

# MAINE'S CMP CORRIDOR AS A "PARACOMMONS":

## The Spatial Politics of Gains and Harms among Proprietors, Neighbors, Socioecological Systems and the Wider Economy

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### ABSTRACT

Schemes for linking hydropower to electricity users in the northeastern US have ignited intense controversies that have slowed down or sunk several infrastructure projects. Maine's Spanish-owned utility monopoly, Central Maine Power, proposed the most recent transmission project, the New England Clean Energy Connect (NECEC), or CMP corridor, a \$1 billion 145-mile transmission line to bring electricity from Hydro-Québec to Massachusetts through western Maine. Proponents of the CMP Corridor highlight the project's carbon impacts, rate savings, construction jobs, mitigation package, and property tax impacts. But, the CMP Corridor has also drawn intense grassroots opposition for its impacts on fisheries, wildlife, recreational tourism, scenic amenities, and development of domestic renewables. The Corridor opposition has been dismissively characterized as "not in my backyard" (NIMBY) politics, but multiple sessions of public testimony by opponents and proponents articulated a wide range of perspectives and engaged in wider critiques that can be effectively understood as competing claims on the "paracommons." This article uses a content analysis of 113 public testimonies to guide a close reading of opponents' and proponents' statements. The spatial politics and overlapping concerns that drove negotiations tied to future gains and harms that may result from the Corridor.

*Key words: CMP Corridor, paracommons, energy transition, energy justice, spatial politics, Maine*

### Introduction

The New England Clean Energy Connect (NECEC) project proposed by Central Maine Power (CMP), a subsidiary of Spanish electric utility multinational Iberdrola, would link Hydro-Québec's hydroelectric generation to Massachusetts consumers by routing a transmission line through western Maine. Most often referred to as the CMP Corridor, the project's promotional website promises a \$950 million investment upgrading 145 miles of corridor with

a new high-voltage direct current (HVDC) transmission line, including cutting 53 miles of new corridor (NECEC 2020). The HVDC line will be supported by an estimated 850 95-foot tall towers and the cleared width of the corridor will vary from 54 feet to more than 150 feet (NECEC 2020).

Originally proposed in response to the 2016 RFP associated with Massachusetts' Act to Promote Energy Diversity (H.4568; see also Nolan and Rinaldi, this issue; Silverstein and Autery, this issue; Vogel, this issue), the project would add 1.2 GW of transmission capacity, about 13 percent of CMP's current load and roughly twice the capacity of the recently decommissioned Pilgrim nuclear power plant in Plymouth, Massachusetts (NECEC 2020). Massachusetts has entered into a 20 year contract with Maine CMP and Hydro-Québec for 9.45 TWh annually, about 90 percent of the power transmitted through the corridor to replace retiring nuclear, oil and coal generation facilities and meet its carbon reduction targets established in the Commonwealth's Global Warming Solutions Act (GWSA) of 2008 (Walton 2018; NECEC 2020; see also Frederic, this issue; Silverstein and Autery, this issue).

The NECEC website lists a variety of benefits of the project including lower electricity costs, reduced regional carbon emissions, 1,600 construction jobs, \$18 million per year in local taxes, \$200 million in grid investments, as well as benefits associated with a mitigation package that includes funding for broadband expansion, tourism and economic development funding, and support for educational institutions (including my employer, the University of Maine at Farmington), the Passamaquoddy Tribe, electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure, heat pumps, and decarbonization planning (2020). The value of the various components of the mitigation package listed on the web page is \$264 million, dispersed over 5 to 40 years (NECEC 2020). As delays pushed the project past its 2020 deadline, subsequent negotiations over summer 2020 resulted in an additional \$140 million from Hydro-Québec in the form of discounted electricity, as well as \$20 million in EV and heat pump incentives for Maine consumers (Anderson 2020).

The CMP Corridor, like New Hampshire's Northern Pass proposal before it, has ignited widespread controversy. A range of opposition groups have emerged including astroturf campaigns<sup>1</sup> funded by fossil fuels-based power producers (e.g., "Stop the Corridor"), as well as highly mobilized grassroots citizens groups (e.g., "No CMP Corridor"). Opponents articulate a wide range of concerns, from the impacts of herbicide spray on fish and wildlife, to scenic impacts on the regional tourism economy. The CMP Corridor is one among a steady stream of local and regional controversies pitting different sets of pro-environmental values and positions against each other. Utility-scale solar and wind installations, pipelines and pipeline regulations, biomass incineration and processing, expansions of natural gas infrastructure, dam removals, and a variety of conservation projects have all generated heated opposition, splitting constituencies along sometimes surprising fault lines, subject to recriminations over corporate influence or claims of corruption, leading to unsatisfactory decision-making outcomes.

A variety of recent geographical research examines Maine's unsettled terrain of environmental politics in far ranging scales and settings. For instance, Harrison (2006) analyzes the cultural and political conflicts emerging from Burt's Bees founder Roxanne Quimby's efforts at landscape-scale conservation and national park designation. His investigation focuses on the ways putative acts of green consumption become implicated in landscape-scale

initiatives and regional politics far beyond a product's lifecycle, contributing to conflicts around conservation efforts. Correia (2010) investigates the erosion of forest products certification goals, and biodiversity practices more broadly, as Maine has emerged as a site of intensifying extraction by new classes of financial owners (see also, Hagan *et al.* 2005). Hanes (2018) delves into the conflicts over aquaculture that surface in leasing hearings. His comparative analysis shows the value of different communication strategies, including mapping and other visualization techniques, for allaying opponents, concerns, as well as the role of regional context in determining local acceptance of aquaculture. A variety of authors explore the debates and displacements enacted through conservation acquisition programs and "traditional use" (Acheson and Acheson 2009; Cottle and Howard 2012), in particular the enclosures enacted by a new class of timberland investors who have used large-scale conservation easements to disrupt long-standing access regimes and extract payments from local, state and national actors (Kay 2017). In a different context, Brewer (2012) and Brewer *et al.* (2017) reports on fissures and deliberative openings between experts and resource users, in particular regulators and lobstermen in Maine fishing communities. And, Miller (2019) examines the theoretical underpinnings of Maine's sustainable development initiatives and institutions, finding the very terms of the debate over supposedly competing environmental, economic and social interests limiting their transformative potential. Collectively, this growing body of research contributes to an increasingly nuanced understanding of the spatial dimensions of Maine's environmental politics, attendant to the state's status as a resource periphery subject to recent episodes of restructuring. These various authors account for larger social or political economic contexts constraining participants in environmental controversies, e.g., the knowledge politics, forces of industrial restructuring, regulatory regimes, environmental discourses, etc., while also attending to the possibilities for alternative environmental futures, whether by questioning policies like certification (Correia 2010) or large-scale conservation (Harrison 2006; Kay 2017) or by emphasizing practices of citizen engagement and participation (Brewer 2012; Brewer *et al.* 2017; Hanes 2018).

