

# Voices Crying in the Wilderness: Recent Works in Canadian Environmental History

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## Voices Crying in the Wilderness: Recent Works in Canadian Environmental History

ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY HAS FINALLY ARRIVED, its importance affirmed by J.L. Granatstein. In arguing that the social history of the 1960s and 1970s degenerated into blame history, Granatstein says: “Blame had to be allocated. Canada was guilty of genocide against the Indians, the bombing of Germany, the ecological rape of the landscape, and so on”.<sup>1</sup> The ecological rape of the landscape? Ahhh. Environmental history, the study of the relationship between humans and nature throughout time, has achieved a place in Canadian historical writing, but not through a single book or event. Rather, there has simply been more interest in the field, as evidenced by more articles, more theses and more conference papers that examine Canadians’ dealings with nature. And, in my own very unscientific measuring, there are more historians deciding that because their topic has an environmental angle – their battle scarred Belgian landscape, their politician made his money in forestry, their striking coal miners mined coal when they were not striking – environmental history must be part of what they do.

In a sense, of course, Canadian history has long been associated with nature. Think Innis on beaver and cod; Lower on trees; Creighton on rivers; Morton on the frontier generally. These foundational historians recognized that nature was a constant contributing factor in what drew Europeans (or, for that matter, Paleoindians) to Canada, what determined their survival, what defined their settlement and what eventually shaped the national identity. But by the 1960s, historians were treating nature as they had long treated Natives – as an opening chapter of the national narrative, worthy of an introductory mention but not to be spoken of again. We were content to pass off any matters of nature and the past to historical geography, a strong field in Canada made stronger by our surrender to it. Though there would always be a few historians writing on environmental topics from the 1970s through the 1990s – John Wadland, Bruce Hodgins, H.V. Nelles and Janet Foster spring to mind – they were voices crying in the wilderness.

Nature was likewise out of fashion in American historiography. The difference there was that, though marginalized, enough historians held an interest in environmental matters to begin developing a distinct field they would christen “environmental history”. While their works were necessarily regionally or thematically limited – there would not be an environmental history of the United States until 1998<sup>2</sup> – these scholars came to agree on the core values of the field. It should be multidisciplinary informed, have a social conscience and take as its purview any or all of three realms: nature itself as it has existed through time, humans’ uses of nature and humans’ ideas about nature.<sup>3</sup> Environmental history prospered in

1 J.L. Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* (Toronto, 1998), p. 59. Birders will recognize this example of *Lymnocyptes minimus*, the common jacksnipe.

2 John Opie, *Nature’s Nation: An Environmental History of the United States* (Fort Worth, Texas, 1998).

3 See Donald Worster, “Appendix: Doing Environmental History”, in Donald Worster, ed., *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History* (New York, 1988), pp. 289-307. I discuss this model further in Alan MacEachern, *Natural Selections: National Parks in Atlantic Canada, 1935-1970* (Montreal and Kingston, 2001), pp. 11 and 246, fn. 12.

the United States with works by Roderick Nash, William Cronon, Donald Worster, Carolyn Merchant, Richard White and Stephen Pyne in the front rank.<sup>4</sup> The field was small enough to be coherent, but large enough to generate debate, attract graduate students and spawn conferences and a pair of journals.<sup>5</sup> In the 1990s, international scholars grumbled about American hegemony in the field, and about the presumption of regarding a field with so many French and British forebears as of American origin. But the term “environmental history” has won out internationally over earlier European names such as “ecological history” and “green history”, showing how real the American influence has been. In any case, environmental history in the last decade has increasingly become a field of comparative and international concerns.

By the early 1990s, more Canadianists were taking a renewed interest in the role of nature in Canada’s past. This was in part due to the rise of environmental history in the United States. Some Canadian scholars were attending conferences there, treating them like spiritual retreats and coming home hungering for revival. But 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. Environmental history holds no patent to good scholarship on environmental subjects and Canadians would best avoid a slavish adherence to an American model. Writing in a field without clearly defined borders, however, inhibits dialogue. The voices crying in the wilderness of the 1990s were not necessarily talking to, or even aware of, one another. Scholars need some common ground and some common literature for fruitful debate. Lack of definition also hampers institutional recognition. Professors and students across Canada have demonstrated interest in courses on nature and the past, but to my knowledge, there have been to date advertisements for only three hirings in Canadian universities which expressed an interest in environmental history.

