

GREAT RIVER OF THE WEST

Two Ways of Seeing the Columbia—Reflections on “an Officially Designated Cultural Landscape”

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"The eyes explore the visual field and abstract from it certain objects, points of focus, perspectives."

—*Yi-fu Tuan*

East of Portland, Oregon, the Columbia River runs through a 3,000-foot-deep gorge in the Cascade Mountains on its westward course to the Pacific Ocean. Near the end of its 1,210-mile run from the Canadian Rockies, the river cuts the only sea-level passageway through the chain of volcanic mountains that string along the western edge of North America. It is a spectacularly scenic landscape. Rising steeply on the south bank, volcanic cliffs clothed in hemlock, fir, oak, spruce and cedar loom over the river and elevated escarpments on the north bank. Dozens of glacier-fed streams fringe the precipices, dropping their waters hundreds of feet in falls and cascades to the Columbia. Formed by millions of years of catastrophic geological and hydrological forces, the Columbia Gorge has impressed, even stunned, every generation since it was first described by explorer William Clark in 1805. Oregon Trail emigrants feared its perilous rapids, 19th-century steamboat operators fought its currents, and 20th-century tourists regaled it as the greatest "spectacle of nature anywhere in the world," where "the scenery is arranged most effectively" to produce awe.

By the mid-20th century the Columbia River Gorge had become emblematic of the river's scenic character, even though the Columbia had been transmogrified into a chain of manipulated reservoirs where the only falling water came from the outflows released over the spillways or the river's drop through the turbines. Nonetheless, this particular section of the mighty river seemingly had been spared many of the changes that characterize modern development on the Columbia and therefore it begged official recognition. During the 1980s a coalition of conservation-minded groups who revered the gorge for its aesthetic qualities, especially its spectacular waterfalls and dense forests, lobbied Congress for federal protection, arguing that the area needed a tightly drawn management plan to save it as a special place, as a "national scenic treasure." After years of political wrangling and sometimes volatile disagreements between the protection advocates and local residents, Congress passed the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act in 1986.

In this singular and unprecedented piece of legislation, Congress identified an officially designated cultural landscape where the future would be controlled and the effects of time would be managed. The statute defined a narrow band of territory along more than 100 miles of the Columbia in Oregon and Washington as a special place. This act was more reification than creation, for Native Americans and generations of non-Indian tourists had long seen the gorge

as an important landscape. From the Indian viewpoint, this stretch of the Columbia was homeland, fishing grounds, and a culturally rich place where community gave deep meaning to the environment. For Euro-Americans, it was assigned unique status: a place where nature's power could be observed firsthand and appreciated. The scenic area legislation was, as historian Carl Abbott has cogently explained, an effort "to transform a particular aesthetic and moral judgment into public policy...[establishing] that the natural and/or pre-European environment is more attractive and meritorious than the European-American built environment."

Labeling the gorge as a cultural place with specific qualities was a potent identification. It was a self-consciously nostalgic and largely romantic characterization of place, one that blended the scenic qualities of the river landscape with distant historical events and images. The process had been comprehensive and included numerous landscape studies, political discussions and community forums, but it ended up raising important and vexatious questions about the meaning of place, the connections landscapes have with human community, and the historical significance of territorial definitions. What meanings do we assign to landscapes? Which human values do landscapes include? What perspectives are the most accurate and discerning?

Answering these questions about the investment of human meaning in landscape thrusts us into a thick conversation between place and perception, between the observable physical qualities of the environment and the cultural meanings humans attach to the land. People identify places through their own biographies, through shared events, and through the larger history that groups apply to the landscape. Each place, as geographer John Allen has explained, is "a fusion of experience, landscape and location." It exists in time and space but is always attached to human awareness through an intricate melding of memory, myth, expectation and sensation. Below the surface of our observation, Simon Schama has recently argued, lies the deeper meaning of places, where "the veins of myth and memory" give profound cultural meaning to our perceptions. Digging into place, in other words, means excavating our cultural texts, exposing the content of what we say about the environment around us.