Notwithstanding this growing body of geographical research describing Maine's complicated terrain of environmental politics, the controversy over the CMP Corridor can be too easily read through the lens of NIMBY politics or taken as a sign of an intractable divide between rural traditionalists and cosmopolitan progressives. Doing so fits the debate into convenient ideological camps but misses the wide range of arguments for and against the Corridor, the wider critique of both Corridor proponents and opponents, as well as the overlapping concerns that both proponents and opponents share.

This paper attempts to understand this wide range of Corridor positions, the wider critique proponents and opponents engage in, and the shared concerns of the two camps through a close reading of public testimonies selected based on a quantitative content analysis. In order to code both proponents' and opponents' testimonies with a common analytical framework that avoids the reductionist tendencies mentioned above, I develop and deploy Lankford's (2013, 2014) concept of the paracommons to understand the CMP Corridor debate as an active negotiation, or "competition over freed up resources obtained by changing the efficiency of usage" (2013, 9). In order to better understand the stakes of this competition over the gains and harms of the new transmission line, I first review the energy justice literature for insights into the unevenness

of low carbon energy transitions, as well as recent contributions to studies of resource populism that highlight the transformative possibilities of energy activism. The paper then elaborates on Lankford's paracommons before using Lankford's framework to code and analyze public testimonies provided during permitting process.

## Energy Justice and Resource Populism

A growing body of research grapples with controversies over energy transitions akin to the CMP Corridor. For instance, an emerging energy justice literature is particularly attentive to low carbon transitions and the debates they animate (Sovacool and Dworkin 2015; Batel and Devine-Wright 2017; Bouzarovski and Simcock 2017; Avila 2018; Williams and Doyon 2019). Geographers and others adopting an energy justice framework proceed from the recognition that energy transitions are always more than technical accomplishments, involving questions about uneven distributions of material conditions, how decisions are made, and whose voices are recognized in policy deliberations (Sovacool and Dworkin 2015, 437). Attention to these concerns serves social justice as well as instrumentalist goals, such as insuring wider social acceptance of low carbon transitions (Williams and Doyon 2019), particularly important given the unprecedented impending societal investments in energy systems (Jenkins et al. 2017).

Bouzarovski and Simcock (2017) develop an explicitly spatial justice approach to the unevenness of energy geographies. They draw on distributive, recognition-based, and procedural theories of justice to focus attention on *where* energy resources are concentrated, *whose* needs are recognized in energy policy and discourses, and *how* democratic legitimacy for energy investments is secured (Bouzarovski and Simcock 2017, 641). Their foremost concern is the production of energy deprivation and energy poor households. For instance, they suggest that low carbon transitions funded by rate payers, as the Massachusetts contract with Hydro-Québec requires (see Silverstein and Autery, this issue; Vogel, this issue), exact a greater toll on low income households while benefitting them less (Bouzarovski and Simcock 2017, 641; citing Boardman 2010; Oppenheim 2016; Stockton and Campbell 2011). Bouzarovski and Simcock (2017, 640) are also attuned to the ways regional variations of household incomes and energy needs (i.e., based on climatic factors and infrastructure) produce "end use energy deprivation" that must be addressed through spatially just energy production, transmission, distribution and consumption.

The uneven burdens of low carbon energy production are a central focus of Yenneti et al. (2016) and Yenneti and Day (2015, 2016). Their research examines the spatial injustices of a large-scale solar project announced as a benign renewable energy investment that nonetheless enacts "the enclosure of commons and land acquisitions under the narrative of infrastructure development [that] alienate vulnerable communities from their sources of livelihood and increase their precarious status" (Yenneti and Day 2016, 97). Yenneti and Day (2015, 2016) variously analyze the large-scale solar project from procedural and distributive justice lenses. Taken together, this energy justice analysis identifies mechanisms of coercive state power, including misinformation and extralegal land acquisitions that dispossess inhabitants and displace livelihoods. Yenneti et al. (2016) argue these energy injustices foster long-term resentments, distrust, and delays around low carbon transitions.

Batel and Divine-Wright (2017, 2020) examine perceptions of large-scale low carbon energy infrastructure development, specifically transmission line siting, from an environmental justice perspective. Their focus group respondents relate grievances that constitute an instance of "carbon colonialism," whereby relatively wealthy regions fulfill binding carbon reduction targets by developing low carbon generation and transmission in distant, historically colonized regions, while maintaining their own high levels of energy consumption (Batel and Divine-Wright 2017, 5). Drawn from rural communities of southwest England and Wales that are impacted by transmission lines, these respondents "go beyond so-called Not in My Back Yard motives" (Batel and Divine-Wright 2017, 11) as they craft narratives of energy infrastructure injustices, interwoven with historical grievance, which can be understood, through an energy justice lens, as a struggle for recognition. Avila (2018) is similarly concerned with reframing NIMBY narratives of local opposition to low carbon energy development. Analyzing twenty cases of wind farms opposition from nearly every world region, Avila (2018, 613) emphasizes the justice claims that animate local resistance to uneven low carbon energy development, arguing: "Rather than framing opposing voices as selfish expressions blocking the cultural change needed to move towards renewables, the political value of these movements resides in their capacity to expand the possibilities of imagining alternative energy futures." Avila (2018, 600) finds wind farm opponents' alternative political imaginaries gathering around long-standing values of landscape and wildlife, as well as "the defense of territories, livelihoods and community-based development projects."

