



THE NEW TONGASS NATIONAL FOREST IN ALASKA A Postmodern Territory of Many Communities

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Introduction

The Tongass

The emergence of the environmental movement in the late 1970s worldwide resulted in new approaches, new perspectives and new analyses of man's relation to nature, space, and the environment, ultimately renovating the notion of "territory." Nowadays, by the turn of a new millennium, in an era of global telecommunication, even the remotest places, lands and wilderness areas seem to be monitored and under scrutiny, thus becoming the virtual territories of a new brand of citizens. One of these areas is the Tongass National Forest in Alaska. Huge expanses of pristine, wild forests, very few human beings and teeming wildlife seem to make the region a remote refuge away from the whirlpools of contemporary life and the angst of modernity or post-modernity.¹ In reality, it is the locus of raging environmental battles.

Theodore Roosevelt created the Alexander Archipelago Forest Reserve, which later became the Tongass National Forest, with his signature on August 20, 1902. In 1907 he used the prerogatives granted to him by the Antiquities Act (1906) and signed an Executive Order that created the

¹ If the notions of "modernity" and "modernism" are—arguably—more or less easy to define, "post-modernity" and "postmodernism" raise many conflicting interpretations. Two articles can help define these terms: Boje, David M. "Stories of the Storytelling Organization: A postmodern analysis of Disney as Tamara-Land."

<<http://cbae.nmsu.edu/~dboje/papers/DisneyTamaraland.html#Disney%20storytelling%20o rg>>. Accessed Sunday 19 October 2003 ; Sauv , Lucie. "L' ducation relative   l'environnement entre modernit  et postmodernit . Les propositions du d veloppement durable et de l'avenir viable." <<http://www.unites.uqam.ca/ERE-UQAM/membres/articles/ERE4.pdf>>. Accessed 3 July 2003. In short, modernity is usually associated with the Enlightenment, reason and the belief in progress. Its main features are liberal democracy but also industrial capitalism, bureaucracy, military power and the nation-state. Post-modernity and/or postmodernism are notoriously difficult to define. Post-modernity followed the socio-economic, cultural and technological developments of the late twentieth century such as post-industrialism, the information revolution with the production and consumption of information, media and services. In politics, post-modernity means a shift from Nation-States and Liberal Democratic governance to regional and global political entities and multi-layered democratic participation. In what follows, the postmodern notion of deterritorialization, which is usually associated with Deleuze, is applied to the Tongass. The deterritorialization of the Tongass into cyberspace may not immediately match Deleuze's use of the term but it eventually appears as another agent of the deconstruction of power and modernity.

Tongass National Forest. Covering 17 million acres of lofty mountains and forested islands in southeast Alaska, the Tongass is the largest national forest in the United States spreading nearly all over the southeastern panhandle of Alaska, the rest being mostly national parks or monuments, all public lands. What makes the Tongass of special interest is its pristine old growth stands, cherished by environmentalists not only locally, but nationwide. The largest temperate rain forest in the world is home to whole populations of deer, bears, moose and fish, especially salmon, which provide food for local human communities. The old growth, mostly old spruce and hemlock trees, is also the basic resource processed by a powerful timber industry. Clean waters are home to salmon runs that feed the local fishing industry. Landscapes of astounding scenic beauty attract cruise-ships with their loads of tourists. Such obviously diametrically opposed land uses have led to environmental wars, still rampant today: the huge area covered by the forest does not mean that its resources are inexhaustible. The timber industry, as well as environmentalists, are mostly interested in the high-volume closed-canopy forests in valley bottoms where most wildlife is also concentrated. Bart Koehler of the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council says these areas considered for cutting are "the biological heart of the forest [...] It's as if somebody came to you and said, 'I'm going to cut out your heart, but don't worry because 90 percent of you will still be OK'."²

Conflicts over land use in the Tongass have been exacerbated owing to its federal status. National forests belong to the American people as stated in the founding texts of the agency,³ but various groups have been fighting to have these public lands used in the way they thought most suitable to their interests. In the earlier days of the Forest Service (FS) until, arguably, the 1970s, timber was given priority but the rise of the environmental movement led to the passage of the 1976 National Forest Management Act (NFMA) that made it mandatory for the Service to design comprehensive land and resource management plans to focus on multiple use: pure drinking water, access for the public for recreation, hunting, sport and commercial fishing, wildlife habitat and protection, tourism and timber. This multiple use approach in the abstract made it possible to allow for varied expectations and demands. Timber companies need access to natural resources to supply the public's demands in wood for the housing industry. Environmentalists insist that the last old growth stands in the boreal rainforest must remain untouched as wildlife habitat. Hunters and fishers want access to the forest for game and recreation. Loggers want more roads open by the Forest Service for more clearcuts. Giant pulp factories had been granted long-term contracts to guarantee steady supply.

But various factors made this multiple, democratic approach demanded by Congress unacceptable to many. Among other factors, one can mention the biocentric fundamentalism of the most radical environmental activists, and the idealization of the American wilderness by many

² Koehler, Bart as quoted in Dushoff, Jonathan. "Tongass Forest Razing Destruction of the Tongass Forest". Accessed 29 June 2003. <http://multinationalmonitor.org/hyper/issues/1990/07/mm0790_07.html>. Accessed 29 June 2003

³ USDA Forest Service. <<http://www.fs.fed.us/na/gt/usfs.html>>. Accessed October 8, 2003. Alaska.

mainstream environmentalists. American environmentalists are mostly urbanites or suburbanites who worship the American wilderness which is still perceived by a majority of the public as the shrine of American identity, accordingly deserving full protection. The Tongass consequently is relentlessly watched and defended not only by local conservationists, but by coalitions of national American environmental organizations which rely on federal legislation to keep the old-growth stands untouched and wild for ever. The local extractive industries, and many locals in the rural communities of course violently oppose what is felt as federal denial of their interests, a feeling widely spread in the American West. They cling to the utilitarian exploitative principles of frontier times.

The conflicts between such widely differing interests used to be debated and dealt with in Congress, which passed bills that regulated land use in the United States especially during and after the Progressive Era of Theodore Roosevelt. With a growing body of laws established during and after the 1970s—the environmental era—and the multiplication of various organizations, lobbies and groups, constant litigation has become a predominant feature of environmental wars in the United States. More regulations, more laws, more lawsuits have ultimately led to deadlocks, gridlocks and a state of “analysis paralysis” in the national forests. It is at least a recurring claim of the G.W. Bush Administration, which claims it wants to fight against the bureaucratic quagmire when it is fighting against environmental protections.

