

The Elements:
Wind

By

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The California Legacy
Project

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THE ELEMENTS:
WIND

Scene: 1

Introduction

MUSIC: CAL LEGACY UPDATED THEME

NARRATOR:

Great writing about California's natural world is compelling and concrete, encouraging us to be personally in touch with the elements of our environment.

Earth, wind, fire, and water, timeless elements of California's natural world.

Hear now--the Wind!

SOUND: WIND SOUNDS SWELL THEN EVENTUALLY FADE OUT

MUSIC: FOLLOWS THE LEVELS OF THE WIND EFFECTS AND EVENTUALLY REPLACES IT

NARRATOR:

Since the early 80s, giant wind farms have perched on breezy passes throughout California. Wind turbines are part of a green vision, for sure, but their construction is not without environmental cost. Here's John Farnsworth of the Santa Clara University Environmental Studies Institute.

FARNSWORTH

Over the past decade an average of 67 golden eagles are killed every year by the wind turbines on the Altamont Pass. Wow. Image the mortality rate when we quadruple the amount of wind energy produced in this state, as a recent law has mandated!

NARRATOR

Wind-born creatures share the wind with us, raptors like the red-tailed hawk that Walter Van Tilburg Clark describes in his 1940 short story, "Hook."

CLARK:

Throughout that summer and the cool growthless weather of the winter when the gales blew in the river canyon and the ocean piled upon the shore, Hook was master of the sky and the hills of his range. His flight became a lovely and certain thing, so that he played with the treacherous currents of the air with a delicate ease surpassing that of the gulls. He could sail for hours

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CLARK: (cont'd)
searching the blanched grasses below him with
telescopic eyes, gaining height against the wind

MUSIC: BRIDGE TO NARRATOR

SOUND: WIND SOUNDS MIXED INTO FOLLOWING DIALOGUE

SCENE: 2

Power and Danger

MUSIC: BRIEF INTERLUDE

NARRATOR:

Wind turbines may look like overgrown egg beaters or, in close formation, a squadron of World War II fighter planes on the deck of a carrier. But here in California, they're just the latest version of an old technology.

SOUND: WIND SOUNDS MIXED INTO FOLLOWING DIALOGUE ALONG WITH MECHANICAL CLACKING OF OLD WOODEN WIND MILL

MUSIC: CONTINUES THROUGHOUT THE READINGS, CONTRIBUTING TO A FEELING OF UNEASE UNDERNEATH THE DIALOGUE

EAMES:

Every family or group of families has its separate well and windmill, thus obviating the necessity of a general source of water supply.

NARRATOR:

Ninetta Eames was writing for the Overland Monthly in 1892. In "Staging in the Mendocino Woods" she described the landscape and the wind-gathering technology of the era.

EAMES:

One sees windmills painted in red, white, or blue, or dark shades of maroon and yellow, and still others so ancient and wind tortured that their distinctive color can only be guessed.

When the wind blows, and there is rarely a day here that it does not, these various windmills set up a medley of discordant creaks and groans, each pitched in a different key, and whether heard singly or collectively, all equally nerve-rendering.

SOUND: WINDMILL SOUNDS FADE

(CONTINUED)

NARRATOR:

And of course, there's Raymond Chandler, who understood full well that the wind could always reach anyone--even those who live indoors.

CHANDLER:

There was a desert wind blowing that night. It was one of those hot dry Santa Anas that come down through the mountain passes and curl your hair and make your nerves jump and your skin itch. On nights like that every booze party ends in a fight. Meek little wives feel the edge of the carving knife and study their husbands' necks. Any thing can happen. You can even get a full glass of beer at a cocktail lounge.

Scene: 3

Ravished Soul

SOUND: WIND NOISES FADE IN FAVOR OF MUSIC

MUSIC: CHANGE OF MOOD TO UPBEAT, MORE ENTHUSIASTIC, MORE ROMANTIC

SOUND: WIND NOISES BUILD UNDERNEATH DIALOGUE, WITH EMPHASIS ON TREES MOVING WITH THE WIND

NARRATOR:

Not all writers saw the wind in sinister terms. Others found it a sublime force.

One December day in 1874, John Muir was exploring a Sierran valley in the middle of a fierce windstorm. He climbed to the top of a Douglas Spruce and, clinging to its branches, paused to listen to the symphony of the trees.

MUIR:

Nature was holding high festival, and every fiber of the most rigid giants thrilled with glad excitement. . . . Even when the grand anthem had swelled to its highest pitch, I could distinctly hear the varying tones of individual trees,--Spruce, and Fir, and Pine, and leafless Oak,--and even the infinitely gentle rustle of the withered grasses at my feet. Each was expressing itself in its own way,--singing its own song, and making its own peculiar gestures,--manifesting a richness of variety to be found in no other forest I have yet seen. . . .

The profound bass of the naked branches and boles booming like waterfalls; the quick, tense vibrations of the pine-needles, now rising to a shrill, whistling

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MUIR: (cont'd)

hiss, now falling to a silky murmur; the rustling of laurel groves in the dells, and the keen metallic click of leaf on leaf--all this was heard in easy analysis when the attention was calmly bent.

NARRATOR:

Again, John Farnsworth

FARNSWORTH

When actively feeding, many raptors fly around 300 feet off the ground, focusing intently on whatever prey are creeping and crawling down there. They did not evolve to be aware of spinning turbine blades, which often reach this height. While newer, larger turbines are less likely to wreak havoc, we are still losing raptors at an alarming level in this state. Wind is important for the sustainable future of your state, but the big question is: how do you save an animal that is looking down while traveling forward.

NARRATOR:

Next time you see--and maybe hear--those giant wind turbines, remember the soaring red-tailed hawk, Hook; or think of John Muir, and his wind woods symphony. Examine your own experience of outdoor California to appreciate better what's at stake here.

For the California Legacy Project at Santa Clara University, I'm Terry Beers

CREDITS:

The Wind is a production of the California Legacy Project at Santa Clara University, californialegacy.org, and featured Kevin Hearle, Dan Maloney, and Jessica Teeter.

Music and post-production by Bernhard Drax at draxtor.com.