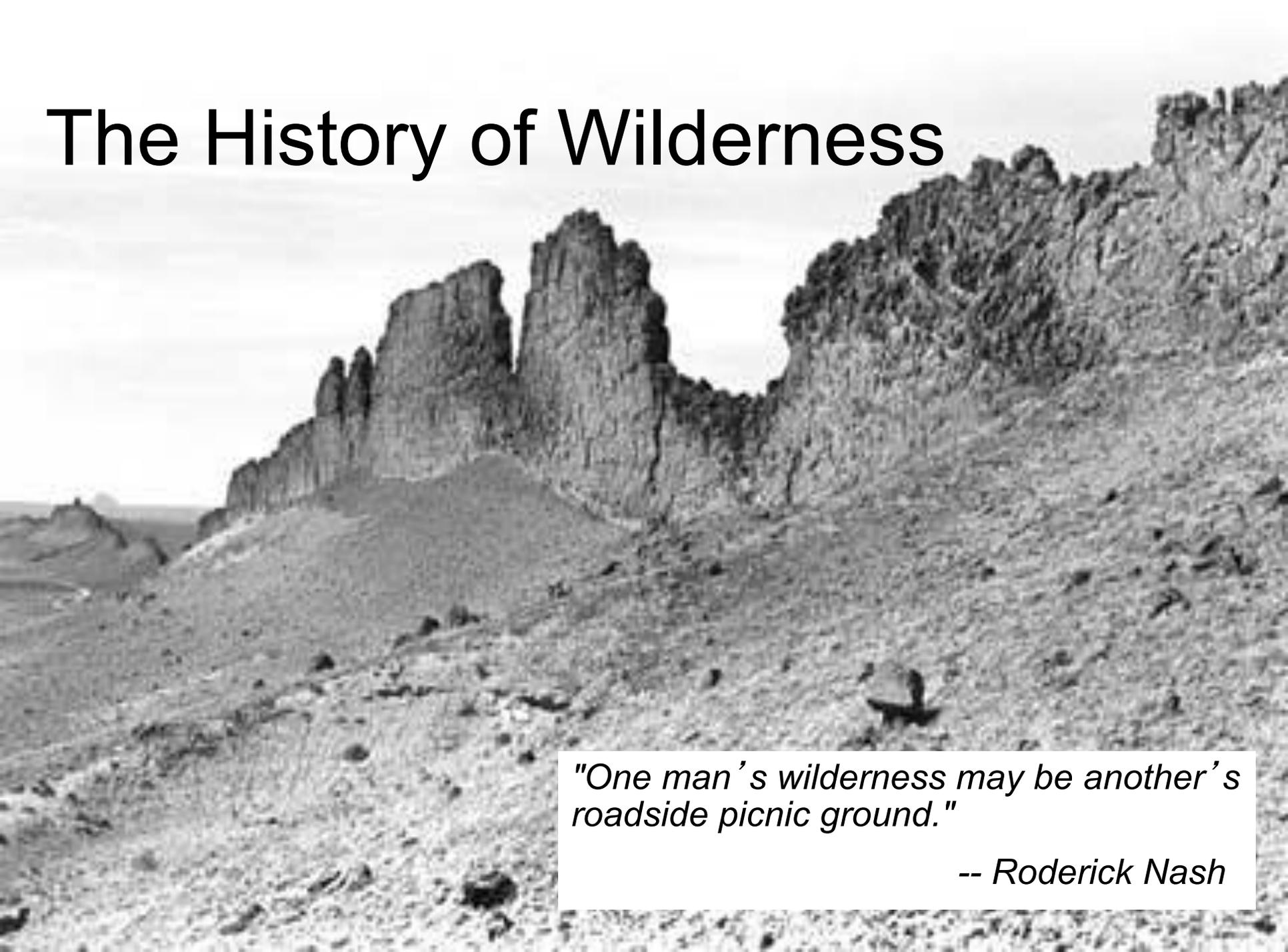
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For all the importance of Chicago Wilderness to the health and preservation of natural lands, it's just as important to both recognize and evaluate the impact it's having on the *cognitive landscape*, the world of ideas about wilderness and urban space.

