



HUNTINGTON LECTURE SERIES

AN UNCOMFORTABLE WILDERNESS

BLACK FLIES AND BELONGING IN THE ADIRONDACKS

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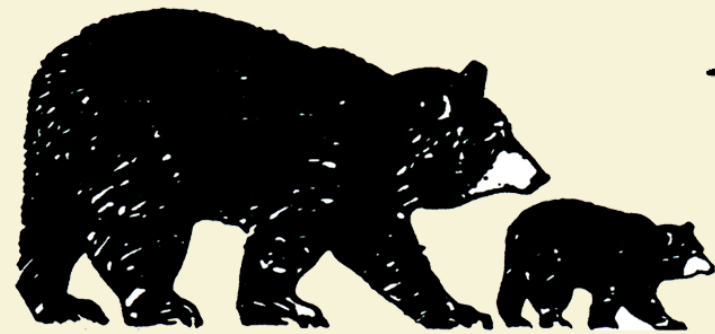
HELLO!



- SU Geography Department
- Lifelong love of ADKs
- Dissertation: *Forever Wildlife: A Cultural History of the Adirondack Animals*
- Peter C. Welsh Research Fellowship, Adirondack Experience Museum

The Adirondack Park

ANIMALS, WILDERNESS, AND THE STORIES THAT CONNECT US



**LONG
LAKE**



**RAQUETTE
LAKE**



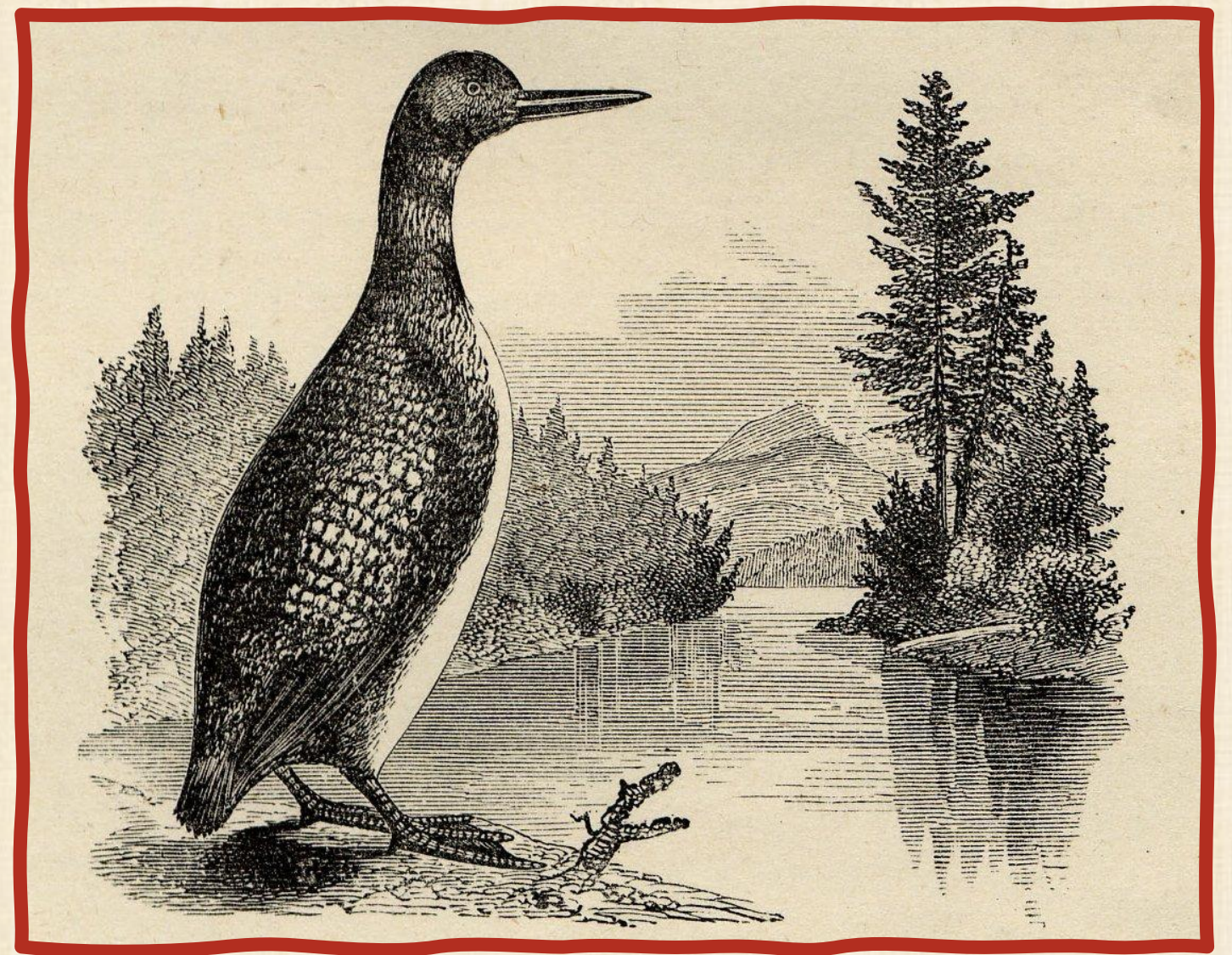


BLACK BEARS



Bear at ESF Newcomb, taken Sept 2025

COMMON LOONS



**BROOK
LAKE
RAINBOW
BROWN**

TROUT





The Fly



- Beliefs about wilderness
- Social hierarchies
- Involuntary intimacy
- Negotiating belonging

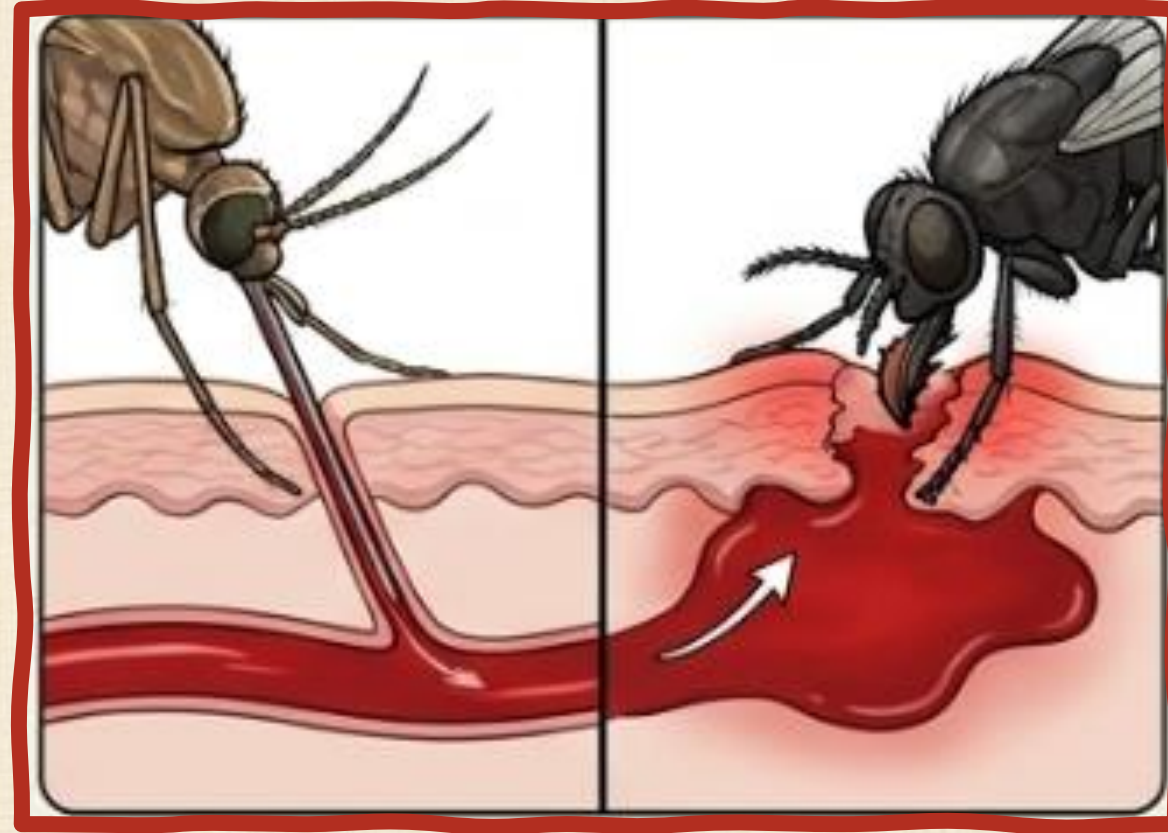
THE FLY ITSELF



“

From dawn until dusk, except in bright sunlight, swarms of them fly about your head and get into your eyes, ears, nose and mouth. The females suck blood and inject a poison which raises big welts that itch and ooze for days, usually on the back of your hands and neck.