These are the practical reasons for siding with environmental history, yet all this ignores what gives the field its theoretical and narrative strength. Environmental history is distinct from earlier work by historians like Innis and Lower not because it promotes the study of nature over that of humans – it does not – but because it takes occasion to focus on nature itself, recognizing that this is necessary for a better understanding of nature’s place in human affairs, and thus ultimately of human affairs itself. Those writing “around” environmental history in Canada would do well to involve themselves in a single field with a single literature, and recognize why environmental history, well-established in the United States and increasingly so

4 An introductory reading list of American environmental history might be: Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3rd ed. ([1967] New Haven, 1982); William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York, 1983) and *Nature’s Metropolis* (New York, 1991); Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (Oxford and New York, 1979) and *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (Oxford and New York, 1985); Carolyn Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England* (Chapel Hill, 1989); Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York, 1995); Stephen Pyne, *Fire in America: A Cultural History of Wildland and Rural Fire* (Princeton, 1982).

5 *Environmental History Review* (previously *Environmental Review*) and *Journal of Forest and Conservation History* merged in 1996 to become *Environmental History*.

worldwide, has become that field.<sup>6</sup> The increase in Canadianists defining themselves as environmental historians suggests this is already underway.

The five books reviewed here each deal in some way with Canadians' past relationship with nature. Though written (mostly) just as environmental history was making itself known to Canadian scholars, only one of the books defines itself as such and cites substantial environmental history literature. Written by a law professor, a political scientist, a naturalist and filmmaker and even a couple of historians, the books are evidence of the difficulty of creating a common field, a single dialogue out of interdisciplinary interests.

It was a pleasure to re-read Janet Foster, *Working for Wildlife: The Beginning of Preservation in Canada* ([1978] Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1998) in its new paperback edition. This incarnation of *Working for Wildlife* should be the starting point for anyone wanting to get to know the Canadian field. The focus is on efforts to protect wildlife in Canada between approximately 1900 and 1920. Those years saw the creation of the National Parks Branch, the world's first governmental organization dedicated solely to parks; the passage of the Migratory Birds Convention Act, which standardized hunting regulations between the United States and Canada; and the birth (and death) of an independent, non-partisan, holistically minded federal agency, the Commission of Conservation. Such measures institutionalized the nation's first environmental movement, ensuring that the good intentions of Canadians interested in saving wildlife were actually implemented as policy. Of course, though Foster does not do so, it could also be argued that institutionalizing environmentalism left Canadians content that wildlife was being sufficiently cared for; as a result, grassroots environmentalism would not flower for another half century.

Foster does not see conservationism as a top-down movement, however, or at least not coming from the very top: "Rather, it was at the level of the senior civil servant that the awareness was born, and that new concepts emerged and took shape. . . . Canada was fortunate to have a handful of far-sighted, resourceful, dedicated civil servants who turned their own goals of wildlife preservation into government policy" (p. 13). The author is speaking of men like Dominion Entomologist Gordon Hewitt, Forestry Branch Director Robert Campbell, "Animal Division" Chief Maxwell

6 Historical geographers, of course, might assert a prior claim. They have paid close attention to the rise of a field which so closely resembles their own, even in name. Some critiques have been unflattering. For example, J.M. Powell begins an article in half-jest: "*Question*: Why is environmental history like Belgium? *Answer*: because it is entirely the product of a resident collective imagination": See J.M. Powell, "Historical Geography and Environmental History: An Australian Interface", *Journal of Historical Geography*, 22, 3 (1996), pp. 253-73. While many historical geographers see environmental historians as reinventing their wheel, others recognize that the success of the new field is, in large part, a reaction to the direction of their own scholarship. In "Ecology, Objectivity and Critique in Writings on Nature and Human Societies", *Journal of Historical Geography*, 20, 1 (1994), pp. 22-37, David Demeritt writes: "I wish that I could report historical geographers out in the forefront of this discussion. I cannot. Like other human geographers, we seem to have all but abandoned the once venerated study of human relations with the environment" (p. 22). And Cole Harris likewise states: "I used to think that it [work which blends history and geography] could only be nurtured in geography departments, but the environmental historians have shown that this is not so. What seems to be happening, at least in North America, is that history is becoming more geographical and that geography is slowly relinquishing the past". See Cole Harris, "Comments on *The Shaping of America, 1850-1915*", *Journal of Historical Geography*, 25, 1 (1999), pp. 9-11, quotation on p. 11.

