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Forests Under Fire: A Century of Ecosystem Mismanagement in the Southwest / Fire: A Brief History

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**Review: Forests Under Fire: A Century of Ecosystem Mismanagement  
in the Southwest**

By Christopher J. Huggard and Arthur R. Gomez (Eds.)

**Review: Fire: A Brief History**

By Stephen J. Pyne

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Stephen J. Pyne. *Fire: A Brief History*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2002. 220 pp. ISBN 0-295-98144-X (paper). US\$18.95

Christopher J. Huggard & Arthur R. Gomez (Eds). *Forests Under Fire: A Century of Ecosystem Mismanagement in the Southwest*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2001. 307 pp. ISBN 0-8165-1775-4 (cloth). US\$40.00. Acid-free paper.

Stephen Pyne, the biologist as historian/poet, the historian as ecologist/advocate, attempts to "evoke rather than explain" (p. ix), the role of fire. Christopher Huggard and Arthur Gomez use scholarly explanation to illustrate the controversies that they believe call for change in the practice of ecosystem management.

A professor in the Biology and Society program at Arizona State University, Pyne is one of the most knowledgeable and prolific writers on the history of fire. The six-part cycle is reminiscent of a German opera, best told as a long saga that weaves together stories of humankind emerging, the discovery of combustion, and then the manipulation of fire for agricultural and industrial use. The result is a chronology of 400 million years of fire in just over 200 pages of text.

Pyne's style will read as a literary treasure for those comfortable with references to humanity as "stoker of industrial fire" (p. 185), and embers falling "like the husks of opened nuts" (p. 48). The enormity of his task-attempting to chronicle the transformation of the landscape from aboriginal "first-contact" fire to the burning of fossil fuels and the use of anthropogenic fire-might discourage a casual reader. But he manages to entice us into reading further because we yearn to see how the saga ends, or at least Pyne's reflections on the future. He seems neither optimistic nor pessimistic as he ends his telling of the story.

Huggard and Gomez, in comparison, show their hand in the book's subtitle with the premise that human planning for over one hundred years has

damaged the Southwest's ecosystems, although the focus is not limited to fire ecology. Like Pyne's work, the case studies also tell a story, beginning with the Apache lumbering empire and ending with the forest management of Arizona's Coronado National Forest. Other cases deal with issues in Colorado, New Mexico, and Utah.

Perhaps the most interesting is Paul Hirt's study of the controversy over the building of an astrophysical complex atop Mount Graham in southeastern Arizona. The proposed facility was also part of the habitat of the endangered Mount Graham red squirrel, leading to a battle that was characterized as squirrels versus 'scopes. The account of the biopolitics of this issue is highly readable, illustrating the role of politics in environmental decision making rather than focusing on the human impact of ecosystem evolution.

Pyne's book is best read at one's leisure in order to appreciate the storytelling style. Huggard and Gomez provide a volume that can be browsed through as a resource for further research and information. Both serve a different, but useful, purpose.

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