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'Work for others but none for us': the economic and environmental inequalities of New Deal relief

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Neil M. Maher

‘Work for others but none for us’: the economic and environmental inequalities of New Deal relief*

ABSTRACT: This article calls for increased dialogue between social and environmental historians through an examination of the unintended inequalities caused by New Deal relief efforts in the United States during the Great Depression era. It does so not by exploring those directly involved in New Deal relief programmes, but rather by analysing the impact of such programmes on residents of local communities situated near New Deal work project sites. In particular, it traces how a dozen Civilian Conservation Corps camps in a state park thirty miles from New York City transformed the local environment, and in turn influenced the economies and political relationships of nearby local communities. The article argues that while working-class residents were unable to benefit financially from nearby New Deal relief work, middle- and upper-class business owners proved more successful. As a result of such economic inequalities, while working-class locals became increasingly critical of Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, middle- and upper-class residents became grudgingly supportive. The article concludes by urging both social and environmental historians to undertake ‘histories from the ground up’ that pay as much attention to nature as they do to race, class, ethnicity and gender.

KEYWORDS: conservation; environmental history; Franklin Roosevelt; New Deal; social history

On 17 April 1933, Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) enrollees in eight buses stopped in Luray, Virginia before making the final push into nearby George Washington National Forest, where they would establish ‘Camp Roosevelt’, the first CCC camp in the nation.¹ According to Captain Leo Donovan, the army officer in charge of this first contingent of

*The author would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers from *Social History* for their insightful comments and suggestions, as well as Gordon Johnston and Louise Jackson for their careful guidance in bringing this article to publication.

¹Captain Leo Donovan, ‘The establishment of the first Civilian Conservation Corps Camp’, *Infantry Journal* (July–August 1933), 245. For other descriptions of early interaction between

local residents and Camp Roosevelt enrollees, see Erle Kauffman, ‘“Camp Roosevelt” – Forest Camp No. 1’, *American Forests* (June 1933), 270, as well as ‘State Camp to Open’, *Westchester (Va.) Evening Star*, 5 April 1933, and ‘Sun Smiles Again on Boys at Camp Roosevelt’, *Luray (Va.) Page News and Courier* (no date), both as reprinted in the *National Association of Civilian Conservation Corps Alumni Journal* [subsequently NACCA], 16, 4 (April 1997), 6.

Corps enrollees, after spending several hours milling about town and talking to local residents who had gathered on Main Street to greet the young men, 'we were off again' up into the mountains 'with the cheers of all of Luray ringing in our ears'. During the next several weeks, as these CCC enrollees cleared trees from the forest to make room for their camp, the citizens of Luray welcomed them into their churches, held a dance in their honour, and played baseball against the young men on weekends and late in the day after work. Later that summer, when these same enrollees began labouring on their conservation projects, which included both the protection of George Washington National Forest from fire and the development of the forest for outdoor recreation, local residents frequently travelled the nine miles from Luray up into the Massanutten Mountains to visit the CCC camp and to tour its work project site. Not only did the mayors of both Luray and nearby Edinburg, Virginia give lectures at Camp Roosevelt, but two Luray residents, one a concert violinist and the other an amateur magician, likewise made the trip into the forest to entertain these enrollees.

This interaction during the Great Depression between Corps enrollees and residents of local communities situated near CCC camps was not unique to the young men of Camp Roosevelt and their Appalachian neighbours in Virginia. Similar relationships developed between the Corps' approximately 1500 camps and thousands of local communities across the United States during the 1930s and early 1940s.² Such relationships, however, were more than social; they depended as well on environmental and economic transformations caused by the New Deal that ultimately bound CCC camps to towns and villages lying within the surrounding region. 'Hundreds of communities have discovered that a Civilian Conservation Corps camp is a bright spot on the business map for the individual community,' proclaimed CCC Director Robert Fechner in September 1934. Because of this, local residents 'have done many things to facilitate work projects and to promote social interests between townspeople and Civilian Conservation Corps enrollees'.³ Thus, as CCC boys transformed the local environment by planting trees,

²For rare examples of local anxiety regarding nearby African American Corps camps see Michael Sherraden, 'The Civilian Conservation Corps: Effectiveness of the Camps' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1979), 221–2; John Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933–1942: A New Deal Case Study* (Durham, 1967), 91; and Jerrell Shofner, 'Roosevelt's "Tree Army": the Civilian Conservation Corps in Florida', *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 65 (April 1987), 449. The best examination of the African American experience in the CCC is Owen Cole, *The African-American Experience in the Civilian Conservation Corps* (Tallahassee, 1999). For similar anxiety regarding CCC camps filled with rowdy immigrant boys from large cities, see Ben Dixon MacNeill, 'The Melting Pot of CCC Takes 'Em, East, West, North,

South and Makes a Sturdy Alloy', *News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC), 31 March 1935, 3; Official File 268 (CCC), Folder: Misc. (April–June 1935), Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library [subsequently FDRL]; Captain X, 'A Civilian Army in the Woods', *Harper's*, 168 (March 1934), 490; and Barrett Potter, 'The Civilian Conservation Corps in New York State: Its Social and Political Impact' (Ph.D. dissertation, State University of New York, Buffalo, 1973), 61.

³National Archives and Records Administration [subsequently NARA], Robert Fechner, 'Third Annual Report of the Director of Emergency Conservation Work: For the Period April 1, 1934 to September 30, 1934', Record Group 35, Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps, Entry 3, Annual, Special and Final Reports, 7.

halting soil erosion and developing parks across the country, they were also altering the economies and social life of thousands of nearby communities.

Unfortunately, few scholars have examined this complex interaction between New Deal programmes and local communities during the Great Depression era.⁴ While social historians have emphasized the experiences of those directly involved in Franklin Roosevelt's work relief efforts, such as those participating in the Works Progress Administration, the Federal Writers' Project or the Resettlement Administration, environmental historians have instead analysed the ecological impact of New Deal conservation programmes, including the Soil Conservation Service, the Tennessee Valley Authority and the CCC.⁵ Moreover, whereas social historians tend to treat the natural environment of the New Deal era as a passive, ahistorical backdrop, environmental historians for the most part ignore the diversity of human experiences during this and other moments of ecological transformation. 'The greatest weakness of environmental history,' explains environmental historian William Cronon, is 'its failure to probe below the level of the group to explore the implications of social divisions for environmental change'.⁶ My own previous work on the New Deal is a case in point; it examined local community thinking regarding both conservation and the federal government during the 1930s, but refrained from comparing competing ideologies among residents with different class and social backgrounds within these local communities.⁷

This lack of synergy between social and environmental history is all the more troubling since the two fields not only share several important characteristics, but could also benefit greatly from sharing methodological approaches. Both, for instance, are interested in unearthing previously unstudied histories, each relies on innovative, non-traditional source materials, and the two fields have an affinity for exploring less powerful and exploited historical actors, whether they be humans or non-human nature. As social historian Alan Taylor has persuasively argued, 'Because social and environmental history are fundamentally compatible and mutually reinforcing, each set of scholars can ease and strengthen their work by developing hybrid approaches' that weave together these two

⁴Exceptions include Maria Montoya, 'The roots of ethnic and economic divisions in northern New Mexico: the case study of the Civilian Conservation Corps', *Western Historical Quarterly*, 26, 1 (1995), 14–24; Richard Melzer, *Coming of Age in the Great Depression: The Civilian Conservation Corps Experience in New Mexico, 1933–1942* (Las Cruces, New Mexico, 2000), 141–60 and 189–202; and Colin R. Johnson, *Just Queer Folk: Gender and Sexuality in Rural America* (Philadelphia, 2013), 129–57.

⁵Examples of histories about the participants of New Deal programmes include Christine Bold, *Writers, Plumbers, and Anarchists: The WPA Writer's Project in Massachusetts* (Boston, 2006); C. J. Maloney, *Back to the Land: Arthurdale, FDR's New Deal, and the Costs of Economic Planning* (New York, 2011); and Kenneth

Holland and Frank Ernest Hill, *Youth in the CCC* (Washington, DC, 1942). For an illustration of an environmental history of the New Deal that focuses on public lands, see Sarah Phillips, *This Land, This Nation: Conservation, Rural America, and the New Deal* (New York, 2007).

⁶William Cronon, 'Modes of prophecy and production: placing nature in history', *Journal of American History*, 76 (March 1990), 1129.