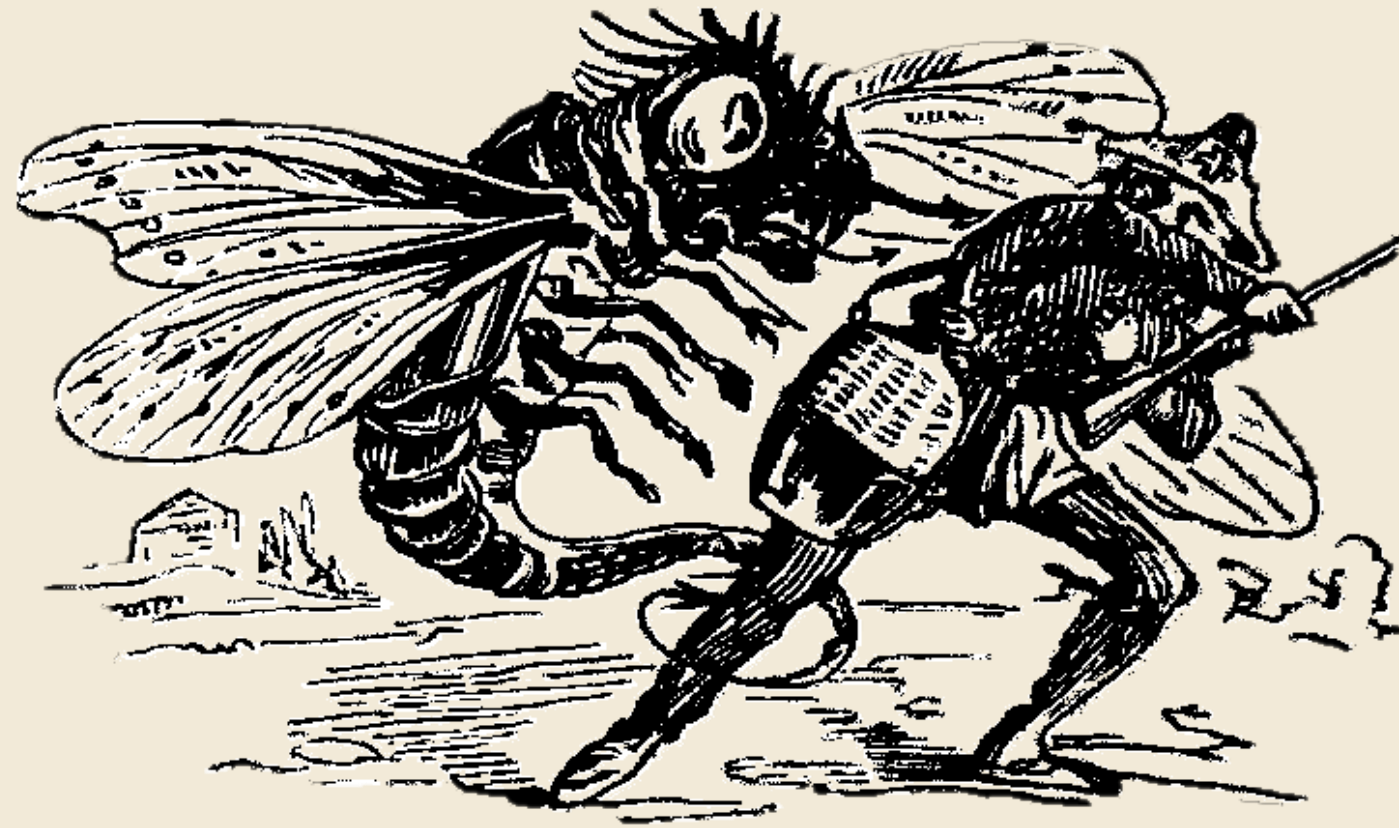
— 1958 Nature Bulletin





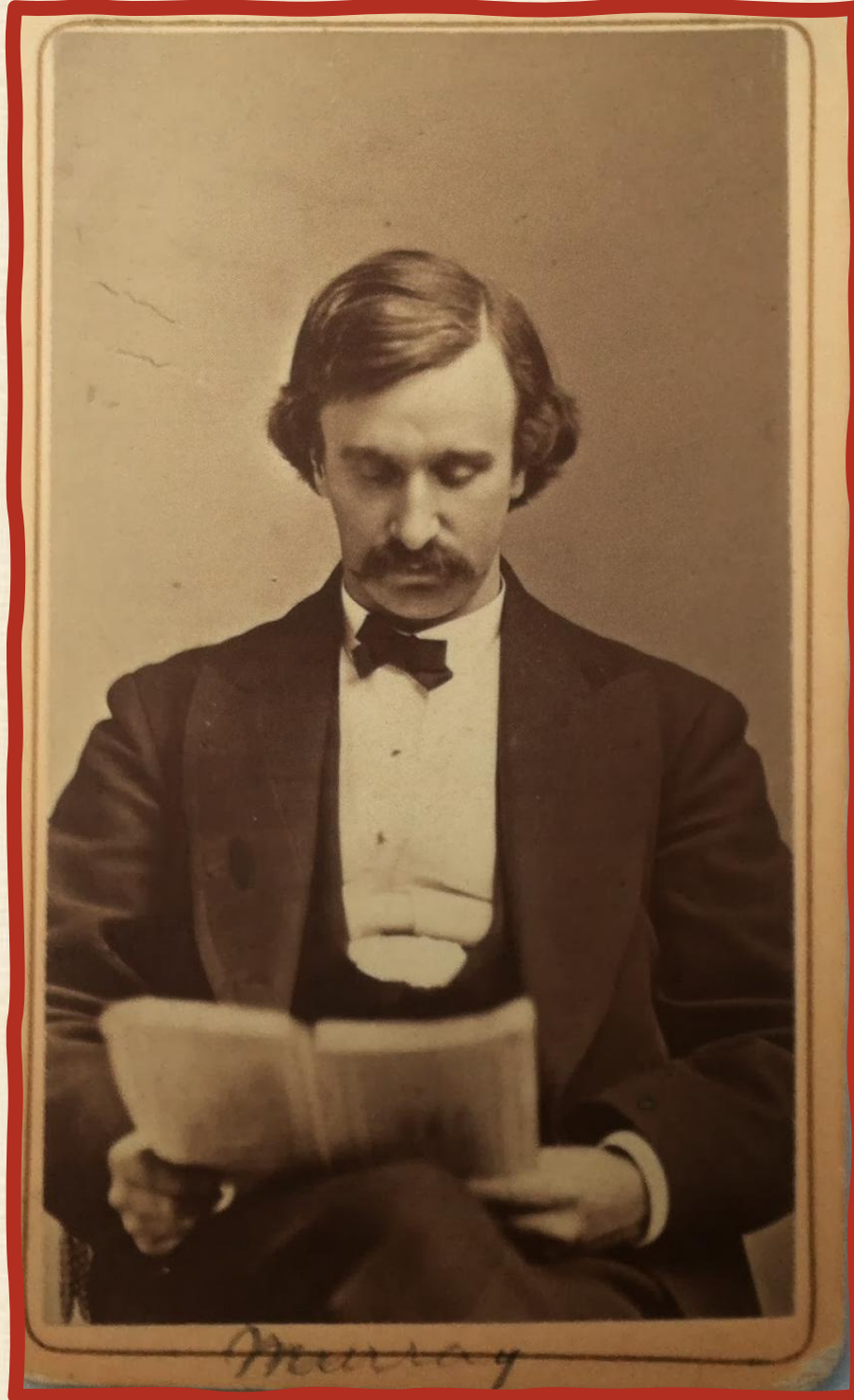
ECOLOGICAL VALUE





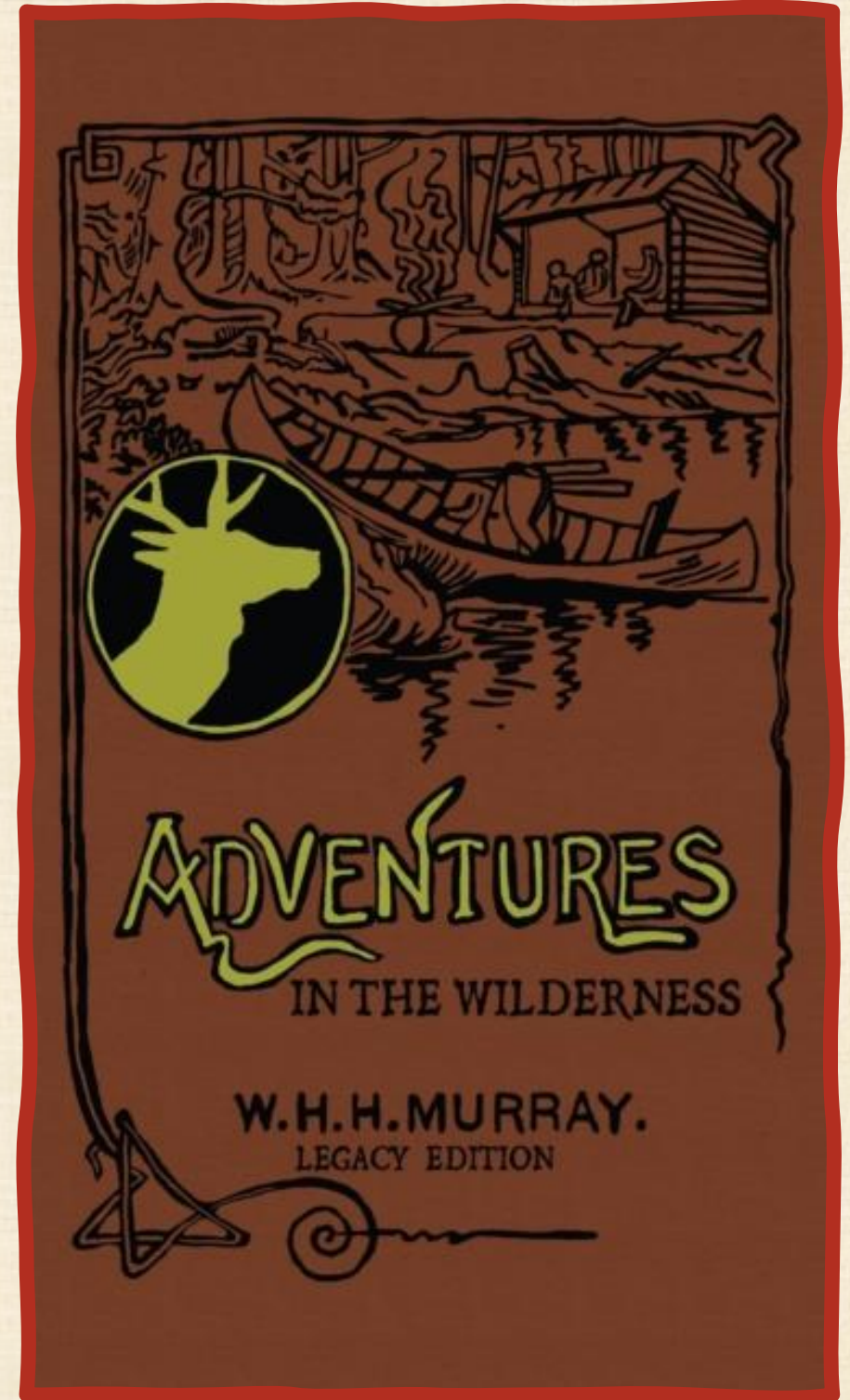
Tourists and Brokers

MARKETING AN UNCOOPERATIVE WILDERNESS



William H.H. Murray

- *Adventures in the Wilderness; or, Camp-Life in the Adirondacks*, 1869
- "Murray's Rush"
- Downplayed flies
- Flexible schedules



