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Hamilton-Smith, Elery

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Review: Forests in Landscapes: Ecosystem Approaches to Sustainability

Edited by Jeffrey A. Sayer, Stewart Macginnis and Michelle Laurie

Reviewed by Elery Hamilton-Smith
Charles Sturt University, Australia

Sayer, Jeffrey A., Macginnis, Stewart and Michelle Laurie. *Forests in Landscapes: Ecosystem Approaches to Sustainability*. London: Earthscan, 2005. 257pp. ISBN 1-84407-195-2.

This is a positive, even optimistic, book. It describes and discusses the developing integration of sustainable forest management with our growing understanding of forest ecosystems. Even more importantly, it has built from the ground up, rather than continuing the all-too frequent preaching from on high.

There is no question that forest management is changing, and the authors represented in this book are all demonstrating genuine professionalism in their search for positive response. The editors conclude with a summary of ten tenets of good practice that emerge from the studies included in the volume. But they end with the harsh reality captured in one sentence:

'The difficulty lays not so much in developing new ideas, as in escaping from old ones.'

Perhaps another way of stating the same problem is that we now have a great deal of knowledge and understanding, but the problem is that it is not often enough called upon by either governmental or corporate decision-makers.

I personally believe not enough attention has been given to the possibilities inherent in unearthing at least some of the lost expertise of indigenous peoples. Their knowledge systems suffered first from the disrespect of colonialism, and then the new disrespect of neo-colonialism working hand-in-hand with modernity. But only in the last year, I have worked with resource managers in three different countries who have each been able to re-discover invaluable knowledge from indigenous minority peoples.

But I have learned a great deal or gained deeper understanding of many issues from this book, much of which has applicability to sustainable management of natural resources generally - not just the forests! Even the opening chapter outlining the current context and processes of change is an explication of remarkable clarity. Similarly, the chapters outlining economic factors in sustainability, the knowledge requirements for sustainability and the generality vis-a-vis specificity issue in strategy development are also models of clarity.

The various regional reviews are well balanced and honestly reported. My only regret is that they have not dealt with the Asian-Pacific area where most of my own work lies. It is a vitally important text, not just for forestry professionals and students, but for all involved in resource management.

Elery Hamilton-Smith <elery@alphalink.com.au>, Adjunct Professor, School of Environmental and Information Sciences, Charles Sturt University, Albury, New South Wales, Australia.