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978-1-107-04334-3 - Forests in Revolutionary France: Conservation, Community, and Conflict, 1669–1848

Kieko Matteson

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Forests in Revolutionary France

This book investigates the economic, strategic, and political importance of forests in early modern and modern Europe and shows how struggles over this vital natural resource both shaped and reflected the ideologies and outcomes of France's long revolutionary period. Until the mid-nineteenth century, wood was the principal fuel for cooking and heating, the primary material for manufacturing worldwide, and the basis for nearly every element of industrial, domestic, military, and maritime activity. Forests also provided essential pasturage. These multifaceted values made forests the subject of ongoing battles for control between the crown, landowning elites, and peasantry, for whom liberty meant preserving their rights to woodland commons.

Focusing on Franche-Comté, an eastern province of France, the book explores the fiercely contested development of state-centered conservation and management from 1669 to 1848. In emphasizing the environmental underpinnings of France's seismic sociopolitical upheavals, it appeals to readers interested in revolution, rural life, and common-pool-resource governance.

Kieko Matteson is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Her dissertation received the American Society for Environmental History's Rachel Carson Prize and Yale University's Henry A. Turner Prize for outstanding work in European history.

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University of Hawai'i at Mānoa



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1669 Ordinance in
Isambert, vol. 18

Édit portant règlement général pour les Eaux et Forêts, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, 31 août 1669. Edict no. 571; reprinted in François-André Isambert, Athanase-Jean-Léger Jourdan (Decrusy), and Alphonse-Honoré Taillandier, eds., *Recueil général des anciennes lois françaises, depuis l'an 420 jusqu'à la Révolution de 1789.* 29 vols. (Paris, Belin-Leprieur, 1821–33), 18:219–311.

AD Doubs

Archives départementales du Doubs, Besançon

ADHS

Archives départementales de la Haute-Saône, Vesoul

ADJ

Archives départementales du Jura, Montmorot

AN

Archives nationales, Paris

AP 1ère série, AP 2ème
série

Archives parlementaires de 1787 à 1860: Recueil complet des débats législatifs et politiques des chambres françaises, imprimé par ordre du corps législatif sous la direction de mm. J. Mavidal et E. Laurent. Première série (1787 à 1799), 82 vols.; Deuxième série (1800 à 1860), 127 vols. (Paris, 1867–1913). Jacques-Joseph Baudrillart, *Traité général des eaux et forêts, chasses et pêches*, part 1, tome 1, *Recueil chronologique des réglemens forestiers: contenant les ordonnances, édits et déclarations des rois de France; les arrêts du conseil et des cours souveraines; les lois, arrêtés du gouvernement, décrets, ordonnances du roi, arrêts de la Cour de Cassation,*

Baudrillart, *Recueil
chronologique*, tome 1

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- décisions ministérielles, circulaires et instructions administratives* (Paris: Imprimerie de Madame Huzard, 1821). (Note: Baudrillart initially intended the *Recueil* as one volume of the planned four-volume *Traité général des eaux et forêts, chasses et pêches*, but the work evolved into a five-volume work unto itself. To avoid confusion with the volume numbering of the *Traité*, I use “tome” to refer to the *Recueil* volumes.)
- Baudrillart, *Recueil chronologique*, tome 3
Jacques-Joseph Baudrillart, *Traité général des eaux et forêts, chasses et pêches*, part 1, tome 3, *Recueil chronologique des réglemens sur les forêts, chasses et pêches, contenant les lois, ordonnances royales, arrêts de la Cour de Cassation, décisions ministérielles, et les circulaires et instructions administratives* (Paris: Imprimerie de Madame Huzard, 1824). (See note on preceding item.)
- Duvergier, *Collection complète des lois*
J. B. Duvergier, ed., *Collection complète des lois, décrets, ordonnances, réglemens, avis du Conseil-d’Etat, publiée sur les éditions officielles du Louvre, de l’Imprimerie nationale, par Baudouin; et du Bulletin des lois; de 1788 à 1830 inclusivement, par ordre chronologique*, 2nd ed., 30 vols. (Paris: Chez A. Guyot et Scribe, 1834–38).
- JHS
Journal de la Haute-Saône, conservative newspaper of the Haute-Saône, 1848, 1852.

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Preface and Acknowledgments

Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offence.

