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# Protecting the Laboratory: Policing in Glacier Bay National Park

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## **Abstract**

On February 26, 1925, President Calvin Coolidge declared Glacier Bay National Monument by way of a presidential proclamation. The benefits of declaring a national monument versus a national park had been debated by the primary lobbyist of the enterprise, the Ecological Society of America (ESA), with no consideration for the Tlingit communities already inhabiting the area. Biologists and geologists, eager to study Glacier Bay's unique features, considered Indigenous subsistence practices an interference. To ensure the wilderness was as "natural" as possible, these practices, such as seal hunting and berry gathering, were criminalized. Conservation officers and other forms of park police served to protect the scientists' laboratories, and thus established scientific inquiry as a form of colonial control in Southeastern Alaska. This paper will investigate how scientific researchers were complicit in and depended on the policing of Indigenous subsistence practices for the sake of maintaining a pristine laboratory for their work.

*Keywords:* Policing, Conservation, Subsistence

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## INTRODUCTION

For many, the history of Glacier Bay begins with John Muir (1838-1914)—or at least, the version of history most valuable to modern conservationists. His 1879 essay, “The Discovery of Glacier Bay” introduced outdoor enthusiasts of the continental US to the sublime, divine experience of Alaska’s glaciers. However, throughout his narrative, Muir uses paternalistic language to refer to Tlingit men who guided him to the glaciers. He compares their hesitation for getting too close to the glaciers to a childish fear (Muir 237). Though altered to suit the changing times, colonial, racist narratives about the Tlingit and their way of life were used to justify scientific study and resource management in Sít’ Eeti Geeyi (Bay Taking the Place of the Glacier), or what is now commonly known as Glacier Bay, well into the 1980s (Thorton 81). The policing of Tlingit communities in Glacier Bay is merely the legislative extension of these enshrined, racist narratives that date back to John Muir and successive generations of scientists who called upon the police to protect *their* natural “laboratory.”

In this paper, I will show how scientific inquiry in Glacier Bay has historically acted as a form of colonial control, and I will give specific examples of the harm of conservation policing in Glacier Bay. Scientists saw themselves as an extension of the 19<sup>th</sup> century pioneers, and to fulfill that fantasy, they required a form of police to enforce control of the land. The main targets of the police were subsistence activities, more commonly practiced by Tlingit natives in the area. However, white homesteaders occupying the area were rarely fined or arrested for their hunting, fishing, and farming practices. By centering the role of the police in the scientific explorations of Glacier Bay, we not only recognize the crucial role played by the police (including game wardens and conservation officers) in the success of the scientific work, but also the role

scientists themselves played in strengthening colonial/imperial control of the region and in aiding the interests and establishment of white settlers over Tlingit natives.

#### SCIENCE IN GLACIER BAY

The ESA, led by ecologist William S. Cooper, brought Glacier Bay to lawmakers' attention because of the scientific value of the park. The three primary scientific values as written in the proclamation were the mature forests, evidence of "ancient interglacial forests," and the potential to study future development of the newly bare land (U.S. President, Proclamation 196). Because the glaciers had receded recently, the area was perfect for ecologists to study ecological succession, the development of new species in a bare environment. Additionally, the retreating glaciers had left pieces of preserved wood, indicating an ancient forest that had been swept up when the glacier had previously surged.

While the mature forests and ancient forest remnants were of interest, ecological succession, or the cycles of plant development, was the primary ecological research interest in the bay. William S. Cooper, an ecologist from the University of Minnesota, introduced the value of ecological succession in Glacier Bay to the ESA with the goal of having the area protected. In his two-part article, "The Recent Ecological History of Glacier Bay, Alaska," Cooper introduces both plant succession (a version of ecological succession specific to plants) and the reasons why Glacier Bay is a perfect laboratory for him to study plant development cycles (Cooper 93). He does mention that Dr. Lawrence Martin first considered this area worthy of study, so it was not entirely Cooper's idea (Cooper 93). However, inspired by both Martin and John Muir, Cooper took Martin's advice and suggested to the ESA that the area be considered for protection. He then led the ESA lobby of President Coolidge to act and protect the bay (Nat'l Park Service,

“William S. Cooper”). Cooper’s personal interest in ecological succession and his admiration of John Muir made Glacier Bay a great place for him to conduct long-term research.

