

Conservation, Preservation, and Environmental Activism: A Survey of the Historical Literature

The American people have had a complex relationship with nature. On the one hand, we have exploited the nation's natural resources with devastating speed -- clearing forests, damming rivers, killing wildlife, fouling the air and water with pollutants. On the other hand, we have taken pride in the extraordinary beauty of our country. For more than a century, many Americans also have fought to protect the environment.

In the late 19th century, indeed, three different kinds of environmental problems became matters of public debate. One problem was the prospect that the nation soon would run out of vital natural resources, especially wood. To ensure that future generations would have adequate supplies of essential raw materials, many people joined "the conservation movement." (That phrase first became popular in the first decade of the 20th century.) A second issue was the fate of "wilderness." A number of organizations began to argue that undeveloped lands of great natural beauty ought to be preserved. The third problem to attract attention before 1900 was pollution -- a horrible threat to health in the nation's fast-growing cities. That threat led to far-reaching efforts to improve the urban environment.

The modern environmental movement, which became a powerful force in the 1960s, built on the earlier efforts to conserve natural resources, preserve wilderness, and control pollution. But the environmental movement also was a response to profound changes in American life after World War II.

Historians have written for decades about the earliest forms of environmental activism. The conservation movement attracted attention first. Then scholars began to explore the growing appreciation of "wilderness." Studies of anti-pollution activism came next. In recent years, historians also have written extensively about the rise of the modern environmental movement.

The Conservation Movement

The classic starting point for the study of conservation is Samuel P. Hays, Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959). Before Hays, scholars accepted the view of conservation held by the movement's first leaders, who saw themselves as champions of democracy: The conservation movement sought to protect the nation's natural resources from short-sighted exploitation by rapacious corporations. Hays rejected the view that the movement was democratic. He argued instead that the driving force among conservationists was a commitment to scientific management of resources by experts. For Hays, a new understanding of the conservation movement provided new insight into the reform spirit of the Progressive era.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, the political history of the conservation movement was the subject of several works, including Elmo R. Richardson, The Politics of Conservation: Crusades and Controversies, 1897-1913 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962); J. Leonard Bates, The Origins of Teapot Dome: Progressives, Parties and Petroleum, 1909-1921 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963); Donald C. Swain, Federal Conservation Policy, 1921-1933 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963); James Penick, Jr., Progressive Politics and Conservation: The Ballinger-Pinchot Affair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); and Elmo R. Richardson, Dams, Parks, and Politics: Resource Development and Preservation in the Truman-Eisenhower Era (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1973).

The first generation of historical writing about conservation was top-down, emphasizing the contributions

of such national leaders as Gifford Pinchot and Theodore Roosevelt. In American Sportsmen and the Origins of Conservation (1975; third edition, Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2000), John F. Reiger challenged that emphasis. He argued that the movement grew out of the concerns of recreational hunters. Richard W. Judd's Common Lands, Common People: The Origins of Conservation in Northern New England (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997) went even further in challenging the view that conservation was driven by a political and scientific elite concerned about resource scarcity. In New England, Judd concluded, farmers led the way in protesting unwelcome changes in the landscape, especially declines in fish populations.

In recent years, historians have looked more critically at the social and environmental effects of conservation policies. Louis S. Warren's The Hunter's Game: Poachers and Conservationists in Twentieth-Century America (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) and Karl Jacoby's Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) demonstrated that regulations to restrict timber cutting and wildlife hunting made subsistence more difficult for many immigrants, native Americans, itinerant laborers, and backwoods farmers. Other works have argued that conservation agencies often failed to appreciate the ecological complexities of forests and fisheries, especially Arthur F. McEvoy, The Fisherman's Problem: Ecology and Law in the California Fisheries, 1850-1980 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Nancy Langston, Forest Dreams, Forest Nightmares: The Paradox of Old Growth in the Inland West (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), and Joseph E. Taylor III, Making Salmon: An Environmental History of the Northwest Fisheries Crisis (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999). Paul W. Hirt offered a more general critique of the U. S. Forest Service in A Conspiracy of Optimism: Management of the National Forests since World War Two (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994).

