

**Review: *The Next West: Public Lands, Community, and Economy in the American West***

Editors: John A. Baden and Donald Snow

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Baden, John A. and Snow, Donald, eds. *The Next West: Public Lands, Community, and Economy in the American West*. Washington, DC: Island Press, 1997. 272 p. US \$22.95 paper ISBN: 1-55963- 460-X. Recycled, acid-free paper.

Intriguing, confusing, exciting, frustrating, Jeffersonian, libertarian, controversial. These terms come to mind as the most appropriate for describing the feel to the discussions and opinions in the essays presented in *The Next West*. Baden and Snow have compiled, under the auspices of the Gallatin Institute, a collection of eleven essays from a variety of outspoken environmentalists and economists discussing the evolution of the 'Next West' and exploring what may need to be done to find and maintain the delicate balance between the natural environment and the human community sharing the same space. Though there is no pre-stated central theme or common literary style, each, in its own way, is an evocative call to the citizenry of the American West to rethink and reevaluate its stance on environmental sustainability and the solutions used to achieve these goals.

The first five essays, grouped together under the section heading "On the Ground", focus their attention on the errors of our ways or, rather, how the idealistic plans and best intentions of the past 25 years have evolved to the point of counterproductivity. Most notably, the authors criticize the Federal and state political machinery for corrupting environmental efforts and disenfranchising the communities these agencies were created to protect. They argue the bureaucratic machinations of these agencies are geared more towards budgetary self-realization than ecological reform and restoration. Worse, the "grand experiments" of the Environmental Protection Agency, Bureau of Reclamation, Forestry Service, et al have grown to the point where the local citizens feel they have no incentive to make a difference since it could mean the loss of jobs and community profits associated with agency operations. In addition, these citizens feel they no longer have to be responsible for the stewardship of the natural resources since the

government is already doing it for them.

The last section, titled "Old Traditions and New Ideas", takes the issue of the "grand experiment" and expands it further. These essays focus on the theoretical realms of politics and economy by discussing how such factors influence community development and environmental decision making processes. Here, for example, such Western institutions and icons as the Bureau of Land Management, the National Parks Service, and John Wesley Powell come under intense scrutiny and evaluation, with less than favorable conclusions.

Traditionalist environmentalists and "wise use" advocates alike will be very upset with this book. Traditionalists will be offended by the suggestions to reduce significantly the power of centralized national regulatory agencies and the legislation supporting these operations, in order to send the regulatory responsibility back to the community level. This would mean the loss of the legislative crutches so dear to many environmental groups. "Wise users" will be disappointed primarily because the authors refuse to support the whole scale privatization and market based methods proposed by the former. The ultimate element for success in the authors' vision of environmental reform is the empowerment of the individual (or community) to have the authority to decide the how's and why's of the use of the land under his/her (its) stewardship. Federal and State government involvement will be relegated down to advisory responsibility.

Strongly recommended for public, college, and university libraries. Environmental studies professors, economists, and natural resources managers would do well to review this book to obtain another perspective on the environmental vs. community growth issues of the American West.

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