Plant succession, or what is commonly referred to now as ecological succession, is still a prominent topic in ecology. Recently, ecological succession has been defined to as “how biological communities re-assemble and change over time following natural or anthropogenic disturbance” by Dr. Cynthia Chang and Dr. Benjamin Turner (Chang and Turner 503). In their 2019 article, “Ecological succession in a changing world,” Chang and Turner argue that ecological succession is a foundational framework for modern ecology (Chang and Turner 503). Cooper, in 1916, understood the importance of ecological succession to his discipline. Gary Vequist at the 1983 Glacier Bay Symposium also emphasized the importance and value of Cooper’s ecological succession studies: “This long sequence covering almost 70 years makes Glacier Bay one of the longest records of vegetative development in the world. Insights from these studies have greatly influenced the concept of plant successional theory” (Vequist 53). Cooper’s work has strongly influenced the field of ecology, which strengthens the validity of conducting scientific research in the bay. However, he neglected to assess the role of humans in the Glacier Bay ecosystem, therefore limiting ecologists’ understanding of ecological succession.

Scientific language, specifically ecological vocabulary, strongly directs the tone of Glacier Bay’s proclamation, especially when compared to other national monuments. The National Park Service, when celebrating Cooper’s legacy in 2016, noted that Glacier Bay is “among a small group of ‘parks established for science’ in the National Park System” (“Celebrating the Legacy”). These proclamations did not go into detail about what scientific research topics should be pursued, just that scientific research could be done.

In Glacier Bay's case, it is made clear exactly who wants this area protected and why. In other proclamations, general scientific value is cited as a reason to protect the area. However, for Glacier Bay, the development of forests and behavior of glaciers described clearly as the purpose for protection. The ESA as lobbyists would have had power in determining what research topics were listed in the proclamation. The proclamation begins with a sentence about ease of travel, thus prompting a look into tourist development in the area. The second, third, and fourth paragraphs of the proclamation go into more detail about the scientific value, stating,

AND, WHEREAS, the region is said by the Ecological Society of America to contain a great variety of forest covering consisting of mature areas, bodies of youthful trees which have become established since the retreat of the ice which should be preserved in absolutely natural condition, and great stretches now bare that will become forested in the course of the next century,

AND WHEREAS, this area presents a unique opportunity for the scientific study of glacial behavior and of resulting movements and development of flora and fauna and of certain valuable relics of ancient interglacial forests,

AND WHEREAS, the area is also of historic interest having been visited by explorers and scientists since the early voyages of Vancouver in 1794, who have left valuable records of such visits and explorations. (196)

From these paragraphs, it is clear that the ESA had an important role in defining the value of Glacier Bay. Using the ancient forest remnants, the bare land on which plants would soon colonize, and the mature forests nearby, the ESA envisioned a perfect outdoor laboratory to set up a multi-year, if not multi-decade, research station. They were able to do this by relying on previous narratives from scientists that disregarded or erased Indigenous communities from the

land. By erasing Indigenous communities and their history from Glacier Bay and replacing it with narratives of pristine wilderness, scientists were complicit in criminalizing Tlingit subsistence traditions.

