

Book reviews

Forests in Landscapes: Ecosystem Approaches to Sustainability

Jeffrey Sayer and Stewart Maginnis (eds)

Earthscan, London

2005, 257 pages, hardback, ISBN 1-84407-195-2, £49.95 or

2007, paperback, ISBN 1-84407-196-0, £26.96 from the Earthscan shop, <http://www.earthscan.co.uk/>

This is an interesting book, in which Jeff Sayer (the inaugural Director-General of CIFOR, now with WWF International) and Stewart Maginnis (Head of the World Conservation Union's Forests Program) seek 'to draw general conclusions about the elements that should make up our approach to forestry for the 21st Century'. They were prompted to do so by dialogue associated with the parallel universes of the two principal contemporary international intergovernmental processes about forests — the Convention on Biological Diversity, with its articulation of the 'ecosystem approach' to forest management, and the United Nations Forum on Forests' focus on 'sustainable forest management'. While others have previously addressed the relationship between these two paradigms (e.g., Stuart Davey and colleagues, *Unasylva* 2003, **54**, 214–215 — <http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/006/y5189E/y5189e02.htm>), the goal of this work is explicitly more ambitious.

The book has 12 chapters: introductory and concluding syntheses by the editors, six country case studies (including a stimulating review for Australia by Ian Ferguson, well subtitled 'beyond one-tenure one-use'), and four thematic chapters (on economics, information needs, biodiversity indicators, and the political ecology of forests). The contributors are well known and each of the chapters has value in its own right — although, as with most edited volumes, the value varies. The substantial added value of the collection is in the introductory and concluding chapters, and the syntheses they offer.

At the heart of these chapters are Sayer and Maginnis' efforts to demonstrate that the largely complementary, but politically-competing, ecosystem principles and approach endorsed by the CBD, and those fostered by the ways in which SFM has been constructed and articulated, can and should be reconciled to address the challenges of forest conservation and sustainable management. They note that both the ecosystem approach and SFM are evolving concepts, and that while they do represent underlying differences in philosophy, 'no single paradigm has a monopoly on the truth'; they therefore suggest 'mixing and matching elements of ecosystem approaches and SFM' to address both conservation and production goals, the institutional arrangements necessary for integrated landscape management across the range of tenures and uses, reform of pricing and incentive structures to reflect real costs and benefits, and the development of effective participatory monitoring and review to enable adaptive management.

Whilst this may seem like common sense to many forest professionals, rationality has not often been a distinguishing

feature of the international governance arrangements for forest conservation and sustainable forest management. Having engaged in these processes personally, Sayer and Maginnis are strong advocates of approaches that are more pragmatically-than philosophically-oriented. They note that 'The CBD definitions of Ecosystem Principles and the different C&I [criteria and indicators] for SFM can be seen either as further attempts to establish norms ... [for] forest management or they can be seen as general frameworks or approaches to management within which locally adapted management solutions are developed. We emphatically see them as the latter ...'. A second agenda which Sayer and Maginnis advance, and with which many readers would sympathise, is to redress the marginalisation of professional foresters in developing and implementing responses to the profound challenges facing forest conservation and management. However, they also point out that foresters need new skills; many of our critics — and indeed many foresters — would also argue we need a new frame of reference, which this book seeks to develop.

The concluding chapter comments briefly on each of the contributed chapters and on 'cross-cutting issues' — decentralisation, natural forest management, plantation forestry, knowledge and information systems, and new institutional arrangements. Sayer and Maginnis conclude by suggesting ten tenets for best practice in forest management: a plurality of approaches; recognition that people are part of ecosystems; the adaptive imperative; monitoring and evaluation; clarity of rights; the desirable characteristics of forestry professionals ('eclectic, excellent interpersonal skills, earn the respect of all stakeholder groups'); the role of science; the importance of seeing ecosystem and SFM approaches as frameworks rather than norms; the importance of extra-sectoral forces; the value of making trade-offs explicit.

The authors' final sentiment is apposite for all who are committed to forest conservation and sustainable management, and echoes similar comments made in other realms: 'The difficulty lies not so much in developing new ideas, as in escaping from the old ones'. This book is a helpful contribution towards that goal.

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Wildfire: A Century of Failed Forest Policy

George Wuerthner (ed.)

Foundation for Deep Ecology by arrangement with Island Press

2006, 350 pages, paperback, ISBN 1-59726-070-3

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Extensive forest fires in North America, Europe and Australia during the past decade have re-focused attention on the fundamental importance of fire in sustainable forest management. Firefighters from Australia and New Zealand were deployed for the first time to fires in the north-western United States in August 2000, and since then exchanges of operational personnel have taken place in most fire seasons. This interaction has fostered a greater awareness of similarities, and in some cases important differences, in the approach to fire management in Australia and the United States. Australian fire managers, particularly those with professional forestry training, should find this book interesting, although they may take issue with the viewpoints espoused by some of its authors.

