



Film Reviews: The Greatest Good: A Forest Service Centennial Film and Borderline Cases: Environmental Matters at the United States-Mexico Border

ASEH's Houston meeting featured a mini film festival, which is reviewed below. Conference organizers are now considering including films at future ASEH meetings, and future issues of *Environmental History* might include film reviews, beginning in 2006.

By Bruce Thompson, University of California – Santa Cruz

The most popular documentary films on public television tend to fall into two categories: nature films, which lure viewers with spectacular color photography, and historical/biographical films,

which tap into the magic of the vanished past by resurrecting black-and-white archival photographs and rare documentary footage. *The Greatest Good*, a film prepared for the centennial of the U.S. Forest Service and one of two films shown at ASEH Mini-Film Festival at its annual meeting in Houston this year, successfully combines both of these genres. Directed by Forest Service filmmakers Steve Dunsky and David Steinke, edited by Ann Steinke and narrated by Charles Osgood of CBS News, the film offers not only a rich and satisfying historical narrative of a century of Forest Service history, but also breathtakingly beautiful images enhanced by state-of-the-art high-definition digital technology.

The title of the film comes from Gifford Pinchot's famous Forest Service "mission statement" of 1905: "Where conflicting interests must be reconciled, the question will always be decided from the standpoint of the greatest good of the greatest number in the long run." Taking their cue from Char Miller's interpretation of Pinchot's utilitarian credo, the filmmakers assume that conflict and controversy are inherent in the management of public lands in a democracy, and they have designed their film to illuminate a century of vigorous debates about the best uses of American forests. The two-hour film consists of four parts, each devoted to roughly a quarter of a century and a particular set of conflicts. Although the first two parts give abundant screen time to the iconic figures of Pinchot and Aldo Leopold, the film includes a multiplicity of voices: historians (among them Char Miller, William Cronon, and Paul Hirt), environmentalists, and Forest Service directors, employees, and retirees—more than forty interviewees altogether.

Part I, "The Fight for Conservation," examines Pinchot's extraordinary career and vision, as well as his alliance with Theodore Roosevelt. As Char Miller and William Cronon remind us, Pinchot was a perfect embodiment of Progressive-era reform: a pragmatic idealist who sought to tame the power of corporate interests by deploying expert knowledge in the service of democratic values. Part II, "Building the Movement," focuses on the evolution of the Forest Service in the era of FDR's New Deal and the Civilian Conservation Corps. Here we find the roots of now-familiar controversies about the wisdom of fire suppression, the elimination of predators, road-building, and timber harvesting. A powerful segment dramatizes Aldo Leopold's recoil from the ruthless slaughter of wolves during his time as a Forest Service employee in Arizona. Part III, "Boom!," deals with the shift in emphasis from stewardship of the land to maximum production of timber for America's booming postwar economy, as well as fierce public discontent with such destructive practices as the clear-

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ASEH Election Results

Congratulations to the following individuals, who were elected by the membership in February 2005:

OFFICERS
Vice President/President Elect
Nancy Langston
Treasurer
Mark Madison
Secretary
Ellen Stroud

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
Kathleen Brosnan
Peter Coates
Katherine Morrissey
Verena Winiwarter

NOMINATING COMMITTEE
Adam Rome
Melissa Wiedenfeld

CHANGES TO BYLAWS
Approved

See President Steve Pyne's column on page 2 for information about ASEH's executive director position. See ASEH's website at <www.aseh.net> for the latest version of the bylaws.

ASEH also wishes to thank all candidates who stood for election.

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From the President's Desk

Becoming President achieved something my critics have long failed to do: I was left speechless. (The effect didn't last long.) The office is an honor with an obligation, and I feel both keenly.

The ASEH has long punched above its weight. The quality of our scholarship is the primary reason; the journal, which our alliance with the Forest History Society makes possible, is another. In numbers, however, we remain a modest organization, and by age, a maturing one. We cannot sprint indefinitely on the adrenaline of ideas and enthusiasms alone. We need to attend to the institution that makes it possible for us to leverage our intellectual effort as we have.

I see four areas that require attention beyond the routine. First, the Executive Director is now a permanent office, and we are inexpressibly fortunate that Lisa Mighetto continues to occupy that post. Over the next two years we will firm up that position, decide how to appoint to it, and determine how we shall pay for the services. The Executive Committee will conduct a search, with the details available on the website and in the newsletter next year. I envision this task as part of a larger project in which we formalize more of what we do, perhaps through a handbook.

