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James Morton Turner. *The Promise of Wilderness: American Environmental Politics since 1964.* Seattle: University of Washington, 2012. 576 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-295-99175-7.

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A Promise Both Fulfilled and Deferred

Writing of the Wilderness Society's training programs conducted in the 1960s, James Morton Turner notes that "wilderness advocates came to Washington, D.C., with expertise in the physical geography important to their wilderness proposals; they left the Washington seminar with an understanding of the political and institutional geography of the nation's capital" (p. 127). In his sweeping and elegantly crafted book *The Promise of Wilderness,* Turner's main aim is to link those two geographies–real landscapes held dear by environmentalists (and their opponents) and the political landscape of the capital–in a way that demonstrates the importance and the complex evolution of an American environmentalism tuned to wilderness preservation.

Turner begins his account at the place where many histories of wilderness culminate–the passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964. Though he does reach back to set the context for this act's remarkable passage, Turner is most interested to show how this law and concern over wilderness preservation has been at the front and center of environmentalism ever since. As Turner points out, in other accounts of American environmentalism, wilderness is consigned to an older chapter of the movement with a periodization that ends in 1964, while Rachel Carson inspired a new environmentalism focused on such issues as pollution and toxic waste. But wilderness advocacy, Turner persuasively shows, was hardly left behind in the new period; struggles over wilderness designation on public lands, while not the only form environmentalism took in the post-1964 period, were both important in themselves and constitutive of larger trends in environmental politics.

In the first of the book's three parts, Turner takes us from the work of the Wilderness Society and Howard Zahniser in building support for the Wilderness Act to the various ways different federal agencies worked to shape the implementation of the act in the early years after its passage; by mobilizing popular interest and oversight in struggles to designate particular places as wilderness, the Wilderness Society, Turner argues, "made citizens the dominant force in Congress's approach to the act" (p. 128). This assured that interpretations would not just be made by bureaucrats at the National Forest or the Fish and Wildlife Services. While noting that environmental reform enjoyed bipartisan support during this period, Turner also concludes that "Democrats were often the driving force in advancing environmental legislation" (p. 135). In the book's second section, covering the years from 1977 to 1994, Turner shows how wilderness became an increasingly polarizing, "even hostile, arena of environmental politics" (p. 262). Chapters examine battles staged over the Tongass National Forest and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska and the fate of roadless areas in the national forests and in public domain lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management. Wilderness advocates won several victories in this period, using increasingly professional lobbying techniques, mobilizing science as a discourse of legitimacy, and drawing financial and political support from local activists across the country. Yet "local activists were increasingly cast in a supporting role to increasingly professional and powerful national groups," leading to internal strain and schisms. Moreover, through such manifestations as the Sagebrush Rebellion and the Wise Use Movement, anti-environmentalists of the New Right "emerged as creative and effective players in environmental politics" (p. 261). The final part takes the narrative up to 2009, exploring the battle over forests in the Pacific Northwest, the spotted owl controversy in the Bill Clinton years, and the rise of new environmental organizations and approaches (such as the Wildlands Project, the Native Forest Council, and the Pew Charitable Trusts, aka, the New Conservation Movement). It also covers the "new pathways" through which environ-

mental reform was pursued in the Clinton and George W. Bush eras, when executive action and judicial review were turned to in a period of congressional gridlock.

Turner's agenda is thus quite extensive. Fortunately, the narrative is crafted not only with considerable analytical insight but also with literary art. He enlivens the account by etching personal portraits of actors, whether they are well-known figures, such as Zahniser or Dave Foreman, or lesser-known people, such as Cliff Merritt ("he had a twinkle in his eye and a way with people" [p. 48]); Debbie Sease (a coresident with Foreman of the Buckaroo Bunkhouse, a sort of Western outpost for Wilderness Society staffers working in Washington, DC, who possessed a "strategic mind, a clear sense for legislative politics, and a love of the western badlands" [p. 239]); or Ernie Dickerman (whose suicide as an elder of the movement is used beautifully to frame the epilogue). He also effectively uses case studies to gain a measure of control over what might otherwise have been an overwhelming account, as when he focuses in on the early and illustrative efforts to designate Alpine Lakes in Washington State and Dolly Sods in West Virginia as wilderness areas. Places on the map come into heightened focus, providing relief for the reader as we encounter the complex terrain. The book is also handsomely illustrated, with photographs of mostly sublime vistas opening chapters and thus echoing (though not deconstructing) the literary program of the wilderness movement itself. Participants in the struggles described and partisans of different points of view will find Turner's evenhanded yet impassioned account fascinating, rewarding, and at times challenging.