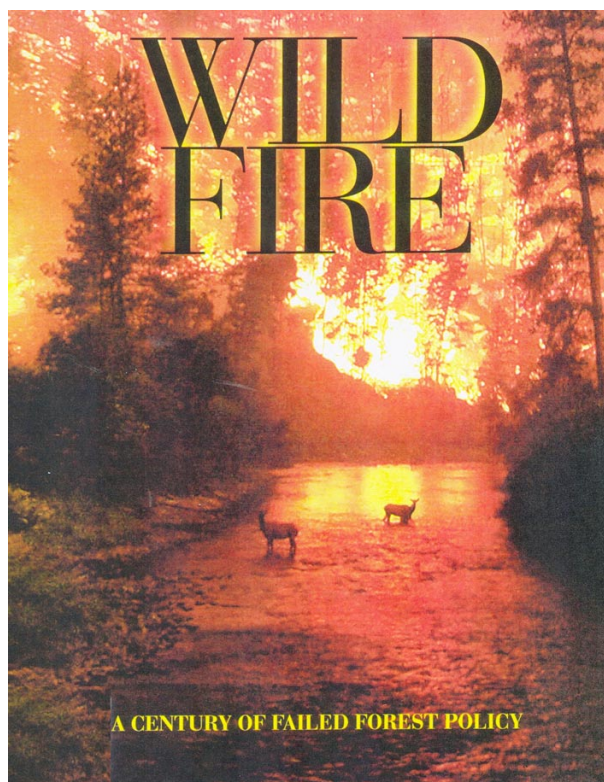
In his opening statement editor George Wuerthner states that the goal in creating this book is to promote a greater appreciation of the role of wildfire on the landscape, to challenge commonly held assumptions about wildfire, and to encourage development of an ecologically based wildfire policy for public lands. This statement is followed by a substantial disclaimer, perhaps not surprising given the large and diverse authorship of the more than 30 chapters in the book. Authors represent a range of disciplines including history, forest ecology, dendrochronology, philosophy, journalism and economics. Some of the authors have spent time as firefighters with federal and state land management agencies in the United States.

The theme of the book is established by presenting a series of ten supposed myths about fire and its role in forest landscapes. Each of these myths is then systematically rebutted in half a page of text with matching illustrations. A number of the myths are quite simplistic and most readers with an understanding of fire management would agree that reality is indeed more complex — for example, 'Fire is bad and needs to be suppressed', 'Fire destroys forests and wildlife', and 'Salvage logging after a fire is necessary to restore forests'. Regrettably, public discussion of fire management in the media often struggles to rise above the level of such simple slogans. Several of the supposed myths relating to the use of fire by indigenous people prior to European settlement and the effectiveness of livestock grazing for fuel reduction are also topical in Australia, and are currently the subject of vigorous debate amongst scientists and the broader community.

In seven subsequent sections the book provides a variety of perspectives about the role of fire in forest landscapes, case studies of fire ecology in different biomes of the United States, critiques of the current wildfire management policy and practice, and proposals for alternative approaches for managing wildfire.

These culminate in a plea to retire Smokey the Bear and replace him with a more ecologically-based paradigm that recognizes the place of wildfires in forest ecosystem management. Not surprisingly, many of the chapters draw on examples and experience from the western United States, where extensive tracts of public forest are managed by Federal agencies including the US Forest Service, National Parks Service and Bureau of Land Management. Two chapters that relate to historical ecology (Swetnam *et al.*) and ecological restoration in south-western ponderosa pine ecosystems (Allen *et al.*) have been published previously in peer-reviewed scientific journals.

An important but unstated goal of the book appears to be to provide a focal point for opposition to some of the initiatives currently being pursued in the name of forest health and ecosystem restoration under the Bush administration. Arguments against salvage logging of stands burnt by high-intensity wildfire are made on ecological and economic grounds, and the effectiveness of commercial tree harvesting treatments and livestock grazing for fuel reduction are also questioned.



There is clearly a degree of suspicion amongst some of the authors that the timber industry is seeking to use forest health as a lever to increase wood production from public forests.

Many Australian fire managers will be intrigued to read the case for prescribed fire being argued strongly from a deep ecology perspective in the chapter written by Timothy Ingalsbee; indeed, he feels strongly enough about this issue to state that 'there is no contradiction between deep ecology and the greenfire of ecological prescribed burning and that it is a mission our species (humans) has been called to perform for many millennia'. I see little evidence that the conservation movement in Australia has embraced this thinking yet. Australian readers may also have some sympathy with the view that a para-military paradigm of fire management based on fire suppression is out of step with contemporary views of sustainable forest management, and that fire must be re-introduced to the forests of the western United States as an integral part of land management.

The book is illustrated with many beautiful photographs and is of large format (30 cm × 34 cm) so you will need strong arms and a sturdy bedside table if you plan to tackle it as bedtime reading.

I enjoyed reading this diverse collection of essays on a topic of undoubted importance, but was left wondering to what extent some of the alternative wildfire management policies espoused in the book really might be practical and politically acceptable in 21st-century United States.

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