
Acid Rain in the Adirondacks is a scientific history of acid rain research, from the discovery of acid rain, to the expanding understanding of its effects on the watersheds of New York’s largest state park. The authors state that they have designed the book for two audiences, both non-technical and technical readers, and in this regard they have succeeded. The book’s structure lends itself to non-technical readers (students, teachers, environmental advocates), by providing an introductory chapter which includes a 27 point synopsis and a color-coded guide to the abbreviations and symbols that populate the text. This is immediately accompanied by a graphically illustrated glossary of terms related to acid rain research and biogeochemical studies. By reading the first two chapters a non-technical readers gets primers in biogeochemistry, hydrology, soil processes, and aquatic biology that make the rest of the book accessible. If on the other-hand even the glossary is too much, the authors have provided a half-page pre-primer which informs the a hurried reader as to the critical concepts in the text. Throughout Acid Rain in the Adirondacks science is communicated clearly, with complete yet simple explanations and examples. It wisely avoids citations and over-reliance on numbers that might be cumbersome for non-technical readers. But even the non-technical reader will be drawn from the main text to the plentiful graphs and diagrams. The authors re-created graphs and diagrams from the original scientific publications which they reference throughout the text. The result is fantastic. The graphs are colorful, attractive, and easy-to-read. Additionally they provide the data and citations that the technical reader may desire. The inclusion of more technical data and the original citations will allow scientists, managers, or engineers to use the book as a guide to the existing acid-rain literature.

Acid Rain in the Adirondacks contains two stories: the effects of acid rain on the Adirondacks, and the development of the scientific studies that led to our current understanding of acid rain. These stories are told through a historical narrative structure. Following the introduction and glossary, early chapters describe the chronology of acid rain research programs in upstate New York. These early chapters set the stage for the middle of the book, which provides details on different topics in acid rain research, from nutrient cycles of sulfur, nitrogen and calcium, wetlands and mercury, biological effects on aquatic systems, and changes in long-term monitoring data. Within these “topic” chapters, research is again presented chronologically. Chapters begin with single-page timelines of the milestone events pertaining to each topic. Each chapter then provides an introduction to the topic (e.g. how the calcium cycle functions), and then the key issues related to acid rain (e.g., how much calcium has been removed from forests by acid rain?). To address these issues, the authors present the scientific rationale at the time of each study, the results, and how those results led to the next study, or were conclusive to some degree. Chapters end with bulleted summaries describing the key points on what has been learned to date.

Unlike other texts on acid rain, Acid Rain in the Adirondacks has a specific scope. The book’s chronicle starts by covering acid rain’s “re-discovery” in the 1970s, including the development of strategies to assess its effects in the Adirondacks. Next the larger regional surveys of the 1980s are covered with clear explanation of what necessitated each research program and how each led to the next. The book also includes emerging topics from Adirondack research in the 1990s and early 2000s (e.g. the role of wetlands and acid rain), as well as long-term changes in emissions and acid deposition rates. The book is, as its title states, concerned primarily with the Adirondack region; however, research programs from other areas in the northeast are appropriately referenced and included throughout the text. This is helpful in both comparing the Adirondacks to other regions where acid rain is a problem and in presenting acid rain as an issue of national and global concern. Thus the book