State Forests has a comfortable balance of forestry detail, government policy, and personal anecdotes to make the book both fun and informative. The unique “peninsular” geography of Michigan lent itself to a sort of “regionalism” in land management styles, with foresters from the Upper Peninsula doing things somewhat differently from those in the Lower Peninsula. The diplomacy involved in how these land managers struggled to meld the two systems makes for intriguing reading as these public stewards addressed this particular issue.

It was especially interesting to see how, over the course of the last century, little has changed regarding the political mire associated with public land management. Botti and Moore provide insights into how forest managers have had to balance environmental concerns, local government issues, and citizen interests while addressing federal and state mandates. The positioning of politicians, universities, and private industry to influence the management outcomes of the state forests was telling, leaving the reader wondering how anything ever gets accomplished on public lands (something that many state resource managers ponder every day).

The authors were concise and pragmatic in their approach to this subject, offering just enough of their own personal experiences to make the book a smooth and quick read. In my opinion, the major downside is that little was provided regarding the development of Michigan’s state forest system in context with surrounding states—the few brief mentions of Wisconsin’s approach did not provide enough bases for comparison. Even though focused on Michigan’s forests, the lessons offered are of relevance to any organization charged with protecting and managing our natural environment. Scholars of forestry and wildlife of other natural resource professions would benefit from using this book, regardless of where they study.

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Building the Next Ark: How NGO’s Work to Protect Biodiversity
Michael M. Gunter, Jr.
University Press of New England, Lebanon, NH.

This book outlines the workings of 11 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) based in the United States and operating to varying degrees internationally on biodiversity protection. They are Biodiversity Action Network (defunct by 2001), Conservation International, Defenders of Wildlife, Earthjustice Legal Defense Fund, Earthwatch Institute, Environmental Defense, The Nature Conservancy, The Ocean Conservancy, Sierra Club, World Resources Institute, and World Wildlife Fund.

Author Michael Gunter examines the ways each uses what he calls mainstream and participatory strategies. Mainstream strategies principally relate to working with governmental units. These include lobbying, litigation, monitoring agreements, scientific research, and acquiring/managing property. Participatory strategies include grassroots or activist networking and community education. Most of the 11 NGOs operate in several of the seven strategic areas. Gunter describes examples of these operations and shares his views on the generic strengths and weaknesses of the strategies.

A major theme of the book pertains to three fundamental linkages that Gunter says are critical to NGO effectiveness. One is a domestic-international linkage by which he asserts that NGOs must connect domestic biodiversity concerns to international ones. Migrating land animals and marine life provide examples. A second linkage is ecological-economic, where the issue of resource sustainability plays a major role. Last is a short term-long term linkage, perhaps best described as connecting today’s needs and values with those of future generations. However, in my opinion, Gunter poorly defines this linkage and he doesn’t clearly relate it to the NGOs’ programs. He does discuss past and present programs of the NGOs in varying degrees of detail. Examples included Earthjustice’s litigation for Colombian natives against a petroleum company, the Sierra Club’s grassroots campaign to save the Grand Canyon from flooding, Conservation International’s work on eco-tourism, and Earthwatch Institute’s worldwide education initiatives.

The book’s final chapter deals with the ways in which the NGOs work to improve themselves. In this discussion, Gunter looks at the general demographics of their leaderships, their decision-making styles and willingness to engage in partnerships, how they target constituencies, and their emphasis on specific strategies. He includes an interesting, though now dated, review of these NGOs’ efficiencies at fundraising for their programs.

Aside from the fundraising comparison, Gunter tends to be uncritical in his assessments of the NGOs, both within the narratives and at the conclusion. He suggests that each of these organizations has a worthwhile role to play in building the metaphorical ark. This is understandable since real world situations, organizational missions, and organizational constituencies vary considerably. However, that left me wondering about the real usefulness of Building the Next Ark. More could have been said about the relative effectiveness of the programs and how they could be improved. The reader also doesn’t get a sense for how they tie together in a coordinated way to protect biodiversity.

I was disappointed with Gunter’s conclusions a few times. For instance, in outlining the strengths and weaknesses of the seven strategies, this is what he says about the weakness of property acquisition and maintenance: “Does not address fully the