What we mean when we identify or label a place has everything to do with our orientation. For an inhabitant, the landscape is sustaining home, but for the explorer or traveler it is unknown, exotic, or representative of the "other." At any moment in time, however, a cultural landscape is, as geographer John B. Jackson explains, "a space or collection of spaces made by a group of people who modify the natural environment to survive, to create order, and to produce a just and lasting society." There is nothing simple here, nothing that does not touch and affect all human activity. A place is a complex, multifaceted, multi-layered, and dynamic connection humans make with the world they encounter, and as such it is a product of cumulative memory and multiple views. Perspective is everything, geographer Yi-fu Tuan reminds us, because nothing appears quite the same from different vantage points. For the visitor, Tuan argues,

perception is often a matter of using his eyes to compose pictures. The native, by contrast, has a complex attitude derived from his immersion in the totality of his environment. The visitor's viewpoint, being simple, is easily stated. The complex attitude of the native, on the other hand, can be expressed by him only with difficulty.

On the Columbia River, during the first half of the 19th century, the distinctions between "resident" and "visitor" took on larger meaning. This was during the period that historians and anthropologists label "the Encounter," when Euro-Americans invaded the Indians' world. People from divergent and distinctive cultures met, interacted, and began a process that changed the

physical landscape and layered on it new cultural meanings. That historical change, which has altered and continues to amend lives in the Columbia River Basin, is a dynamic composed of diverse and powerful forces, including the effects of population growth, capitalistic enterprise and modern engineering. Before those changes dramatically altered the environment—in large measure a 20th-century story—Native Americans met Euro-Americans and introduced them to their lands.

In the journals of mariners and land explorers we read descriptions of those meetings between English seamen and Chinookan Indians at the mouth of the Columbia, and between Lewis and Clark and Sahaptin-speaking groups far upriver. What strikes us in these descriptions are the differences among the native people and the relative similarity of the Euro-American visitors. The indigenous peoples of the Columbia looked at their land from the inside out, from their own beginnings as a human community, and from their lives as shapers of their place. At the time of first contact with Euro-Americans, Indians living on the lower river resided in densely populated communities, with as many as 300 persons inhabiting residential structures, while up on the plateau the groups were family-sized; in the entire Columbia River Basin population density averaged about one person per square mile. Native people spoke an amazing variety of languages, with many as singularly different from one another as contemporary French and Chinese. Their clothing, residences, hunting and gathering strategies, and cultural forms were as diverse as their languages.

How these people described and understood their places can best be seen as cultural maps that included an incredibly detailed and intimate knowledge of the region and its resources. These cultural maps disclosed much more than an environmental catalog of resources. They also reflected hundreds or thousands of years of knowledge and meaning. Along the middle Columbia, for example, ethnobotanist Eugene Hunn has documented an incredible richness in botanical names known and used by Sahaptin-speaking Indians who had memorized a catalog of more than 200 names to identify plants, their locations, the season for harvesting, and other distinctive characteristics. This ecological map focused on everything that related to humans and the natural world.

Fundamental to these maps are words, for it is with names and their associations that Indians in the Columbia River Basin created and described their place. The names come from within a lived space, where human events are connected to landforms, sources of food, sacred places, home. Some names reflect the physical appearance of the landscape, while others document the coincidences between human activity and natural resources. Others serve as guides for travel, locations of medicinal plants, and sites of danger. Hunn records names on the Columbia Plateau, for example, that translate as "many pestles," "Indian hemp place," "large-scale sucker place" and "swallowing monster." They are names with histories and utility. "Many pestles," for example, refers to a rich area for desert parsley on the plateau east of the Cascade Mountains, a place where Indian women gathered these plants and, using basalt pestles and oak mortars, pounded the parsley roots into a meal. The women's activity, the location of the roots, and the richness of the ground inform this name on the Yakama Indians' cultural map and invest it with meaning. In like ways, prime fishing spots, streamside locations where specific families settled in their winter lodges, camps where celebrations were held, and hundreds of other places were named according to experience and meaning. The fishing spots at Celilo Falls, for example, are named for the gear used in landing salmon, the families who claimed the locations, and the varieties of fish taken there.

Names and words dominate in the Columbia River Indians' place mapping because it was through language, especially vested in stories, that native people knew their world, the realities of the environment, and the meaning humans attach to creation. Through language, generation upon generation learned the revealed secrets of the world, and those revelations constituted a literal map of the region. Creation stories were some of the most dynamic oral traditions among Columbia River tribes. These narratives described the beginning of the world, the exploits of animals in the mythic age, the adventures and misadventures of Coyote, and how people should live in this world. They were essentially stories of place that mapped out the core truths about existence. Through these stories, as mythologist Mircea Elaide has explained, "the world 'speaks' to man, and...reveals itself in language."

