

Scholarship and Environmentalism

The Influence of Environmental Advocacy on Canadian Environmental History

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Scholarship and Environmentalism: The Influence of Environmental Advocacy on Canadian Environmental History

ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY HAS BEEN both a friend and an enemy to the environmental movement. To some, the discipline aligns itself too closely with environmental advocacy. To others, it offers a critique of environmentalism that threatens to undermine the movement. Ironically, William Cronon, one of the best-known scholars in the field, has found himself subject to both charges. “In pushing and pushing his green line,” wrote Peter Coclanis in 1992, “the author fundamentally distorts both the nature of capitalist development in the Great West and Chicago’s history.” Coclanis’s highly critical review of Cronon’s award-winning book *Nature’s Metropolis* accuses the author of revealing “assorted confessions of environmentalist faith.” He predicted that readers would “find Cronon’s ecological overkill a bit much.” His dissatisfaction with Cronon’s analysis of the relationship between Chicago and its rural hinterland was based in large part on his distrust of “(Birken-)stock condemnations of accumulation” and “the assumptions and agendas of environmental historians,” which he found to be “disturbingly anti-industrial.” According to Coclanis, *Nature’s Metropolis* expressed too much sympathy for environmentalism.¹

Four years later, Cronon was on the other side of this critique. As part of an anthology of essays that re-assessed changing historical understandings of nature, Cronon wrote “The Trouble With Wilderness or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature” – a critical essay about the idea of wilderness that called for environmentalists to abandon previous concepts of pristine nature, which he believed undermined the urgency to address environmental issues in urban environments, and to seek solutions that reconcile the place of humanity within nature. According to Bill Willers, an environmental activist, Cronon had “dealt quite a blow to the Environmental Movement” by implying that nature and wilderness were social constructs. Willers and other activists believed that such constructivism gave comfort and support to anti-environmental political opponents. Other environmental historians found fault with Cronon’s essay for its unfair criticism of wilderness and conservation advocates. Samuel P. Hays, a historian of the conservation movement and early practitioner of environmental history, found Cronon’s assessment of the wilderness movement to be “well off the mark.” He believed that Cronon’s arguments were mainly abstract and rooted in the writing of only a select few prominent wilderness advocates. As such, “Cronon’s wilderness is a world of abstracted ideas, real enough to those who participate in it, but divorced from the values and ideas inherent in wilderness action.” Hays used his own personal experiences working as an environmental activist in the eastern wilderness movement as evidence of the weaknesses in Cronon’s thesis.²

1 Peter Coclanis, “Urbs in Horto,” *Reviews in American History* 20, no. 1 (March, 1992): 15-19.

2 William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York:

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Writing in defence of his work, Cronon argued that his essay was an exercise in self-criticism and that he was, in fact, working in the interests of environmentalism. While he recognized that in the early 1990s environmentalism was under attack from political opponents, Cronon insisted that he did not believe that “the apparent triumph of those opposed to environmental protection excuses environmentalists from the task of self-criticism.” Such self-criticism, however, placed Cronon at odds with some environmental activists. Critical environmental history scholarship, therefore, has not always aligned neatly with the environmental movement.³

Since its emergence in North America, US historians have attempted to develop the sub-discipline of environmental history alongside and in relation to the modern environmental movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. One of the earliest historiographical reviews of the field, Roderick Nash’s 1970 essay “The State of Environmental History,” attempted to outline the contours of this admittedly nascent approach to historical scholarship. Nash was best known for his 1967 intellectual history of wilderness, *Wilderness and the American Mind*. He was also at ground zero on the campus of the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), during the catastrophic offshore oil blowout in 1969, considered to be one of the foundational events of the modern environmental movement in the US. The oil disaster in Santa Barbara inspired Nash and 20 other faculty members from UCSB to establish an environmental studies program. In 1970, Nash began teaching a new course entitled “American Environmental History.” According to Nash, he decided to offer such a course because “I thought I was responding to the cries for environmental responsibility which reached a crescendo in the first months of that year. I also felt good about helping make the university, and particularly the Department of History, more responsive to the problems of society.”⁴

