

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

TINA LOO, *States of Nature: Conserving Canada's Wildlife in the Twentieth Century*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006, 280 p., index.

The stimulating material which comprises *States of Nature: Conserving Canada's Wildlife in the Twentieth Century* demonstrates Tina Loo's mastery of social history. A historian at the University of British Columbia, Loo is able to weave together the scientific, economic, social, and political aspects of wildlife conservation into an inclusive volume. Her bibliography is extensive, the notes are thorough and the addition of a few chosen photographs dispersed throughout the book add a more "human" dimension to the discussion. *States of Nature* received the 2008 Harold Adams Innis Prize, from the Aid to Scholarly Publications Programme; and the 2007 Sir John A. Macdonald Prize, from the Canadian Historical Association.

The book presents a sweeping study of Canadian wildlife conservation in the twentieth century; one that examines the economic, social and political relationships among the state, private interests, as well as the general Canadian public. The volume consists of seven chapters, divided into major chronological and thematic sections: the legal regime that was created to regulate wildlife; the tensions and conflict between game laws and rural people; local knowledge of the "natural world" and the influence of the conservationist Jack Miner; the role of scientific and local knowledge, illustrated by the Hudson's Bay Company and personalities such as Grey Owl; the new wildlife conservation philosophy; the post-war policy, the role of emerging individual conservationists, transnational organizations (such as Ducks Unlimited), and the influence of late-twentieth-century conservationists (notably, Bill Mason and Andy Russell).

In presenting her analysis, the author identifies three main arguments. First, prior to the twentieth century, Canada's wildlife management was localized, fragmented, informal and a variety of practices were in place across the country. Only at the dawn of the twentieth century did the state begin to play a more active and intrusive role in the creation of wildlife management policies and programs. Her second argument is that while the state, environmentalists, and scientists were influential in developing wildlife management/conservation practices and policies, their impact was minor compared to the influence of particular individuals over the twentieth century (e.g., Jack Miner, Andy Russell, Farley Mowat, and Bill Mason). In short, the scientific community and other organizations which collected data on wildlife were ineffectual in their ability to provide convincing information to policy-makers. My own assessment is that the government research projects which were carried out moved in the direction of economic studies that downplayed the scientific aspects of their work. Her final argument is that current wildlife conservation policies focus on values which

should govern humans' relationships with nature (e.g., Christianity, private property) as well as values that would come from conserving wildlife (e.g., creating ethical human communities).

The author approaches her subject from the point of view of "landscape ecology" and "philosophical ecological thought" but makes use of concepts grounded in sociological systems theory. However, she treats systems as intentional or unintentional results of choices made by individuals rather than as holistic entities that are subject to integrity and disturbances. At the same time she systematically explores how population developments influenced wildlife conservation policy and the incentives that political actors took with regard to regulating wildlife.

Unfortunately, the author does not address more "macro" issues which impinge upon the state of wildlife policy in Canada. For example, what was the link between industrial agriculture – with its emphasis on increased production regardless of the social or environmental cost – and the development of a wildlife conservation policy? We also note that state policy was (and still is) not keeping pace with ecological degradation and free-market boosters who have continued to ignore immanent ecological limits and the failure of the market to appropriately value limited natural resources. Nor does the book address the fact that cornucopians and other "environmental sceptics" never began to confront (and continue to ignore) the bleak future Canada faces in conserving its wildlife if profit-driven technological innovation and lack of regulatory policies cannot keep pace with the material needs of a growing Canadian population. To be sure, Canadians have a greater awareness of environmental problems than ever before and we certainly have the capacity to reduce resource use and pollution as well as conserve our wildlife, but the provincial and federal governments continue to ignore the issue. It is indeed unfortunate that the author fails to present the ideological and pragmatic perspectives of the national "parks service" and fails to ask if this had any impact on broader policies about wildlife conservation.

As our society continues to degrade nature and consume all the open territories that the next generation might explore, we as Canadians, are developing "environmental generational amnesia." Thus the new generation of Canadians, including immigrants, have become unaware of wildlife as an integral part of the ecology of Canada. As "vacant" land continues to be swallowed up with impunity by voracious developers, the precarious state of our wildlife continues to be in balance. Moreover, the continued insistence on a global unregulated market economy will not only yield poverty and inequality but also ecological devastation. The antiregulatory stance on the part of commercial enterprises as well as the laissez-faire attitude of most Canadians during this period allowed key influential people, supported by the private sector, to set the stage and dictate wildlife conservation policy. Moreover, when policies were adopted to conserve wildlife, government enforcement of specific policies was sporadic and without force (with some exceptions such as northern Caribou). In the end, one might argue that the state has been more effective in serving commercial interests than in saving animals.

These latter comments are simply suggestions of topics the author should have noted in her quest to provide a sweeping analysis of conservation policy over the past century. However, none of these remarks should be taken as a serious criticism of this excellent, well-researched and well-written book which is a worthy addition to the growing literature on environmental history that adds to our understanding of the relationship between humans, wildlife, and the environment.

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