

Community Forestry in the United States: Learning From the Past, Crafting the Future, by Mark Baker and Jonathan Kusel. Washington, DC: Island Press, 2003, 247 pp., U.S. \$25.00 (paperback), U.S. \$50 (hardback), (ISBN 1559639849).

DOI: 10.1177/1070496503255579

This book makes the case for considering community forestry as a social movement and discusses its potential long-term contribution to more sustainable, profitable, and equitably distributed forest resources. It speaks to practitioners and advocates of community forestry, and to a broader audience interested in human organization and sustainable development.

During the first four chapters of *Community Forestry in the United States*, Baker and Kusel describe the historical context that created the community forestry movement. They begin by identifying key traits that the movement shares with other community-based initiatives and discussing the diverse traditions it draws on. Three specific examples are explored in depth, including landscape management by the O'odham and other Native American tribes, irrigation districts in the Hispanic Southwest, and municipal forestry in small towns of New England.

The authors then explore the evolution of national Forest Service policy and management during the Progressive Era and the New Deal. Potentially esoteric discussions of internal agency debates are brought to life by descriptions of Benton Mackaye, Gifford Pinchot, and other individuals who personify the different points of view. With the trend toward management by a scientific elite, the democratic involvement of rural communities declined. The centralization of forest management and unsustainable practices, such as clear-cutting, also made it difficult for forest workers to establish strong communities, as reflected by the persistence of transient labor camps. How this chain of events led to the rise of different regional forms of community forestry is illustrated with case studies from around the country.

Supplementary topics covered in later chapters include the pitfalls of expert-driven science when faced with complex systems, countered by a model for more adaptive and participatory science. Further chapters emphasize the need to value nontimber forest products, such as mushrooms and herbal medicines, within the current market framework and

propose more equitable investment strategies to address this problem. A capital assets framework involving transfer between natural and social capital is briefly referred to, but not well integrated into the rest of the book.

For those interested in follow-up research, many related writings are named. The book is also well organized, as illustrated by the very helpful chapter-by-chapter overview in Chapter 1. However, the writing style is more analytical than narrative, giving the book a slightly dry feel for the general reader.

The impetus for this book came from Forest Community Research, a California-based nonprofit that develops and advocates community-based management of natural resources. The writing of the book was a participatory process in and of itself, involving a 10-person advisory group, 55 interviews, and three regional workshops with community forestry practitioners. Its tone partly reflects this process, and the authors' advocacy goals are clear in Chapter 7, where a detailed strategy for advancing community forestry at the national and local levels is laid out.

Many of the strategies and messages conveyed by this book are directly applicable to other economic activities, including fisheries and agriculture. The basic principles for participatory engagement in public policy have also been codified elsewhere in similar writings on natural resource conflict resolution and public involvement in environmental decision making. For example, the International Association for Public Participation offers a more general training program that puts some of the aspirations of this book into operational terms. However, additional writing in this growing field is by no means redundant.

The most important original contribution of this work is to highlight the growth of community forestry in the United States. The authors' thesis recognizes community-based efforts as a contrast to the dominant science-based but undemocratic approaches to natural resource management. *Community Forestry in the United States* is well worth reading purely for the blow-by-blow account of how the principle of community involvement developed within this branch of the federal government. It also offers the take-home message that community-based forestry provides an alternative mode of civic engagement for those disillusioned by the dollar-driven battles of interest group politics. This book represents an authentic effort to support and promote grassroots solutions and is a worthy read.

—Margot Stiles
San Diego, CA

Margot Stiles is a freelance science writer currently based in San Diego, CA. She earned her M.S. in marine biology at Scripps Institution of Oceanography and studied community-based fisheries as a Thomas J. Watson Fellow. She can be reached at mstiles@bluelink.andover.edu.