

NEWS MEDIA AND MINERAL KING: FRAMING CALIFORNIAN DEVELOPMENT,  
ENVIRONMENTALISM AND RECREATION, 1965-1978

by

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**Abstract:**

The US Forest Service and Walt Disney Productions clashed with the Sierra Club over construction of a planned ski resort in California's Mineral King Valley between 1965 and 1978. This thesis qualitatively analyzed over 120 newspaper articles to find how the *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* framed developers and conservationists in the environmental conflict. Previous seminal framing studies guided this study's scope and provided background. The *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* both framed the new ski resort predominantly positively when Disney received a development permit from the Forest Service and when the US Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior clashed over the development before 1970. Thereafter, newspaper articles framed conservationists more positively and development more negatively when the *Sierra Club v. Morton* lawsuit made it to the US Supreme Court and the valley was preserved through annexation into Sequoia National Park. These findings coincided with newspaper habits and environmental attitudes which transformed during the 1960s and 1970s. Learning how newspapers framed ski resort development at Mineral King Valley provides a much needed contribution toward overall understanding of environmental, outdoor recreation and media histories.

## Introduction

“What could be the most outstanding ski area in North America,” “a recreational paradise,” and “European-type skiing not found anywhere else in the United States” are all ways the *Los Angeles Times* announced a newly planned ski development in central California’s Mineral King Valley on December 21, 1965.<sup>1</sup> American recreational skiing like the kind proposed for Mineral King had surged in popularity over the previous thirty winters and demonstrated ski resorts’ value to skiers, tourists, local economies, and investors. Mineral King’s developer was to be none other than Walt Disney Productions, which had entertained mainstream American audiences with nature films that earned critical praise from conservationist groups. “Mineral King is one of the most beautiful spots I’ve ever seen,” Walt Disney told reporters, “and we want to keep it that way.”<sup>2</sup> Financially successful precedents coupled with Disney’s cultural and conservationist popularity in the 1960s signaled that skiing on Mineral King’s slopes would soon be an immensely popular enterprise.

Disney’s Mineral King resort certainly made headlines. However, they told a story of natural degradation and scandal. By 1978, *Los Angeles Times* reporters described Mineral King skiing as the site of “intense environmental controversy” which was now apparently dead as the new National Parks and Recreation Act permanently annexed Mineral King inside adjacent Sequoia National Park.<sup>3</sup>

The enormous transitions in conservation and public dialogue which occurred at Mineral King between 1965 and 1978 have been understudied in previous research. Existing scholarship reveals relationships between winter outdoor recreation and conservation, but Mineral King is rarely the center of the discussion. When Mineral King is examined, the influential role played by media is

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Fradkin, “Disney’s New Recreation Paradise,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 21, 1965.

<sup>2</sup> “U.S. Chooses Disney to Develop Sequoia Resort,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 18, 1965.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Jones, “Controversial Mineral King Resort Plan Dies in Congress,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 15, 1978.

neglected. Media frames' impact on why Mineral King went undeveloped should be considered to offer new insight into that pivotal yet understudied environmental battle.

The *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* collectively published over 120 news and opinion articles which chronicled the Mineral King environmental conflict. Through media coverage, both publications contributed to environmental and development discourses by shaping public perception of events. Newspapers described the situation for their readers, which contributed to how Disney, the Sierra Club, and other actors were perceived by the public. The *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* constructed frames for the public to understand the situation through by making specific storylines more salient than others. Specific recurring frames depicted these groups as progressive leaders or inconvenient obstructionists.

Media coverage of Mineral King's environmental battle encapsulates a distinct chapter in post-World War Two outdoor recreation. Outdoor winter recreation expanded greatly after 1945, and ski areas transformed into large-scale resorts and corporate business enterprises with more noticeable environmental impact.<sup>4</sup> News coverage about the proposed development of Mineral King similarly represents a new chapter in the construction of media frames. Media outlets shifted their attitudes toward authority, politics and business interests during the 1960s and 1970s which changed content and story focuses.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, public attitudes about environmental protection were changing.<sup>6</sup> Examining the evolving role of newspaper coverage

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Childers, *Colorado Powder Keg: Ski Resorts and the Environmental Movement*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Pressman, "Remaking the News: The Transformation of American Journalism, 1960- 1980," PhD diss., (Boston University, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> David Vogel, *California Greenin': How the Golden State Became an Environmental Leader*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 14.

Riley Dunlap, "Trends in Public Opinion Toward Environmental Issues: 1965–1990," *Society & Natural Resources*, 4:3 (1991), 285.

about ski resort development adds another dimension for understand environmentalism, media and skiing.

Using framing as a methodology, this thesis analyzes how the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times* framed Walt Disney Production's attempts to build the Mineral King ski resort and conservationists' opposition to the project between 1965 and 1978. Following this introduction and background section, a literature review details the relevant research related to this study. Next, a findings section presents the representative newspaper frames and how they changed over time as the Mineral King case unfolded over more than a decade. A discussion section interprets and explores some of the implications of the findings. Finally, the thesis concludes by reviewing what has been learned and suggesting future research.

Mineral King's development controversy is a key moment in three different historical movements: expanding tourism, the environmental movement and media reporting transformations. It produces a case study for understanding media framing and journalism's role in influencing public perceptions. A reader must understand how newspapers framed both conservationists and developers involved with Mineral King to gain a more complete understanding of how media, recreation and environmental attitudes shifted in the 1960s and 1970s.

### **Historical background:**

Newspaper coverage about Mineral King is best contextualized as a product of national tourism, media and environmental transformations. Newspapers were not the primary influences on these social changes, and should be situated within broader movements. In the three decades after 1945, Americans enjoyed increased leisure spending and tourist destinations ranging from

Disneyland to Forest Service public lands.<sup>7</sup> The Forest Service benefited from newfound relevance and funding from increased tourism by offering leases to companies who could develop public lands. New technology and safeguards made previously strenuous outdoor activities more accessible for the growing public, and the ski industry boomed throughout the 1960s. New alpine resorts in Colorado and California demonstrated that both developers and tourists had much to gain from increased outdoor recreation.

Walt Disney Productions aimed to enter this expanding industry. Walt Disney had previously funded Sugar Bowl resort in California's Tahoe National Forest in 1938, and he worked as the pageantry chairman for the 1960 Squaw Valley Olympics in Northern California.<sup>8</sup> Disneyland had been a success since 1955, and the entertainment company looked to expand with a ski resort which could serve skiers from the southern California market by 1965. The company successfully won a bid from the Forest Service to develop a year-round mountain resort less than 300 miles from both Los Angeles and San Francisco in Sequoia National Forest's Mineral King Valley, which newspapers advertised as picturesquely offering "some of the longest and most perfect ski runs in North America."<sup>9</sup> Despite Disney's success as an entertainment company, and a desirable location, Disney's plans were thwarted by conservationist opposition to road building, lawsuits and shifting public environmental attitudes, which culminated in bipartisan political support for conservation in the 1970s.

Ski recreation was flourishing by the late 1970s, and Mineral King was a key controversy in deciding how that trend would continue into the future. Ski booms in Colorado, California and

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<sup>7</sup> Annie Gilbert Coleman, *Ski Style: Sport and Culture in the Rockies*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2004), 117.

<sup>8</sup> David Antonucci, *Snowball's Chance: The Story of the 1960 Olympic Winter Games Squaw Valley and Lake Tahoe*, (Lake Tahoe: Art of Learning Publishing, 2009), 2.

<sup>9</sup> "Sierra Nevada Resort is Planned by Disney," *New York Times*, August 23, 1965.

"U.S. Chooses Disney to Develop Sequoia Resort," *Los Angeles Times*, December 18, 1965.



elsewhere across the United States brought unprecedented numbers of Americans to the mountains and transformed how they interacted with forest lands.<sup>10</sup> Losing Mineral King to environmentalists signaled changing parameters that ski business would need to operate within. New environmentally friendly red tape made Mineral King more controversial and contributed to its defeat. It continued to limit future ski developments elsewhere, and far fewer new ski resorts were built after Mineral King than before.

Media transformations in the 1960s and 1970s were on full display in Mineral King newspaper coverage. The *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times* and similar mainstream news outlets offered longer articles, more analysis and less affinity for government and business than in the past. *Times v. Sullivan* and the 1971 Pentagon Papers showcased media willingness to cover events in ways which elected politicians and businesses disliked.<sup>11</sup> Mineral King became a new topic for newspapers to break ties with business and government officials who supported development.

Evolving media habits provide a valuable new perspective to understand the Mineral King controversy. This study deciphers how newspapers framed developers and conservationists at Mineral King. This reveals what messages public reader received if newspapers were their primary sources of information.

Newspaper coverage was created amid national transformations in environmental awareness. Americans' environmental attitudes shifted dramatically during the same years as the Mineral King controversy. Development and tourism increased massively after World War Two, and by the 1970s the American public was increasingly conscious of their impact on the natural environment. Investigating research like Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* increased support for

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<sup>10</sup> Coleman, *Ski Style: Sport and Culture in the Rockies*, 142.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Vaughn, *Encyclopedia of American Journalism*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 338.

environmentally protective legislation. During the Mineral King controversy, legislatures passed groundbreaking and unprecedented laws like the 1970 National Environmental Policy Act which demonstrated newfound American willingness to limit wilderness development, car pollution and water degradation. Public outdoor groups like the Sierra Club internally transformed from hiking clubs to conservationist advocacy groups.<sup>12</sup> Mineral King was a stage which displayed the environmental movement's recent growth.

Mineral King's case study can be divided into five main stages from 1965 to 1979. The Forest Service collected highly publicized bids from developers to build a Mineral King resort. In 1969, controversial road access to Mineral King was prominent in reports. In 1970 and 1972, the Sierra Club lost lawsuits in both the U.S. Ninth District Court of Appeals and U.S. Supreme Court to prevent development. While the environmentalist case wound through the courts, conservationist attitudes became increasingly popular and appeared to translate into legislative actions, which ended all possibility of Mineral King development by 1978. All five of these stages received news coverage and put the Forest Service, Disney and the Sierra Club into the media spotlight.

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<sup>12</sup> Alexandra Vicknair, "Mindsets, Motivations, Mickey Mouse, and the Mountains: The Social, Political, and Intellectual Foundations of the Mineral King Controversy, 1965-1978," MA Thesis, (California State University, Stanislaus, 2013), 78.

## Literature Review:

### *Conceptual Frameworks:*

Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky speculate how media reporting on world events and actors is influenced by business and political interests in *Manufacturing Consent*. Herman and Chomsky suggest the public should not assume that the news media presents all sides of all stories evenly. By providing some facts while suppressing others, members of the media craft narratives. These narratives are built on facts' "placement, tone, repetitions, the framework of analysis within which it is presented, and the related facts that accompany it and give it meaning (or preclude understanding)."<sup>13</sup> Reporters are influenced by requirements of their media organizations, which inevitably guide coverage in specific directions. Herman and Chomsky describe topics and audiences as victims of media agendas, which are set with business and political interests by owners, advertisers and those with political leverage. Media will favorably portray groups or ideas in line with these interests while creating less positive content for unworthy subjects. Herman and Chomsky contribute a scholarly precedent for researching media influences and business interests toward developing Mineral King. Based on *Manufacturing Consent's* media analysis, the assumption might be that news media reports and frames would positively describe business development in the Sierras, given Walt Disney Productions' popularity at this time. This thesis considers the premise in *Manufacturing Consent* when analyzing newspaper content about Mineral King.