Finally, along with the growing complexity of the decision-making process, and thanks to telecommunication and networking, the intrusion of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) onto the political arena has possibly given birth to a new societal fabric. Political power is arguably less concentrated in Washington D.C., it has become more decentralized, if not deterritorialized, so that the old definition of “territory” which used to be that area within whose limits a (central) power could exercise its jurisdiction is being challenged by new, multiple centers of power that are interconnected in telecommunication networks.

The Tongass provides a good case study of this increasingly complex process, of this passage to postmodernity defined as the age in which metanarratives have become bankrupt, an age of fragmentation and pluralism.⁴ The Tongass, because of its vastness—it is as large as West Virginia—and because of Southeastern Alaska being so thinly populated,⁵ was seen until quite recently as mere empty space, or hardly chartered territory under the jurisdiction of the United States Department of Agriculture. But even if it is still mostly empty, the region covered by the Tongass has become “virtually” occupied by thousands or hundreds of thousands of concerned citizens, local and national e-communities.⁶ A space devoid mostly of human occupants has become a virtual territory inhabited

⁴ Woodward, Ashley. “Jean-François Lyotard (1924 - 1998).” <<http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/1/Lyotard.htm>>. Accessed Oct. 11, 2003. Metanarratives are grand narratives, myths, ideologies, Enlightenment, Marxism, for example, and political order in a given society.

⁵ There are approximately 73,000 residents in Southeast Alaska.

⁶ “e” for electronic or /and environmental.

by thousands of electronic environmentally concerned dwellers. It is this shift from the federal to the local, from the regional to the virtual, from the modern to the postmodern that will be examined below, using the Tongass as a showcase of current, highly significant trends at work in the so-called postmodern society.

I - The Tongass as a national forest belongs to the American people

Whatever these current changes might be, the Tongass is the product of American history, and the outcome of two centuries of federal policies for public lands, the very lands that greatly helped to create the Union in the early days of the Republic. Such lands were meant to be sold to the American pioneer farmer along the principles established by Jefferson: Jefferson's agrarianism inspired the Land Ordinance of 1785, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, the Homestead Act of 1862. When the frontier closed in the 1890s, a new spirit inspired the management of these public lands. They were still open to settlement according to agrarian principles, as proved by the Reclamation Act of 1902, but conservation was the new order of the day. The Forest Service and the national forests were the prominent realizations of the conservation movement headed by Gifford Pinchot, a close friend of Theodore Roosevelt's. One of the requisites of conservation was the wise use of public lands, national forests and their resources for the benefit of the American people. "National forests and grasslands belong to the American people. The intelligent management of our natural resources for the people is our mission."⁷ National Forests thus belong to the national community so that many American citizens feel entitled to have their say and participate in the making of the Forest Service's policy. The Tongass is the nation's territory. What possibly made it different however at the time of its creation was its remoteness and vastness in a territory⁸ that was still perceived as wilderness, a territory that belongs to the imagination of many American wilderness lovers.

A- ANILCA

The term "wilderness" is possibly the best feature to characterize Alaska and the best reason why it has captured the imagination of so many Americans. The 49th state is quintessentially American to the extent that it relates to many national founding myths. Alaska has been somehow first associated with the myth of the Northwest Passage to India and the fabulous markets of the Orient. The 1867 acquisition of Alaska can be seen as one of the aftermath effects of the Manifest Destiny spirit that launched the conquest of the West. The 1898 gold rush to Alaska later revived several American founding myths. The myth of the New World as the Eldorado, which had attracted the Spaniards first to the New World, and then the forty-niners to California and other regions of the West, was also reborn in Alaska. More importantly, the 1898 gold rush refurbished the national myth of the frontier. Many would-be gold seekers went to Alaska not for gold, but simply to experience a pioneer's life. Those were the years when the myth of

⁷ USDA Forest Service.

⁸ Alaska became a state on January 3, 1959.

the vanishing frontier had been made widely popular by Turner. Alaska was thus the place that offered a chance to continue or experience frontier life, and to perpetuate the pioneers' past that had shaped American identity since the very first days of white settlement. To this day, Alaska is recurrently called "the Last Frontier." Alaska thus offers a concentration of American founding myths that calls out to the American imagination.

But "the last frontier" and its millions of acres of wilderness which had captured the American imagination raised many problems. Before Alaska reached statehood in 1959, it was mostly federal lands. The passage to statehood implied the huge task of organizing the new state under the supervision of the federal government at a time when the wilderness movement was very influential with the ultimate passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964. How could Congress and the executive branch strike a balance between conservation and development, between the frontier tradition of natural resource exploitation and wilderness preservation efforts, between the guilt felt about the decimated Indians in the West and the respect for their northern brothers? How could Alaska, still a national territory, be prompted to become the custodian of the American frontier past and at the same time keep most of its wilderness intact so as to nourish the national imagination? How could Alaska be urged to remain the shrine of American identity? The answer was the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) of 1980. The very name suggests the nation's determination to conserve its interests in lands that were clearly tagged "national" and part of the nation's territory. Defining these interests and striking a balance between preservation and development proved to be a most difficult task.

B - Alaska and ANILCA: the last frontier for wilderness preservation or frontier style exploitation of natural resources?

The passage of ANILCA in 1980,⁹ as the result of an extremely long process, can be seen as emblematic of the environmental era, the 1970s, and of congressional efforts to strike a balance between development and wilderness preservation. The environmental movement had many activists in Alaska who significantly took part in the elaboration of the Act to make sure that Alaska would largely remain a national, protected wilderness millions of acres wide. The task at hand in the wake of the passage of Alaska to statehood was the organization of the public lands in the new state. Alaska has a land area of 375 million acres, and it took nearly ten years, three administrations and five sessions of Congress to achieve a national compromise over these lands. The newly established state (1958) had been allowed to select over 104 million acres out of the federal 375 million as an economic base. The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971 authorized the native tribes to select 44 million acres of federal land. Section 17(d)(2) of ANCSA allowed the Secretary of the Interior to withdraw 80 million acres of Alaskan federal land for potential wilderness designation and integration in the National Park, National Wildlife Refuge, National Wild and Scenic Rivers, and the National Forest Systems. This measure was the result of the efforts of Alaskan environmentalists—and of

⁹ "ANILCA Introduction" <<http://www.r7.fws.gov/asm/anilca/intro.html>>. Accessed 23 July 2003.

environmentalists in the lower 48 states—who considered too much importance was being granted to development measures in the bill. The bill resulting from these “d-2” and other studies was submitted to Congress in December, 1973. Congress had five years to act. But eventually Congress examined more than a dozen versions of ANILCA legislation between 1977 and 1980. The result was a compromise with wilderness preservation hugely enhanced on federal lands in Alaska:

the statute protected over 100 million acres of federal lands in Alaska, doubling the size of the country’s national park and refuge system and tripling the amount of land designated as wilderness. ANILCA expanded the national park system in Alaska by over 43 million acres, creating 10 new national parks and increasing the acreage of three existing units.¹⁰

Concerning the Tongass, ANILCA set aside 5.4 million acres in the Tongass for wilderness preservation. ANILCA can be called an environmental victory at a time when the energy crisis that followed 1973 and the discovery of oil in Prudhoe Bay could have annihilated environmentalists’ efforts to have Alaska’s wilderness protected as a national treasure. But President Carter’s pro-environmentalist stance and the activism that followed the institutionalization of the American environmental movement made it possible. However, Alaskan developers and their political supports in Congress used all their political clout to make sure ANILCA would make development possible for the newborn state.

