

Restoring Walden Woods and the Idyll of Thoreau II: A Recent Historical Tracing of Changing and Renegotiated Restoration Goals

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ABSTRACT

Narratives of environmental restoration are subject to continual renegotiation and mediation by different groups and contexts. They are constrained by a combination of geo-political, socio-cultural, ecological, economic, legal, and moral-emotional influences. In this study, I focus on the case of Walden Woods (Massachusetts, U.S.) to provide empirical evidence of the evolution and historical portrayal of environmental restoration narratives, and the nature-society interaction and management of socio-ecological systems. Through a temporal examination of restoration narratives at Walden Woods, I provide evidence on the social mechanisms for restoration and the manifestations of 'restored nature.' The 'who', 'where', and degree of myth creation and selection (after Hall 2005) is critiqued to highlight changes and shifts in restoration practice. I compare changing restoration narratives across three sites in Walden Woods: 1) shoreline restoration at Walden Pond (1960s–1990s); 2) restoration of the former Town of Concord landfill (1990s–2000s); and 3) the creation of Thoreau's Path on Brister's Hill (2000s). Here, 'what would Thoreau want?' is a guiding restoration goal for practitioners. A key issue for this study is the *limits* to myth creation, grounded in the context and materiality of nature, and how it shapes practice.

Keywords: Brister's Hill, cultural landscape restoration, myth-changing, nature, Henry David Thoreau, Walden Woods

There have been many styles of restoration through time, and these styles have changed according to knowledge bases, biases, and even fashion. (Hall 2005, pgs xii–xiii)

Restoration practitioners continually redefine how nature is interpreted, for "every time an ecosystem is restored, a particular view of nature is expressed" (Higgs 2005, pg 162; also Hinchliffe (2007) and geographies of nature). Phrased another way, the mutability of restoration narratives means that they can be molded and reshaped by different actors and contexts, with different values and meanings attached to 'nature'. There exist multiple, and contested, natures of ecological restoration—nature(s)

both in the sense of the properties of restoration and also what is restored to a site.

This study provides evidence of the changes, shifts, and mutations in restoration narratives (rationales/visions) as well as the underpinning causes/contexts and prevailing social attitudes. I develop these through the case of Walden Woods (Massachusetts, U.S.), where restoration practices extend back to the late-1950s. The purpose of 'Walden restoration' is to maintain the integrity and functionality of the landscape recorded in the writings of Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862). What is of particular interest is that while political objectives may have changed, and while the 'nature' produced through restoration practices may have changed, 'Walden Woods' as a construct (a literary and historical entity) has remained unchanged throughout. The Walden context provides restorationists with

an opportunity to balance environmental history with the claims made of literary-historical and cultural landscapes, and to construct and apply Thoreau's environmentalism in restoration practices.

In this study, I trace the evolution and mutability of restoration narratives through activities at three sites within Walden Woods: Walden Pond; the former Town of Concord landfill; and Thoreau's Path on Brister's Hill. Consideration of the wider Walden context is fundamental here. Restoration knowledge (as understood through social expectations and experiences) is shaped not only by the ecological/geographical context, but also by historical, literary, cultural and political events and trends. A reinforcing of one or more of these narratives will in turn have consequences for the style of restoration that is practiced. The study concludes by considering the implications posed by the 'idyll

of Thoreau' (the literary landscapes and philosophical legacy of Thoreau in Walden Woods) to restoration knowledge, and thus policies and practices, in Walden Woods.

