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"Wild and Scenic Wasteland: Conservation Politics in the Nuclear Wilderness"

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Nuclear weapons production has created a unique geography of irradiated open space in the United States. In recent years, many of these landscapes have been re-classified as national wildlife refuges in an attempt to transform the nation's atomic sacrifice zones into spaces of environmental salvation. However, these areas are also home to contaminated biota that migrate beyond refuge boundaries, inspiring biological vector control campaigns that frame nuclear nature as a threat that must be contained. How can these environments simultaneously embody ruin and redemption, and what work does this constitutive contradiction do? In this article, I explore the slippery subjectivities of nuclear waste and nature at Washington State's Hanford Nuclear Reservation. Beginning with the Hanford Reach National Monument, I examine how this space is framed as both pristine habitat and waste frontier. Next, I consider how Hanford's biological vector control program addresses the spread of radioactive flora and fauna. Looking specifically at one of the site's most notorious offenders (the fruit fly), I discuss how vector control uses instances of nuclear trespass to articulate the boundary between contaminated and uncontaminated. Finally, by examining the dual production of nature as both untouched wilderness and biological vector, I consider how this slippage between pure and polluted has been employed in the service of nuclear industry. I argue that in its doubling, nature is being recruited to do what the U.S. Department of Energy cannot: to solve Hanford's nuclear waste problem. (Text from author's abstract)

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