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Author

Nocera, Joseph J.

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Peer reviewed

Review: *Balancing Act: Environmental Issues in Forestry* (2nd ed.)

By J. P. Kimmins

Reviewed by [Joseph J. Nocera](#)

Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources, Canada

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Kimmins, J. P. *Balancing Act: Environmental Issues in Forestry*. (2nd ed.)
Vancouver, Canada: UBC Press, 1997. 305 pp. ISBN 0-7748-0574-9
(softcover).

Finding a balance in a debate of extremes is a daunting task. In *Balancing Act*, the author attempts to describe all points between aggressive environmental protectionism and outright resource exploitation. Throughout the book, the reader is presented with numerous facts, theories, and research concerning the effects of exploitation and the fallacy of "eternal" hands-off protectionism. His facts are precise, and his presentation of all aspects of forestry is thorough—from climate change to groundwater issues.

J. P. ("Hamish") Kimmins offers a complete and extensive primer on forestry, forest science, and relevant topics. This background consists of five full chapters (73 pp.) and provides, as the author states, "the average concerned citizen or forester with an introduction to the ecological aspects of the major environmental issues facing the managers of Canada's great forest resource" (p. 4). Even those readers armed with intricate knowledge of these disciplines will take home something new, or at least be reminded of something they may have forgotten. This lengthy introduction is well written and is the greatest strength of this book.

Has the author managed to find a balance, as the title suggests? Throughout, Kimmins disclaims this work as not being a vehicle meant to resolve a debate. I suggest that he has accomplished neither the intended, or unintended, objectives. The entire work is one of a pro-forestry nature, albeit against blatant exploitation, where forests are considered a "resource" (e.g. see quote above). The objectivity that the author desires is lost in his repeated advocating of active forestry over forest protection. This is most evident in the very limited discussion on some sensitive wildlife issues. Wildlife that are dependent upon old-growth (requiring the least intensive style of forest management), seemingly receive a brush-off, with only one paragraph devoted to their discussion (p. 150). The reader is told how harvested forests beget different suites of species, but that overall diversity is unharmed. What about the inherent value of wildlife that resided there?

Many of the issues raised and information presented are generated from the west coast of Canada, particularly the author's home province of British

Columbia. Although the task of discussing global forest types would require tomes, a more comprehensive discussion of at least North American issues could surely have been accomplished. The western forests are certainly a unique ecosystem, but so are the Acadian forests of Eastern Canada, the long-leaf and loblolly pine forests of the southeastern United States, etc. All of these areas are under intense forestry pressure but suffer from different problems that are not necessarily applicable to the focus on western forests.

This book possesses real value to anyone who wants to become well informed on forest science in western Canada. I would also recommend that this work be used as a first reference text on forestry and forest resource extraction. However, this book would have benefited from a more thorough discussion on region-wide topics, and more sincere thought on wildlife related issues.

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Joseph J. Nocera <nocerajj@gov.ns.ca>, Wildlife Biologist, Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Division, 136 Exhibition St., Kentville, Nova Scotia, Canada. TEL: 1-902-679-6091.

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