Cooper, however, was not the first scientist interested in Glacier Bay. In summer of 1899, Edward Harriman, president of the Union Pacific Railroad, decided to take a team of scientists up the Alaskan coast for research and recreational purposes (Goetzmann and Sloan 5-6). Originally meant as a vacation for Harriman and his family and friends, Harriman decided to invite some of the most influential scientists, photographers, authors, and artists of the time to use the trip as a research experience (Burroughs et al. xxi-xxii). He consulted with the Chief of the Biological Survey, C. Hart Merriam and the Washington Academy of Sciences to create the guest list which included the likes of Merriam himself, John Burroughs (ornithologist and author), Dr. William H. Dall (paleontologist with the United States Geological Survey and honorary curator of mollusks at the U.S. National Museum), Henry Gannett (chief geographer of the USGS), Dr. George Bird Grinnell (anthropologist and editor of *Forest and Stream*), and John Muir (author and “student of glaciers”) (Goetzmann and Sloan 208-09; Burroughs et al. xxv). Twelve volumes of new information about Alaska were published in the two decades after the Harriman Expedition in 1899 based on the work of the Harriman scholars (Goetzmann and Sloan 199-200).

The expedition served as a “floating university” with a five hundred volume library to assist the researchers (Goetzmann and Sloan xv). Merriam states in his introduction to the published editions of the Harriman Volumes, “Nearly every evening an informal lecture or talk on some subject connected with the work of the Expedition, and illustrated by blackboard sketches, was given in the main cabin” (Burroughs et al. xxix). As the men encountered new

species, glaciers, and people, they could workshop their ideas with other influential people in their respective fields.

While the Harriman Expedition resulted in many advances for science, anthropology, and writing about Alaska, the expedition also exemplifies how scientific research served as a form of colonialism. In Cape Fox, the expedition members spent a day taking objects from an abandoned village. A blanket was taken off a grave, the imposing totem poles were taken down, and houses were searched to collect masks and baskets for museums and universities (Goetzmann and Sloan 164, 168). Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian belongings, all throughout southeastern Alaska, were disrespected and stolen to be put on display in museums far away, where they were represented as artifacts of ancient cultures even though the people to whom those items belonged lived nearby.

Scientists as colonizers did not stop after national monuments and parks were created. The entire state of Alaska was considered one giant laboratory. In September 1951, the Alaska Division of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) held the Second Alaskan Science Conference to discuss the future of scientific research in the territory. In the opening session, Kirtley F. Mather, the President of AAAS remarked, “I know just enough to recognize the unlimited opportunities for scientific achievements that lie before you. . . . You are still pioneers in a rich, new land. You are blazing trails in a region that has only begun to be developed” (Mather 5). Into the mid-twentieth century, the president of AAAS was still upholding the frontier mentality by directly referring to scientists as pioneers. Instead of gold prospectors, the pioneers were scientists both in the academy and in industry, and they had the assistance of conservation officers and game wardens to defend their work. Ira Wiggins remarked, “Supervisory controls placed on hunting, fishing, and trapping have resulted in the



accumulation of many valuable data on the life histories of our native animals” (Wiggins 33).

These scientists knew their work relied on the policing of the land. To them, the criminalization of subsistence activities was justified by the work they produced for their disciplines.

In 1983, the First Glacier Bay Science Symposium took place in Gustavus, Alaska, within the boundaries of Glacier Bay National Park to celebrate “A Century After Muir” (Wood Jr. et al. i). Indigenous people were only incorporated into the discussion of the humanities program. The keynote, presented by William E. Brown, the Alaska Regional Historian of the National Park Service, referred only to “ancient peoples” and the science sections omitted any evidence of Indigenous people living in the area (Brown 2). Gary Vequist, a resource management specialist with Glacier Bay National Park, stated, “Glacier Bay’s natural resources have remained essentially unaltered by man, making it an excellent laboratory for conducting scientific research” (Vequist 52). He denied the existence and impact of Tlingit communities in Glacier Bay even though Robert Ackerman, an anthropologist, argued at the same conference that people had occupied the area near Glacier Bay for at least 900 years, perhaps stretching back 9000 years (Ackerman 70).