Graham and especially the first Parks Commissioner, James Harkin – all but Hewitt lacking any biological training. They developed strong conservationist philosophies based on their own experiences in nature, an on-the-job understanding of how wildlife populations were under threat by modern civilization, and the influence of American thinkers coming to the same conclusions. These men then moved a conservationist agenda forward, winning over politicians and the public to the cause. This is a distinctly Canadian tale: bureaucrat as hero.

Foster's argument is very much a product of the sources she chose. Her study relies heavily on departmental correspondence, where upper-level civil servants can be seen promoting policy to their superiors, and on annual reports, where they can be seen promoting the department's philosophy to the public. But this diminishes the significance of those both farther up the ladder (such as Prime Minister Laurier, a birder who took an active interest in conservationism) or those below (like the Parks Canada staff who wrote much of the material Harkin signed). Foster's sources also lead her to downplay wider conservationist impulses. One would expect that the back-to-nature movement, also occurring in Canada in this era, would have led to, or at least accommodated, efforts to protect wildlife, but there is little sense of a relationship between the two here.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, *Working for Wildlife* has aged remarkably well. In the past quarter century, no other book has bettered its strong national narrative of the conservation movement (and Granatstein might rightly note that no one has even tried). The 1998 edition contains no changes to the text of the original, but does include a new short preface from Foster, and a foreword and afterword from environmental historian Lorne Hammond. Foster's preface notes that, for good or ill, preservation has become more the purview of individuals and private landowners than the federal government. Hammond's foreword sets the book in its own historical context, and the afterword offers an overview of Canadian environmental history since Foster – both welcome additions.

George Warecki, *Protecting Ontario's Wilderness: A History of Changing Ideas and Preservation Politics, 1927-1973* (New York, Peter Lang, 2000), is something of a spiritual descendent of Foster's book. Beginning essentially when Foster leaves off, Warecki examines preservationist ideas and actions at the provincial level. Of the works reviewed here, this one is positioned most explicitly in the environmental history field, the author having taught it for years at the University of Western Ontario. Warecki's book, coupled with his mentor Gerald Killan, *Protected Places: A History of Ontario's Provincial Parks System* (Toronto, Dundurn Press, 1993), are together such well-researched, thorough compendiums of Ontario environmental policy in the 20th century that they are likely to be cited for decades.

Warecki writes that his book "blends two themes: the politics of wilderness preservation and the history of changing ideas of wilderness" (p. 2). This, then, is intellectual/political history, seeking to understand how ideas shape policy and, more

7 Bill Parenteau's recent work is only now expanding our sense of what the conservation movement actually meant to Canadians. See Bill Parenteau, "'Care, Control and Supervision': Native People in the Canadian Atlantic Salmon Fishery, 1867-1900", *Canadian Historical Review*, 79, 1 (March 1998), pp. 1-35; Parenteau, "Angling, Hunting, and the Development of Tourism in Late 19th Century Canada: A Glimpse at the Documentary Record". *The Archivist*, 117 (1998), pp. 10-18.

difficult to discern, how policy shapes ideas. Warecki never defines “preservation” directly, but he uses it to mean protection of nature from (non-recreational) use. “Conservation”, in contrast, is the measured use of nature so as to guarantee its permanent benefit to humans. This distinction, used by many historians and environmental writers, is not universal – Janet Foster, for one, employs the terms interchangeably. More problematic, so did early environmental advocates themselves, demonstrating that the distinction is one of convenience for historians, not one of historical reality. So it is anachronistic for Warecki to chide a group for writing “an inaccurately titled promotional article, ‘Wilderness Preservation in Ontario’”, though they were “conservationists, not preservationists” (p. 40). The author likewise offers a problematic definition of “wilderness”. He states: “This study considers wilderness to be what the preservationists perceived, and fought for, as wilderness. One may recognize, however, a continuum of sizes and land types ranging from a few acres of wetland to several square miles of boreal forest” (p. 3). Even allowing for such relativism, the definition should mention that one necessary attribute of wilderness is the (presumed) absence of past human use, and it should make clearer that wildernesses need not be limited to several square miles.