Land use and natural resources exploitation in the American West have increasingly been the one bone of contention between environmentalists and local interests since the 1970s. The influence of the environmental lobby in Washington D.C., once called the most powerful national lobby, was counterbalanced by the collusion between local and regional industrialists and developers and the U.S. senators of Western States. These conflicts resulted in last-minute riders often in appropriation bills that could save or simply lead to the demise of thousands of acres of national forests. Similar patterns of political strife are developing in Alaska today. But even at the time of the preparation of ANILCA, local developers and the state congressional delegation (one Representative and two Senators) used their influence to defeat or delay bills. Filibustering was a permanent threat on the Senate floor whenever a bill about Alaskan public lands was to be debated. For example, under threat of a filibuster from Senator Ted Stevens, ANILCA provided a permanent appropriation of “at least \$40,000,000 annually or as much as the Secretary of Agriculture finds necessary to maintain the timber supply from the Tongass National Forest to dependent industry at a rate of 4.5 billion board feet measure per decade.”¹¹ The program prepared by conservationists to become ANILCA was bound to meet considerable opposition from every possible development interest in Alaska: as expected, the oil, mining, timber industries worked with the

¹⁰ “Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.” <http://www.npca.org/media_center/factsheets/nilca.asp>. Accessed 22 July 2003.

¹¹ Dushoff, Jonathan. Tongass Forest Razing Alaska. “The Destruction of the Tongass Forest.” <http://multinationalmonitor.org/hyper/issues/1990/07/mm0790_07.html>. Accessed 29 June 2003.

Alaskan congressional delegation to delay the bill in Senate after it passed the House in 1978.¹² President Carter then decided to take action and use his prerogatives to protect millions of acres of federal lands in Alaska. But such a measure was not satisfactory as it bypassed normal democratic law-making procedures. In the last days of Jimmy Carter's presidency, Congress found a compromise and the President signed the final version of ANILCA on December 2, 1980.

One possible interpretation of ANILCA consists in seeing it as an example of the normal workings of the democratic process of law-making and illustrative of modernity: an allegedly rational approach to problems supposedly leads to compromises written into law. Originating on the local level with local citizens voicing their interests, the process is handled by their representatives following established democratic rules. Alaskan environmentalists and Alaskan developers pressured their congressional delegation, American environmental organizations lobbied Congress, the President used his prerogatives, long debates and shuttles followed in Congress, and the outcome was an act that has been hailed as a monument of preservation legislation typical of an environmental era, even though developers' interests were not ignored. ANILCA's *priority* is wilderness preservation but frontier style exploitation of natural resources was not terminated. ANILCA is also emblematic of the burden of federal power imposed upon states through a vertical exercise of power. This is possibly even truer in Alaska which, as mentioned earlier, still mostly consists of federal public lands that the national community highly values: the last frontier is an all-American myth. Noteworthy too is the fact that ANILCA, in spite of opposing widely different interests, did not end up in a stalemate on Capitol Hill or in the courts, as often was the case later for environmental programs or environmental impact statements. A good example of democracy at work, ANILCA is emblematic of an age that still clearly belonged to modernity.

C- The Tongass: all-American wilderness preservation or frontier style exploitation of natural resources by local interests?

The ambivalence of ANILCA about development and wilderness preservation is reflected in Southeast Alaska and the management of the Tongass. Even if over time concern about old-growth stands of local and national environmental organizations and the public in general has increased, recent plans of the G. W. Bush Administration seem to revive former policies that gave timber extraction absolute priority over any other use. Yet, wilderness appreciation and tourism had begun by the time of the 1898 gold rush.

If we are to believe Roderick Nash, John Muir (1838-1914) was the first to find some value in the "folly" that had made Alaska American in 1867. Muir was the father to the preservation movement of the late nineteenth century. Preservationists considered the American wilderness to be a temple of the divine to be kept untouched. Thanks to Muir's writings, an urban elite became more and more interested in visiting today's Tongass forest's region

¹² <http://www.alaskacoalition.org/history_public Lands.html>. Accessed 20 July 2003.

wilderness. They had read his writings, and Ruhamah Scidmore's *Alaska, Its Southern Coast and Sitkan Archipelago* (Boston, 1885). The new fad even caught millionaires such as Edward H. Harriman, the railroad tycoon, who chartered an expedition to southeast Alaska in 1899. Among the passengers was geographer Henry Gannett who published an essay in 1901 in the *National Geographic Magazine*, extolling the scenic beauty of the coast as an asset for a thriving tourist industry far more profitable than the mere exploitation of timber or game resources.¹³

Today, tourism, and especially eco-tourism is one of the most profitable and sustainable industries in Alaska. Tourists go to Alaska for fishing, hunting, scenic beauty, wildlife and possibly above all for a wilderness experience. Ketchikan in the Tongass welcomes about 500,000 tourists every year. About 632,000 cruise ship passengers visited Juneau in 2000.¹⁴ These tourists expect to have their wilderness experience. One of their favorite destinations is Misty Fiords National Monument. Snow-capped mountains, canyons, bald eagles and goats, waterfalls and rainforests make the area an American wilderness as dreamed of by millions of urbanites. Ironically, the area is getting more and more crowded and planes with their loads of tourists constantly rip the silence and quiet of the no longer so wild wilderness. However, the American fascination for a wilderness experience is testimony of the persistence of the appeal of the frontier myth in a nation whose identity was shaped by the conquest of the wilderness, and the ensuing unfettered exploitation of natural resources.