This study tackles a weakness of existing literatures—the *changing nature* of restoration narratives over time. This weakness in existing literature has been pointed out by Hall (2005), as well as by Eden (2002), Higgs (2005), and Clewell and Aronson (2007), among others. It is Hall's understanding of nature myths, "those collective, often explanatory set of assumptions that people hold about the nature of nature" (2005, pg 10), and subsequent scrutiny of myth-changing—that "Only by switching myths can one justify different ways to restore" (2005, pg 233)—which is taken forward in this study, and of particular interest are the claims and, in some instances, tensions that are bound up therein. The definition of restoration put forward by the Society for Ecological Restoration (SER) is introduced here as a marker against which to gauge shifts and mutations in restoration practices on the ground. Restoration is defined as "the process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged or destroyed" (SER 2004, pg 3), with the idea of 'recovery' further qualified: "intentional activity that initiates or accelerates the recovery of an ecosystem with respect to its health, integrity and sustainability" (SER 2004, pg 1).

The Politics of Cultural Landscape Restoration and the Legitimizing Question: What Would Thoreau Want?

Narratives of restoration inevitably mediate between different attachments to, and perceptions of, space and place, fostering and reinforcing some and downplaying others. The socio-cultural construction of ideas of space and place are fundamental to restoration: such constructions are acutely site-specific, applying



Figure 1. The location of Walden Pond (site A), the former Town of Concord landfill (site B), and Brister's Hill (site C) in Walden Woods, Massachusetts, USA. Map Credit: Burne/WWP for the author 2011.

dominant meanings to areas, but they are not necessarily *proportional*. Rationalizations of practice may combine the local and the abstract in varying ways. Spatial and scalar constructs (of context-embeddedness, abstraction and transferability, alongside ecological and political influences) are integral to the shaping of restoration narratives, and the mutability of such narratives.

There are three case studies I wish to draw upon in developing a focused historical narrative detailing how restoration has changed at Walden:

these include the shoreline restoration at Walden Pond, restoration of the former Town of Concord landfill, and the creation of Thoreau's Path on Brister's Hill (Figure 1). Of particular interest are how and why narratives of restoration have changed over time and the consequences of these changing narratives. Here I ask, how are narratives limited and shaped by the institutional context and the physical condition of particular sites? As Hall (2005, pg 202) argues, "More than a problem of semantics, the subtle differences in these various definitions

can lead to the creation of dramatically different landscapes.” The cases also illustrate how restoration knowledges and the imaginative landscapes of Thoreau are used and represented in these processes.

Study Methodology

I used a variety of strategies to gain information about myth-changing in restoration practices. I started with participant observation through an extended research placement at the Walden Woods Project (WWP; Lincoln, MA) in 2007. Over the course of the placement, I took part in the Discovering Walden Woods outing series, and attended many of the lectures of the Approaching Walden professional development seminars for teachers and graduate students. To further understand the changing nature of restoration, I interviewed staff at the Walden Woods Project as well as staff from organizations with links (collaborative, geographic, literary, personnel) to the WWP. These organizations included: Department of Conservation and Recreation, Estabrook Woods Alliance, Friends of Thoreau Country, Massachusetts Audubon Society, Sasaki Associates Inc, Thoreau Society, Walden Pond Board of Directors, Walden Pond State Reservation (all MA); the Caddo Lake Institute (TX); RESTORE The North Woods (ME); and the Sand County Foundation (WI). Many of the research participants were actively involved in restoration practices at Walden Woods throughout the 1980s and 1990s (as planners, landscape architects, ecologists, and land managers), and had a degree of control over what they chose to do. Material from the interviews also provided the context for a visual ethnography of sites to illustrate how restoration narratives are put into practice. I also had the opportunity to draw upon and utilize resources from the Henley Library of the Thoreau Institute at Walden Woods and the Concord Free Public Library, for further material relating to Thoreau, the environmental and literary

history of Concord and Lincoln, and the development of conservation and restoration philosophies in the area.

Case Study 1: Shoreline Restoration at Walden Pond (1960s–1990s)

Walden Pond has a long history as a site for recreation, not least because of its location 25 miles from Boston, and is the deepest natural body of water in Massachusetts. As evidence of this, the 1940s witnessed the establishment of a bathhouse, changing rooms and a concrete swimming dock. As a consequence, conservation was thus downplayed, such that: “Middlesex County saw their role as providing the recreation piece and supporting recreation, and so that was their idea of how to do that” (Mass Audubon interview #1). Today, only the bathhouse remains.

