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### Consuming Nature: Environmentalism in the Fox River Valley, 1850-1950

Terence Kehoe

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*Consuming Nature: Environmentalism in the Fox River Valley, 1850–1950*, by Gregory Summers. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006. xii, 256 pp. Illustration, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

Reviewer Terence Kehoe is a senior research associate with Morgan, Angel & Associates in Washington, DC. He is the author of *Cleaning up the Great Lakes: From Cooperation to Confrontation* (1997).

Following the path of Samuel P. Hays, American environmental historians have rooted the emergence of the post-World War II environmental movement in America's shift from a society oriented around production to one centered on consumption. According to this thesis, an increasing number of citizens came to value nature for the amenities it offered to people with expanded amounts of leisure time and disposable income. Americans—and people in other developed, affluent countries—now encountered nature primarily through outdoor recreation, travel, and forms of leisure. As a result, they gave equal or even higher priority to preserving the natural environment than to exploiting natural resources for various types of production. In *Consuming Nature*, Gregory Summers explores in fascinating detail how that transformation played out in the Fox River Valley of Wisconsin, a region that was both rural and also quite industrialized. In doing so, Summers helps us understand America's transition from a producer to a consumer society. He also sheds light on important aspects of modern environmentalism, particularly the way, for most Americans, the connection between the large-scale manipulation of nature and the consumption of various goods and services became largely hidden.

By just about every measurement, the material quality of life experienced by inhabitants of the Fox River Valley changed dramatically during the century covered by this book. The basic components of everyday life, such as working, cooking, heating and illuminating one's home, and traveling, became both easier and more dependent on the reshaping of the natural environment by business and government. Summers illustrates this industrial progress and transformation of everyday life by looking in detail at the spread of electricity, the construction of the state highway system, and the rise of the modern dairy industry.

That material progress affected the ways people interacted with nature. For example, residents of the valley eventually were able to travel long distances throughout Wisconsin in enclosed comfort when and where they chose without much reference to the weather, except for the most severe snowstorms. Without the need to work in and some might even say "battle" nature to obtain the necessities of life, citizens were now more likely to encounter the natural environment as

a place for leisure and relaxation. The Wisconsin state government and business interests encouraged this trend by creating, maintaining, and promoting state parks and other recreation areas to which people could travel and experience nature. This was, however, a particular kind of nature: one that had been reshaped and made accessible (and more comfortable) as a result of the same transformation that had reshaped everyday life in all parts of Wisconsin.

These linked worlds of production and consumption first came into overt conflict right after World War II, when aroused citizens in the Fox River Valley pushed for more rigorous enforcement of water pollution laws along the Fox River, site of one of the most intense concentrations of pulp and paper mills in the world. Ironically, those paper mills, first drawn to the valley by its natural resources, had played a large role in creating the material prosperity that lay behind the heightened concern for protecting the environment. At first, the economic importance of the paper industry allowed it to avoid stringent regulation of its discharges. That was only the initial clash, however, in a series of battles over Fox River water quality that would become more intense in later decades.

*Consuming Nature* addresses a topic of relevance for students of Iowa history as well as other parts of the United States. The particular timing of the developments described here will, of course, vary by state, depending on such factors as industrial development and traditions of active government. *Consuming Nature* is well written, and the analysis is based on a close review of local newspapers, state government documents, and other primary sources. The implication of modern environmentalism's failure to adequately recognize the ways modern life is inextricably linked to productive use of the environment is not well developed, but other scholars interested in this issue can build on Summers's fine monograph.

*Kansas in the Great Depression: Work Relief, the Dole, and Rehabilitation*, by Peter Fearon. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007. xv, 316 pp. Map, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$44.95 cloth.

Reviewer J. Christopher Schnell is professor of history at Southeast Missouri State University. He has written extensively about the Great Depression and the New Deal, including "Franklin D. Roosevelt, the New Deal, and the Missouri Clergy," in *Gateway Heritage* (1997-98).

When the Great Depression struck in 1929, midwestern farm states such as Iowa and Kansas presented very similar pictures to federal officials attempting to relieve the widespread misery. Such rural states