The political history of conservation continues to attract scholarly attention. Donald J. Pisani's Water, Land, and Law in the West: The Limits of Public Policy, 1850-1920 (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996) collected a number of important essays about the region most affected by the conservation movement. Pisani's essay on "Natural Resources and the American State, 1900-1940," in Morton Keller and R. Shep Melnick, editors, Taking Stock: American Government in the Twentieth Century (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), went beyond the traditional focus on the Progressive era to consider the conservation efforts of the 1920s and 1930s. Kurkpatrick Dorsey broke new ground in The Dawn of Conservation Diplomacy: U.S.-Canadian Wildlife Protection Treaties in the Progressive Era (Seattle: University of Washington, 1998).

In the tradition of Samuel Hays, scholars also have reexamined the relationship of the conservation movement to broader trends in American society. David M. Wrobel's The End of American Exceptionalism: Frontier Anxiety from the Old West to the New Deal (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993) argued that the movement was part of a far-reaching effort to come to terms with the seeming end of the nation's unique "safety valve" -- the opportunity for people to start over by moving west. In Hoover, Conservation, and Consumption: Engineering the Good Life (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), Kendrick A. Clements tied conservation to efforts to promote a modern consumer culture.

Though much of the writing about conservation has focused on forest and water resources, a few scholars have explored efforts to conserve agricultural soils. Donald Worster's Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) brilliantly analyzed the response to the disaster that made soil conservation a national issue. Tim Lehman carried the story forward in Public Values, Private Lands: Farmland Preservation Policy, 1933-1985 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995). Randal S. Beeman and James A. Pritchard traced a critical tradition of thinking about "sustainable agriculture" in A Green and Permanent Land: Ecology and Agriculture in the Twentieth Century (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), while Steven Stoll's Larding the Lean Earth: Soil

and Society in Nineteenth-Century America (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002) argued that concern about wasteful and destructive methods of farming dates from the early 1800s.

Several outstanding biographies also have contributed to our understanding of the history of conservation, including David Lowenthal, George Perkins Marsh: Prophet of Conservation (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000); Char Miller, Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern Environmentalism (Washington: Island Press, 2001); and Donald Worster, A River Running West: The Life of John Wesley Powell (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Preserving "Wilderness"

In the historical literature on preservation, the breakthrough work was Roderick Nash's Wilderness and the American Mind (1967; fourth edition, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). At first, Nash argued, Americans saw undeveloped forests and fields as wastelands. But by the middle of the 19th century, a small group of artists and writers had begun to celebrate the undeveloped countryside as a romantic escape from civilization and a sublime source of national pride. Then the rise of the industrial city and the closing of the frontier encouraged a new appreciation for seemingly pristine landscapes. The result was a series of preservation campaigns culminating in the passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964. To trace the change in thinking about wilderness, Nash focused on such seminal thinkers as Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and Aldo Leopold. But he also considered popular culture and legislative battles.

Soon after the publication of Nash's work, Peter J. Schmitt's Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969) offered a more critical account of the growing appreciation for the wild in the early 20th century. To Schmitt, the desire to return to nature was a form of nostalgia for a simpler world.

In the 1970s and 1980s, several scholars explored more deeply the historic arguments for preservation. Alfred Runte's National Parks: The American Experience (1979; third edition, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997) was a provocative intellectual history of the park ideal. In Forever Wild: A Cultural History of Wilderness in the Adirondacks (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), Philip G. Terrie explained the origins of the nation's largest and most influential state park. Hal K. Rothman's Preserving Different Pasts: The American National Monuments (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989) considered the important yet neglected legacy of the Antiquities Act of 1906.

The great attraction of the national parks was spectacular scenery. Over time, however, the parks also became important nature preserves. Several recent works have looked at the history of ecological management in the parks. Richard West Sellars, Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), is one; James A. Pritchard, Preserving Yellowstone's Natural Conditions: Science and the Perception of Nature (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), is another.

Because the nation's wildest places have become tourist attractions, the historical literature on tourism offers much insight into the preservation movement. Earl Pomeroy's In Search of the Golden West: The Tourist in Western America (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957) was the first work on the subject. Warren James Belasco's Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910-1945 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1979), Hal K. Rothman's Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), and Marguerite S. Shaffer's See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940 (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001) all explored the relationship between tourism and nature appreciation. In Driven Wild: How the Fight Against Automobiles Launched the Modern Wilderness Movement (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), Paul S. Sutter argued that the growth of automobile tourism was critical in the formation of the Wilderness Society, which began

to fight in the 1930s for a new type of protected space -- the designated wilderness area, where motorized vehicles are prohibited.