Restoration efforts at Walden Pond (Figure 2) commenced in the late-1950s, with the restoration of Red Cross Beach (Maynard 2005, Wheeler 2005). In 1957, Middlesex County began work to create a new beach area, and were taken to court by the Save Walden Committee (formed within the Thoreau Society) for destroying ‘the Walden of Emerson and Thoreau’ (a cultural construct with much emotional weighting, as well as institutionalized gravitas), as set down in the 1922 Deed of Gift. Somewhat paradoxically, the Town of Concord had agreed three years earlier to site a municipal landfill within Walden Woods, without opposition. Trees along the shoreline of Walden Pond were felled, with part of the bank also cut away and moved into the Pond. As a consequence of the court case, in 1960 the Middlesex County Commissioners were required to:

Restore ‘the Walden of Emerson and Thoreau’, to the extent that restoration is practicable [. . .] ‘to restore much of the sylvan charm of the denuded area’ by proper replanting of trees and shrubbery, and that such replanting and reforestation

could be accomplished more effectively by removing the roadway and building new contours with additional fill [. . .]; that it would be practical to restore the demolished section of the ancient foot-path encircling the pond [. . .]; and that the proposed new bathhouse would ‘mar the beauty of the shore.’ [. . .] steps should be taken to prevent erosion in the area and to restore the foot-path. (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 1958, pg 12)

The literary/imaginative landscapes of Thoreau were used in this process to justify restoration practices at Red Cross Beach. Nevertheless, the County Commissioners of Middlesex County (1958) acknowledge that: “After 115 years, who knows what was ‘the Walden of Emerson and Thoreau’”, introducing an element of *human choice* in the restoration. For one research participant, the restoration of Red Cross Beach is ‘authentic’, because:

They brought in deposits, restored the original contours, and then planted trees, so that now you can hardly tell where that was. That in my opinion is ecological restoration. (FOTC interview #1)

In the 1960s, Middlesex County applied a particular reading of ‘environmental restoration’ to the Pond area, and introduced timber cribbing at multiple sites—representative of stadium seating—due to the County’s explicit focus on recreation. Other efforts to stabilize and restore the shoreline have involved the use of riprap, paving sections of the trail, and a boardwalk—none of which remain today. By the 1980s, the interpretation of ‘restoration’ had shifted towards a need to “de-emphasize the recreation and re-emphasize the historical aspects” (Mass Audubon interview #1); in effect to restore ‘the right kind of connection’ with a particular, preferred past. The ‘Walden restoration’



Figure 2. Walden Pond. Top: the restoration of Red Cross Beach and its slopes; bottom left: shoreline stabilization; bottom center-left: DCR trail request; bottom center-right: trail and planting on slopes; bottom right: field stones as site stabilization along the trail. Photo Credit: Laura Smith.

narrative is also limited and shaped by the institutional context, with restoration practices framed within wider conservation (rather than recreation) objectives. Shifts in the goals and context of restoration, and their governance and control, are a reflection of the political history at Walden Pond.

A balancing act between restoration and recreation was evident in the DEM/DCR restoration program of the 1980s and 1990s for Walden Pond, as it paralleled management decisions to limit the number of visitors, preventing restoration efforts being negated by over-use. Recreational overuse is still a driving management issue, especially for Walden Pond and Walden Pond State Reservation. This is qualified such that: “the Pond edge restoration that went on moved it back to kind of its natural state, but it didn’t ignore the fact that accessibility, and the ability for the general public to use it, had to be accommodated” (Walden

Pond Board of Directors interview #1). A tension existed here surrounding the necessity of a public benefit dimension of restoration, which almost always in practice means more visitors, with their own consequences in terms of ecological services. A telling statement from the study revealed the tensions inherent in restoration practices at Walden Pond State Reservation: “we have tried to make it as natural as possible, but so that people can still use it” (WPSR interview #2). While organizations may not seek to actively dominate and control nature through environmental restoration practices, ideas of ‘nature’ and ‘naturalness’ are nevertheless framed by, and constructed within, societal choices and expectations.