**“Mr. Murray makes light
of these insect pests.”**

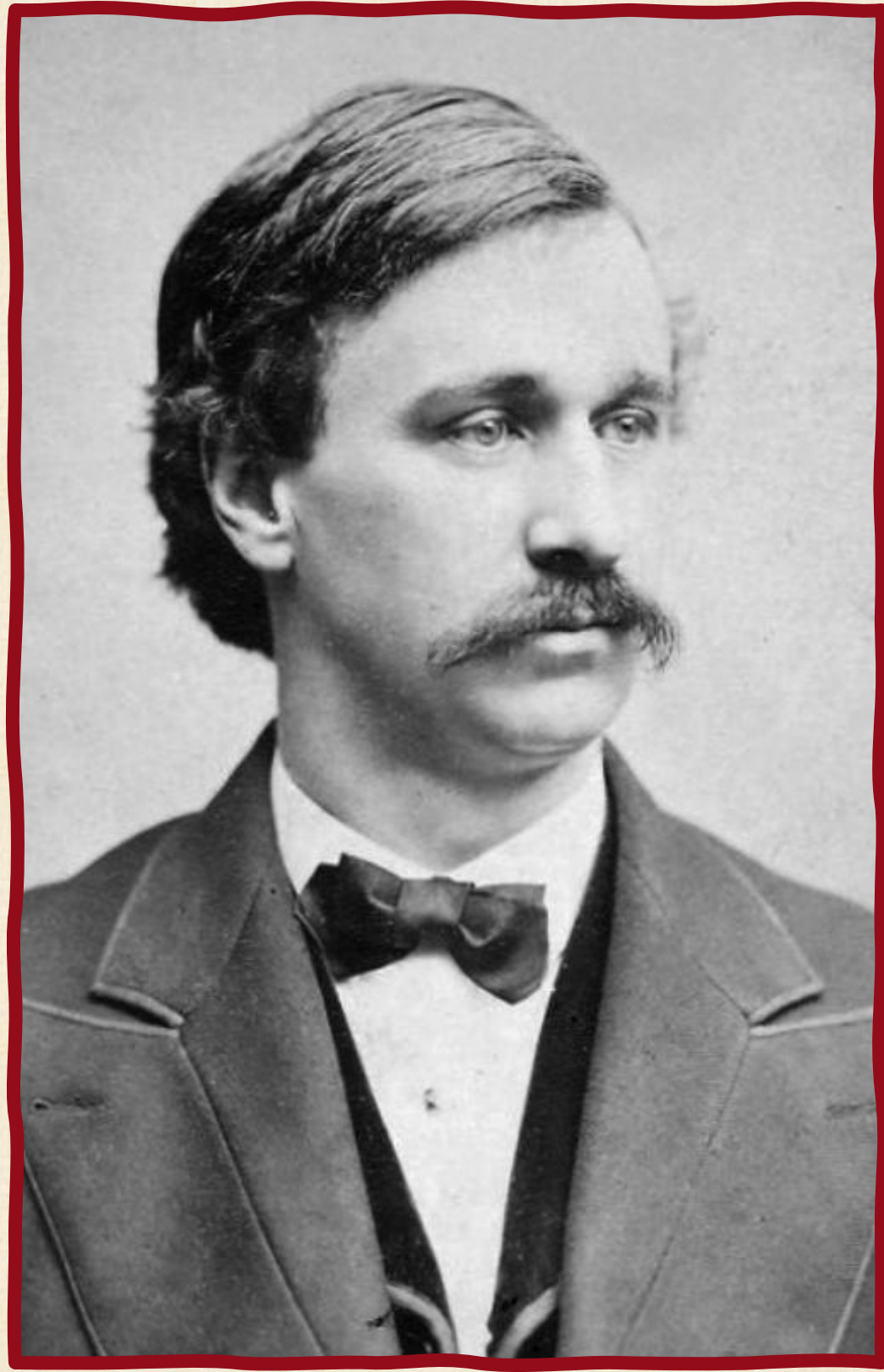


“I have heard of a
gentleman...who
discharged his guide
after five days and sped
back to the city to tell
how a revered author had
gulled him and the
public.”

“Wachusett”, 1869

“

“I will speak of these and other nuisances before I close, in order to state the exact truth in reference to subject concerning which newspaper and magazine writers have given the public an **erroneous impression**. The spirit of exaggeration, and the necessity of ‘getting up a good article,’ have contributed to the dissemination of ‘anecdotes’ and ‘experiences’ which are the **merest balderdash imaginable**... I regard it as one of the **most harmless and least vexatious** of the insect family. For five years my wife and self have camped in the wilderness; we have traversed it near and far, sleeping where the night found us, but we have never been, to any extend worth mentioning, disturbed by its presence. The **black fly**, as pictured by ‘our Adirondack correspondent,’ like the Gorgon of old, is a myth,--a monster existing only in men’s feverish imaginations.”



DENY AND DOWNPLAY



1888

THE ADIRONDACK RAILWAY

ALONG THE UPPER HUDSON
TO LUZERNE, SCHROON
LAKE,

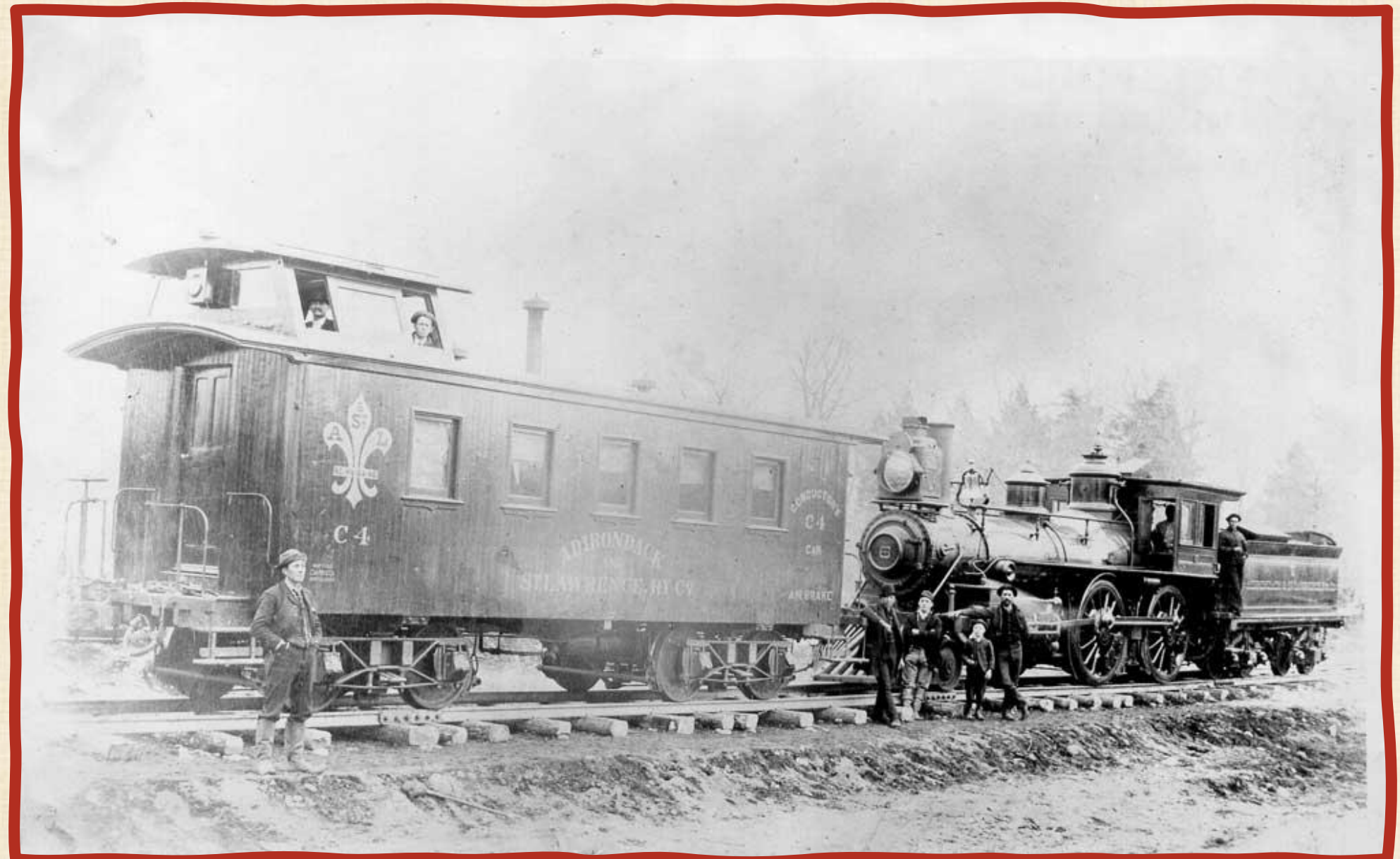


BLUE MOUNTAIN LAKE,
LONG LAKE,
RAQUETTE LAKE,
TUPPER LAKES,
M^Y MARCY, INDIAN PASS

JUNE 25, 1888 G.C. & C. & C.

1880s-1900 travel opened remote areas and created markets

NEW TOURISM, NEW INDUSTRY



TROUT FISHING

VS

FLY SEASON



“

“You can never enjoy the perfection of fly-fishing unless you endure the torment of black flies.”

