

Review: Human Dimensions of Ecological Restoration: Integrating Science, Nature, and Culture

Dave Egan, Evan E. Hjerpe and Jesse Abrams (Eds.)

Reviewed by Jamie Conklin

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, Illinois, USA

Egan, Dave, Hjerpe, Evan E., and Abrams, Jesse (Eds.). *Human Dimensions of Ecological Restoration: Integrating Science, Nature, and Culture*. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2011, 410 pp. ISBN 9781597266901. US \$45.00, paper. Recycled, acid-free paper.

While much has been written on ecological restoration as a scientific endeavor, *Human Dimensions* depicts the subjective, value-driven elements of this process. It is a collection of case studies and essays meant to show that “at the heart of ecological restoration is a vision of a better relationship between humans and the rest of the world” (p. 1). The book highlights frequently overlooked areas of restoration ecology that can make the difference between a society of “informed, engaged participants in restoration and apathetic bystanders” (p. 13). Organized into three meta-themes of participation, power, and perspective, these areas include volunteerism, partnerships, politics, restoration economics, culture, and education.

With experience in fields varying from restoration ecology to art, the contributors are as diverse as the localities and issues they discuss. One details the process of making ecological restoration more inclusive in Toronto through storytelling, leadership training, and connecting with local community partners. Another describes social actions needed to restore the culturally iconic Mesopotamian Marshes in Iraq, which require an increase in water levels to restore both the ecosystem and the Marsh Arabs’ lifestyle. Most chapters describe successful methods and ideas, such as the Cape Florida Project that rallied the community to engage in restoration activities after Hurricane Andrew in 1992 and the chapter on the use of game theory to understand the decision-making process for restoration projects. A few chapters, including Chapter 15, admit to lessons learned. It describes the African Rural Initiatives for Sustainable Environments (ARISE), a program that provided employment opportunities, improved well-being, and restored degraded land in Giyani—in the short term. To reach long-term benefits, the project needed more funding sources, participant training, and an emphasis on removing causes of environmental degradation rather than simply repairing the damages.

The book contains useful tips and summaries, including a conceptual framework for volunteerism, a checklist of questions for the social component of restoration, action items to alleviate climate change’s impact on restoration, steps in restoration education, and others. The book’s greatest value, however, is not as a how-to manual but rather as a guide for seeing the restoration process more holistically. Readers will approach future restoration efforts by first considering stakeholder involvement, educational opportunities, planning components, economic justification, and other people-driven factors.

Other books, such as Eric Higgs’ *Nature by Design: People, Natural Process, and Ecological Restoration* (2003), have touched on the importance of the community’s involvement in restoration efforts, but *Human Dimensions* is the first book of its kind to provide a comprehensive overview of the ways in which people intersect with and ultimately determine the

success of those efforts. Part of the Society for Ecological Restoration's "*The Science and Practice of Ecological Restoration*" series, this book will appeal broadly to professionals and the public involved with restoration efforts, as well as upper division undergraduates and graduate students studying for restoration careers.

Jamie L. Conklin, MLIS. <jconkli@siue.edu>, Science and Health Sciences Librarian, Lovejoy Library, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, Campus Box 1063, 30 Hairpin Drive, Edwardsville, IL 62026, USA.

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