The term ‘restoration’ is used explicitly by Walden Pond State Reservation, as seen on a panel at the entrance to Walden Pond on Route 126, outlining the restoration schedule for the Pond.

It cites: “Walden Pond is undergoing a major trail improvement and bank restoration project [. . .] Once completed, the shoreline will be restored to its native condition, not seen in 75 years.” Furthermore, the restoration schedule of 1996–1997/1997–1998 detailed on the panel proposes a bio-engineering approach, primarily through brush layering, bundled fascines and live stakings; as well as restricting access to the shoreline. In addition, the concrete pier and two concrete changing rooms were removed, and the beach restored. As the beach was not a natural feature, what this demonstrates is restoration to the recreational goals of an earlier time, and not necessarily an ecological restoration.

The shoreline restoration of Walden Pond provides a contrast to the following case studies of restoration within Walden Woods, for while the case at the Pond represents restoration *sensu stricto* (historically accurate, or



Figure 3. The former Town of Concord landfill. Top: panoramic view of the capped site; bottom left and right: grassland planting atop the capped site. Photo Credit: Laura Smith.

perhaps, an *imagined* historical accuracy), the remaining cases are representative of restoration *sensu lato* (functional) (Aronson et al. 1993). Nevertheless, restoration practices are guided both by assumptions of society's place within nature, and by a sense of the past.

Case Study 2: Restoration of the Former Town of Concord Landfill (1990s–2000s)

The Town of Concord landfill opened in 1954 and was closed to landfill activity in 1994. The Walden Woods Project has been working with Mass Audubon, Sasaki Associates, and the Town of Concord to 'restore' native grassland on the 30-acre capped portion, and hand it over to DCR as a part of Walden Woods (Figure 3). The landfill remains the single outstanding piece of unprotected land surrounding Walden Pond, with the Landfill Study Committee (2003, pg 4) commenting: "The Landfill Site would be an important and significant asset to the Walden Pond State Reservation." Owned by the Town, the landfill was

not slated for habitat conservation, because of perceived future development value, but as of April 2013, the Concord Board of Selectmen voted "unanimously to Support Article 12, to authorize the sale of a Conservation Restriction over the former landfill at Walden to the Walden Woods Project. They also voted unanimously to Oppose Article 13, which would result in a bus depot being built at the Walden Site" (WWP 2013).

The grassland restoration emerged from the work of Collins et al. (2000), who put forward three Vision Plans for the site: 1) maintain the capped area as open grassland; 2) establish rotating succession areas; or 3) allow parts of the capped area to reforest—with Vision 1 advanced. Mass Audubon drew upon its Grassland Conservation Program (established in 1993; see Mass Audubon 2001) to promote a mix of grass species for the landfill that was a compatible grassland habitat for the area. This was in contrast to the Town's own proposal for capping the site, for as a representative from Sasaki Associates remarks:

It was landscape architecture practiced by a civil engineering firm hired to be landscape architects—stick some trees along it. It had nothing to do with restoration of a grassland habitat. (Sasaki Associates interview #1)

Grassland is arguably just as incongruous (aesthetically) as the previous landfill, but the decision to introduce a grassland habitat was twofold: 1) insufficient soil depth on the capped landfill would prevent the dense planting of trees; and 2) with grassland habitat diminishing in New England, any new grassland habitat creation is highly coveted by Mass Audubon (Sasaki Associates interview #1). Walden's place in the wider historic colonial landscape is also revealed here: meadow shaped the colonial landscape of Paul Revere (cf. Minute Man National Historic Park, Lexington, MA), and its echo at the landfill reconnects with this cultural-historical moment. Restoration practices are limited by the physicality of the site, with the 'nature' of restored



Figure 4. Thoreau's Path on Brister's Hill. Top left: entrance to Brister's Hill from Walden Street/Route 126; top center-left: 'I wish to speak a word for nature' (Entry Meadow); top center-right: the path through the meadow; top right: 'I see in the open field . . .' (forest succession); bottom left: 'What though the woods be cut down . . .' (grassland); bottom center: 'Heaven is under our feet . . .' (entry meadow); bottom right: Reflection Circle. Photo Credit: Laura Smith.

nature negotiated by wider ecological, cultural and technical/chemical narratives.