A 15-minute Tour

- A (Very) Short History of Wilderness
- The Problem of Wilderness
- Chicago Wilderness: What's in a Phrase?
- The Death of Dichotomy
- Representations of Nature in Chicago, Past and Present

The History of Wilderness

A black and white photograph of a rugged, rocky landscape. In the foreground, there is a rocky, uneven ground covered with small stones and pebbles. In the middle ground, several prominent, dark, jagged rock formations rise up, resembling spires or buttes. The background shows a hazy, overcast sky and more distant, lower rock formations. The overall scene is desolate and wild.

"One man's wilderness may be another's roadside picnic ground."

-- Roderick Nash

The History of Wilderness

Roderick Nash

Wilderness and the American Mind (1967)

- Cornerstone of wilderness studies
- Wilderness is an intellectual construct as much as a concrete, objective entity
- Changing attitudes reflect relationship to and impact upon nature
- Wilderness embraced as part of national heritage; now cherished/commodified rather than feared

The History of Wilderness

John Rennie Short

*Imagined Country: Environment, Culture,
and Society* (1991)

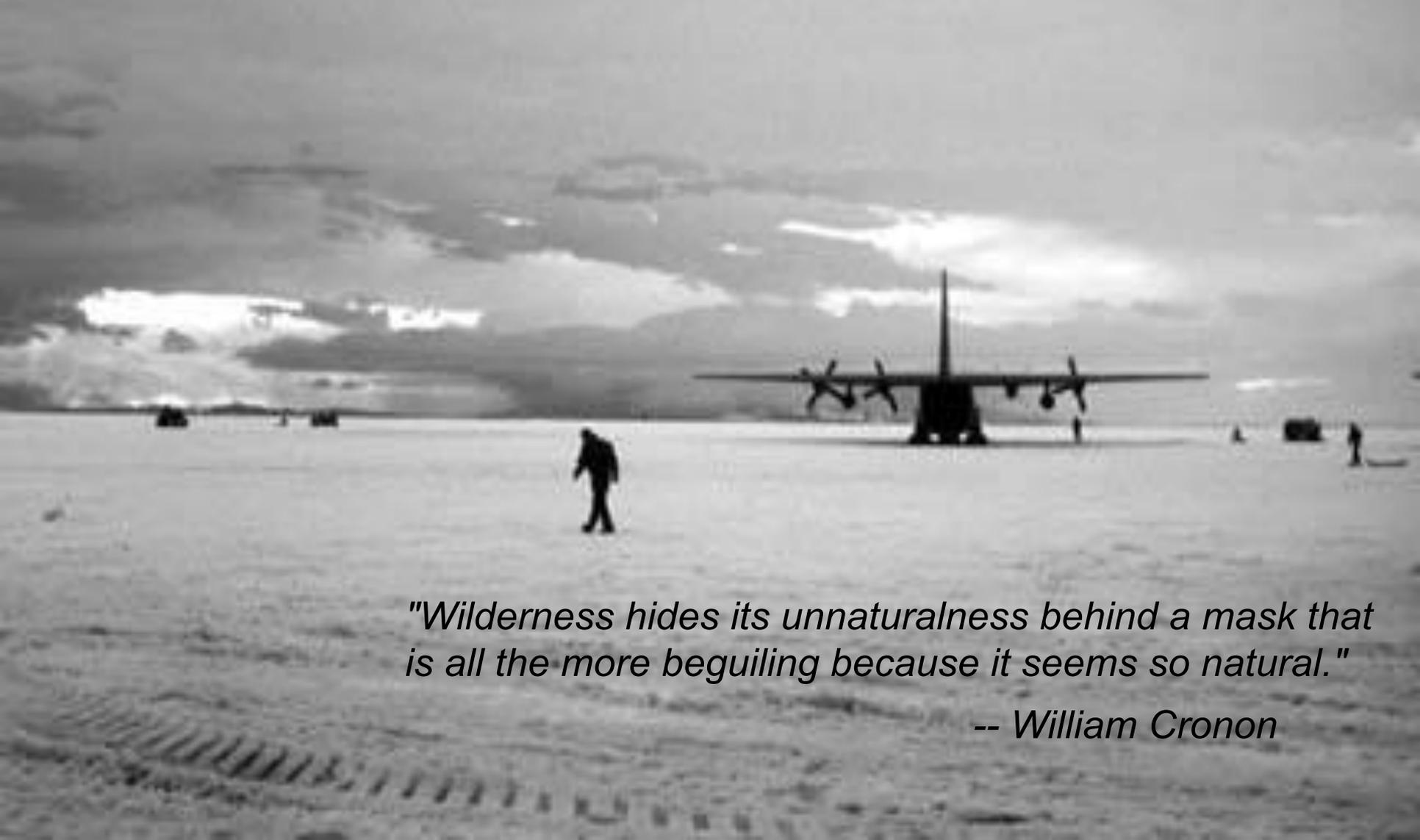
- Interrelatedness of wilderness, country, city
- Classical Wilderness: that which is feared, the place of wild beasts, the place to be conquered by a victorious civilization
- Romantic Wilderness: that which is revered, a place of beauty, sublimity, nostalgia, spiritual sustenance

