Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement. *By Paul S. Sutter*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002. xvi + 343 pp. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, $35.00. ISBN 0-295-98219-5.

Reviewed by John Paul Rossi

Paul S. Sutter has written an engaging account of the origins of the "modern wilderness idea" and its role in the creation of the Wilderness Society (1934). The narrative is constructed primarily through intellectual biographies of four of the Society's founders: Aldo Leopold, Robert Sterling Yard, Benton MacKaye, and Bob Marshall. The "group," Sutter argues, "had come together to define a new preservation ideal because of a common feeling that the automobile and road building threatened what was left of wild America" (p. 4). Surprisingly, Leopold, Yard, MacKaye, and Marshall all believed that the primary threat to wild public lands in the interwar period was not resource extraction and industrial development, but rather the motorized outdoor recreation and the tourist infrastructure that it called into being. "The founders of the Wilderness Society," Sutter writes "had been *driven wild*" by the willingness of the federal government to facilitate these developments in "opening up the nation's few remaining wild landscapes" (p. 10).

Driven Wild effectively places the development of the modern wilderness idea in the socioeconomic, cultural, and political (environmental/recreational politics) milieu of the interwar period. In it Sutter argues that as industrialization and urbanization divorced Americans from nature, the automobile revolution and the expansion of leisure time made it possible for them to travel back to it. Consumerism made such travel desirable as Americans began to view "recreational nature as an experiential commodity." This combination of factors produced "the rise of mass nature tourism" in the 1920s (p. 27).

This mass consumption of nature created one of the many paradoxes that Sutter explores. Visits to the U.S. national parks and forests increased dramatically (park visits grew from 360,000 in 1916 to 21 million in 1941; forest visits grew from 3 million in 1917 to 32 million in 1931) and brought what some preservationists viewed as horrific consequences. For Leopold, Yard, MacKaye, and Marshall, the American drive back to nature produced the destruction of wild lands by what MacKaye called the "motor slum" of sprawling commercial development: "billboards, restaurants, shops, filling stations, and residences" (p. 172). The Wilderness Society founders believed that auto-driven sprawl of this sort, along with the tremendous numbers of motor tourists who wanted to view the nation's great natural sights through their windshields, would convert the few truly wild places left to "development of the Coney Island type" (p. 183),

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gridironed with asphalt and overrun with automobiles, people, and tourist facilities. In their view, the American rush to embrace nature in the 1920s and 1930s threatened to destroy a national treasure.

Wilderness, the group believed, offered Americans an important escape from what Bob Marshall termed "the strangling clutch of a mechanistic civilization" (p. 207). Their anxieties and hopes led the founders to define wilderness clearly and create an organization that would fight for its preservation. Wilderness, as they developed it, was "a continuous stretch of country preserved in its nature state, open to lawful hunting and fishing, big enough to absorb a two-weeks pack trip and kept devoid of roads, artificial trails, cottages, or other works of man." These stretches were primitive areas where "people entering them would have to travel in a primitive way." Commercial development would be barred from wilderness areas, as would all "mechanical sights and sounds and smells" (pp. 70, 240, 242). It was a definition of wilderness, Sutter points out, that was largely "recreational" (p. 240). And it was one derived in opposition to the automobile, roads, and "their train of desecrating abominations" (p. 183). This vision, Sutter argues, would later be codified in the Wilderness Act of 1964.

To construct his account, Sutter draws on a wide variety of sources. He relies heavily on the published writings of Leopold, Yard, MacKaye, and Marshall, and supplements these sources with their personal papers (Leopold, MacKaye, and Marshall) and those of other important preservation advocates. *Driven Wild* also makes use of the archives of environmental organizations (e.g., the Wilderness Society) and the National Park and U.S. Forest Services. The book reflects the mastery of an extensive range of primary and secondary print sources on the automobile, consumerism, the environment, intellectual history, and outdoor recreation, to name a few.

There is, however, one serious flaw in the main argument: Sutter does not evaluate the central premise of the wilderness advocates and critically examine the threat that the automobile posed to the remaining federally controlled wild lands in the United States during the interwar period. James J. Flink generally addresses the issue in his major study of the automobile in American life, *The Automobile Age* (1990). He notes that as late as 1924 "there were only 12 miles of paved road in the entire National Park System." While the road mileage increased significantly thereafter in the National Parks (from 1,060 miles in 1924 to 5,387 miles in 1947), the total square miles of parkland tripled during the same period. Despite this growth, Flink observes that even in the most heavily visited parks such as Yosemite, a walk of an hour brought the hiker into the complete solitude of wilderness (pp. 173, 177–8). Was the automobile and all it

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brought in its train really the threat that the Wilderness Society founders perceived to the nation's wild lands? Unfortunately, this is a question that Sutter does not pose.

One suspects that other forces were driving men like Leopold, Yard, MacKaye, and Marshall wild. Three of the four (Yard excluded) were foresters, and they believed that wilderness and industrial uses, such as limited logging operations, could coexist. Leopold went so far as to write that he "would rather see cut-over lands than Fords any day" (p. 206). Sutter never attempts to analyze seriously the contradictions that appear writ large here.

Despite these criticisms, Sutter has written a rich intellectual history of the origins of the modern wilderness ideal in all its complexity. Many business historians will find *Driven Wild*'s discussion of the automobile's transformation of outdoor leisure illuminating. Sutter effectively surveys the revolution in outdoor recreation that the widespread dissemination of the car and road, the expansion of leisure time, and interest in nature brought to 1920s America. The result is a good overview of the development of mass nature tourism and its consequences. On a more philosophical level, Sutter's intellectual history of the wilderness ideal explores the multiple meanings that nature held out for Americans in the urban, industrial, consumer society of the interwar period. Leopold, Yard, MacKaye, and Marshall struggled to articulate those meanings and to use the knowledge they gained to find the best uses for public lands. The debates that the Wilderness Society's founders joined over the automobile's threat to the natural environment and how best to employ the nation's public lands continue down to this day. *Driven Wild* provides an informative perspective on them.

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