*Protecting Ontario’s Wilderness* spotlights Ontario environmental advocacy groups through different eras, showing how their cultural contexts led to the philosophy and the tactics they chose and whether these tactics worked to accomplish their goals. Ironically, the story opens with an American organization, the Quetico-Superior Council which, beginning in the 1920s, promoted protection for the borderland park areas west of Lake Superior, and inspired the creation of a Canadian counterpart, the Quetico Foundation, to do the same. Both groups favoured a multiple-use concept of wilderness, whereby limited resource extraction could go hand in hand with recreation. As might be expected, the Ontario government found such “conservation”-style environmentalism relatively palatable, making it harder for a more “preservationist”-minded group like the Federation of Ontario Naturalists (FON) to influence policy. Founded in 1931, the FON lobbied for decades before achieving success, with the creation of sanctuaries free from exploitation, the passage of the Ontario Wilderness Areas Act in 1959 and the creation of the Nature Conservancy of Canada as an offshoot agency in 1963. The “environmental decade” of the 1960s greatly changed the nature of advocacy. A new group such as the Algonquin Wildlands League (AWL) could afford to be more strident. Using a modern mass media campaign, and working hard to increase and involve membership, the AWL was successful in restricting, though not eliminating, commercial logging at Algonquin Provincial Park. The AWL then set its sights on Quetico, achieving a total logging ban in the park in 1971 – in spite of, rather than with the aid of, the old Quetico Foundation.

One of the great strengths of the book – its firm grounding in American environmental history – is also a weakness. The American model at times seems accepted as the normative one that the Canadian case should follow. For example, while discussing a 1958 FON document, the author breaks off to explain the significance of American Aldo Leopold’s land ethic to the field of ecology in the 1950s. He continues, “This philosophy led the FON to conclude . . . ” (p. 76). Yet there is no evidence here, nor the next four times the ecologist is mentioned, that Leopold was being read by Canadians, let alone influencing them. On other occasions,



Warecki over-values classic American historiography and feels obliged to confront it. He cites such well-worn works as Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, first published in 1967, to make the case that early-20th-century conservationism was an elite activity, then continually apologizes for this elitism and uses it to explain environmentalism's failure to gain widespread support. First, this would seem to ignore more recent scholarship which argues that American conservation also had popular roots.<sup>8</sup> And second, even if conservationism was strictly elitist, that is not reason itself for failure. Other early-20th-century Canadian groups, such as the Conservatives and Catholics, were elite-led and still managed to win supporters. In some ways, elite leadership undoubtedly added to their appeal.

Warecki makes two very real contributions to Canadian environmental history. First, by assiduously combing countless archival collections and published reports, he creates a series of institutional and individual mini-biographies, and then brings them together to show the networks of environmental activism. There is extremely interesting material here on Douglas Pimlott, George Priddle, Fred Bodsworth, J.R. Dymond, Gavin Henderson, the National and Provincial Parks Association of Canada, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, the Conservation Council of Ontario and many others. Anyone researching a 20th-century environmental topic which touches on Ontario should read over Warecki's index and notes. Second, he does much to dispel the notion that because Canada has so much nature, we have been less environmentally minded than Americans. He argues that since Crown lands are a provincial responsibility in Canada, environmentalism here has been more provincially directed, making it less visible to a national audience and less obvious in a national narrative, but just as significant as it has been in the United States.

Raymond A. Rogers, *Solving History: The Challenge of Environmental Activism* (Montreal, Black Rose Books, 1998), the final book in a trilogy on the relationship between conservation and development presents the theory behind political activism. Rogers, now at the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University, brings experience to his theory, having been a commercial fisherman in Nova Scotia for more than a decade. *Solving History* does not pretend to be environmental history, rather it offers the sort of political theory best represented by the journal *Capitalism, Socialism, and Nature*. However, like many books in environmental literature, this one also assumes that somewhere in the past our relationship with nature went astray. At least implicitly, the bulk of environmentalism, if not actually always historically aware, is historically minded.

