

Riverhood: histories across time, place, and waters

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HARVARD
UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACTS & BIOS

Convened by Katie Holmes, Gough Whitlam and Malcolm Fraser Chair in Australian Studies

'Riverhood' is a nineteenth century word meaning the 'state of being a river'. But what makes a river? How has the idea of a river changed over time? Who decides and to what effect? With a particular focus on First Nations and settler-colonial relationships with rivers, this symposium brings together Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars from Australia and North America, to engage with this idea of 'riverhood' and to explore the more-than-human histories and cultures of rivers across the Pacific and Atlantic worlds.

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Tuesday, April 9

Session 1: River Cultures I

Klamath River Fish-Weirs toward a Decolonial Future

Brittani Orona, UC Santa Cruz

The lower Klamath River Basin, home to the Hupa, Yurok, and Karuk people, is vitally important to the cultural and physical health of each tribe. While this point has been made in numerous publications, this paper will focus on one little explored aspect of the relationship between the three tribes and the Klamath River and its tributaries: fish weirs. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, fish weirs, or temporary dams, disappeared as settlers invaded the Klamath River region building permanent dams and irrigation infrastructure all but ended the fall and spring salmon runs on the river and its tributaries. Despite this, fish weirs, and their cultural significance, have not been forgotten. In this paper, I will reflect on fish weirs as decolonial future for the Hupa, Yurok, and Karuk people. I am interested in how the balance of a temporary dam structure, such as fish weirs, benefited the Klamath Basin and how this symbiotic relationship may be established again after the permanent dam structures are gone. As four dams are currently being removed on the Upper Klamath River, this paper explores the relationship of the lower Klamath River and how Hupa, Yurok, and Karuk story and ceremony intertwine on the Basin to build a new, decolonial future for the river itself.

Dr. Brittani Orona is currently a UC President's and Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow at UC Santa Cruz in the Department of History. Her research and teaching focus on Indigenous history and human rights, environmental studies, public humanities, and visual sovereignty. Orona earned her Ph.D. in Native American

Studies with a Designated Emphasis in Human Rights from University of California, Davis. Dr. Orona is Hupa and an enrolled member of the Hoopa Valley Tribe in Northern California.

Not just water: The contested spaces of the lower River Murray

Margaret Cook, Griffith University/La Trobe University

To engineers, rivers are a resource, a reservoir of water to be managed and modified for human consumption. For fish, rivers are home, providing sustenance, seasonal flows, spawning grounds and migratory pathways. Since the 1920s engineers have imposed their hydraulic vision on the lower River Murray in South Australia, regulating flows with weirs that converted the river to a chain of cascading pools with scant regard to the more-than-human world. The flow regime and seasonality were fundamentally changed, altering fish habitat and pathways. My paper interrogates how the disparate ways of knowing rivers by engineers and fish collided in the lower Murray and how they co-exist in this deeply entangled space.

*As an historian, **Margaret Cook** is fascinated by water and its interaction with humans, animals, and the environment over time. She writes about climate-related disasters, with a particular focus on rivers and floods, and is the author of “A River with a City Problem: A History of Brisbane Floods”. Dr Cook is a Research Fellow at the Australian Rivers Institute, Griffith University, and La Trobe University.*

Reciprocity – Cultural ways of caring for Country and Natural Waterways through Kinship Obligations

Danielle Carney-Flakelar, Wayilwan Cultural Knowledge Holder, Dubbo, Australia

Danielle Carney-Flakelar is a Wakka Wakka and Wayilwan First Nations woman, who has a passion for and cultural responsibility to advocate for the rights of water within the Macquarie, Castlereagh and Bogan catchments, to flow into the Barwon River (Darling River), in New South Wales (NSW), Australia. These ancient waterways carry out their role to nurture and provide for kin including the native plants and animals within Wayilwan homelands. The internationally recognised Ramsar Wetlands of the Macquarie Marshes lie within the Macquarie floodplain and are a part of the immense Murray Darling Basin that spans four states in south eastern Australia. Through cultural obligations of reciprocity stemming from her paternal grandmother and great-grandmother, Danielle has taken up the responsibility to be a voice for her Wayilwan ancestral homelands and waterways, including multiple rivers, creeks, cows and wetlands within a now dry floodplain.