The energy justice literature's attentiveness to the uneven burdens of specific energy projects and the power of their critique to produce alternative, more just energy transitions resonates strongly with emerging research on resource populism (Bosworth 2018; MacArthur and Matthewman 2018). Bosworth (2018) is centrally concerned with the counter-expertise—or "minor science" (Secor and Linz 2017)—voiced by opponents to Keystone XL and Dakota Access Pipeline projects during environmental review proceedings. Rooted in a cross-class environmental populism, this counter-expertise serves to articulate a collective identity that, although "partial, fragmentary, and largely unsuccessful in constructing a durable political subject" (Bosworth 2018, 585), nonetheless "created the conditions of possibility for deeper resentment toward state and corporate forces as well as opening possibilities for more politically radical forms of pipeline opposition" (585). MacArthur and Matthewman (2018) likewise locates radical political potential in populist resistance to elite, corporate capture of energy transitions, while taking an additional step of identifying Maori collective ownership of specific low carbon energy enterprises alongside sweeping advocacy for more just and collective forms of energy transitions. MacArthur and Matthewman thereby pivot from the juridico-ethical concerns of energy justice and resource populism to an alternative economic framing aligned with commons perspectives. This paper also attends to the energy justice concerns of CMP Corridor opponents and proponents, for example expressed in their claims of uneven energy outcomes and decision-making practices, local/regional grievances, and the spatialities of energy justice. But it is also crucial to understand the CMP Corridor debate as a struggle over the future freed-up resources produced by the new transmission line, for which Lankford's "paracommons" concept is required (Lankford 2013, 2014).

## The Paracommons

Lankford's concept of the paracommons responds to debates around efficiency and the "rebound effect" that are increasingly important in the context of sustainability transitions that are either planned or underway (Druckman et al. 2011; Saunders 2013; Lankford 2013, 2014; Gillingham et al. 2016). Perhaps the most popular narrative of energy efficiency posits that technological progress brings efficiency gains leading directly to reductions in resource usage thereby delivering widespread environmental and economic benefits. The counter-narrative associated with the rebound effect holds that any resource savings produced by efficiency gains are potentially undercut by changing behaviors as consumers respond to price signals and gains in personal income. The rebound effect says, in short, that efficiency gains do not produce proportional reductions in resource usage because consumers end up increasing their consumption as a result of those efficiency gains. Commonplace examples of a rebound effect include rising fuel economy leading to increased personal vehicle use (Hughes et al. 2008), energy saving appliances leading to increased household electricity usage, and energy efficient LED lighting technology leading to new lighting applications (Kyba et al. 2016).

The rebound effect has been a long-noted phenomenon, dating to William Stanley Jevons' (1865) observation that increasingly efficient steam locomotives led to greater aggregate coal consumption. Subsequent and ongoing debates in environmental economics have estimated the size and significance of rebound effects in various contexts, leading some to argue that the significance of rebound is overstated (Gillingham and Kotchen 2013). Nonetheless, analyses of rebound effects by economists and other analysts lead to policy interventions that pair taxes with efficiency improvements to offset the potential for rebound.

Lankford (2014) responds to the rebound effect by first recognizing that efficiencies do not guarantee socioecological gains, pro-environmental outcomes, or widely distributed savings. He cautions, "[W]ithout careful planning and forethought, the material gains arising from increased efficiency may not end up where we expect or intend. Under many circumstances, such material savings will not 'return to nature' and therefore, paradoxically, will not reduce natural resource consumption." (Lankford 2013, 14). In order to account for these unintended, squandered efficiency gains and promote careful planning, Lankford develops the concept of the paracommons, a discursive domain of debate and negotiation that governs the competition over future gains of sustainability transitions. In Lankford's terms, "A liminal paracommons contains a 'space' (or field of potential options) associated with socioecological systems undergoing efficiency changes" (2013, 14). Within this space, the freed up resources produced by efficiency gains (or "paragains") can be redirected to four parties or destinations: 1) the "proprietor system" responsible for making the efficiency gain; 2) immediately connected neighbors who seek to sustain benefits or raise productivity; 3) the socioecological system, or common pool, where gains are returned in the form of conservation and productivity; and/or, 4) the wider economy, including government, urban or industrial demands (see Figure 1). Identifying these four destinations in a negotiation over some prospective efficiency gain reveals the competing interests and outcomes gains may accrue.



The four distinct destinations within Lankford's paracommons bring clarity to the competition over efficiency gains, but his own empirical analyses also emphasize the complexity of tracking paragains through the four destinations within the paracommons: "Competition over resources takes place between these four parties, and many factors affect the destination of the resources as they cascade through the overall system, including not only changing practices and technologies, but also shifting perceptions about efficiency, waste and ownership" (Lankford 2013, 30). Perhaps the most important aspect of the 'para' prefix is that, in Lankford's words, it "signals uncertainty about the salvageability of the gain and its eventual size, location, timing and destination/ownership" (2013, 14). Thus, the paracommons framework can clarify but not resolve the terms of the negotiations in a controversy like the CMP Corridor. In other words, the climate benefits claimed by Corridor proponents of providing Massachusetts residents with hydropower would count as paragains for the sociological system *for those proponents*, but Corridor opponents will continue to contest these climate benefits, with their own contrary accounting of paragains emphasizing uncertainty surrounding Hydro-Québec's hydropower capacity, the loss of sequestration, the Corridor's negative impacts on regional renewable projects and other arguments that challenge the paragains that accrue to that destination.