Robert Frost, "Mending Wall," 1914¹

This book has its origins in Vermont, where for generations my family owned an eighteenth-century farmhouse and several hundred acres of surrounding fields and forest. By the time I appeared on the scene, it was no longer a working enterprise – it housed no animals, other than the woodchucks and chipmunks that lived under the outbuildings, and it grew no commercial crops. Instead, my parents and sisters and I traveled the ten miles from town every weekend to stay overnight, trundle about in the woods, and, in summer months, coax vegetables from the stony soil of our enormous garden.

It was there that I gained an early appreciation for the concept of customary usage and the idea of land as a resource that cannot, and ought not, be possessed exclusively. In the fall, around the time the sugar maples' reds and golds had faded to brown and the "leaf-peepers" had headed back to points south, men dressed in orange vests and camouflage pants would begin appearing at the edge of our meadow, pausing for a cursory wave before trudging, rifles in hand, up the logging road and into the woods. Their cars, large sedans with out-of-state plates, often parked in ways that blocked our egress, underscored their outsider status. My sisters and I would suspend whatever we were doing – digging

¹ Robert Frost, "Mending Wall," in *The Poetry of Robert Frost* (New York: Macmillan, 1979), 34.

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potatoes or hauling the last of the winter squash – and tepidly return the men’s salute. For us, hunting season meant six weeks of avoiding the woods and dressing in bright orange, lest we be mistaken for a whitetail deer. We had heard the stories – a girl in Maine had been shot in her own yard because she was wearing white mittens. What we resented as perilous trespass, however, was to our father a time-honored tradition. Each time we demanded to know why these intruders were allowed on our property, he would reply in august tones, “our land is not posted” – referring to the small white notices that dotted the property lines of other farms around the county and warned hunters, fishers, and trappers to stay away. Posting, he asserted, was inconsistent with the “neighborly use of private land” that had long characterized the region. “As long as they’re not hurting anything or making any messes up there,” he would add, gesturing to the mountain behind the farm, “they can come.”

No doubt the deer that we saw browsing the meadow’s edge in the frosty mornings would have begged to differ with my father’s concept of “not hurting anything.” And I, for one, remained skeptical of his benevolence toward these strangers, who littered the woods with beer cans and snuff tins and kept us from our rambles during the best season of the year. Still, the message took hold. Legal formalities aside, every property is subject to overlapping interests and competing claims, to assertions expressed through a wall or a wave, and to needs that fluctuate with the passage of time. Just as surely as we accepted that by planting a garden we played host to pollinators and pests, so too our status as the farm’s titular landowner in no way invalidated its appeal to others. Instead, we learned to raise our hand in greeting to the hunters, hikers and dirt bikers, in the hopes that when it was our turn to cross their properties, they would do the same. In this same spirit of *quid pro quo*, we welcomed (albeit more enthusiastically) the maple sugar man in March, who tapped our trees in exchange for two gallons of syrup, and the mowing-machine guys in August, who kept our meadows open in return for hay they cut.

My youthful awareness that the land was not ours alone to possess was eventually rendered manifest in my father’s decision to sell it – woodlot by woodlot, meadow by meadow – to pay off property taxes and accumulated debts. Today, he is the uninvited guest on the farm, tottering in his nonagenarian dotage across Vermont’s last remaining unposted parcels in search of half-recollected memories and places from long ago.

Though personally painful, the loss of the farm was not entirely unexpected. The fleeting nature of our and our ancestors’ presence had been

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apparent wherever I looked – in the decrepit stone walls surrounding the stagheaded old sugar bush; in former pastures overgrown with beech and hemlock; and in the ancient, caved-in sheep dip on the hillside, where unwilling ovines were once plunged in a chemical cocktail to rid their fleece of ticks and which had since become home to a horde of ground-dwelling critters. These traces of past possessors, and evidence of their replacement and succession, made clear to me in a way no textbook ever could that ecosystems are dynamic and our place within them transient. At the same time, they raised lingering questions about how people adapt and transform the land to serve their needs, how different stakeholders accommodate each other or remain at variance, and how these interests play out in policy and practice. Those questions formed the seedbed of my later research.

