

The Appalachian Mountain Club and the Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920

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This dissertation explores the eastern origins of American environmentalism by examining the Progressive-era conservation initiatives of the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) during the period 1890-1920. Founded in Boston in 1876, AMC is the oldest conservation and recreation organization in the United States. However, AMC's contributions to the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century conservation movement have been largely overlooked by historians who have favored a narrative focused on western public lands debates. My research will seek to understand how and why an organization traditionally viewed as a hiking club became engaged in conservation issues locally, regionally, and nationally during the Progressive era. Specifically, I am interested in exploring the following questions:

- How did the professionalization of conservation in fields such as landscape architecture and forestry inform AMC's conservation agenda?
- How did the debate between "conservation" and "preservation" of natural resources influence AMC's involvement in conservation issues?
- What ideologies and ideas about nature and wilderness informed AMC's approach to conservation?
- Why did AMC seek to protect urban and suburban as well as wilderness landscapes?

I will explore these questions through archival research including AMC publications, meeting minutes, and reports; historical newspaper and journal articles; and the manuscript collections and correspondence of AMC leaders. My study will focus thematically on AMC's engagement with four distinct but related branches of conservation: the urban parks movement, the land trust movement, the forestry movement, and the national parks movement. I hypothesize that a variety of factors characterize AMC's approach during this period, including a focus on both urban and wild nature, aesthetic and utilitarian concerns, conservationist and preservationist sentiments, and amateur and professional advocacy. This research will shed light on the important financial, intellectual, and political contributions of AMC to local, regional, and national conservation issues, and will inform the broader question of how the conservation movement developed in the industrialized East.