Second, we ought to upgrade the website, in particular, to make it more interactive so we can conduct more business on-line and unburden our volunteers of clerical busywork. What we want the

site to contain will be a matter of broad discussion because all the parts will have to mesh, and for that we will require specialty software and a webmaster with duties perhaps not unlike those of the journal editor.

Third, we share interests in history and the environment with many other organizations. I would like to reach out to more of them - find points of common ground where we might converge for shared panels or projects. The bottom line should be to improve the quality of our intellectual life. We need to leverage what we have in abundance (mind) to compensate for what we have less of (money).

Which brings me to the fourth theme, finances. Our members have been exceptionally generous, but here scale, in the form of membership numbers, matters. We need to be resourceful in finding new caches of revenue, which will likely require new venues for presentation. Hal Rothman has graciously volunteered to help hammer out a business plan to identify our needs and find ways to meet them.

We will be what we choose. If you wish to contribute in any way, please let us know. For myself, I look forward to serving ASEH during the next two years. Stay tuned.

Steve Pyne
ASEH President

American Society for Environmental History

Officers:

President: Stephen Pyne, *Arizona State University*
Vice President: Nancy Langston, *University of Wisconsin-Madison*
Secretary: Ellen Stroud, *Oberlin College*
Treasurer: Mark Madison, *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

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Kathleen A. Brosnan, *University of Houston*
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Sarah Elkind, *San Diego State University*
Katherine Morrisey, *University of Arizona*
Ted Steinberg, *Case Western Reserve University*
Mart Stewart, *Western Washington University*
Verena Winiwarter, *University of Vienna, Austria*

Ex Officio

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Jeffrey Stine, *Smithsonian Institution*
Douglas Weiner, *University of Arizona*

Acting Executive Director:

Lisa Mighetto, *Historical Research Associates, Inc.*

H-Environment Representative:

Melissa Wiedenfeld, *Charles Darwin Research Station-Galapagos*

The American Society for Environmental History seeks understanding of the human experience of the environment from the perspective of history, liberal arts, and sciences. The Society encourages cross-disciplinary dialogue on every aspect of the present and past relationship of humankind to the natural environment. ASEH maintains a website at <www.aseh.net>. Contact <K.J.W.Oosthoek@newcastle.ac.uk> to discuss including material on the web page.

Items for the next newsletter should be sent by *June 10, 2005*:
Lisa Mighetto, Editor, 119 Pine St., Suite 301, Seattle, WA 98101. E-mail to <mighetto@hrassoc.com>.

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The ASEH thanks Doug Weiner, outgoing president, for two years of leadership and service. His contributions included getting ASEH accepted into the American Council of Learned Societies.



Birding field trip to Brazos Bend, ASEH Houston conference.
Photos by Lisa Mighetto.

from **Film Reviews** page 1

cutting of huge swaths of forest. And Part IV illuminates the last quarter of the century, in which political polarization, increasing ecological awareness, and public activism have had varying impacts on the evolution of Forest Service policy.

The Greatest Good received the lion's share of its funding from the Forest Service, but it is far from being a work of propaganda. By focusing intensively on conflicting visions of purposes and policies, and by including such a wide range of voices and opinions, the film succeeds triumphantly as a work of popular history. (And the segments on Gifford Pinchot and Aldo Leopold in particular are as rich as the biographical films in the PBS American Masters series. Teachers of courses on American environmental history will find the three-disc DVD version of this film especially useful.)

Lynn Corcoran's *Borderline Cases*, the second film screened at the Houston meeting, is very different in subject and style from *The Greatest Good*: there are no sumptuous images of nature here. On the contrary, its producer describes her work a "toxic road film," with stops in three environmentally stricken border regions: Matamoros/Brownsville, Tijuana/San Diego, and Juarez/El Paso. Her subject is the American/Mexican border in the post-NAFTA



The Houston conference included an exhibit area, where participants could meet with book publishers. Photos by Christine Womack.

Society of Architectural Historians

ASEH joined the American Council of Learned Societies in 2004. Each month we will feature information on one of the constituent societies, beginning with the Society of Architectural Historians. Similar information on ASEH will appear in the newsletters of constituent societies.