The History of Wilderness

Lutz, Simpson-Housley, and de Man
"Wilderness: Rural and Urban Attitudes and
Perceptions" (1999)

- Empirical study of rural/urban Canadians' perceptions and assumptions about wilderness
- Urbanites more willing to confer wilderness status on areas with visual human presence/alteration
- Rural citizens more cognizant of how, agriculture, etc. transforms of the landscape
- Resource management contingent on consensus among people who share different values and perceptions about wilderness

The Problem with Wilderness



"Wilderness hides its unnaturalness behind a mask that is all the more beguiling because it seems so natural."

-- William Cronon

The Problem with Wilderness

The Wilderness Act of 1964

"A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this chapter an area of underdeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value."

(Sec. 2C)

The Problem with Wilderness

The Wilderness Act of 1964 (Not Applicable to Chicago)

"A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this chapter an area of underdeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value."
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(Sec. 2C)

The Problem with Wilderness

William Cronon

"The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature" (1995)

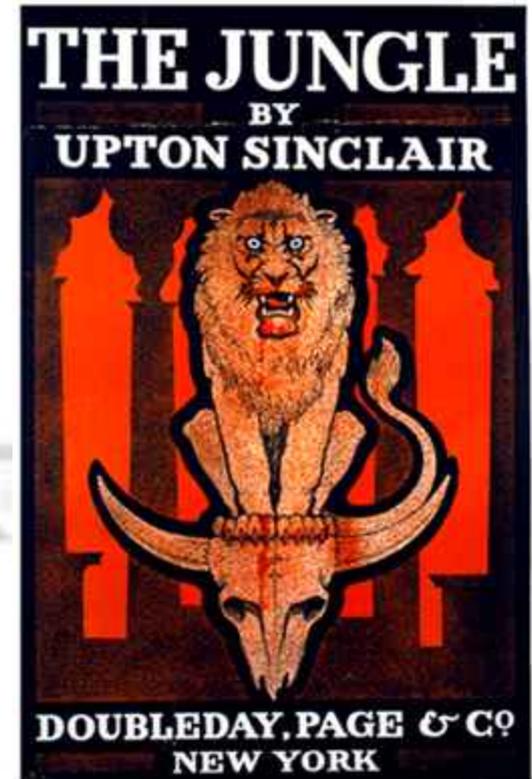
- Myth of wilderness as untrammelled wild place
- Inherent dualism -- domestic vs. wild, urban vs. wilderness, culture vs. nature
- Frontier ideology -- wilderness and natural character; rugged individualism and democracy; inspired hostility to and suspicion of urban environment; empty recreation space
- Need for recognition of the interactions between nature and culture that characterize all environments

