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Author

Piselli, Kathy

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Review: America's Private Forests: Status and Stewardship

By Constance Best and Laurie A. Wayburn

Reviewed by [Kathy Piselli](#)
Vistronix, Inc., USA

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Constance Best, & Laurie A. Wayburn. *America's Private Forests: Status and Stewardship*. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2001. 268 pp. ISBN 1-55963-900-8 (cloth); ISBN: 1-55963-901-6 (paper). US\$50.00 cloth; US\$27.50 paper.

Forests are worth more standing than when cut down. This isn't always obvious to everyone. But it is to two co-founders of the Pacific Forest Trust, a nonprofit established in 1993 to promote good forest stewardship chiefly in private forests, and they have published a book that both outlines threats to forests and presents solutions.

The book's interest is in the preservation of biodiversity. It was commissioned by a group of conservation foundations called The Consultative Group on Biological Diversity, and analyses United States government data released in summer 2001. So in addition to identifying the major threats to private forests in the United States, this book offers guidance for conservation efforts that will lead to preservation of native biodiversity.

Best and Wayburn maintain that so-called nonindustrial private forestland owners (NIPFs) own 60% of America's forests and that most biological diversity resides in these forests. For this reason, they are not only concerned with preserving the kinds of large tracts found in Alaska, but also with defragmenting and protecting smaller tracts in the lower 48. Atlanta, Seattle, and Washington D.C. are named as containing smaller tracts that should be targeted as "at risk." These are areas that have seen between 13% and a whopping 40% population increase in the ten-year period between censuses.

Part One presents data analysis clear enough so that even those not familiar with forest conservation issues can make sense of it. Data limitations are pointed out, explaining how seemingly positive trends may mask underlying problems. For example, a statistic indicates an increase in total forest acreage but obscures the difference between acres of new pine on abandoned farmland and acres of hardwood lost to a new subdivision.

Part Two, the "Conservation Toolbox," focuses on potential solutions. The authors' strategy is two-pronged. Any ecologist knows that forests represent

much more than board feet of lumber. Benefits great and small come from forests and serve both general planetary functions critical to all life or critical to just a single species (for example, supplying humans with a valuable new medicine). The authors point out ways owners might realize financial return on uses for forests that go beyond board feet. In modern times, this is accomplished with government incentives such as those outlined in the toolbox. Some of these tools already are in place in some states, but there is ample material here to get anyone started if they don't exist locally, or could be expanded.

The authors maintain that building public interest in forest conservation is critical. Without public interest, government support on many levels is impossible. The book is lighter on this score, but does provide some direction, especially for educators.

America's Private Forests is well indexed and contains a list of references. There are 36 pages of appendices including statistics as well as that all-important acronym decoder. It would be useful in nearly any library and makes a good gift for policymakers. The history, toolbox, and large listing of contacts is particularly useful for forest owners, especially those new to forest-owning, who are interested in maximizing profit and don't mind helping Mother Earth at the same time.

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Kathy Piselli <piselli.kathy@epa.gov>, Librarian, Vistronix, Inc., contractor to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 4 Library, 61 Forsyth St., Atlanta, GA 30303, USA. TEL: 1-404-562-8190.