Society of Architectural Historians

The Society of Architectural Historians was founded in 1940 to advance the history and preservation of architecture, urbanism, landscape and applied design world wide. The Society serves scholars, architects, preservationists, planners, professionals in allied fields, and the interested public. Membership to SAH is open to everyone, regardless of profession or expertise. Benefits of membership in SAH include a quarterly scholarly journal, *JSAH*; a bi-monthly *Newsletter*; reduced registration for the Society's scholarly annual meeting; opportunities to apply for research, publication, and travel grants; opportunities to participate in domestic and foreign study tours; access to an electronic Listserv; access to AIA/CES credits; and admission to the historic Charnley-Persky House in Chicago.

era. The migration of American capital and factories to Mexico in search of cheap labor and looser environmental regulation has created industrial zones of Dickensian squalor. In each case, pollution on the Mexican side of the border has spilled over onto the American side. While some owners of the new factories (*maquiladoras*) have tried to behave responsibly, many *maquiladoras* have spewed untreated effluent directly into local streams, or illegally dumped barrels of toxic wastes. Corruption has compounded the problems of inadequate regulation and lax enforcement, and there have been clusters of severe birth defects in areas where hazardous chemicals have found their way into local water supplies.

This disturbing film does not aspire to be a work of history. It aims to increase awareness of an urgent crisis, and it includes shocking images of anencephaly and other horrors. But here too the range of voices is impressively wide: government officials from both sides of the border, managers and workers in the *maquiladoras*, and environmental activists. The focus of the film is on bi-national efforts to mitigate the damage, and although there are no easy solutions to the toxic mix of environmental devastation and egregious poverty that is so common in the developing world, the film documents the first hopeful steps in the right direction. It is a constructive film as well as a provocative one, and it could be very useful in courses that emphasize the increasingly transnational character of contemporary environmental issues.



Comments on ASEH Awards

ASEH awarded the following prizes at the Houston conference.

Comments on George Perkins Marsh Prize for Best Book

Brian Donahue's *The Great Meadow: Farmers and the Land in Colonial Concord* is a magisterial work of environmental history. Bringing to bear path-breaking historical and ecological scholarship, his own keen insight as a Massachusetts farmer, and extraordinary gifts as a writer, Donahue reexamines one of the most famous places in America: colonial Concord. His highly original analysis will profoundly alter our understanding of colonial farming practices, and cause us to rethink the environmental lessons of that period.

By applying innovative spatial analytical methods to a monumental amount of information gleaned piecemeal from legal and property records, genealogies, and GIS mapping, Donahue brilliantly reconstructs colonial land ownership and land use patterns over a hundred-year period. He achieves a phenomenal level of detail in laying out the rhythms of life that characterized New England rural society, while building a persuasive argument that turns on its head the longstanding orthodoxy through which seventeenth-century New England colonists have been characterized as poor farmers who degraded their land. To the contrary, Donahue shows, Concord families possessed a deep and subtle knowledge of their regional environment, and gradually developed sophisticated farming practices that proved both ecologically and economically sustainable over more than eight generations.

Finally, *The Great Meadow* is a sheer delight to read. Donahue clearly loves this land, and as he takes us through it, unfolding its secrets in beautiful prose, we gradually come to feel as if we ourselves had been tromping along its paths, watching it shift and evolve with the passing of time. The book—like the farms it describes—is a labor of love, and one of its most impressive attributes is that it powerfully conveys a "feeling for place," a uniquely concrete kind of knowing that allows the reader to become intimately connected with this small patch of New

England. *The Great Meadow* will no doubt come to be regarded as a classic work of environmental history: a study that sees through the lens of the "micro," while brilliantly exploring fundamental questions of sustainability, and of the evolving relation of humans to their natural surroundings.

George Perkins Marsh Prize Committee for 2004:
 Michael Bess, Chair
 Lynne Heasley
 Alan MacEachern

Comments on Rachel Carson Prize for Best Dissertation

The committee read nine dissertations. We read manuscripts on controlling urban weeds, Great Plains conservation, on environmental politics, and on the "re-wilding" of Apostle Island National Lakeshore. We were very impressed with these works and felt that most all of the authors make great contributions to environmental history.