⁷Neil M. Maher, "'Crazy Quilt Farming on Round Land": the Great Depression, the Soil Conservation Service, and the politics of landscape change on the Great Plains during the New Deal era', *Western Historical Quarterly*, 31 (Autumn 2000), 319–39; and Neil M. Maher, *Nature's New Deal: The Civilian Conservation Corps and the Roots of the American Environmental Movement* (New York, 2008), 115–50.

methodologies.⁸ Deeper analysis of shared access to natural resources and environmental spaces, for instance, can help social historians elucidate the uneven power relationships playing out among historical actors. Conversely, more detailed examination of the economic, racial, gendered or other inequalities functioning within historical groups can serve to moderate environmental historians' tendency to homogenize human cultures. Yet as Stephen Mosley has illustrated in his article 'Common ground: integrating social and environmental history', the two fields continue to remain separate, with little trans-disciplinary communication. 'The foremost challenge for the coming generation of social historians,' argues Mosley, 'is to seek out common ground between social and environmental history.'⁹

This article takes up Mosley's challenge by first analysing the environmental history of conservation work undertaken by a dozen CCC camps located an hour north of New York City. It then traces how such conservation efforts in turn altered the social history of Hudson Valley residents who, although unable to join this New Deal programme themselves, nevertheless lived in close proximity to these Corps camps. Tying together these two histories – one environmental, the other social – illustrates that local residents of different economic classes had extremely divergent lived experiences as a result of the environmental changes wrought by their new neighbours in the CCC. The article, however, also pushes beyond this call for dialogue between environmental and social history by 'bringing the state back in'.¹⁰ 'The disappearance of the state has had profound consequences for the writing of social history,' argued Prasanna Parthasarathi in a 2006 special issue of the *Journal of Social History* dedicated to assessing future social history practices. 'To ignore the state,' he concludes, 'is to seriously distort our understanding of both past and present.'¹¹ To avoid such distortions, this article examines how the conservation work of Corps enrollees during the Great Depression exacerbated environmental and economic inequalities among local residents that ultimately resulted in competing political ideologies regarding Franklin Roosevelt's modern welfare state.¹²

⁸Alan Taylor, 'Unnatural inequalities: social and environmental histories', *Environmental History*, 1, 4 (October 1996), 9. For examples of environmental historians who incorporate social history approaches, see Louis Warren, *The Hunters' Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-Century America* (New Haven, 1999); and Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley, 2003).

⁹Stephen Mosley, 'Common ground: integrating social and environmental history', *Journal of Social History*, 39, 3 (2006), 915. For similar calls for synergy between social and environmental history see also Ted Steinberg, 'Down to earth: nature, agency, and power in history', *American Historical Review*, 107 (2002), 820 and 805; and 'Bringing the natural world into history', *American Historical Review*, 107 (2002), 797.

¹⁰Examples of the rich literature on the New Deal and the state include Theda Skocpol, 'Political response to capitalist crisis: neo-Marxist theories of the state and the case of the New Deal', *Politics and Society*, 10, 2 (1980), 155–201; Skocpol, 'Bringing the state back in: strategies of analysis in current research' in Peter Evans, Dietrich Reuschmeyer and Theda Skocpol (eds), *Bringing the State Back In* (New York, 1985); Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York, 1996); Brinkley, 'The New Deal and the idea of the state' in Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle (eds), *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930–1980* (Princeton, 1989).

¹¹Prasanna Parthasarathi, 'The state and social history', *Journal of Social History*, 39, 3 (Spring 2006), 773.

¹²For examples, by environmental historians, that link environmental, social and political history, see Arthur McEvoy, 'Toward an

State power here is thus envisioned less as an instrument of class rule or abstract action, and more as a contestation of cultural practices, in this case involving the conservation of natural resources, emanating from both above at the federal level as well as from below within local communities.

During Franklin Roosevelt's first one hundred days in office, the economic emergency of the Great Depression was obviously of paramount concern. In one of his earliest messages to Congress, submitted on 21 March 1933, the new president lamented the nation's rising levels of unemployment, which that spring had reached an astounding 25 per cent. 'It is essential to our recovery program that measures be immediately enacted aimed at unemployment relief,' he urged, warning that the enforced idleness of millions of Americans threatened not only the economic vitality of the nation but also its spiritual and moral stability. Yet unemployment was not the only emergency on the president's mind when he arrived in Washington, DC. In the same Congressional correspondence Roosevelt also directed politicians' attention to 'the news we are receiving today of vast damage caused by floods on the Ohio and other rivers', due in large part to deforestation along their banks. The president dismissed the notion that these disasters were natural and instead blamed human negligence, arguing that the floods had occurred because 'national and state domains have been largely forgotten in the past few years of industrial development'. To make up for such neglect, the federal government had to take action to 'conserve our precious natural resources' located on these important public lands.¹³

President Roosevelt's solution for both of these crises – one economic, the other environmental – was quite simple: he asked Congress to give people jobs conserving natural resources. 'I propose to create a civilian conservation corps to be used in simple work, not interfering with normal employment and confining itself to forestry, the prevention of soil erosion, flood control and similar projects,' he explained to his fellow lawmakers. 'I estimate that 250,000 men can be given temporary employment by early summer if you give me authority to proceed within the next two weeks.'¹⁴ Roosevelt's estimates were far too conservative; between 1933 and 1942, when Congress halted funding for the CCC, more than three million young American men enrolled in the New Deal programme. These 'boys', as they were called, had to be between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three and willing to send \$25 of their \$30 monthly pay back home to their families, which had to be listed on state relief registers. The president decided to house these enrollees in 200-man camps, mostly located in national and state parks and forests, and to run the New Deal programme co-operatively; while the Department of Labor co-ordinated enrollee recruitment and the army was responsible for the daily functioning of the CCC camps, the Department of Agriculture supervised Corps conservation projects situated in national and state forests and the Department of Interior

interactive theory of nature and culture: ecology, production, and cognition in the California fishing industry', *Environmental History Review*, 11 (Winter 1987), 300; and Barbara Leibhardt, 'Interpretation and causal analysis: theories in environmental history', *Environmental History Review*, 12 (Spring 1988), 23–33.

¹³President Franklin Roosevelt, 'Relief of unemployment', Message to Congress, 21 March 1933, as reprinted in Edgar Nixon (ed.), *Franklin D. Roosevelt and Conservation, 1911–1945* (Hyde Park, New York, 1957), vol. 1, 143–4.

¹⁴*ibid.*

oversaw the work performed in national and state parks. The resulting New Deal programme, argued the CCC's director in 1942, 'started a change in the landscape of a Nation'.¹⁵

Much like the landscape changes taking place at Camp Roosevelt in Virginia's George Washington National Forest, those caused by the CCC in New York's Bear Mountain State Park also began before any conservation work had officially commenced. This was due to the sudden influx of thousands of Corps enrollees into the 50,000-acre park, which straddled the border between Orange and Rockland counties approximately forty-five miles upriver from New York City in the Hudson River Highlands.¹⁶ While during the first six months of 1933 many of these CCC camps failed to attain their allowable quota of two hundred enrollees, by the beginning of 1934 all twelve Bear Mountain companies had filled their rosters to capacity.¹⁷ The number of CCC workers living in Bear Mountain State Park was actually higher than these figures suggest, since five to ten army personnel in charge of running each camp were not included in enrollee population estimates. When these army officers are taken into account, approximately 2500 Corps employees were eventually stationed in the state park as of January 1934 (see [Table 1](#)).¹⁸

Before Corps enrollees could begin their conservation work, however, they needed to replace the tents they were living in with more permanent dwellings in order to protect themselves from oncoming winter weather.¹⁹ Enrollees throughout the park were therefore first put to work constructing wooden barracks similar to those used by the Corps in its camps nationwide. Enrollees in Bear Mountain built two camps during the spring of 1933, each with half a dozen barracks, and eight similar compounds later that year. Before it had even planted a tree, then, the CCC had cut down trees within the park in order to build its enrollee camps. For instance, in establishing their camp near Christie Brook, enrollees cleared several acres of forest before constructing five dorms, a mess hall, infirmary, recreation hall, supply house, administrative quarters and a latrine. The CCC also cut a dirt road through the forest to the camp from a nearby park thoroughfare.²⁰ Corps enrollees built and occupied twelve such camps in Bear Mountain State Park by November 1933.²¹

¹⁵NARA, James McEntee, Federal Security Agency, Final Report of the Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps, April 1933 to 30 June 1942, Record Group 35, CCC, Entry 3, Annual, Special and Final Reports, 41.

¹⁶The name Bear Mountain State Park is used throughout this article when referring to both Bear Mountain and Harriman state parks, which lie adjacent to one another and comprise approximately 5000 and 45,000 acres respectively, because during the Great Depression the public, and the Roosevelt administration, referred to both as Bear Mountain State Park.

¹⁷NARA, Boxes 1–4, Entry 108, 'Station Strength Reports', Record Group 35, Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

¹⁸This enrollee estimate was calculated by multiplying the number of enrollees in each camp (200) by the number of camps (12), and

then adding the approximately 120 army officers stationed in the twelve Bear Mountain Camps. This total comes to 2520 CCC personnel stationed in Bear Mountain State Park.