A trio of biographical studies, all almost a generation old, also are helpful in understanding the history of preservation: Stephen Fox, John Muir and His Legacy: The American Conservation Movement (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1981); Frederick Turner, Rediscovering America: John Muir in His Time and Ours (New York: Viking, 1985); and Michael P. Cohen, The Pathless Way: John Muir and American Wilderness (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984). Cohen's The History of the Sierra Club, 1892-1970 (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988) is valuable too.

Like conservation, preservation came at a social cost. The lands preservationists viewed as "wild" often were inhabited by native Americans. Mark David Spence's Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) discussed the unsettling consequences of preserving Yellowstone, Glacier, and Yosemite. Yet in at least one place the story was more complicated, as Theodore Catton demonstrated in Inhabited Wilderness: Indians, Eskimos, and the National Parks in Alaska (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997).

The First Anti-Pollution Campaigns

Historical analysis of anti-pollution activism began with H. Wayne Morgan's essay on "America's First Environmental Challenge" in Essays on the Gilded Age (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), edited by Margaret Francine Morris. In the period roughly from 1865 to 1915, activists focused on the environmental ills of cities, and city governments responded by building sewer systems, taking responsibility for collecting garbage and cleaning streets, protecting sources of drinking water, establishing parks, and regulating "the smoke nuisance." The first in-depth analysis of those efforts came in a still-indispensable collection: Martin V. Melosi, editor, Pollution and Reform in American Cities, 1870-1930 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980).

In the 1980s, several cases studies of municipal sanitary reform appeared, including Judith Walzer Leavitt's The Healthiest City: Milwaukee and the Politics of Health Reform (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982) and Stuart Galishoff's Newark, The Nation's Unhealthiest City: 1832-1895 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988). Scholars also began to look at the response of citizens and city officials to specific environmental problems, and studies in that vein continue to appear. Martin V. Melosi's Garbage in the Cities: Refuse, Reform, and the Environment, 1880-1980 (1981) remains the best work on that issue, while efforts to deal with air and water pollution are the subject of David Stradling's Smokestacks and Progressives: Environmentalists, Engineers, and Air Quality in America, 1881-1951 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999) and John T. Cumbler's Reasonable Use: The People, the Environment, and the State, New England 1790-1930 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). Common Fields: An Environmental History of St. Louis (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society Press, 1997), a collection edited by Andrew Hurley, also includes several important essays on urban environmental activism.

Women were especially active in the Progressive-era campaigns to improve the urban environment. In a contribution to Martin Melosi's Pollution and Reform collection, Suellen M. Hoy argued that women often justified their activism as a natural extension of traditional gender roles: Anti-pollution and beautification campaigns were "municipal housekeeping." In recent years, several works have developed Hoy's insight, including Susan Curtis, A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and Modern American Culture (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Daphne Spain, How Women Saved the City (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); and Maureen A. Flanagan, Seeing with Their Hearts: Chicago Women and the Vision of the Good City, 1871-1933 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). Hoy herself put municipal housekeeping in a broader context in Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of

Cleanliness (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

As Stanley K. Schultz argued in Constructing Urban Culture: American Cities and City Planning, 1800-1920 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), environmental issues were critical in the expansion of the power of municipal government. Martin V. Melosi made that argument even more impressively in The Sanitary City: Urban Infrastructure in America from Colonial Times to the Present (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000). The essays of two pioneers in the study of the urban environment also provide rich insight into the subject. Joel A. Tarr republished work from the 1970s to the 1990s in The Search for the Ultimate Sink: Urban Pollution in Historical Perspective (Akron: University of Akron Press, 1996), and Martin V. Melosi's essays are collected in Effluent America: Cities, Industry, Energy, and the Environment (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001).

In the vast scholarly literature on city parks, a few works stand out. David Schuyler's The New Urban Landscape: The Redefinition of City Form in Nineteenth-Century America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) neatly laid out the intellectual underpinnings of efforts to green American cities. In The Park and the People: A History of Central Park (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar considered the social history of the nation's most celebrated urban greenspace. Their work anticipated the recent literature on the social costs of establishing state and federal preserves. Laura Wood Roper's F.L.O.: A Biography of Frederick Law Olmsted (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973) still is invaluable as a guide to the career of the nation's most influential park designer.