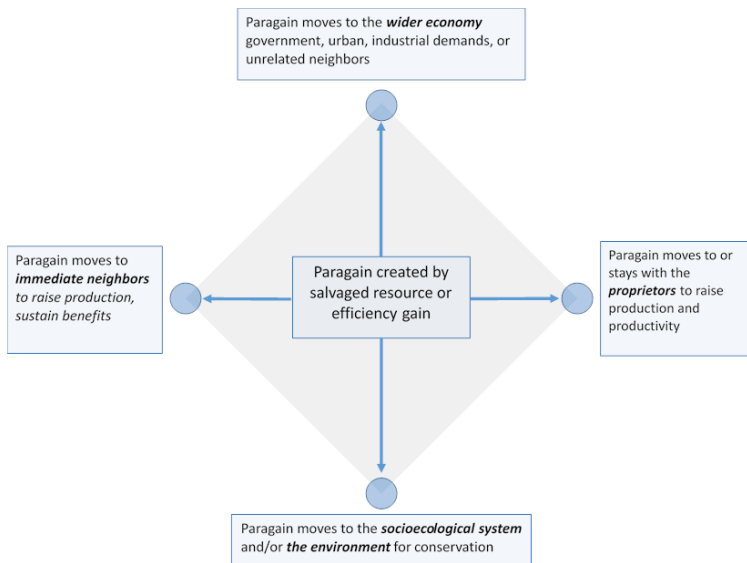


Figure 1. Diagram of the four destinations competing over paragains within a paracommons, based on Lankford (2014)

## The Paracommons of the CMP Corridor

Lankford's concept of the paracommons enables the debates over the CMP Corridor to be understood as a complex but clearly demarcated struggle over future gains and harms presented by the powerline project. The *paracommons* of the CMP Corridor is tied to material space of the Corridor itself, which can be understood as a more traditional terrestrial commons, i.e., *the de facto* commons of the Maine Woods, where multiple interests have claimed the informal access/use rights, in spite of private ownership (see, for example, Acheson and Acheson 2009). But the paracommons of the CMP Corridor exists in the future, as a site of struggle, based on CMP and Hydro-Québec promised efficiency gains as well as the wider array of proponents' and opponents' redrawing of paragains (and *paraharms*) in relation to their respective destinations. In simplest terms, for Corridor proponents the paragains of the CMP Corridor may accrue to: 1) the Proprietor System, benefitting the producer (i.e., Hydro-Québec) and the distributor (i.e., CMP/Iberdrola) in the form of revenues, as well as the customers (i.e., Massachusetts ratepayers) in the form of lower electricity costs; 2) the Neighbors, in the form of mitigation payments, recreational uses of the corridor, and property tax revenues; 3) the Wider Economy, in the form of lower electricity rates, thereby spurring development and productivity increases, and lastly, 4) the Socioecological System in the form of a reduction in carbon emissions and air pollution due to avoided fossil fuel consumption. Meanwhile Corridor opponents may emphasize: 1) the paragains accruing to Québec, Massachusetts and Spanish-owned CMP, at the expense of Maine residents; 2) the harms that Neighbors incur as a consequence of foregone recreational activity, loss of livelihoods and scenic amenities; 3) the drain on the Wider Economy due to diminished tourism activity; 4) the damage to the Socioecological System resulting from herbicide spraying within the corridor in close proximity to sensitive fish habitat. This summary traces the broad contours of the CMP Corridor paracommons, but applying these four paragains destinations to the actual testimony of Corridor opponents and proponents can help identify both 1) the aggregate frequencies of paracommons destinations and 2) the more nuanced ways participants in the Corridor debate struggle over its potential gains and harms.

## Methods

In order to apply the insights of the paracommons to the CMP Corridor debate I first coded 113 testimonies delivered over the course of approximately six hours of public hearings before the Maine Land Use Planning Commission (LUPC) and Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) on 2 April and 4 April 2019, which I attended. There were 71 Corridor opponents and 32 Corridor proponents who participated in the hearings, held at the University of Maine at Farmington campus (10 participants provided testimony during both public hearings, so there are more testimonies than the number of participants). The LUPC and DEP invited written statements as well, but that testimony was not considered for this analysis. The transcribed verbal testimonies that I analyze below amount to over 48,000 words.

Many opponents (46 of 71, 65 percent) identified themselves as seasonal or year-round residents of transmission line communities or their immediate neighboring communities.



Others claimed livelihoods tied to recreation-based tourism. Several opponents represented organizations like Sierra Club, Say No to NECEC, Trout Unlimited, and regional watershed associations. A smaller proportion of proponents identified themselves as residents of transmission line communities (9 of 32, 28 percent). Proponents more frequently claimed livelihoods tied to construction and the forest products industry. Several proponents spoke on behalf of organizations like Maine Audubon, a chamber of commerce, and the Association of General Contractors. Approximately 40 percent of the opponents presented or identified as female, while 19 percent of the proponents presented or identified as female.

We can expect that numerous interested and important voices were not included in the formal political spaces of the LURC and DEP public hearings. Geographers and others have shown that political participation in environmental governance is subject to social exclusions, whether working from perspectives of feminist political geography (Cope 2004; Fincher 2004; Staeheli 2010), political science (Fischer 2000; Bryan 2003; Adams 2004; Rountree and Baldwin 2018) or political ecology (Sultana 2011; Camargo and Ojeda 2017; Nightingale 2018). In this case, these exclusions, whether identity- or class-based, would be interwoven with the challenges the LURC and DEP hearings posed in terms of travel and time commitments, access to information, and the unevenness of political participation. Thus, an examination of these transcripts is an inevitably partial exploration of the range of positions that opponents and proponents might take.

The goal of coding the public hearing transcripts is a content analysis that identifies the frequency and diversity of opponents' and proponents' references to paracommons destinations. These differences and similarities between opponents' and proponents' aggregate references then guides a closer examination of exemplary testimonies. This coding approach performs a first-level coding aimed at identifying the manifest meanings of the testimonies (Krippendorff 2004; Neuendorf and Kumar 2016) and thus does not pursue successive levels of coding and theme building to disclose the testimonies' latent meanings (cf. Cope 2010).

