

July 2009

Book Review: Forest Community Connections: Implications for Research, Management, and Governance

Joshua Gruver
Pennsylvania State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/jces>

Recommended Citation

Gruver, Joshua (2009) "Book Review: Forest Community Connections: Implications for Research, Management, and Governance," *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 1 , Article 12.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/jces/vol2/iss1/12>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Nighthawks Open Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship by an authorized editor of Nighthawks Open Institutional Repository.

woven throughout the book are finally revealed as part of this analysis-of-dreams process.

As Naidus looks to herself, society, and others through *Arts for Change*, she is reminded of how often the answer to life's questions are located outside the frame, and that thinking outside the box and looking at things from a different perspective are metaphors for what she wants the reader to think about as they ponder their own creative battles, and look through the cracks for ways to serve the many rather than just a few. Through a multifaceted account that merges personal narrative, biography, history and the presentation of strong pedagogical practices, *Arts for Change* offers all of us an open invitation to become mindful of the unifying ability and eye-opening power of art.

Donoghue, E.M., and Sturtevant, V.E., Eds. *Forest Community Connections: Implications for Research, Management, and Governance*. Washington, DC: Resources for the Future Press, 2008. 280 pp. \$32.95 (hardbound).

Reviewed by Joshua Gruver
 Doctoral Candidate
 Penn State University
 E-mail: jbg166@psu.edu

Within the last several decades, the management of the nation's public forests has increasingly shifted from an industrial extraction model toward a focus on ecosystem functions, restoration, and forest health. This evolution in forest policy and management has created more opportunities for community involvement in resource management and governance. *Forest Community Connections: Implications for Research, Management, and Governance* seeks to elucidate the consequences of this shift and examine factors contributing to strong community-forest connections.

Nineteen authors contribute 14 essays to the book, which is organized within three broad categories, examining how social science is used to define and assess communities; how persistent and emerging forest management issues affect communities; and how forest and community connections develop into unique forms of forest governance. The book is well organized according to these three areas and each essay is

relevant to the topic and contributes sensibly toward better understanding community-forest connections. Within the first chapter, the editors set the stage by exploring the evolution of forest policy and management from the Great Depression to the current struggle toward integrating communities and forests. Viewed in light of the sociocultural and biological history of our forested landscape, the current relationships between people and forests and forest policy are better understood. Subsequent essays examine issues such as the advantages of involving communities in collaborative research; the growing need to consider non-timber forest products in forest management; and the logic of creating community forests to avoid, among other ills, landscape parcelization.

Donoghue, Sturtevant, and their contributing authors submit that healthy communities and forests are dependent on flexible and dynamic community-forest connections. Socioeconomic, political, and institutional processes operate to either sustain or weaken forest communities. The recognition and the development of human capital within a community and the strengthening of internal and external communal ties are integral to its strength and resilience. Realizing this vision of resilient communities and healthy forests is not something that happens overnight. The path toward fostering strong community-forest connections requires citizen engagement over time and is fraught with several significant challenges. First, the nature of the community-forest connection is continually redefined through timber markets and technology, shifting sociodemographics and environmental values, and changing forest policy. Further, production of timber products in the U.S. has flat-lined while consumption has increased. Products such as furniture, the bread and butter of many communities, are being replaced by imports from China and elsewhere. Finally, the expanding urban fringe into forested areas and the increasing immigration of exurbanites presents new challenges to communities, forests, and forest managers. Finding ways to work with these challenges while taking meaningful steps toward the communal stewardship of our forests is at the heart of Donoghue and Sturtevant's message.

The authors illuminate the consequences of the shift from single-interest-based forest

management to collaborative stewardship and ecosystem management. Much of the book is devoted to defining and analyzing community forestry and grassroots community engagement. However, engaging communities and connecting them to their forests is not a new idea. Following the Earth Summit in 1992, work began on a set of common criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management. Following this, the U.S. Forest Service began to partner with community groups to advance understanding of how national, regional, and local efforts to develop sustainability criteria and indicators could be linked. Since then there has been a groundswell of literature and research focused on the community-forest connection. *Communities and Forests: Where People Meet the Land* (Lee and Field, Eds. 2005) is a good example of work in this area though there is little mention of this prior publication in *Forest Community Connections*. Further, despite “Community” in the title, most contributors never really define the term. This is unfortunate, since a conversation about what community means to the authors would serve readers well.

To the authors’ credit, they offer honest criticism of community forestry and avoid the elementary notion that it is an elixir fit for every community. The work makes clear that forest communities need the opportunity to act cohesively and to participate in decisions that directly affect them. Helping people engage in

restoring the forests to which they are connected involves attending to factors that determine the quality, durability, and meaningfulness of this connection. The book provides social scientists, forest managers, and community representatives with ways to potentially attend to these factors.

Even though this recent effort by Donoghue and Sturtevant and their contributing authors is largely a synthesis of past work, there is much to be gained from continuing and extending the conversation. Their work adds clarity to the complexities inherent in understanding forests and communities by focusing on the nature and quality of the actual connection between them. It will appeal to those interested in human/nature relationships, particularly from a forestry perspective. I especially recommend this book to social scientists interested in exploring new ways to engage the study of communities and forests, as the work speaks well to those ends. Selected readings would also benefit advanced undergraduate and graduate students interested in the human dimensions of natural resources and should be required reading for those students who wish to work with trees and people.

If you would like to review a book relevant to the scholarship of engagement, call Heather Pleasants at 205-348-3282 or e-mail her at hpleasan@bamaed.ua.edu.