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<sup>13</sup> Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), xv.

David Altheide's and Christopher Schneider's *Qualitative Media Analysis* provides an organized methodology to test Herman and Chomsky's theoretical framework.<sup>14</sup> Altheide and Schneider also argue that news media influences public discourse and societal understandings. *Qualitative Media Analysis* describes previous challenges for framing studies such as limited access to newspaper sources but celebrate that technology and online archival collections have largely overcome this problem. *Qualitative Media Analysis* reviews a variety of methodological approaches to content analysis and outlines a basic process for qualitative document analysis by deciding on research questions, source material and methodologies followed by discussion of findings. This is useful information to draw on for a Mineral King framing analysis. Altheide and Schneider introduce framing as a way to understand news reports and as related to themes, but stop short of describing framing in depth.

Paul D'Angelo and Jim Kuypers' *Doing News Framing Analysis* sharpens earlier points about newspaper framing as a method of content analysis. The text includes essays about the state of news framing analysis, adding new perspective gained since previous important works such as Stephen Reese's *Framing Public Life*.<sup>15</sup> D'Angelo, Kuypers, and their contributing authors review framing effects on public opinion and economics, which are both relevant to newspaper coverage of environmental issues, including Disney's proposed development at Mineral King. Overall, *Doing News Framing Analysis* synthesizes almost all framing theories and conceptual frameworks into one place with emphasis on future research applications.

Robert Entman and Dietram Scheufele helped to make framing research more uniform in the 1990s by emphasizing topics' salience and organization in a text. Entman's "Framing:

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<sup>14</sup> David Altheide and Christopher Schneider, *Qualitative Media Analysis*, Second ed, (Los Angeles: Sage Publication, 2013), 51.

<sup>15</sup> Jim Kuypers and Paul D'Angelo, *Doing News Framing Analysis* (Florence: Routledge, 2010), 3.

Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm” has been seminal to subsequent researchers for suggesting scholars take a uniform approach when identifying frames.<sup>16</sup> According to Entman, framing is best identified as the salience a topic receives in news coverage. Specific perspectives may be more prominent, even if by a small amount, than other perspectives in news coverage of an issue. The salience a perspective receives puts it on display for readers, and repetitive emphasis on a perspective builds a frame that readers recognize it by. Specific textual elements are key to identifying how a specific subject is framed in news coverage. Entman says “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating context.” These aspects include “the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments.”<sup>17</sup> This Mineral King study adapts the work of Entman and Scheufele. Saliently repeated keywords, phrases, sources and themes will be considered when detecting framed newspaper narratives of events at Mineral King.

In addition to emphasizing specific points, framing is useful as an organizational tool. Dietram Scheufele compares framing to headings that writers and readers alike can organize news content by.<sup>18</sup> Different reporters may use a variety of sources and highlight a spectrum of perspectives, and this flexibility can result in a story’s basic facts getting framed differently.

Claes H. De Vreese’s “New Avenues for Framing Research” shows that framing influence commonly wears off on audiences after one or two weeks. This fact encourages news organizations such as the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times* to amplify frames repeatedly, which increases their effectiveness over time. Repetitive news framing can increase

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<sup>16</sup> Robert M. Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm,” *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993), 51-58.

<sup>17</sup> Entman, “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm,” 52.

<sup>18</sup> Dietram Scheufele, “Framing as a Theory of Media Effects,” *Journal of Communication* 49, no.1 (1999), 107.

readers' exposure to a frame and its salience in the public discourse.<sup>19</sup> This study will consider the repetition of specific frames based on De Vreese's findings.

### *Framing Literature*

The most salient points made by media outlets about a topic can influence audiences' beliefs about it. This is especially true if audiences lack background in the subject matter. Frames define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgements and suggest solutions at a surface level for readers.<sup>20</sup> Although responsible readers should scrutinize news and decide their own conclusions, frames can form lasting impressions about topics for uninformed audiences.

Gamson and Modigliani suggest that public opinions "can be fully understood only in the context of media discourse on the issue," and that media outlets control how issues are framed.<sup>21</sup> Reporters and editors dictate how issues are presented to the public and through their reporting they can, "amplify, facilitate, or orchestrate public concern about a particular event or situation, thereby contributing to consensus, resistance, or even moral panic."<sup>22</sup> News media can amplify some positions over others through controlling how a topic is packaged and framed for audiences. Further, frames help to determine which topics are legitimate or not. Gamson and Modigliani argue that there is a strong correlation between media coverage and public opinion polls.<sup>23</sup> If public opinion and media coverage do not coincide, that could reveal tensions or conflicts between public perceptions and newspapers.

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<sup>19</sup> Claes H. De Vreese, "New Avenues for Framing Research," *The American Behavioral Scientist*, 56, no 3. (2012), 370.

<sup>20</sup> Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," 52.

<sup>21</sup> William Gamson and Andrei Modigliani, "Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach," *The American Journal of Sociology* 95, no. 1 (1989), 30.

<sup>22</sup> Wynne Wright and Taylor Reid, "Green Dreams or Pipe Dreams? Media Framing of the U.S. Biofuels Movement," *Biomass and Bioenergy* 35, no. 4 (2011), 1391.

<sup>23</sup> Gamson and Modigliani, "Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach," 8, 30.

News media should be considered as historical actors because they influence public opinion and discourse. The correlation between media narratives and public opinion makes media framing relevant both in the present and the past. In this light, historians should understand media framing and take it into account as primary source material which impacts historical actors. Future studies on environmental debates and Mineral King will be incomplete without considering the ways which mainstream media framed the issues for public audiences.

Actors involved in the story can also use framing to their advantage. Framed discourses can be described as conceptual packages with a frame at the center of each package. Different elements of a story are emphasized with unequal intensity by groups involved. Each group can market talking points most in line with their motivations and sponsor different packages of which they endorse the frames. Rival groups might shape the same mainstream media reporting to amplify opposing messages.<sup>24</sup> This relationship is important for understanding how actors frame their messages for audiences.

Common types of frames and studies have emerged from increased attention toward framing research and growing numbers of framing case studies. Jörg Matthes argues that content analysis of media coverage can be qualitative and engaging through the use of quotes and in-depth discussion.<sup>25</sup> Multiple qualitative approaches to media analyses exist. Deductive content studies test an existing theory from previous content analyses. For example, a deductive content analysis might be hypothesis driven, with predictions related to previous studies of media content on similar topics. Inductive content analysis uses observations to explain new findings. Most text

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 3-6.

<sup>25</sup> Jörg Matthes, "What's in a Frame? A Content Analysis of Media Framing Studies in the World's Leading Communication Journals, 1999-2005," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 86, no. 2 (2009), 351.

frame analyses draw inductively through manual observation of texts. Some researchers employ computer coding programs to help process results, but this is done infrequently.

The majority of studies are “inductive qualitative studies, with an interpretive focus.”<sup>26</sup> Matthes identifies A, B, C, and D types of framing studies which are distinguished by how the researcher is looking for information. B studies look for generic frames that media often use broadly to describe topics in unrelated news stories. D studies inductively locate issue-specific frames related to individual topics in news articles. B and D studies are the most common and impactful to framing analysis.<sup>27</sup> Alternative options exist, like competitive news framing which compares medias’ use of two competing frames. Both frames are analyzed and compared in context of each other. This allows for greater discussion and reader interpretation.<sup>28</sup>

Generic frames are those which are visible in news stories broadly across many different themes or topics. Conflict, human interest, economic consequences, morality and responsibility are all common generic frames used by reporters to make sense of situations they write about regardless of topic. Across a spectrum of topics, “news media tend to focus on stories where there is conflict-where two sides can be pitted against one another” because it is easily relatable and interesting to audiences and also allowed for pursuit of balanced reporting of two clear sides.<sup>29</sup> Generic frames like these can commonly appear, for example, in a newspaper article covering crime while also appearing in an article covering environmental policy. Despite unrelated story focuses, reporters are likely to highlight the human interest or economic loss

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<sup>26</sup> Matthes, “What’s in a Frame? A Content Analysis of Media Framing Studies in the World’s Leading Communication Journals, 1999-2005,” 357.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 356.

<sup>28</sup> De Vreese, “New Avenues for Framing Research,” 370.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 369.

Matthes, “What’s in a Frame? A Content Analysis of Media Framing Studies in the World’s Leading Communication Journals, 1999-2005,” 350.



related to both situations. A generic framing study will identify common frames like these and actively seek them out in media content.

Issue-specific frames are more closely related to a specific situation or issue. While the frames relevant to one situation may be similar or the same to frames in another situation, issue-specific frames are too contextualized to be truly generic and identifiable across all news coverage topics.<sup>30</sup>

Groups mentioned in news reports are interested in how their agenda is portrayed in the coverage. Some interest groups are motivated to use their influence to dictate frames and thereby influencing news consumers' perceptions of a situation. Dependent frames are those dependent on outside influences. Commonly influential groups include business interests, editorial biases and social activist groups. Independent frames are created within media outlets free from outside influences dictating how topics are framed.<sup>31</sup> Although independent frames are ideal for balanced news reporting, content analyses should pay attention to potential sources of influence over the news reporting which aim to create dependent frames.

Matthes' explanation of framing research includes suggestions for this approach to content analysis, and how to address existing shortcomings and make framing studies more relevant and reliable. According to Matthes, shortcomings in existing research include vague framing definitions, weak distinction between frame types and non-transparent methodologies. One way to improve framing analysis moving forward, Matthes argues, is by making framing definitions concrete and operationalizing them for analysis. Matthes also suggests providing transparent and clear distinctions between individual and generic frames so that the two are not

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 368.

<sup>31</sup> Scheufele, "Framing as a Theory of Media Effects," 110-111.

confused.<sup>32</sup> These suggestions have been taken into account when formulating the methods for this study of Mineral King framing.

### *The Changing Newspaper Industry*

To understand why and how reporters covered the Mineral King case, it is important to know how news reporting changed in the 1960s and 1970s. To compete with the growing television market, newspapers were incentivized to provide readers with more detail, description and breadth of coverage than the still-growing TV industry and to create more content to accommodate rising advertising profits. Articles' lengths increased and they began discussing news trends more than in the past to contrast from context-lacking spot coverage in television and tabloids. Types of stories began transforming as well. Investigative journalism grew, creating opportunities to expose officials of wrongdoing. Increasingly objective writing made news outlets more skeptical of and less in step with government officials.<sup>33</sup> Mainstream outlets increasingly questioned the motives and wisdom of officials they reported on. The scope of news coverage also widened to include opinions of dissenters and minority opinions.<sup>34</sup> This 1960s and 1970s reporting culture fostered increased framing in news stories. When writing stories with more details and analysis, authors inherently emphasize some aspects of the story over other parts. Although an article which mentions both sides of a debate might seem unbiased, sometimes more prominence is given to one perspective framework than others.

Some newspapers' traditional political attitudes were altered as a result of the 1970s' increased framing and other media transitions. One case study is *Los Angeles Times* coverage,

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<sup>32</sup> Matthes, "What's in a Frame? A Content Analysis of Media Framing Studies in the World's Leading Communication Journals, 1999-2005," 352.