During the Riverhood symposium, Danielle will share her experiences of growing up and watching the waterways change, due to the impacts of damming of the Macquarie River and the intensifying of cotton farming and requirements of the mining industry, all within hundreds of kilometres of the waterways. The over extraction and diversion of water and the lobbying and political influence of these industries have swiftly changed the natural water regime and landscape.

*Since the early 2000's, **Danielle Carney-Flakelar** has been a cultural voice for the natural waterways, challenging and speaking up for the rights of water, floodplains and the natural world of the beloved Marshes. She has represented the Macquarie Marshes and waterways at local, state, national and international forums and has learnt a lot from other first nations people about leading change.*

Following in her paternal grandmother's footsteps, Danielle spent seven years as a member of the Macquarie Marshes environmental water advisory group that provided water allocation advice to the NSW Minister for Environment. But since 2012, she has shifted her approach to reclaim the rights of the Marshes and all

waterways within the Murray Darling Basin by creating opportunities for cultural immersion experiences for Wayilwan and other Aboriginal people, supporting the revival and renewal of cultural knowledge and practice about Country with her cultural sisters.

In 2023, Danielle agreed to advocate that her Wayilwan community partner with the University of NSW to undertake a five-year Australian commonwealth government funded project to monitor and evaluate the effects of environmental water flows at five sites within the Macquarie Marshes. Wayilwan people, will support of Professor Richard Kingsford and his PhD students, to monitor waterbirds, native fish, turtles, native plants and connectivity of waterways within the marshes. Danielle hopes it will inspire many Wayilwan people to consider having two-way knowledge, including cultural and western science, to carry on the legacy to protect and care for Country for the benefit of kin, Country, culture and future generations.

Session 2: Colonial Currents

Contending with and Contextualizing Currents of Colonialism on the Colorado Plateau

Erika Bsumek, University of Texas, Austin

This paper will explore how the history of the Colorado river is one that cannot be fully understood without first reckoning with Indigenous water use and the subsequent dispossession that was part and parcel of settler colonial ideas about resource extraction. Once we do that, we can see that the contemporary crisis on the Colorado River is neither shocking nor unexpected. From before the 1922 Colorado River Compact to the more recent negotiations about the Quadilateral Agreement, this paper will consider the role reframing the debate about riverhood might be a useful way forward.

Dr. Erika M. Bsumek is a Professor at the University of Texas at Austin. She writes and teaches about Native American history, environmental history, and the history of the U.S. West. She is the author of the award-winning, [*Indian-made: Navajo Culture in the Marketplace, 1848-1960*](#) (University Press of Kansas, 2008) and the coeditor of a collection of essays on global environmental history titled [*Nation States and the Global Environment: New Approaches to International Environmental History*](#) (Oxford University Press, 2013). Her most recent book explores the social and environmental history of the area surrounding Glen Canyon on the Utah/Arizona border from the 1840s to the present. It is titled [*The Foundations of Glen Canyon Dam: Infrastructures of Dispossession on the Colorado Plateau \(2023\)*](#). She is also the creator of [*ClioVis*](#), a digital history platform, and is the co-director of the [*Radical Hope Syllabus Project*](#) – a crowd sourced climate change curriculum.

Finding Time in the Barmah-Millewa Forest

Ruth Morgan, Australian National University

This paper considers the temporalities of an 80-km section of the River Murray that is inscribed in settler geographies as the 'Barmah Choke'. Through this narrow channel water flows from Bullatale Creek, about 26km downstream of Tocumwal, NSW, through the Barmah-Millewa Forest of river red gums and moira grass, to Barmah township in Victoria. For Yorta Yorta people, this section of the Murray is known as 'the narrows', more an observation than a judgement of its geomorphology and hydraulic capacity. Drawing on the work of environmental historian Ulrike Kirchberger on the biochronologies of trees, this paper proposes the complementary concept of hydrochronologies to understand the temporal meanings associated with this

stretch of the Murray and its flows. In studying 'the narrows' in the context of the area's changing social and economic histories, we see how water regulators, foresters and irrigators appealed to natural and seasonal climatic rhythms in order to normalise particular hydrochronologies of the Murray in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Associate Professor **Ruth Morgan** is the Director of the Centre for Environmental History at the Australian National University in Canberra. She has published extensively on the water and climate histories of Australia, the British Empire and the Indian Ocean world, including the co-authored book, *Cities in a Sunburnt Country: Water and the Making of Urban Australia*, published by Cambridge University Press in 2022. She was a Lead Author on the latest report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and her latest book is *Climate Change and International History: Negotiating Science, Global Change and Environmental Justice* (Bloomsbury, 2024).