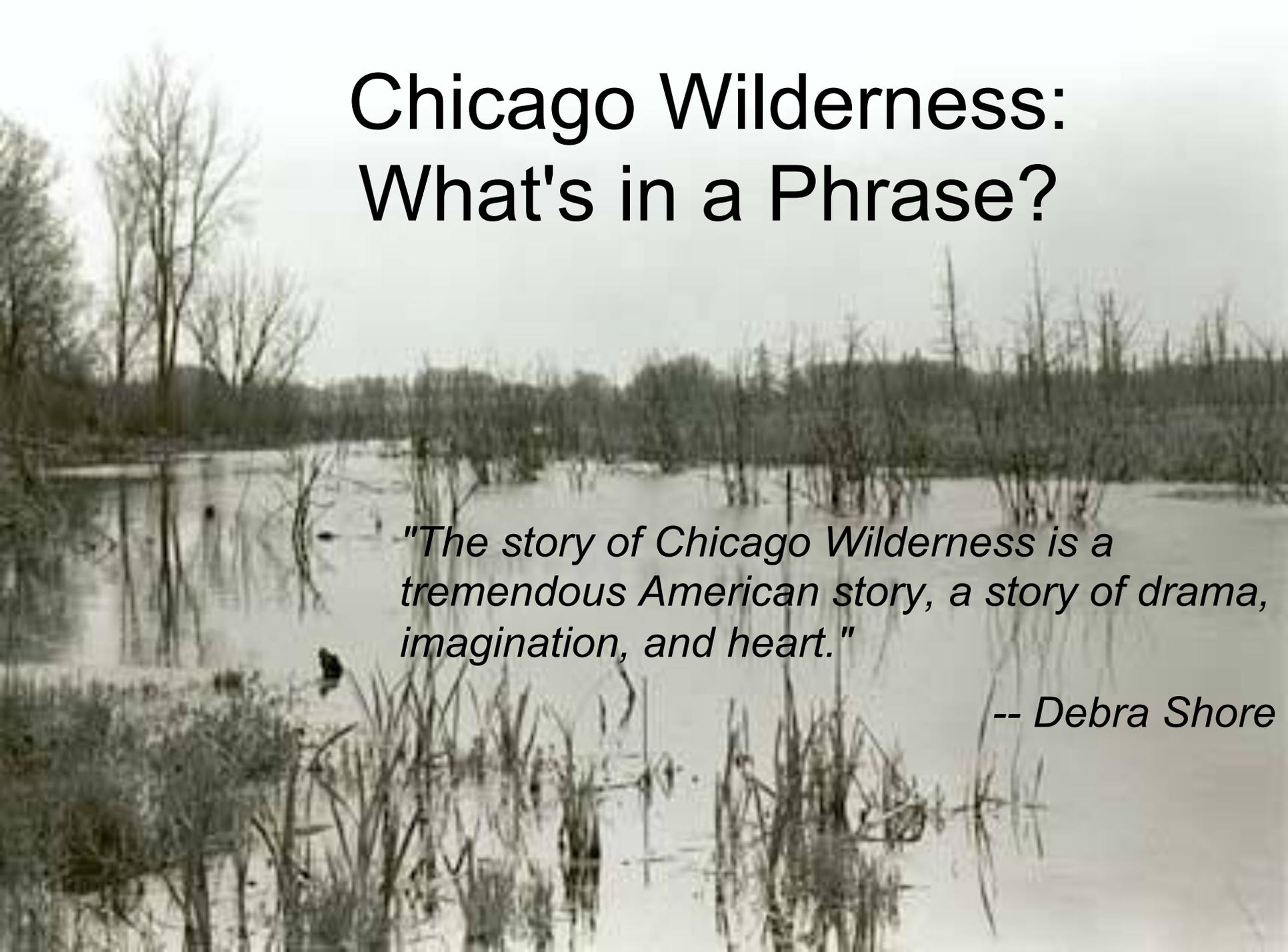
The Problem with Wilderness

Andrew Light

"Urban Wilderness" (1995)

- Classical view of wilderness as something to be feared has been transferred to cities, in a process of reinforcing racial, economic, and geographical separation/isolation
- Shift in rhetoric of urban wilderness (from Sinclair's *The Jungle* to Michael Douglas in *Falling Down*)
- Contemporary representations of urban space as dangerous wilderness





Chicago Wilderness: What's in a Phrase?

"The story of Chicago Wilderness is a tremendous American story, a story of drama, imagination, and heart."

-- Debra Shore

Chicago Wilderness Is . . .

- Land -- protected areas plus associated lands
- Biodiversity -- species and ecosystems of local and global significance
- Human ecology -- interaction of people and nature
- Conservation / Preservation / Restoration
- Scientific research and public policy
- Public outreach and education
- Vantage point for thinking about Chicago