<sup>33</sup> Pressman, "Remaking the News: The Transformation of American Journalism, 1960- 1980," 8.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

which had a history of pro-business attitudes, slandering socialist politicians and supporting local government and police.<sup>35</sup> This worked to expand the Los Angeles economy at the expense of labor unions. However, new *Los Angeles Times* ownership in the 1960s reversed this trend and reinvented the publication with more analytical, broad, unbiased and respected coverage than before. This change was signaled when the publication negatively framed Republicans during Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential campaign despite a tradition of regularly endorsing the GOP.<sup>36</sup> The Mineral King controversy started a year later in 1965, and provided an occasion to test whether the editorial line of newspapers would shift regarding environmental issues.

### *Framing of Sports*

Pia Wanneberg has examined how sports topics are represented in news media through word choices and in images.<sup>37</sup> She performed an inductive content analysis of three newspapers' coverage about athletes, and divides her findings into different coverage eras with distinct frames. Her analysis reveals media agendas at work to enforce gender norms. News media employed frames to represent athletes differently by gender and maintained a very observable trend of reinforcing those frames. Media sources emphasizing certain characteristics of recreation stories while minimizing others is foundational when researching how newspapers covered details about Mineral King.

Thilo Kunkel and Olan Scott also have analyzed differences in newspaper coverage about sports. In their study of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, both authors identified biases in news

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<sup>35</sup> Vaughn, *Encyclopedia of American Journalism*, 276.

<sup>36</sup> Pressman, "Remaking the News: The Transformation of American Journalism, 1960- 1980," 70.

<sup>37</sup> Pia L. Wanneberg, "The Sexualization of Sport: A Gender Analysis of Swedish Elite Sport from 1967 to the Present Day," *The European Journal of Women's Studies* 18, no. 3 (2011), 266.

coverage.<sup>38</sup> Newspapers from different countries framed the Olympics to entertain and keep audience attention in each newspaper's home country. Media framed teams and opposing sides in athletic competitions in distinct ways. Reporters assigned different characteristics to actors involved in the stories. Australian and Canadian newspapers covered the same topics but used different frames and highlighted different story components. Newspapers also covered different athletes at the same times, offering contrasting notions of who the central characters were. This offered evidence that, depending on the publication, a spectrum of frames could be used to portray sports framing.

### *Environmental Framing*

Taylor Reid and Wynne Wright analyze media framing of environmental and energy debates. Their findings are important to Mineral King because newspaper coverage and the frames that were used to describe environmentalism contributed to the debate. In their study about news reporting on biofuels in the United States, Reid and Wright found that *New York Times* articles amplified some aspects of environmental and energy dialogues while downplaying the salience of other aspects.<sup>39</sup> Reid and Wright identify several salient issue-specific frames and the different frequencies at which they are referenced. Their study shows that media framing does differ over aspects of an environmental conversation. Some articles displayed frames and informational packages which are more sympathetic to one point of view, while other articles emphasized the opposing perspective. The content of individual frames and strategies used to

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<sup>38</sup> Thilo Kunkel and Olan Scott, "Using Self-Categorization Theory to Uncover the Framing of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games," *Journal of Sports Media* 11, no. 1 (2016), 135.

<sup>39</sup> Reid and Wright, "Green Dreams or Pipe Dreams? Media Framing of the U.S. Biofuels Movement," 1397.

construct those frames varied among different articles. Many articles crafted connections to situate the biofuels movement amid larger cultural, economic and political contexts.

Mark Stoddart has used newspaper framing as a qualitative approach to study major environmental debates. Stoddart argued that the *Vancouver Sun*'s coverage of environmental policy battles between 1991 and 2003 guided topics for public conversation. The newspaper included actors and attitudes that the publication deemed as most important. Other groups like indigenous tribes were excluded in coverage except for in passing references, despite those groups' interests and connections to the situation.<sup>40</sup> The newspapers emphasized stances taken by government, business and environmentalist officials. His study found that news coverage was a key factor in influencing the way readers understood various actors involved in environmental conflicts. Stoddart's methods are useful when looking at newspaper coverage of Mineral King.

Mark Stoddart and Laura MacDonald discussed the media's role in spreading environmentalist and business messages during planning of the controversial Jumbo Glacier ski resort.<sup>41</sup> Their work studies how two large national Canadian newspapers and one large regional newspaper in British Columbia covered the proposed ski area between 1983 and 2009. They detail media framing of ski development, which is valuable to this study of framing at Mineral King. Stoddart and MacDonald found that environmental movements survived based on their ability to get media exposure. These scholars argue that "Environmentalism [relies], ... "on the mass media to gain visibility for their issues, to reach potential supporters, and to engage opponents and governments in public debate."<sup>42</sup> Groups that are denied media exposure must

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<sup>40</sup> Mark Stoddart, "Wilderness or Working Forest? British Columbia Forest Policy Debate in the Vancouver Sun," *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, Vol. 26 (2005), 38.

<sup>41</sup> Mark Stoddart and Laura MacDonald, "'Keep It Wild, Keep It Local': Comparing News Media and the Internet as Sites for Environmental Movement Activism for Jumbo Pass, British Columbia," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 36, no. 4 (2011), 313.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.

compete and pay for advertising. Newspaper coverage of Mineral King, similar to these other cases, provided a forum for athletic and environmental framing, and Stoddart's and MacDonald's work provides a conceptual background to investigate whether events are framed differently by separate media outlets.

### *Winter Sports Literature*

Shifting local identities and reduced local control are “devil’s bargains” that communities experience in exchange for swells of tourists’ dollars in Hal Rothman’s *Devil’s Bargains*.<sup>43</sup> Rothman’s study details case studies of sites such as the Grand Canyon and ski resorts in Colorado, which he maintains have led to the destruction of the environment because of tourism and development. Rothman’s study brings up some important points that are relevant when studying Mineral King. Rothman explains how the arrival of new winter sports attractions transformed towns and environmental debates. In some cases, winter sports businesses outpaced traditional local farming and other non-visitor industries, and corporate influence led to social changes within towns. The problems with tourism that Rothman identifies provide important context when evaluating criticism about Mineral King development in newspapers.

Tension with environmentalists increasingly accompanied ski resort development in the 1970s. Annie Gilbert Coleman’s *Ski Style* traces how increased discretionary income and improved roads paved the way for larger public interest in skiing.<sup>44</sup> The 1950s, 1960s and 1970s saw increased numbers of new resorts and new innovations like snowmaking and increased chairlifts to attract new consumers. Mineral King’s development plans were initiated in this context.

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<sup>43</sup> Hal Rothman, *Devil’s Bargains*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998), 243.

<sup>44</sup> Coleman, *Ski Style: Sport and Culture in the Rockies*, 117.

By the 1970s, resort developers were increasingly restricted by environmentalists and government policy. The Environmental Protection Agency introduced more red tape to build new or expand existing ski areas. Opponents of development focused their criticisms on perceived local animal suffering, water rights and tree removal as potential negative impacts of resorts. This tension is highlighted in Michael Childers' *Colorado Powder Keg*.<sup>45</sup> Ski resorts are often on U.S. Forest Service and other public lands, giving environmentalists an avenue to resist development through lawsuits and protest campaigns. Mineral King researchers should consider the tremendous momentum for ski resort growth in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as understanding the contentious environmental discourse, which eventually contributed to Colorado's decision to reject holding the 1976 Winter Olympics.

### *California Conservation Literature*

Increased tourism and rural development influenced conservationists to become increasingly wary of how natural resources were being preserved. Riley Dunlap explains how the modern environmentalist period started in the 1960s. Conservationist activity by groups like the Sierra Club grew alongside increased tourism and rural development. News coverage helped move environmental issues from special interest groups to the general population by making it a more salient topic in coverage.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, public opinion polls indicated that concerns about the environment tripled among Americans between 1965 and 1970, culminating in the first 1970 Earth Day celebration. Americans' increased concerns over environmental regulation were

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<sup>45</sup> Childers, *Colorado Powder Keg: Ski Resorts and the Environmental Movement*, 96.

<sup>46</sup> Dunlap, "Trends in Public Opinion Toward Environmental Issues: 1965-1990," 285.

reflected in federal legislation such as the 1970 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and 1978's HR1771.<sup>47</sup>

California, specifically, is a recognized leader in environmental activism and protectionist attitudes, according to Michael Kraft's *California Greenin'*. The state has a history of preserving natural areas and working to combat pollution. It has done this despite tremendous development and population growth during the latter half of the twentieth century.<sup>48</sup> Coordination between government, businesses, and conservationist mobilization produced noteworthy examples of environmental regulation in places like Bodega Bay, Mono Lake and San Geronio.

David Beesley's *Crow's Range* brings relevant awareness to California forestry, mining, recreation and resource management from prehistory to the twenty-first century. He discusses how U.S. Forest Service support formed the basis for ski resort development in the Tahoe and central Sierra Nevada regions. This conversation effort provides a background for understanding Mineral King in context of previous Sierra Nevada environmental debates and development. Beesley also provides a condensed history of the conflict there, which allows readers to make connections between it and future Californian environmental debates such as proposed development at Mono Lake in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>49</sup> In *Challenge of the Big Trees: A Resource History of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks*, Lary Dilsaver and William Tweed provide a history of development and preservation relevant to Mineral King Valley. The chapter titled, "Controlling development: How much is too much?" traces episodes of development and management throughout the include Sequoia National Park. Mineral King bordered the national

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 288.

<sup>48</sup> Vogel, *California Greenin': How the Golden State Became an Environmental Leader*.

<sup>49</sup> David Beesley, *Crow's Range: An Environmental History of the Sierra Nevada*, (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2008), 210-213.



park before being added to it in 1978.<sup>50</sup> When Mineral King gained value as a development site during the 1960s, Forest Service officials clashed with the Department of Interior's National Park management in adjacent Sequoia National Park. Dilsaver and Tweed discuss the conflicts between Disney and Sierra Club over Mineral King, including the materials used to plead their respective cases and discredit their opponents. In the end, the authors conclude that contested public opinion and decreasing political support led to the project's stagnation. Less than 3,000 words in *Challenge of the Big Trees* mention Mineral King, leaving much to be explored.

### *Mineral King Literature*

Despite the importance of the case to California's history and the history of the West, only one monograph exists about the Mineral King's failed development. John Harper's *Mineral King: Public Concern with Government Policy* is a memoir that favors Sierra Club conservation. While the book takes a specific position, the text is useful for collecting basic information and facts, dates, and other reference points in the Mineral King drama.<sup>51</sup> Travis Roy and Alexandra Vicknair have also completed studies which discuss Mineral King's timeline. Roy provides detail about Walt Disney's role as an outdoor educator and conservationist through nature films and how that related to his planned development at Mineral King. Vicknair describes the motivations for the Forest Service and Disney to develop Mineral King, conservationists' motivations against development, and a description of how Mineral King was fought over.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Lary Dilsaver and William Tweed, *Challenge of the Big Trees: A Resource History of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks*, (Three Rivers: Sequoia Natural History Association, 1990).

<sup>51</sup> John Harper, *Mineral King: Public Concern with Government Policy*, (Eureka: Eureka Printing Company, 1982).

<sup>52</sup> Travis Brandon Roy, "The Edutainer: Walt Disney, Nature Films, and American Understandings of Nature in the Twentieth Century," MA Thesis, (Temple University, 2015), 15.  
Vicknair, "Mindsets, Motivations, Mickey Mouse, and the Mountains: The Social, Political, and Intellectual Foundations of the Mineral King Controversy, 1965-1978," 78.

