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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Frederick H. Swanson. *The Bitterroot and Mr. Brandborg: Clearcutting and the Struggle for Sustainable Forestry in the Northern Rockies.* Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011. 408 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-60781-101-5.

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Published on H-Environment (October, 2011)
Commissioned by David T. Benac

Davis on Swanson

Frederick Swanson's ambitious undertaking, part biography, part policy history, and part history of the United States Forest Service (USFS), required weaving together many different threads into a coherent story of the contentious battle over forestry resources in the West known as the Bitterroot controversy. The book will appeal to both academic and non-academic audiences and adds to the growing literature on sustainable forestry practices and rural communities that often depend on a timber economy. The book is the result of exhaustive, meticulous research at the hands of a master storyteller.

Guy Brandborg began his forty-year career with the Forest Service in June 1915, bringing to his work a belief that "his primary duty was to improve social conditions in forest-dependent communities, and not necessarily by making resources available to industry" (p. 25). This belief drove his advocacy of a holistic approach to sustainable forestry that integrated the protection of watershed, forests, and wildlife habitat while developing long-term employment of mostly local people through selective timber harvest. Brandborg understood the benefit of working to stabilize the private agricultural sector and improve private land grazing practices in order to reduce overgrazing in national forests. His commitment to education and concern for the socioeconomic health of rural communities faced with pressure from government agencies and private industry pushing for unfettered access to natural resources was the foundation of his plan for sustainability: "His focus was on maintaining employment in the country's mills, not creating a new, modernized timber industry" (p. 79). Throughout his career with the USFS, Brandborg repeatedly clashed with his superiors who he believed were focused on development at the expense of nature. The gap between official policy and Brandborg's management philosophy grew nearly insurmountable during World War Two, when the Forest Service responded to demands from the federal government by increasing the timber harvest beyond sustainable levels. When the war ended, the aggressive harvesting policy remained intact, deepening Brandborg's concern for forests, watersheds, and human community and widening the chasm between himself and the USFS. Brandborg continued for several years after the war to fight the battle for sustainable forestry before deciding that continuing the struggle from within the agency was futile and unlikely to lead to effective change. He finally decided "to assume the role of private citizen in the interest of achieving better public understanding of conservation ideals" and retired in 1955 (p. 102). Retirement gave him the freedom to publicly criticize the USFS without fear of reprisal. His advocacy became full-blown activism dedicated to drawing national attention to the devastation caused by large-scale clear-cutting and terracing and the USFS's abandonment of sustainable forestry.

Brandborg began an intense letter-writing, speech-making, and publicity campaign against a USFS management plan that he believed catered to the timber interests to the detriment of the environment and the local communities. USFS policy was diametrically opposed to Brandborg's unshakeable belief that the ultimate purpose of conservation was "respectful interplay between man and the land" (p. 28). A management plan that relied on clear-cutting and terracing and lack of attention to other uses of USFS land was anathema to everything Brandborg believed in and had worked for during his four decades with the agency.

Developing relationships with journalists, activists, the Sierra Club, environmental lobbyists, and the people who lived in the Bitterroot valley, Brandborg found what might have been his true calling as a radical activist. He "refused to be an interchangeable cog in the Forest Service apparatus, knowing that few others would carry on his unique program of tailoring national forest management to serve a local agriculturally based con-

stituency" (p. 270). Similarly, he maintained his integrity and individuality by refusing to bow to the pressure of the environmental lobby, maintaining his steadfast insistence on a forestry policy that responded to "the question of maintaining jobs in a permanent forest economy" (p. 263). He never wavered from his commitment to the relationship between natural resources and the socioeconomic well-being of people living in rural areas. Brandborg's stubborn insistence that he was right and his difficulty with compromise, at times caused friction with his fellow activists; however, that friction did not end in broken relationships. For instance, he worked closely with Doris Milner, an influential Bitterroot activist, and though they had very different approaches and at times "stormy arguments over tactics" (p. 249), Brandborg respected Milner's leadership abilities and commitment to the cause. Despite his often cantankerous personality and confrontational methods of communication, under his influence grassroots efforts to make the public and government aware of the destructive policies of the USFS in the Bitterroot was the catalyst for the National Forest Management Act of 1976. As Swanson argues, the Bitterroot controversy stands "as a model of how citizen activists could alter a federal agency's course–not just block a specific project but institute meaningful and lasting reforms" (p. 271).

Swanson does an excellent job of sorting through the massive amount of information available about the Bitterroot controversy. He carefully, and in great detail, analyzes the events and decisions that led to the conflict, as well as Brandborg's part in the grassroots movement that eventually led to major changes in U.S. forest policy. The controversy over logging in the Bitterroot region is only one part of a larger controversy over the nation's forest management policies. By writing such a detailed history of a local case, Swanson has called attention to and opened the door for a clearer understanding of the pressure on the entire national forest system and the agencies charged with managing it.

This is a very important book to forest policy history, conservation history, and the history of rural land use. It is detailed and exhaustive in scope and attempts to present environmental history through the vehicle of biography. On the whole Swanson is successful, although the book is more biography of an agency than of a man. I was left with a feeling of incompleteness when it came to understanding Brandborg the man. Swanson provides little of substance about Brandborg's personal life, definitely not enough to really understand his beliefs and the motivation for his actions. He made a dramatic shift from USFS supervisor to environmental activist, and knowing more about him, as a person, would make this shift more understandable. This is, however, a minor flaw in a truly remarkable book that clearly demonstrates the importance of local case studies to understanding larger environmental issues confronting the nation in this century.

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Citation: Kathryn Davis. Review of Swanson, Frederick H., *The Bitterroot and Mr. Brandborg: Clearcutting and the Struggle for Sustainable Forestry in the Northern Rockies.* H-Environment, H-Net Reviews. October, 2011.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=33147

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