TWO-TIER TOURISM SEASON





STORY 1: THE FLY AND THE TOURIST

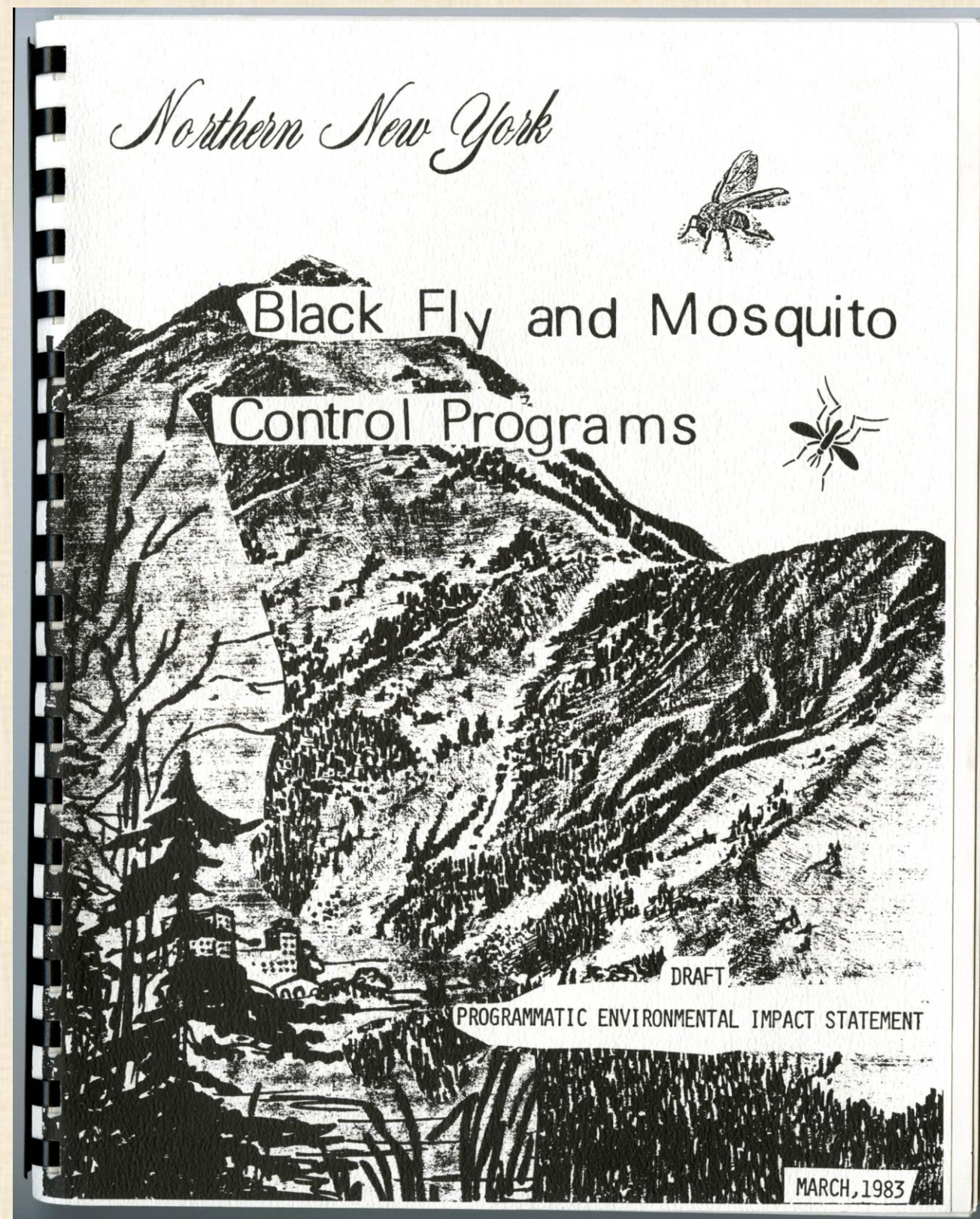


- Denial
- Deferral
- Marketable
narratives
- Individual
burden



MANAGING THE UNMANAGABLE

The State & The Conservationist



STATE CONTROL & SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH



**Adirondack
Park Agency**

CHEMICAL WARFARE

- Methoxychlor
- Dibrom-14
- Dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane
(DDT)

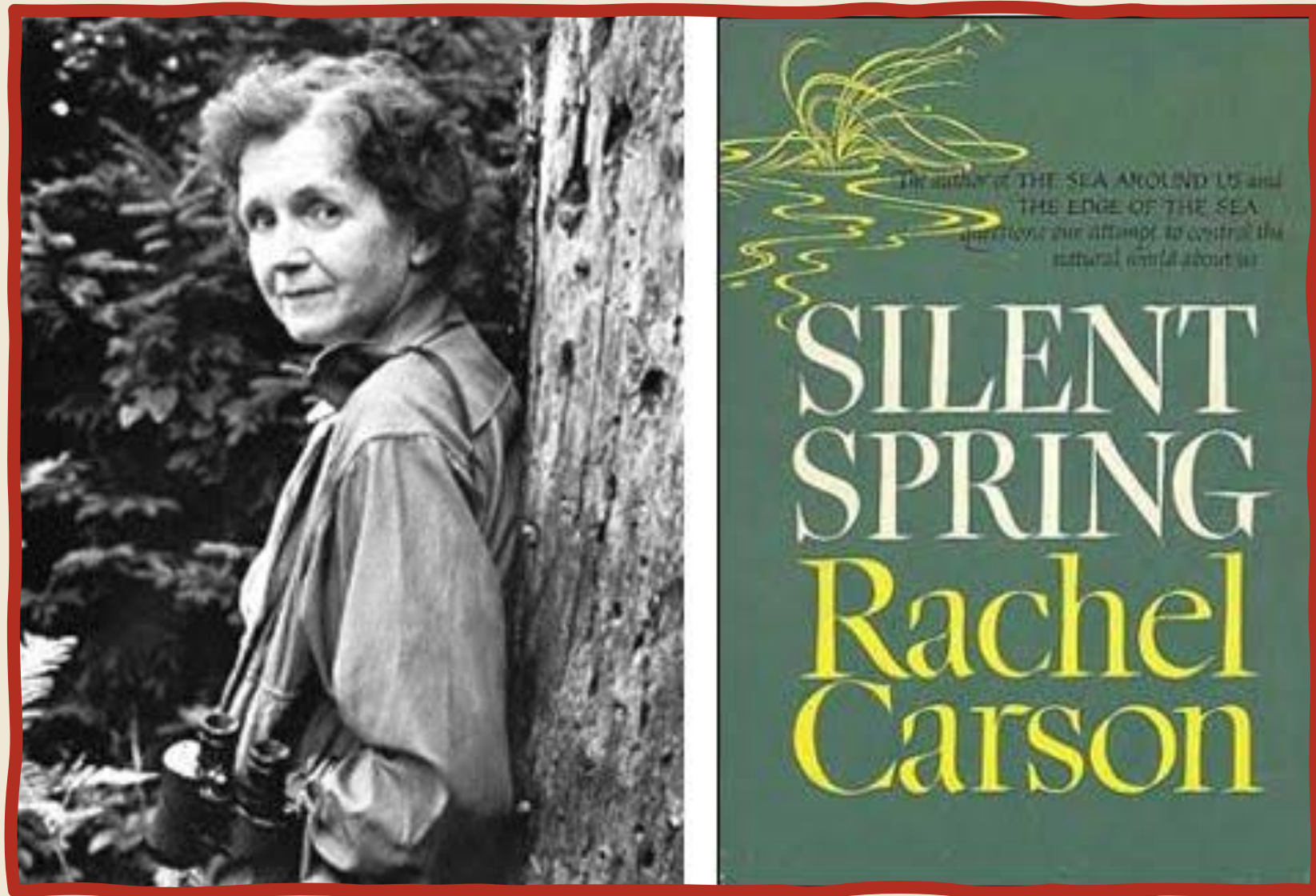


JEFFREY DUFLO



- Patented spraying technology
- Twin engine plane
- Regional insect suppression

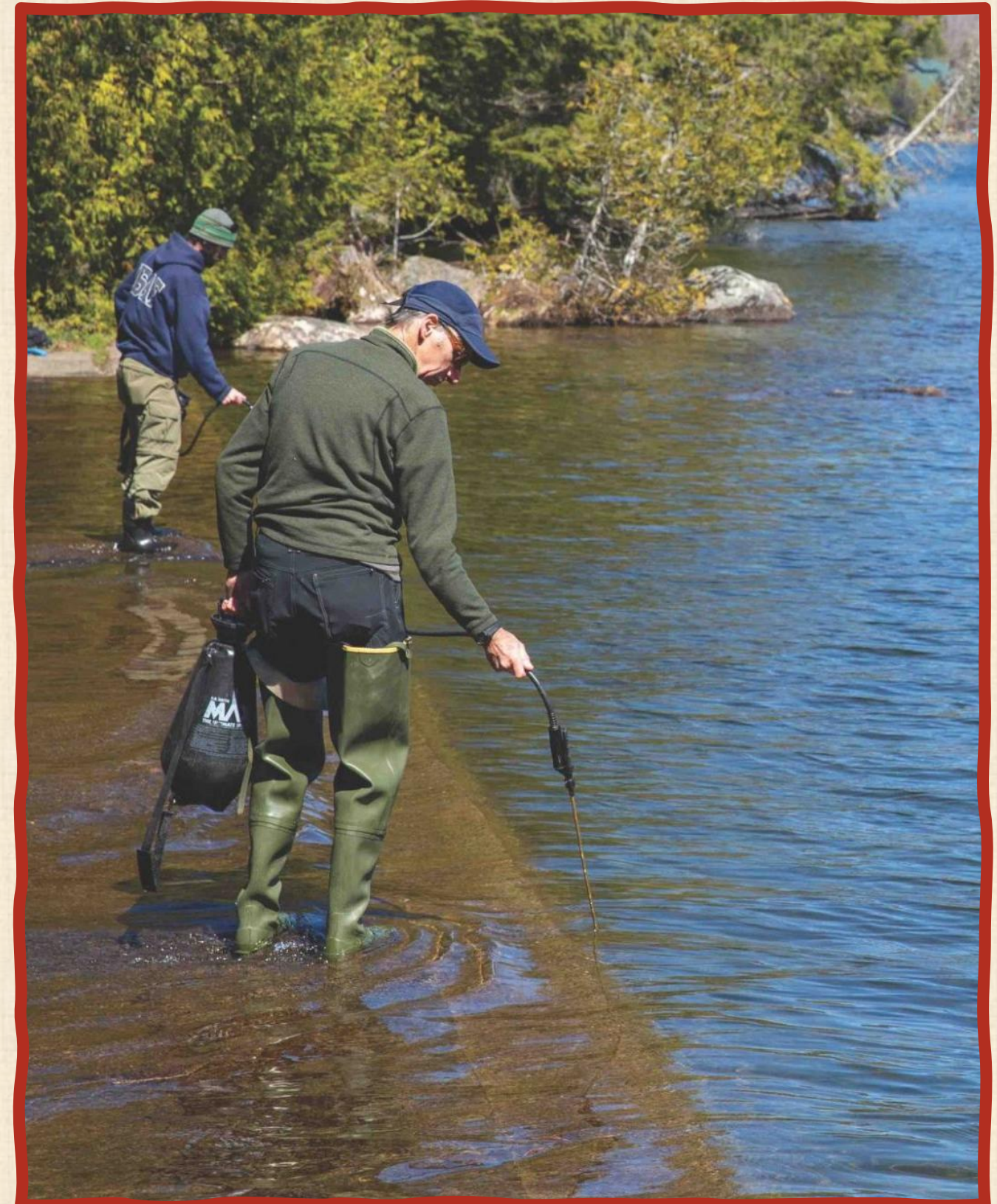
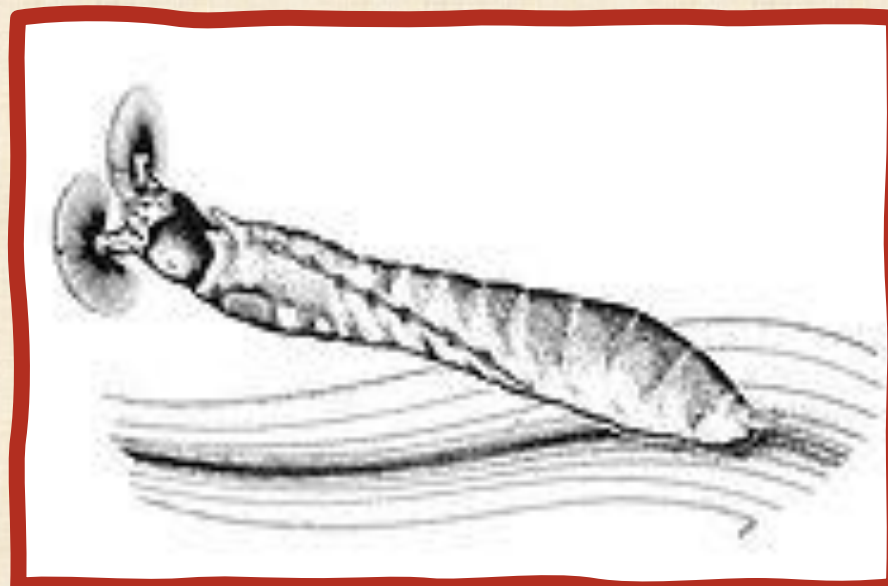
SPRAY NOW, PAY LATER