Rogers argues that "conservation" and "sustainable development" inevitably fail as responses to environmental problems because they presuppose the continued existence of capitalism and do nothing to resolve the structural problems it causes. Most markedly, capitalism falsely separates the "economic" from the "political", ensuring that economics will appear abstract, natural and neutral, so that capitalism's political and social repercussions will appear entirely unrelated. The author relies

8 See for example Richard Judd, *Common Lands, Common People: The Origins of Conservation in Northern New England* (Cambridge, 1997). There is a growing recognition among environmental historians that earlier ones had overstated the significance of elites because their work relied heavily on elites' archival papers and published pronouncements.

heavily on Ellen Meiksins Woods, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism*, extending her analysis to environmental affairs (beyond the fiction of “surplus labour” to the fiction of “surplus resources”). In what is perhaps the most concise presentation of his argument, Rogers writes:

If the capitalist project has been to expand the realm of economic logic, and to transfer a large share of a society’s political power to the privatized relations of the economy, the sustainability project associated with internalizing externalities merely extends and aids in that expansionary project, and therefore cannot sufficiently challenge appropriation and domination in capitalist relations. A more resistant and challenging conception of sustainability associated with externalizing internalities attempts to reclaim the political power buried internally in the economy, and externalize it so that it can return to the political and social realm, thereby opening up the creation of a moral economy (p. 78).

In other words, rather than convincing society to acknowledge and respond to environmental concerns, environmentalists should apply their energies to pulling nature, ideologies and themselves free of capitalism’s orbit altogether. “Solving history”, then, means rejecting everything we have learned during our capitalist-clouded history, including what needs to be done to solve that history.<sup>9</sup>

Having come to the position that we must externalize internalities, Rogers provides few clues as to how to reject everything in a capitalist system or what to adopt in its place. This is disappointing for a third book in a trilogy. There is talk of “embedded alternatives which link humans and nature in viable social terms through the ‘participation of subjects’ rather than the ‘participation of objects’” (p. 192), but no real detail on what these alternatives might be. The most specific advice is to urge fishermen:

The next time a fishery meeting is called, you would be a lot better off if you turned your back on the stage and started to talk to each other. Solve your own fractured history. In good times, everyone is out for themselves. In bad times, you are better off to look out for each other. Value what you know and care about where you live. No one else does (p. 185).

Externalizing internalities thus apparently means turning your back (literally) on the existing political process, but with no alternatives proposed. This is just antimodern isolationism – go back to your roots – with no discussion of what happens when you get there and what keeps you from reliving the same history once again.

9 The presumption behind such green Marxist thinking is, to my mind, an odd one: that the environmental problems we face are solely the result of our loss of control of the earth’s resources (like the loss of our own labour), and that if that control was regained, environmental pressures would soon disappear. The book’s epigram by Egon Czerny states blandly, “Nature doesn’t mind. It takes such pleasure making new ones”. It does? New oil? New whooping cranes? Writers such as Rogers feel obliged to attack conservation because of its presumed privileging of “person-living-tomorrow X” over “person-living-today Y”, when many Ys are not doing so well. But whether you are a watermelon (green on the outside, red on the inside) or a Grinch (vice versa), surely the goal should be an environmentalism which can accommodate both X and Y.



My frustration with *Solving History* may result from my difficulty in reading it. And the argument, and not merely the writing, is dense. Consider this example:

To speak of natural communities then, as separate from human communities is to replicate the separation of the political from the economic and the separation of the individual from a wider community. To speak of nature is to confirm culture. The more nature is exploited – the more nature is mixed with culture – the more impoverished becomes the cultural understanding of nature within culture (p. 22).

If separating human communities from natural ones is a problem (sentence 1), why is mixing nature and culture (sentence 3) exploitative? If our conceptual separation of culture and nature is the underlying environmental problem (sentence 1), does it really matter whether our cultural understanding of nature within culture is impoverished (sentence 3)? It is enough to make you externalize your internalities.

Jamie Benedickson, *Idleness, Water, and A Canoe: Reflections on Paddling for Pleasure* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1997), differs from Rogers's book in tone and message. Where Rogers sees modernity as estranging us from self, community and nature, Benedickson sees modernity itself as providing a relatively easy reconnection. And where Rogers sees the problem as rooted in how we work with nature, Benedickson sees the solution in how we play in nature. The tones of the books are in keeping with their degrees of optimism: Rogers's is heavy and dire, while Benedickson's is light and jokey.

*Idleness, Water, and a Canoe* is not a straightforward chronology, telling of how and when Canadians came to see canoeing as fun. Benedickson, instead, wants to understand the feeling itself:

First, the book is about why apparently normal people have paddled canoes and kayaks for pleasure and continue to do so. Second, the book is about how canoeists have practised their craft, built their boats, camped in comfort, and coped more or less successfully with insects and other perils. Most generally, the book is about the experience of canoeing, a subject linked to why and how, although that is merely the start of the relationship (p. vii).

