

## **Review: The Politics of Ecosystem Management**

By Hanna J. Cortner and Margaret A. Moote

Reviewed by [Susan Maret](#)

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Cortner, Hanna J., and Margaret A. Moote. *The Politics of Ecosystem Management*. Washington, DC: Island Press, 1998. 224 pp. US \$25.00 paper ISBN 1559636726. Recycled, acid-free paper.

Ecosystem management is not exclusively concerned with scientific judgments; the social and political also influence the ways in which ecosystems are "managed" (xi). This is the foundation of *The Politics of Ecosystem Management*, written by Hanna J. Cortner and Margaret A. Moote.

Cortner, a professor at the School of Renewable Natural Resources, University of Arizona, Tucson, and Moote, a senior research specialist at the Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy at the University of Arizona, describe themselves as advocates for "more ecological approaches to resources management, for policy changes that foster more open and collaborative decision-making processes, and for innovative ways to manage resources across mixed ownerships." It is the author's philosophy that it is not only the duty of public policy scholars to describe and empirically explain relationships regarding the natural world; scholars must also promote the ideals of democracy and citizenship (x) . Cortner and Moote take these ideas to heart, weaving a philosophical discussion of ecosystems and the role of science within a political context.

In their work, Cortner and Moote also examine the history and policy of natural resource management in the United States, and how this approach differs from ecosystem management. Traditionally, natural resource management has focused on the sustained yield ("outputs") approach, which evolved out of Progressive Era utilitarian thinking about ways to control and use natural resources. The authors argue that as applied, the principle of sustained yield meant an emphasis on maximum production, and "a continuous supply of market-oriented goods: in forest management the timber cut; in range management the stocking rate; in water management the acre-foot" (17). The philosophy of sustained yield eventually became institutionalized in federal agencies such as Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service, and politicized by way of private interest. However, in the 1970s into the 1990s, resource managers began to consider the health of ecosystems, landscape-scale and decentralized management, and different ways to include active citizen participation (20) in

policymaking.

Over the last decade, changing societal values, new scientific knowledge about ecosystem interactions and growing public input have contributed to the adoption of an eco-centric approach to natural resources management. It is within this context the authors argue for the next step: ecosystem management mandates ecological sustainability as a primary goal of resource management (136).

*The Politics of Ecosystem Management* stands as an important supplement to more scientific works on ecology, natural resource and ecosystem management, and should be included as mandatory reading for students in these fields. Activists, citizens and policymakers will also want to carefully consider many of the philosophical points Cortner and Moote raise on the relationship of democracy, stewardship and ecological sustainability.

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