Nash found common cause with other US environmental historians in the 1970s, who also situated their work in response to increasing concerns about ecological degradation. For example, Donald Worster’s research on the 1930s Great Plains dust bowl was clearly aimed at addressing ecological and moral considerations about the contemporary relationship between humanity and the planet. Writing in 1976, Worster contended that larger environmental issues facing Americans “are after all ethical as much as scientific problems and their resolution depends on the moralist as much as the ecologist.” In 1977, Thomas Dunlap’s first contribution to *Environmental Review*, a newly formed journal for environmental scholarship, attempted to historicize the chemical pesticide industry in the US because “in the last fifteen years public and scientific concern about the environmental effects of pesticides has stimulated interest

W.W. Norton, 1995), 23-56; Bill Willers, “The Trouble with Cronon,” *Wild Earth* 6, no. 4 (Winter 1997): 59; Samuel P. Hays, “The Trouble with Bill Cronon’s Wilderness,” *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (January 1996): 29, 31.

3 William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness: A Response,” *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (January 1996): 47-8.

4 Roderick Nash, “The State of Environmental History,” in *The State of American History*, ed. Herbert J. Bass, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970), 249-60; Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967); Roderick Nash, “American Environmental History: A New Teaching Frontier,” *Pacific Historical Review* 41, no. 3 (August 1972): 362.

in other ways of controlling insects.” Martin Melosi became one of the earliest environmental historians to urge scholars to look at the ecological conditions of urban environments from a historical perspective. “After establishing a reasonably comprehensive body of evidence about the magnitude of pollution problems in the past,” Melosi argued, “it is important for the researcher to address questions considering the social, political, and economic consequences of urban environmental degradation.”⁵ Many of the earliest American scholars in the field of environmental history were thus motivated by contemporary concerns regarding environmental degradation.

In 1982, John Opie, founding editor of *Environmental Review* and founder of the American Society for Environmental History, raised crucial questions about this relationship between environmental advocacy and scholarship. “Is there a search for a holy grail of ecological equilibrium,” Opie asked, “which characterizes, shapes, and even controls the pursuit of environmental history?” He cautioned environmental historians about a tendency in environmental history writing “to revel in dismal conditions” and prejudice past societies, admitting “the environmental historian is constantly dogged by the spectre of advocacy.” He saw merit in the critique that environmental history was too closely associated with the environmental movement, but also saw “certain virtues” in the linkages with environmental advocacy. While close connections with advocacy might threaten the supposed objectivity of environmental history scholarship, Opie acknowledged “a strong sense of moral responsibility to call to the attention of other historians and the general public the ethics of land use, of appropriate technology, and responsible conservation of resources.”⁶ In this early period of the development of the field, then, environmental historians struggled to reconcile the complicated tension and straddle the gulf between aspirations of advocacy and objectivity.

By the 1990s, the field of environmental history in Canada had emerged in response to these developments in US scholarship and similarly drew connections between historical scholarship and environmental advocacy. Writing in this journal over a decade ago, Alan MacEachern offered a tongue-in-cheek declaration that “environmental history has finally arrived” in Canada because Jack Granatstein had identified the field as a murder suspect in his 1998 polemical book *Who Killed Canadian History?* MacEachern also noted that in the early 1990s “many Canadianists knew little or nothing of the new field, and were drawn to environmental topics through the environmental movement of the era, or simply from a realization that there was good history to be written.” He was even concerned for the future of the field, and asked “If it was an echo of the environmental movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s, will it die away as that movement falls further out of fashion?”⁷ Canadian

5 Donald Worster, “Grass to Dust: The Great Plains in the 1930s,” *Environmental Review* 1, no. 3 (1976): 9; Thomas R. Dunlap, “The Triumph of Chemical Pesticides in Insect Control, 1890-1920,” *Environmental Review* 2, no. 5 (1977): 39; Martin V. Melosi, “Urban Pollution: Historical Perspective Needed,” *Environmental Review* 3, no. 3 (1979): 37.