Park construction in the late 19th and early 20th centuries often was part of a broader effort to improve the aesthetics of the metropolis -- an effort that included campaigns against air and water pollution, noise, and even billboards. The best account of those campaigns is William H. Wilson's The City Beautiful Movement (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989). Ernest Morrison's J. Horace McFarland: A Thorn for Beauty (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1995) told the story of a leading "City Beautiful" advocate. In Visions of Eden: Environmentalism, Urban Planning, and City Building in St. Petersburg, Florida, 1900-1995 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1997), R. Bruce Stephenson traced the evolution of the ideal in one community.

The Environmental Movement

Historians agree that three developments after World War II encouraged the rise of the modern environmental movement. As the economy boomed, newly affluent Americans became less willing to accept environmental degradation as the price of progress. New technologies -- from the atomic bomb to chemical pesticides -- brought new environmental hazards. The popularization of ecological ideas also gave countless citizens a new appreciation of the risks of transforming and manipulating nature.

Of course, the environmental movement built on earlier efforts to conserve resources, preserve wilderness, and improve the urban environment. Yet only a few scholars have tried to explain how the causes of the late 19th and early 20th centuries evolved into modern environmentalism. Stephen Fox argued in John Muir and His Legacy that the environmental movement largely descended from grassroots efforts to save wild places and wild creatures. For Robert Gottlieb, however, the most vital tradition of environmental activism began with the early 20th-century campaigns to improve the degraded environments of factories and working-class neighborhoods. In Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement (Washington: Island Press, 1993), Gottlieb thus concluded that recent campaigns for environmental justice have deep roots.

Samuel P. Hays took a different tack in Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Hays sharply contrasted the

conservation and environmental movements. Conservationists sought to make the world of production efficient and sustainable, Hays argued, while environmentalism was largely a consumer-oriented effort to improve the quality of life.

To analyze the rise of the environmental movement, several scholars have explored activism in specific cities and states. Andrew Hurley's Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995) brilliantly showed how middle-class women, factory workers, and African Americans came to form a coalition to address environmental problems in a steel town. In Protectors of the Land and Water: Environmentalism in Wisconsin, 1961-1968 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), Thomas R. Huffman traced the sources of the movement in the home state of Gaylord Nelson, a governor and then U. S. senator who organized the first Earth Day. Richard W. Judd and Christopher S. Beach argued in Natural States: The Environmental Imagination in Maine, Oregon, and the Nation (Washington: Resources for the Future, 2003) that efforts to stop water pollution and control urban sprawl grew from a powerful sense of place.

Historians also have looked at a variety of environmental controversies and issues. In A Symbol of Wilderness: Echo Park and the American Conservation Movement (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), Mark W. T. Harvey analyzed a battle that many scholars consider the first sign of the increasing appeal of environmental values after World War II: In contrast to the early 20th century, when John Muir failed to stop the construction of a dam in the Hetch Hetchy valley, the Sierra Club succeeded in a similar effort in the 1950s. Thomas Raymond Wellock's Critical Masses: Opposition to Nuclear Power in California, 1958-1978 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998) explained how the Sierra Club moved beyond the traditional concerns of preservation to become a powerful environmental organization. In The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), Adam Rome argued that the movement gained strength from grassroots and professional protests against the environmental costs of tract-house development.

In addition, several works have shed light on the history of environmentalism by analyzing attitudes toward elements of nature, including Susan R. Schrepfer, The Fight to Save the Redwoods: A History of Environmental Reform, 1917-1978 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983); Joseph V. Siry, Marshes of the Ocean Shore: Development of an Ecological Ethic (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1984); Lisa Mighetto, Wild Animals and American Environmental Ethics (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991); and Ann Vileisis, Discovering the Unknown Landscape: A History of America's Wetlands (Washington: Island Press, 1997).

In a very different way, Spencer R. Weart provided rich insight into the rise of an environmentalist sensibility in Nuclear Fear: A History of Images (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988). Though one source of the environmental movement was a new appreciation of nature, another was a growing anxiety about the fruits of modern science and technology.

