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Book Review of *Great Plains: America's Linger- ing Wild* by Michael Forsberg.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Great Plains: America's Lingering Wild. By Michael Forsberg. Foreword by Ted Kooser. Chapter introductions by David Wishart. Essays by Dan O'Brien. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009. 260 pp. Maps, table, bibliography, index. \$45.00 cloth.

Michael Forsberg's magnificent photos of land, animals, and people compelled me initially to turn page after page of *Great Plains*. The wonderful color images pulled me into the initial historical overview and chapter introductions by historical geographer David Wishart, field journal anecdotes by Forsberg himself, and the intensely personal essays by wildlife biologist and rancher Dan O'Brien. Ted Kooser's foreword poetically set the tone for both the photography and the text.

Forsberg and O'Brien present short pieces up front to introduce the book. Then comes a sweeping historical overview by Wishart, telling in about ten text pages and numerous historical photos how settlers from Europe in less than a century displaced Native hunters and lifeways across this vast land. The main body of the book—containing sections on the Northern Plains, the Southern Plains, and the tallgrass prairies—follows Wishart's overview.

Each of the three major sections contains a succinct introduction by Wishart followed by a compelling combination of photos by Forsberg, essays by O'Brien, and field journal narratives by Forsberg. The Northern Plains section—"Ocean of Grass"—takes a look at the region's pothole country, water, black-footed ferrets, and wind. Shifting southward, "Next Year Country" describes the unpredictable climate and the culture that resulted from it in the Southern Plains and features, among other things, essays on the elusive cougar and the vast Ogallala Aquifer. The last major section, "Tallgrass Remains," looks for lost vignettes of the Eastern Plains's tallgrass ecosystem, now nearly all converted to other uses, mainly crop production. From north to south and east to west in these main sections, Forsberg's photos bring the landscapes, people, animals, and artifacts into living perspective.

Dan O'Brien worked over three years with friend Michael Forsberg to gather material for this volume. In its last essay, a two-page summary, he pulls together his views and predictions. Nothing is permanent except change, he says. The most troubling change in the past century seems to him to have been loss of species diversity and wildness in the Great Plains, driven in large part by the prevailing

mythology of the endless space, freedom from regulation, and economic opportunity available therein. But his cynical outlook about the future, he concludes, has been moderated somewhat by Mike's vision of hope.

I recommend this book highly. The attractive 11 x 12-inch format, magnificent color photography, very readable essays, and reasonable price suit *Great Plains* admirably for personal and institutional libraries and living room and office display. An unusual combination of good art and scholarship, given greater depth by the personal experiences and perceptions of the authors, it has relevance not only in the Great Plains but far beyond. **Joe C. Truett**, *Turner Endangered Species Fund, Turner Enterprises, Bozeman, Montana.*