

BACKGROUND BOOKS

THE ENVIRONMENT

A sizable literature is available on various aspects of the environment: ecology, nature, conservation, preservation, pollution and its control, economic growth, endangered animal species, the seas, the wilderness, parks, forests. Offshoot subjects—environmental law, ethics, economics, and politics—are treated in scores of specialized works.

But dispassionate full-length studies are rare, as are scholarly critiques of the leading environmentalists' contemporary assumptions and proposals concerning energy, land use, and agricultural methods.

Of the "basic" books, most ardent environmentalists would place Aldo Leopold's **A SAND COUNTY ALMANAC** (Oxford, 1949, cloth and paper; Sierra Club/Ballantine, 1970, paper) at the top of the list. For two decades this book had a small but devoted following; the environmental awakening of the late 1960s brought hundreds of thousands of readers to *Almanac*.

Leopold, who takes the reader through each month of the year at his Wisconsin farm, has been called a 20th-century Thoreau because of his fine descriptive prose. But it is his philosophy, expressed in such essays as "The Land Ethic," that has guided his disciples.

"A land ethic," he writes, "changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members and also respect for the community as such." Leopold defines conservation as "a state of harmony between men and land. . . . The land is one organism. Its parts, like our own parts, compete with each other and co-operate with

each other. The competitions are as much a part of the inner workings as the co-operations. You can regulate . . . but not abolish them."

The first environmental best seller was Rachel Carson's **SILENT SPRING** (Houghton Mifflin, 1962, cloth; Fawcett, rev. 1973, paper). A biologist already widely admired for her 1961 book *The Sea Around Us*, Miss Carson challenged the agricultural pesticide industry when no other writer was either competent or willing to do so and documented the harm that DDT and other popular pesticides were doing to the soil, water, wildlife, and, potentially, to humans as the poisons passed up through the food chain.

"The chemicals to which life is asked to make its adjustment," she wrote, "are no longer merely the calcium and silica and copper and all the rest of the minerals washed out of the rocks and carried in rivers to the sea; they are the synthetic creations of man's inventive mind, brewed in his laboratories, [with] no counterparts in nature."

What happened as a result of Miss Carson's impassioned plea for biological instead of chemical control of harmful insects? In **SINCE SILENT SPRING** (Houghton Mifflin, 1970, cloth; Fawcett, 1970, paper), Frank Graham, Jr. describes the Velsicol Chemical Corporation's unsuccessful campaign to get the publishers to withhold Miss Carson's book, the controversy it created, and the partial ban on DDT that followed.

MAN AND NATURE (Scribner's, 1864, cloth; Harvard, 1965, paper) by George Perkins Marsh is the granddaddy of ecological books. It appeared in many languages besides English and in an

1874 revision entitled **THE EARTH AS MODIFIED BY HUMAN ACTION: A New Edition of Man and Nature**. Marsh, a Vermont lawyer, congressman, and U.S. ambassador in Europe, recorded in graphic language man's depredations against nature: "Vast forests have disappeared from mountain spurs and ridges; rivers famous in history and song have shrunk to humble brooklets; . . . the estuaries, and the consequently diminished velocity of the streams which flow into them, have converted thousands of leagues of shallow sea and fertile lowland into unproductive miasmatic morasses."

In **NATURE AND THE AMERICAN: Three Centuries of Changing Attitudes** (Univ. of Calif., 1957, cloth; Univ. of Nebr., 1972, paper), Hans Huth traces the rise of the U.S. conservation movement. He provides abundant detail on the Theodore Roosevelt era and the development of the great Western parks—Yosemite, Yellowstone, and the Grand Canyon. The standard historical study of this period is **CONSERVATION AND THE GOSPEL OF EFFICIENCY: The Progressive Conservation Movement** by Samuel P. Hays (Harvard, Historical Monograph Series, 1959, cloth; Atheneum, 1969, paper). Hays highlights social and political tensions that plagued the movement.

MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR NATURE: Ecological Problems and Western Traditions by John Passmore (Scribner's, 1974) examines changing attitudes toward nature in terms of pollution, conservation, preservation, population. Passmore, an Australian professor of philosophy, goes back to Biblical sources and the ancient Greeks; he punches holes in a number of theories held by ecologists as well as by the ecologists' critics.