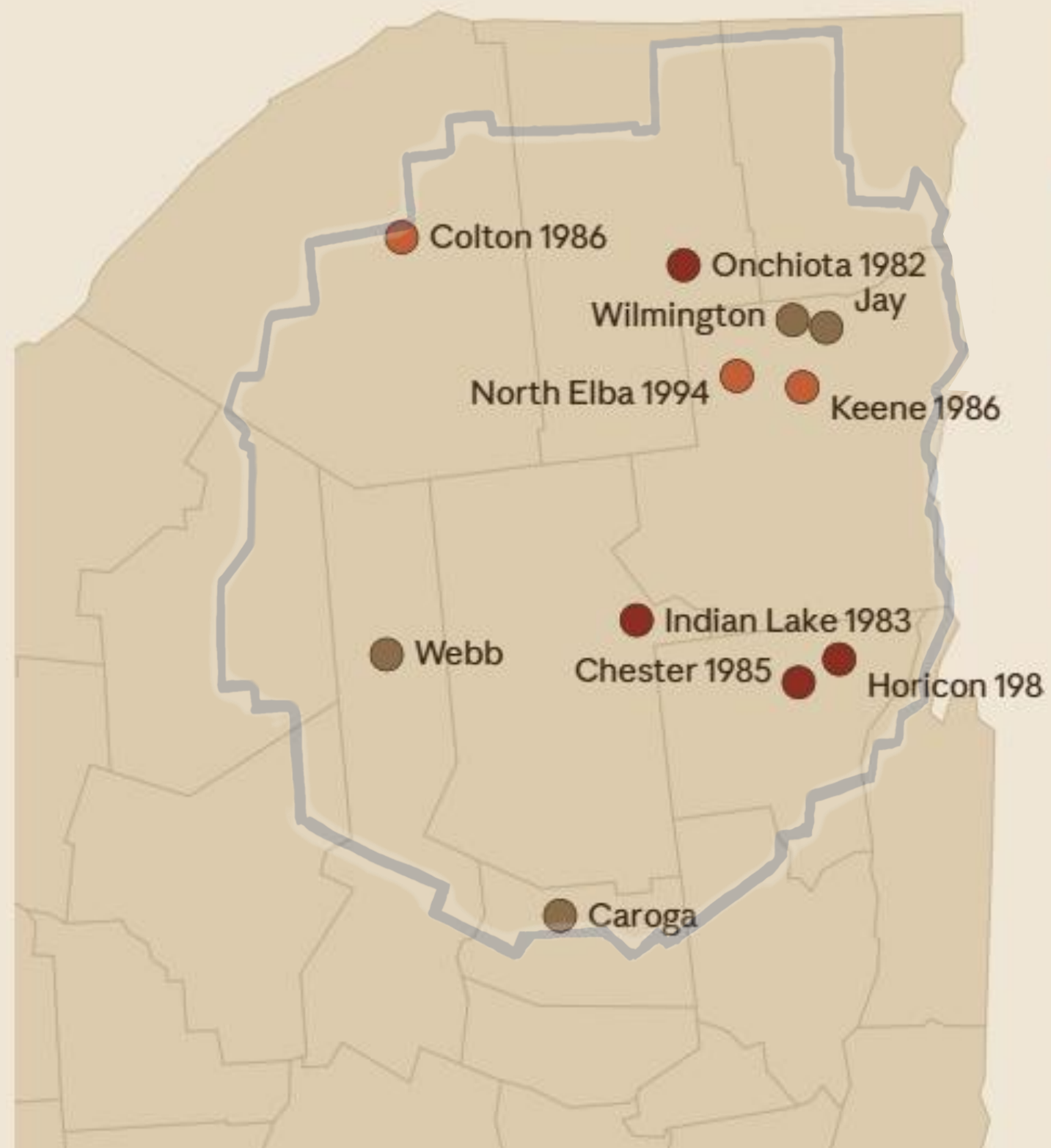
Daniel Molloy



1976:
Bacillus
thuringiensis
israelensis
(BTI)



PATCHWORK PESTICIDES



Folk remedies
pre-1900s – 1940s

Aerial spraying
1940s – early 1980s

Bti transition
1982 – early 1990s

Bti as norm
2000 – present

- Adopted Bti 1982–85
- Adopted Bti 1986–94
- Later or contracted

Counties: US Census via us-atlas



INTERNAL CLASS GEOGRAPHY



Pest Control Controversy

BTI vs. SCOURGE

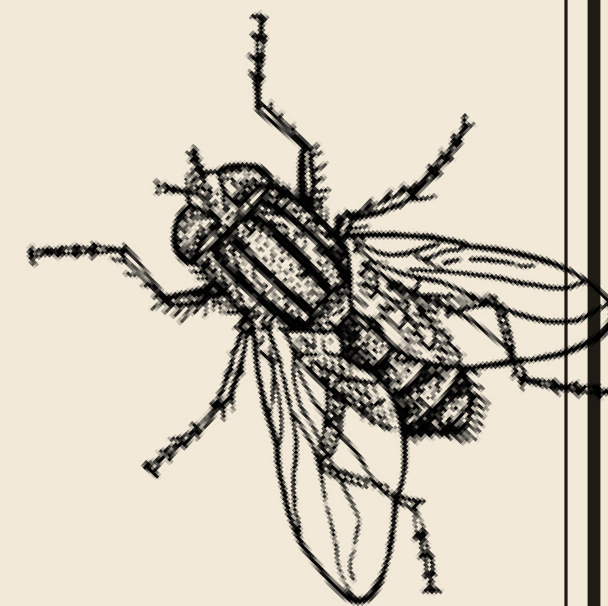
“Here we have an illegal EIS being passed by a town board who has not read it, in a room full of residents asking them not to approve it.”

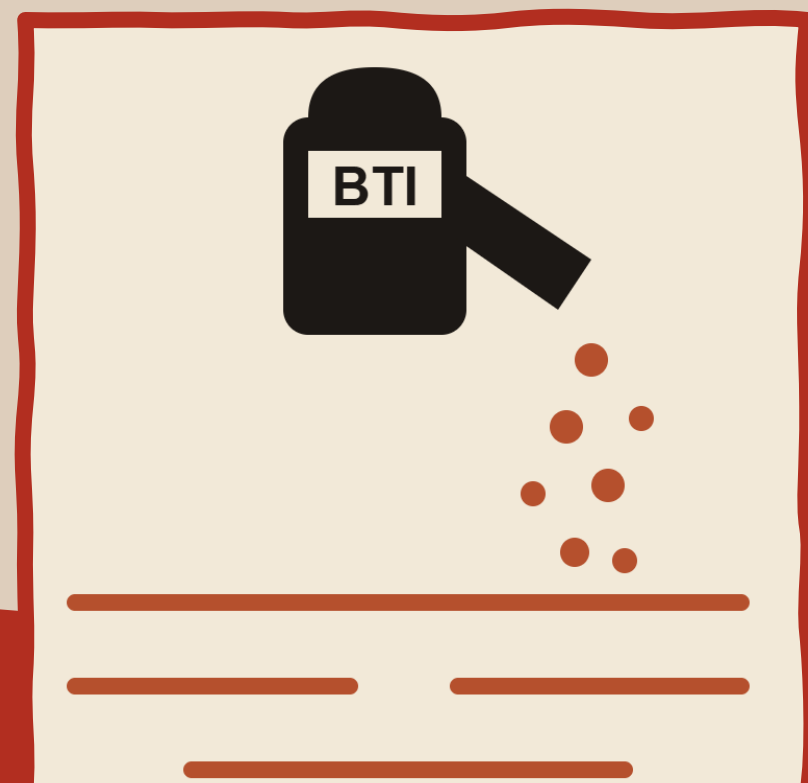
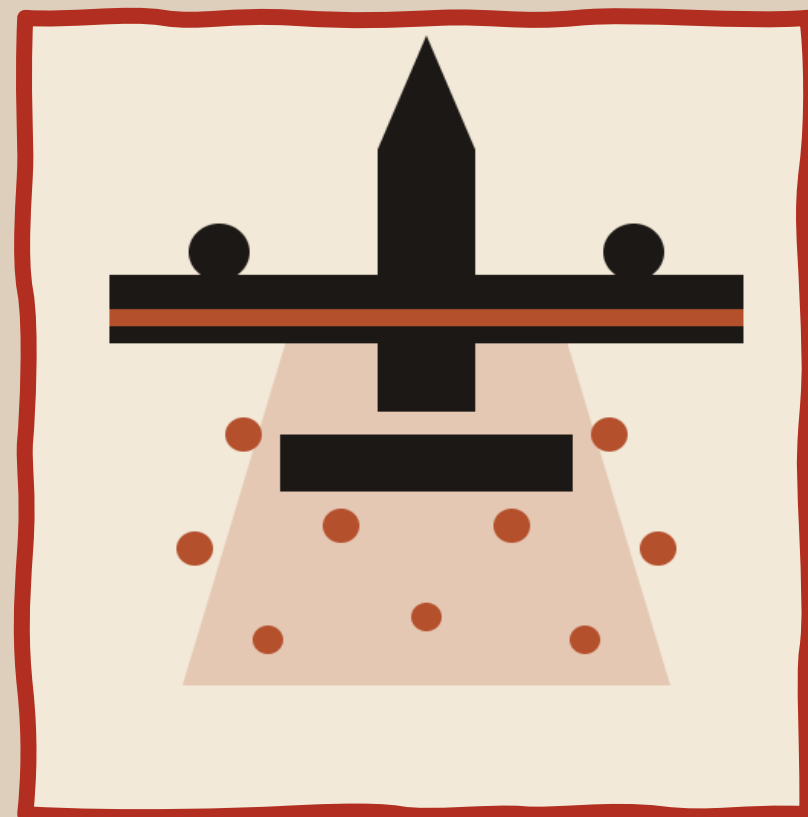
— Webb Resident, April 1990