Taken together, these three sources point to five stages of Mineral King's environmental debate where newspaper coverage is most worth studying. The first stage begins with Disney winning a bid to develop Mineral King in 1965. This is followed by the environmental tension over highway access to Mineral King. *Sierra Club v. Hickel* (1970) and *Sierra Club v. Morton* (1972) both are important stages to look at media coverage. The final stage is Mineral King's legislative 1978 annexation into Sequoia National Park.

### Research Questions and Methodology:

Based on existing literature related to Mineral King and research gaps therein, this study poses the following research questions:

1. How did the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times* frame Disney, the Forest Service and their efforts to develop Mineral King between 1965-1978?
2. How did the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times* frame conservationists and their efforts to stop the development between 1965-1978?

Answering these questions will help shed light on news medias' role in the public discourse about the Mineral King environmental conflict. Findings will deepen understanding of environmental and business interests framing, along with new knowledge on California environmental and recreation history.

This newspaper content analysis identifies the frames created by the *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* to narrate the development and environmental tensions in Mineral King Valley between March 1965 and November 1978. Both publications were significant newspapers of record in the 1960s and 1970s and provided ample coverage of Mineral King's situation. The *Los Angeles Times* was a top 5 American newspaper with nationally influential advertising and reporting in the latter twentieth century.<sup>53</sup> By the 1930s the *New York Times* was being referred to as the national newspaper of record. Management there worked to create a reputation for trustworthy and engaging reporting, claiming to report on "all the news that's fit to print."<sup>54</sup> The *Los Angeles Times* was located only 230 miles from Mineral King valley, making any

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<sup>53</sup> Vaughn, *Encyclopedia of American Journalism*, 276-277.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

development there firmly within the newspaper's regional coverage sphere.<sup>55</sup> The *New York Times*' interest in Mineral King worked to elevate that environmental debate to a national audience.

Articles included in the study were identified through a keyword search using the University of Arizona's Libraries website. Articles were located through the UA Libraries' *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* ProQuest databases. The search generated 128 relevant articles. The thirteen-year period between March 1965 and November 1978 was selected as a timeframe because it encompasses the Mineral King case from Forest Service marketing the area's skiing potential to the valley's entrance into Sequoia National Park in 1978, where it remains today. These include Walt Disney Productions winning the Forest Service's permit, tension over the highway access between the Department of the Interior and Department of Agriculture, the Sierra Club's first lawsuit in 1969, the Sierra Club's 1970 appeal in the Supreme Court, and ski prospects ending with Mineral King's placement in Sequoia National Park in 1978.

All but about a half dozen duplicate or clearly unrelated articles from the search have been included in the framing analysis. Intentional selecting has been used instead of random sampling. This study is qualitative, and intentional selecting provides the clearest and most accurate scope of content while not missing any noteworthy articles.<sup>56</sup> An analytical criteria was developed based on similar studies, which include elements such as page number, length, sources, and emphases on specific themes as relevant when qualitatively analyzing news reports.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>56</sup> Matthes, "What's in a Frame? A Content Analysis of Media Framing Studies in the World's Leading Communication Journals, 1999-2005," 354.

Newspapers are the exclusive source type analyzed. Researching these two publications contributes to a historical understanding of two significant papers of record. Newspapers provide a more complete source for historical research than television news, which often reflected print media coverage and is less accessible in archives compared to print articles from this timeframe. Television news has been studied much less commonly in previous content analyses, and this study aims to adapt methods which best match previous studies.

The individual news articles represent the unit of analysis. Instead of looking at only titles or visuals, analysis focuses on the articles' entire texts. No reliability reporting is necessary since all articles have been analyzed by a single author. No software or computer analysis was used. This study is similar to the D study identified by Matthes, which inductively searches for issue-specific frames in the source body.<sup>57</sup>

This research identifies issue specific frames in the Mineral King situation. Matthes argues that a majority of content analyses discuss situation-specific frames which are specific to their individual topic.<sup>58</sup> Almost all of the related articles in this study's literature review identify issue-specific frames, and this study does the same.

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<sup>57</sup> Matthes, "What's in a Frame? A Content Analysis of Media Framing Studies in the World's Leading Communication Journals, 1999-2005," 356.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 354-355.

## **Findings:**

### *General Summary:*

Between 1965 and 1978, the *Los Angeles Times* published just over 90 news articles specifically about Mineral King or situating Mineral King within other development or environmental stories. The *New York Times* published just under 40 news articles of the same type in the same time period. The *Los Angeles Times* published most early stories on Mineral King and framed Disney's development as environmentally considerate and full of potential. The *New York Times* began publishing alongside the *Los Angeles Times* in covering Mineral King's access road, the *Sierra Club v. Hickel* and *Sierra Club v. Morton* lawsuits, and the 1978 National Parks and Recreation Act. Road access was originally described as environmentally problematic but necessary, but increasingly was framed negatively after 1970. Conservationists are framed more positively after losing their lawsuits in 1970 and 1972. By the time that Mineral King Valley was annexed into Sequoia National park in 1978, newspapers had largely reversed their original frames and were mostly negative toward development. Although both the pros and cons of development were mentioned in newspaper coverage, more emphasis was given to certain frames. These findings are based on salience given to specific frames. Overall, newspaper coverage shifted from predominantly pro-development frames before 1970 to frames that opposed development thereafter.

### **Building in the Backcountry, March- December 1965**

Skiers were eager to see new development, which would offer new terrain and reduce crowding at existing resorts in California's Sierra Nevada mountains. Conservationists

successfully blocked development at San Geronio Mountain 95 miles east of Los Angeles in 1965, leaving the Forest service and skiers to look elsewhere for a new resort location. In February of that year the Forest Service opened bidding for Mineral King Valley to interested developers who could provide at least \$3 million in investments, parking for at least 1,200 vehicles, housing for at least 100 overnight guests, arrangements for pollution control, plus an additional \$5 million to improve the access road from Visalia.<sup>59</sup> The successful bidder would win a renewable 30-year permit to develop the valley. The U.S. Forest Service selected Walt Disney Productions from a pool of competing bidders in December, with a vision for a complete resort including 14 chairlifts, parking for 2,500 vehicles just outside the valley to control auto pollution, and a resort village with shops and restaurants. The Forest Service picked Walt Disney Productions as the best option in part because of Disney's track record of environmental awareness and promises for large financial returns to be reinvested back into public lands.<sup>60</sup> Conservation opposition to the development had not reached a critical mass by at this point. Newspapers reflect the positives of development and Disney's reputation as a great developer.

*RQ1- How did the Los Angeles Times and the New York Times frame Disney, the Forest Service and their efforts to develop Mineral King?*

### *Positive Potential Frame*

Newspapers endorsed the idea that Mineral King offered a great potential skiing location because of its natural setting, proximity to Los Angeles, and profitability. A majority of

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<sup>59</sup> Harper, *Mineral King: Public Concern with Government Policy*, 79.

<sup>60</sup> Roy, "The Edutainer: Walt Disney, Nature Films, and American Understandings of Nature in the Twentieth Century," 3.

newspapers initially reported on the Mineral King story by prefacing that the location was ideal for winter and summer activities. Since the Forest Service's ski resort project was based around winter activity, the *Los Angeles Times* seized on chances to reiterate that the site was ideal for skiing in articles. The *Los Angeles Times*' first article on Mineral King immediately situates the valley as having "outstanding Alpine terrain" suitable for skiing from November to April.<sup>61</sup> This trend of highlighting winter recreation potential continued through many articles during the Forest Services' bidding stage for developers. After Disney won the rights to develop Mineral King, a suggestively-titled "Disney's New Recreation Paradise" headline compared the valley's snow to miner's riches with terrain unlike any other ski location for "the most outstanding ski area in North America."<sup>62</sup>

Mineral King's location near Los Angeles is another frequently emphasized point. Initial articles about the location in 1965 mention Los Angeles as the resort's main consumer base. The *Los Angeles Times* portrays Mineral King as a new alternative for frustrated skiers after environmentalists defeated attempts to build Southern California skiing facilities at San Geronio Mountain. Others describe the visitor base as wide from Los Angeles to San Francisco, which were about the same distance to centrally-located Mineral King Valley. California's southern Sierra region is written about by the *Los Angeles Times* as an ideal location for audiences to visit.

One element worth noting is that newspapers emphasized competition among companies during the Forest Service bidding process. The scale of bidding that the *Los Angeles Times* emphasizes suggests that development rights are over something unique, worthwhile and profitable. Developers' abilities to accommodate thousands of visitors daily in nearby parking

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<sup>61</sup> Lou Desser, "Mineral King Will be Major Ski Area," *Los Angeles Times*, March 3, 1965.

<sup>62</sup> Philip Fradkin, "Disney's New Recreation Paradise," *Los Angeles Times*, December 21, 1965.



lots and garages is mentioned almost as frequently as Mineral King's natural assets. By explaining the mass of potential visitors, newspapers reveal the scale of profits from the project. Federal government officials also are spotlighted, saying that development candidates for the valley are being evaluated by projected "greatest monetary returns to the federal government."<sup>63</sup> The same article described profits as a result of high capacity visiting from Los Angeles crowds. This is described positively and opportunistically. Once Disney received the bid, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that 3-8% of Mineral King profits would go to the Forest Service. This is an important arrangement that explains why Disney was chosen as the company to develop the area.

#### *Sensible, Thoughtful Development Frame*

Newspapers framed the Forest Service's selection of a permit awardee as a decision of importance with much caution taken to vet the proper winner. There is no mention of scandal in this stage. News reports discussed a transparent and fair process, covering Disney as the first bidder followed by other competitors. In total six bids were included in the *Los Angeles Times* coverage, with Disney and rival Robert Brandt's Mineral King Development Company receiving the most attention. Once the Secretary of Agriculture eliminated four competitors and narrowed the field to Disney's and Brandt's bids, newspapers detail that Forest Service representatives formed a panel to methodically look at the remaining bids. This is not portrayed as a light decision, and attention to detail is ensured "because of [the proposal's] magnitude."<sup>64</sup> That magnitude was largely a product of the bidders' investments ranging from \$15-\$35 million that papers repeatedly highlighted.<sup>65</sup> Emphasizing the big money up for grabs pairs with the Forest

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<sup>63</sup> "Two Mineral King Bids Picked for Panel Review," *Los Angeles Times*, October 18, 1965.

<sup>64</sup> "Mineral King Decision Believed Up to Freeman," *Los Angeles Times*, October 17, 1965.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

Service's selection process to portray that this process is quality and sensible while being devoid of lightheartedness or corruption.

Disney was portrayed as a particularly accommodating and trustworthy developer. After Disney was selected, the first two reactions by the *Los Angeles Times* illuminated the company as environmentally responsible and avoided mentioning development negativities. No cars would be allowed in the Valley and the planned recreation village was predicted to be self-contained as a means of minimizing pollution and physical impact on the area. Newspapers amplify Disney's claimed interest in preservation when quoting Walt Disney saying "When I first saw Mineral King five years ago, I thought it was one of the most beautiful spots I had ever seen and we want to keep it that way."<sup>66</sup> A more detailed follow up article mentions that the location will change with more visitors, but this is not labelled a bad thing. Walt Disney is quoted saying "This will be a recreation project not an entertainment center."<sup>67</sup> When interviewing local cabin owners in Mineral King, reporters found sources who approved of Disney as a responsible builder. One long time visitor says "If they keep the natural beauty and don't interfere with our cabin rights, it will be a wonderful thing. So many people will be able to enjoy the grandeur of these high peaks."<sup>68</sup>

*RQ2- How did the Los Angeles Times and the New York Times frame conservationists and their efforts to stop the development?*

As the Forest Service auctioned Mineral King and Walt Disney Productions was awarded development rights, all *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* articles were predominately

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<sup>66</sup> "U.S. Chooses Disney to Develop Sequoia Resort," *Los Angeles Times*, December 18, 1965.