The image of the world speaking to humans is unfamiliar to modernists who have long since objectified the visible world, but for Indian people on the Columbia—and for indigenous peoples throughout the world—communication with the land is bidirectional. The place had and continues to have voice. Among the Colville Indians on the upper Columbia River, for example, two Coyote stories illustrate the inseparableness of landscape and human community. In the stories, names and cultural prescriptions about human beings and their relationship to place make up important components of the tale. The relationships between place and humans in the story are a reflection of Native American understandings about a similar inseparableness in life.

In the first story, Coyote longs to give the people some manner of gift that will elevate them and bind them together as part of creation. He travels for miles down many streams until he comes to a large lake. There he pauses to rest, tired as he is from arduous travel, and drifts into sleep. In his dreaming he hears the "lap, lap, lap" of the water on the shore and when he wakes he knows what he shall give the people. On his return, Coyote brings the drum as his gift and instructs the people to strike it rhythmically: "thum, thum, thum." When they hear that resonant sound, Coyote tells the people, they should think about themselves as a whole and remember their duties to each other as people. The image of water, the distances between rivers and lakes on the Columbia River Plateau, and the importance of a healthy environment to the prosperity of the people are intermixed with the cautionary image of prosperity as a result of responsible behavior toward the land.

In the second story, Coyote is again desirous of giving something to the people. He knows how valuable the salmon have been to the people living far down the Columbia River, but salmon could not make their way far enough upstream to give themselves to upstream tribes. Coyote blasts through an obstruction in the river and leads the salmon to his people, but when he offers this priceless gift he warns the people not to transgress the world and its creatures, not to misbehave and neglect their duties to plants, land and animals. If they forget or ignore the rules of life, Coyote admonishes, he will throw up barriers across the rivers and streams and block salmon from their place. In the rock formations along the tributaries of the upper Columbia today, if you look carefully you can still see images of salmon in the rocks, where Coyote made good on his caveats.

In these stories and others that tell of complicated characters such as Coyote or ice changing the world for people, there are powerful didactic messages about what humans should do with each other and how they should relate to the larger environment. There are also distinctive markers and delineations about the landscape that map out place as more than a three-dimensional, sensory reality. Spiritual themes and ideas are pervasive. Stories carry the strong message that

everything in the world has theological meaning and that humans must acknowledge the spiritual power vested in an unlimited universe.

"People, animals, plants and other forces of nature—sun, earth, wind and rock—are animated by spirit," Eugene Hunn explains, and "as such they share with humankind intelligence and will, and thus have moral rights and obligations of moral persons."

Columbia River Indians mapped out what modern interpreters might call an "enchanted" landscape, where life forces permeated all things and all things were inherently part of the purpose of life. The burden of living in such a landscape could be endured only if people had some assurance that the world would accommodate them and nourish their existence. The native's map of this world identified safe and dangerous spaces, places with power, places for sanctuary, and places of plenty. Such maps also identified "landscapes of fear," as geographer Yi-fu Tuan has called them, and landscapes of joy. The distinction resides in the bargain of responsibility humans struck with the environment, which included sets of relationships with all of creation, animate and inanimate. In exploiting natural resources, native peoples connected their wealth directly to the sacrifices made by plants and animals on their behalf, and directly to their gratefulness and spiritual affinity with the nonhuman world. In the Indians' world view, creation could not be divided into living and nonliving, spiritual and nonspiritual. The Columbia River landscape was an environment of mutual obligation and respect among humans, plants, animals, rivers, land and atmosphere. Maintenance of this complicated ethical bond informed native peoples and in large measure defined their maps of place.

The contrast between the native peoples' map of their world and the maps created by Euro-American visitors to the Columbia River Basin could not be more different. Euro-Americans had no similarly enchanted or spiritual view of this landscape. Their perspective had a larger geographical frame and a more selective purpose. They came as commercial adventurers, representing foreign nations and seeking new pathways to wealth and often the treasure itself. They came initially as investigators and catalogers, and later as claimants and occupiers. First by sea and then by land, the explorers looked at the land and drew specialized and instrumentalist maps quite unlike the ones created by the Indians. The first ones were drawn in the last decade of the 18th century by maritime explorers and traders who charted the river's mouth and its first 100 or so miles. On George Vancouver's exploratory mission in 1792, for example, crew members drew nautical charts, noting sandbars, islands and other riverine features, while scientists described flora and fauna they observed on their trip up the river. A little more than a decade later, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark drew detailed maps of the courses of the lower Snake and Columbia rivers and included substantial detail about natural resources, plants and animals they saw, and the character and composition of native groups they encountered. During the first decade of the 19th century, David Thompson, a fur trader/explorer in the employ of the Northwest Company, described the Columbia in even more cartographic detail while he scouted prime fur-trapping country.