The subject therefore must be treated thematically. There are chapters on canoeing's health-giving, character-building and soul-enriching benefits. There are chapters on perils, on clubs and competitions, on cost, on comfort, on the crafts themselves, on wilderness, on destinations. There are chapters on women and canoeing, Natives and canoeing, voyageurs and canoeing.

As can be imagined, this makes for a disjointed narrative. The reader learns, for example, about Eric Severeid's 1930 trek along Hudson Bay bit by bit, in five different places through discussions of fishing, spirituality, maturity, canoe clubs and Native paddlers. Other journeys are divided up into as many as ten short stages throughout the book. This makes for considerable portaging. On a single page peoples' opinions of canoes may be quoted in passages from 1901, 1948, 1880 and 1818 (p. 129). Mixed this way, there is no opportunity to judge whether the assessments tended to become more or less positive over time. Though Benedickson writes "There is certainly history here" (p. vii), the result is ahistorical. The sources

are so thoroughly mixed throughout that the love of canoeing comes across as universal, with its manifestation in any one era – whether for birchbark, canvas or aluminum, for example – strictly a matter of an undifferentiated taste.

The book is most memorable in its details. We learn that the voyageurs consumed and expended approximately 7,000 calories a day. We read of mosquito repellent recipes over the past century and a half. We discover the Hudson's Bay Company's "U Paddle Canoe Rental Service", which between 1964 and 1984 allowed paddlers to pick up a canoe at one post and drop it off at another. And we learn of the Ontario Ministry of Correctional Services' DARE program, offering multiple recidivists the experience of backcountry canoeing adventures. Benedickson has an encyclopaedic knowledge of canoe-tripping, and presents all versions with humour and grace.

Focusing on paddling-for-pleasure permits the author on the main to avoid the long history of Native and voyageur canoeing in Canada. But there is surprisingly little here on how canoeing was transformed into a recreational activity in the mid to late 19th century. One would expect that it was an antimodern sensibility, made possible by the confluence of a growing middle class, settlement and exploration deeper into Canada's wilds, and, with the subjugation of Native peoples, a romanticization of their lives. Benedickson does deal with such nostalgia for early Canada, but gives it no prominence. His chapter on Natives is the book's eleventh, and the one on voyageurs the last. The sentence "Over the past century, a remarkable number of canoeists have imagined themselves travelling in the footsteps of the voyageurs, of early European explorers, or of the original human inhabitants of the North American wilderness landscape" (p. 239) is probably the first time in the book that Natives, voyageurs and pleasure-seekers are mentioned together.

*Idleness, Water, and a Canoe* is one of several canoeing history books published in the past few years.<sup>10</sup> If the term means the history of how we have enjoyed nature, then, the popularity of such books, or at least of the topic, speaks to Canadians' interest in "environmental history". Indeed, the identification in a number of these books of canoeing with Canadianness suggests that the history is proffered as a sort of cultural pitch, holding the canoe's place in our culture and keeping it from springing leaks. This may make us more interested in our relationship with nature (and more interested in environmental history), but may also help to instil the notion that nature is out there, a pleasant diversion from the ravages of modern life, rather than a realm both here and there, intimately connected to modernity.

Maybe it takes an Atlantic Canadian to call into question the whole canoe-is-Canada/Canada-is-canoe mystique, because, Mi'kmaq associations notwithstanding, the canoe has never been all that important to us. *Idleness, Water, and a Canoe* makes reference to one New Brunswick and one Nova Scotia excursion, but the book's unspoken focus is canoeing in Central Canada (with side trips to the United States and England). Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island and Ontario are notably the only three provinces not listed in the index – the first two because of no references, the

10 These publications include James Raffan, *Bark, Skin, and Cedar: Exploring the Canoe in Canadian Experience* (Toronto, 1999); John Jennings, Bruce W. Hodgins and Doreen Small, eds., *The Canoe in Canadian Cultures* (Toronto, 1999); Jim Poling, *The Canoe: An Illustrated History* (Toronto, 2000).

third presumably because of too many. Benedickson obliquely acknowledges the regional nature of Canada's canoe-loving, stating, "There are significant numbers of canoeists and canoe enthusiasts in all parts of Canada, including the west, particularly if you are willing to fit kayaks, dugouts, and dragon boats into your vision of a canoe, or to add rafters to the community of paddlers" (p. 254). But in his own book he rarely, if ever, writes about kayaks, dugouts, dragon boats or rafts.