"There is certainly a risk that we shall be utterly discouraged by the im-

plications of Barry Commoner's first ecological law," he writes. To say, as Commoner does, that "'everything is connected to everything else' makes it appear that to act at all is the height of imprudence. . . . It is just not true that everything I do has effects on *everything* else. Rather . . . the unintended consequences of our actions are often surprisingly remote in time and place from those actions."

Which brings us to Barry Commoner's **THE CLOSING CIRCLE: Nature, Man, and Technology** (Knopf, 1971, cloth; Bantam, 1972, paper). Advocate-biologist Commoner gives examples of technological and social actions that have broken nature's cycle and produced an environmental crisis which, in his view, endangers mankind's survival.

Less polemical analyses of environmental problems and possible remedies are available in a number of superior textbooks, including Raymond F. Dasmann's well-written classic, **ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION** (Wiley, 1959, rev. 1972, cloth & paper), and the more pedantic but useful **SOCIAL BEHAVIOR, NATURAL RESOURCES, AND THE ENVIRONMENT** (Harper, 1972, paper), edited by William R. Burch, Jr., Neil H. Check, Jr., and Lee Taylor.

Three newly published books by former federal officials offer glimpses into the making of environmental policy. One is **CLEANING UP AMERICA: An Insider's View of the Environmental Protection Agency** by John Quarles, Jr. (Houghton Mifflin, 1976). In it, the former EPA deputy administrator describes his frustration with the federal bureaucracy and his gloom over the prospect of diminished public support for environmental action. John C. Whitaker's **STRIKING A BALANCE: Environment and Natural Resources Policy in the Nixon-Ford Years** (American

Enterprise Institute, 1976, paper) presents background on major environmental policy decisions as seen by the author, a Nixon White House aide and later Under Secretary of the Interior. Whitaker blames most mistakes and delays on what he calls the "iron triangle" of vested interests embracing lobbyists, congressional committees, and middle-level federal bureaucrats.

THE NEW AMERICAN DREAM MACHINE: Toward a Simpler Lifestyle in an Environmental Age by Robert L. Sansom (Doubleday/Anchor, 1976) views the complexities from lower down the federal totem pole. Sansom, EPA assistant administrator for Air and Water Programs (1972-74), analyzes energy, pollution, transportation, and land-use problems facing the nation. All, he contends, are linked to Americans' profligate way of life.

Two books based on task force studies sponsored by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund rate special mention. **THE USE OF LAND: A Citizen's Policy Guide to Urban Growth**, edited by William K. Reilly (Crowell, 1973, cloth & paper), is a comprehensive account of land use and urban growth problems in the United States. **THE UNFINISHED AGENDA: A Citizen's Policy Guide to Environmental Issues** (Crowell, 1977, cloth & paper), edited by Gerald O. Barney, is a collection of papers and recommendations for action on pressing problems from the heads of 12 major environmental organizations—all aimed

at influencing the new administration.

Books on specific subjects range from West Virginian Harry Caudill's eloquent case against strip mining, **MY LAND IS DYING** (Dutton, 1973, cloth & paper), to novelist and nature interpreter Freeman Tilden's introspective **THE NATIONAL PARKS** (Knopf, 1968, cloth; 1971, paper). Ian L. McHarg's **DESIGN WITH NATURE** (National History Press, 1969, cloth & paper) is aimed at urban planners. In McHarg's view, existing soils, terrain, and waterflow show us how to use land; human settlements work best when designed in harmony with nature's patterns.

Lewis Mumford's two-volume *The Pentagon of Power* makes excellent reading for environmentalists. In the second volume, **THE MYTH OF THE MACHINE** (Harcourt, 1964, 1970 cloth; 1974, paper), Mumford examines the historical basis for man's "overwhelming commitment to his technology" with its miscarriages of production that lead to pollution and waste.

Inspiration and hope for the future come from several writers, among them René Dubos. **A GOD WITHIN** (Scribner's, 1972, cloth; 1975, paper) is Dubos' eloquent plea for a "creative stewardship" of the earth. Reminding his readers of the Biblical injunction that man was put in the Garden of Eden "to dress it and to keep it," he calls this passage from Genesis (2:15) "an early warning that we are responsible for our environment."

—Lois Decker O'Neill, Associate Editor (Books)

EDITOR'S NOTE: We are grateful for suggestions and comment from members of Washington-based environmental organizations in the choice of the books described above. Michael J. Lacey, assistant director of the Wilson Center, also provided guidance. Mr. Lacey is at work on a book about government scientist W. J. McGee and his role in the early U.S. "cult of conservation."