One of the misconceptions that Turner overturns is the idea that environmentalists believed that only landscapes never touched significantly by people could qualify for wilderness status–and that after that status was granted, it could never be touched significantly by people again. In fact, that purist standard was one environmentalists actually fought against, as they recognized the pristine myth would severely limit the number of acres across that nation that could potentially count as wilderness. Environmentalists time and again fought for places that they knew registered a history of human use or abuse to be included in the wilderness system. Moreover, they were willing at times to grant exceptions to the leave-only-footprints-take-only-photos guidelines for management, allowing for Native hunting and gathering in Alaska or for military flyovers in California. While highlighting the spirited divisions within the Wilderness Society and through environmentalism more generally over principles and political strategy, ultimately Turner emphasizes the pragmatic nature of the movement as a whole over time. Wilderness advocates can claim a remarkable record of success, even as compromises have been criticized over time: as of 2009, some 109.5 million acres of federal land is designated and managed as official wilderness areas.

Turner tells no simple tale of a gathering movement and its ultimate success; he conveys a realm of political contestation over the fate of wilderness that was always shifting. While the author clearly has sympathy for the agenda of wilderness advocates, he is careful to keep an open perspective as he delves into both divisions within the environmental camp (such as that which arose between the mainstream groups and EarthFirst!), as well as when he looks at opposition movements, including the Sagebrush Rebels, the Wise Use Movement, and the Republican administrations of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush. One of the remarkable facets of his book is that he manages to do justice to the complex set of actors involved on various sides and the myriad particular battles as well as keep the narrative manageable for the reader. The effect is like surveying a vast terrain aerially, but also touching down here and there to walk the winding trails.

The tour may be satisfying and seem comprehensive, yet in some respects Turner's itinerary keeps us on the straight and narrow. *The Promise of Wilderness* does little to contextualize the story of wilderness in a global frame–either through comparative political or intellectual moves touching base with the rest of North America or other parts of the world, or through a pursuit of the transnational politics of wilderness preservation during this time (which deeply involve American institutions and environmentalists). Even within the U.S. boundaries that Turner establishes and respects for the book, the choice to anchor this history in the Wilderness Society and its interplay with other actors (e.g., Washington, various grassroots environmental organizations, and environmental opponents) has the effect of restricting the agency of other mainstream organizations and environmentalists. The Sierra Club and David Brower, for example, seem almost to be stuck on some remote parapet, unable to rappel down to where the political action on wilderness is taking place. And while he never claims that his focus on wilderness can stand in for a history of American environmentalism as a whole during the period (despite the book's subtitle), a case could be made for giving somewhat more attention to some of those other arenas (e.g., pollution, population, climate, environmental justice) for contextualization.

Another choice Turner faced was just how much to allow the so-called great new wilderness debate of the 1990s to orient his study. That debate–touched off by philosophers, environmental justice advocates, and historians–challenged both the philosophical and political implications of building environmentalism around the idea of wilderness. That debate reached a wider public when William Cronon published his essay "The Trouble with Wilderness" in 1995, which argued that it was "time … to rethink wilderness."[1] Some found it a heretical intervention (as Cronon predicted), including Earth First! cofounder Foreman (who Cronon had argued embodied some of the myriad troubles with wilderness). To Foreman, Cronon was taking an "arms-crossed antiwilderness stand." He scolded Cronon's constructivist argument that wilderness is a human creation, and one that is in part built out of a dualistic myth separating humans from nature: "this human/Nature question is not a deconstructionist toy with which to play in the coffeehouse or academic lounge; it is a matter of life and death since those who are trying to squeeze more dollars out of Nature have long argued that because humans are part of Nature, everything we do is natural–so, why worry?"[2] Cronon and Foreman were each a rod stuck in the soil of wilderness environmentalism in the 1990s, with lightning arcing between them. It is some kind of testament to Turner's powers of mediation, or just plain bravery, that his book is printed on pages between a front cover carrying Cronon's name (as author of the foreword and editor of the book series) and a back cover with an endorsement by Foreman hoping that it "sparks lively discussion around the campfire."[3]