¹⁹Bear Mountain Trailside Museum [subsequently BMTM], 'Civilian Conservation Corps Work Program in Palisades Interstate Park', Commissioners of the Palisades Interstate Park, unarranged and undated files.

²⁰NARA, File 'New York State', Entry 6, 'CCC Camp Reports', Record Group 35, Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

²¹Although NARA records note eleven camps functioning within Bear Mountain State Park, numerous archival materials from the Bear Mountain Trailside Museum indicate twelve camps in the park. For CCC enrollee numbers for each camp see, NARA, Boxes 1–4, Entry

Table 1. CCC Camp enrollments in Bear Mountain State Park, 1933-5

Date	Camp number	Camp name	Number of enrollees	Nearest local town
August 1933	SP-1	Pine Meadow	163	Sloatsburg
	SP-2	Beachy Bottom	154	Bear Mt.
September 1933	SP-1	Pine Meadow	90	Sloatsburg
	SP-2	Beachy Bottom	130	Bear Mt.
October 1933	SP-1	Pine Meadow	186	Sloatsburg
	SP-2	Beachy Bottom	159	Bear Mt.
	SP-20	Lower Pine Meadow	48	Sloatsburg
	SP-21	Christie Brook	25	Sloatsburg
	SP-22	Lower Beachy Bottom	108	Bear Mt.
	SP-23	Brook Hollow	26	Bear Mt.
	SP-24	Storm King	25	Cornwall
	SP-26	Beaver Pond	57	Bear Mt.
	SP-27	Bockey Swamp	25	Bear Mt.
	SP-29	Blauvelt	189	Blauvelt
	November 1933	SP-1	Pine Meadow	171
SP-2		Beachy Bottom	182	Bear Mt.
SP-20		Lower Pine Meadow	59	Sloatsburg
SP-21		Christie Brook	33	Sloatsburg
SP-22		Lower Beachy Bottom	55	Bear Mt.
SP-23		Brook Hollow	36	Bear Mt.
SP-24		Storm King	29	Cornwall
SP-26		Beaver Pond	41	Bear Mt.
SP-27		Bockey Swamp	25	Bear Mt.
SP-28		Mica Mine	192	Iona Island
SP-29		Blauvelt	198	Blauvelt
January 1934	SP-1	Pine Meadow	197	Sloatsburg
	SP-2	Beachy Bottom	182	Bear Mt.
	SP-20	Lower Pine Meadow	175	Sloatsburg
	SP-21	Christie Brook	190	Sloatsburg
	SP-22	Lower Beachy Bottom	192	Bear Mt.
	SP-23	Brook Hollow	183	Bear Mt.
	SP-24	Storm King	191	Cornwall
	SP-26	Beaver Pond	191	Bear Mt.
	SP-27	Bockey Swamp	178	Bear Mt.
	SP-28	Mica Mine	199	Iona Island
	SP-29	Blauvelt	180	Blauvelt
October 1934	SP-1	Pine Meadow	191	Sloatsburg
	SP-2	Beachy Bottom	206	Bear Mt.
	SP-20	Lower Pine Meadow	197	Sloatsburg
	SP-21	Christie Brook	198	Sloatsburg
	SP-22	Lower Beachy Bottom	195	Bear Mt.
	SP-23	Brook Hollow	195	Bear Mt.
	SP-24	Storm King	195	Cornwall
	SP-26	Beaver Pond	206	Bear Mt.
	SP-27	Bockey Swamp	196	Bear Mt.
	SP-28	Mica Mine	198	Iona Island
	SP-29	Blauvelt	207	Blauvelt

Table 1 – *continued*

Date	Camp number	Camp name	Number of enrollees	Nearest local town
June 1935	SP-1	Pine Meadow	175	Sloatsburg
	SP-2	Beachy Bottom	190	Bear Mt.
	SP-20	Lower Pine Meadow	197	Sloatsburg
	SP-21	Christie Brook	186	Sloatsburg
	SP-22	Lower Beachy Bottom	177	Bear Mt.
	SP-24	Storm King	174	Cornwall
	SP-26	Beaver Pond	193	Bear Mt.
	SP-27	Bockey Swamp	197	Bear Mt.
	SP-28	Mica Mine	189	Iona Island
	SP-29	Blauvelt	138	Blauvelt

Sources: NARA, Boxes 1–4, Entry 108, ‘Station Strength Reports’, Record Group 35, Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

The Civilian Conservation Corps did not locate all of its camps deep in the woods and far from civilization. As with camps nationwide, the CCC situated most of those in Bear Mountain within a few miles walking distance of nearby towns.²² For instance, four Hudson Highland villages served as mailing addresses for CCC enrollees. Many of Bear Mountain’s 2500 enrollees were therefore living on the outskirts of local communities bordering the park, communities that could barely claim a population larger than a single CCC camp. In fact, so numerous were Corps enrollees by late 1933 that they accounted for just under 10 per cent of the civilian population encircling the park.²³ Even if this geographical area is expanded far beyond the park’s borders to encompass all of Orange and Rockland counties, which together completely surround Bear Mountain State Park, CCC enrollees by the mid-1930s accounted for one out of every hundred people residing in the region (see [Figure 1](#) and [Table 2](#)).²⁴

Once they were settled in their camps, Corps enrollees finally began a wide array of conservation projects, most of which included some forestry work. Enrollees from several Bear Mountain camps planted saplings across soil-eroded hillsides that had been heavily logged during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, before

108, ‘Station Strength Reports’, Record Group 35, Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

²²Ray Hoyt, *Your CCC: A Handbook for Enrollees* (Washington, DC, 1939), 42.

²³Local town population for Rockland County towns compiled from ‘The Rockland County Red Book, 1927’ (Nyack, New York, 1927). For local town populations for Orange County see ‘Table 21: Population by Sex, Color, Age, etc., for Counties By Minor Civil Divisions, 1930’, 15th Decennial Census, 1930, vol. 3, Part

II (Washington, DC: US Bureau of the Census).

²⁴According to the 1930 US Census, Orange and Rockland counties had populations of 189,982 and 59,599 respectively. To access this data from the US Census Bureau, see ‘Population of States and Counties of the United States: 1790–1990, Part III: Population of Counties, Earliest Census to 1990’, online at: www.census.gov/population/www/censusdata/pop1790-1990.html (accessed 3 July 2013).