Using nVivo I performed subsentence, first-level coding of all word forms that could be aligned with one of Lankford's paragon "destinations" (i.e., the Proprietors, Neighbors, the Wider Economy, and the Socioecological System) and occurred with greater than 0.05 percent frequency. After reviewing the coded references in context I determined that references to the four paracommons destinations accounted for 12 percent (opponents) and 14 percent (proponents) of the testimony. In other words, I was able to code 4,034 words as belonging to paracommons destinations out of 34,345 total words of opponents' testimony. And, for proponents, I was able to code 1,864 words of 13,670 words of testimony. To account for the different word counts in opponents' and proponents' testimonies I report counts of paracommons references alongside their relative frequency as a percentage of all coded references. The resulting table in Table 1 shows the frequency of references to each destination in the CMP Corridor paracommons for opponents and Table 2 shows the frequency of paracommons references for proponents. In the analysis below, I compare opponents' and proponents' aggregate frequencies for each paracommons destination and use the patterns they reveal to highlight key testimonies that exhibit the spatial politics of the Corridor debate."

NECEC Opposition Testimony References	Frequency
<b>Socioecological System</b>	1675 / <b>42%</b>
<b>Threats:</b> Impacts, Herbicides, Destroy, Damage, Loss, Losing, Lost, Ruin, Crossings, Fragmentation, Harm, Risk, Cut, Fires, Spray, Scar, Permanent, Clearcut, Pollution, Chemicals, Threats	404 / <b>10%</b>
<b>Environment:</b> Environment, Nature, Habitat, Wild, Wilderness, Ecosystem, Earth	211 / <b>5%</b>
<b>Waters:</b> Waters, River, Pond, Lake, Streams, Wetlands, Spring, Waterways	185 / <b>5%</b>
<b>Forests:</b> Forests, Woods, Trees, Vegetation	168 / <b>4%</b>
<b>Wildlife and fish:</b> Wildlife, Fish, Trout, Animals, Bats, Species, Deer, Moose, Birds	162 / <b>4%</b>
<b>Pro-environmental actions:</b> Protect, Mitigate, Reduce, Renewable, Sustainable, Sequester, Sequestration, Preserve, Reduction, Save, Buffer, Conservation	154 / <b>4%</b>
<b>Lands:</b> Land, Mountains, Landscape, Valley	127 / <b>3%</b>
<b>Climate:</b> Climate, Carbon Emissions, Greenhouse, Global warming	113 / <b>3%</b>
<b>Environmental qualities:</b> Pristine, Health, Unique, Endangered, Threatened, Precious	68 / <b>2%</b>
<b>Named common pool features:</b> Kennebec, Moxie, Enchanted	28 / <b>1%</b>
<b>Air:</b> Air, Oxygen	27 / <b>1%</b>
<b>Fossil fuels:</b> Natural gas, Fossil fuels	27 / <b>1%</b>
<b>Wider Economy</b>	934 / <b>23%</b>
<b>Energy:</b> Power, Transmission, Energy, Electricity, Turbines, Windmills, Solar, Dams, Grid, Supply, Generation, Hydropower	362 / <b>9%</b>
<b>Wider geographies:</b> State, Statewide, Mainers, American, Nation, Country	167 / <b>4%</b>
<b>Tourism:</b> Scenic, Visual, Views, Travel, Tourism, Visit, Brand, Tourists	111 / <b>3%</b>
<b>Development:</b> Industry, Resources, Development, Production	94 / <b>2%</b>
<b>Jobs:</b> Work, Jobs	69 / <b>2%</b>
<b>The economy:</b> Economic, Economy, Opportunity, Markets, Export, Efficiency	65 / <b>2%</b>
<b>Rates:</b> Cost, Value, Price, Customer	43 / <b>1%</b>
<b>Named wider places:</b> New Hampshire, Portland	22 / <b>1%</b>
<b>Proprietor</b>	800 / <b>20%</b>
<b>The corridor:</b> Project, Corridor, NECEC, Hydropower, Towers, Poles	345 / <b>9%</b>
<b>Proprietors:</b> CMP, Hydro-Québec, Company, Business, Corporation, Utility, Shareholders	222 / <b>6%</b>
<b>Named proprietor places:</b> Québec, Massachusetts, New England, Canada, Canadian, Spain	132 / <b>3%</b>
<b>Proprietor profit:</b> Money, Compensation, Profit, Interests, Pay, Funds, Dollars	100 / <b>2%</b>
<b>Neighbors</b>	625 / <b>15%</b>
<b>Land uses:</b> Trails, Hiking, Hikers, Guide, Recreation, Logging, Snowmobile, Hunters, Hunt	138 / <b>3%</b>
<b>Neighbors' places:</b> Lot, Home, Camp, Property, House	117 / <b>3%</b>
<b>Stakeholder groups:</b> Public, Residents, Future generations, Owners, Tribes, Citizens	94 / <b>2%</b>
<b>Community:</b> Place, Local, Communities, Region	83 / <b>2%</b>
<b>Named neighboring places:</b> Jackman, Farmington, The Forks, Lewiston, Wilton, Franklin, Caratunk	73 / <b>2%</b>
<b>Family:</b> Children, Family, Grandchildren, Father, Grandfather	58 / <b>1%</b>
<b>Jurisdictions:</b> Town, Township, County	40 / <b>1%</b>
<b>Qualities of neighboring places:</b> Remote, Paradise	21 / <b>1%</b>

Table 1. Frequencies of CMP Corridor opponents' paracommons references.