Wednesday, April 10

Session 3: River Rights, Relationships and Responsibilities I

In conversation: Aimée Craft, Brittany Luby (University of Guelph) and Kabl Wilkerson (Harvard University)

Aimée Craft is an award-winning teacher and researcher, recognized internationally as a leader in the area of Indigenous laws, treaties and water. She holds a University Research Chair *Nibi miinawaa aki inaakonigewin: Indigenous governance in relationship with land and water*. In 2022 she was appointed to the Royal Society of Canada's College of New Scholars.

An Associate Professor at the Faculty of Common law, University of Ottawa and an Indigenous (Anishinaabe-Métis) lawyer from Treaty 1 territory in Manitoba, she is the former Director of Research at the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and the founding Director of Research at the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. She practiced at the Public Interest Law Centre for over a decade and in 2016 she was voted one of the top 25 most influential lawyers in Canada. In 2021 she was awarded the prestigious Canadian Bar Association President's Award and was named the Early Career Researcher of the Year Award at the University of Ottawa. In 2022, she was named to the Order of Ontario.

Prof. Craft prioritizes Indigenous-lead and interdisciplinary research, including through visual arts and film, co-leads a series of major research grants on *Decolonizing Water Governance* and works with many Indigenous nations and communities on Indigenous relationships with and responsibilities to *nibi* (water). She plays an active role in international collaborations relating to transformative memory in colonial contexts and relating to the reclamation of Indigenous birthing practices as expressions of territorial sovereignty.

Breathing Life Into the Stone Fort Treaty, her award-winning book, focuses on understanding and interpreting treaties from an Anishinaabe *inaakonigewin* (legal) perspective. *Treaty Words*, her critically acclaimed children's book, explains treaty philosophy and relationships.

She is past chair of the Aboriginal Law Section of the Canadian Bar Association and a current member of the Speaker's Bureau of the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba.

Dr. Brittany Luby, Anishinaabe-kwe, is an award-winning researcher who specializes in Crown-Indigenous relations. She is the recipient of the Governor General's History Award for Scholarly Research (2020), and

renowned for her skill at communicating across disciplinary and cultural divides. The Canadian Historical Association has described her research as “innovative in its structure and responsive to Indigenous research methodologies.” Luby’s expertise in Indigenous methods influences her teaching. She is an award-nominated educator known for engaging undergraduate students in experiential learning projects. Luby’s traditional academic work is complemented by experience working for First Nations to produce historical reports on Treaty Rights for court use. Her commitment to sharing Indigenous issues with diverse audiences has spurred creative outputs like art installations and children’s books. The Toronto Star notes that Luby’s work for children “models how to build love and respect.”

Kabl Wilkerson (they/them) is an enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation (Bourassa & Muller families; Bear Clan) and is a doctoral candidate in the History Department at Harvard University. Their scholarly interests examine the evolving contradictions in U.S Indian policy from the early nineteenth to the early twentieth centuries as shifting forms of imperial, state-building practices. Their dissertation highlights the imposition of federal definitions for tribal membership in federal Indian policy as an example of these practices and notes the way in which foreign observers took stock of these developments, primarily in Germany, as a source of validation of the continuities in U.S. imperial practice.

Kabl has also written and presented about Northeastern (Great Lakes) Indian Removal policy, practice, and resistance for the D’Arcy McNickle Center for American Indian and Indigenous Studies at the Newberry Library in Chicago and the Citizen Potawatomi Nation Cultural Heritage Center in Shawnee, Oklahoma, and maintains a collaborative, scholarly relationship with both institutions. In their free time, Kabl works on Bodéwadmik (Potawatomi) and Great Lakes Indian histories with other Neshnabé, non-Neshnabé, and non-native scholars, ranging from the early seventeenth to the mid-twentieth centuries.

Session 4: River Rights, Relationships and Responsibilities II

The dark side of rivers as rights bearing entities in Australia’s Murray-Darling Basin

Sue Jackson, Griffith University (presenting) and Sangeetha Chandrashekeran, University of Melbourne

Rivers have been granted legal personhood in Colombia, India, Ecuador, and Aotearoa (New Zealand). In Aotearoa, for example, the nation’s Parliament acknowledged the relational values and ontologies of Maori by conferring the Whanganui River as a subject of rights. A new legal entity was established as guardian of the entire river. The liberal rights-based celebration of riverhood has overshadowed a parallel, but highly relevant, development whereby the ‘environment’ has become a right bearing entity. In Australia, where rights-of-rivers case law has not developed, the environment’s right to water (to an environmental flow) has been legally recognized since the 1990s. The environment has been deemed a new water user under legal instruments designed to meet ecological imperatives.