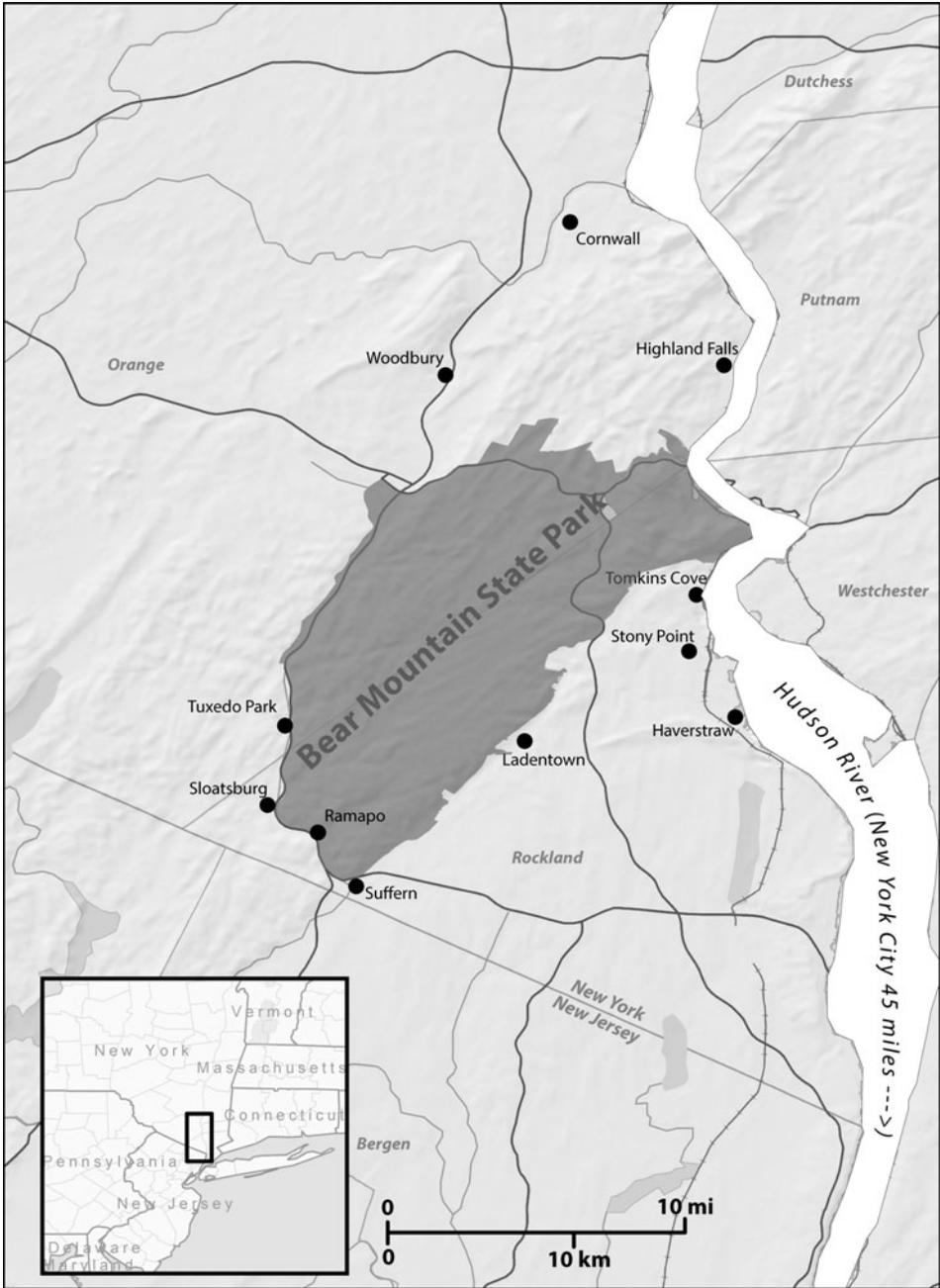


Figure 1. Map of local communities surrounding Bear Mountain State Park. Created for the author by Scott Walker, Harvard Map Collection, Harvard University.

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Table 2. Local town populations surrounding Bear Mountain State Park

County	Local town	Local population
Rockland	Tomkins Cove	1300
	Stony Point	1000
	Haverstraw	5699
	Ladentown	200
	Suffern	3349
	Sloatsburg	1516
	Ramapo	300
Orange	Cornwall	5017
	Highland Falls	7057
	Woodbury	1923
	Tuxedo	2606
	Total	29,967

Sources: Populations for Rockland County towns compiled from 'The Rockland County Red Book, 1927' (Nyack, New York: Rockland County Trust, Co., 1927); populations for Orange County compiled from 'Table 21: Population by Sex, Color, Age, etc., for Counties By Minor Civil Divisions, 1930', 15th Decennial Census, 1930, vol. 3, Part II (Washington, DC: US Bureau of the Census).

New York established the state park.²⁵ During the first three months of 1934, workers from the CCC camps at Mica Mine and Beaver Pond also cut and burned more than a thousand trees infected with Dutch elm disease, even journeying outside park boundaries in an effort to help residents of nearby Nyack and Suffern, New York with their eradication programme.²⁶ Fire protection was yet another forestry work project that kept enrollees busy. Corps workers removed fire-prone underbrush from the forest floor, cut dozens of miles of firebreaks throughout the park, and built a system of fire towers, including one constructed of local stone atop Bear Mountain.²⁷ As the army officer in charge of Bear Mountain's Beachy Bottom camp explained, most enrollees located in the park were working on projects that 'embraced a vast scope of forestry work'.²⁸

More widespread than forestry and soil conservation work, however, were those camp projects that involved developing the state park for outdoor recreation. This type of labour included the blazing of dozens of miles of new trails and the building of numerous comfort stations, hiking shelters, picnic areas and campgrounds, as well as the digging of water and sewage systems to accommodate visitors less apt to journey deep

²⁵Neil Maher, 'Changes in the park: a study of the ecological and cultural transformations associated with the creation of Bear Mountain State Park', *Hudson Valley Regional Review*, 11, 2 (September 1994), 4.

²⁶BMTM, 'Interstate Park CCC Camps Eradicating Diseased Elms', Commissioners of the Palisades Interstate Park, unarranged and undated files. On project description of the camp at Mica Mine, see NARA, 'Emergency Conservation Work Camp Report, Mica Mine, SP-28', 26 March 1935, File 'New

York State', Entry 6, 'CCC Camp Reports', Record Group 35, Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

²⁷BMTM, 'Relief Work Increases Fire Protection in Interstate Park', Commissioners of the Palisades Interstate Park, unarranged and undated files.

²⁸NARA, 'Emergency Conservation Work Camp Report, Beachy Bottom Camp SP-2', 20 July 1933, File 'New York State', Entry 6, 'CCC Camp Reports', Record Group 35, Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

into the woods. Most importantly, the CCC also constructed motor roads. Corps enrollees built the George Perkins Memorial Highway as well as a new entrance road across the western portion of the park, and widened both Seven Lakes Drive, the main motor artery through Bear Mountain, and Popolopen Drive, which connected the park to the Bear Mountain Bridge spanning the Hudson River.²⁹ So extensive was this road-building campaign that as early as 1934 Park Manager Major William Welch boasted that the CCC had successfully ‘completed, this year, enough main motor driveways to meet the motorist demands for some years’.³⁰

The most common type of recreational development work undertaken by the Corps in Bear Mountain, however, involved the construction of dams across meadows, swamps and narrow stream valleys to create enormous artificial swimming lakes. For example, enrollees stationed in the park’s Pine Meadows region built a dam that impounded eighty-four acres of water for swimming atop what was once an open meadow, while enrollees in other camps helped build a dam that created 250-acre Beaver Pond lake. Corps camps in Bear Mountain built similar dams for aquatic recreation in Bockey and Owl swamps, as well as across Christie and Queensboro brooks in what one park official called ‘a high forested region which includes the largest block of what has been practically uninhabited forest’. Ultimately, the CCC created ten new bodies of water in Bear Mountain that together increased the park’s water surface area by approximately one thousand acres.³¹ The hard work of CCC labourers on such projects, wrote one Palisades Park Commissioner in 1934, was ‘transforming meadows and wooded swamps and beaver ponds into clear, shining lakes’.³²

Corps administrators and Bear Mountain park officials went out of their way to portray publicly such dam projects as forms of conservation. Many of these artificial lakes, park managers stressed, served as ‘natural’ firebreaks and as sanctuaries for migrating waterfowl. Along similar lines, park officials likewise emphasized the natural character of these man-made bodies of water by arguing that the CCC created lakes only in those areas of the park thought to be the previous location of ancient glacial lakes. As one park official explained, ‘by selecting the old moraine dams and the beds of the lakes they once naturally impounded’ the Corps and its enrollees were ‘restoring conditions of ten or twenty thousand years ago’.³³ Finally, the managers of Bear Mountain State Park also promoted the aesthetic value of such environmental changes, again highlighting the role of these aquatic recreational areas in attracting visitors. Bear Mountain’s new lakes, wrote the Palisades Park Commission in 1934, ‘will greatly improve the scenery of the region, making the water contrast among the hills and forests’.³⁴

²⁹BMTM, ‘10,000 Men at Work this Winter in Palisades Interstate Park’, Palisades Interstate Park Commissioners, 4 January 1934, unarranged files.

³⁰BMTM, Major William Welch to President of the Palisades Interstate Park Commission J. DuPratt White, 29 January 1935, unarranged files.

³¹Increase in water acreage was calculated by multiplying the average size of the CCC reservoirs (100 acres) by the number of reservoirs built (10).

³²BMTM, ‘CCC Building New Wilderness Lakes in Interstate Park’, Commissioners of the Palisades Interstate Park, 1934, unarranged files.

³³*ibid.*

³⁴*ibid.*

The thousands of CCC enrollees pouring into Bear Mountain State Park during the early 1930s thus dramatically transformed the Hudson Highland environment. These young men first cut small clearings into the forest to make way for their camps, and then immediately began planting thousands of trees in an effort to reforest the park and halt soil erosion across its steepest slopes. They also removed infected trees and fallen brush from the park to protect it from disease and fire. As important, Corps enrollees crisscrossed the landscape with new hiking trails and motor roads, and peppered the park with a host of recreational amenities from picnic and campgrounds to hiking shelters and comfort stations, all in an effort to open the park up to increased outdoor recreation. Perhaps most dramatically, enrollees from Bear Mountain's twelve Corps camps created nearly a dozen enormous, artificial lakes throughout the state park to lure outdoor recreationists, many from as far away as New York City, up into the Hudson Highlands. Yet while this army of conservation workers could see Bear Mountain's natural environment changing all around them, they were often blind to the economic impact of such transformations on their neighbours living in small towns and villages just beyond the park's boundary.