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NECEC Support Testimony References	Frequency
<b>Wider Economy</b>	630 / 34%
<b>Energy:</b> Energy, Power, Electricity, Transmission, Megawatts, Grid, Solar, Hydropower, Generation, Nuclear, Capacity, Reliability, Supply	278 / 15%
<b>Development:</b> Industry, Resources, Development, Production, Timber, Forestry, Construction, Infrastructure, Investment, Contractors	87 / 5%
<b>Jobs:</b> Working, Workers, Jobs, Employment	63 / 3%
<b>Wider geographies:</b> State, World, Mainer, Nation, Country	55 / 3%
<b>Rates:</b> Costs, Rates, Rate payers, Customers, Consumers, Price, Demand	55 / 3%
<b>The economy:</b> Economic, Economy, Opportunity, Efficiency, Markets	40 / 2%
<b>Tourism:</b> Visual, Views, Visible, Scenic, Visit, Tourism	26 / 1%
<b>Named wider places:</b> Pownal, Waterville, Baxter, the Coast, Cumberland	25 / 1%
<b>Socioecological System</b>	587 / 31%
<b>Threats:</b> Impacts, Fragmentation, Damage, Footprint, Cut, Clearcut, Crossings, Storms, Risk	92 / 5%
<b>Forests:</b> Forest, Woods, Plants, Trees, Vegetation	80 / 4%
<b>Environment:</b> Environment, Nature, Habitat, Wilderness, Wild, Earth, Ecology	75 / 4%
<b>Climate:</b> Climate, Carbon, Greenhouse, Emissions, Global warming	73 / 4%
<b>Fish and wildlife:</b> Wildlife, Animals, Fish, Trout, Critters, Deer, Birds, Species, Fisheries, Osprey	60 / 3%
<b>Lands:</b> Land, Landscape, Mountains	44 / 2%
<b>Pro-environmental actions:</b> Reduce, Mitigate, Renewable, Buffer, Preserve, Conservation, Green, Reductions, Sustainability	44 / 2%
<b>Waters:</b> Water, Streams, Pond, Rivers, Lake, Wetlands	43 / 2%
<b>Fossil fuels:</b> Fossil fuels, Natural gas, Oil, Coal	42 / 2%
<b>Environmental qualities:</b> Pristine, Sensitive, Threatened	17 / 1%
<b>Named common pool features:</b> Kennebec, Beattie, Gorge	10 / 1%
<b>Air:</b> Atmosphere, Air	7 / .4%
<b>Proprietor</b>	349 / 19%
<b>The corridor:</b> Project, Corridor, NECEC, Towers	183 / 10%
<b>Proprietors:</b> CMP, Hydro-Québec, Company, Business, Commercial, Utility	77 / 4%
<b>Named proprietor places:</b> New England, Québec, Canada, Canadian, Massachusetts, Connecticut	56 / 3%
<b>Proprietor profit:</b> Pay, Compensation, Dollars, Funds, Funding, Money, Interests, Financial	32 / 2%
<b>Neighbors</b>	298 / 16%
<b>Land uses:</b> Snowmobiling, Recreational, Trails, Fishing, Logging, Hiking, Farm, Rafting, Hunting, Hiker, Guide, Canoe, Fisherman	83 / 4%
<b>Jurisdictions:</b> Town, County, Township, Municipalities, Selectman	46 / 2%
<b>Community:</b> Communities, Local, Place, Region	41 / 2%
<b>Named neighboring places:</b> Lewiston, Farmington, Somerset, The Forks, Jackman, Starks, Franklin, Chesterville, Coburn	37 / 2%
<b>Stakeholder groups:</b> Public, Residents, Citizens, Neighbor	31 / 2%
<b>Neighbors' places:</b> Lot, Property, Home	26 / 1%
<b>Family:</b> Children, Family, Grandchildren, Son, Daughter, Parent	21 / 1%
<b>Benefits to neighbors:</b> Tax, Income	13 / 1%

Table 2. Frequencies of CMP Corridor proponents' paracommons references.

## The Paracommons of the CMP Corridor I: Proprietors and Neighbors

Calculating the frequency of terms identified with each paracommons destination provides an indication of the importance of each of the four destinations in opponents' and proponents' testimonies. For instance, the aggregate frequencies of references to the Proprietors and Neighbors were notably similar between Corridor opponents (20 percent for Proprietors, 15 percent for Neighbors) and proponents (19 percent for Proprietors, 16 percent for Neighbors). But the prevailing sentiment and breakdown within these destinations were different. For instance, opponents named Massachusetts (i.e., part of the Proprietors system) 46 times, compared to proponents mentioning Massachusetts 4 times. Moreover, opponents refer to the Commonwealth in a disparaging way, in some cases calling out the rebound effect to undercut Proprietors' claims on paragains:

- "The clear beneficiaries are CMP and its *owners*, their *shareholders* and Commonwealth of *Massachusetts*"
- "While the vast majority of benefits go to *Québec, Spain and Massachusetts*, Maine is left with a division between the residents of this state and its government and agencies bigger than any corridor will be"
- "I wonder if we are now experiencing something of the colonization imposed on habitats of the Abenaki from *Massachusetts* and international corporations from 200, 300 years ago"
- "We don't need to leave [future generations] a legacy providing more electricity to *Massachusetts* so they can enjoy air-conditioning"
- "Does it even make sense to destroy our Maine woods to satisfy *Massachusetts* need for electricity and their need to feel like they're going green and the *corporate greed* of two *foreign owned companies* who stand to make billions over the long run if this process goes through?"
- "I can't see making the *Spanish* any richer; they're already rich enough. I can't see making the stockholders of *CMP* any richer; they're already rich enough. And I can't see us supplying power to *Massachusetts* and making the people in *Québec* a little richer" (italics added to identify Proprietor references)

In these testimonies, Corridor opponents contest the Proprietors' claim on paragains by drawing on deep-seated grievances and anticorporatist language conveying their perception of injustice. Their criticisms betray a sense of rebound effect in their calling out the frivolous electricity uses (e.g., air conditioning, greenwash), and complicated spatial politics of the New England region (e.g., "destroying our...woods," sowing "division," histories of dispossession and "colonization").