In this paper we examine an insidious implication of this legal and policy recognition which has so far attracted little critical attention and is yet to be framed or analysed as an ontological issue. In administrative and technical decisions, as well as massive infrastructure schemes, the rivers and waterways of the Murray Darling Basin are being extended not just rights, but also the responsibilities and duties of subjects. A new ontology of water is emerging in which the (aquatic) environment holds the status of stakeholder - a consumer of water with a legal entitlement and, like other entitlement holders, this means it too must be efficient in using water. Water law and policy reforms in this economically productive agricultural region are directed towards saving water,

reducing 'losses', and achieving efficiency in water use, in a multi-billion-dollar inter-governmental sustainability strategy in which waterways are expected to perform as rational, economising subjects.

In this paper we will trace the rise over the past 30 years of an efficiency discourse that is rooted in the colonial anxiety about Nature's wastefulness, thereby deepening our understanding of the colonial history of legal personhood (cf. Rawson and Mansfield). We will show how engineering projects and water accounting schemes ostensibly designed to restore some rivers and waterbodies (while simultaneously continuing to extract value from their exploitation), are responsible for de-watering and wasting others. Our focus will be on the Murrumbidgee catchment where we will also describe the counterstrategies of Indigenous Traditional Owners.

The paper draws a connection between rights and responsibilities; liberalism and utilitarianism in resource management; and the risks, not just the emancipatory possibilities, of riverhood (Boelens et al. 2023) as a political strategy.

Sue Jackson is a professor of geography at the Australian Rivers Institute at Griffith University where she conducts research on water-society relations. She leads the Australian Research Council project, *Water Cultures of the Murray-Darling Basin*, with colleagues Lesley Head, Katie Holmes and Ruth Morgan, and the Social, Economic and Cultural Theme of the Commonwealth Government's Water and Environment Program in the Murray Darling Basin.

Sangeetha Chandrashekeran is a geographer at the University of Melbourne. She is Senior Research Fellow at the ARC Centre of Excellence on Children and Families over the Lifecourse, and the Indigenous Knowledge Institute.

Indigenous Nation (re)Building as Murrundi, the River Murray.

Daryle Rigney, University of Technology, Sydney

In settler-colonial situations such as Australia, where First Nations peoples are overwhelmingly subjected to the legal, political, socio-economic and cultural forms imposed by colonizing authorities, practices of Yannarumi, a Ngarrindjeri concept of acting lawfully as Country, define a distinctive quality of Aboriginal sovereignty. Here Ngarrindjeri articulate their sovereignty in relational terms of ecological and ontological interdependence. This paper explains the strategic political process of Indigenous Nation (re)building pursued by Ngarrindjeri leaders to reclaim political authority and justice for Murrundi, the River Murray in exercising their ongoing duty to, and responsibility for, protection of country. Ngarrindjeri leaders argue that the capacity to act as country is crucial for the health and well-being of Indigenous nations, whose identity and existence is inseparable from the health of the lands and waters.

Daryle Rigney is a citizen of the Ngarrindjeri nation located along the lower River Murray, Coorong and Lakes in South Australia. He is Professor and Director of Research in Jumbunna Indigenous Nation Building and Governance at the University of Technology Sydney.

Hiak Vatwe and Zuaque: Yoreme River Defense in Northwest Mexico

James Mestaz, Sonoma State University

This project uncovers an array of defense strategies against the loss of river rights employed by the three largest indigenous groups of northwest Mexico, the Mayo of Sinaloa, and Mayo and Yaqui of Sonora. These groups share a common language, affectionately refer to each other as siblings in that language (Yoreme in Sinaloa and Yoeme

in Sonora), and perform the same cultural/religious rituals such as the deer dance. Despite these similarities and over a century of pan-Yoreme military alliances generated up to the late 19th century, each group attempted to protect and reclaim their water rights in the early to mid-twentieth century in different ways. Such divergent strategies depended on local resources available to each group, but all reflected their reverence for their river system that served as the lifeblood of their cultures. Different, and sometimes contentious, approaches to securing water rights challenge the notion of indigenous community uniformity. The particularly unorthodox tactics used by some Yoreme individuals and villages further complicate the history of this region and questions the static conceptions of both indigenous stewardship and identity. Such case studies also help to provide a more complex picture of indigenous peoples' approach to the commodification of natural resources, as well as their changing relationship with a Mexican state undergoing profound change.