6 John Opie, “Environmental History: Pitfalls and Opportunities,” *Environmental Review* 6, no. 2 (Autumn 1982): 9-11.

7 Alan MacEachern, “Voices Crying in the Wilderness: Recent Works in Canadian Environmental History,” *Acadiensis* XXX, no. 2 (March 2002): 215, 226; J.L. Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1998), 59.

environmental history, however, was not triggered by national debates over environmental catastrophes and the development of federal environmental regulations as much as it was in the United States. Environmentalism as a political and social movement in Canada has tended to be fractured and local or regional in scope. Few Canadian environmental groups organize nationally, and still fewer address environmental issues from a national perspective. This is, in part, due to the fractured character of environmental policy in Canada, which tends to be divided in terms of responsibility between the federal and provincial governments. As such, in the 1990s it was difficult (as it is today) to identify a national environmental movement in Canada. Early Canadian environmental history scholarship, therefore, tended to focus on areas of federal environmental policy or specific provincial case studies, especially those policies that were of public concern during the 1980s and 1990s such as forestry, fisheries, wildlife, parks, and industrial pollution.⁸ Though environmentalism played a different role in the development of Canadian environmental history scholarship, it nevertheless exerted a significant influence.

While environmental history scholarship has grown to incorporate critical analyses of environmentalism and it has distanced itself from its roots in the environmental movement, Canadian environmental history continues to navigate an unclear, and occasionally uncomfortable, relationship with environmental advocacy. Are all environmental historians environmentalists? How should environmental scholarship relate to environmental activism? Should advocacy for environmental issues shape historical scholarship on the environment? Can history always inform contemporary environmental issues? The field in Canada has not devoted much critical attention to these important questions. In 1995, in one of the first textbook

8 See, for example, Janet Foster, *Working for Wildlife: The Beginning of Preservation in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978); Graeme Wynn, *Timber Colony: An Historical Geography of Early Nineteenth-Century New Brunswick* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981); R. Peter Gillis and Thomas R. Roach, *Lost Initiatives: Canada's Forest Industries, Forest Policy, and Forest Conservation* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986); Special Issue: A Collaborative Effort on Forest History in Canada, *Journal of Forest History* 32, no. 3 (July 1988); Bill Parenteau, "The Woods Transformed: The Emergence of the Pulp and Paper Industry in New Brunswick, 1918-1931," *Acadiensis* XXII, no. 1 (Fall 1992): 5-43; L. Anders Sandberg, ed., *Trouble in the Woods: Forest Policy and Social Conflict in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1992); Gerald Killan, *Protected Places: A History of Ontario's Provincial Park System* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1993); Lorne Hammond, "Marketing Wildlife: The Hudson's Bay Company and the Pacific Northwest, 1821-1849," *Forest and Conservation History* 37, no. 1 (January 1993): 14-25; Neil S. Forkey, "Anglers, Fishers, and the St. Croix River: Conflict in a Canadian-American Borderland, 1867-1900," *Forest & Conservation History* 37, no. 4 (October 1993): 179-87; Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things: Nature, Culture, and Tourism in Ontario, 1790-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995); Jennifer Read, "'Let Us Heed the Voice of Youth': Laundry Detergents, Phosphates and the Emergence of the Environmental Movement in Ontario," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 7 (1996): 227-50; John D. Wirth, "The Trail Smelter Dispute: Canadians and Americans Confront Transboundary Pollution, 1927-41," *Environmental History* 1, no. 2 (April 1996): 34-51; Stephen Bocking, "Fishing the Inland Seas: Great Lakes Research, Fisheries Management, and Environmental Policy in Ontario," *Environmental History* 2, no. 1 (January 1997): 52-73; Richard A. Rajala, *Clearcutting the Pacific Rain Forest: Production, Science, and Regulation* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1988); and Matthew Evenden, "Remaking Hells Gate: Salmon, Science, and the Fraser River, 1938-1948," *BC Studies* 127 (Autumn 2000): 47-82.

anthologies of scholarly essays in Canadian environmental history, editors Chad Gaffield and Pam Gaffield directly sought “to illustrate for students in other programs the value of historical perspectives on current environmental concerns.” They found that, among a number of scholarly influences, “a series of public debates also encouraged research on environmental issues,” including deforestation, acid rain, toxic waste, and ozone depletion. Few contributors to this collection or other Canadian environmental historians stopped to reflect critically on the relationship between contemporary environmental issues and environmental scholarship. Yet, in one form or another, most Canadian environmental history scholarship foregrounds contemporary environmental issues and attempts to address these concerns.⁹