STATE LAWSUITS
ILLEGAL SPRAYING
SHIFT TO BTI
NO TREATMENT





STORY 2: THE FLY AND THE STATE





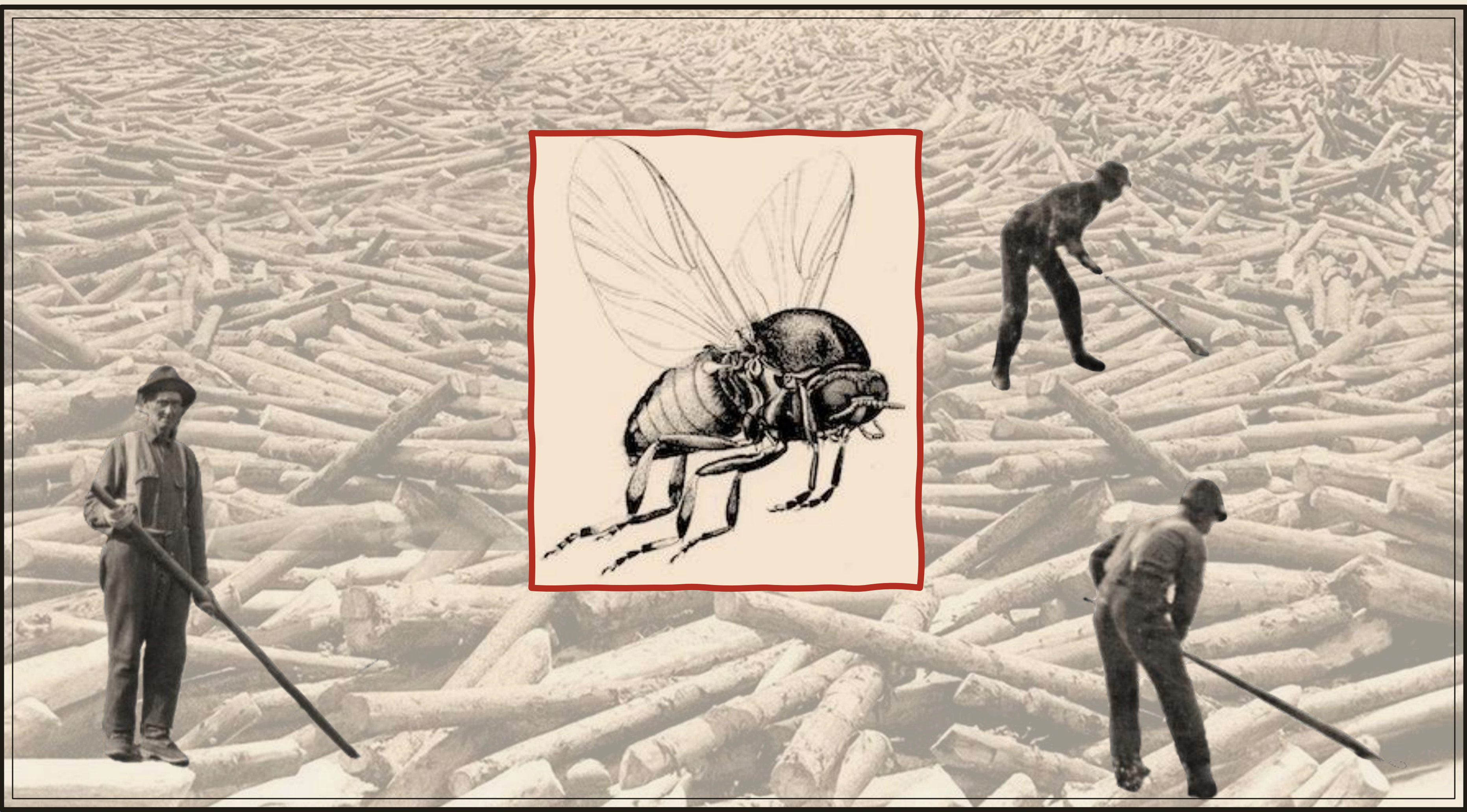
The Local Resident

Who was in the Adirondacks in 1880?



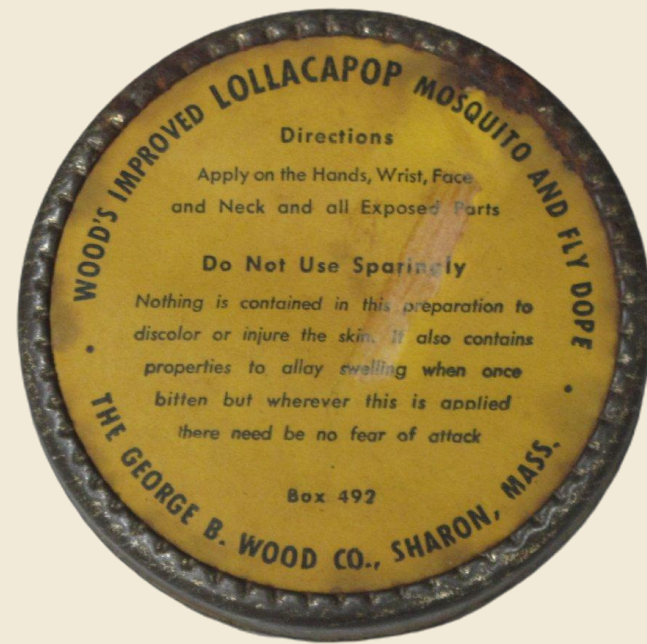
**Seasonal
labor and
regional
pride**





THE ADIRONDACK GUIDE





- Post WWI Mass Tourism
- Car camping
- Seasonal and year-round occupants

A HARDENED ADIRONDACK IDENTITY



Cultural work of
the black flies



Anne LaBastille



“

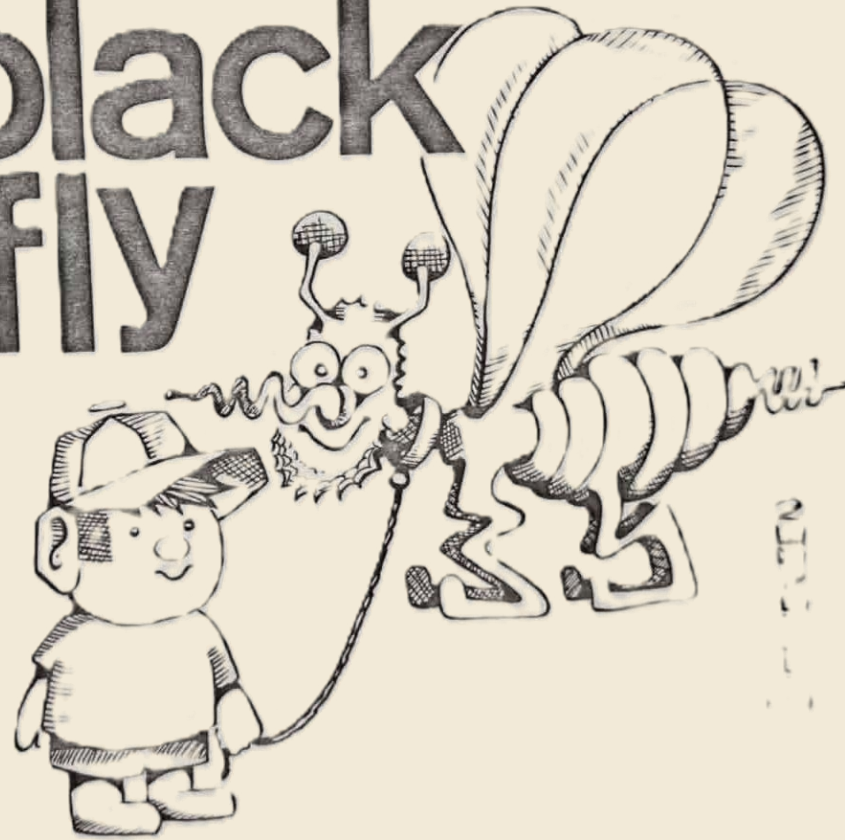
Summer in the Adirondacks, as far as humans are concerned, is heralded by one event: the emergence of that winged monster the black fly. These airborne devils can successfully blight the sunniest, balmiest day. At times they make a game of golf, a fishing spree, a lawn party, or a camping trip virtually impossible. Linemen, gardeners, lumberjacks, and road crews are tormented in the line of duty.

”