Dr. James Mestaz is an Assistant Professor of Latin American History at Sonoma State University. He previously taught at the University of Iowa, Claremont McKenna College, Harvard University, and Central State University. His courses focus largely on the histories of marginalized groups, allowing students to draw connections between past and current social and environmental justice struggles. This approach fits into his commitment to linking students to grassroots and community organizations in both the U.S. and Latin America. His recently published book *Strength from the Waters: A History of Indigenous Mobilization in Northwest Mexico is an Environmental and Ethnohistory that interrogates the historic connection between humans and water.*

Session 5: River Cultures II

Wasted Water or Water Wonderland? Imagining Hattah Lakes

Katie Holmes, Harvard University/La Trobe University

In the settler colony of Victoria, the Murray River makes its way through an area colonists named the 'Mallee'. As it does so, it feeds a large chain of lakes now known as Hattah Lakes. First Nations' stories of the area suggest that prior to European invasion it was populated by numerous Indigenous groups who lived around the lakes and the river, used it for meeting grounds, initiation sites, birthing places and burials. For settlers, in a region infamous for its semi-arid conditions, hot, dry summers and unvaried vegetation, the presence of abundant water prompted divergent imaginaries about the area. Engineer A.S. Kenyon and journalist 'Steel Blayde', advocated impounding the water of the Lakes, using it for irrigation and to support the project of the closer settlement of the inland. Above all, the water should not be 'wasted'. In contrast, the Field Naturalists, who delighted in the abundance of the non-human communities that the lakes sustained, believed that protecting the lakes and in particular the birdlife they supported, was paramount. This paper will explore these different imaginaries of the lakes and the river which supported them, the significance of climate in influencing these different visions, and the differing water cultures of the men who sought to shape the future of the lakes at a pivotal moment in their history. What experiences and ideas about 'riverhood' were reflected in these different water cultures? Drawing on Marco Armario's work on the Wasteocene, it will also consider what constituted 'waste' in settler-colonial responses to land and water.

At Katie Holmes' home university of La Trobe in Melbourne, she is Professor of History and Director of the Centre for the Study of the Inland. For the 2023-24 academic year she holds the Gough Whitlam and Malcolm Fraser Visiting Chair in Australian Studies at Harvard. Her work integrates environmental, gender, oral and cultural history and she has a particular interest in the interplay between an individual, their culture and environment. Her recent research is on the cultures of drought in regional Victoria, and water cultures and conflicts in Australia's Murray Darling Basin. Her books include Spaces in Her Day: Women's diaries of the

1920s-1930s (1995), *Between the Leaves: Stories of women, writing and gardens* (2011), and the co-authored *Mallee Country: land, people, history* (2020).

'Decorated with feeding egrets': Water flows, birds and people at Hattah Lakes

Karen Twigg, La Trobe University

How do both egrets and people respond to wetlands, especially when they are sometimes not wet but dry? Concentrating on a string of ephemeral wetlands known as Hattah Lakes and the decade of the 1950s, my paper demonstrates how water birds interacted with the Lakes' cycle of inundation and dry out while a primary focus on birdlife also shaped the quest of one man to understand its flows. As tourist priorities replaced bird-centric approaches in the 1960s, I explore how competing knowledge and relationships with the Lakes influenced how they were imagined and, in turn, managed. In doing so, I highlight the existence of the Lakes as far more than a simple chain of ephemeral water bodies but rather a complex entanglement of the human and more-than-human world.

Dr Karen Twigg is an environmental historian at La Trobe University's Centre for the Study of the Inland, with core interests in oral history, gender and rural settlement. Her current research centers on changing responses to drought, water and climate in regional Victoria and within the Murray Darling Basin.

Session 6: Knowing Rivers

The work it takes to meander; how river scientists talk about rivers

Lesley Head, University of Melbourne

River scientists have been important historical influences on riverhood in Australia, helping shape how rivers are imagined, understood and managed. This paper reports the findings from a set of interviews with senior river ecologists, geomorphologists and hydrologists. I explore how they think and talk about rivers, as they reflect on how their understandings have changed (or not) over the decades.