This path from recreational avocation to intellectual vocation may seem a winding one. Vermont is a far cry geographically and temporally from France's sanguinary struggles over natural resources in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nonetheless, for me, the history of forest conservation and customary rights in the revolutionary era that I first became interested in as an undergraduate resonates deeply with the larger questions of access, exploitation, and transformation that were piqued long ago on our family farm. As you will see in the story that follows, peasant communities and practitioners of customary rights, denounced as malefactors by state, industrial, and private landowner interests, succeeded in the long run through tenacity, wiliness, and sheer violence in retaining significant control over their forests – though not before it had ceased to be the most critical element of their everyday survival. Like the moss-covered stone walls that I clambered over in my childhood – barriers delineating practices that no longer took place – communal possession and customary rights in France persist today in a substantially altered ecological and economic context. Understanding this struggle for control, its stakes and evolution – as well as, indirectly, its implications for a future filled with looming and increasingly dire natural resource challenges – is the aim of this book.

In the course of working on this absurdly protracted project – a *longue durée* effort in every sense of the term – I have accumulated an enormous debt of gratitude to many people and institutions. I am grateful for the opportunity to finally be able to thank them. First and foremost, I salute the Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, especially Christof Mauch and

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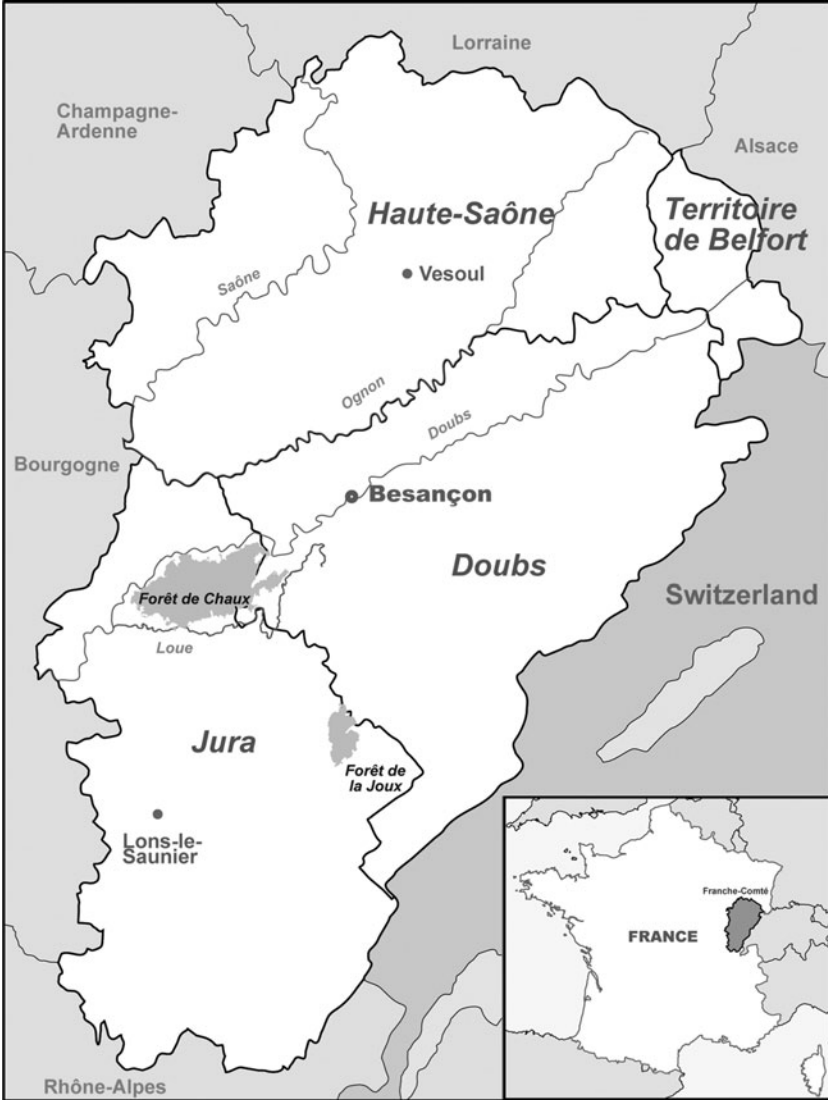
Many people read and commented on the manuscript at different stages. Starting midalphabet and scattering forward, then backward, in the same way that I read novels, I thank for their invaluable insights Peter McPhee, John Merriman, Jeremy Popkin, Naoko Shibusawa, Mari Yoshihara, Laura Lyons, Cindy Franklin, Robert Harms, Monisha Das Gupta, William Beik, David A. Bell, and Ellen F. Arnold. For their patience and faith in the project, I thank my editors, Donald Worster, John McNeill, Edmund Russell, and Deborah Gershenowitz. For inimitable support and reflection on concerns related to the book and otherwise, I am inexpressibly grateful to Frank Zelko, Linda Lierheimer, Matthew Lauzon, Marcus Daniel, Vina Lanzona, Demetria Koninis-Washburn, Andrée Collier, Yuma Totani, Jacqueline Wah, and Winston Welch. For introducing me to France in indelible travels in their Volkswagen camper, I thank Brenda, Ed, and Ursula Owre. For inspiring me to think about ecology and conservation, I thank Mollie Matteson. For their companionship in work and play, I thank all of my sisters, especially Ruth Banchik. For my education, I thank my parents, Mary and Bob Matteson. Angela Kaufman and Xioayan Zuo helped me carve out writing time while my daughters were young; now my daughters are old enough to appreciate a dedication. Amika and Riya, this book is for you.