The new anthology *Land and Sea: Environmental History in Atlantic Canada* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 2013) tries to place contemporary environmental issues at the centre of its analysis of history, “for it is the inheritance of past environments that poses substantial challenges to Atlantic Canada in the 21st century” (1). Editors Claire Campbell and Robert Summerby-Murray draw direct connections between environmental history and the environmental crises of the present. They view the field in terms that are reminiscent of the initial objectives and interests of US environmental historians during the 1970s – that, for instance, “environmental history explores these places to better understand our relationship with nature in the past, the consequences for the present day, and the range of options for the future” (1). While not entirely advocating a form of applied history, *Land and Sea* clearly implies a practical rationale for environmental history: to understand contemporary environmental challenges, we must know more about the past.

Most of the essays in this collection attempt to fulfill this mandate by relating historical case studies of human-nature interactions in Atlantic Canada to present-day ecological concerns. While the wide-ranging selection of essays in *Land and Sea* showcases an impressive and comprehensive depth of historical scholarship on the environmental history of the region, not all of these case studies neatly address environmental matters relating to the present. This is especially true of the essays that cover the history of the region prior to 1800. Heather MacLeod’s survey of European observations of the Nova Scotia environment from 1607 to 1900 offers an important contribution to the scholarship on the ecological consequences of European colonial expansion in North America. However, it provides only a loosely relevant “historical basis for our present-day interactions with changing environments” (11). Similarly, Allan Dwyer’s superb history of the relationship between changing human communities and the ecology of Notre Dame Bay in 18th-century Newfoundland strains to establish its contemporary relevance by making the case that a “borderlands approach to history can provide contemporary economic planners with actionable, ethical alternatives for regional development and rural renewal” (43). This critique should not detract from these two excellent and much-needed contributions to Canadian environmental historiography. It merely points to one of the primary limitations of such an approach to environmental history. By seeking to demonstrate the utility of historical scholarship to present-day concerns

9 Chad Gaffield and Pam Gaffield, eds., *Consuming Canada: Readings in Environmental History* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1995), 1.

relating to the environment, environmental history in Canada tends to focus more on the modern period — after Confederation. As such, superb scholarship, such as the work of MacLeod and Dwyer, struggles to find a place in the current literature.

Other essays in this anthology provide more direct examples of the contemporary relevance of environmental history and the connections between scholarship and advocacy. For example, both Edward MacDonald and Joshua MacFadyen critique 21st-century tourism in Prince Edward Island by demonstrating the dissonance between representations of nature in tourist promotion and the histories of the worked landscapes of the island. MacDonald shows the ways in which tourism literature changed over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, finding that it idealized pastoral landscapes (and labour) and ignored economic and environmental transformations of the late 20th century. MacFadyen's analysis of "mussel mud" extraction in the estuaries of PEI not only reveals a remarkably little-known and regionally distinctive agricultural and industrial practice, but it also makes evident the extraordinary human modification of environments that those in the present might assume to have been crafted solely by the forces of nature. As MacFadyen clearly shows, "the famous estuarine scenery enjoyed by thousands of tourists and locals at St. Peter's every year was one formed by human hands" (114). His analysis thus offers direct insights into the legacies of the past and ways in which European settlers bridged the terrestrial and estuarine environments of PEI by shifting energy and nutrients from the natural sea-bed fertilizer of "mussel mud" to the acidic and nutrient-poor soils of island farms. This case study clearly explains the necessity of considering both land and sea in the analysis of the ecological conditions of Atlantic Canada. Similarly, David Freeland Duke and Allan J. Macdonald make a persuasive case for the relevance of historical scholarship for disaster planning in their essay on the history of severe weather events in the Annapolis Valley. Highlighting three such extraordinary storms — in 1869, 1927, and 1954 — the authors show the different ways in which human communities during different periods of Maritime history responded to uncontrollable, powerful wind events. Put simply, "lessons can be learned from the above examples of how communities have responded to similar disasters" (197). Given the increased frequency of extreme weather events and rising sea levels, disaster planning in 21st-century Nova Scotia has taken on even more urgency in the age of global warming. Historical perspective certainly can help inform future policy options.