Bob Burns, with Mike Schintz, *Guardians of the Wild: A History of the Warden Service of Canada's National Parks* (Calgary, University of Calgary Press, 2000) is what people must think of when they hear the term environmental history: books with cover photos of men on horseback in the mountains and nary a Starbucks to be seen. The two authors are long-time Parks Canada staff – Burns an historian, Schintz a warden – and they write with intimate knowledge of the park system's history and sociology.<sup>11</sup> The topic is an important one, because it offers great opportunity for exploring how environmental policy has actually been applied by people in the field.

The great strength of the book is its relentless detailing of seemingly every element of the warden system's history, from the 1885 birth of the Canadian park system to the contemporary debate of whether wardens should carry handguns. In between there are 300 pages of often fascinating narrative. The chapter on the post-1945 boom is fairly representative in its scope, covering wildlife relocations, growing professionalization, predator control, wildlife slaughter, bears, poaching, fire, resource extraction in parks, park development, housing standards, personnel mobility, work in newer parks, work life, home life and search and rescue. Such depth is possible through the authors' extensive research involving warden interviews, the National Archives' Parks Canada collection, and century-old western parks files that are just coming to light now and are used here for the first time.

A main theme is the corps' sometimes grudging professionalization. When park guardians were first hired to protect Rocky Mountains (later Banff) National Park from fire and hunters in 1909, men were chosen for their experience as outfitters, hunting guides or professional trappers. The new wardens soon became jack-of-all-trades, the public face of the park for virtually all its contacts with both people and nature. Wardens were expected to be on virtually never-ending patrol throughout their district, and be on-call all day, everyday. In such tough conditions the wardens developed real power in the park's workings, even as they developed a romanticized public image. It is little wonder the authors call this early era the service's "golden age".

But after 1945 a changing Canada would not let this warden lifestyle be. In 1958 the federal government legislated a 40-hour work week for all federal employees. More and more, wardens were expected to have university training – in part because of a rising societal value placed on education and in part because of the increasing importance of science in the natural resource management of parks. In 1968, the

11 Schintz's actual contribution to the book is unclear. The back cover states, "Robert Burns traces . . .". An endnote refers to "personal communication with retired warden Mike Schintz". (p. 378, n. 67) And on several occasions (see pp. 190 or 231-3) the prose shifts noticeably from a general academic narrative to a more folksy retelling of an anecdote; presumably, Schintz wrote these. Though for all intents and purposes Burns may be the primary author, this review will credit both writers throughout.

Sime-Schuler report on the warden's function in the Parks Branch argued that wardens should no longer be expected to do everything and their duties should be narrowed to fulfil the general roles of natural resource management, public relations, public safety and law enforcement. There is no doubt that the string of measures to professionalize the warden service has done much to improve wardens' lives, but, as might be expected, there is a trace of sadness throughout the book that the warden's job has in so many ways become like that of any other civil servant. The existence of the book itself may be seen as a rear-guard action against this.

Analysis is scant here. The closest *Guardians of the Wild* comes to a thesis is its back-cover claim that it "shows how the role changed and developed according to the expanding park system, altered societal expectations, and technological change". There is seldom an attempt to relate warden history to what is going on outside the parks. And occasionally the authors simply remind readers of what they expect them to know. Thus "the shocking Mount Temple tragedy" in which seven young climbers died is passed over in a single sentence (p. 245). So too is the 1960 brouhaha resulting from Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources Alvin Hamilton's mention in Parliament that wardens were painting red markings on the rear ends of drugged, nuisance bears (p. 279). Nor do the authors mention the damaging press coverage of the bear story, including one pundit's comment that Parks Canada was "leaving no stern untuned".

Like a park trail, *Guardians of the Wild* offers a brisk walk with much to observe along the way. It is an interesting social and administrative history of a group uniquely involved with Canadian nature. But there needs to be a warning at the trailhead. The book began as a commissioned, in-house history for the Canadian Warden Service, although this is not mentioned anywhere in the present volume.<sup>12</sup> Thus, some subjects get the treatment one might expect in a commissioned history, but not in a book bearing the imprimatur of an academic press. To demonstrate, consider a moment in the historical record when wardens might look bad. Through the 1920s, park wardens were expected to trap unwanted predators, and were permitted to keep the profit from the fur-bearing ones they had captured. Parks Commissioner James Harkin ended this policy in 1929, to great opposition from the wardens. The authors do not supply a motivation for Harkin's decision, but archival letters – in files they read – show the Parks Branch had discovered that at least a few wardens were exploiting the policy, making a profit trapping all kinds of animals, predators or not.<sup>13</sup> There is no mention of this in either version of the book. Indeed, the second version omits a quotation

12 A volume with the same name and authorial credit was produced by Parks Canada in 1999. A sticker inside states, "This is a technical report for use within the Parks Canada Agency".