In the wake of that frontier tradition, in 1947, the Tongass Timber Act gave absolute priority to timber extraction. As a result, in 1954, the Forest Service signed a fifty year contract with the Ketchikan Pulp Company to guarantee steady supply—8.25 billion board feet—to its giant pulp factory in Ketchikan. A similar contract was signed with Japanese-owned Alaska Pulp Corporation for its facility in Sitka for 5 billion board feet. Road building and clear-cutting followed in the Tongass. Local conservationists argue that even if a fragment of the Tongass has been fed to the pulp mills, the timber was cut from the oldest and most biologically and ecologically important stands. Other resources have been heavily exploited:

Since 1950, more than 1 million acres have been clearcut and 4,600 miles of road have been built through the forest. The Tongass is also home to one of the largest gold/silver mines, Greens Creek, which is located in the middle of the 1 million acre Admiralty Island National Monument.

As pro-industry politics continue to dominate in Alaska and in Washington D.C., the Tongass will continue to be viewed as a colony of extractive resource industries. The timber and mining industries may gain further access to the Tongass's 9.2 million acres of roadless land if America does not stand up to protect our largest rain forest.¹⁵

¹³ Roderick F. Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3rd edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982) 281-84.

¹⁴ Tongass-SEIS Media Room: Tongass Trivia. <http://www.tongass-seis.net/media/tong_triv.html>. Accessed 20 July 2003.

¹⁵ "Forest Profiles - Tongass National Forest." <<http://www.endangeredforests.org/profiles/tongass.htm>>. Accessed 20 July 2003.

It is worth noting here that Alaska is compared to a colony, just as the West was considered a colony and a provider of raw materials to the rest of the nation until the Second World War, in the wake of frontier times. The frontier mentality in extractive industries has thus persisted in Alaska possibly to these days. It is characterized by unfettered exploitation of natural resources for immediate profits. In the Tongass area, these natural resources include minerals, fishing grounds and above all timber.

ANILCA accordingly reflected concern for development based on extractive industries. It set a legislative target of 4.5 billion board feet per decade and a permanent timber appropriation of at least \$40 million per year to support the timber industry, especially in the Tongass region. But ANILCA also provided for wilderness preservation on the Tongass. ANILCA designated 55 million acres of wilderness in Alaska, doubling the size of the National Wilderness Preservation System and on the Tongass itself it set aside 5,362,000 acres in 14 wilderness areas.¹⁶ However well wilderness areas may be protected yet, new laws can always change their status. A decisive and critical issue here is road building in the national forests, which has been a bone of contention between American environmentalists and the Forest Service especially, as early as the 1970s. The Tongass is one of the current battlefields for this issue.

Building roads to give access to old growth stands to loggers means development and the destruction of wilderness areas for ever. Environmental wars over national forests have therefore often concentrated on the roadless area issue. In January 2001, in the last days of the Clinton Administration, the President issued the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. On January 12, 2001, the U.S. Forest Service finalized the rule. The plan aimed to end virtually all logging, roadbuilding and coal, gas, oil and other mineral leasing on existing roadless areas in national forest lands.

But the Clinton Roadless Area Conservation Rule is being whittled away by the G. W. Bush Administration. The USDA is trying to find exemption from the rule for the Tongass which has consequently become one of the major battlefields for environmental wars at home in 2003. What is happening in the Tongass is highly reminiscent of earlier environmental wars in the lower 48 United states. The spotted owl controversy for example brought the forest industry to a halt in the Pacific Northwest in the late 1980s and early 1990s after a long series of debates in Congress, in the Forest Service, and an endless series of lawsuits. The current roadless controversy only reveals the ambivalent status of the Tongass. It is public land and therefore open to exploitation for local citizens who follow the frontier tradition. It is wilderness on federal land and therefore the object of national environmental worship for thousands of environmentalists in the United States. Above all, the Tongass lies in Alaska, the last frontier, but only as long as it remains a wilderness.

¹⁶ History of Public Lands in Alaska. Accessed 20 July 2003. <http://www.alaskacoalition.org/history_public_lands.htm>.

II - Modernity: federal power in trouble on the Tongass

With the end of the frontier in 1890 came the realization that the American inexhaustible natural resources were in fact limited. This realization fostered the advent of the Progressive Era during which Theodore Roosevelt's Administration tried to put an end to their unbridled exploitation by robber barons and redistribute the nation's wealth to the American people. The President did his best to restore federal power by reviving some of the Founding Fathers' principles and the ideals that established modernity in the United States, e.g. reason, progress, civilization, democracy and federalism.

A - The National Forests as the creation of the Progressive Era

The Forest Service founded in 1891 but established as the Forest Service in 1905 by Gifford Pinchot (1865-1946), a close associate of Theodore Roosevelt, is emblematic of the Progressive Era. Pinchot claimed that "the alliance between business and politics is the most dangerous thing in [Americans'] political life."¹⁷ Although mostly middle-class hunting and fishing enthusiasts, conservationists, those who shared Pinchot's views, thus opposed "the interests" of corporate America in that utilitarian age. Conservation—the wise management of natural resources as commodities for the benefit of the people of America—did not imply that forests should become temples of worship for nature lovers. Timber, it was believed, was the staple good that marked the progress of civilization. "Sustained yield" soon became the key notion in forestry: on average, no more wood would be cut each year than could be replaced with growth, ensuring a steady wood supply forever. The timber orientation has always prevailed in the Service. It is the duty of the agency to survey and map federal forests, define the mature patches to be cut, build access roads for potential buyers, and organize the selling of timber. Pinchot clearly stated the policies of his service in a letter dated 1905:

In the administration of the forest reserves it must be clearly borne in mind that all land is to be devoted to its most productive use for the permanent good of the whole people, and not for the temporary benefit of individuals or companies. All the resources of forest reserves are for use, and this use must be brought about in a thoroughly prompt and businesslike manner, under such restrictions only as will insure the permanence of these resources. The vital importance of forest reserves to the great industries of the Western States will be largely increased in the near future by the continued steady advance in settlement and development. The permanence of the resources of the reserves is therefore indispensable to continued prosperity, and the policy of this Department for their protection and use will invariably be guided by this fact, always bearing in mind that the conservative use of these resources in no way conflicts with their permanent value. You will see to it that the water, wood, and forage of the reserves are conserved and wisely used for the benefit of the home builder first of all, upon whom depends the best permanent use of lands and resources alike. The continued prosperity of the agricultural, lumbering, mining, and livestock interests is directly dependent upon

¹⁷ Gifford Pinchot as quoted in "Environmentalism as a Mass Movement." *Radical America* 17 (1983): 9.

a permanent and accessible supply of water, wood, and forage, as well as upon the present and future use of these resources under businesslike regulations, enforced with promptness, effectiveness, and common sense. In the management of each reserve local questions will be decided upon local grounds; the dominant industry will be considered first, but with as little restriction to minor industries as may be possible; sudden changes in industrial conditions will be avoided by gradual adjustment after due notice, and where conflicting interests must be reconciled the question will always be decided from the standpoint of the greatest good of the greatest number in the long run.¹⁸