'The unemployment situation in the vicinity of our Park, particularly in Orange and Rockland Counties, is most deplorable,' wrote Bear Mountain Park Manager Major William Welch at the outset of the Great Depression. Not only did Welch refer in his letter to the near-absence of state, county and municipal jobs in the region, but he also lamented the 50 per cent reduction of his own park workforce due to a decline in state funds during the fall of 1930. Moreover, it was not only government jobs that were lacking. According to Welch, 'a number of the large factories [had] closed up and discharged all of their employees'.³⁵ So had many of the quarries in nearby Haverstraw, New York.³⁶ Even local construction workers faced economic collapse due to a severe building slump throughout the Hudson Highlands. 'I am besieged constantly by the residents of both Counties for work of any kind that will enable the heads of families to exist through this winter,' explained Welch to New York State Parks Chairman Robert Moses. 'It is hard to overemphasize the suffering that is bound to come before spring.'³⁷

Not surprisingly, unemployed residents of the region were hopeful when in May 1933 local newspapers announced the CCC's intention to establish several camps in Bear Mountain State Park. Axel Benson was one such resident. Seeing himself and others living near Bear Mountain as 'the closest working-class people to the park', Benson quite naturally looked to the CCC for economic help. 'A new hope had appeared for [those] who had no work,' he wrote in 1934. 'That new hope was the benevolent care and solicitude manifested by our National Government through the CCC.'³⁸ In an effort to take advantage of this opportunity, more than fifty local residents rushed to the town hall of the nearby village of Highland Falls in the spring of 1933 to register for enrolment. By the fall of that year, however, the CCC had accepted only ten of these applicants, a fact

³⁵BMTM, William A. Welch to Robert Moses, 21 November 1930, unarranged files.

³⁶Douglas and Warren Springstead, interview by author, tape recording, Stony Point, New York, 19 November 1994.

³⁷William A. Welch to Robert Moses, *op. cit.*

³⁸NARA, Axel Benson to FDR, 15 August 1934, File 'Rockland County, New York', Box 593, Entry 300, 'General Correspondence, 1933-1942', Record Group 35, Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

not lost on working-class locals.³⁹ 'Many poor farmers, village people and labouring men are in terrible distress,' lamented Benson, 'distress that is wholly due to the refusal of the local agent of the CCC to give us any employment.'⁴⁰

An article appearing in the local newspaper in May 1933 helps explain much of this working-class frustration. Under a headline reading 'Five is Quota for Town of Highlands in Forestry Work' was a long list of government regulations that restricted enrolment in the Corps. Regulation number three, which stated that enrollees had to be 'unemployed but with dependants' provided assurance for poorer locals such as Axel Benson, who were no doubt relieved that middle- and upper-class Hudson Highland residents who still had jobs would be unable to compete with them for Corps employment.⁴¹ Yet as they continued reading down the list of rules printed in the paper that day, Benson and his working-class neighbours would have become increasingly alarmed at other restrictions that would dramatically undermine their own chances of gaining employment with the CCC.

Along with insisting that applicants be jobless, the law establishing the Corps stated that they had to be male; women were even restricted from applying for positions as camp cooks.⁴² Axel Benson's wife, along with women throughout the Hudson Highlands, was therefore unable to look to the CCC for economic relief. Perhaps even more surprising, neither could Axel Benson, since being married, like being female, was also not permitted by the Corps. Couples could only benefit from the New Deal programme indirectly if they had a son, or sons, who were unmarried, unemployed, and between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three.⁴³ Moreover, these young men had to feel comfortable being stationed far from their homes, since the original intention of the CCC was to locate all youths approximately two hundred miles from their families. Although this separation was thought to develop 'a spirit of independence' within each enrollee, it made employment with the Corps improbable for Hudson Highland farm boys whose muscle was often needed in their parents' fields and dairy barns at key times throughout the growing season.⁴⁴

If these restrictions made it difficult for Benson and his working-class neighbours to gain employment with one of the dozen CCC camps in Bear Mountain, enrolment quotas like that explained in the local Highland Falls newspaper made it even more so. Because the federal government established such quotas on the basis of a region's population, urban areas such as New York City supplied more enrollees to Bear Mountain's camps than local rural districts, including Orange County, which in 1933 was assigned an overall enrolment quota of only 120 men.⁴⁵ Warren Springstead, one of the few Hudson Highland residents stationed by the CCC in Bear Mountain State Park, remembered that few locals were as lucky as he. 'The camp I was in had a couple fellows

³⁹'Many Local Boys Enrolling for CCC Camp at Bear Mountain', *News of the Highlands*, 26 October 1933, 1.

⁴⁰Axel Benson to FDR, *op. cit.*

⁴¹'Five is Quota for Town of Highlands in Forestry Work', *News of the Highlands*, 4 May 1933, 1.

⁴²Hoyt, *op. cit.*, 78.

⁴³*ibid.*, 78; Salmond, *op. cit.*, 30. The age parameters were widened in 1936 to include those between seventeen and twenty-eight years of age inclusive, and narrowed again in 1937 to their original specifications.

⁴⁴Holland and Hill, *op. cit.*, 77. See also Salmond, *op. cit.*, 141.

⁴⁵'Five is Quota', *op. cit.*, 1.

from Sloatsburg ... and there was me and Shorty Hansen from Tomkins Cove,' explained Springstead, whose brother Douglas also had the good fortune of being assigned to a CCC camp within the park. 'We were the only guys that were local. The rest were from Brooklyn and some from upstate New York.'⁴⁶

Axel Benson and his working-class neighbours attempted to circumvent CCC enrolment regulations by taking advantage of an exception in official Corps policy. Ever since the creation of the CCC early in 1933, woodsmen and day labourers concerned with job displacement by Corps enrollees had complained to politicians in Washington, DC. Many of these men had already lost their jobs due to the depressed economy, and became understandably angered when young Corps enrollees began performing forestry and light construction work in places like Bear Mountain State Park. In nearby Plattsburg, New York, for instance, the president of the Bricklayers, Masons and Plasterers International Union of America wrote to CCC officials in the nation's capital after local union members discovered Corps enrollees preparing to build eighty-seven large cobblestone fireplaces in a nearby town park. Local labourers 'are somewhat concerned about rumors that CCC workers are to be employed in building these fireplaces' wrote the union president, 'and have requested us to see if it cannot be agreed that this work be done by the unemployed mechanics in that locality'.⁴⁷ In an effort to address such concerns, and to stock each camp with knowledgeable men who could train 'green' enrollees, the federal government allowed a small number of what it called 'Local Experienced Men' to enrol in the CCC regardless of age and marital status.⁴⁸ Benson and his neighbours hoped to become what the Corps nicknamed 'LEMs'.

Organized labour on the national level had also initially opposed the Corps for similar reasons. American Federation of Labor (AFL) president William Green, for instance, who in early March 1933 stated in the *New York Times* that the proposed conservation work programme awakened 'grave apprehension in the hearts and minds of labor', testified against the CCC bill on three fronts, arguing that the army's control of Corps camps would militarize labour, that the proposed compensation of \$1 a day would depress wages for non-relief workers, and that CCC enrollees, as they did near Plattsburg, New York, would displace free labourers.⁴⁹

To change the hearts and minds of the labour movement, Roosevelt instructed Senate leaders to rewrite the Corps bill to eliminate the controversial dollar-a-day wage rate, and instead to authorize the president to organize and run the CCC as he saw fit. Although Roosevelt later approved this same wage system, the rewording of the bill provided necessary political cover for labour leaders such as Green. During the summer of 1933 Roosevelt also invited the AFL president to accompany him on an inspection tour of five Corps camps in Virginia's Shenandoah National Park, where the two men lunched with

⁴⁶Springstead, interview by author, 19 November 1994.

⁴⁷NARA, Henry C. Bates, President of the Bricklayers, Masons and Plasterers International Union of America to J. J. McEntee, Acting Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps, 11 April 1935, File 300, 'New York Building of Fireplaces', Box 616,

Entry 300, Record Group 35, Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

⁴⁸Salmond, *op. cit.*, 34–5.

⁴⁹On labour's 'grave apprehension' regarding the CCC bill, see *New York Times*, 22 March 1933, and President of the Brotherhood of Trainmen A. F. Whitney, *New York Times*, 24 March 1933, as quoted in Salmond, *op. cit.*, 14.

an enthusiastic company of CCC enrollees on steak, mashed potatoes, green beans and apple pie.⁵⁰ The excursion, wrote Green in a letter to the president several weeks later, was 'one of the most pleasing experiences' of his life and convinced him to 'view the whole project in a most sympathetic way'.⁵¹ Roosevelt similarly lobbied organized labour by also appointing as Corps director Robert Fechner, a nationally known unionist who had risen to the rank of vice-president of the AFL, and by allowing 'Local Experienced Men', many of whom hailed from unions, to enrol in the CCC, albeit in limited numbers.

