



9-24-2008

Pioneering Conservation in Alaska by Ken Ross

Clayton M. White

Brigham Young University, clayton_white@byu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/wnan>

Recommended Citation

White, Clayton M. (2008) "*Pioneering Conservation in Alaska* by Ken Ross," *Western North American Naturalist*. Vol. 68 : No. 3 , Article 16.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/wnan/vol68/iss3/16>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Western North American Naturalist Publications at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Western North American Naturalist by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

BOOK REVIEW

Pioneering Conservation in Alaska. 2006. Ross, Ken. University Press of Colorado, Boulder. \$34.95, hardcover; 564 pp., 109 photographs, 28 tables, 8 maps. ISBN 13: 987-0-87081-852-3.

The encyclopedic nature of this book makes it difficult to review. The book is a rapid series of brief clips in the history of conservation in Alaska starting with that region's encounter with the Russians in the 1700s and ending with Alaska's statehood in 1959. Actually, in places, the text treats related issues within a topic beyond that date, such as the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill in 1989 and the logging interests and abuses in the Tongass National Forest (White 2007). Interspersed within the chapters are longer and more detailed accounts of people and issues. The book is dedicated to the North Pacific Right Whale (*Eubalaena japonica*). This is a companion volume to *Environmental Conflict in Alaska*, written by the same author, and deals with post-statehood issues.

The book is in 2 parts. Part I treats early naturalists and wildlife exploitation, and part II deals with wildlife and wildlife managers. At the end are notes from each chapter followed by a works employed (literature cited) section. To me, this is a bit redundant. Why not incorporate the literature with the notes and reduce the number of pages? There are 9 topics within part I. A few of the chapter titles include Sea Otters and Scientists (which deals with the early Russian and American exploitation of not only the otter but also the Aleuts and other Native Americans), Wake of the Whalers, The Boone and Crockett Club, Charles Sheldon and Mt. McKinley National Park, and Alaska Natives and Conservation. Part II also has 9 topical sections with the chapter titles including Bureau of Biological Survey Chiefs (highlighting, for example, C. Hart Merriam and Ira Gabrielson—the Gabrielson that coauthored *Birds of Alaska*), Alaskan

Wildlife Managers (highlighting such people as Jim King), Grizzly Bears and Politics, Predator Control, Gold and Oil on the Kenai, The Arctic Wildlife Refuge, and Evolution of Conservation Values.

Each main chapter is further divided into specific topics. For example, in the chapter on predator control, there are subtopics entitled Initiation of Alaska Wolf Control, Defense of Predators, Wolves in Mt. McKinley Park, Escalation of Wolf Control, Predation on Salmon, Fox Predation of Seabirds (mainly about introduced fox in the Aleutians), Other Exotics in the Aleutians, Predation by Eagles, and Evolution of Predator Policy. All the above should give an idea of the flavor of the book.

The author perhaps assumes too much knowledge from the reader. For example, he writes about the Aleuts, the Koniag, and the Keneitze natives without really identifying the regions they are from, which could have been done parenthetically. Most readers will recognize that the Aleut is clearly from the Aleutians, but the reader wouldn't learn until long after their introduction that the Koniag and the Keneitze are native people from the Kodiak and the Kenai and Cook Inlet regions, respectively.

The book is full of little gems here and there and instructive historical photographs, including pictures of John Muir on St. Matthew Island and Mardy and Olaus Murie on the Sheenjek River. Of historical importance is a post-statehood photograph (ca. 1985) of Ginny Hill Wood and Celia Hunter, who helped organize the Alaskan environmental community. I was caught by C. Hart Merriam's observations of Charles Sheldon (of Boone and Crockett importance): "Sheldon was a splendid type of vigorous manhood; self reliant, courageous, of pleasing personality, possessed of sober, earnest dignity, unassuming, simple in tastes, kindly, generous and when estimating others always fair, giving due weight to their environment and opportunities." Would it not

be a credit to one's inner-self to be evaluated like that?

For those interested in Alaska or conservation in general, this is a good read. If not in one's own library, it should definitely be in public or school libraries.

WHITE, C.M. 2007. Tongass: Pulp Politics and the Fight for the Alaska Rain Forest by Kathie Durbin [book

review]. *Western North American Naturalist* 67: 156–157.

Clayton M. White
Department of Plant and Wildlife Sciences
Brigham Young University
Provo, UT 84602
E-mail: clayton_white@byu.edu