Over the course of a hundred years, the general perception of Glacier Bay (much like the rest of Alaska) from the perspective of many scientists was of a pristine laboratory, perfect for scientific inquiry. However, this narrative erases the long history of Tlingit society in and around the Bay. Even in 1983, an anthropologist and a resource management specialist had two fundamentally different views of human history and life in Glacier Bay. Additionally, at each of these conferences the merits of policing the bay were recognized. Therefore, they knew that to conduct their research, police force had to be standing guard ready to arrest people who would disturb the laboratory. By neglecting to acknowledge Indigenous history, at times with

Indigenous people in the audience, scientists reinforced the colonialist idea that the land was empty, yet mythical, beautiful, and ideal for white occupation.

#### POLICING OF GLACIER BAY

Conservation officers and game wardens are hired to patrol the area and enforce laws regarding national parks. In addition to officers of the National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, etc., the state of Alaska employs Alaska Wildlife Troopers for their parks. According to the current National Park Service website, their law enforcement rangers are “trusted to protect the country’s most precious resources” (Nat’l Park Service, “Become a Law Enforcement Ranger). In Alaska, game wardens are considered a part of the state troopers (Alaska Department of Public Safety, “Division of Alaska Wildlife Troopers). Whether they are called officers, wardens, or managers, they all have the role of policing and controlling access to and interaction with the physical, ecological space.

Conservation officers have been described as protectors of the environment. However, in some states, their power is equivalent to regular police officers. Theodore Catton argues in *Inhabited Wilderness*, that after the hiring of Duane Jacobs as a ranger in Glacier Bay, “the NPS’s approach to native hunting definitely shifted from biological investigation to law enforcement” (63). Because scientific methodology dismissed Indigenous knowledge as legitimate for resource management purposes, conservation officers prevent knowledge and cultural practices from continuing when they fine and arrest people in the park.

In the case of Glacier Bay, white homesteaders living in the park were rarely arrested or penalized for the same activities that Indigenous people were prohibited from entering the park to do. To compare the experiences of Tlingit natives in Glacier Bay with white homesteaders, I will analyze three different accounts of people who have lived, hunted, and/or harvested

materials in Glacier Bay: Jim Huscroft, a white homesteader; Frank Sinclair, a Hoonah Tlingit Native; and Scotty James, a Tlingit native. Huscroft's and Sinclair's stories represent generally the same time period, while James's account shows how the same dismissive attitudes toward Indigenous land claims in Glacier Bay lasted into the 1970s.

Jim Huscroft lived in Lituya Bay from around 1917 to 1939. According to the Glacier Bay Official National Park Handbook from 1983, he was the only person living in the 150 mile stretch of coastline (Nat'l Park Service, *Glacier Bay: A Guide*, 21). The handbook describes his yearly trip to Juneau for supplies and his Christmas dinner in an approving way, even though the area he was living in would have been inside the grounds of the national monument where, at the same time, natives were being prohibited from living. The handbook also fails to mention Ernie Rognan, a Norwegian fishman whom Rick Kurtz mentions in his *Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve Historic Resource Study* as being Huscroft's fox farming partner (Kurtz 76); the NPS overemphasized that he lived alone, mentioning the fact twice in one sentence (Nat'l Park Service, *Glacier Bay: A Guide* 21). Kurtz's study was published twelve years after the Glacier Bay handbook; however, Rognan is mentioned with Huscroft in a 1935 article about southeastern Alaska (Washburn 361).