Proponents, on the other hand, credit Massachusetts with funding the project, strengthening its claim on the Corridor paragains:

- "In addition to the project being paid for by *Massachusetts*, it's a huge economic influence on Maine and the Maine counties that will be going through the corridor"

- "Clean Energy Connect will deliver one billion dollars in jobs, taxes and other benefits in Maine, not *Massachusetts*"
- "This project is a good deal for Maine. *Massachusetts* rate payers will pay a billion dollars to bring existing clean hydroelectric power from *Canada* into New England"

Corridor opponents made 82 references to Québec, Hydro-Québec and Canada—sometimes co-mingled with Massachusetts references quoted above—enough to equal 2 percent of all coded paracommons references, about three times more frequently than Corridor proponents' 14 references to Québec, Hydro-Québec and Canada (i.e., .07 percent of coded references). The opponents, references to Québec were less freighted with grievance than Massachusetts references, but still likely to contest its claims on paragains, in some cases calling out Hydro-Québec's history of mistreating First Nations' lands and people:

- "I've been to where *Hydro-Québec* does all their clean energy and seen what it did to the native tribes in that area and it's disgraceful"
- "Meanwhile how does Maine benefit from this project? How do our children and grandchildren benefit? The benefits will only accrue to the shareholders of *CMP* and *Hydro-Québec*"
- "We're all in the same biosphere here, *Québec* and Maine, and if we go ahead with this project, I think that, you know, people in Maine will be complicit in the destruction of more habitat in *Québec* and then will be responsible for creating more demand to build more dams"
- "*Hydro-Québec* can shift power from existing markets in Ontario, *Québec* and other parts of *Canada* as well as New York and New England to feed *Massachusetts*. Those markets will then be forced to compensate with fossil fuels"
- "*Hydro-Québec* is a *Canadian* province company. If they want to make money off Maine, if they want to make money off New England, let them pay more money than what they're already offering, you know"

Corridor proponents' fourteen references to Québec, Hydro-Québec and Canada generally serve to substantiate the state-owned enterprise's (and province's) claim to paragains:

- "It will replace a huge amount of electricity from dirty fossil fuels with inexpensive renewable hydropower from *Canada*. In 2018 *Hydro-Québec* spilled more than enough water to generate *NECEC's* 1,200 megawatts"
- "*CMP* is constantly accused of lying and *Hydro-Québec*, which is the biggest source of clean energy in eastern North America, is accused of green washing. Meanwhile is anyone demonizing the *owners* of the fossil fuel plant, and by the way, the biomass plants, how many trees are they cutting? Those are the biggest funders of the opposition"
- "We know that one-third of New England's generated capacity will retire over the next decade and that capacity needs to be replaced. There is clean hydro-electric power in *Canada* for the taking"

While opponents see Proprietors hoarding gains, these proponents see Hydro-Québec and Canada as the unproblematic source of “clean” energy, which is “for the taking,” and favorably compare Hydro-Québec to “dirty” fossil fuels producers who fund astroturf campaigns opposing the Corridor.

While both opponents and proponents reference Neighbors with similar frequency, their respective references are differently distributed. With 117 references (3 percent of all coded references) to a lot, home, camp, property, or house, the opponents were three times more likely to use a *neighboring place* to support the Neighbors’ claims on paragains compared to proponents who invoked these places twenty-six times (1 percent of coded references). When opponents reference these places, it often substantiates the harms they feel are disproportionately borne by Neighbors (and the Socioecological System), placing themselves and their claims within the landscape: “I own a sporting *camp* and campground which abuts the corridor along *Moxie Pond*. I’m opposed to the project for its impact on the scenic viewshed and its impact on a working forest, our pristine wilderness that has a working forest in it.” But it may be worth emphasizing that references to Neighbors among opponents were the *least* frequent of the four paracommons destinations, notwithstanding the tendency to characterize Corridor opposition as a NIMBY phenomenon.

Proponents’ references to Neighbors’ places highlight the Corridor’s benefits to Neighbors, epitomized by the business leader from coastal Maine who testified: “This project will boost jobs in the *region* by supporting employment for an average of 1,700 people per year over a six year period. Beyond that it will add to the permanent *local tax base* of the host *communities* and help to expand broadband in an area of the state that really needs it desperately and help fund essential economic development initiatives.” The proponents argue that Neighbors’ share of paragains is adequately factored into local taxation and mitigation packages, emphasizing benefits in economic terms, bridging paragains claims to the Wider Economy.

## The Paracommons of the CMP Corridor II: The Socioecological System and Wider Economy

The largest difference between aggregate frequencies are between references to the Socioecological System, with 42 percent for opponents, compared to 31 percent for proponents, and a roughly complementary difference in references to the Wider Economy, which accounted for 23 percent of opponents, paracommons references and 34 percent of proponents paracommons references. In simple terms, this indicated that Corridor opponents’ testimonies were more focused on the environment, environmental qualities and environmental features, like wildlife and water bodies, as well as threats and pro-environmental actions. On the other hand, proponents’ testimonies were more focused on the Wider Economy, including gains in terms of electricity supply, the grid, reliability, rates and ratepayers, as well as broader concepts of development, production, efficiency, markets, and so on (see Table 2). This divergence in proponents’ and opponents’ public testimonies is worth detailing, especially because the CMP Corridor announces itself in pro-environmental language and emerges from Massachusetts’ progressive climate policies.



Aside from opponents' greater aggregate frequency for Socioecological System references, their testimony was much more likely to reference threats (+100 percent), waters (+150 percent), pro-environmental actions (+100 percent), and environmental qualities (+100 percent), especially qualities that conveyed fragility (e.g., pristine, unique, endangered, etc.). Corridor proponents more frequently referenced climate (+25 percent) and fossil fuels (+100 percent), but it is worth noting that a significant portion of opponents' testimony (113 references, or 3 percent of total) explicitly referenced climate, in addition to climate-linked references to sequestration, renewable energy, and other pro-environmental concepts. In other words, the Corridor opponents' testimonies engaged with climate change and showed concern for climate change impacts as part of their more frequent and diverse references to the sociological system.

