

**NATURALNESS AND
BIODIVERSITY: POLICY
AND PHILOSOPHY
OF CONSERVING
NATURAL AREAS**

Gordon Steinhoff

ENVIRONMENTAL LAW INSTITUTE
Washington, D.C.

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Environmental Law Institute
1730 M Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036

Published August 2016.

Cover design by Davonne Flanagan.
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Printed in the United States of America.
ISBN 978-1-58576-178-4

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About the Author

Gordon Steinhoff is an associate professor of philosophy. His teaching interests include philosophy of science, deductive logic, metaphysics, and environmental philosophy. He has taught at Grinnell College, Utah State University, and other schools. He earned a Ph.D. in philosophy of science at Indiana University, and an M.S. in zoology at the University of British Columbia. Gordon's research is interdisciplinary. He likes to explore the intersection of philosophy, ecology, and environmental policy. He has published articles on the Wilderness Act of 1964, the National Environmental Policy Act, mitigation banking, ecological restoration, and other topics. Gordon has been active in a number of local environmental and community organizations. His favorite pastimes include hiking, bicycling, gardening, playing music, and reading mystery novels.

Preface

This book is concerned, most broadly, with the preservation of national parks, wilderness, and other legally protected areas through proper interpretation and application of federal environmental law and policy. This book features extensive discussions of the Wilderness Act of 1964, the National Environmental Policy Act, and §4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act—which protects significant public parks and other designated areas from impacts of federal transportation projects. I also briefly discuss the Organic Act of 1916, which governs national parks and monuments. The book offers extensive discussions of protected area policies adopted by the National Park Service, the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. These policies represent agency responses to the mandates presented within the Wilderness Act and other federal legislation.

A major theme of the book is that maintaining natural conditions and processes, or naturalness, is an essential goal in the management of wilderness, national parks, and other protected areas. Indeed, naturalness is currently mandated within the Wilderness Act of 1964, the Organic Act of 1916, other federal environmental legislation, and agency policy. I am opposed to views expressed in the current literature by management experts who recommend the abandonment of naturalness as a required goal in protected areas. I will argue that naturalness is essential for the preservation of native biodiversity. Amphibians and other environmentally sensitive species are highly vulnerable to human alterations of natural ecosystems. There are many examples of native biodiversity being lost or threatened as a result of managers manipulating protected areas to conserve “what we value” without respect for natural conditions. It will also be argued that naturalness should be maintained within protected areas for important social reasons.

Naturalness and Biodiversity includes a chapter concerning restoration of damaged ecosystems in national parks and other protected areas. The approach to restoration recommended in this chapter can be found within federal protected area policies, and is in sharp contrast to the approaches recommended by leading restoration experts. What is expressed in this chapter fits well in the general theme of maintaining naturalness within protected areas.

Another major theme of this book is that federal and state agencies should accommodate the environmental goals adopted by Americans as they plan their actions within and adjacent to protected areas. Philosopher Mark Sagoff has introduced into environmental philosophy the distinction between the citizen perspective and the consumer perspective. Much environmental degradation has resulted as state and federal agencies virtually ignore environmental goals expressed within federal law and policy in their efforts to satisfy consumer preferences. In their planning, agencies too often assume that Americans are merely consumers, concerned only with their own narrow interests. Reform will involve a reorientation within the agencies toward the goals of land use adopted by Americans in their role as citizens. This theme is the central focus of Chapter 7, but it can be found in several other chapters in which it is argued that agencies in their planning should take into account the ideals and preservationist goals of Americans.

This book is interdisciplinary, with discussions of philosophy, ecology, and environmental management and policy. This book is not narrowly concerned with conservation science or with legal analyses. Although the approach in this book is philosophical, this is not a philosophy book in a narrow sense. I believe the views defended in this book are sensible and indeed unavoidable as we move away from limited concerns in the various disciplines and adopt a wider perspective. Admittedly, *Naturalness and Biodiversity* will be controversial. This book calls into question much that has been written in the environmental literature, including views expressed by philosophers and by leading land management and restoration experts. This book is a needed response, I believe, to much that appears in the current literature.

The chapters are based on previously published articles that have been revised and updated. References to the original articles are noted in each chapter. The chapters are arranged in a sensible progression. They can be read in any order, however, with the exception that Chapter 5 best follows Chapter 4. The book has been written to be accessible to any careful reader.

I wish to thank the Environmental Law Institute for publishing this book. I also wish to express my gratitude to the following friends and colleagues who have provided support and encouragement through the years: Kent Robson, Richard Sherlock, Diane Michelfelder, John Seiter, Matt Sanders, and Kent Steinhoff. I hope those who read this book will find it interesting and worthwhile.