<sup>67</sup> Philip Fradkin, "Disney's New Recreation Paradise," *Los Angeles Times*, December 21, 1965.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

positive. Conservations are peripheral actors in reports during this stage of Mineral King development. The opening sentence in the *Los Angeles Times*' very first article announcing Mineral King as a future ski resort states that "California skiers, frustrated in their repeated attempts to have Mt. San Gorgonio developed for their use, have triumphed..."<sup>69</sup> The Sierra Club and other conservationists helped prevent ski development at San Gorgonio Mountain in 1964, and the very first mention of Mineral King to public audiences starts from that point. In this frame, conservationists are a hindrance.

Some development consequences tied to future environmentalist activity are briefly mentioned, but mostly as an afterthought compared to the surrounding pro-development content. Road access was described as costly and time consuming by the *Los Angeles Times*- "A two lane road will cost about \$10 million. Under a "crash" program, it would take at least five years to make such a road a reality."<sup>70</sup> This frames infrastructure as a problematic but surmountable obstacle, much like conservationists.

### **The Road Toward Opposition, January 1966- March 1969**

The Forest Service gave Disney three years to plan its resort and develop road access to it. Tourists and the Forest Service grew increasingly enthusiastic for a world class resort which would alleviate overcrowding and produce funding for public lands. An unpaved road had existed since the nineteenth century from Visalia to Mineral King, but expanding it became a contentious issue since conservationists feared that an improved road was a domino theory to future expansion which would open Mineral King to greater exploitation than its ecosystem

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<sup>69</sup> Lou Desser, "Mineral King Will be Major Ski Area," *Los Angeles Times*, March 3, 1965.

<sup>70</sup> Philip Fradkin, "Disney's New Recreation Paradise," *Los Angeles Times*, December 21, 1965.

could handle.<sup>71</sup> The existing unpaved road needed for access also snaked through Sequoia National Park for between nine and eleven miles. This caused tension between Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman, who was responsible for the Forest Service, and Secretary of Interior Stewart Udall, who was responsible for preserving national park lands. Freeman emphasized that a road already existed and that improvements would be environmentally friendly, while Udall preferred alternative transportation like a railway which he believed would help preserve the national park lands with less impact. Newspapers picked up on this story and began covering conservationists' efforts, Freeman-Udall arguments, and Udall's eventual compromise to allow a road in December 1967.

*RQ1- How did the Los Angeles Times and the New York Times frame Disney, the Forest Service and their efforts to develop Mineral King?*

#### *Positive Potential Frame*

Although negative frames became increasingly common, they were not exclusively used to describe Mineral King during the road conflict. Papers continued to repeat salient frames of great recreation potential which became salient as the debate moved forward. One way this happened was through reporters' continued labelling of Mineral King as offering skiing on par with the best skiing in North America and Europe- "the same as the prime ski slopes in Switzerland, Germany, Austria and France"- for example.<sup>72</sup> The frame of Disney responsibility and trustworthiness also continues to be used during the road debate and serves to refute concerned environmentalists. The winter of 1966-1967 saw the *Los Angeles Times* publish

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<sup>71</sup> Harper, *Mineral King: Public Concern with Government Policy*, 110.

<sup>72</sup> "Disney to Start Work on Sierra Ski Resort," *Los Angeles Times*, June 3, 1965.

multiple articles repeatedly depicting positive perspectives of Mineral King. One standout example focuses on the Anaheim City Council's support for Disney by sending a resolution to the Secretary Udall in support of development. Reporters' coverage that Disney demonstrates "outstanding professional ability and high personal standards in creating family entertainment in Anaheim" goes to support previously reported stances that Disney has communities' best interest in mind and can be trusted in the Sierras.<sup>73</sup>

### *Exaggerated Damage Frame*

Exaggerated damage is a new part of pro-Disney framework which emerges in response to environmentalist complaints. When Secretary Udall yielded to pressures and approved a road design, a *New York Times* article mentioned conservationist concerns but spent a majority of its words discussing the ecological protection measures being taken, including restricting the road to two lanes and preventing pollution of the nearby Kaweah River flowing out of Mineral King Valley. Reporters remind readers that the Forest Service manages over 250 ski areas on federal land and that both that organization and the Department of the Interior will monitor for quality control. Overall, several reports seemed to suggest that the resort as planned would satisfy any realistic environmental concerns.<sup>74</sup>

### *Necessity Frame*

Mineral King's necessity to solve overcrowding at existing ski resorts and generate an economic boost became new frames in newspaper coverage. First, overcrowding at limited ski areas was a problem which expanded in the late 1960s and newspapers made sure to mention it

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<sup>73</sup> "Anaheim Backs Mineral King Development," *Los Angeles Times*, December 4, 1966.

<sup>74</sup> "Udall Oks Road for Mineral King, Ends Deadlock," *Los Angeles Times*, December 18, 1967.

when talking about Mineral King's potential. Both the *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* published articles detailing that the ski industry had several million consumers and was growing nationally by hundreds of thousands of new skiers. The *Los Angeles Times* described emphasized that "Even with planned expansion, existing ski areas will be hopelessly overcrowded within a few years unless new resorts are developed."<sup>75</sup> While mentioning the ski area strain, both publications situate Disney's Mineral King plans as a solution. The area's proximity to Los Angeles is highlighted as prime for that area's population centers and depicted as part of a necessary national trend for new areas to alleviate overcrowding. In this light, a road to Mineral King seems necessary.

Mineral King is also framed as a matter of economic necessity. Reports tell that after fifteen years, the development would bring \$1 billion to the local area. Los Angeles' mayor, a US senator, and Governor-elect Ronald Reagan all are cited as supporters for the project and the access road leading to it.<sup>76</sup> Economic necessity gave merit to a narrative of Mineral King profitability which challenged negative framings of economic toll. After Walt Disney's death, the *Los Angeles Times* published an article highlighting that Walt Disney Productions was nevertheless profitable, and that park attractions like Disneyland and the forthcoming Mineral King ski area and Disneyworld were eclipsing films as a majority of Disney profits.<sup>77</sup> Reports like this help downplay concern about Mineral King soaking up money from highway budgets and demonstrate a correlation with Disney earnings producing tax revenue and local investment. Mineral King's road seems like a necessity in newspaper reporting because of overcrowding issues and economic rewards.

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<sup>75</sup> Lou Desser, "Trail Peak Looms as New Ski Area," *New York Times*, March 2, 1967.

<sup>76</sup> "Two Groups Fight Proposed Highway to Disney Resort," *Los Angeles Times*, November 22, 1966.

<sup>77</sup> Wayne Warga, "A New Troika Heads Destiny of Disney Empire," *Los Angeles Times*, December 1, 1968.

*RQ2- How did the Los Angeles Times and the New York Times frame conservationists and their efforts to stop the development?*

### *Economic Consequences Frame*

As the road to Mineral King became a growing topic of debate, newspaper reports focused the uncertainty related to the road's cost and financing. This economic-related coverage was the first negative framing of Mineral King development to appear in papers. An improved road from Visalia to Mineral King is accurately described as central to Disney's plans, but during this time period, reporters highlight the tension between Disney and road planners. Reporters frame Disney Productions as out of touch when reporters interview highway engineers who discuss the issues of carrying out Disney's plans. The paper highlights that "there are too many needed projects in Tulare County [and]... There are many needed projects in Southern California for which there are not sufficient funds."<sup>78</sup> In this light, Disney's demand for a road seems to impede other necessary plans and stretch highway spending thin. A month later, the paper again highlights the road's economic toll when reporting on Disney's application for a \$2.5 million loan from the federal government toward the total \$30 million road cost. District engineer W.L. Welch is again included mentioning that Disney is asking for more attention diverted from existing road improvements to fuel their Forest Service contract. Selecting road financing issues as a central topic portrays Disney as expensive and inconsiderate of other road projects.

### *Violated Wilderness Frame*

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<sup>78</sup> "Outlook Seen Brighter for Mineral King Road," *Los Angeles Times*, March 6, 1966.

Disney's planned development faced the most overt criticism in newspaper coverage through a frame of violated wilderness linked to road access in Mineral King and adjacent Sequoia National Park. The road's threat to violate Mineral King's isolation is one of the primary reasons given by newspapers for Sierra Club's opposition. The *Los Angeles Times* also called attention to the National Parks Association's opposition, which was based on the idea that any road would remove limits to reasonable development. Under this reasoning, the road was linked to destructive runaway commercialization equivalent to a "mountain Disneyland."<sup>79</sup>

The controversial road construction becomes central to the idea of wilderness violation through the Secretary of the Interior and Secretary of Agriculture dialogue over how cars will impact the valley. This is an opportunity for media to endorse either side of the issue, and editors give attention to Secretary Udall's argument that cars will degrade sections of Sequoia National Park land. Air pollution, river pollution and large crowds are concerns tied to the road that are at odds with the natural attractiveness advertised in previous articles.<sup>80</sup>

### ***Sierra Club v. Hickel, June 1969- September 1970***

Conservationist opposition to the road and Mineral King development in general remained dissenting but was overall more organized and robust throughout the three-year window of time that Disney made plans for Mineral King. By June 1969, the Sierra Club had crafted its claim that the Departments of Agriculture and Interior were mismanaging Mineral King as a wild area. In the US District Court for Northern California's *Sierra Club v. Hickel et al*, the club directly sued Secretary of the Interior Walter Hickel, Secretary of Agriculture Clifford Hardin, and their regional managers in the Sequoia National Park and Sequoia National

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<sup>79</sup> "Two Groups Fight Proposed Highway to Disney Resort," *Los Angeles Times*, November 22, 1966.

<sup>80</sup> Philip Fradkin, "Impasse Stalls Mineral King Road," *Los Angeles Times*, December 6, 1967.



Forest. Conservationists claimed that the federal government's Departments of Agriculture and Interior were threatening Mineral King's water integrity and the animals living there with the threat of overcrowding. Conservationists also argued that the area's natural assets would decline with a new road and that facilities would scar the area well beyond the 30-year permit. Notably, judges granted Sierra Club's wishes by putting a hold on development of the road and development until it was resolved by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Because the Sierra Club had no tangible property or other physical assets in Mineral King which would be harmed by development, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against the conservationist group on September 17, 1970. During this period, *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* coverage was unprecedentedly high at the state and national level. Negative coverage framed development as violating wilderness and the access road as problematic, while positive frames of development questioned the Sierra Club's legal standing and suggested the group's concerns were unfounded.

*RQ1- How did the Los Angeles Times and the New York Times frame Disney, the Forest Service and their efforts to develop Mineral King?*

*Exaggerated Damage Frame:*

Exaggerated damage framing reappears. The American Forestry Association unanimously voted to endorse Disney's Mineral King project amid the lawsuit, and an article suggested that forestry interests do not stop the association from supporting Mineral King

development.<sup>81</sup> Episodes like this reveal glimpses of positive light on Disney's ski resort future amid a lawsuit seeking to prevent the development of the area.