Of the early Euro-American mappers of the Columbia, Lewis and Clark spent the most time on the river and produced the most commentary about what they saw in the Columbia River Basin. Their inventory of the region has astounded scholars for generations because of the intimate detail included in their reports and the impressive range of subjects they addressed. They had begun with a staggering letter of instruction from President Thomas Jefferson, who had bid them to investigate all flora and fauna, topography, minerals and resources, all native groups and their customs, including language, ceremonies, political organization and much more. They

were to explore all major tributaries of the Missouri and Columbia rivers and collect as many specimens from the region as possible. But more than anything else, Jefferson instructed them to pursue commercial relationships with Indian tribes and to evaluate their route as a commercial causeway to the Pacific and the market of Asia.

The two men came into the Columbia River Basin in August 1805 with their minds full of the previous months' experience cordelling up the Missouri and its tributary streams to the Continental Divide and trying to find an easy passage between the two great river systems. The explorers entered a terra incognita after they left the Mandan villages in April 1805, but they traveled with an articulated purpose, a list of what they should observe, what they should record, what questions should be answered. This discovery matrix—the kinds of items they should find and how they should see them—came with them on the journey as part of their intellectual equipment. They were men of the Enlightenment, which equipped them with a well-developed method of observation. That method—in effect a way of seeing the material world—rested on two scientific perspectives: Francis Bacon's definition of exploration as a "dwelling purely and constantly among the facts of nature," and Carl Linnaeus's prescribed terminology for cataloging the world's flora and fauna. Their Baconian guidelines assured Lewis and Clark that while wonderment was the spur to investigation, it was not its end, and that truth lay at the conclusion of factual discovery, precise notation, and creation of an understandable order. The more careful the inspection and recording of the new world seen by the explorers, Bacon's prescription promised, the better their map, the truer their portrait of place, and the more complete their demystification of nature.

Lewis and Clark's journalizing also owed much of its form and content to Linnaeus's methodological perspective on the botanical and zoological world. The captains looked at the Columbia River Basin landscape as part of a broader, continental natural history that emphasized the categorization of plants and animals into a known and regularized outline. The system strove to create, as one scholar has called it, a "general table of relations" for what we find in the world. Carrying two illustrated volumes of Linnaeus's works with them on their westward journey, Lewis and Clark applied the taxonomist's system to record an impressive list of newly named flora and fauna species in the Columbia River Basin. Among the dozens of animals the explorers added to the Linnaean matrix were Clark's nutcracker, mountain goat, Franklin's grouse, Townsend's chipmunk, candlefish, and whistling swan. They cataloged a similarly impressive list of flora, including huckleberry, bitterroot, camas, broadleaf arrowhead and yarrow.

Because of these two methodological perspectives, Lewis and Clark saw the landscape in a much different way than the natives they encountered. They focused on specifics and recorded what they hoped to find—answers to geographical questions, newly observed flora and fauna, Indian languages and social relations. More importantly, at least in applying the Linnaean system, they reported what they discovered on the Columbia as part of a universal catalog that promised to reduce the world to a systematized, measured place. Distinguishing one plant from another in large part meant counting its parts—stamens, petals, leaves—and measuring its height and conformation. The method "enabled discovery through observation," as Pamela Regis has concluded, "but like all methods, [it] defined what would be observed and how."

Lewis and Clark came as visitors and, in Tuan's terms, they composed pictures of the landscape that portrayed the environment as fundamentally a place of utility, where human action was seen as separate from the landscape rather than part of the landscape.

Throughout the journals, the explorers related their observations to a known and utilitarian world, and consistently in their journal and field note entries they ignored activities and evidence that depicted things beyond their experience and imagination. Jefferson had instructed them to record details on religious belief among the Indians, for example, but there is scant information in the captains' journals on the subject. When these details are recorded, the information is often tinged with bewilderment or disgust. On October 9, 1805, along the Clearwater near present-day Spalding, Idaho, for example, Clark wrote:

"A woman faind madness etc. etc. Singular acts of this woman in giving in Small potions all She had & if they were not received She would Scarrify her Self in a horrid manner etc."