13 James Harkin to W.W. Cory, 18 January 1929, RG 84 vol. 36, file U300 vol. 5; Supervisor of Western Parks James Wardle to Harkin, 22 February 1935, RG 84 vol. 37, file U300 vol. 8, National Archives of Canada [NAC]. This is discussed in my "Rationality and Rationalization in Canadian National Parks Predator Policy", in Pam Gaffield and Chad Gaffield, eds., *Consuming Canada: Readings in Environmental Canada* (Toronto, 1995), p. 202. One reason *Guardians of the Wild* may have bypassed these important letters is that, for whatever reason, the authors tend to cite National Archives files concerning the individual parks rather than the U-coded ("Universal") files related to the entire park system. RG 84 volumes 35 to 39, containing U300 parts 1 to 17, should be the backbone for any research on Canadian parks wildlife policy prior to 1950, but they are cited only a few times here.

(found in the original version) from “a remarkable memorandum” from 1939 explaining that parks have a predator problem because some wardens believe they should be allowed to hunt in the parks for profit, while other wardens are just too lazy to catch predators; this is one of the few sections from the in-house draft to be expunged.<sup>14</sup> Simply because this book was written by, for and about Parks Canada staff need not necessarily skew its interpretation. Unfortunately, it appears that at times it did.

The five books reviewed here do not begin to cover the full range of environmental history. None studies matters prior to the mid 19th century. All but Rogers’s explicitly focus on “wild” nature, eschewing rural, suburban or urban Canada. Three – Warecki, Foster and Rogers – take environmental protection as their subject. Three – Warecki, Foster and Burns and Schintz – might be considered institutional histories. What is most exciting about environmental history in Canada right now is that a much wider range of work, much of it from graduate schools, is just now coming to the surface.<sup>15</sup>

If Canadian environmental history truly has arrived, might it leave? 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?<sup>16</sup> Knowing what we do about global population pressures, the exhaustability of fuel sources and other natural resources, global warming and other pollution problems, and Canadians’ own close association of nature with national identity, it is difficult to imagine our relationship with nature taking up less of our thoughts and easy to imagine it taking up more.

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14 “No doubt a great deal of our difficulty about predators has arisen from the fact that a certain type of warden never abandons the idea that in addition to his quite adequate salary and perquisites he should also be given the right to hunt and trap in the park for his own profit. Moreover, there are certain wardens that are too lazy to try and kill predators which are usually wary”. See R.A. Gibson to F.H.H. Williamson, 21 November 1939, RG 84 vol. 8, file B300 pt. 5, NAC, in Burns with Schintz, *Guardians of the Wild* (1999), p. 127.

15 I look forward to the publication of books arising from recently completed environmental history dissertations, such as Claire Campbell, “Shaped by the West Wind: Nature and History in the Georgian Bay”, Ph.D. thesis, University of Western Ontario, 2001; Matthew Evenden, “Fish vs. Power: Remaking Salmon, Science, and Society on the Fraser River, 1900-1960”, Ph.D. thesis, York University, 2000; Jennifer Read, “Addressing ‘A Quiet Horror’: The Evolution of Ontario Pollution Control Policy in the International Great Lakes, 1909-1972”, Ph.D. thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1999; Kathryn Morse, “The Nature of Gold: An Environmental History of the Alaska/Yukon Gold Rush”, Washington University, 1997; Pearl Ann Richwein, “Beyond the Visionary Mountains: The Alpine Club of Canada and the National Park Idea, 1906-1969”, Ph.D. thesis, Carleton University, 1996; Neil Forkey, “Segmented Frontiers: A Socio-Environmental History of the Trent Watershed, Ontario, 1818-1867”, Ph.D. thesis, Queen’s University, 1996.

16 In proposing a Canadian environmental history course recently, I was advised to change the name to “Nature and Canadian history”. Presumably “environmental history” was either too dry or already too dated.