The winning manuscript considers the lifestyle of leisure in Southern California, arguing that Catalina Island, Palm Springs, and Los Angeles contributed to the formation of a distinct American suburban culture in the twentieth century, and that these landscapes of leisure have proved to be at least as influential as the nineteenth-century suburban "hearths"—places like Westchester County, New York. Lawrence Culver asks us to think about all the ways that Palm Springs changed the way Americans thought about leisure: modernist desert architecture, the golf-course residence, and the Hollywood vacation colony. He also writes compellingly about segregated pools and beaches in Los Angeles—how African Americans resisted segregation and how they created their own places of leisure, like Val Verde, known as the "Black Palm Springs."

The manuscript explores the idea that leisure shaped the development of Southern California and "ultimately influenced the nation as a whole." Perhaps most important of all, Culver refuses to look at these places as mere backdrops for certain attitudes about leisure or from the point of view of tourists *but as emerging communities themselves*—as suburban societies, in which people with competing interests and conflicting assumptions struggled over development.



Brian Donahue received the George Perkins Marsh prize.



Lawrence Culver received the Rachel Carson award.

see **Comments** page 5

from **Comments** page 4

We found this argument compelling, and we were very impressed by the skillful way that Culver situates it in the literature of tourism. He writes gracefully and tells tight, witty stories. Kavita said of the manuscript that it is "a successful piece of interdisciplinary scholarship that creatively integrates urban and suburban studies, architectural history, and cultural politics." Neil said that the author did "a wonderful job weaving cultural and social history with the history of tourism and leisure," and he thought that Culver "succeeded in linking his local history with larger events in U.S. history generally." Neil called it innovative and said that it "pushes environmental history in interesting directions."

And that might be the most important criteria for a winner of this prize. The 2005 Rachel Carson Dissertation Prize is awarded to Lawrence Culver for "The Island, the Oasis, and the City: Santa Catalina, Palm Springs, Los Angeles, and Southern California's Shaping of American Life and Leisure." Congratulations for writing a significant book.

Rachel Carson Prize Committee for 2004:

Steven Stoll, Chair
Neil Maher
Kavita Philip

Comments on Alice Hamilton Prize for Best Article Outside *Environmental History*

The Alice Hamilton Prize committee is pleased to award Linda Nash's "The Fruits of Ill-Health: Pesticides and Workers' Bodies in Post-World War II California" with this year's prize. The 2004 submissions included a diverse array of excellent essays, a testament to the growing scholarly impact of our field outside the journal *Environmental History*. Nash's essay stood out among these articles for its ability to weave interdisciplinary insights, including the history of science, the history of the body, agricultural science, ethnic studies, and environmental history, into a compelling story about the ideological, institutional, and environmental factors that shaped occupational health authorities' understanding of organophosphate pesticide poisoning in the California agricultural industry. Nash offers makes a number of insightful claims about these authorities' approach between the 1940s and the 1970s that underscore the limits of Western medical and scientific models to understand and regulate environmental toxins.

Nash shows that "modernist" conceptions of the human body's openness to environmental penetration were hopelessly limited; that understandings of how to quantify poisoning were naive, especially given the variable effect of pesticides in changing environmental conditions of wind, temperature, and sunlight; that authorities, largely



Linda Nash received the Alice Hamilton award.

unintentionally, demonstrated their racism in distrusting the "popular epistemologies" of migrant reports and migrant health conditions; that social awareness of pesticide poisoning was intimately connected to other social arenas, such as the 1960's antiwar movements and social justice movements; and that agricultural work was wrongly conceived of as "natural" and therefore as inherently healthful. She backs up these sobering claims with a wide-ranging source base (including highly technical epidemiological and chemical risk studies), eloquent writing, and a sophisticated yet accessible approach appropriate for both scholarly audiences and advanced undergraduate students. The article, which appeared in *Osiris*, will undoubtedly stimulate renewed public policy interest in the occupational and public health effects of pesticides and sets a new standard for interdisciplinary analysis.

The committee would also like to note, in the form of an "honorable mention," Connie Chiang's excellent essay "Monterey-by-the-Smell: Odors and Social Conflict on the California Coastline"; like Nash, Chiang carries out an interdisciplinary, socially-inflected form of environmental history that is sure to influence the course of our future research.