Glimmers of Utopian Rhetoric

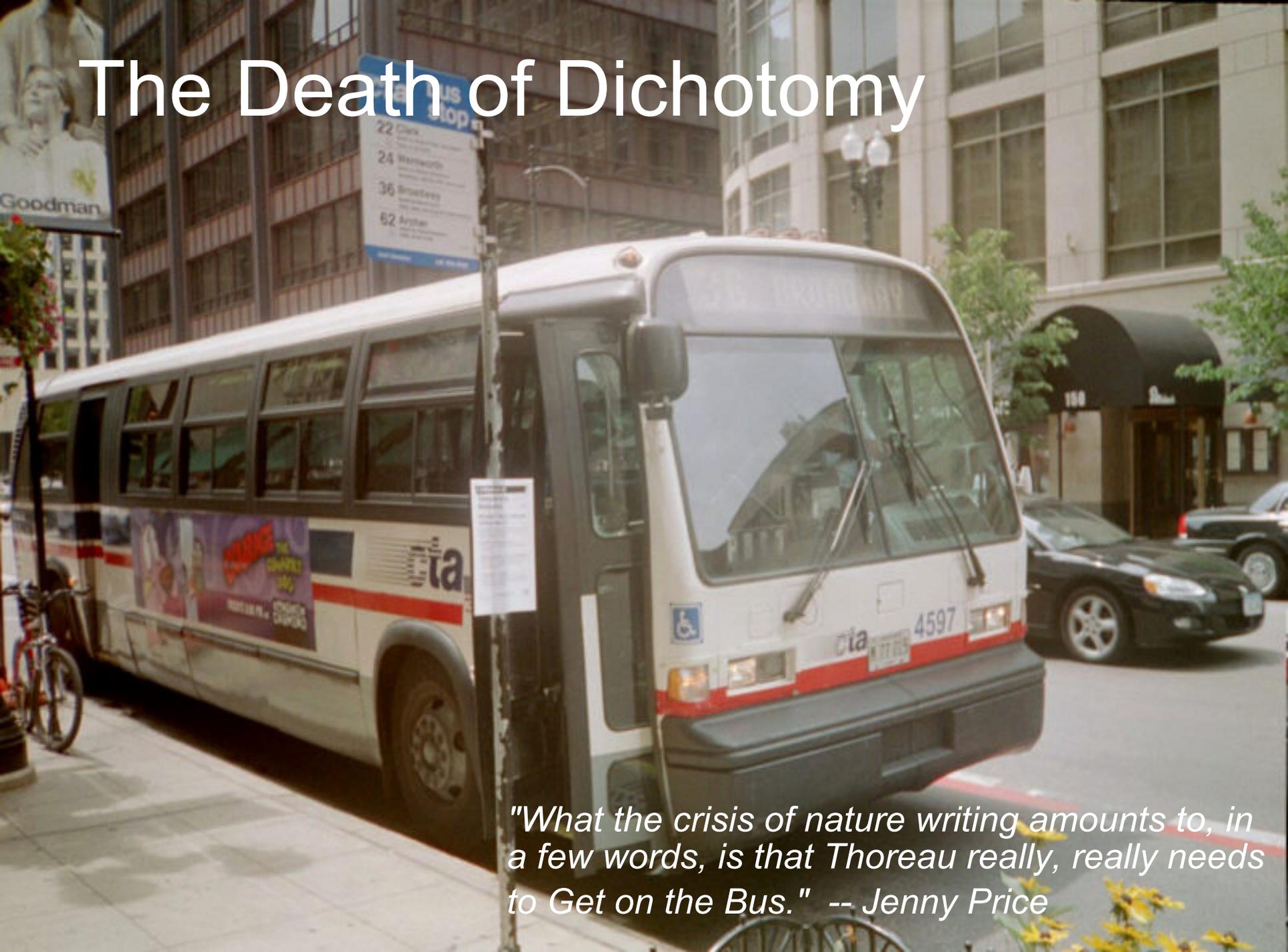
CW aims to create the "world's first bioserve, a metropolitan area where people live in harmony with rare and valuable nature."