Not all of the essays in *Land and Sea* explicitly attempt to draw connections between historical scholarship and contemporary environmental issues. Still, all the contributions to this anthology provide insight into the changing relationship between humans and the natural environments of Atlantic Canada spanning a period of more than 400 years. As such, the authors have made a tremendous contribution to the literature. Graeme Wynn's epilogue takes a broader view of this history by, in part, synthesizing the case studies and highlighting the major junctures in Atlantic Canadian environmental history. In a tone that echoes Opie in 1982, Wynn cautions environmental historians to view past human actors as neither "cultural dopes nor pawns of political and economic imperatives." He convincingly encourages scholars to consider European settlers as "active participants in the production of the lives they lived and the meanings they attached to them" (235). His argument is a plea for historians to take a deeper view of the relationship between people and nature rather

than a short-term perspective locked on the world we have inherited. “By attending to both the circumstances and the consequences of previous actions,” Wynn argues, “we are better able to weigh the significance of current developments” (236). From this perspective, he finds that the European people who colonized Atlantic Canada, and who displaced the First Nations of the region over hundreds of years, lived and worked with their natural surroundings within the context of the immediate needs of survival and the betterment of the lives of future generations. They were not, he contends, “engaged in simple, mindless plunder” (243). The major juncture Wynn identifies in terms of the changing relationship between people and the environment in this region occurred in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with the introduction of “new brute-force technologies developed and defended by newly revered scientists and engineers, financed by new corporate entities, and deployed by newly empowered states” (250). Wynn’s observations on the long history of human-nature relations in Atlantic Canada are influenced by the arguments of John McNeill in *Something New Under the Sun*, in which McNeill makes the case that events in 20th-century global environmental history were set apart from any other period in human history. Wynn similarly distinguishes the 20th century as an extraordinary period of human-induced ecological transformation powered by new technologies and high-energy fossil fuels.¹⁰

In Wynn’s own words, “The prologue helps us understand the play. There are lessons to be learned from history, and we would be shrewd to heed them.” In many ways, this idea, which was (and is) foundational to the field of environmental history, continues to inform new scholarship in Canada and the relationship between environmental history and environmental advocacy. Two other new books in the field are clearly driven by this approach to environmental history. Laurel Sefton MacDowell’s *An Environmental History of Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012) and Neil S. Forkey’s *Canadians and the Natural Environment to the Twenty-First Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012) both situate the teaching of environmental history in relation to the ecological conditions of Canada in the present. Forkey’s hook is his contention that “at the surface level, Canadians’ experience with the natural world has been informed by two major impulses. The first is the need to exploit natural resources, while the second is the desire to protect them” (3). He uses this idea as a way to structure his analysis of Canadian environmental history from the earliest times to the present. This framework, however, tends to shift the chronological weight of his analysis to the post-Confederation era (and the same is true of MacDowell’s book). Forkey gives some attention to the environmental history of the Aboriginal peoples of northern North America prior to European colonization and the ecological consequences of European colonization, but this analysis is compressed into the opening chapter of the book. The remaining chapters span the 19th and 20th centuries, focusing on the tension between the exploitation and protection of nature. Even within this limited framework, Forkey provides an impressive synthesis of Canadian environmental history that attempts to explain some of the shifting and sometimes contradictory

10 J.R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000).

attitudes that Canadians have held toward the natural environment. Forkey reserves most of his analysis of the relationship between history and contemporary environmental debates to the conclusion of his narrative. Much like Wynn, he believes that “recognizing our shared historical development alongside nature may well be the best spur to address the threats to our common future” (125); but Forkey also admits that his analysis of that historical development has led him to “some rather pessimistic conclusions,” including Canada’s continued dependence on fossil fuel production and consumption, the accelerated pace of global warming, and the unlikely rejection of industrial capitalism (124).

