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**Review: Conservation Across Borders: Biodiversity in an Interdependent World**

By Charles C. Chester

Reviewed by [A.M. Mannion](#)

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Charles C. Chester. *Conservation Across Borders: Biodiversity in an Interdependent World*. Washington D.C.: Island Press, 2006. 262pp. ISBN: 1-55963-611-4, US pbk Alkaline paper. \$US 29.95.

Biodiversity loss is one of the major environmental issues of the 21st century. The conservation of species and ecosystems is difficult under the best of circumstances but where regional or national borders are involved the task requires even more effort. In North America, the mainly straight-line boundaries separating the USA from Mexico in the south and Canada in the North were drawn with political and not ecological motives. Conservation problems associated with these boundaries are the substance of this book and are illustrated by reference to two initiatives: the International Sonoran Desert Alliance (ISDA) and the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative (Y2Y). Following an introduction to the general problem and the specific programmes, Chester's book moves into an analysis of the many interpretations of the term 'transborder', and a brief review of historical efforts at transborder conservation such as the proposed Peace Parks of the early 1900s in Europe and North America. The many international initiatives have various names, the most widely accepted being Transboundary Protected Areas (TBPAs). Their advantages and disadvantages, successes and failures, best and worst practices are examined. A major example discussed is the Man and Biosphere Programme (MAB), established in the late 1960s, which recognized conservation needs and the need to reconcile them with society's needs, and instigated the development of an international network of Biosphere Reserves to preserve representative areas of the world's biodiversity. The goals, ethics and practices of MAB influenced ISDA and Y2Y, both ambitious projects embracing substantial areas, land managers with varying economic and ecological goals as well as different national governments.

Details of the ISDA occupy the next 80 pages. Its official designation occurred in 1993 but it emerged from earlier MAB efforts in Mexico and the USA, which emerged from even earlier protected areas. Biology and geography are just two facets of a complex land area that experiences rapid urban growth, cultural variation, different legal systems, migration problems and drug smuggling. ISDA itself has experienced rifts within its ruling body and shifts in policy from an emphasis on land management to environmental

education and community outreach programmes. The subsequent 80 pages are devoted to Y2Y that has an equally tortuous history, and to the difficulties of reconciling US and Canadian attitudes to conservation and land management. Y2Y concerns a vast area of 1.2 million sq. km. extending from northwest to southeast through the Yukon, the Northern Territories and British Columbia and into the US states of Montana, Idaho and Wyoming. Although its boundaries are ill defined it encompasses the high Rockies and is especially important for large predators such as the grizzly bear, lynx and bald eagle. It came into existence at the same time as the ISDA though its precursors were many and varied, dating back to the 1880s and including the establishment of nine national parks. Education and the dissemination of information are at the heart of Y2Y which attempts to integrate issues at local, national and international levels, to operate through a network of informed parties linked electronically, and to build on established successes such as Yellowstone, 'a symbol of American heritage' and the Yukon, a symbol of 'Canadian heartiness'.

The final chapter invokes the work of the zoologist William T. Hornaday, a pioneering wildlife expert in the early 1900s when nature in North America was largely ignored in the face of development, who highlighted civic society's responsibility (through Non-Governmental Organizations), rather than or as well as that of government, for conservation. A discussion follows of the achievements of ISDA and Y2Y and of qualitative and quantitative means of expressing the success or failure of conservation efforts in general. Both ISDA and Y2Y reflect civil society as the predominant actor, a situation characteristic of free, democratic and relatively wealthy societies.

The detail of chronological development and the personalities involved in ISDA and Y2Y presented in this book is comprehensive; for those who enjoy the history of conservation, especially such movements in Mexico and North America, this book is a recommended text.

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