A few scholars also have analyzed the evolution of the pollution issue after the Progressive era. In Great River: An Environmental History of the Upper Mississippi, 1890-1950 (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985), Philip V. Scarpino argued that grassroots protest against water pollution came largely from sporting organizations, especially the Izaak Walton League. Scott Hamilton Dewey's Don't Breathe the Air: Air Pollution and U. S. Environmental Politics, 1945-1970 (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000) tied the passage of national legislation to activism in several states, especially New York and California. Craig E. Colten and Peter N. Skinner analyzed efforts to deal with a major source of land and water contamination in The Road to Love Canal: Managing Industrial Waste before EPA (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996). In Deceit and Denial: The Deadly Politics of Industrial Pollution (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), Gerald Markowitz and David Rosner offered a hard-

hitting argument about the forces that have made the pollution problem so difficult to solve.

In the last decade, scholars have begun to argue that women made distinctive contributions to environmentalism. Lewis L. Gould's Lady Bird Johnson and the Environment (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988) was the first in-depth study of a woman's activism. In Made from this Earth: American Women and Nature (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), Vera Norwood argued that women have a long tradition of caring about the environment. Her pioneering work explored the careers of a variety of writers, illustrators, garden designers, scientists, and wildlife conservationists from the 19th century until the present. In Earthcare: Women and the Environment (New York: Routledge, 1995), Carolyn Merchant considered the role of women in the conservation, wilderness preservation, and environmental movements. Polly Welts Kaufman's National Parks and the Woman's Voice: A History (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996) and Glenda Riley's Women and Nature: Saving the 'Wild' West (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999) surveyed the ties of women to the outdoors.

The historical studies of the environmental movement all make clear that the 1960s was a critical period, yet the relationship of environmentalism to the political and cultural developments of that decade has received little attention. For the liberal contribution to the movement, the best starting point still is Martin V. Melosi's essay on "Lyndon Johnson and Environmental Policy" in The Johnson Years: Vietnam, the Environment, and Science (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1987), edited by Robert Divine. J. Brooks Flippen discussed the environmental politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s in Nixon and the Environment (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000). Though not a study of environmentalism, Warren J. Belasco's Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took on the Food Industry (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989) provided a suggestive account of the movement's ties to one strand of sixties dissent. Andrew Kirk took a different approach in an essay on "Alternative Technology, Environment, and the Counterculture" in Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s (New York: Routledge, 2002), edited by Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle.

Science and the Environmental Movement

From the first, scientists played a critical role in the rise of environmentalism, as scholars began to note in the 1970s. In a pioneering essay about the intellectual "Roots of the New Conservation" -- published in volume 6 of Perspectives in American History in 1972 -- Donald Fleming focused on ecological ideas. Susan L. Flader's Thinking Like a Mountain: Aldo Leopold and the Evolution of an Ecological Attitude Toward Deer, Wolves, and Forests (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1974) analyzed in detail a key experience in the life of one of the most influential environmental thinkers of the 20th century. In Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas (1977; second edition, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), Donald Worster provided a sweeping analysis of two centuries of thought about the workings of nature.

Since the appearance of Worster's classic work, historians have done a number of excellent case studies of the role of ecological ideas in environmental politics. The most influential are by Thomas R. Dunlap: DDT: Scientists, Citizens and Public Policy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981) and Saving America's Wildlife (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). Dunlap also wrote at length about the influence of science in Nature and the English Diaspora: Environment and History in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

To understand the role of ecological ideas in the evolution of environmentalism, two biographies are indispensable: Curt Meine's Aldo Leopold: His Life and Work (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988) and Linda Lear's Rachel Carson: Witness for Nature (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997). Betty Jean Craig's Eugene Odum: Ecosystem Ecologist and Environmentalist (Athens: University of

Georgia Press, 2001) also is useful.

Ecology was not the only science to contribute to environmentalism. Michael L. Smith considered the contributions of geologists in Pacific Visions: California Scientists and the Environment, 1850-1915 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987). To a greater extent than scholars had realized, earth science shaped the early history of the Sierra Club. In Hazards of the Job: From Industrial Disease to Environmental Health Science (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), Christopher C. Sellers demonstrated that modern understanding of the health effects of a variety of pollutants owed much to earlier research on "occupational hygiene." The first medical studies of pollution focused on epidemic disease, but studies of workers in dusty factories pointed the way toward a new emphasis on the danger of long-term exposure to chemicals and particulates.