Professor Lesley Head FASSA FAHA DFIAG is a geographer whose research expertise is in human-environment relations, particularly the cultural dimensions of sustainability and climate change issues. She is Redmond Barry Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the University of Melbourne, where she continues to be involved in several ARC grants, including the Cultures of Water project. Lesley is the Immediate Past President of the Australian Academy of the Humanities.

Confluences: Rivers, history and community engagement in British Columbia

Matthew Evenden, University of British Columbia

How can river history and historiography enter into contemporary debates about place, belonging and river development? When is river history 'useful' for understanding the limits and opportunities of past experiences and for framing and imagining new possibilities? Taking up these questions in the context of three different community-engaged environmental humanities projects in which I participated, I consider the uses of history for building a context for community and public policy debate, deepening understandings about ignored historical narratives and fueling artistic creation. The first episode is a workshop convened in 2008 to consider the

prospect of a new dam development on the northern Peace River at Site C, the second a floating field trip down the Fraser River in the summer of 2019 to examine the historical landscape traces of Chinese settlement and indigenous interaction in the Fraser River gold rush, and the third an artistic collaboration and exhibit on the contested Columbia River. Each involved a range of academics and community members and wrestled with questions of colonialism, extractivism and modernity. My interest and involvement was educational and aimed at stimulating wider discussion and debate about important matters of public memory and public policy. In comparing and contrasting these episodes, I will consider how a contested river lay at the center of each, and how different communities generated ways to discuss and interpret river history in and for the present. Finally, I will reflect on some of the ways in which these engagements challenged my own assumptions about river history.

Matthew Evenden is Associate Vice-President, Research & Innovation and Professor of Geography at the University of British Columbia. A specialist in environmental history and historical geography, his research examines how human communities perceive, develop and contest rivers and waters. Some of his major publications include *Fish versus Power: An Environmental History of the Fraser River* (2004), *The River Returns: An Environmental History of the Bow* (2009) with Christopher Armstrong and H.V. Nelles, and *Allied Power: Mobilizing Hydro-Electricity during Canada's Second World War* (2015).

Thursday, April 11

Session 7: Riverhoods

Mountain-Rooted Riverhoods: A Watershed Walk through Forests and Floods in Appalachian History

Kathryn Newfont, University of Kentucky

The Appalachian mountain chain serves as headwater region for many of eastern North America's rivers, and nearly all in the eastern United States. By creating the Eastern continental divide, these mountains also delineate and designate riverhoods. The highlands determine which waters will flow to the Atlantic Ocean and which will go to the Gulf of Mexico via the vast Mississippi River system. It is therefore necessary to attend to these mountains and to the native forests that swathe them—the most biodiverse temperate forests on earth—in order to understand major North American riverhoods, including giants such as the Ohio. Eastern U.S. flood history clearly demonstrates links between upstream forest damage and downstream ills including human suffering and ecological impoverishment. Seen through historical lenses, mountains and forests clearly emerge as crucial to “riverhood,” and major rivers in eastern North America prove to be “rooted” in at least two senses. First, in a system echoing tree structure, mountains provide the spring-fed capillary “roots” that feed tributary creek “branches,” which in turn merge to form the large-water “trunks” known as rivers. Second, healthy native Appalachian forests have tremendous water retention capacity, especially though not only in their roots. They store water in soils, mosses, trees, and other forest components, thereby keeping waters “rooted” and effectively mitigating both drought and flood. Trouble in these roots spells trouble throughout a riverhood, as this presentation will demonstrate through a brief exploration of Appalachian forest and flood history in the past two centuries.

Kathryn Newfont studies forest history in North America's Appalachian mountain region. Her research documents and analyzes forest commons systems and commons-based forest protection efforts using a combination of oral history, archival sources, and evidence from lands and ecologies. Her first book, *Blue Ridge*

Commons: Environmental Activism and Forest History in Western North Carolina (UGA Press, 2012), won the Appalachian Studies Association's 2012 Weatherford Award for Non-Fiction and the 2012 Thomas Wolfe Memorial Literary Award. She is co-editor with Debbie Lee of *The Land Speaks: Voices at the Intersection of Oral and Environmental History* (Oxford, 2017). At the University of Kentucky, where she is Associate Professor of History, she works closely with the Kentucky Climate Consortium, the UK Appalachian Center, the Appalachian Studies Program, the Commonwealth Institute for Black Studies, and the Environment and Sustainability Program. She has held fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Mellon Foundation, and the U.S. Forest Service Grey Towers Historic Site. Her current project focuses on "the Monongahela case," a landmark federal suit brought by West Virginians that changed U.S. national forest management policy in the 1970s and continues to shape it—as well as North America's capacity for climate resiliency—in the present day.