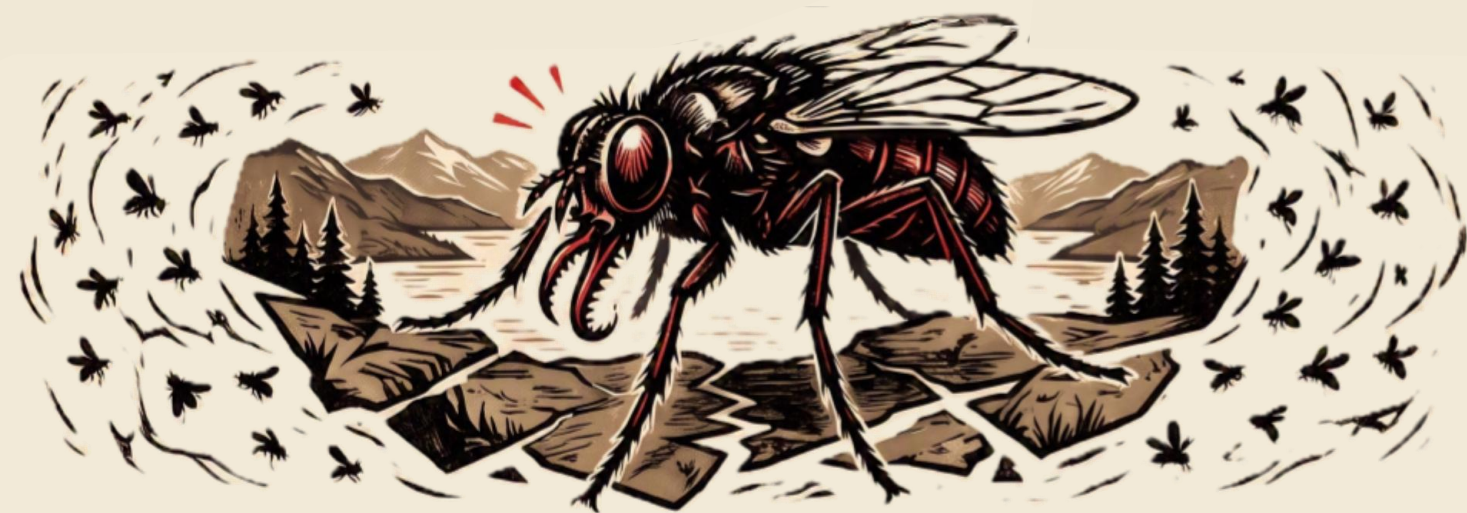
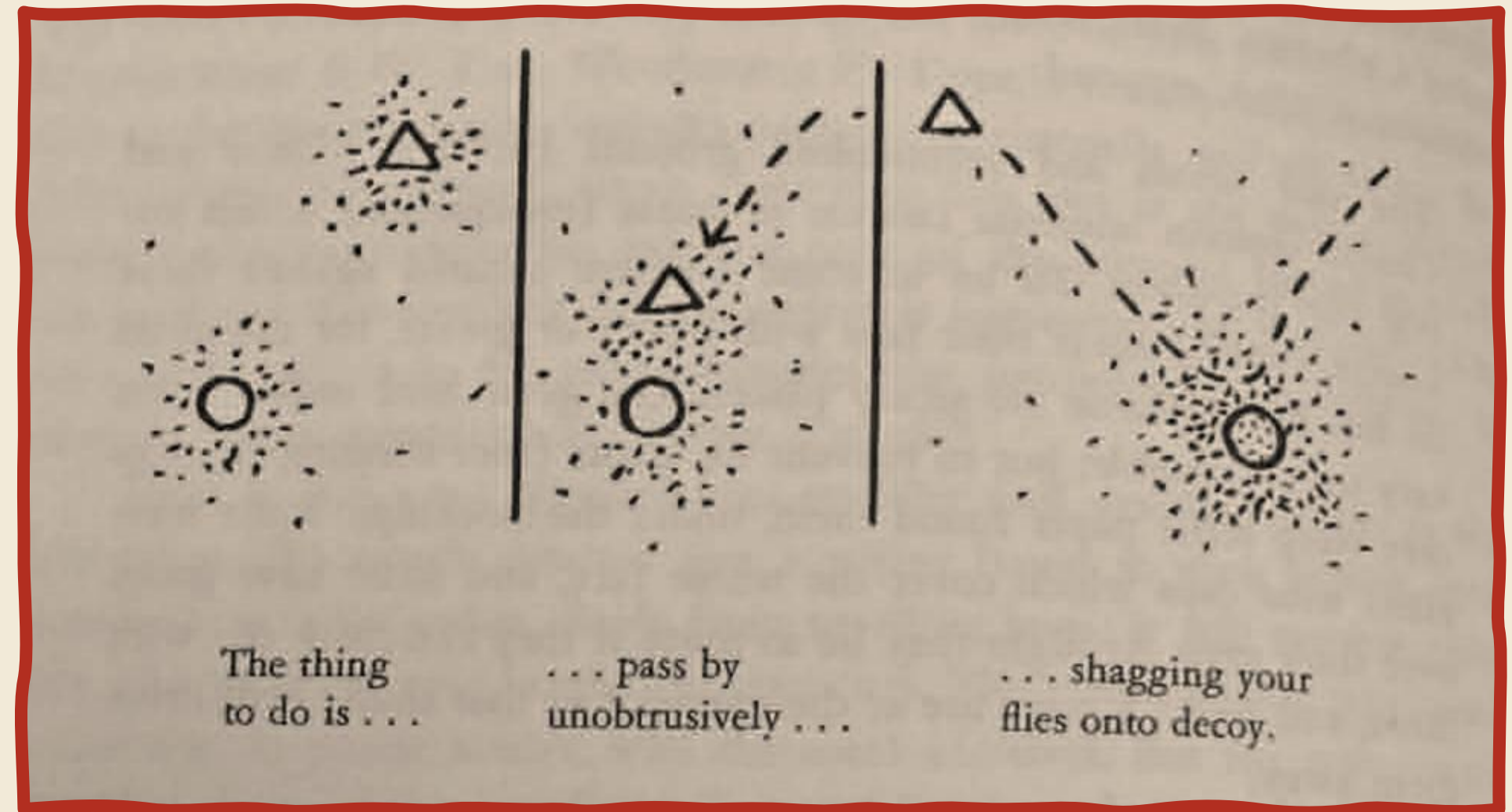