*RQ2- How did the Los Angeles Times and the New York Times frame conservationists and their efforts to stop the development?*

*Violated Wilderness Frame:*

The idea of violated wilderness returns with increased salience after Sierra Club's lawsuit against Disney. Both papers ran stories on Mineral King the day after the Sierra Club announced its lawsuit. These stories emphasized the idea that Sierra Club was pursuing an agenda aimed at stopping wilderness degradation. The *Los Angeles Times* reminds readers that Mineral King is a game refuge, and that development there will "damage fish and wildlife in the area" and negatively impact "45 rare giant Sequoias there [which] would be jeopardized by the access road."<sup>82</sup> Wildlife disruption by development seems bad from this perspective. The *New York Times*' article on that date ran a subheading stating "[Mineral King] Now a Remote Area," under which the author told that new infrastructure, cars and visitors were soon expected.<sup>83</sup> The reporter's decision to highlight the valley's undeveloped status creates a clear contradiction with news of an expected visitor influx. Another article is harshly subtitled "Tourist Influx Is Augmenting Nature's Destruction" and describes overcrowding tourism as equivalent to avalanches that violently reshape the remote mountain slopes.<sup>84</sup> Damage is reportedly caused by

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<sup>81</sup> "Forestry Unit Backs Disney Resort," *New York Times*, September 23, 1969.

<sup>82</sup> Philip Hager, "Sierra Club Suit Seeks to Block Mineral King," *Los Angeles Times*, June 6, 1969.

<sup>83</sup> Gladwin Hill, "Suit Seeks to Bar Disney Forest Resort," *New York Times*, June 6, 1969.

<sup>84</sup> Philip Fradkin, "Sierra Nevada Backcountry: Devastated, Never so Beautiful," *Los Angeles Times*, August 24, 1969.

litter from visitors and is “closing in on wilderness areas” like an adversary. Articles like these do much to promote the idea that a Sierra Club lawsuit is beneficial, and do little to endorse the defendant Forest Service’s vision of increased visitation.

### *Illegal, Corrupt Frame*

A new negative frame of illegal development and even corruption emerges during the first Sierra Club lawsuit. Newspapers amplify Sierra Club arguments that Disney’s plans are outside the legal boundaries of development, and that the Forest Service is behaving criminally by approving the plans. Newspapers included the Sierra Club’s goals to stop development immediately by arguing that the government was not authorized to approve a commercially-minded road into the wilderness area. Development of this size is described as circumventing protective Congressional limits. The development’s impact on Sequoia National Forest is also labelled as violating Department of Interior restrictions. This coverage suggests that the Forest Service and Department of the Interior are violating guidelines for financial greed contrary to public interest.<sup>85</sup> Reports like these contribute more to negative frames of Mineral King development than positive frames, and they continue even during the interim period between lawsuit headlines. The *Los Angeles Times*’ coverage appeared to side with conservationists through an investigative article about the financial sacrifice that Los Angeles highway district and California highway funds will suffer if the Sierra Club lawsuit fails. Fueling the Mineral King road through transferred funds apparently leaves Southern Californians “cheated out of ‘a heck of a lot of highway mileage’” funds.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Daryl Lembke, “Sierra Club Attempts to Bar Mineral King Resort Permit,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 2, 1969. Martha Willman, “Disney Project takes Millions From Valley, State Aid Says,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 14, 1969.

### *Sierra Club Illegitimacy Frame*

Despite anti-development frames of violated wilderness and development corruption, some reports framed the Sierra Club as illegitimate. In a few instances, reporters covered how the Sierra Club's delay-by-lawsuit strategy may be based on an illegitimate premise. One report stated that the Forest Service "question[s] the Sierra Club's right to sue since it does not have a direct interest in Mineral King."<sup>87</sup> The article gives the Forest Service an opportunity to assert its right to issue development permits and that the size of the planned resort is not excessively larger than predecessors built on federal land. When the Far West Ski Association filed an appeal regarding the lawsuit, an article described Sierra Club success as the result of militancy more than strong arguments. Skiers were pictured as victims of conservationists who were now banding together to stop an illegitimate threat.<sup>88</sup> This perspective casts the Sierra Club's lawsuit as an antagonistic move against public interest.

### ***Sierra Club v. Morton and Beyond, October 1970- February 1977***

Soon after losing the appeal before the Ninth Circuit, the Sierra Club's executive director, Michael McCloskey, announced plans to appeal that decision and take the case to the US Supreme Court. Construction was again stalled until the Supreme Court decided whether to accept the revised lawsuit against new Secretary of the Interior Roger Morton, which it did in February 1971. During the *Sierra Club v. Morton et al* case, newspapers covered stories with both positive and negative frames toward development and conservationist activity.

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<sup>87</sup> Philip Fradkin, "U.S. Appeals Mineral King Ban," *Los Angeles Times*, February 15, 1970.

<sup>88</sup> Philip Fradkin, "Skiers Join Battle to Land Mineral King," *Los Angeles Times*, December 21, 1969.

On April 19, 1972, the U.S. Supreme Court agreed with the Ninth Circuit that the Sierra Club failed to make clear how its members “would be affected by the actions of [development] other than the fact that the actions are personally displeasing or distasteful to them.” The Court did “not, of course, bar the Sierra Club from seeking... to amend its complaint” and appeal the decision again.<sup>89</sup> The Sierra Club did exactly that, replying with a new appeal emphasizing conservationists’ and local cabin owners’ regular activities in the valley. The new appeal also pointed out that developers had not completed an environmental impact statement as required by law since 1970’s National Environmental Protection Act. Development was again delayed until an unannounced date for another Supreme Court review. Even after losing in the Supreme Court, the Sierra Club’s cause was discussed positively by the *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times*.

*RQ1- How did the Los Angeles Times and the New York Times frame Disney, the Forest Service and their efforts to develop Mineral King?*

*During the lawsuit- Necessity Frame*

During the *Sierra Club v. Morton* trial, some positive coverage of Disney’s plans continued to preserve frames of necessity. Newspapers covered groups who benefitted from Mineral King’s development. First, the federal government is shown supporting Disney and defending development in a *New York Times* article titled “US Asks Supreme Court to Uphold Disney Resort.”<sup>90</sup> Government support gives an air of legitimacy to Disney’s plans for neutral readers. Another article shows additional groups that more directly benefit from Mineral King’s commercialization. The article tells that Mineral King’s location in Tulare County makes

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<sup>89</sup> Harper, *Mineral King: Public Concern with Government Policy*, 178.

<sup>90</sup> “U.S. Asks Supreme Court To Uphold Disney Resolution,” *New York Times*, January 5, 1971.

officials and residents there support the project because an “all-year recreation area could correct ‘Tulare’s present depressed economic condition.’”<sup>91</sup> Perhaps inevitably, some articles which describe the lawsuit’s outcome frame the Sierra Club as unreasonable. For example, attention is given to the need for increased recreation which Sierra Club opposes. The idea that Sierra Club is an obstacle to compromise is hinted when newspapers give Disney sources an opportunity to emphasize that Mineral King is being planned with accommodations for responsible sustainability as a priority.

#### *After the lawsuit- Necessity Frame*

In the aftermath of the Supreme Court trial, some newspaper coverage continued to frame conservationists as unreasonable challenges to positive development. Several articles remind audiences that overcrowding is still a problem at existing ski areas and that a new one at Mineral King will solve this. One article profiles a notable judge who enjoys skiing, while others preserve the idea that people want a new ski area and that Mineral King promises more than any other area.<sup>92</sup> The *Los Angeles Times* dedicated two articles to covering increased Far West Ski Association activity, which advocated for skiers facing overcrowding at resorts and rising costs of the sport. One of the articles, titled “Endangered species: Future of Ski Resorts Feared” quotes a skier who complains “skiers don’t vote, the conservationist crowd does.”<sup>93</sup> This pro-skier frame suggests that recreationists are a silent majority necessarily standing up to unreasonable preservationists.

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<sup>91</sup> Ronald Ostrow, “U.S. Supreme Court Will Hear Challenge to Disney Ski Resort,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 23, 1971.

<sup>92</sup> “Judge Happy Going Downhill,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 23, 1975.

<sup>93</sup> “Assoc. Strives for Development,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 20, 1974.

Joan Sweeney, “Endangered Species: Future of Ski Resorts Feared,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 8, 1976.

*RQ2- How did the Los Angeles Times and the New York Times frame conservationists and their efforts to stop the development?*

*During the lawsuit- Violated Wilderness Frame*

Negative frames of violated wilderness return to newspaper coverage during the Supreme Court lawsuit. During the ongoing trial, the *New York Times* published an article about backpacking which describes the freedom and beauty that hikers experience in the outdoors. These backpackers are framed as suffering from overcrowding, which the author directly ties to Mineral King before quoting a source saying “[wilderness is] going to have to be closely guarded and managed in the future if it is going to remain this way. It’s a precious thing.”<sup>94</sup> Litter and overcrowding are themes in a *Los Angeles Times* article from the same week titled “National Wilderness Areas- They Exist in Name Only.”<sup>95</sup> This lengthy article highlights water pollution, wildlife intrusion and theft that are collectively destroying previously remote areas in the Sierra Nevada mountains surrounding Mineral King. The timing of this article during the Supreme Court’s decision on Mineral King development does much to suggest that a ski area will be a death blow to any remote areas there. The volume of negative environmental degradation coverage that newspapers published during the Mineral King trial is uncharacteristically large compared to pre-trial coverage. News articles’ increased emphases on violated wilderness makes the Sierra Club’s lawsuit seem like a necessary step against a disturbing trend.

*After the lawsuit- Sierra Club Relevance Frame, Problematic Development Frame*

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<sup>94</sup> “Backpackers Find Wilderness Trails Are Becoming Crowded,” *New York Times*, August 10, 1971.

<sup>95</sup> Philip Fradkin, “National Wilderness Areas- They Exist in Name Only,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 1971.

Perhaps the most notable thing about newspaper coverage of the Sierra Club's trial is how media continued to paint the Sierra Club positively after that group lost in the Supreme Court. The trial loss was an opportunity for newspapers to abandon the Mineral King coverage and move on to other content, but they repeatedly maintain coverage that mostly frames the Sierra Club as still relevant and responding to threats of wilderness violation in Mineral King. Disney proposed to make more environmentally-friendly concessions after the lawsuit including conceding a railway instead of the controversial highway while reducing the planned number of chairlifts and visitors. However, this compromise was unsatisfactory for some Sierra Club members, who vowed in reports that they would sue again if possible. This frame that the Sierra Club still has legitimacy is present in several articles which say although conservationists lost in the Supreme Court, they still can snub the Mineral King development for years through further lawsuits. One example is the *Los Angeles Times*' "Sierra Club Could OK Certain New Resorts" article.<sup>96</sup> By advertising potential ski areas that the Sierra Club approves of, this article maintains the idea that the group has influence over development despite having been thrown out of two major judicial reviews. Another negative frame on Mineral King is created by newspapers covering setbacks for the project. The *Los Angeles Times* advertises when Governor Reagan vetoes the road to Mineral King, and also when conservationists organize an anti-Mineral King resort march on Disneyland. When Disney's Environmental Impact Report is released, one article quotes a fire warden who claims the report neglected to mention fire damage. This works to make development look threatening and unorganized.<sup>97</sup> Negative coverage of Disney's project makes it look weak and brings awareness to the project's opponents.