What was likely an expression of spiritual belief and the acting out of religiously informed behavior was cast as "faind madness," her belief system ignored in Clark's dismissive "etc. etc." Beyond their experience and comprehension, the spiritual world of Indian people escaped notation in their copious detailing of the Columbia River landscape, while they meticulously described the Indians' technologies, commercial relationships, wealth, personal habits, and willingness to trade. The unexpressed meaning is unmistakable. For the explorers, the spiritual life of native people, especially when it exposed animistic beliefs, existed outside of the anticipated relationships between Indian and non-Indian people. Engaging with the natives through the spirit world had no functional meaning for the captains.

Part of the captains' neglect of Indian spiritual life was due to their preconceived ideas about Indian belief systems, which had permeated Enlightenment culture for more than three generations. Jefferson and other like-minded scientists understood indigenous peoples more as part of the environment and a legitimate subject for natural history than as comparable human communities. Lewis and Clark followed this viewpoint, noting the numerical strength of Indian groups, their relative positions and comparative behaviors and relationships to each other, much in the way they described and categorized plants and animals they encountered.

Native peoples, in short, were listed and described as part of a larger matrix of natural history in the Columbia River Basin. Embedding Indians in the natural world had profound implications, for it identified them as part of the material environment and thereby more malleable, functional, and utilitarian than Lewis and Clark saw fellow Euro-Americans. Ironically, listing native peoples as part and parcel with the environment acceded with the Indians' own world view, but for the captains and their Enlightenment cohorts, making humans part of natural history had a much different meaning.

The physical maps drawn by the captains reveal their commercial and instrumentalist orientation perhaps better than any other documents related to the expedition. There were several cartographic missions included in the Jefferson's instructions to Lewis and Clark. There were concerns about territorial claims made by Great Britain's fur-trading activities, especially the importance of drainages east of the Continental Divide that might originate in British possessions north of the 49th Parallel. In addition, Lewis and Clark hoped to sort out the pattern of rivers represented only in an imagined cartography as depicted on Nicholas King's map of 1803. The maps that the leaders compiled at Fort Clatsop during the winter of 1805-06 focus on the physical relationship among the river courses in the Columbia River Basin, partly from observation and partly from information they acquired from native peoples. In the end, they misinterpreted the courses of the present-day Snake, Willamette and Clark Fork rivers while they documented the mainstem of the Columbia and Clearwater rivers with exceptional

accuracy. This was especially true at critical points along the river, as at the mouth of the Snake and The Dalles-Celilo area.

The detail provided on the maps, the intimate cartography of specific places, and the misunderstanding of the larger drainage patterns reflect Lewis and Clark's principal orientation toward rivers and the landscape. They saw most of it as part of a commercially oriented world. The course of the rivers, their patterns of confluence, and their potential for trade all amounted to a geography of power in which the cumulative importance of a river system was most palpable at its estuary—where it joined the waters of the world. For Lewis and Clark, the power and conformation of the Columbia system became most important and most instrumental at its mouth, where they spent a horrible winter but where they also recommended building a major trade entrepôt.

The differences between the native maps of the rivers and Lewis and Clark's cartographics are distilled in their respective views of water. Indian people in the Columbia River Basin honored water as the source of life, as the most important of sacred foods. The rivers brought water to the people and existed as both a physical reality and as part of an enchanted universe where the material and spiritual worlds commingled and coexisted. The Euro-American viewpoint also assigned importance to water for human sustenance, but it added the power of work and utility to its definition and did not include a sacred role. The difference and the change of perspective is what social geographer E. V. Walter calls a "topomorphic revolution." Revolutionary changes in the structure of spaces, Walter argues, redefine place by radically changing the "system of mutual immanence" that exists between people and their environment. Such change affects, among other things, how sustenance is related to residential patterns, how wealth is determined in society, and how landscapes are understood. Adopting a Euro-American viewpoint on the Columbia River as a causeway of extractive commerce, for example, reorders nearly all relationships with the river that were understood by native populations. More importantly, though, this topomorphic revolution vested transportation value in the water itself. Such valuation led directly to the assumption that human engineering could improve upon nature. For native peoples who used the river for transportation, the water itself never became objectified.