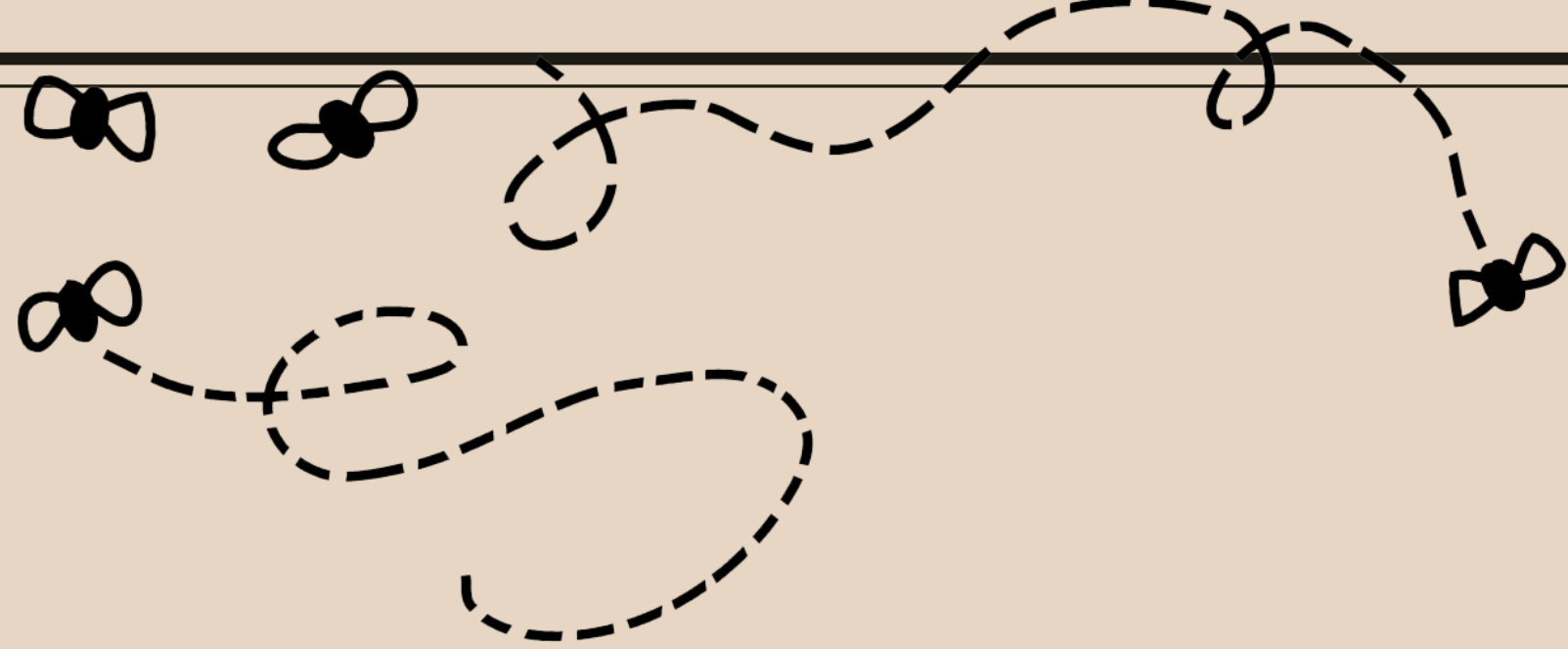
ADIRONDACK CAROUSEL

adopt a black fly



- Complaint
- Endurance
- Humor
- Belonging





- Labor
- Exposure
- Endurance
- Accumulation



STORY 3: THE FLY AND THE RESIDENT



WHAT THE FLY DID

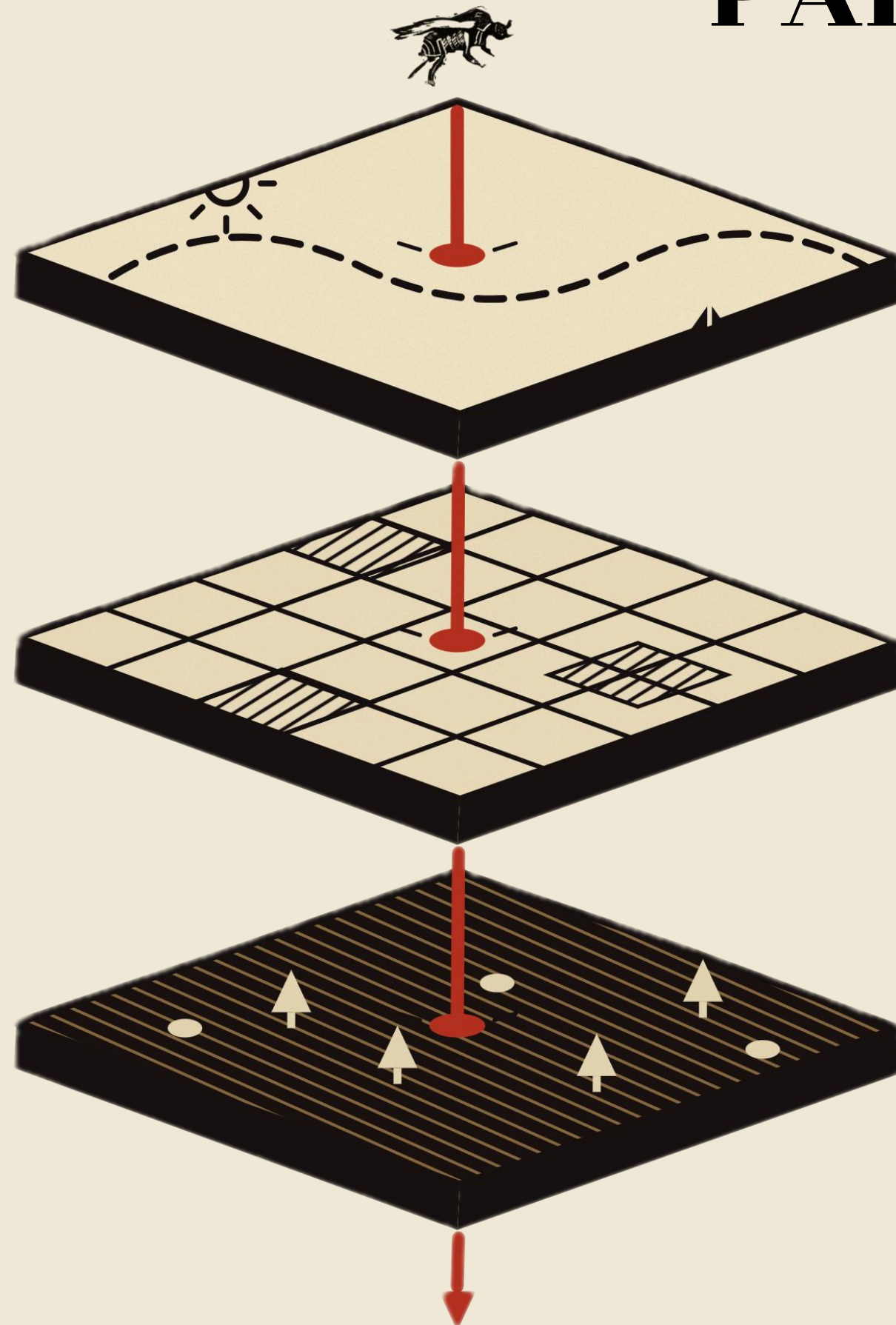


Sorting Mechanism

Class
Labor

Privilege
Endurance

PARADOXICAL WILDERNESSES



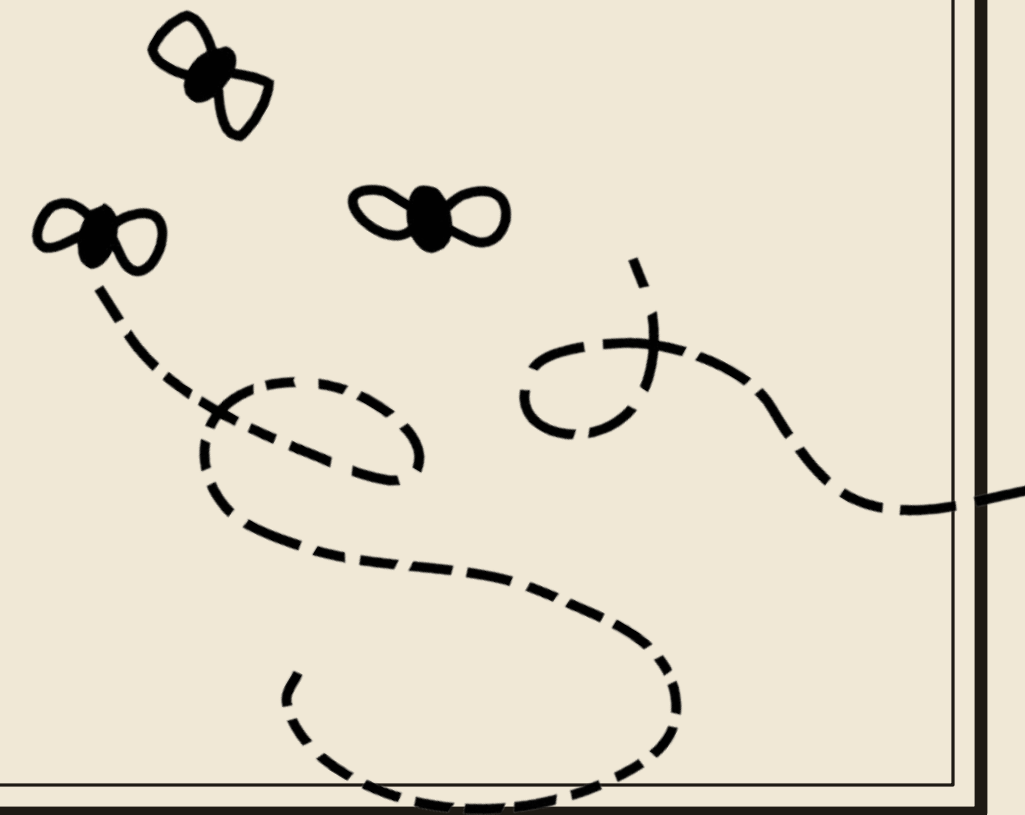
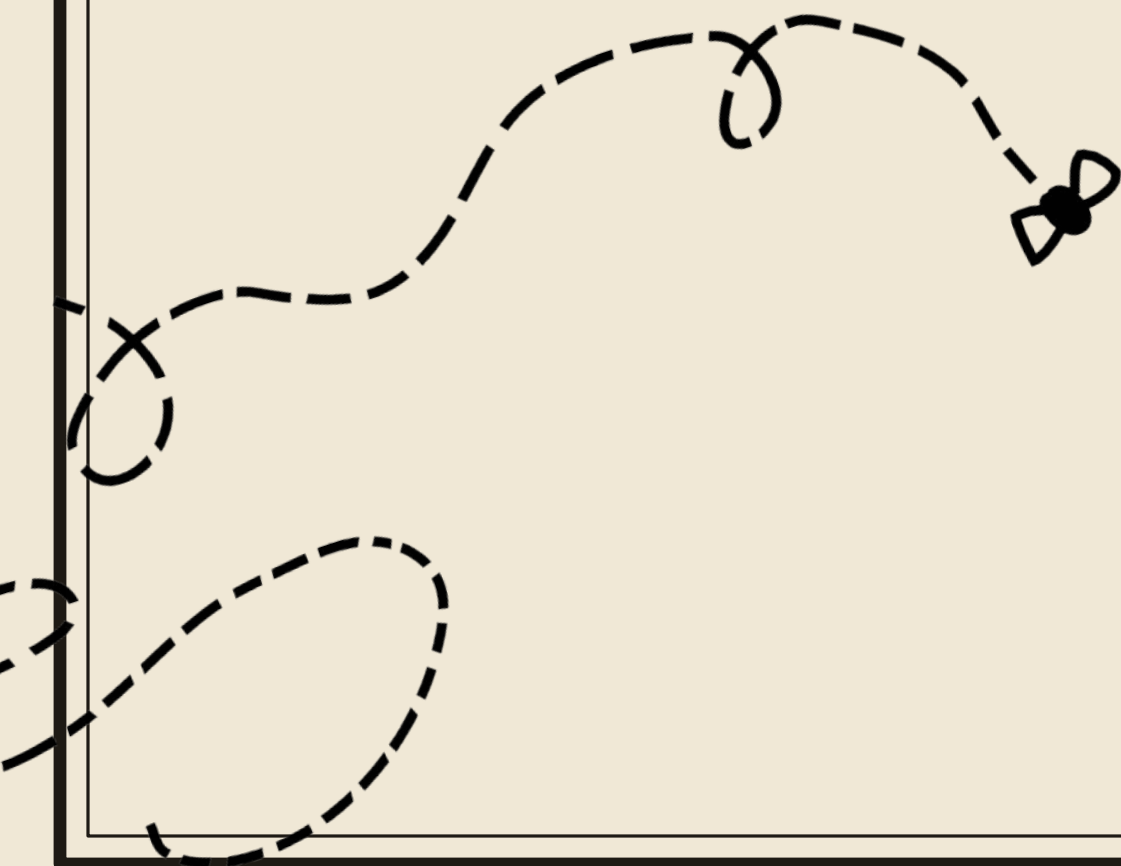
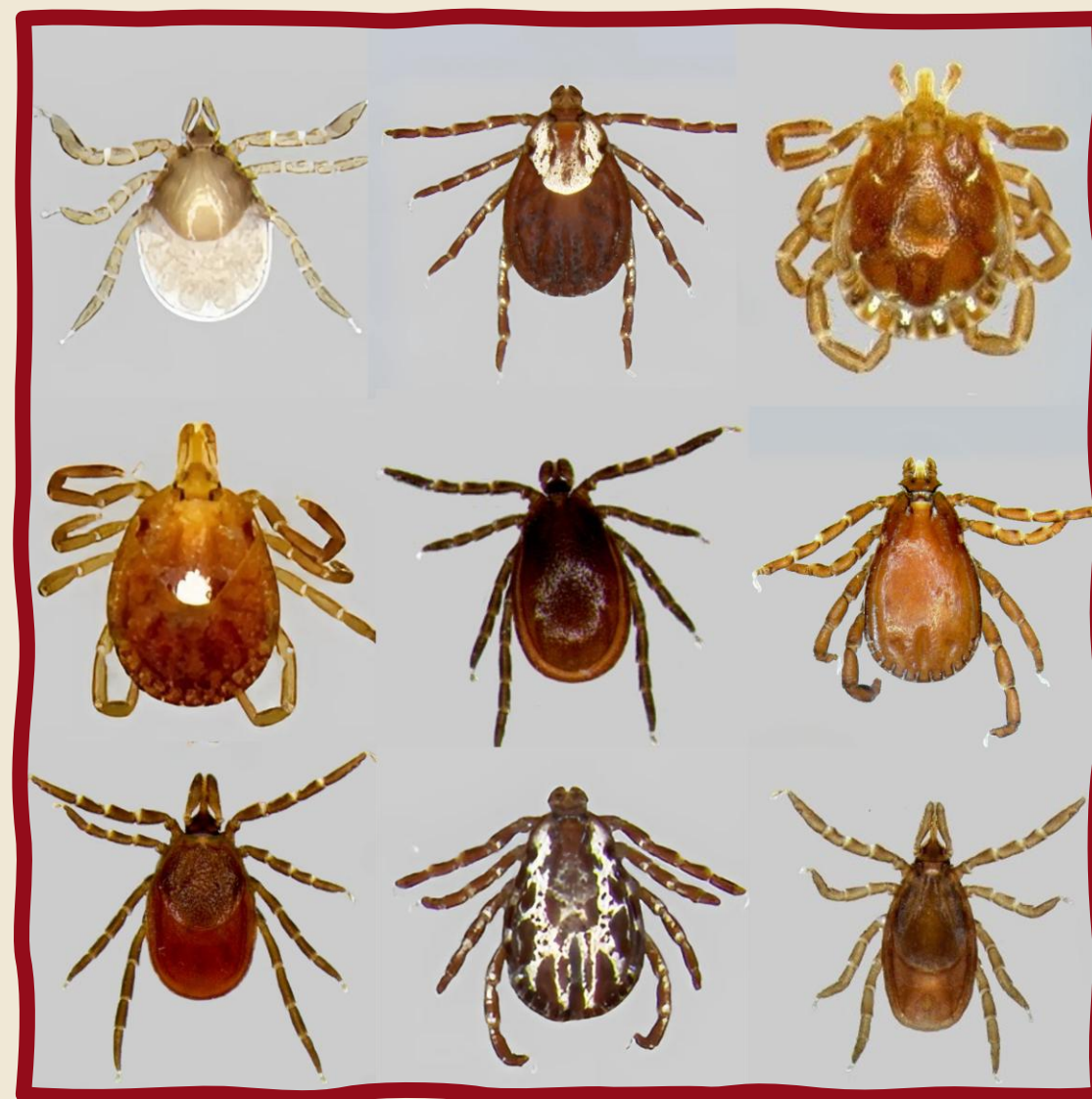
TOURIST

STATE

LOCAL



Intimate Geography





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THANK YOU

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