MacDowell’s *An Environmental History of Canada* begins with a similarly pessimistic outlook. MacDowell attempts something more comprehensive than Forkey while still keeping the focus very much on contemporary anxieties concerning numerous environmental crises facing Canadians. From the outset, MacDowell argues “sustained economic development, not sustainable development, has been the driving force in Canadian history” (5). While she suggests that her intent is not to condemn “the grave consequences of the development ethos as it played out throughout Canadian history,” the narrative of this book is decidedly declensionist. For example, MacDowell finds that “mining disrupted the landscape, produced hazardous waste piles, and created extensive pollution, which had a detrimental effect not only on water, air, and soil quality but also on the health of miners, mining towns, and northern communities” (120). The environmental effects of mining across Canada left behind “visible scars on the landscape,” which, according to MacDowell, “reflect a political environment that has consistently favoured industry and opposed regulation” (137). During the 20th century, the popularization of automobiles “desensitized people to the natural world and polluted the environment” (140). In tracing shifting energy regimes in Canadian history, she finds that “the consumption of fossil fuels has contributed to growth and prosperity, but it has also resulted in widespread industrial pollution, automobile emissions, resources depletion, and environmental degradation” (185). When it comes to Canadians and their relationships with water, “the story of water in Canada has been one of manipulation (for agricultural, energy, or industrial purposes) and abuse (as water became a convenient dumping ground for waste from agricultural and industrial processes and expanding cities)” (188). And finally, on the coastal and inland fisheries, “the poor management of Canada’s fisheries resulted in a 90-percent reduction of fish stocks and mass unemployment because the long-term sustainability of fish resources and communities was never a priority” (302). This is an overwhelmingly linear narrative of environmental decline.

MacDowell’s declensionist history is a story of steady environmental degradation at the hands of an insatiable development ethos driven, in part, by human ignorance and greed. It is a common perspective about the historical relationship between humans and the natural environment, but one that offers little nuance and few critical insights. Many of MacDowell’s case studies of environmental degradation are difficult to dispute. The collapse of the Atlantic cod fishery, the production of hazardous nuclear waste, the emission of greenhouse gases from automobiles and industry, and the denuded landscapes of abandoned mines certainly demonstrate the worst consequences of human impacts on the environment. However, nature itself in such a narrative plays almost no role, offering no resistance or resiliency.

Environmental history is not simply the history of what people have done to the Earth. It must also show the reciprocal relationship between humanity and the non-human world upon which we all depend. Furthermore, this version of Canadian environmental history does not complicate the history of environmental degradation. For instance, technological change had the capacity to address some environmental concerns while inadvertently creating others. In the early 20th century, Canadians would not likely have considered automobile exhaust to be an environmental pollutant. Instead, as Joel Tarr has shown, they might have considered automobiles to be a solution to a more urgent urban pollutant, horse feces.¹¹ As Wynn concludes in *Land and Sea*, “looking back with sensibilities heightened by 40 years of environmental activism and (thanks to modern science) acutely conscious of the interconnectedness of all things, including the effects of human actions on the very air we breathe, it is easy for us to look back in anger and interpret the past as a long period of environmental decline. But this declensionist view is as unsatisfying as it is effortless” (243).

In taking such an approach, MacDowell’s book offers few historical revelations to consider in light of contemporary environmental circumstances. As such, its conclusions are unsatisfying. Although MacDowell builds a convincing case that a powerful development ethos in Canadian history since Confederation has driven patterns of ecologically and socially unsustainable consumerism, her analysis fails to critically analyze the roots of that ethos and makes only modest allusions to the inequities and injustices of advanced global capitalism. MacDowell’s efforts at environmental advocacy put forth only minor recommendations for changes in consumer behaviour and the adoption of new environmental regulations rather than more radical calls for a transformation of economic paradigms. For example, while MacDowell acknowledges that a response to the challenge of global warming and the development of a sustainable society “requires the application of environmental values; more eclectic, inclusive decision-making structures; and alternative economic and energy regimes,” her recommendations only include business plans that incorporate environmental costs and “tax policies and fines [which] may move businesses and society in a new direction, but only if there is political will” (327). MacDowell also sees hope in the actions of those individuals who choose “to walk more, ride bicycles, give up plastic bags, and participate in local food movements” (328). Given the enormity of the environmental crisis MacDowell outlines in this book, one would expect a call for the upending of the consumer society that caused the crisis rather than the mild adjustment to patterns of consumer behaviour. Forkey, on the other hand, takes up a more radical outlook, arguing “unless Canadians renounce involvement in the capitalist economic system, it seems unlikely that the situation will improve” (125).