The site is a prime example of restoring natural capital to an area and of promoting a landscape type compatible with the wider landscape, within the constraints of a polluted site. As Collins et al. (2000, pg 23) noted: "The vegetation on Brister's Hill and the landfill can all be classified as cultural; that is, all of the current vegetation has been fundamentally shaped by recent human land use." However, a portion of the site is still used by Concord Public Works (CPW) for activities such as the storage of ploughed snow and street sweepings; and composting and wood chipping operations—limiting the full restoration of the landfill site. Yet in the closure and restoration of the landfill, a social space promoting community recycling has also been lost—a space where 'green' local residents would gather to exchange materials prior to dumping. In this instance, a narrative of restoration has replaced those of reuse, recycling, and reinvestment to

promote a new environmental locale and consciousness.

There is equally a concern that the restoration of the landfill does not constitute an 'ecological restoration', as exemplified in the following statement, with the grassland simply 'making the best of a bad situation:'

I'm grateful that it's closed, but I think that capping it the way it was done was not ecological restoration—because it's grassland, it's open habitat; mainly for birds. But it's not Walden Woods. It's surrounded by Walden Woods, but it can't be Walden Woods because the substrate is not correct. It's not the glacial deposits, and it's not a replacement of those glacial deposits. (FOTC interview #1)

Case Study 3: Thoreau's Path on Brister's Hill (2000s)

Environmental restoration practices at Brister's Hill have sought to counter the ecological damage resulting from sand and gravel extraction in the 1960s, and more recently from

off-road vehicle trails and the illegal dumping of garbage. Restoration at Brister's Hill is realized through the creation of an interpretive trail. A collaboration between the Walden Woods Project, Mass Audubon, and Sasaki Associates, Thoreau's Path on Brister's Hill (Figure 4) encompasses a loop path and 'reflection circle', the latter a "ring of granite, incised with quotations, [which] brings together a diverse group of leaders and thinkers whose words echo and extend Thoreau's, and whose wisdom, like his, is timeless" (WWP 2006b, pg 9). This restoration serves to restore a literary, historical, and cultural connection with the land through the writings of Thoreau, by siting quotes from Thoreau throughout the landscape to highlight and bring attention to the landscape condition.

The Path highlights five important contributions made by Thoreau through his writings: conservation (Entry Meadow); social reform and commentary (Brister's Orchard); teaching and observing (Sand Plain/Grassland); science (Forest Succession); and Thoreau's philosophy

and influence on others (Reflection Circle) (WWP 2006a). The physical condition of the site and the imaginary of Thoreau come together in the restoration narrative at Brister's Hill.

Within the context of the Brister's Hill site, an interesting case emerges concerning the planting of pitch pine (*Pinus rigida*) and white pine (*Pinus strobus*). There is a predominance of white pine in the landscape, to the detriment of oak and pitch pine stands which might have been more common in the region before the land was cleared (Mass Audubon interview #3). Pitch pine is favored in areas with sandier soils, and where fires occur (such as Walden Woods), as it has a better fire resistance than white pine. For this reason, restoration efforts at Brister's Hill sought to promote the establishment of pitch pine stands, not only for its congruence with the 1840s of Thoreau, but for its physiological characteristics.