Several points should be underlined here. After clearly reinstating the Progressive Era's struggle against big trusts, Pinchot insists that national forests belong to "the whole people," the national community. For tactical reasons, he reinstates the utilitarian approach of the Forest Service, but he insists however that exploitation must be counterbalanced by the notion of "sustainable yield." This is the "wise use" management that became the catch word of conservation. In the heyday of modernity, at a time when science reigned unchallenged, human reason dominated nature, imposing "progress" in an unabashed anthropocentric approach for the benefit of the American people, the "home builder" and local communities, especially loggers' communities in the West. It is remarkable how the three characteristics of today's catchword, "sustainable development," are implied in these policies. Environmental priorities (sustainable yield) must take economic consideration into account (utilitarianism, industry) with a sense of social justice ("the greatest good of the greatest number"). One could even argue that the phrase "in the long run" is a harbinger of sustainable development defined as "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."¹⁹

Pinchot believed that the Service should be managed by experts, not by politicians. Originally part of the Department of the Interior, Pinchot had the Service transferred to the Department of Agriculture, which helped insulate the Service from presidential intrusions.²⁰ The Service thus remained insulated for decades and decades, and could impose its experts' decisions locally upon distant national forests. Power being imposed upon a territory from top to bottom, from one central place to local communities, is, like the notions of progress, anthropocentrism and reason, a feature associated with modernity. The balance between this brand of central, "vertical power" as opposed to local power has structured American politics for centuries and the anti-federalism in the West today is heir to this antagonism. The Forest Service possibly provides one of the best examples of power imposed by experts from above, from a central, distant place, Washington D.C.

¹⁸ The Pinchot Letter, (1905) as quoted in Charles F. Wilkinson, *Crossing the Next Meridian: Land, Water, and the Future of the West* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1992) 128.

¹⁹ UK Government Sustainable Development. <http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/what_is_sd/what_is_sd.htm>. Accessed Oct. 12, 2003.

²⁰ <<http://www.ti.org/SA17.html>>. Accessed 24 July 2003.

B - Federal “vertical” power as the environmental guardian

The Service’s isolation was somehow questioned by the passage of essential laws that significantly updated the management of federal and public lands in the 1970s during the environmental era. These statutes were the 1976 Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and the National Forest Management Act (NFMA). They demonstrated a deep change in the American public’s attitudes toward the environment, and their interest in and consequently the congressional concern about the management of public lands, which were no longer meant to be solely exploited. Rather, the national community wanted their lands protected.²¹ Public participation in the management of public lands was encouraged. Public participation meant more intrusion into the once unquestioned Forest Service’s decisions, so that litigation became a feature of environmental activism in the 1980s and later. Federal statute law had the potential to become the environmental guardian of federal lands, imposing “vertical” power over the remote regions of the West, and over the Last Frontier state.

A good example of these changing attitudes of the public toward public lands is provided by the ever changing Tongass Land Management Plan (TLMP) of the FS of May, 1997. It set the Allowable Sale Quantity or maximum logging level at 267 million board feet per year, largely ignoring the closure of the last pulp mill. This closure marked the end of an era characterized by frontier-like exploitation of the Tongass. Big changes had occurred in the local economy and public expectations. Following the TLMP, salmon runs and wildlife were given increased protection, and some areas of the Tongass were better protected. But obviously, even if the TLMP was a compromise in the purest traditional political style to take new environmental concerns into consideration, timber was still given priority, before recreation, tourism, sport and commercial fishing, hunting and other activities. This prompted local environmental groups to file administrative appeals. As a result, the final TLMP decision (1999) “removed over 40 [roadless] wild watersheds in 18 high-value community use areas from the timber base.”²² A federal judge ordered an additional wilderness study in 2001. The shuttle between the local and the federal centers of decision had taken two years. But the Forest Service, as a federal agency, still enunciated the rules of local forest management from above.

The Tongass also provides a good example of federal environmental guardianship with the Clinton Roadless Area Conservation Rule of January 2001. Very much like ANILCA, the Roadless Rule was issued in the hectic times of the last days of the Clinton Administration. Clinton who had to a large extent disappointed the expectations of his environmental constituency during his presidency, possibly tried to catch up with his green agenda. In the rural West, this move was perceived as a typical example of a federal discretionary decision imposed from above upon local communities. It was also illustrative of a widely accepted idea in the radical branch of the

²¹ Cynthia Ghorra-Gobin, *Les Etats-Unis: espace, environnement, société, ville* (Paris: Nathan, 1993) 41.

²² “Southeast Alaska Conservation Council (SEACC) working to protect Southeast Alaska’s Tongass National Forest” <<http://www.seacc.org/TongassHistory.htm>>. Accessed 23 July 2003.

American environmental movement which considers that the best way to secure protection for federal lands is to establish and implement federal legislation, which is usually initiated by Democrats. Environmentalists are wary of state and local laws and environmental regulations as such laws generally serve economic interests or job creation plans and consequently environmentalists rely on federal legislation. The Clinton Roadless Rule, which virtually ended logging in the roadless areas of the Tongass National Forest, was accordingly immediately rejected by the local forest industry, and especially by the Alaska Forest Association (AFA) in Ketchikan in the heart of the Tongass, which typically joined the State of Alaska in a lawsuit against the rule.

The Alaska Forest Association represents 80 companies directly involved in the forest products industry and 130 companies which provide support services to the industry in Alaska. AFA is supported entirely from dues from these members. "The severe constraints on timber supply imposed by the Roadless Rule will force many of AFA's members out of business. In turn, the programs offered by AFA may disappear with the implementation of the Roadless Rule," explained Executive Director, Jack Phelps.²³

Interestingly, the AFA followed the State of Alaska in this lawsuit. The State of Alaska's government obviously backed the local developers and extractive industries, not the more sustainable activities like tourism, and opposed federal power from afar and above. Undisputedly, the opposition to the Roadless Rule reflected the local resentment felt in the West toward federal power, a feeling that can partly account for the political backlash that had sent G. W. Bush to the White House.

The series of electoral Republican wins that began in November 1994, until November 2000 with the election of G. W. Bush are sometimes interpreted as the rejection by the American electorate of big government, big government power from above, and specifically, of the burden of federal environmental legislation and the cumbersome regulations of EPA, the federal Environment Protection Agency. If we are to believe John Baden and Doug Noonan of the Thoreau Institute, the electorate "found repugnant the statist, bureaucratic, command-and-control means to green ends exemplified by the EPA's approach to wetlands and its management of Superfund sites."²⁴ In a postmodern age, authoritative command and control policies are less and less accepted. The current Republican administration therefore feels it has a mandate to alleviate the citizenry's exasperation with environmental bureaucratic harassment, and its handling of the Roadless Rule is typical of this.