At its best, environmental history shows the complexity of human-nature relations and the importance of resisting the urge to view the past in a linear fashion. It should call into question our assumptions about human relations with nature and

11 For more on the pollution impact of horses in cities, see “The Horse – Polluter of the City,” chap. 12 in Joel Tarr, *The Search for the Ultimate Sink: Urban Pollution in Historical Perspective* (Akron: University of Akron Press, 1996).

critique past approaches to environmental remediation. Dean Bavington's *Managed Annihilation: An Unnatural History of the Newfoundland Cod Collapse* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010) provides one of the most critical assessments of environmental management within Canadian environmental historical scholarship.¹² Instead of beginning his assessment of this social and ecological catastrophe on the assumption that a better management approach might have saved the northern Atlantic cod as a commercial species, Bavington questions the very idea of managerial ecology and the commodification of wild animals as resources. The northern cod fishery did not collapse because it was mismanaged. According to Bavington, "the story of the northern cod fishery is an astonishing example of management creating the very thing that it was designed to prevent." Unlike the demise of other prominent North American wild animals, such as bison and passenger pigeons, northern cod off the coast of Newfoundland went into significant population decline not because of unthinking and unmanaged human greed and ignorance. Prior to the 1992 Canadian fishing moratorium, the northern cod fishery "was presided over by one of the world's most comprehensive renewable resource management systems" (2). The astonishing thing about the collapse is that scientific management emerged from this colossal failure virtually unscathed. As Bavington points out, "the failure of cod fisheries management has been misread as a failure *in* management" (131-2, italics in original). In the wake of the moratorium, federal and local governments, private industry, fisheries scientists, and even some fishers themselves sought out new forms of management to correct the problems that had led to the collapse. Bavington warns, however, that "by assuming that solutions ultimately lie within the hands of managers, that better organization is the key to improvement, and that problems can be solved merely by increasing effort or efficiency, managerial ecology has come to significantly constrain human relations with the natural world, obscuring alternative ways of framing and responding to environmental issues" (3-4).

This critical analysis of managerial ecology – by tracing its history and pushing further to provide alternatives to management – calls into question the history of past assumptions regarding natural resources, scientific management, and industrial modernity. It thus offers new insights into the complicated choices 21st-century Canadians face regarding sustainable relations with the natural environment, while it also effectively resolves the tension between environmental scholarship and environmental advocacy. The most significant insight Bavington provides is that management itself is a historical and ideological phenomenon that has influenced the ecological relationship among people, fish, and the rest of nature. The conclusion to *Managed Annihilation* attempts to prescribe some possible paths forward that do not assume scientific management to be the normative mode of governing the relationship among humans, cod, and the rest of the ecosystems they cohabit. Instead, Bavington suggests a shift in focus to the interests and needs of fishers as well as the needs of cod. As such, he calls for "greater attention to arguments from fishermen about how fishing is done and to what end it is pursued, as opposed to how many fish can be removed from the ocean" (125). Furthermore, he sees a need to merge our thinking about the social and ecological contexts of the

12 This book won the 2011 Clio Prize for best book in Atlantic Canadian history.

fishery. "It is important that open debate occur about how and why fishing is done," Bavington contends, "not as a way to learn how maximum sustainable yields can be obtained from fish populations and ocean spaces but because fishing practices have political and moral consequences for how humans and fish live, who gets to eat, and how the restoration of lives based on fishing might proceed" (126). Canadians should therefore consider the value of fish as food from small-scale fisheries rather than as commodities for international markets, which tend to divorce cod from its social and ecological contexts. Because the core of his argument critiques fundamental assumptions about managerial ecology, Bavington's approach to environmental history opens up new ways of thinking about contemporary environmental challenges.