As the Walden Woods Project (2006c) acknowledges of Thoreau's Path: "Like the capped landfill across Route 2, the Walden Woods Project has restored this small section of Brister's Hill with native grasses to provide habitat for some of those species and to enhance overall diversity of the site." A distinction is nonetheless made between the 'restoration' of the landfill and of Brister's Hill:

[Of the landfill:] that is ecological restoration, but it's a different end point than the restoration that Brister's Hill is going to undergo over time.

[Of Brister's Hill:] that site was heavily altered and its restoration (essentially through benign neglect, but with a little bit of help from us) is going to go back to mature native forest (over time). So that will actually be restored to a landscape that looks more or less like it did before all that gravel extraction happened. (WWP interview #1)

This distinction is such that of all the restoration activities undertaken by the Walden Woods Project, it is the restoration of Brister's Hill and the creation of Thoreau's Path which is formalized as an example of 'environmental restoration' by WWP staff.

A further example of environmental restoration at Brister's Hill is realized in the proposed Walden Passage, a combined wildlife-recreational crossing spanning Route 2. A feasibility study produced by UMass Amherst (2007) identified three locations (and a no-build option) for a combined pedestrian and wildlife highway overpass for the area, with the proposal near Goose Pond 'show[ing] the most merit.' A crossing near Goose Pond would also complement the four existing wildlife underpasses/crossing culverts installed along Route 2 in 2005 by MassDOT. Moreover, locating the crossing at Goose Pond would link the Hapgood Wright Town Forest and Brister's Hill with Walden Pond State Reservation, and it:

Includes a number of landscape features directly associated with nineteenth-century intellectual life of Concord. Fairyland Pond, named by Thoreau, and the surrounding area were frequently visited by a number of notable walkers. Goose Pond, Brister's Hill, Brister's Spring, and other nearby (and still extant) landscape features are all mentioned by Thoreau in his journals or in Walden. Of the three alternatives, this location has the highest number of nearby features with historical associations and with a good degree of integrity. It therefore offers the most potential for conveying the significance of the cultural landscape—particularly as it relates to the nineteenth century—to human users of the crossing. (UMass Amherst 2007, pgs 65–66)

Once again, the historic landscape context combines with the imaginary of Thoreau to mold restoration practices.

The Changing Nature of 'Walden Restoration'

The shoreline restoration at Walden Pond in the 1960s, continuing through into the 1980s and 1990s, prioritizes restoration-as-replication narratives (and those of return), to 'keep it like it was'; to emulate 'the Walden of Emerson and Thoreau'. The restoration of the landfill and of Brister's Hill illustrates a shift in narratives, to restoration-as-repair (see SER 2004), to repair damage, or replace or renew ecological structure and function. Subsumed within the repair narrative as applied to Brister's Hill are narratives of natural regeneration by 'the natural', allowing natural processes of regeneration and succession to dominate. Two restoration narratives to cross-cut all three cases are restoration-as-removing-anthropogenic-influences, that is, reversing or countering negative human interventions in the landscape; and restoration-as-restoring-natural-capital—but it is 'natural capital' in the sense of 're-greening', rather than as producing ecosystem goods and services to support socio-economic wellbeing.

A further re-organizing of Walden restoration narratives to simplify this complexity might be to view *ecological* restoration as a subset of *environmental* restoration. Ecologists and their methods reveal one restoration vision, as illustrated at the Concord landfill. Likewise, another subset—*cultural landscape* restoration—might be applied to the restoration of both Walden Pond and Brister's Hill.

Tensions arise out of conflicting narratives of 'Walden restoration', not least because restoration is complicated by literary, historical and cultural legacies—"you can't hire a lawn service to go out there" (Sasaki Associates interview #1). Moreover, not all narratives woven into the Walden landscape are concerned with restoration; wider aesthetics are relevant too. "A lot of times you assume people have the values that you do, and of course they're going to want it to be like this

and this is going to make it better. Then you realise no, they just want it to be convenient” (WPSR interview #1). Restoration practitioners in Walden Woods frequently have to juggle multiple restoration visions in their work, and the durability of a narrative/vision is essential, as “people take a term and run with it, and then actually ‘degrade’ it in a sense, to the point that it almost doesn’t mean anything anymore. So you have to know exactly what your definition of restoration is” (FOTC interview #1).