Although Corps regulations specified that these local men were to account for no more than 10 per cent of each camp's workforce, monthly records from the twelve camps at Bear Mountain indicate that this was not usually the case. During the early months of CCC activity in the park, it was common for each 200-member camp to have approximately twenty local men on its roster. Yet as time progressed, both the percentage and the actual number of Hudson Highland men working for the camps decreased dramatically. In 1934, for instance, although enrolment numbers remained stable, reports indicate that on average only sixteen local men worked in each camp. In 1935 this number dropped again to twelve locals per camp, suggesting that as Corps enrollees learned how to labour outdoors in the park, their training by LEMs was less necessary.⁵²

Thus while Axel Benson and his working-class neighbours were initially encouraged by the arrival of the Corps in the Hudson Highlands, most were unable to secure jobs with the CCC in Bear Mountain. Moreover, CCC enrollees stationed in the state park could actually have undermined the livelihood of local labourers, much as the enrollees in Plattsburg, New York threatened the work of stonemasons from that region. Yet while Roosevelt's New Deal failed for the most part to help poorer residents living near Corps camps, it functioned quite differently for some of their neighbours. Gus Lazarus, for instance, like Axel Benson, was ineligible for enrolment in the Corps because of his age. Yet when Lazarus, as proprietor of the Reliable Shoe Repairing and Hat Cleaning Shop in nearby Haverstraw, New York, secured a contract with CCC authorities to 'renovate and reconstruct' the 'high laced leather shoes' issued to every new enrollee in Bear Mountain's camps, his own financial situation began to change.⁵³

Economic woes had begun for Lazarus and other Hudson Highland businesses in October 1929. The local economy remained stagnant four years later, when the First National Bank of Highland Falls closed its doors, along with the Ramapo Trust Company of nearby Ramapo, New York, and the National Bank of Haverstraw, which needed \$400,000 to re-open.⁵⁴ Like the region's bankers, local merchants were also

⁵⁰*New York Times*, 15 August 1933.

⁵¹William Green to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 18 September 1933, Roosevelt Papers, Official File 142, as quoted in Salmond, *op. cit.*, 47.

⁵²Averages compiled from NARA, 'Emergency Conservation Work Camp Report', File 'New York State', Entry 6, 'CCC Camp Reports', Record Group 35, Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps. Average for 1934 was taken from eight monthly reports representing seven different

Bear Mountain camps. Average for 1935 was taken from six monthly reports representing six different Bear Mountain camps.

⁵³'New Industry Started', *The Rockland County Times* (Haverstraw, New York), 18 November 1933, 1.

⁵⁴On the First National Bank of Highland Falls see 'Bank News', *News of the Highlands*, 4 May 1933, 1; on the Ramapo Trust Company see 'Trust Company to Open', *Rockland County Times*, 15 April 1933, 1; and for the National

suffering. As the editor of the *Rockland County Times* stated in 1933, 'The problem of building new commercial life was a problem for all lines of business and not the retailers alone.' So dire was the situation that local merchants discussed forming co-operatives to lower costs, and entrepreneurs from Haverstraw organized a 'businessmen's association' to promote their town to industries seeking new locations.⁵⁵

Although no new businesses flocked to the Hudson Highlands as a result of these efforts, in May 1933 the CCC moved into nearby Bear Mountain State Park, and local merchants immediately began forming new economic relationships with the New Deal programme. The construction industry forged some of the earliest financial ties by supplying much of the building material used to erect the Corps' Bear Mountain camps. J. M. Barnes & Company, for instance, a lumber dealer located in nearby Central Valley, New York, supplied much of the wood used to build the barracks, mess halls, enrollee libraries, latrines and other structures in Bear Mountain's twelve CCC camps.⁵⁶ The financial rewards of these new business relationships became evident during the winter of 1934, when severe cold weather warped the floorboards at the Corps' Christie Brook camp; the cost of replacing the boards in all of the camp's five dorms, each of which was one hundred feet long by twenty feet wide, totalled \$20,000.⁵⁷ Other building suppliers that provided materials used in constructing the twelve Bear Mountain camps included local brick makers, cement mixers and a hardware store owner in Haverstraw.⁵⁸

Once constructed, the CCC had to keep the Bear Mountain camps in running order, and here again local business people took the initiative. According to monthly camp reports, by the late summer of 1933 enrollees stationed in the state park no longer read at night by lantern light; instead they were using new gasoline-powered generators in each camp. The CCC company at Beachy Bottom utilized eight such generators in March 1935.⁵⁹ Similarly, the trucks used to transport enrollees back and forth to various conservation projects throughout the park also demanded a steady supply of fuel. Memorandums hounding camp commanders to keep their mileage down and directing them to nearby gas stations with the lowest prices suggest that the CCC spent a significant sum locally to keep their barracks lit and their trucks rolling.⁶⁰ Coal, along with gasoline,

Bank of Haverstraw see 'Haverstraw National Bank Difficulties Presented to Stockholders on Monday', *Rockland County Times*, 27 April 1933, 1.

⁵⁵'Merchants Plan Activity', *Rockland County Times*, 20 May 1933, 1.

⁵⁶Elmer Morgan to Representative Hamilton Fish, Jr, 29 March 1935, NARA, File 'Bear Mountain', Box 'Cities Bear Bluff - Blackwater', Entry 300, 'General Correspondence 1933-1942', Record Group 35, Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

⁵⁷Estimate written by Claude Farmer Lt USN Construction Officer and found at NARA, 'CCC Camp 48, Christie Brook, Sloatsburg, NY', 13 January 1934, File 'New York State', Entry 6, 'CCC Camp Reports', Record Group 35, Records of the Civilian Conservation

Corps. On the layout of the Corp's Christie Brook camp see NARA, File 'New York State', Entry 6, 'CCC Camp Reports', Record Group 35, Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

⁵⁸NARA, *Camp Chat* (Stony Point, New York), no date, File 'SP-26 - New York State - State Parks', Box 103, Entry 37, 'State Park File, 1933-1947', Record Group 79, Records of the Branch of Recreation, Land Planning and State Co-operation.

⁵⁹NARA, 'Emergency Conservation Work Camp Report, Beachy Bottom', 19 March 1935, File 'New York State', Entry 6, 'CCC Camp Reports', Record Group 35, Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

⁶⁰BMTM, 'General Correspondence' file, unarranged and undated files.

was yet another form of energy needed by Bear Mountain camps, especially during the cold winter months. According to *Camp Chat*, the CCC newspaper for the Bear Mountain region, by the winter of 1934 every barrack of the Stony Point camp was equipped with 'two large coal stoves'.⁶¹ For such a steady demand, the CCC undoubtedly relied on local suppliers such as J. M. Barnes & Company, whose letterhead stated that it traded in coal as well as lumber.⁶²

Local merchants also provided Bear Mountain's 2,500 CCC enrollees with the nutritional energy needed day in and day out to plant trees and fight soil erosion, as well as to build hiking trails and construct dams for recreational swimming. According to national regulations, while staples such as flour and cereals were obtained through the regional army quartermaster, perishable food items for each camp were bought locally.⁶³ A brief look at the numerous 'Weekly Menus' attached to most Bear Mountain camp reports indicates substantial purchases of local foodstuffs.⁶⁴ During the week of 12 July 1933, for instance, CCC enrollees in Bear Mountain ate 'fresh green beans', 'fresh beets and onions', cabbage, lettuce, celery, radishes, succotash, tomatoes and apples, most of which were supplied by Grenis Brothers Inc., a wholesale produce merchant located a few miles upriver in Newburgh, New York.⁶⁵ Fresh meat as well as baked goods were also shipped to Bear Mountain camps by local suppliers. As CCC enrollee Douglas Springstead remembered, a meatpacking truck from Haverstraw was a familiar sight in camp, as was a local baker who 'used to come in every day'.⁶⁶

Along with feeding Bear Mountain enrollees, local businesses also helped to keep them well clothed. As already noted, Gus Lazarus's Reliable Shoe Repairing and Hat Cleaning Shop in nearby Haverstraw was extremely successful at forging economic links between his business and the twelve Corps camps located within the park. Another local businessman who had similar success was the proprietor of the Haverstraw Better Laundry company. Although enrollees were responsible for cleaning their own personal clothes, including their two sets of CCC uniforms, they had the option of paying to have it done.⁶⁷ The camp's tablecloths, bed linens and kitchen staff uniforms were also sent out weekly for cleaning.⁶⁸ In November 1933, nine Bear Mountain camps sent their sheets to Haverstraw Better Laundry, while a tenth camp shipped its dirty linen to Rockland Laundry, located just outside the park in Spring Valley, New York.⁶⁹

⁶¹NARA, 'Many Camp Improvements', *Camp Chat*, November 1934, 2, no. 2, 1, File 'SP-26 - New York State - State Parks', Box 103, Entry 37, 'State Park File, 1933-1947', Record Group 79, Records of the Branch of Recreation, Land Planning and State Co-operation.

⁶²NARA, Elmer Morgan to Hamilton Fish, Jr, 29 March 1935, File 'Bear Mountain', Box 'Cities Bear Bluff - Blackwater', Entry 300, 'General Correspondence 1933-1942', Record Group 35, Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

⁶³Salmond, *op. cit.*, 110; and Hoyt, *op. cit.*, 63.