The topomorphic revolution on the Columbia, which began during the early 19th century, expanded quickly and gained enormous power by mid century. Lewis and Clark, David Thompson, Hudson's Bay Company traders, and other mappers of the region increasingly defined the place in instrumentalist terms. The Dalles-Celilo area, for example, ceased being an enchanted and cultural place—where fishing merged easily with spiritual life—but rather became a strategic and commercial place—where the flow of goods was the truest measure of the river's power. This instrumentalist viewpoint mapped out a geography of power, as cultural geographer Cole Harris labels it, in which the Euro-American patterns of exchange, political relationships, and evaluations of status were laid over the landscape. The Hudson's Bay Company established central trading forts that were supplied from distant ports by maritime transport and connected them to interior outposts for the extraction of furs. The system fed toward a central entrepôt, where power concentrated and could be wielded throughout the company's claimed territory.

The Hudson's Bay Company's invasion of the Columbia River Basin was only the beginning of a process of domination by Euro-Americans that has continued to the present day. The fur men and the latter-day settlers would not have accomplished their goals so rapidly, of course, had

not the advance agents of this topomorphic revolution—virulent pathogens—swept the region, decimating native populations. In what anthropologists call the Northwest Coast cultural region, the native population declined by more than 80 percent between 1774 and 1870. Although the loss of life east of the Cascade Mountains was relatively less, smallpox, measles, diphtheria, tuberculosis and other diseases left Indian groups physically, culturally and spiritually wounded, making them much less resistant to the invading Euro-American forces. Many of the Indians who survived the pestilential onslaught became participants in the establishment of the new geographies of power in the region, first in the fur trade and then as hired laborers for white entrepreneurs.

The rapid overlaying of this geography of power engendered similar additional overlays by Euro-Americans during the first half of the 19th century. By the 1850s the Hudson's Bay Company had begun its retreat to British possessions north of the 49th parallel and American entrepreneurs had put steamboats on the lower Columbia River as adjuncts to an active economic development of the region. The river served the steamboat men as a wondrous source of income and exorbitant profits. The Columbia, as seen from the instrumentalist perspective of entrepreneurial investors such as the incorporators of the Oregon Steam Navigation Company, looked like a way to wealth, not like a homeland. A generation and more later, the descendants of those incorporators and their fellow non-Indian residents of the Columbia River Basin could see the landscape as home, understand it empathetically, and identify themselves with the place. Nonetheless, the viewpoint was distinct from the native perspective, where place was seen as the locale of spirit and not as mostly a means to wealth. The invading population brought with them patterns of land use and viewing the land that had been developed in other places and for other purposes. In the most essential ways, the new residents of the Columbia River Basin translated the newly discovered landscape into a known place by imposing geographical understanding from another place. The topomorphic revolution on the Columbia came with the outsiders.

The changes that continually remade the Columbia landscape during the century beginning in 1850 added newer perspectives, newer patterns of use and applications of power. Engineers looked at the river as a place to be controlled, altered and harnessed. The Columbia's powerful current and volume of water became the focus of investment as well as a characterization for the river itself. By the time the Columbia River Gorge Scenic Act passed Congress in the mid 1980s, the image of the river had become a collage of competing portraits, ranging from a "working river" of hydroelectric turbines and towboats to a "recreational river" of sports fishing and windsurfing.

Behind these newer perspectives on the Columbia, as the justification for the protective legislation made clear, was an older and much more distant image of the river as an unmitigated place, where Indians fished at Celilo Falls and the water ran unimpeded to the sea. The irony is inherent in the Scenic Act's attempt to freeze the gorge into a romantically understood place, a landscape of nature and history that possesses the intrinsic qualities to evoke the Columbia's earliest history. In the midst of modernity, the Scenic Act suggests that the Columbia is still the river Sahaptin speakers called Nch'I Wana, but its rules and regulations remind landowners in the gorge that the Columbia is every bit the Great River of the West that early entrepreneurs

and contemporary engineers have defined.

Embedded in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Act is this binocular-like perspective on the river that draws strength from both viewpoints: the native and the visitor. The legislation and politics that surrounded its enactment remind us that no place has a singular cultural meaning and that there are many ways of looking, many ways of "seeing" a river.

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