²³ "Timber Industry Intervenes in Roadless Suit." Accessed 24 July 2003. <<http://www.akforest.org/March1PR.htm>>. Accessed 24 July 2003.

²⁴ Charles, John A. "Environmentalism in the 1990s: Intolerant and Proud of It." <<http://www.ti.org/Charles.html>>. Accessed 22 July 2003. "The Thoreau Institute has been a part of the environmental movement since 1975. But in the last ten years, the Institute has focused on market solutions to environmental problems, while much of the rest of the movement has focused on political--usually federal--solutions." The Environmental Movement. "The State of the Environmental Movement." <<http://www.ti.org/enviros.html>>. Accessed Oct. 19, 2003.

C - Logjams in the forest: the failure of modernist management

The Forest Service has tried to overcome these red tape and regulatory obstacles but the result has been lawbreaking if we are to believe a Tongass former timber-sale administrator in Alaska's Tongass Forest. He soon realized that Pinchot's ideal of sustainable yield had long been forgotten, and that "at the rate we were going through it, there was no way it was going to last." Caught in the logic of the Service's "timber first" tradition, he also realized that "the Forest Service intentionally overestimates timber volume to meet political and economic demands, [...] ignoring illegal clearcuts."²⁵ As for environmentalists, they insist that the situation is all the more unacceptable as there is timber available on private lands, and building more taxpayer-subsidized roads in national forests is so costly that the sales do not compensate for the expenditure. All this leads to one conclusion: the democratic law-making process inherited from the Founding Fathers has possibly worked well in other areas, but as far as the Forest Service is concerned, central federal planning inherited from the modernist principles and ideals of the Progressive Era has led to a giant logjam.

The G. W. Bush Administration has tried to cope with this giant logjam situation in the national forests. Environmentalists insist that in the aftermath of 9/11, the public was paying less attention to environmental issues so that the administration took advantage of the situation to whittle down the Clinton Roadless Rule. While officially reinstating the rule, the administration would allow governors to seek exemptions for logging and drilling. But the Tongass, whose roadless areas could have been protected for ever by the rule, would be exempted. Incidentally, one should mention that the Clinton Administration had deliberately left open the question of whether the roadless rule would apply to the Tongass, most probably so as to make it possible to carry on contracts with the local forest industry. On July 17, 2003, an amendment to the 2004 Interior Appropriations bill tried to prohibit the Bush Administration from using any funds to make changes to the Roadless Rule. The amendment did not pass, (185 for, 234 against), but it revealed a bipartisan strong opposition to the Administration forest policies, which are inspired by Mark Rey. He is the Agriculture Department undersecretary in charge of the Forest Service, has worked as an aide to Alaska Senator Frank Murkowski, and is an ex-timber lobbyist. Moreover, this policy is conducted in spite of strong evidence of unremitting public support for the protection of national forests, as will be seen later, which is an obvious denial of the democratic majority rule principle. The G. W. Bush Administration has also tried to give to the forest chiefs more leeway to manage national forests locally. It has also tried to launch a new idea, the "charter forest": portions of national forests would be administered by local trusts. Local decision-making would be encouraged and endless procedural logjams avoided. Environmentalists maintain this is a disguised means to give easier access to the forests to local extractive industries, but the idea smacks of postmodern governance. At least, one can reasonably conclude that the Forest Service, as the crown jewel of the Progressive Era is

²⁵ Shoaf, Bill. "The Taking of the Tongass: Alaska's Rainforest." <http://www.findarticles.com/cf_0/m1525/5_85/64426314/p1/article.jhtml?term=Tongass>. Accessed 24 July 2003.

illustrative of the malfunctioning of the ideals of modernity in terms of democracy.

III - The shift to the postmodern: rhizome power in the Tongass archipelago

At this stage, it would be easy to put forward conventional interpretations pitting the old frontier tradition in Alaska versus a new, urban environmental majority in the New West, the two political forces fostering endless series of conflicts and compromises on Capitol Hill, to account for the malfunctions in the FS. Another possible interpretation however is to analyze the current situation on the Tongass as exemplifying the shift from a modern era to what has been called the "postmodern" age. Arguably, we are witnessing a shift from "vertical power" as described above, to "rhizome power." The rhizome metaphor initiated by Deleuze in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) suggests that in a postmodern age power is no longer exercised from top to bottom, from the center to the periphery, but rather is appropriated by local, usually oppressed groups and fragmented movements, in an erratic process that multiplies the centers of power. NGOs typically illustrate this process especially when they become interconnected with other organizations of their own kind, as they build up communication networks over the Internet. Their power and influence may be eroding the nation-state as *the* center of power. Interestingly, this interconnectedness is very much in keeping with ecological thinking for which the interrelations at work in ecosystems can be used as theoretical models.

A - Communities sharing the Tongass territory

This new order has possibly been perceived by Alaskan politicians who seek to transfer control over the Tongass from the national to the local communities. This move follows the new societal postmodern trends which favor local centers of power. On September 28, 1995, Representative Don Young (R-AK), Chairman of the House Resources Committee, introduced the Tongass Transfer and Transition Act (H.R. 2413), to permit the transfer of the 17 million acre Tongass National Forest to the State of Alaska.²⁶ Decisions vital for the Tongass area were to be made not by remote federal bureaucrats but by the local communities, including tourism operators, fishermen, crabbers, and cabin owners for whom mere permits become federal issues. A survey (September, 1995) showed that 55% of southeast Alaskans favored such a transfer, while 34% opposed it. It is obvious that more and more Alaskans seek to have better control over decisions that concern their state, a process of appropriation that transforms what they so far have perceived as public lands into their own territory. The empowerment of local communities is one of the features that characterize postmodernism.

Interestingly and to confirm this interpretation, in 2002, southeastern Alaskan communities celebrated the centennial of the creation of the Tongass National Forest. Such a celebration clearly shows that there is a community feeling around the forest. The celebration was also an

²⁶ Issue #28—October 6, 1995. <<http://www.nationalcenter.org/ReliefRpt28.html>>. Accessed 24 July 2003.

opportunity to pay homage to the Forest Service which, however criticized in recent decades, has long been hailed by logger communities as a beneficial agency that literally created them and provided them with a living and a way of life. This is true for most national forests and logger communities in the United States. But the Tongass centennial celebration was also an opportunity to associate other communities:

A ranger boat roundup, performances by the Fiddlin' Foresters, panel discussions, artwork and a festival of Native culture [were] scheduled in communities throughout Southeast Alaska [...] as part of the Tongass National Forest's centennial celebration.²⁷

The celebration undoubtedly was a way to promote a sense of territorial community, something akin to a sense of place, of belonging to a specific area in a nation where mobility has long been a dominant feature. The consensual approach associated the Native people of the Tongass to the event: the forest now works as a factor of integration for the local communities.