The complexity bound up in the practice of environmental restoration is such that it “may be less a process of remedying damaged natural systems than of discovering our biases about environmental damage, less a process of re-creating past landscapes than of discovering our myths about idealized landscapes” (Hall 2005, pg 238). What emerges is a parody of the landscapes of Thoreau, where ‘nature’ and ‘restored nature’ are homogenized, to reflect or echo ‘the Walden of Emerson and Thoreau.’

Indeed, ‘what would Thoreau want?’ seems to be a key legitimizing question for restoration practitioners. As Thoreau (1859 in Thoreau 2007, pgs 405–406) argues: “Each town should have a park, or rather a primitive forest, of five hundred or a thousand acres, where a stick should never be cut for fuel, a common possession forever, for instruction and recreation [. . .] inalienable forever. Let us keep the New World new, preserve all the advantages of living in the country.” Furthermore, changes and shifts have taken place because of the materiality of particular contexts, the regulations that surround them (such as limits as to what can be done on landfill sites), or because key project actors have changed/moved between organizations or changed their views over time.

Where Does the Idyll of Thoreau Leave Restoration Policies and Practices in Walden Woods and Beyond?

Efforts to think through what Thoreau might want or see have come to provide legitimation for practices—once again reinforcing the importance placed on the idyll of Thoreau in environmental decision-making. Hinchliffe (2007) has reported on geographies of nature, and what is evident at Walden is a series of imagined geographies of nature, where ‘nature’ takes as its reference the construct of ‘the Walden of Emerson and Thoreau.’ The landscapes and writings of Thoreau are brought to the forefront in restoration and wider political/politicized debates, and are translated into practices—such as planting schemes/plans—through reference to the vegetation and land uses of the 1840s (Schofield and Bush-Brown undated). One such example is the selection of planting materials for the shoreline restoration at Walden Pond—even though *grasses* are better for anchoring the soil, it is Thoreau’s botanical observations and recordings of the *trees* of Walden that informed the restoration decision. Such imagined geographies of nature take forward ‘nature(s)’ that are sympathetic to the idyll of Thoreau, but which also maintain the integrity, functionality and future condition of the landscape. This is echoed in a statement from the National Park Service (2002, pg 16), for “its integrity remains remarkably high. One can still see and understand the landscape encountered by Thoreau, even with the losses and changes. Present land use continues to reflect the historic pattern.” As a research participant also notes, “You can come here, to Walden Woods, a good deal of it is very much like it was. You can go to so many places that Thoreau wrote about, and studied, and they’re still there” (WWP interview #5).

Despite this, there are several plants in the Thoreau Institute grounds

today which Thoreau would not have recognized. Largely the presence of these is the result of gardening; the beautification of gardens and private land (Field Journal: WWP). There is also less open space today within Walden Woods—if it was to be restored to a state similar to the 1840s, it would require the felling of trees to mirror Walden’s previous use as a woodlot (Field Journal: WWP). As Thoreau acknowledges, “This winter they are cutting down our woods more seriously than ever—Fair Haven Hill—Walden—*Linnaea Borealis* wood &c &c [etc., etc.]. Thank God they cannot cut down the clouds!” (Thoreau 1852 in Thoreau 2007, pg 125) and “Though they are cutting off the woods at Walden it is not all loss. It makes some new and unexpected prospects” (Thoreau 1852 in Thoreau 2007, pg 131). Such examples as those above raise the question of historical fidelity and restoration imperialism, and the place of imagined geographies of nature in restoration narratives (cf. Frederick Law Olmsted and ‘restoration’ of the Back Bay Fens, Boston, MA).

