

Review: *Everyday Environmentalism: Law, Nature & Individual Behavior*

By Jason J. Czarnezki

Reviewed by Byron Anderson

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Czarnezki, Jason J. *Everyday Environmentalism: Law, Nature & Individual Behavior*. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2011. 156pp. ISBN: 9781585761524, US \$29.95, paper.

Czarnezki, Professor of Law in the Environmental Law Center at the Vermont Law School, uses this book to “promote environmentally conscious decision-making in daily life and limit the negative ecological footprint of individual behavior” (p.109). The focus is on three areas of individual behavior: household energy and consumption patterns, food choices, and suburban sprawl, but included are broader areas, such as, the destruction of small organisms and the role of wetlands. Weaved through this discussion is how public policy influences, or can influence, individual behavior. Multiple jurisdictions, including local, regional, national and international are considered.

Consumers are mostly ignorant of the environmental costs of their behavior and activity patterns. Daily individual decision-making impacts nature, leaving a negative footprint amounting to 30 to 40 percent of greenhouse emissions in the U.S. These decisions often involve matters of convenience, for example, always “on” computers, leaf blowers, and using one’s automobile for every errand. The aggregate ecological costs of household behavior can be countered by the aggregate behaviors of everyday environmentalism. This would include, for example, decisions to turn off unneeded lights, purchase locally grown food, and avoid unnecessary automobile idling.

A primary obstacle currently lacking in gaining everyday environmentalism is consumer information. Consumers need to have information, that is, they need to know that environmental problems caused by their actions can have significant consequences. For example, food labeling should inform about “chemical additives, land stewardship practices, and fossil-fuel consumption required to bring any food to market” (p.71). Envisioned is a “green seal” or environmental rating for products that would allow consumers to compare similar products. This could include information on “carbon footprints, distribution miles, energy consumption, land use consequences, and waste production” (p.145). Making consumers more aware of environmental consequences will help motivate consumers in modifying their behaviors.

Everyday Environmentalism is comprehensive in its coverage of law, nature and individual behavior, including statistical measures that could prove useful for some individuals. The text is action oriented and provides directions for one to move toward, for example, “. . . individuals should make themselves aware of political and legal processes that determine our transportation infrastructure, food labeling, and residential zoning and development patterns” (p.143). The book is capable of raising one’s awareness of the environmental effects of everyday decisions and the roles that government and the law play in shaping consumer decision-making. It would serve well as a textbook in environment-oriented classes, and is recommended for individuals interested in the topic and libraries that maintain environmental collections.

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