The image of the forest is thus greatly changing. It no longer is a resource on public lands to be plundered. It may be harvested, but above all it should be protected. In the summer of 2001, the results of public comments on the draft Tongass Wilderness Plan were released.²⁸ All in all, 170,000 public comments were sent to the FS. Most of these comments demanded more wilderness protection especially for the Tongass. Interestingly, Alaskans with a majority of 85% called for protection, not exploitation of the forest. Logging is no longer the only source of revenue: tourism with fishing, hunting and hiking is another source of income. All this calls for the protection of the natural environment, and the environmentalists' discourse is given more and more attention. The Tongass as a territory is no longer the sole business of the FS or of local timber barons or logger communities. The Tongass belongs to Alaskans, and sustainable development and its catch words are the new order of the day. Local small business owners, local communities, local environmental and conservation organizations express environmental concern for the Tongass, just as national environmental organizations and a majority of the American public. Out of fourteen major environmental organizations in Alaska, five are clearly concerned with the protection of the Tongass.²⁹ A huge network of environmental watch has developed to save the Tongass.

B - Deterritorialization: electronic mobility in the landscapes of imagination

To the local and regional communities' concern must be added the interest of the national environmental organizations and the American public in general. By August 2002, the Forest Service had received more than 2.2 million comments favoring roadless protection following the roadless rule

²⁷ Markell, Joanna. "Tongass National Forest celebrates 100th birthday." *The Juneau Empire* © 2002 <http://www.juneauempire.com/stories/070802/loc_tongass.shtml>. Accessed 24 July 2003.

²⁸ "Let it be wild forever!" <<http://www.akrain.org/include/seisoverview.pdf>>. Accessed 24 July, 2003.

²⁹ Organization details. <http://www.worldashome.org/org_detail.asp?title=119>. Accessed 25 July 2003.

controversy, a clear signal to the Bush Administration that the American public loved their national forests. "The American people are trying to get through to the Bush Administration, but all they are hearing is a busy signal," said Jane Danowitz, Director of the Heritage Forests Campaign, an alliance of conservationists, wildlife advocates, clergy, educators, scientists, and other Americans.³⁰ The Campaign, which depends heavily on the Internet for its efficacy, is another example of many communities from many different areas and fields that come together to exert pressure on the federal government. The question is why so many people who will probably never go to the Tongass give some of their time and much concern to the Tongass and other national forests. There are of course many possible answers, some of which have been mentioned earlier, such as the American fascination for the national wilderness myth. Another one is the influential impact of environmentalism in the nation's life. Environmentalism was institutionalized in the 1970s and quality of life and genuine wilderness support have provided millions of members to the local, regional or national environmental organizations. Visiting their websites is part of the environmentalist's duty if he or she wants to show support, and after some time surfing on the net the chances are that major issues as the roadless rule or oil drilling in Alaska will attract many web surfers. Slide shows and other attractive pictures will re-create the Tongass on the surfers' screens and in their minds, nourishing and sustaining a virtual forest in their imagination. The virtual Tongass is born. It is possibly greener and assuredly more sensational and more attractive than the real one for many Internet addicts, who would find little interest in the nondescript barren lands covered with shrub that make up much of the territory covered by the Tongass. Virtual mobility whisks visitors into ideal, synthetic, beautiful landscapes. And the virtual Tongass cannot be logged. It has become a virtual, idealized and ideal territory in hyperreality, a simulacrum of the real forest so far away, the result of electronic deterritorialization. Visiting the actual forest may eventually prove frustrating as suggested by a cartoon published on the Internet.³¹

The cartoon is proof that the Tongass attracts tourists for its wildlife just as it is evidence of the looming danger of more clearcuts. A landscape studded with stumps is a clear allusion to the havoc wreaked by clearcuts. But the cartoon first conveys the full power of the virtual Tongass. The tourists seem familiar with the technology that created it and all its icons: salmon runs, bald eagles, grizzly bears and deer. Maybe the whole nonsense of the situation is conveyed by the futile attempt by man at touching the real thing, which is gone forever, and the nonsensical efforts of tourists who have come to the spot to visit what their computer back home can better show them. The forest has gone and now survives in the void of some electronic territory in cyberspace. A place on the map that could have become a dwelling place dear to human residents vanished forever. It is a recurring comment of concerned environmentalists on the Tongass that clearcuts wipe out scenic landscapes before they could become "places," the

³⁰ "Heritage Forests Campaign News Release." Accessed 25 July 2003. <<http://www.ourforests.org/press/pr081902.html>>.

³¹ Johnson, Karen. "Virtual Tongass." <<http://www.ptialaska.net/~johnson/>>. Accessed 28 July 2003.

loci of aesthetic appreciation, environmental concern, and human care. Postmodernism is also a fable in nonsense, virtuality and deterritorialization.

Other forms of deterritorialization exist about the Tongass. One may call “ideological deterritorialization” the move of loggers’ associations from an aggressive discourse against environmentalists in the days of the spotted owl controversy³² to a language that reflects the environmentalist moods of the present:

The timber industry is a primary industry like the mining and fishing industries. The essential elements of the industry are:
Community support. A desire from the local people to have a particular industry in their midst. We have had that support since the mid-1940s when the communities of Southeast Alaska lobbied Congress to help foster the Long Term Timber Sales. A guaranteed timber supply offered at that time attracted two pulp mills that operated successfully for about 40 years. An assured timber supply is still the key to fostering and maintaining a timber industry in our remote region, but maintaining a healthy environment has also become a major concern both in Congress and here in Alaska. To respond to this concern, we have sponsored a sustainable forestry program for our industry to be able to certify that our industry operates in an environmentally appropriate and sustainable manner.³³

The loggers have always formed a community bonded by the many dangers of tree cutting whose prestige put it above the others. Nowadays it is a community that thinks of itself as oppressed by the environmental discourse but that tries to use it. After paying lip service to the behemoths, the two giant pulp mills of former days, after alluding to the original timber sales as harbingers of sustainable development (“sustainable forestry program,” “an environmentally appropriate and sustainable manner”), the Alaska Forest Association spokesperson insists upon the importance of “maintaining a healthy environment.” This is an about-face unthinkable in the 1990s when the spotted owl wars were raging in the Pacific Northwest. It is evidence that loggers have given up the ideological territory of unabashed natural resource exploitation. It is the discourse of a minority community.