A key narrative which ‘talks back to’ restoration knowledge at Walden Woods concerns balancing and regulating the ‘demand’ for, and ‘supply’ of, nature. The popularity of Walden as a site of literary and historical significance, alongside recreation, informed the perceived need for a carrying capacity study. A report compiled by Gardiner and Associates (1974) proposed limiting the number of people in the Reservation at any one time to 1,000 people. As such, car parking facilities were designed to complement this, with 350 spaces provided (based on an average of three people per car). Prior to this, cars would pull off Routes 2 and 126 and park on the edge of the Woods, or in the local High School grounds. Although the establishment of a carrying capacity is beneficial (with additional cars turned away), it does not mediate or control variations in use of the Woods. As one research participant (Walden

Pond Board of Directors interview #1) argues, “The problem being that on a hot summer day, all 1,000 people may be there to swim; on an autumn afternoon, it may be 1,000 people there, but they’re all walking around looking at foliage—you get this tremendous swing in what people’s interests are.”

Another narrative framing restoration knowledge at Walden focuses on the importance of social and cultural history. The Walden Woods Project serves to safeguard the landscapes written about and experienced by Thoreau. Much of Thoreau’s writing links social responsibility and environmental stewardship; and it was at Brister’s Hill that Thoreau formed his theory of the ecological succession of plant species through seed dispersal—*The Succession of Forest Trees* (Thoreau 1860) and *The Dispersion of Seeds* (in Thoreau 1993). For the Walden Woods Project (2007, Part III), “Directly or indirectly, social history is inevitably tied to the surrounding landscape that is home. When words and landscape come together, they bring to life the connections between the social and natural histories of home place.” As a research participant (WWP interview #6) also notes, the Path “brings Thoreau’s words to the landscape and uses them in a metaphorical way on the site that he did so frequently in his own writing.” What is of particular interest for restoration knowledge is the interaction between Thoreau’s vision (his words), the landscape, and restoration technology and design.

Conclusion

The case of Walden Woods illustrated in this study provides restorationists with an understanding of how restoration knowledges (and narratives) come to be mobilized in a particular space at a particular time. Here I provide evidence of the claims that are made of a landscape over time, and how landscapes are reconfigured to reflect those claims—as in the imagined geographies of nature. Over the past six decades, restoration practices

have assumed many forms in Walden Woods—from shoreline restoration at Walden Pond, to the capping and restoration of the Concord landfill, to the creation of an interpretive trail on Brister’s Hill. Early restoration practices were very much governed by narratives of recreation provision, taking forward a hard engineering approach, with later restoration practices concerned with conservation, in turn favoring soft engineering approaches.

What is of particular interest is that while the nature of ‘restored nature’ varies from site to site, embedded and site-specific, the ‘Walden’ construct remains unaltered. This is due in part to all restoration practices operating against a backdrop of maintaining the integrity and functionality of ‘the Walden of Emerson and Thoreau.’ The Walden of Emerson and Thoreau seems like an appropriate goal for Walden’s restoration, granted that 1) many visitors ground their understanding of the Pond and Woods in Thoreau’s writings and philosophy, and 2) this is often the principal reason for the visit. This epoch in Walden’s history carries so much literary, cultural and historical gravitas that it has come to overshadow a Walden of pre-Columbian Indians as well as a Walden of C20th, even C21st, America. What the Walden situation illustrates is how restoration narratives provide opportunities for the continued reinterpretation of what it means to *restore*—a reflection of where priorities lie in addressing environmental destruction and degradation.

It can also be argued, however, that the mutability of language makes it difficult to formulate any challenges to the practices involved, and allows restoration practitioners to control the relationship between past, present, and future landscapes (echoing Hall’s (2005) claim that switching nature myths allows one to justify different ways of restoring nature). No single restoration narrative takes precedence, instead, each serves to guide and inform the direction of a particular restoration scheme, ensuring a

more strategic approach than simply being ‘fit for purpose;’ one designed to *persuade* (or even *reassure*) within particular arenas.

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