

George Marsh
Excerpt from his 1847 address
to the Agricultural Society of Rutland County

Background for the children:

John Muir loved the wilderness. He valued the Earth in its original form, and believed it was important to keep as many places possible wild and free from pollution or the harms of mining and logging. Many others shared then and today his love for wild places, for nature that is undisturbed by humans.

Some people then and now, however, do not share this love for wild places. They believed, and believe now, that when the Earth is left wild it goes to waste. They believe there is no value or beauty in wilderness. We have a speech that one such person made long, long ago, more than one hundred and fifty years ago, in 1847. In this speech, George Marsh said this about humans and the Earth:

“In North America...civilization was brought to bear at once on a desert continent, and it has been but the work of a day to win empires from the wilderness...This marvelous change...has converted unproductive wastes into fertile fields, and filled with light and life the dark and silent ...aboriginal forests and mountains.”

Questions for students:

- What did George Marsh mean by “unproductive wastes”? (Wilderness)
- John Muir believed wild places were wonderful places to walk and camp-out. What do you think George Marsh believed wild places were good for? (Mining, logging, farming.)