By leaving Rognan out of the picture, Huscroft's story as dictated by the NPS shows a pioneer type man, living off the land, and rarely making contact with civilization. They also introduce Huscroft as one of the "few residents since Indian days" to reside in Glacier Bay (Nat'l Park Service, *Glacier Bay: A Guide* 21). This suggests that Native Americans happened to leave instead of being forced off the land for the purposes of the national monument. Additionally, there is no evidence of Huscroft's presence in Lituya Bay ever being questioned as legal or illegal. In the introduction to *Haa Aanii*, Thomas Thornton argues, "Natives' communal rights to

hunting grounds on islands were similarly usurped on the basis of the common property principle, only to then be leased exclusively by the government to non-Native fox farmers” (xviii). Kurtz notes that even though residents of the Glacier Bay area before the expansion of the park in 1939 were not “founded under homesteading provisions,” they “qualified” as homesteaders (75). He does not go into detail if these settlers had to sign any paperwork to continue living in the area, or if they were simply left alone. White people, like Jim Huscroft, continuing to live within the boundaries of the national monument even as native subsistence activities were being criminalized. Not only were white settlers were given a pass for activities for which Natives were punished, but they were encouraged to introduce non-native species, like foxes, into Native lands.

Frank Sinclair’s statement concerning his (and other Hoonah Natives’) rights to land in Glacier Bay provide a stark contrast to Huscroft’s story. A letter addressed to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs on September 20, 1946, provides a testimony for the discrimination against Tlingits by the National Park Service (NPS) and the Fish and Wildlife Service. Fred R. Geeslin of the Alaska Native Office attached a statement from Frank Sinclair, a Hoonah Native, noting recent arrests of other Hoonah Natives and his family’s long relationship to the land now controlled by the U.S. government. Geeslin notes in his section of the letter that he heard from Alfred Kuehl, a landscape architect, that the NPS wanted to remove “two Native allotments at Glacier Bay . . . as that particular area is desired for a Park Service hotel (tourist)” (Williss; Fred R. Geeslin to Walter V. Woehlke). Although the proclamation for the national monument had focused on scientific inquiry as the main purpose for protection, the attraction that Muir and other writers brought to Glacier Bay encouraged a healthy tourist interest in the region. The NPS

was aware of this tourist interest, and by Geeslin's account, was prepared to meet those needs at the cost of evicting Tlingits from their homesteads.

In Sinclair's statement, he notes that the place where his homestead sat (Berg Bay) had been occupied by his father before him. Sinclair, born in 1881, visited the homestead "every summer until [his father's] death" (Fred R. Geeslin to Walter V. Woehlke). However, he explained that his title papers, which he obtained after his father's death, were destroyed "in a fire which destroyed most of the Hoonah Village on June 14, 1944" (Fred R. Geeslin to Walter V. Woehlke). Even though Sinclair followed the legal processes to apply for a homestead on his late father's land and he had lived, worked, and harvested food there long before the establishment of Glacier Bay National Monument, the traditional subsistence activities of Sinclair and other Hoonah Natives in Glacier Bay continued to be a criminal offense.

Sinclair goes on to describe in detail the subsistence activities that his father practiced and what he has continued. In the spring, summer, and fall, most of the work involved "fishing, picking berries and hunting seals and putting up supplies for winter use for myself and my family" (Fred R. Geeslin to Walter V. Woehlke). In addition to a vegetable garden, he collected "blueberries, lagoon berries and strawberries" near his home (Fred R. Geeslin to Walter V. Woehlke). However, Sinclair's statement does not only demonstrate the subsistence activities of Berg Bay, but also the ways in which his father altered the environment to increase his harvests. He recalled that his father caught deer and moved them to Willoughby Island near Berg Bay to ensure that there would be a place to hunt if meat was needed (Fred R. Geeslin to Walter V. Woehlke). He compared this case to a white man running a fox farm on the same island who refuses to allow Sinclair to hunt the deer that his father had originally moved to the island. Sinclair's statement provides evidence that humans had been influencing the ecosystem before

Glacier Bay National Monument was established. This human influence continued to be ignored by scientists.