⁶⁴NARA, 'Emergency Conservation Work Camp Report, Beachy Bottom', 20 July 1933,

File 'New York State', Entry 6, 'CCC Camp Reports', Record Group 35, Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

⁶⁵BMTM, Grenis Brothers, Inc. Wholesale Produce, Newburgh, New York, 14 September 1934, unarranged files.

⁶⁶Springstead, interview by author, 19 November 1994.

⁶⁷Hoyt, *op. cit.*, 50.

⁶⁸Springstead, interview by author, 19 November 1994.

⁶⁹BMTM, Haverstraw Better Laundry to 'Whom it May Concern', 29 November 1933, and Major Welch to Rockland Laundry, 22 March 1934, unarranged files.

Besides merely servicing the needs of Corps camps, local merchants also courted the business of enrollees, who often walked to nearby towns and villages during the week, or drove as a group in the back of the company truck on weekends, to spend the remaining five dollars of their monthly wages that were not mailed home to their families. Local merchants advertised for such patronage in the pages of *Camp Chat*. The Highway Diner and the geographically misnamed restaurant Texas Lunch, for example, both promoted discount meals for enrollees, while the Broadway Theatre of Haverstraw offered 'special priced movie tickets on sale at all times' for Corps workers.⁷⁰ Local bars, billiard halls and dance parlours advertised similarly to lure CCC customers.⁷¹ Even illegal businesses profited from Corps labourers. Steve Canton, who was stationed at the Bear Mountain Beachy Bottom camp for a year beginning in May 1933, remembered that his camp commander often visited local prostitutes.⁷² Bear Mountain enrollees not only frequented these nearby businesses, but in doing so were conscious of their power as consumers; on the banner of the same Corps newspaper was the weekly reminder that 'All members of Camp 50 should mention the camp when patronizing our advertisers.'⁷³

Local business people's hard work forging these economic relationships with nearby Corps camps and their enrollees paid off handsomely. According to internal studies by the New Deal programme, each CCC camp pumped approximately \$5000 per month back into the local economy through the purchase of materials and services.⁷⁴ Additionally, roughly \$2000 in spending money from each camp also found its way every month from enrollees' pockets into local movie theatres, pool halls, bars, restaurants and shops as the young men flocked to nearby towns to let off steam after work or on their days off. A single Corps camp therefore infused approximately \$7000 per month into local businesses, or more than \$80,000 per year.⁷⁵ Such estimates do not include the approximately \$22,000 spent on the construction of each CCC camp, which during the early 1930s, before the Corps began using prefabricated barracks, involved the use of local materials.⁷⁶ In Bear Mountain State Park, even if such estimates for camp construction are excluded, the twelve Corps camps injected more than \$84,000 per month, or more than one million dollars per year, into the regional economy.⁷⁷

⁷⁰NARA, *Camp Chat*, September 1934, 6 and *Camp Chat*, November 1934, 4, File 'SP-26 - New York State - State Parks', Box 103, Entry 37, 'State Park File, 1933-1947', Record Group 79, Records of the Branch of Recreation, Land Planning and State Co-operation.

⁷¹NARA, *Camp Chat*, October 1934, vol. 2, no. 1, 6, File 'SP-26 - New York - State Parks', Box 103, Entry 37, 'State Park File, 1933-1947', Record Group 79, Records of the Branch of Recreation, Land Planning and State Co-operation.

⁷²Steve Canton, *Dusty Roads* (Winter Park, Florida, 1993), 63.

⁷³NARA, *Camp Chat*, October 1934, 2, no. 1, 1 and 6, File 'SP-26 - New York - State Parks', Box 103, Entry 37, 'State Park File,

1933-1947', Record Group 79, Records of the Branch of Recreation, Land Planning and State Co-operation.

⁷⁴NARA, Robert Fechner, 'Third Report of the Director of Emergency Conservation Work: For the Period April 1, 1934 to September 30, 1934', Record Group 35, CCC, Entry 3, Annual, Special and Final Reports, 7.

⁷⁵Sherraden, *op. cit.*, 235.

⁷⁶Robert Fechner, *Summary Report of Director, Fiscal Year 1936* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1936), 8, located at NARA, Record Group 35, CCC, Entry 3, Annual, Special and Final Reports.

⁷⁷These dollar amounts were calculated by taking the estimated \$7000 per month spent by each Corp camp nationwide and multiplying it

Thus unlike the area's working-class residents, who were unable to gain financially from the CCC, business people throughout the Hudson Highlands were quite successful at forging economic ties with the twelve Corps camps in Bear Mountain State Park. As the president of the Suffern Business Men's Association explained, 'Local merchants directly or indirectly all feel the benefit of having the camps situated as they now are.'⁷⁸ Unfortunately this flow of federal dollars failed to trickle down to working-class residents like Axel Benson. Although businesses such as the Broadway Theatre of Haverstraw, Grenis Brothers Produce Inc., and the J. M. Barnes & Company lumber dealer all benefited greatly from CCC patronage, these local businesses refrained from hiring vast numbers of new employees. Gus Lazarus's Reliable Shoe Repairing and Hat Cleaning shop, for example, maintained only one other worker throughout the 1930s.⁷⁹ The economic changes caused by the CCC, therefore, affected the working and business classes of the Hudson Highlands unequally. As a result, Axel Benson and Gus Lazarus also began thinking quite differently about their political relationship with the state.

Rather than simply returning to their mountain homes after being denied employment with the Corps, Axel Benson and his working-class neighbours began reassessing their relationship with Washington, DC. Before the arrival of the Corps, these Hudson Highlanders had enjoyed a highly independent lifestyle, relying on subsistence farming, domesticated animals and fruit orchards for their nutritional needs, and supplementing their meagre incomes by making wooden baskets, axe handles, spoons and ladles in their homes during the winter months.⁸⁰ The farthest most travelled was to the local store in order to trade such goods. When they were not farming or manufacturing wooden products, these 'mountain folk', as they were called, cut cordwood and made charcoal for the brick kilns of nearby Haverstraw. As a result, they rarely looked to the federal government for help. As Axel Benson stated, 'Because we live high up in the hills, until the depression came we never knew what it was to ask anybody for aid or even a courtesy.'⁸¹

It was quite out of character, then, when on 15 August 1934, Benson and thirty-nine of his neighbours gathered together to write a four-page petition to the president of the United States. Calling themselves the 'Home Defense Committee', the petitioners outlined what they believed to be a conspiracy between the local CCC representative and the Palisades Interstate Park Commission, which oversaw the administration of Bear Mountain State Park. According to the members of Benson's Committee, the Corps was denying employment to working-class Highlanders in an attempt to impoverish them even more and ultimately drive them from their homes, many of which were located either on the outskirts of the park or, because they received life rights to their property when New York established Bear Mountain in 1911, within the park itself. After forcing

by the twelve CCC camps located in Bear Mountain State Park (\$84,000), and then multiplying this dollar amount again by twelve months in a year (\$1,008,000).

⁷⁸BMTM, Louis Hammel to J. Dupratt White, 17 April 1935, unarranged files.

⁷⁹'New Industry Started', *Rockland County Times*, 18 November 1933, 1.

⁸⁰Maheer, 'Changes in the Park', *op. cit.*, 1–22.

⁸¹NARA, Benson to FDR, 15 August 1934, File 'Rockland County, New York', Box 593, Entry 300, 'General Correspondence, 1933–1942', Record Group 35, Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

them out, the Park Commission would raze their houses and expand the acreage of public land lying within Bear Mountain State Park.⁸²

Along with the mere act of writing to the president, the content of the Home Defense Committee's petition also suggests that working-class residents near Bear Mountain State Park had by the mid-1930s become not only more dependent on the federal government but also increasingly critical of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. After explaining to the president that the CCC 'has employed hundreds of strangers' in the nearby state park, Home Defense Committee members complained that 'there is lots of work for others but none for us'. These formerly independent mountain folk then requested redress from politicians in far-off Washington, DC. 'The petitioners ask for an examination of the administration of the affairs of the CCC at Bear Mountain,' they demanded of President Roosevelt, 'and that such action be taken as will give us the relief intended for us by our National Government.'⁸³ No longer shy about 'asking anybody for aid', as they had been before the Great Depression, Axel Benson and his working-class neighbours were increasingly reliant on, yet critical of, the federal government.