While Bavington calls into question fundamental assumptions about human-nature relations and uses history as a way of disrupting normative thinking about scientific management, David R. Boyd advocates specific environmental policy change in his new book entitled *The Right to a Healthy Environment: Revitalizing Canada's Constitution* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012). As one of Canada's leading environmental scholars and lawyers, Boyd's argument is direct, persuasive, and nearly unimpeachable. Boyd believes that the federal and provincial governments should amend the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* to include a right to a healthy environment. This book presents a comprehensive argument for such a constitutional amendment, offering convincing evidence of the necessity, the efficacy, and the feasibility of enhancing the lives of all Canadians by codifying a right to live in an ecologically balanced environment with clear air, safe water, fertile soil, nutritious food, and vibrant biodiversity (197). Boyd goes as far as to provide draft language for such an amendment, including a "Canadian Charter of Environmental Rights and Responsibilities" (197-8).

Boyd also deals with the pros and cons of a right to a healthy environment. He tackles each of the major points of criticism of such an amendment and provides crucial international comparisons and insights from the 147 countries that now recognize constitutional environmental rights and/or responsibilities. He carefully explores the history of environmental rights in Canada, a history that might come as a surprise to those who assume that successive Canadian governments have had a sterling international reputation when it comes to environmental policy and performance. In fact, he notes, "contrary to the myth of a pristine green country providing environmental leadership to the world, a huge pile of studies prove beyond a reasonable doubt that Canada lags behind other nations in terms of environmental performance" (6). The idea of environmental provisions in the Canadian constitution first emerged in the late 1960s at the beginning of Pierre Trudeau's earliest forays into constitutional reform. When Trudeau commenced nation-wide consultations on patriating the constitution, several legal scholars and environmental activists suggested a constitutional right to a healthy environment be included in any future amendments. According to Boyd, in spite of this early advocacy and broad public support for the idea, "the constitutional right to a healthy environment has never been the subject of a concerted campaign by environmental groups; nor has it ever been championed by a prime minister or other leading political figure" (66). This is all the more surprising given that an overwhelming majority of Canadians today express support for recognition of environmental

human rights (5). If a constitution is intended to reflect “a society’s deepest and most cherished values, acting as a mirror of a country’s soul” (3), Boyd contends, the absence of any reference to environmental rights in Canada’s constitution “is a fundamental defect that must be rectified” (4). And if Boyd’s evidence of Canadian public opinion is accurate, few Canadians will disagree.

David Boyd’s approach to navigating the tricky relationship between environmental scholarship and environmental advocacy is quite different from those of the other works discussed in this review. As an environmental lawyer and not a historian, his perspective is obviously focused on present-day conditions and pathways for the future. Canadian environmental historians have been far more reluctant to be prescriptive. Instead, environmental historians have tended to use history as a way of informing contemporary environmental debates with the hope of providing useful insights and answers into questions about the past. This approach, which arguably has guided environmental history from its infancy in US scholarship in the 1970s, has great value and continues to shape scholarship in the present. It might, however, be criticized for being a passive form of environmental advocacy; as Graeme Wynn’s epilogue to *Land and Sea* cautions, historians need to be prudent with the application of contemporary concerns to historical analysis. Perhaps the best caution that Canadian environmental history can offer to environmental advocates and activists is that, as Wynn points out, “individual and societal attitudes to nature are always complex, rarely consistent, and frequently contradictory” (239). This can also make it difficult to apply lessons from the past to current environmental problems. Although Canadian environmental history scholarship will likely continue to be influenced by matters relating to contemporary environmental advocacy, historians should be mindful of retaining some critical distance from such issues. As the backlash against William Cronon’s “The Trouble with Wilderness” revealed, environmental history can be both friend and foe to environmentalism. At times, it offers key insights into past human relations with nature that have influenced our environmental circumstances in the present. But critical scholarship can also call into question assumptions about how we remediate environmental degradation, deconstructing and criticizing environmental activism and ecological management itself. Finally, there must continue to be space within environmental history for scholarship that does not directly situate itself in relation to the present. A study of the deeper past, which may not be directly relevant to contemporary environmental advocacy, is nevertheless critical for Canadian environmental historical scholarship and must not be overlooked in pursuit of present-day relevance. As it now stands, Canadian environmental history tends to focus mainly on case studies since Confederation and leaves open many research possibilities for studies of earlier periods of history. There must be space within the literature for research on a wide range of questions about historical human-nature relations without an imperative to relate those studies to current environmental issues.

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