Nature and American Culture

To understand the rise of environmentalism, a number of older intellectual and cultural histories still are useful, including Hans Huth's Nature and the American: Three Centuries of Changing Attitudes (1957; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990) and Arthur A. Ekirch, Jr.'s Man and Nature in America (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963). Both works shed light on conservation and preservation as well as environmentalism.

Scholars have continued to explore the history of ideas about nature in a variety of ways. Patricia Nelson Limerick's Desert Passages: Encounters with the American Deserts (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985), Stephen J. Pyne's How the Canyon Became Grand: A Short History (New York: Viking Penguin, 1998), and Susan Kollin's Nature's State: Imagining Alaska as the Last Frontier (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001) looked at intellectual and cultural responses to specific landscapes. William Cronon provided a superb analysis of conceptions of nature in the 20th-century West in "Landscapes of Abundance and Scarcity," a chapter in The Oxford History of the American West (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), edited by Clyde A. Milner II, Carol A. O'Connor, and Martha A. Sandweiss.

Roderick Nash surveyed the "greening" of science, religion, philosophy, and law in The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989). Gregg Mitman's Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) offered a thoughtful reading of a powerful form of popular culture. The history of animal displays also is a good way to understand changing attitudes toward nature, as Susan G. Davis's Spectacular Nature: Corporate Culture and the Sea World Experience (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) and Elizabeth Hanson's Animal Attractions: Nature on Display in American Zoos (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) make clear. In Flight Maps: Adventures with Nature in Modern America (New York: Basic Books, 1999), Jennifer Price provocatively analyzed the meaning of a variety of artifacts, from feathered hats to pink flamingos.

Other scholars have considered the role of religion in shaping ideas about nature. In an essay on John Muir in The Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), Donald Worster argued that a dissident tradition of Protestantism contributed to the activism of a surprising number of influential preservationists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Mark Stoll's Protestantism, Capitalism, and Nature in America (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997) went further in considering the complex and even contradictory ways religion has shaped environmental attitudes.

Resources for Teaching the History of Environmentalism

As scholarly interest in environmental history has grown, the number of textbooks in the field has exploded, and many of the texts offer excellent introductions to the history of environmental activism. The first survey of the subject was Joseph M. Petulla, [American Environmental History: The Exploitation and Conservation of Natural Resources](#) (San Francisco: Boyd & Fraser, 1977). Now a range of overviews are available: John Opie, [Nature's Nation: An Environmental History of the United States](#) (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1998); Anthony N. Penna, [Nature's Bounty: Historical and Modern Environmental Perspectives](#) (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1999); Richard N. L. Andrews, [Managing the Environment, Managing Ourselves: A History of American Environmental Policy](#) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Ted Steinberg, [Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History](#) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Carolyn Merchant, [The Columbia Guide to American Environmental History](#) (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002). In addition, several texts offer more limited coverage, including Benjamin Kline, [First Along the River: A Brief History of the U. S. Environmental Movement](#) (1997; second edition, San Francisco: Acada Books, 2002); Hal K. Rothman, [The Greening of a Nation?: Environmentalism in the United States Since 1945](#) (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1998); Hal K. Rothman, [Saving the Planet: The American Response to the Environment in the Twentieth Century](#) (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000); and Samuel P. Hays, [A History of Environmental Politics since 1945](#) (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000).

Several scholars have put together excellent environmental-history readers for course use. The best collection of primary sources, however, is a classic reference work: Frank Smith, editor, [Conservation in the United States: A Documentary History](#) [Five volumes] (New York: Chelsea House, 1971).

Finally, the quarterly journal [Environmental History](#) is invaluable. Though the journal considers all times and places, most of the articles are about the United States, and many concern the history of environmental activism. In recent issues, for example, the journal has included articles about the Civilian Conservation Corps, the evolution of hiking ethics, and the career of Everglades champion Marjory Stoneman Douglas. Every issue of [Environmental History](#) also includes book reviews and bibliographical guides to new books, articles, and dissertations.

Adam Rome
Department of History
[Pennsylvania State University](#)

return to [Thinking About National Park Service History](#) page

[Home](#) | [NPS History](#) | [Online Books](#) | [Historical Themes](#)
[Maritime](#) | [Research and Education](#) | [Oral History](#) | [Site Map](#)

[Privacy & Disclaimer](#)

Last Modified: Thurs, Jan 16 2003 10:52:46 pm PST