Though Turner ably enumerates some of the challenges posed by the critique, he, like Foreman, compares them to the record of wilderness activists and activism since 1964 and implies that it does not really apply. They were never so beholden to wilderness in the mythic forms that Cronon critiqued. Since Cronon and others aimed at "a transcendent American wilderness ideal" (p. 327), Turner tends to consider the critique as being mostly outside of his particular history. The trouble is, Turner does not really tell us how the range of issues it raised–and the larger environmental justice movement that embodied and helped fuel it–reverberated, if at all, through the environmental community. Did wilderness activists worry about the charge of elitism and racism? How do labor-oriented accounts of environmentalism in this period help us retell the story?[4] Issues of gender identity came to the fore as Earth First! evolved, and fractured. It was deeply important in the earlier history of wilderness environmentalism. Was it important to the Wilderness Society in the 1990s? Cronon and others had pointed out that Native Americans had been dispossessed and removed from lands in order to construct bounded parks of "pristine" wilderness, violating both rights and history to inscribe a myth on the land that at first appealed to a narrow class of white people. In the 1990s, common cause was made with some Alaska Natives for strategic purposes, but did wilderness advocates think about working with tribes to help them regain hunting and gathering rights in wilderness areas and national parks? These are trails not taken. Describing a Wilderness Retreat Conference in 1998, Turner observes: "Its starting point was not philosophical questions about wilderness and its place in environmental advocacy–questions that had preoccupied critics during the 'great new wilderness debate' in the 1990s. Its starting point was politics" (p. 380). The same could be said of Turner's book. No doubt many readers will appreciate this choice, but they should recognize that this history defers rather than pursues the full promise of the multifaceted wilderness critique–a critique that was itself as much political as it was philosophical.

Still, one of Turner's real strengths is to offer a persuasive account of why, despite being critiqued from within and without, wilderness always had great promise. To him, the promise of wilderness, ultimately, is not that it will preserve a vital resource that will renew American national character (or manliness or sanity or our connection to nature)–or even save the environment for itself–but rather that it created a "political process." "Instead of a retreat from pressing realities," Turner maintains, "wilderness advocacy has been an ongoing exercise in citizen organizing, policy negotiations, and judicial and administrative maneuvers" (p. 406). For Turner, this political process involved individuals as agents–a faith at the heart of Turner's disagreement with an influential account of environmental politics in the 1990s written by political scientists Christopher Klyza and David Sousa. While Turner generally accepts Klyza and Sousa's thesis about the alternative pathways that were pursued for environmentalists during an era of congressional gridlock (e.g., executive action and judicial review), he takes issue with their notion of "green drift." Klyza and Sousa use the concept to explain the paradox of how "green policymaking" continued more or less unabated, even as environmentalism was attacked following the "right turn" of the nation marked by the accent of Reagan. They attribute this both to popular support and its mobilization as well as "the accumulated weight of the green state that makes retreat on environmental matters a tremendous political undertaking."[5] Klyza and Sousa offer a more

structural explanation for the resiliency of green policy, whereas Turner prefers to see the agency of individuals, learning from the past, inspired by an ideal, and evolving strategies to meet present realities. "Green drift," Turner concludes, "was the work of environmental advocates who actively piloted the environmental regulatory state through an ever-contested landscape of American environmental politics" (p. 373). The distinction in part reflects the kind of analysis each book presents: Klyza and Sousa take apart environmentalism structurally as part of a larger political system while Turner creates a narrative of struggle, successes, setbacks, and adaptations. Of course, both structural and narrative analysis have their virtues and drawbacks; Turner is to be commended for putting them in conversation with one another, even if his quibbles with Klyza and Sousa are not fully persuasive (after all, they also highlighted the mobilization of popular support as an explanation for green drift). More significantly, Turner should be lauded for making good on the promise of narrative analysis.

Indeed, *The Promise of Wilderness*'s outstanding feature is its ability to deliver a rich narrative and a clear and revealing set of conclusions that emerge organically from its warp of places and policy and weave of people and passions over time. In his epilogue, Turner offers up a useful and revealing list of "lessons of the wilderness movement": the power of having a tangible and infinitely renewable goal to fight for; the efficacy of political pragmatism; the vital power that can come from the potentially synergistic relationship between national and local actors; the fact that Democratic leadership has often been key to policy success; the multivalent way that science can influence policy debates; and the importance of pursuing different policy pathways and adapting organizational forms for different places and times. Each conclusion is built carefully and convincingly from his account, showing that history can both explain the past and provide readers with tools to use as they grapple with present and future challenges. Though *The Promise of Wilderness* is not the last word on wilderness and environmentalism in the last half-century, it is an instructive and invaluable road map for all who would like to explore and understand the battles waged over the nation's precious and contested roadless areas.

Notes

[1]. William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: Norton, 1995), 69.

[2]. Dave Foreman, "Around the Campfire: Wilderness Areas and Human/Nature Dualism," *The Rewilding Institute*, January 21, 2007, http://rewilding.org/rewildit/9/around-the-campfire-wilderness-areas-and-humannature-dualism (accessed January 15, 2013).

[3]. One can only surmise that Cronon's earlier writing might have kindled Foreman's campfire itself.

[4]. Chad Montrie, *Making a Living: Work and Environment in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

[5]. Christopher Klyza and David Sousa, *American Environmental Policy, 1990-2006: Beyond Gridlock* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), 297.

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