



1-20-2000

***Contested Landscape: The Politics of Wilderness in Utah and the West* edited by Doug Goodman and Daniel McCool**

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Recommended Citation

Barnum, Andrew H. (2000) "*Contested Landscape: The Politics of Wilderness in Utah and the West* edited by Doug Goodman and Daniel McCool," *Western North American Naturalist*: Vol. 60 : No. 1 , Article 10. Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/wnan/vol60/iss1/10>

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BOOK REVIEW

Contested Landscape. The Politics of Wilderness in Utah and the West. Edited by Doug Goodman and Daniel McCool. University of Utah Press, Salt Lake City, UT. 1999. \$19.95, softcover; xvii + 266 pages.

The origin of this book is most interesting. As explained in the Preface (p. xiii), it grew out of a political science course, “The Politics of Wilderness in Utah and the West,” taught by one of the editors. Students were required to author or co-author a chapter of the book “based on original research.” *Contested Landscape*, then, is really a compilation of term papers. The 24 students, singly or in teams of 2 or 3, wrote most of the book. It would be interesting to know how assignments were made. Did the student select his or her coauthor(s) or were these assigned by the professor? There must have been some degree of organization because the 4 sections (A Foundation of Facts; The Wilderness of Politics; Competition for Resources; and Lessons from the Past, Proposals for the Future) each have meaningful chapters. Assignments must have been made.

The Preface is authored by Daniel McCool; the introduction to the 4 sections, each a 2-page narrative, is authored by “The Editors”; and the concluding chapter, The Community Context Approach, is authored by Doug Goodman and Daniel McCool. The other 13 chapters are student contributions.

One would expect writing styles of the contributors to be diverse, and differences would be expected in quality. In this reviewer’s 45 years of teaching college and university science courses where students have been required to write term papers, it has become obvious that students write to impress the instructor who will ultimately grade them at the end of the term.

How much of the writing is original and in the author’s own words? In *Contested Landscape* it would appear from the list of references accompanying each chapter that much of the material is a compilation of previously published information. Students have been known to plagiarize. Inasmuch as the dialogue in many chapters is so

encyclopedic, one might question whether the editors checked all references for plagiarism. Having compared references used by students writing term papers, I know this is a tedious, yet necessary process. Chapter 3 can be used as an example. Did the editors check for plagiarism all 60 references listed?

Some, but not all, chapters are well written. Since it was apparent from the project’s inception that student contributions would make up most of the book, the editors should have given more direction to produce consistent organization of the chapters. Seven of the chapters, for instance, include both an introduction (or overview) and a conclusion, which one would expect of student term papers; 2 chapters have the introduction but no conclusion; 2 chapters have the conclusion but no introduction; and 3 chapters have neither introduction nor conclusion.

Four maps are printed in *Contested Landscape*, 3 in chapter 7 and 1 in chapter 13. In the reviewer’s opinion, these maps contribute little to the book because they mostly lack definition. Twenty tables are included in 10 chapters, but some of these simply take up space.

An alphabetized list of 43 abbreviations is found on pages ix and x. The editors stated that the “spell-checker could not recognize any of the acronyms listed at the beginning of the book” (p. 66 [emphasis added]). Most of these abbreviations are NOT acronyms, but are initialisms. There are some abbreviations used in the text that are not included in this alphabetized list. Usually the words to the abbreviation are given parenthetically. However, the words to the acronym ANILCA (p. 104) could not be determined when it was first encountered. This reviewer had to turn to the index to find the words explaining that acronym. Upon reading further, these words were discovered in the references section of that chapter.

The serious reader of this book would be advised to memorize the abbreviations before ever attempting to read the chapters, or to remove pages ix and x from the book to be used as a handy reference while reading. Otherwise,

much of the text will not be understood. In one 9-line paragraph, 13 abbreviations are used (p. 52). This paragraph is quoted to illustrate how meaningless the narrative becomes unless the abbreviations are known.

VERs in WSAs are protected by Section 701(h) of FLPMA and are subject only to the undue degradation provisions of FLPMA. However, these restrictions may not unreasonably interfere with the benefit of existing rights, which usually consist of pre-FLPMA grazing rights and developed mining claims. A special VER exception does exist. The Director of the BLM may suspend pre-FLMPA VERs in a WSA when the President is expected to recommend a special WSA for wilderness designation. Although Congress is expected to act quickly, the VERs could be suspended for a maximum of two years (BLM 1995).

In the Preface the editors state the purpose or goal of the book is to compile the facts and explain “the relevant laws, policies, court cases, and political activity . . . needed if the wilderness debate is ever going to move toward resolution.” One additional declaration states the book “is an effort to move the debate beyond the present stalemate.” This is an ambitious request that likely will not be accomplished from reading *Contested Landscape*.

The controversy as to designation of wilderness areas in Utah is apparent. It is printed almost daily in newspapers and magazines, is heard and seen frequently on radio and television broadcasts, and is the subject of numerous books. This is another book to add to the list.

Contested Landscape is about wilderness, an explanation of which is found on page 117. “For an area to be designated as wilderness, it must be roadless, have an acreage of five thousand acres or more, be natural and without the imprint of man, and provide the opportunity for solitude and/or primitive recreation.” (Note the repetition of *acreage* and *acres* within the space of 5 words in the sentence. This is not good writing.) It is very possible that no such area exists anywhere. If a wilderness must be untouched by human hands, feet, or vehicle tires, it probably cannot be found. Directly or indirectly all land by this time has been contaminated by humans through overgrazing and introduction of noxious adventive weeds. The reference is made that “310 plant species . . . have been introduced into Utah” (p. 162). Can a plot of 5000 acres be found without noxious adventive weeds, footprints, or tire tracks?

It would appear, then, that a wilderness area must be without roads. However, “neither the courts nor Congress have delineated a clear set of criteria that would define what constitutes a legal road. . . . Furthermore, since Congress has failed to define what a road is, states must use their own definitions of what constitutes a road” (pp. 181–182). This discussion is inconsistent. If a wilderness area cannot have a tire track, how can it have a road? What then is the purpose of the discussion on the definition of a road in terms of wilderness?

First impressions of *Contested Landscape* may be positive with the reader. The book is clean with attractive type and printed on quality paper; it is well organized and well referenced. Additionally, it would appear to be well written and carefully edited. However, the concerns discussed in this review show otherwise. Why is the word *forgone* repetitiously used 4 times in 9 lines of text (p. 210)? What is the meaning of the word *columnse* in “These columnse 25,000 acres” (p. 245)? Or is this merely a typographical error not corrected? The editors “propose a special commission to make formal proposals for wilderness designation” (p. 248). Note the repetition in *propose* and *proposals* within the same sentence. The people of these United States have been commissioned to death in recent years.

In the last chapter the editors state, “The wilderness debate is not about right or wrong; it’s about needs and values” (p. 252), which statement is also found on the back cover. If it’s dealing in acreage that is either too small or too large, it’s certainly dealing in right or wrong in the minds of taxpayers.

This reviewer, after reading and analyzing technical books written by professionals and correcting papers “authored” by college or university students for well over half a century, has finally discovered a book that is technically the greatest challenge of all. Certainly a subtitle to *Contested Landscape* could well be written: *Trivium ad Infinitum* or *Nauseum ad Infinitum!*

Contested Landscape is not entertaining bedtime reading. Don’t expect to see it on the best-seller list in the near future.

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