

farmers of all kinds as making reasonable decisions given their circumstances including soils, market dictates or the cotton economy.

At the level of temperament, Sutter makes a case for the limits of irony as an analytical mode. In some ways we live at a time when critical irony comes all too quickly to the scholar's mind and environmental history frequently offers examples to apply it since we are primed to notice the ironic quality of the past. Providence Canyon and some of the other eroded and silted sites he examines are easily looked upon through an ironic lens, but he argues that to do so is to only understand them superficially. Instead, he advocates a more complicated version of natural versus human processes, finally arguing that: "the compelling lesson of the rare tupelo gum swamp at the Alcovy Conservation Center, and the debate about its provenance, is that we ought to move beyond the moral authority of a nature before history" (p. 191).

This is a great history of forest use, agricultural practice, market dictates, federal policy, and the soils on which they all act. Sutter put in considerable research trying to find any and all mentions of the gullies, unearthing some that might easily have been missed. Not many people, even among environmental historians, go this deeply into the soils and subsurface geology for answers. This book makes clear a host of reasons why we should. Not only does it change the reader's understanding of Providence Canyon and soil erosion history in the South, it invites a much bigger analytical recalculation as well.

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Inside the Equal Access to Justice Act. *By Lowell E. Baier. Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. xxix + 648 pp. \$75.00 cloth.*

Adopted in what Lowell E. Baier describes as "the earliest legislative manifestation and harbinger" of the Reagan Revolution (p. 79), the 1980 Equal Access to Justice Act (EAJA) authorizes reimbursement of legal fees for prevailing parties suing the government. While originally designed to serve a deregulatory agenda that would limit state power over business and persons, the EAJA has frequently come to support environmental groups pressing the federal government through the courts for greater environmental regulation, rather than

less. According to Baier, whose stated aim for the book is “to cast light upon their practices” (p. 443), the litigiousness of these groups has paralyzed the administrative state and eroded its capacity to manage the nation’s resources, to the detriment of the environment that such groups set out to protect.

Baier, as a lawyer and historian, is sharply critical of this policy evolution of the EAJA, through which courts and civil society groups came to play an increasing role in environmental policy, challenging the actions or omissions of resource management agencies. Part narrative history of the development, passage, and later evolution of the act, and part polemic against the US environmental movement and its legal strategy, the book is bound to attract two different sets of readers. Historians and other scholars of US environmental politics will find a scrupulously narrated account of the political milieu from which this legislation emerged, along with its evolution over recent decades, in the book’s first four chapters. Assembled from an impressive array of interview notes and archival texts, these accessible chapters detail the original objectives for and later impacts of this important statute.

More polarizing is the polemic that follows, with Chapters 5 and 6 painting the majority of organized environmental groups with a crude and uncharitable brush, Chapters 7 and 9 launching a relentless series of accusations against environmental litigants and their legal strategies, and Chapter 8 offering an alternative to this kind of adversarial politics in the form of “cooperative conservation,” through which polluting industry and the state are touted as better able to protect the environment in the absence of legal accountability to civil society groups. Chapter 10 proposes several reforms to the EAJA, restricting funds to environmental groups for reimbursement of their legal expenses, paving the way for Baier’s preferred corporatist environmentalism.

Baier’s portrayal of the “third generation” of post-1980 environmental advocacy groups and the “eco-crusaders” that lead them most forcefully wields the ideological perspective from which the book’s central argument is based, and it reveals its limitations. All such groups, he claims, “embrace a biocentric consciousness rooted in the philosophy of deep ecology” (p. 165), which he describes as a “fatalist anarchist philosophy” first conceived in 1979 by the founders of Earth First! (p. 182), but continuing the legacy of Thoreau, Muir, and Bob Marshall, who “were all deep ecologists” (p. 164). While deep ecology is usually associated with a fringe of radical environmentalists, rather than the mainstream groups that embrace the system enough to utilize the courts, for Baier, this abstract value theory lies at the root of a conspiracy to “impede federal agencies and stymie progress” (p. 443).

Environmental and animal advocacy groups are thus “barbarians at the gate” and “special interests with crony government relationships” (p. 439) that serve as obstacles to the enlightened and independent conservation efforts of federal resource agencies. Their objectives are limited

to “merely delaying action and sapping time, money, and morale from agencies” (p. 409), rather than achieving substantive policy outcomes, and they must be exposed as such in order to be stopped. While the litigiousness of some such groups is open to criticism, little acknowledgment is made of the accountability provided by such groups or of the politicization of science that undermines the objective role that Baier naively posits for resource agencies absent such legal challenges. Likewise, his endorsement of “cooperative conservation” relies on familiar case studies but fails to engage the critical literature questioning their efficacy. Setting aside its overwrought polemic, Baier’s detailed policy history of the EAJA should be of interest to scholarly and lay readers alike.

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Across Forest, Steppe, and Mountain: Environment, Identity, and Empire in Qing China’s Borderlands. *By David A. Bello. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. 336 pp. Maps, tables, notes, bibliography, and index. Cloth \$99.99.*

Qing borderland history has seen growing inquires in recent years in the ideologies, policies, and ethnic relations of the empire. David A. Bello’s comparative study makes important new contributions to the field through its nuanced analysis on the roles of ecology in configuring, constraining, and confounding state programs of frontier control. Challenging steady-state theories, Bello portrays the eighteenth-century economic and demographic expansions on Qing borderlands after they came under unified administration as unsustainable and poorly managed intensification. Excessive extraction of resources resulted both from bureaucratic overregulation and oversight, destroying the foundations of foraging, venery, and swiddening economies, thereby also eroding the ethnic identities that the state wanted to preserve.

Three case studies form the substantive part of the book. They examine the Amur River basin, the Mongolian steppe, and the Yunnan-Burma frontier from the mid-seventeenth through the eighteenth century. In Manchuria, state-building imperatives to counter Russian expansion and prepare for invading Ming China led to political centralization of relations with local tribes and tighter regulations over foraging. Extractions of sable and ginseng intensified, driven by court