Sinclair's detailed explanations for why he has a right to land is motivated by a case of Hoonah Natives being arrested. The winter before the letter was written, "three or four of the Hoonah Natives . . . arrested for hunting and trapping in the Glacier Bay area" (Fred R. Geeslin to Walter V. Woehlke). Additionally, Geeslin notes that "the Hoonah Natives were forbidden to hunt in this area by Fish and Wildlife Service representatives who evidently are empowered to enforce the hunting and trapping regulations in the National Park" (Fred R. Geeslin to Walter V. Woehlke). This detail suggests that enforcement from the NPS and the Fish and Wildlife service differed in terms of who was being arrested and detained. The distinction in enforcement from NPS and Fish and Wildlife is not clear. In the case of Jim Huscroft, it was known that he had a trapping cabin, so the trapping law was not being enforced fairly by neither the NPS or the Fish and Wildlife Service (Kurtz 77).

Scotty James, in an interview from Sitka in the 1970s, gave an example of how the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) continued to dismiss Indigenous knowledge well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While Sitka is well outside of the boundaries of Glacier Bay National Park, the sentiment that he shared about FWS can be translated to how Indigenous people in this region have been treated by park police. He begins by explaining that before the "fish run," Tlingits and fish lived together with few seagulls in the area. However, after the seagull population increased, the fish population decreased. He notes that the salmon are snatched by seagulls as they head out to sea. James's frustration with the fish and wildlife service appears as he states, "If the fish-wildlife stopped every person from eating fish, we quit eating fish, we're still going to lose the fish because the seagulls are doing away with all our fish. I wish they wake up one of these days

and do away with the seagulls, then our fish run gonna come back” (MC 5, Item 296, Tape 238). James then says that he brought up this issue with the fish and wildlife service in Ketchikan. In his memory of the event, he told them the worst enemies of the fish run, and they laughed at him. James hoped that the service would begin to focus on eliminating seagull eggs, sea lions, and seagulls to restore the balance of fish and predators to “being like old times” (MC 5, Item 296, Tape 238). Traditional Tlingit practices, like egg collecting, had impacted, if not clearly benefitted, the ecological balance that ecologists sought out in their ecological succession research. Without humans collecting eggs and the introduction of multiple canneries and fishing operations, seagull populations rose, and fish populations declined drastically. By prohibiting Native practices, ecologists failed to acknowledge the crucial role of humans in an ecosystem.

From these three different stories, Tlingit hunters and fishers were being penalized by police due to environmental law more often than white homesteaders who continued to live within the boundaries of the national monument. Their knowledge about nature, like Scotty James’, was dismissed well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. White men like Huscroft, among many other white homesteaders in the park, continue to be romanticized in the history of the park.

#### CONCLUSION

In the time between John Muir’s publishing of “The Discovery of Glacier Bay” in 1895 and the First Glacier Bay Science Symposium in 1983, little had changed in the narratives of scientific inquiry in Glacier Bay. The bay was still considered an empty space ripe for scientific inquiry and research stations. The few traces of humans and its remoteness inspired a mythical understanding of the ice fields and glaciers of southeastern Alaska. This narrative allowed scientists to justify the continued prevention of people in the park for the sake of keeping their outdoor laboratory free from disturbance. Tlingit communities were pressured to abandon their

subsistence traditions even though white settlers were encouraged to live their pioneer fantasies on Native land. Their culture, religion, and way of life that relied on interactions with the environment were obstructed to promote the development of white civilization and the advancement of Western science.

Scientific inquiry in Glacier Bay has historically been used to justify colonialist violence towards Indigenous people. Scientists have been complicit in the criminalization of traditional ecological knowledge and Indigenous culture for the sake of scientific inquiry. They relied on police to fine or arrest local Tlingits to prevent them from re-entering the land, while allowing white settlers to stay. In Glacier Bay National Park, Indigenous subsistence activities were perceived as a threat to a clean scientific research space, while white homesteaders were not harassed for the same actions. As long as the pristine wilderness myth pervades Glacier Bay National Park, the racist and colonialist foundations of scientific inquiry will continue to relegate Tlingit knowledge for the sake of scientific possibility and aesthetic appeal of the manufactured, desolate landscape.



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