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<sup>96</sup> Joan Sweeney, "Sierra Club Could OK Certain New Resorts," *Los Angeles Times*, January 26, 1973.

<sup>97</sup> "Disney's Mineral King Impact Report Hit," *Los Angeles Times*, March 27, 1975.

William Endicott, "Reagan Signs Bill Halting Proposed Mineral King Road," *Los Angeles Times*, August 19, 1972.  
 "Anti-Mineral King March OKd by Council," *Los Angeles Times*, March 18, 1973.



### **Legislative Annexation, February 1977- February 1979**

The Forest Service was required to draft an environmental impact statement due to the Sierra Club's revised appeal in *Sierra Club v. Morton*. Construction was again delayed until the impact statement was completed, pausing any further development actions. Walt Disney Productions redistributed attention to other projects while proposing new concessions to the Mineral King plans which included significantly reducing the maximum number of daily guests, cutting proposed chairlifts in half to ten instead of the twenty originally planned and conceding road construction in favor of an electric railway to reduce car pollution.<sup>98</sup> However, Disney's enthusiasm waned when in 1974 a complete environmental impact statement suggested that the company would need to raise guests' ticket prices for the Mineral King development to make financial sense, which changed the resort's target audience. Simultaneously, the Sierra Club lobbied for political support of its proposal to move the land in question into Sequoia National Park. Developers faced increasing government regulations from the National Environmental Policy Act and were still prevented from beginning construction when congressional Representative John Krebs (D- Fresno) proposed moving Mineral King into the adjacent national park in 1977 with bill H.R.1771. This bill was added to the National Parks and Recreation Act, and President Jimmy Carter's 1978 signature at last moved Mineral King into Sequoia National Park and prevented any future development plans in Mineral King Valley. The pro-development necessity frame still circulated, while a majority of *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* reports framed conservationist legislation as a good measure for protecting threatened wilderness.

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<sup>98</sup> Harper, *Mineral King: Public Concern with Government Policy*, 181-182.

*RQ1- How did the Los Angeles Times and the New York Times frame Disney, the Forest Service and their efforts to develop Mineral King?*

*Before H.R.1771- Necessity Frame*

Before the bill navigated through Congress, necessity framing still existed in newspaper coverage which supported the need for development. Reports in both newspapers mentioned overcrowding and environmental regulation which choked profits out of ski areas. In an article quoting ski area managers in California and Colorado, the *Los Angeles Times* described challenges such as excessive environmental scrutiny, coupled with higher ticket prices and insurance costs, which were making resorts need more capital than restrictions seem to allow. Mineral King is mentioned as the most-publicized case study of environmentalists using legal stalling to prevent needed improvements to the industry. This collectively creates a situation that the *Los Angeles Times* described as “skiing faces a bumpy track.”<sup>99</sup> Another article gives attention to the Far West Ski Association again, which is quoted claiming “Mineral King is a bellweather... if it is killed [by HR1771], ski areas all over the country will be affected. The battle for ski expansion everywhere will be tougher.”<sup>100</sup> A number of articles support the development in this stage, but those which do give a picture of the complex tension between recreation advocates and conservationists instead of exclusively positive coverage.

*During and after the bill- Necessity, Void Frame*

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<sup>99</sup> Joan Sweeny, “Skiing Faces a Bumpy Track,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 11, 1977.

<sup>100</sup> Bob Lochner, “Far West Group Moving Uphill and Bearing Down,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 16, 1977.

Most coverage during and after HR1771's passage avoids positively framing the Mineral King development project. However, the development is referenced in passing in a small number of articles which, ironically, begin discussing the need for more ski areas now that conservationists have again demonstrated their influence to check ski industry growth. Now that Mineral King is gone, overcrowding continues as a topic in at least two newspaper articles by the *Los Angeles Times*. The director of Vail is quoted worrying "Look what happened to Disney with... Mineral King... in California. And Aspen has had several new projects stopped... Will there ever be another new [ski] area anywhere in the US...?"<sup>101</sup> In this light, Disney's defeat is situated as a concern for the entire ski industry. Another article reported that the US federal and California state governments were researching new potential locations at Mount Shasta and Mammoth Mountain for resort expansion where skiing already existed.<sup>102</sup> This push for more skiable acres is framed as a response to growing skier numbers and banned skiing at Mineral King.

*RQ2- How did the Los Angeles Times and the New York Times frame conservationists and their efforts to stop the development?*

*Before the bill- Violated Wilderness Frame*

Violated wilderness frames emerged in newspaper coverage before HR1771 was passed. During the time when congressional legislators were discussing their voting plans, several articles highlighted perceived problems of the Mineral King project and negative consequences if it moved forward. The *Los Angeles Times* quoted Sierra Club Board of Directors member Joe

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<sup>101</sup> Bob Lochner, "Vail May Have the First- and the Last Resort," *Los Angeles Times*, February 14, 1979.

<sup>102</sup> Ellen Hume, "U.S.-State Effort to Establish Ski Areas Planned," *Los Angeles Times*, January 26, 1979.

Fontaine saying “we feel there should not be a development up there, even if it is scaled down.”<sup>103</sup> The article continues to frame Mineral King as a threat to nearby redwood trees and wildlife. Air pollution and smog are also predicted to increase. In addition to reiterating potential wilderness violation, newspaper articles highlighted skiers that ironically did not want the resort. An article titled “Not all the Skiers Want Mineral King Development” profiles Ed Pell, co-chair of the “Skiers to Keep Mineral King Natural” group. The article amplifies the organization’s belief that the Sierras should stop being developed and that “the benefits of commercial development at Mineral King are not worth the negative impact it would have on the aesthetics, wildlife and vegetation of both Mineral King and Sequoia National Park, which borders it on three sides.”<sup>104</sup>

#### *During and after the bill - Violated Wilderness Frame*

During and after HR1771’s passage, newspaper coverage placed most salience on framing a negative resort which was defeated. When President Carter’s administration announced support of legislation which annexed the location into Sequoia National Park, the *New York Times* described it as preventing a crowded “Disneyland North.”<sup>105</sup> When the bill passed in the House of Representatives, news that Mineral King would be off limits for development was described as pleasing to environmentalists without mentioning the massive support the project gathered from skiers and local Californians. A majority of articles describe the project as a ballooning and environmentally destructive enterprise instead of a necessary and ideal option for future recreation. The *New York Times* ends its coverage of the environmental

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<sup>103</sup> Robert Jones, “Disney Urged to Change Plans for Ski Resort,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 19, 1977.

<sup>104</sup> Bob Lochner, “Not All the Skiers Want Mineral King Development,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 5, 1978.

<sup>105</sup> Gladwin Hill, “Carter Plan Opposes a ‘Disneyland North,’” *New York Times*, January 26, 1978.

conflict saying “Conservationists are jubilant over their victory... in one of the thorniest environmental disputes in years- the battle over a proposed ‘mountain Disneyland.’”<sup>106</sup> The article frames Mineral King Valley as a natural asset threatened by controversial and possibly corrupt expansion before being stopped by Sierra Club litigation.

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<sup>106</sup> “Environmentalists Jubilant Over Mineral Springs Development Victory,” *New York Times*, November 27, 1978.

## Discussion:

### *Mineral King, the Los Angeles Times, and the New York Times*

Differences in news coverage quantity and general framings between the *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* are intriguing when acknowledged. The *Los Angeles Times* published over 90 articles compared to the *New York Times*' less than 40 articles, which suggests that Californian news media prioritized environmentally conscious news reports as much or more than other U.S. regional or national news media. This captures how media played a role in building Californian environmental consideration as David Vogel argues in *California Greenin'*.<sup>107</sup>

Tension over road building was covered much more heavily by the *Los Angeles Times* than *New York Times*. It was not until the Sierra Club's first lawsuit to stop development that the *New York Times* began reporting at a level comparable to the *Los Angeles Times*, before shrinking again to fewer reports than its counterpart after the second lawsuit. As a result, Californian readers were exposed to the Mineral King environmental battle earlier and more frequently than *New York Times*' East Coast and national readers.

Both publications framed the development in a positive way upon the announcement of the Forest Service's bidding process and Disney's selection. Common frames were great recreation potential and sensible development at Mineral King. Both publications remained positive toward the development during road tension coverage, with the *Los Angeles Times* producing twice the positive coverage as it did negative and only a single negatively framed *New York Times* article out of eight. This signals that newspapers were able to continue promoting

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<sup>107</sup>Vogel, *California Greenin': How the Golden State Became an Environmental Leader*.

business development without making conservation a central theme before the National Environmental Protection Act and the first Earth Day in 1970. During the Sierra Club's first lawsuit this trend reversed. Over half the *Los Angeles Times* articles from this period are negative, compared to over three-quarters of negative *New York Times* articles. *Los Angeles Times* coverage increased dramatically and peaked during and after the Supreme Court trial, while *New York Times* coverage remained consistent in density. Framing is more balanced during this period although both newspapers became more negative toward development after the Sierra Club lost their Supreme Court battle. During news coverage of HR1771 and afterward, both publications published double or nearby double overall negative articles against development compared to articles with overall positive frames. This signals that newspapers have turned against their traditional pro-business framing. It suggests that by the 1970s, newspapers were influenced by contemporary legislation and increasing public interest in preservation. During Mineral King coverage, newspaper articles were feeding into growing public environmental awareness.

Each newspaper also published editorials which should be taken into account when considering the respective publication's framing preferences. It is intriguing that opinion articles are published almost exclusively during three moments in Mineral King's storyline which were crucial to environmental victories. During the Sierra Club's first lawsuit, the *New York Times* published two negative opinion articles which framed Disney's development as a scandal which violated natural beauty. The *Los Angeles Times* published one positive opinion article and one negative opinion article during the Supreme Court trial, while the *New York Times* published two additional negative opinion pieces which advocated for Sierra Club's legal methods to stop a defenseless valley from destructive overcrowding and pollution. The *New York Times* coverage

dropped off and included no more opinion articles after *Sierra Club v. Morton*, while the *Los Angeles Times* laced news of HR1771 with two positive opinion articles about Mineral King compared to four negative opinion articles which frame the development as environmentally costly and elitist. Both publications complimented their coverage with opinions which view development skeptically. This allowed them to promote conservation during lawsuits and legislation without outright editorially doing so.

News framing and opinions help show how the style of reporting changed from reactionary and episodic to proactive and continual throughout the Mineral King timeline. Newspaper reporting is generally episodic, covering big events more than the context between those events. Mineral King coverage shows a reversal of this trend, with the *Los Angeles Times* providing frequent stories and analysis of the situation in between key moments. The *New York Times*' coverage is likewise relatively consistent through most phases of the Mineral King storyline. This relates directly to Matthew Pressman's argument that more complete reporting grew in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>108</sup> Reporting also became increasingly proactive, seeking out stories and perspectives from development advocates, skiers and conservationists without any new events happening. These reporting patterns illustrate the newspapers' relevance as a source of public understanding about Mineral King events.