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Franche-Comté

1 Franche-Comté: Political

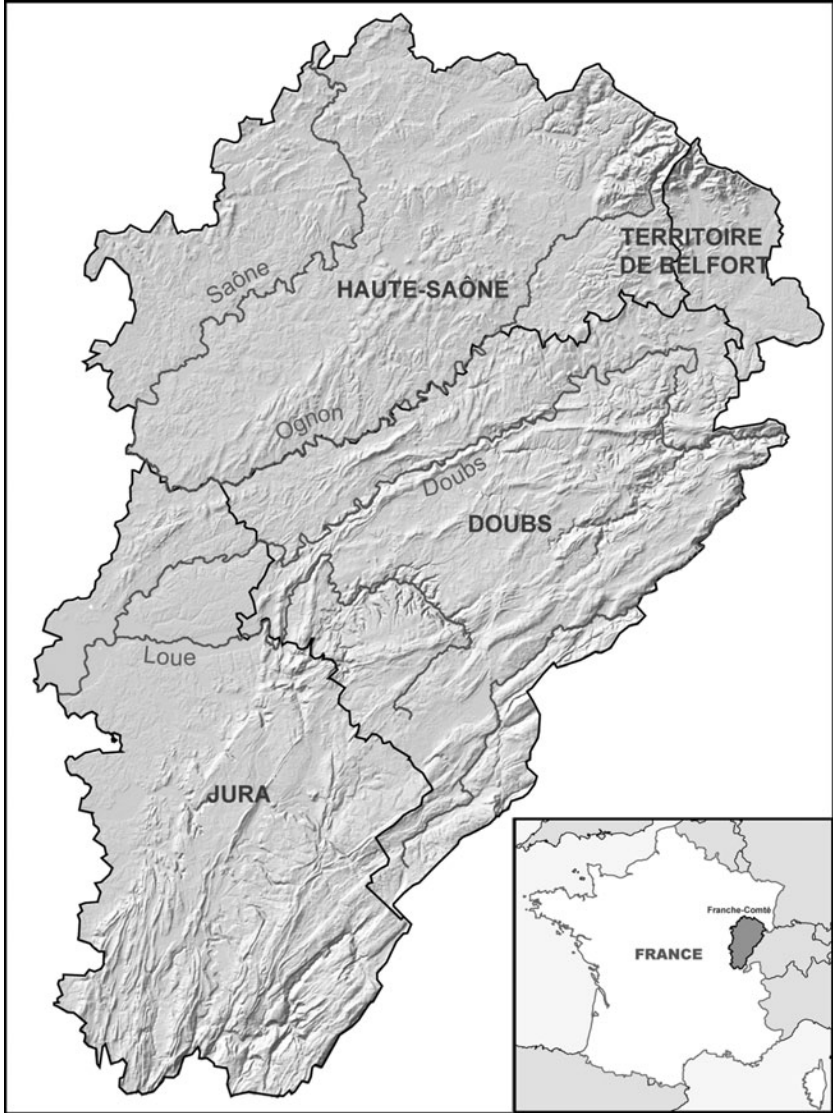
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2 Franche-Comté: Physical

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