Similar to their working-class counterparts, middle- and upper-class business people throughout the Hudson Highlands were also quite wary of the state prior to the arrival of the CCC in Bear Mountain. This was evident on 5 January 1910 when local newspapers announced that Mary Harriman, widow of railroad tycoon E. H. Harriman, had offered New York ten thousand acres in the Hudson Highlands and one million dollars for the purchase of adjacent land in order to create what would become Bear Mountain State Park. Within the week nearby businesses had joined forces to oppose Harriman's philanthropy on the grounds that a new state park would weaken the local economy. As the *Rockland County Times* reported, local financial interests were critical of the proposed park because 'to carry out the project, all the great stone crushing plants on Hook Mountain, Rockland Lake, Upper Nyack and Tomkins Cove, will have to be acquired, and it would cause the secession of wonderfully successful commercial enterprises'.⁸⁴ Area business owners reiterated such concerns later that year when they voted against a statewide referendum on whether to accept the Harriman land. Only seven counties north of New York City, the majority of them located far upriver from the Hudson Highlands, voted in favour of the proposition, which passed by a mere 50,000 votes.⁸⁵

In March 1935, however, less than two years after the Corps began its conservation work in Bear Mountain State Park, local business owners were singing a quite different tune regarding state involvement in their daily lives. One indication of this political turnabout took place on the first Thursday of that month, when members of the Haverstraw Rotary Club attended a dinner at the Bear Mountain CCC camp near the town of Stony Point. Following a tour of the camp and a well-cooked meal in the enrollees' mess hall, local business leaders listened to speeches from several Corps officials. The camp's educational advisor spoke first about the wide array of night classes offered to enrollees, followed by the camp chaplain, who described the various religious services

⁸²*ibid.*

⁸³*ibid.*

⁸⁴'Harriman Gift', *Rockland County Times*, 15 January 1910, 1.

⁸⁵'State Park of the Highlands', *The Cornwall Local* (Cornwall, New York), 15 December 1910, 8.

held each week, outdoors, for the young men in the New Deal programme. Yet it was the CCC camp's supplies officer who best captured the business crowd's attention by discussing in detail 'the sums of money left in Haverstraw, Suffern, Newburgh and other Hudson Highland towns by adjacent Civilian Conservation Corps camps'. This amount, he went on to explain to the rapt members of the Haverstraw Rotary Club, 'had run [to] well over \$100,000 in the past year'.⁸⁶

Rotary Club members also listened intently as other speakers at the dinner that night discussed the longer-term economic benefits that would result from the conservation efforts of the twelve Bear Mountain camps. Infrastructure development by the Corps such as the building of campgrounds, picnic areas, hiking trails and artificial swimming lakes, explained a National Park Service administrator in charge of CCC work in state parks, provided an unprecedented 'opportunity to develop recreational areas for greater use'. Long after the Corps had packed up and left the region, he added, tourist dollars spent on outdoor recreation in Bear Mountain would continue to boost the economies of local towns and villages. After the businessmen's enthusiastic applause had died down, the president of the Haverstraw Rotary Club stepped to the podium and 'thanked the various officials of the camp for their helpful attitude towards the people of the community', which, he concluded, 'had made it possible for both to get along so pleasantly'.⁸⁷

Along with applauding New Deal officials at Rotary Club dinners hosted by Bear Mountain CCC enrollees, local business people expressed their new-found appreciation of federal involvement in the local economy in more direct ways as well. During the winter of 1935, when rumours began circulating throughout the Hudson Highlands that Corps administrators in Washington, DC were planning to remove all twelve CCC camps from the state park, in part because of the accusations levelled the previous summer by Axel Benson's Home Defense Committee, local business leaders took co-ordinated political action to protect their financial interests. Similar to their working-class neighbours, business leaders in the Hudson Highlands initiated their own letter-writing campaign to politicians in the nation's capital in a lobbying effort against the removal of CCC camps from Bear Mountain. Local lumber dealer Elmer Morgan, for instance, of J. M. Barnes & Company, wrote a letter reminding his own congressional representative, Hamilton Fish, Jr, that the Corps camps in the nearby state park had significantly aided his business. Morgan then implored Fish, an arch-conservative who vociferously opposed the New Deal, to do everything in his power to keep the twelve CCC camps situated in Bear Mountain State Park.⁸⁸ Thus as the CCC transformed both Bear Mountain's environment as well as the economy of nearby towns and villages, middle- and upper-class business people in the Hudson Highlands, like their working-class neighbours, became increasingly dependent on the state. Yet unlike Benson and the members of his Home Defense Committee, in doing so businessmen such as Elmer Morgan and Gus Lazarus became supporters, rather than critics, of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal.

⁸⁶Activities of CCC Described in Detail by Various Officers', *Rockland County Times*, 9 March 1935, 1.

⁸⁷*ibid.*, 1.

⁸⁸NARA, Elmer Morgan to Representative Hamilton Fish, Jr, 29 March 1935, File 'Bear

Mountain', Box 'Cities Bear Bluff - Blackwater', Entry 300, 'General Correspondence 1933-1942', Record Group 35, Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

On 17 April 1933, as eight buses filled with the nation's first contingent of CCC enrollees pulled out of Luray, Virginia, to make a final push up into nearby George Washington National Forest to establish Camp Roosevelt, local residents cheered. Locals living on the periphery of New York's Bear Mountain State Park were similarly hopeful when twelve Corps camps moved into their neighbourhood. They, like locals living in thousands of communities situated near CCC camps across the country, often travelled the short distance from their homes to Corps conservation projects to watch young enrollees labour in nature. In New York's Hudson Highlands, such work transformed barren hillsides into dense forests, inaccessible backcountry into a day's hike, and meadows, swamps and valleys into an aquatic escape from the dog days of summer. Such environmental changes, the Corps argued throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, involving both the conservation of natural resources in places such as Virginia's George Washington National Forest and the improvement of outdoor recreation in locations including Bear Mountain State Park, were a form of public good that would benefit all Americans.⁸⁹

However, soon after the CCC moved into Bear Mountain during the summer of 1933, local residents of the Hudson Highlands realized that these environmental transformations taking place next door were actually benefiting some Americans more than others. For working-class locals such as Axel Benson, the economic perks of these environmental changes failed to materialize; Benson and his working-class neighbours were restricted from enrolling in the Corps, they were hurt financially when park managers relied on CCC labour rather than local labourers to develop Bear Mountain's recreational infrastructure, and they were unable to forge profitable commercial relationships with the twelve Corps camps located within the state park. Middle- and upper-class business owners in the Hudson Highlands had a quite different experience. For Gus Lazarus, Bear Mountain's twelve Corps camps were an economic godsend that supplied his shoe-repair shop with a steady stream of dirty boots in dire need of resoling. The environmental and economic changes caused by the arrival of CCC camps were thus a public good only for certain publics in nearby local communities.

These environmental and economic inequalities also influenced local politics. Working-class members of the Home Defense Committee, who before the Great Depression 'never knew what it was to ask anybody for aid', during the New Deal era began petitioning the president for help with what they perceived as discrimination against locals by the CCC. As this dependence on the state grew, however, so too did the Home Defense Committee's criticism of the New Deal. Middle- and upper-class business owners experienced a somewhat different political re-orientation. Similar to their working-class neighbours, Hudson Highland businessmen had also been wary of state involvement in local economic affairs prior to the Great Depression, and had likewise become increasingly reliant on the federal government during the New Deal era. Members of the Haverstraw Rotary Club, for instance, wrote letters to local congressmen to lobby against the removal of Bear Mountain's dozen Corps camps.

⁸⁹On the Corps' promotion of recreation as a form of 'human conservation' see Maher, *Nature's New Deal*, *op. cit.*, 161–3.

Yet unlike their working-class counterparts, these businessmen praised the CCC in particular, and the New Deal in general, in their political correspondences. Thus while both classes of locals became more dependent on the federal government during the Great Depression, their political support for the New Deal depended on their economic standing within the local community.

Taking into account such class inequalities in places like Bear Mountain State Park represents just one example of Stephen Mosley's 'common ground' between social and environmental history. Yet while Mosley's desire for increased dialogue between these two sub-disciplines is persuasive, a more helpful metaphor is possible. 'Common ground' suggests not only that these two groups of historians should share more fully their historical questions, methodologies and historiographies, but also that the historical actors they examine likewise share a common environment.⁹⁰ But this was just not the case in the Hudson Highlands; because they came from different class backgrounds, Axel Benson and Gus Lazarus experienced quite different local environments during the Great Depression era. Instead, then, perhaps social and environmental historians should focus their analysis on 'uncommon grounds', natural environments that have contested meanings and which result in divergent everyday experiences for different groups of people. Although a version of this phrase served as the title for an important collection of essays in the field of environmental history, the authors similarly used the term 'uncommon ground' more as a description of their own disparate academic backgrounds and views on nature than as a signifier of a new synergy between environmental and social history.⁹¹ Conceiving of this phrase in the plural is essential for an alternative 'history from below', what one might call 'histories from the ground up', which adds nature to other analytical categories of race, ethnicity, class and gender.⁹²

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⁹⁰Mosley, *op. cit.*, 929.

⁹¹William Cronon (ed.), *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (New York, 1996).

⁹²No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.