-- Chicago Region Biodiversity Council

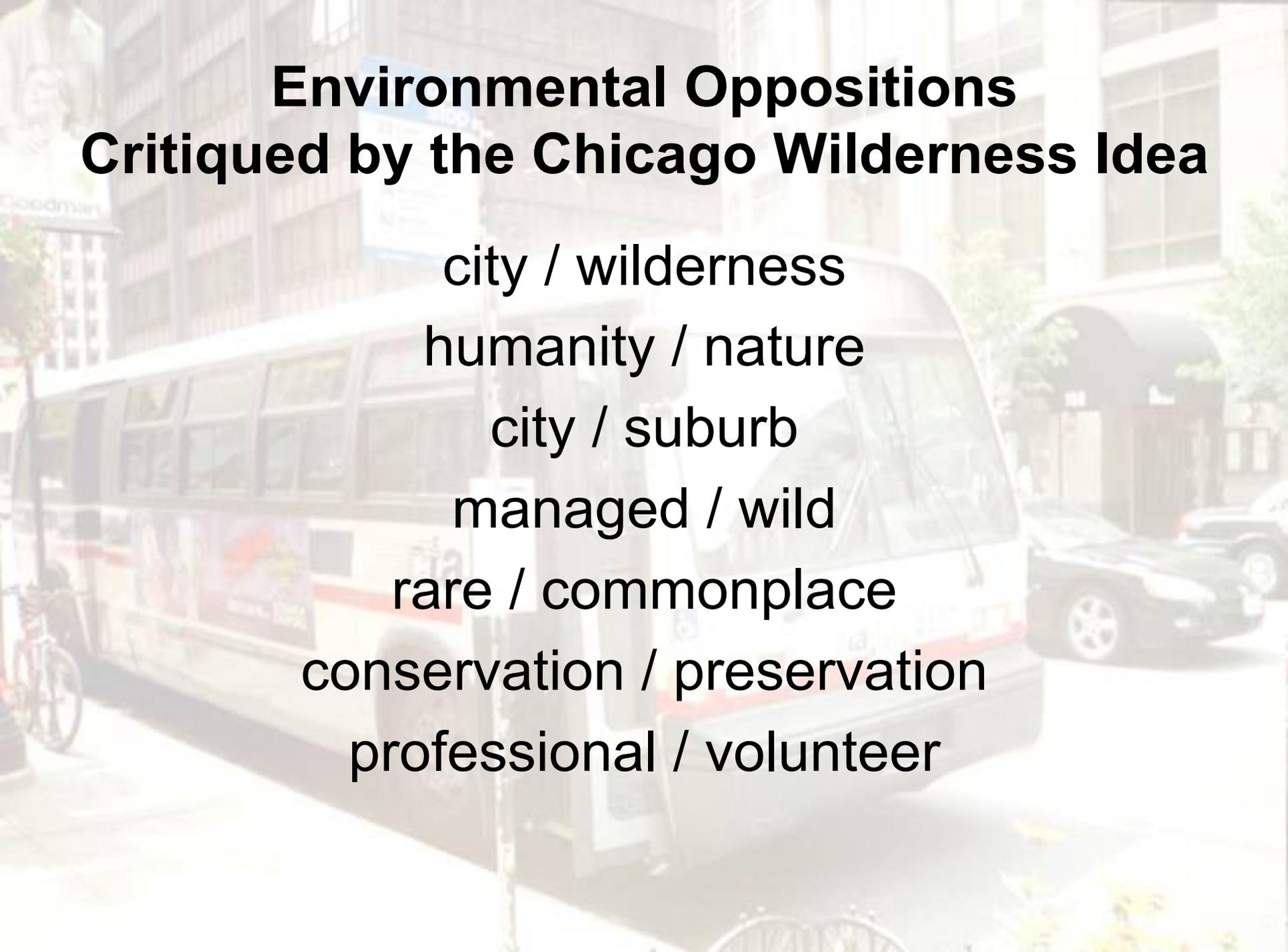
CW strives to "reconnect a landless urban population with the pulse of nature," a process in which "human communities reclaim a cultural tradition of restoring, protecting, and managing our natural communities."

-- Moskovits, et al.

The Death of Dichotomy



"What the crisis of nature writing amounts to, in a few words, is that Thoreau really, really needs to Get on the Bus." -- Jenny Price



Environmental Oppositions Critiqued by the Chicago Wilderness Idea

city / wilderness

humanity / nature

city / suburb

managed / wild

rare / commonplace

conservation / preservation

professional / volunteer

Chicago Representations of Urban Nature, Past and Present

Poetry, fiction, literary nonfiction

Biography and autobiography

Travel accounts and exploration documents

Planning documents and historical studies

Scientific reports and natural histories

Maps, paintings, photography

Nature writing: urban, suburban, rural

Chicago Nature Writing: A Sampling

Donald Culross Peattie, *A Prairie Grove* (1938)

Edwin Way Teale, *Dune Boy: The Early Years of a Naturalist* (1943)

May Theilgaard Watts, *Reading the Landscape of America* (1957, 1975)

Leonard Dubkin, *The Murmur of Wings* (1944), *Enchanted Streets* (1947), *Natural History of a Yard* (1955), *My Secret Places* (1972)

Jerry Sullivan, *Atlas of Biodiversity* (1997) and *Hunting for Frogs on Elston, and Other Tales from Field and Street* (2004)

Joel Greenberg, *A Natural History of the Chicago Region* (2002)

Chicago Wilderness magazine (1997-present)

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<http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/wenatchee/cle-elum-wilderness/wilderness-act.pdf>>

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