Individual reporters are worth attention when investigating biased framing at Mineral King. Evidently reporters were conscious of bias impacting reporting. The 1970s were "a time when partisanship among environmental journalists could run amok," journalist Frank Clifford tells. Some Mineral King reporters were well known environmental journalists. Robert Jones was one of the *Los Angeles Times*' first writers to break into environmental reporting in the 1970s

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<sup>108</sup> Pressman, "Remaking the News: The Transformation of American Journalism, 1960- 1980," 8-9.



and was remembered as keeping his head above biased coverage. “He stayed even handed,” recalled Clifford in Jones’ obituary.<sup>109</sup> Philip Fradkin also wrote frequently on environmental topics for the *Los Angeles Times*, but alternatively “left the Times in 1975 after his editors told him his stories were too tilted toward the environmentalist movement,” according to his obituary. Thereafter Fradkin served in Governor Jerry brown’s California Resources Agency and helped establish the environmentally friendly 1976 California Coastal Act, and wrote a book emphasizing environmental degradation at the Colorado River.<sup>110</sup> Jones and Frandkin demonstrate that individual reporters’ impartiality should be questioned in Mineral King environmental journalism.

#### *Mineral King and Shifting Newspaper Behavior*

Mineral King framing contributes to the literature on changing newspaper practices in the 1960s and 1970s. The *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* follow the expanding trend of printing stories with detail, description, analysis and interpretation that Pressman argues became more widespread during the time.<sup>111</sup>

Another key change in the 1960s and 1970s media coverage was increased investigative stories which deeply reported lesser-known consequences of a topic. Some reporting fits this description by exposing Mineral King negatives which fall outside the story’s mainstream narrative. The *Los Angeles Times* published at least two such stories which framed development as creating social divisions and greedy land speculation near Visalia or diverting over \$20

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<sup>109</sup> Doug Smith, “Robert A Jones, Pioneering Environmental Voice and Whitewater Adventurer, Dies at 74,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 15, 2019.

<sup>110</sup> Elaine Woo, “Obituaries; Peter Fradkin, 1935-2012; Writer Who Chronicled Western U.S.,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 11, 2012.

<sup>111</sup> Pressman, “Remaking the News: The Transformation of American Journalism, 1960- 1980,” 9.

million from Los Angeles highway funds to pay for the Mineral King access road. These investigative, negatively framed stories about development mirror a larger 1960s and 1970s trend.

Much of the Mineral King analysis was skeptically critical of political and business figures who supported development. This is seen in the majority of articles framing development negatively after the Sierra Club's 1969 legal loss. This is in line with Pressman, who also states that papers began abandoning right-wing loyalty in the 1960s. Mineral King was not necessarily a partisan issue, but right-wing proponents would likely have been disappointed to see regional business development stopped by conservation-leaning democrats like John Krebs and Jimmy Carter. This coverage shift would have been especially noticeable at the *Los Angeles Times*, which traditionally supported regional economic growth like the type the Forest Service predicted Mineral King development would foster.<sup>112</sup>

Opponents received abundant attention in Mineral King coverage, which was also characteristic of changing newspaper reporting. The development's support from the beginning by California governors, the Forest Service, and popular Walt Disney Productions made pro-developers a dissenting minority among newspaper reports. Losing the *Sierra Club v. Hickel* lawsuit should have made the already-underdog environmentalists even less relevant in public discourse. *Manufacturing Consent* argues that powerful government and business interests converge, determining what issues are covered over others. The frames identified in *Los Angeles Times* Mineral King reporting call Herman's and Chomsky's arguments and conclusions into question. As the findings for this thesis revealed, over time news frames tended to side more with environmental concerns than with business leaders and government officials. In the case of

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<sup>112</sup> Vaughn, *Encyclopedia of American Journalism*, 276.

Mineral King it was grassroots conservationists, not business elites, who emerged as the most salient protagonists in newspaper reports during key events during the more than decade-long environmental battle.

The findings are consistent with Pressman's work, as they show that pro-development groups did indeed complain that the *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* were biased toward minority opinions.<sup>113</sup> The Far West Ski Association began increasing their public outreach and political rallying, for example, to offset what they perceived as favoritism toward environmentalists. Members of that group saw themselves as a silent majority being underrepresented in politics and media.<sup>114</sup> Far West Ski Association sentiments align with claims that media coddled dissenters during the 1970s.

The findings about news frames related to the Mineral King case also contribute to an understanding of how the *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* were evolving during this period. Under the leadership of the new editor Otis Chandler, the *Los Angeles Times* began to transition away from its previous right-wing editorial line.<sup>115</sup> The *Los Angeles Times* increasingly criticized government administrations and voiced that it would hold government officials accountable.

By the 1960s, the *New York Times* had a reputation of holding government officials accountable. The newspaper promoted itself as "objective" and demonstrated a willingness to criticize government and businesses corruption, such as during the Red Scare of the 1950s, the Vietnam War, and the Pentagon Papers.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Pressman, "Remaking the News: The Transformation of American Journalism, 1960- 1980," 79-80.

<sup>114</sup> Janelle Dykes, "The New Skier," *Los Angeles Times*, October 1, 1978.

<sup>115</sup> Vaughn, *Encyclopedia of American Journalism*, 277.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

News frames moved away from supporting business and government as environmental opposition grew. Pro-development frames waned as investigative articles and other reports about Mineral King showed some balance between positive and negative frames. Many of the anti-development frames directly scrutinized government and business interests. Mineral King findings provide a relevant case study about how an important regional newspaper such as the *Los Angeles Times* evolved during the 1970s.

*New York Times* coverage of Mineral King shifted between frames. During the initial bidding process for Mineral King and road construction tension, the *New York Times* published half a dozen articles which mainly backed the government and business interests at Mineral King, while only a single article was critical of it. Earlier reporting on the case did little to scrutinize authority and was hardly balanced. However, by end of the 1960s, the *New York Times* reversed this trend by publishing more than twice as many anti-development news reports and opinion pieces. Again, news coverage illustrated biases.

### *Mineral King and Shifting Environmental Attitudes*

Changes in journalism practice coincided with the beginning of the modern environmental movement, which influenced mainstream Americans' attitudes about the environment and environmental conservation efforts. The Mineral King story unfolded during this same period and provides an example of increased media coverage of conservation topics. Authors from both the *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* in this study emphasized threats to a fragile ecosystem if development were to happen. Even in stories which featured competing positive and negative frames of Mineral King development, many authors stressed threats against nature. The general public became more engaged in environmental debates, as shown by

increased public group involvement by the Sierra Club and the Far West Ski Association. Both conservationists and ski proponents were highlighted in news as concerned groups seeking to influence policy decisions.

Construction of certain media frames over others and their use can be explained in part as a product of shifting journalistic practices and environmental attitudes. Newspaper articles revealed increased activities like protests and legal lobbying, which shadow broader environmentalist patterns at the time. Mineral King coverage also corresponded with a growing number of Americans interested in recreation. It especially coincided with a rise in skier numbers, and that circumstance was mentioned in many Mineral King stories. Lastly, government policies shifted further to support environmental regulation, such as the National Environmental Policy Act. The Environmental Protection Agency became an important factor in decisions related to the Mineral King case by requiring detailed transparency from the Forest Service and Disney. When increased transparency supported negative framing, media advertised it.

**Conclusion:**

This study has shown that news media outlets in the 1960s and 1970s generated frames that had the potential to shape public perceptions, opinions and understanding of issues related to the environment and outdoor recreation. The thesis also has demonstrated that news media frames change overtime. *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* readers were initially exposed to predominantly positive depictions of Mineral King as a tourist destination site, before eventually reading reports which predominantly described the resort in a negative light by the end of the 1960s. Negative news media framing of Mineral King development grew as opposition toward construction, legal battles, and legislative action all limited skiing at Mineral King. Newspaper coverage coincided with shifts in American public environmental awareness. In doing so, the news media, in this case the *Los Angeles Times* and the *New York Times*, functioned to amplify conservationist efforts and, in some cases, promoted attitudes in favor of environmental movements.

From 1965 to 1978, reporters used specific frames to cover the Mineral King case. Overall depictions of business, government, conservations, and other public actors were reinforced by a repeated set of facts presented by reporters. While characters might be described both positively and negatively, particular emphasis was placed on certain facts over others. This created labels that readers could associate with particular characters, such as conservationists, more than others. Efforts to develop Mineral King were positively framed as creating economic potential, environmentally considerate, satisfying necessary recreation interests, and negatively as corruptly violating wilderness. Conservationists were positively framed as environmental protectors and negatively framed as obstacles to progress. However, the most salient and repetitive frames depicted Mineral King development as increasingly negative. Newspaper

readers, perhaps, were not surprised when in 1978 Mineral King development was officially cancelled.

Negative frames toward Mineral King development occurred at a transformative moment in journalism history. Newspapers had framed issues for decades before Mineral King, but those frames were often pro-business. Media transformed in the 1960s and 1970s to include longer and more detailed reporting with analysis and skepticism toward authority.

This was also a transformative moment in environmental history. Americans enjoyed access to unprecedented postwar transportation with affordable cars and leisure spending. Recreational enterprises in natural areas were developed to attract visitors, and previously undeveloped rural locations were viewed as locations for dams, power plants, housing and ski resorts. Conservationist groups like the Sierra Club evolved from hiking clubs to environmental protection organizations that began to resist development when they thought that natural assets were being threatened. Mineral King's development battle transpired in the midst of sweeping environmental legislation such as the 1970 National Environmental Policy Act. These changes in policies forced developers to confront changing attitudes and legislation that supported conservation efforts.

The effort to develop Mineral King as a ski resort represents a seminal environmental dispute for those seeking to understand conservation, particularly in California, during the 1960s and 1970s. This study's focus on how one regional and one national newspaper framed potential development in Mineral King Valley opens doors to understanding how public audiences understood conservation. The way in which media framed the issues influenced public perception about the topic.

While news reporters covered the environmental conflict, Disney executives, Forest Service personnel and Sierra Club members crafted their own marketing campaigns in response to public opinion. In turn, the *Los Angeles Times*' and the *New York Times*' framing also likely influenced public perception to some degree about the issue. Similarly, news coverage by these two news outlets perhaps influenced the ways in which developers and the Sierra Club marketed themselves and pushed their respective interests. While analyzing the marketing campaigns of Disney or Sierra Club goes beyond the scope of this thesis, the findings in this study pave the way for future research that might focus on how each group's public relations compared with news coverage and the frames that were produced by newspapers.

Analyses of potential Mineral King development and conservationists in media frames provides greater understanding about journalism practice. The findings in this study coincide with other scholars' arguments that media uses frames to depict characters related to outdoor recreation and amplifies some political and economic positions more than others in environmental disputes.<sup>117</sup> The findings in this study about Mineral King framing also establish a record for deepening understanding about how media coverage influenced winter outdoor recreation. Moving forward, this thesis lays groundwork for future research on California's ski and environmental history. Further, this framing study contributes deeper understanding of California's mountain development. Finally, *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* frames of developers' and conservationists' agendas at Mineral King call into question conceptual frameworks on media analysis and refute some previous research about elite groups' media influence.<sup>118</sup> The shifting frames manufactured by the *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times*

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<sup>117</sup> Stoddart and MacDonald, "Keep It Wild, Keep It Local": Comparing News Media and the Internet as Sites for Environmental Movement Activism for Jumbo Pass, British Columbia," 328.

<sup>118</sup> Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*, 4-14.



between 1965 and 1978 about Mineral King development provide useful new findings for understanding environmental, media and mountain histories.

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