The local native tribes are also marginalized communities that are not often heard and have suffered from loss of territory. They have been the dwellers of the Tongass, a territory which was the legacy of their ancestors, for thousands of years. Human bones can be found in the many fissures and caverns of the area. But the Haida and Tlingit people, the local tribes, have given up any claim on the bones found in the caves in order to help scientists.³⁴ Science, the goddess of modernity, still wields influence in

³² One of the most popular bumper stickers at the time in the logger communities of the Pacific Northwest was “I love spotted owls: fried.”

³³ Alaska Forest Issues. <<http://www.akforest.org/aboutafa.htm>>. Accessed 20 July 2003.

³⁴ Preston, Douglas. “Anthropology and American Ancestry.” *Natural History*. Issue: April, 2000. <http://www.findarticles.com/cf_0/m1134/3_109/61524427/p2/article.jhtml?term=Tongass> Accessed 23 July 2003. The members of the Haida Indian tribe in Canada have a different approach: “Chicago—After spending decades in storage drawers at Chicago’s Field Museum, the remains of 160 members of the Haida Indian tribe will return to Canada under an

postmodern ages. The Tlingits' and Haidas' renunciation to any claim over their ancestors' remains can also be construed as symbolical deterritorialization. Removing the bones of their forebears is also moving them from their ancestors' territory into the lifestyles of postmodernism, making them a community among other communities, in a process of integration.

C - Interconnectedness: multi-centered cooperation and electronic environmental activism

Another case of integration exists for all sorts of organizations which fight against pollution in the Tongass. The giant pulp mill in Ketchikan has polluted the local environment for forty years to make diapers and rayon out of the old-growth giants of the Tongass. Extensive pollution followed. Nowadays, Alaska's Department of Environmental Conservation and the federal Environment Protection Agency, are supervising the cleanup of the area while Alaskan foundations grant local environmental organizations in order to raise ecological awareness. A web of official as well as non-profit, non-governmental organizations interconnected in cooperation works for a better, healthier environment. This multi-centered kind of cooperation is characteristic of a rhizome-like organization of work.

Many examples of interconnected teamwork to save the Tongass and about other environmental matters are available. A most interesting one is provided by a short opinion³⁵ in a forum about national forests found on the forum published online by *Issues in Science and Technology Online*, "a publication of the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Engineering and the University of Texas at Dallas."³⁶ The opinion itself was written by Matthew Zencey, Campaign Manager Alaska Rainforest Campaign Washington, D.C.:

The Alaska Rainforest Campaign (ARC) is a coalition of national and Alaska conservation groups that work to protect the remaining wildlands of the Tongass and Chugach National Forests from clearcutting and other harmful development.³⁷

Alaska Rainforest Campaign Member Groups include Alaska Center for the Environment, Alaska Conservation Foundation, Alaska Wilderness League, Defenders of Wildlife, Earthjustice, National Audubon Society-Alaska State Office, Natural Resources Defense Council, Sierra Club, Sitka Conservation Society, Southeast Alaska Conservation Council, The Wilderness Society, Alaska Rainforest Alliance Member Organizations, Center For Biological Diversity, Eyak Preservation Council, National Wildlife Federation, The Boat Company. This intricate web of links and this coalition of environmental groups include local, regional, state, federal, national associations of environmentalists. As for *Issues*, its mission statement is also worth some comments:

agreement the tribe and museum officials signed Friday." Eugene, Oregon, *The Register-Guard* Oct. 18, 2003, p. A3.

³⁵ Zencey, Matthew. "National forests." Accessed 29 July 2003. <<http://www.nap.edu/issues/16.3/forum.htm>>. Accessed 29 July 2003.

³⁶ <<http://www.nap.edu/issues/>>. Accessed 29 July 2003.

³⁷ <<http://www.akrain.org/>>. Accessed 29 July 2003.

Although *Issues* is published by the scientific and technical communities, it is not just a platform for these communities to present their views to Congress and the public. Rather, it is a place where researchers, government officials, business leaders, and others with a stake in public policy can share ideas and offer specific suggestions.³⁸

Issues appears as a network that associates scientific and technical communities, that wishes to enlighten or cooperate with and help other communities—the public, Congress, government officials, business leaders—to somehow impact on law-making or decision taking. It would be difficult to find a better example of the intricacy and multiplicity of communities whose networks swarm the Internet and impact the decisions taken in local boardrooms or in federal agencies or even on Capitol Hill. Power has become diffused and spreads in quantum leaps from website to website to boardrooms, in rhizome-like interconnectedness, without a center, deterritorialized and multipolar. All stripes of e-tribes are busy communicating and working together. Whether “e—” stands for electronic or environmental is no longer clear in the postmodern age which counts ecology as one of its main topics.

Is the long awaited e-democracy emerging? The question remains unanswered but the “Click Here To Submit Your Comments Electronically,” “Send a free fax today!” and other electronic petitions, action alerts, letters to Representatives and Senators have become standard environmental grassroots activism. An electronic petition in support of the roadless rule is available on the net:

I strongly support the Roadless Area Conservation Rule as it was issued in January 2001 and oppose the proposed exemptions of the Tongass and Chugach National Forests, our nation's two largest national forests, from the Roadless Area Conservation Rule.³⁹

The result of this electronic lobbying possibly gives a feeling of electronic empowerment to the grassroots citizenry. Whether this e-lobbying has a real impact is unsure. The history of environmental law-making in the late 1980s and later is one of endless counterproductive riders on appropriation bills. The trick consists in adding a last minute amendment, a rider, on appropriation bills. Exemption from environmental strict laws is usually what Congressmen seek to have included in the bills by means of riders. But this technique indisputably derides and insults representative democracy as modernity had established it in the United States and erodes the nation-state's power.

Conclusion

The Tongass thus proves to be an interesting case study in postmodernist governance. It has become a virtual territory in the imagination of environmentalists surfing the Web, in search of a national myth, the American wilderness. It is a territory where potential places are wiped away before they exist. It is a virtual territory opened by virtual mobility. It is an

³⁸ <<http://www.nap.edu/issues/about.html>>. Accessed 29 July 2003.

electronic territory where a cluster of communities work together in rhizome-like fashion. The deterritorialization of the Tongass and electronic empowerment of the concerned e-citizenry has generated countless centers of activism, a huge archipelago of electronic interconnectedness, a typical post-post-modern landscape.