Opponents referenced twenty-one distinct environmental threats (i.e., with a frequency above the .05 percent threshold), whereas proponents referenced nine threats. Their assessment of threats to the Socioecological System were often grounded in specific charismatic species impacts

- [Y]ou cannot underestimate the impact on *wildlife*, be it *habitat fragmentation*, the loss of shade for cooling *waters* or the widespread use of *herbicides*—are all detrimental. I concern myself most with the *impact* on *brook trout*, a very *sensitive species* that is on its last leg in the eastern U.S., here in Maine, particularly in that region north. When the *species* is gone, it will be tragic.... [A]s far as mitigation is concerned, in my opinion no amount of today's dollars for alternative *habitat* tradeoff should be considered to compensate for this corridor....It is extremely shortsighted to sell our future for foreign profits and pennies per month to Mainers. In 100 years do we think our future generations will thank us for development or for *saving a unique place*...?

For this opponent, the specific impact of brook trout extirpation is explicitly linked to Proprietors' ("foreign profits") and Wider Economy's ("pennies per month to Mainers") appropriations of paragains.

Proponents also often conveyed urgency but with much less specificity about the threats to the Socioecological System or how the paragains of the CMP Corridor would accrue there:

- "We need the *clean* energy future. To suggest that the 'status quo is okay' is... sticking one's head in the sand. The long-term *viability* of the *planet* depends on a *carbon-free* future. If steps are not taken now to reduce *carbon emissions*, the *visual impacts* of power lines and potential *habitat fragmentation* will be the least of our worries. There will be wholesale negative changes in our *climate* and the *ecology* of our *planet*."
- "We all see daily reminders of the widespread *catastrophic* effects of *climate change* and *global warming*. The United Nations issued an urgent call to action in its 2018 special report. The secretary general of the UN said this report by the world's leading scientists is an ear splitting wake-up call to the world. It

confirms that *climate change* is running faster than we are and we are running out of time. We are running out of time.”

Proponents invoked global actors, like the United Nations, and the global scale, while using suitably strong language (“long-term viability,” “catastrophic,” “wholesale negative”) for the urgency of climate crisis, but these testimonies were not in general anchored in the regional sociological system.

Corridor opponents testified to their concerns for the Wider Economy in 23 percent of the coded testimonies. Compared to proponents, these testimonies showed less concern for development (-60 percent), energy and energy infrastructure (-40 percent), and much more concern for tourism (+300 percent), including the regional recreation-based tourism industries tied to whitewater rafting and angling, which they saw as threatened by scenic and ecological impacts. For example, one opponent argued: “The *State of Maine* economically gets \$3.5 billion a year from *tourists*. That number equates to 52,000 *jobs*. That number is dependent upon the pristine areas that people come to *visit* and see that they don't have in their own backyard.” This opponent among others argued that the Corridor presents *paraharms*, or degrades, the Wider Economy.

Corridor proponents engaged more frequently in testimony that emphasized the gains that accrue to the Wider Economy in general, with more diverse language centering on development and industrial capacity and more frequent (+300 percent) and diverse references to rates and rate-payers. A proponent representing a business association provided testimony particularly dense with paragains claims for the Wider Economy:

NECEC...will lower *electricity supply prices* and even...out *energy price* spikes and uncertainty, which is never good for *business*. This project will result in millions of dollars of *rate relief* every year for *Maine ratepayers*. It will also provide increased *reliability* for *Maine* and the *ISO New England* region by delivering base load *energy* to replace retiring resources such as nuclear power set to close later this summer. There is real value in this *infrastructure*, which *Maine* will host and yet not pay to construct. It is also extremely important to ensure we have *reliable electricity* for the future.

While not every proponents' references to the Wider Economy contained the same specific and detailed claims for the Wider Economy's paragains, proponents in general showed a more sustained and sophisticated engagement with the Wider Economy destination.

## Conclusion

By using Lankford's paracommons framework to code and then explicate the testimony of CMP Corridor opponents and proponents, the foregoing analysis clarifies the spatial politics of the controversy, while offering insights into the spatial politics of sustainability transitions more broadly. The quantitative content analysis of the frequency of terms associated with

paracommons destinations accounts for the range of perspectives of both constituencies, while also directing attention to key overlapping concerns and differences in Corridor opponents' and proponents' testimonies. Expounding on illustrative or representative testimonies reveals the wider critique of both Corridor proponents and opponents.

Opponents contest the Proprietors' claims (i.e., Massachusetts, Québec, and Spain) on future gains on the basis of deep grievances, greed, and anti-corporatist politics. Nearly half of opponents' coded references to paracommons destinations are associated with the Socioecological System, indicating both their concern for the threats posed by the Corridor, as well as their recognition of problem of the rebound effect. These references to the Sociological System are diverse, grounded in impacts on specific regional species and ecosystem dynamics, and show a significant concern for climate change and climate mitigation. Corridor opponents' references to Neighbors are rooted in place, but it is the least frequent paracommons destination opponents cite, complicating narratives that reduce their opposition to NIMBY politics.

Proponents, on the other hand, most frequently and favorably reference the Wider Economy in their testimonies, emphasizing widespread benefits to industry and economic productivity from grid investments and lower electricity costs. This language supports paragains accruing across Maine and the New England region. Proponents are more likely to approvingly cite benefits to the Neighbors, via taxation and mitigation, but their Neighbor references, while less place-based, do share a concern for land uses, family, and named locations. When proponents reference the Sociological System, they use a more narrow set of terms to frame environmental threats or pro-environmental actions—both of which are much less frequent—even as they advocate for the Corridor as a response to our urgent planetary climate crisis.

Lankford's paracommons framework helps appreciate that Corridor opponents and proponents are participating in current and ongoing negotiations over future, freed up gains of sustainability transitions—both the CMP Corridor, the Maine-based renewable energy projects it threatens, and alternative visions. There is considerable overlap in both constituencies' concerns for the Socioecological System, though differently expressed, and similar frequencies for Neighbors and Proprietors, with decidedly different sentiments. Much of the complexity of these diverging positions on the Corridor is directly rooted in the spatial politics competing perspectives bring to the controversy, whether rooted in regional grievances, local versus global, place-specificity versus planetary.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> "Astroturf" describes deceptive practices of mobilizing citizens campaigns for or against controversial initiatives and practices. Astroturf campaigns gain legitimacy by hiding their corporate funders in order to appear as spontaneous mobilizations of grassroots citizens groups (Saint et al. 2009).

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