Rivers and Red Gums: 'Leaky places' and settler riverhood in and around the Barmah Forest

Jess Urwin, Australian National University

Australia's Barmah Forest is an historically contested place. What remains of this once-mighty forest is sustained by waters escaping at the Barmah 'choke', the narrowest section of the Murray-Darling Basin system. Since the mid-nineteenth century, settlers have sought to contain the waters lost to the forest's river redgums in this 'leaky place', a place where not just water, but river boundaries, river relations, and river imaginaries have proven difficult to contain (O'Gorman, 2022). Applying Emily O'Gorman's theory of 'leaky places' to the Barmah Forest, this paper will explore how the Murray River's 'leakiness' at its narrowest point has historically influenced settler riverhood in and around the region's famous river redgums. I show that the forest was at once considered part of the river and entirely separate to it. Similarly, the forest's revered river redgums are fundamental to settlers' conceptualisation of the riverhood of the region, and have variously been considered a direct impediment to it. Considering the Barmah Forest as a leaky place thus illuminates the contradictions of settler riverhood in Australia while highlighting the integral role of the more-than-human in shaping settler riverhood.

Jess Urwin is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at La Trobe University working on the Murray-Darling Water and Environment Research Program project 'Navigating Change' and a research assistant on the ARC Linkage project 'Water Cultures of the Murray Darling Basin'. Her research expertise and interests sit at the intersection of environmental history and histories of settler colonialism, and her award-winning doctoral research explored the environmental justice concept of 'nuclear colonialism' in Australian contexts.

Riverhood Comes and Goes: Alabama's Saugahatchee Creek, 1870-2020

Christopher Morris, University of Texas at Arlington

This presentation takes the concept of riverhood, defined by the OED as "the state of being a river," and redefines it somewhat by blending it with the more familiar concept of neighborhood, defined by the OED as "A district or portion of a town, city, or country, esp. considered in reference to the character or circumstances of its inhabitants." For centuries, the Saugahatchee Creek in the southeastern corner of Tallapoosa County, Alabama, defined the character and circumstances of the people who lived there, just as their activities in turn shaped the Saugahatchee's state of being a river, and thus we have a "riverhood." My presentation examines

“riverhood” along the Saugahatchee, from its heyday as a cotton planting, ginning, and milling center at the end of the nineteenth century, to its present state as a rewilded, reclaimed, and largely depopulated space.

The Saugahatchee figured into indigenous histories that preceded the integration of this part of North America into the United States. Indigenous histories are recalled today in the name, Saugahatchee, which is Muskogean and means something like rattling creek, for its sound as it flowed through the rocky hills in this portion of Alabama. The Creek people who settled here, forming the area’s first “riverhood,” became known as Saugahatchee Creeks. Epidemics in the wake of Hernando de Soto and other Spanish invasions led to massive depopulation. Sometime later, the Creeks returned to the Saugahatchee, and there they grappled with English and French, and eventually, United States invasions.

My perspective on Saugahatchee riverhood will center primarily on the life and experiences of a Black Alabama cotton farmer, Ned Cobb. In Cobb’s lifetime this stream flowed by his home on its way to the Tallapoosa River. Cobb saw it transformed from a source of food (fish and game) into a sewer for agricultural and industrial runoff. It was always a landmark. People said they lived on Saugahatchee Creek, so-and-so lived near it, on one side or the other, and which side mattered. Cobb fished the creek. He ginned cotton, cut lumber, and ground grain at mills powered by the river. Neighbors baptized neighbors in Saugahatchee Creek. Tragically, some drowned in the creek, usually while fishing carelessly. Topsoil from Cobb’s farm ran into the creek, darkening its water. Indeed, in the 1930s, federal government agents designated the land in this region of Alabama as severely eroded. When Cobb died in 1973, agriculture along the Saugahatchee was dying too, as were many of the industries that were supposed to replace agriculture. Recent decades have seen the area’s transition to an economy based on health and education centered in the growing city of Auburn. Urban and suburban growth has kindled interest in river restoration. But far fewer people actually live on the river, and fewer still work the river, and this raises questions about the relationship between people and rivers, and whether there can be “riverhood” without people.

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