Alice Hamilton Prize Committee for 2004:

Thomas M. Lekan, Chair
Lisa Kiser
Deborah Fitzgerald

Comments on Leopold-Hidy Award for Best Article in *Environmental History*

The Leopold-Hidy Award honors the best article published in *Environmental History* in the preceding year. The award is presented jointly by the ASEH and the Forest History Society and judged by the editorial board of the journal. This year, the Leopold-Hidy Award goes to Brett Walker for his article "Meiji Restoration, Scientific Agriculture and the Destruction of Japan's Hokkaido Wolf," which appeared in the April 2004 issue.

In my editor's note to that issue, I wrote that Brett's article demonstrated that "new conceptions of nature were part of the self-conscious modernization program of Japan's Meiji rulers in the late nineteenth century. To be modern, the Meiji decided, the people of Japan needed to eat beef. Accordingly, the Meiji sought to develop a ranching industry on the island of Hokkaido. That effort led to a systematic campaign to exterminate wolves—a campaign that went against powerful traditions. Because the Meiji relied on American advisers, Walker's work adds to our understanding of the globalization of western ideas about progress."

Members of the *Environmental History* editorial board praised Brett's work as "fresh," "provocative," "impressively researched," and "well written." One board member summarized the article's virtues with these words of praise: "Like 'The Last Samurai,' this article tells a great story of a transplanted American in nineteenth-century Japan and, in that telling, illuminates both nations and their converging histories. It is exceptionally well-crafted and brilliantly organized from the first sentence to the last. The added bonus is that Walker also expands our moral vision to include a fellow creature who is normally missing from conventional history."

Congratulations, Brett!

Adam Rome, editor, and Editorial Board of *Environmental History*

Announcements

ASEH Awards – Submissions for Next Year's Prizes

It is not too soon to be thinking about next year's awards. ASEH's prize committees will evaluate submissions (published books and articles and completed dissertations) that appear between November 1, 2004 and October 31, 2005. Please send three copies of each submission by *November 4, 2005* to:

Lisa Mighetto
119 Pine Street, Suite 301
Seattle, WA 98101

If you have questions, contact Lisa at <mighetto@hrassoc.com>

ASEH Future Conferences

By May of 2005, ASEH's website will include an expanded section on conferences, 2006-2009. See <www.aseh.net> for more details.

2006

St. Paul, Minnesota

"A River Runs Through Them: Landscapes in Environmental History"

March 29 – April 2, 2006. Radisson Hotel. For more information, contact John Anfinson, local arrangements chair, at <John_Anfinson@nps.gov>

2007

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

March 1- 4, 2007. For more information, contact Craig Colten, local arrangements chair, at <ccolten@lsu.edu>

2008

Boise, Idaho

Date not yet determined. For more information, contact Lisa Brady, local arrangements chair, at <lisabrad@boisestate.edu>

Check ASEH's website at <www.aseh.net> for more information.

2009

When ASEH's Executive Committee met in Houston in mid-March, members agreed to ask the Site Selection Committee to investigate the possibility of a world environmental history conference in 2009. This could be a joint meeting with the International Consortium of Environmental History Organizations (ICEHO), which includes the ESEH, Forest History Society, and others. The Site Selection Committee will consider whether ASEH would offer regional conferences on the East and West Coasts in addition to the world environmental history conference in 2009. The location for the international conference has not yet been determined – and if you are interested in proposing a site, check ASEH's website at <www.aseh.net> for more information. Comments from members regarding the 2009 meeting(s) are welcome. Please send to Paul Sutter, Chair, Site Selection Committee, at <sutter@uga.edu>

H-Environment Editors Needed

If you are interested in serving as an H-Environment editor in 2005, please contact Melissa Wiedenfeld at <mwiedenfeld@fcdarwin.org.ec>



Adam Rome presented the Leopold-Hidy Award to Brett Walker.

Adam Rome received a standing ovation at the Houston meeting in tribute to his outstanding service as editor of *Environmental History*. He will remain editor until January 2006, when Mark Cioc will assume the position. Ed Russell will remain book review editor throughout 2005.

Call for Papers

Joint Meeting ASEH and Forest History Society

Rivers Run Through Them: Landscapes in Environmental History

St. Paul, Minnesota

March 29- April 2, 2006

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION: JULY 1, 2005

The program committee for the joint meeting of the American Society for Environmental History and Forest History Society invites panel, paper, and poster proposals for its March-April 2006 meeting in St. Paul, Minnesota. Proposals may address any area of environmental history, but in keeping with the conference themes the committee specifically solicits submissions examining the place of landscapes in environmental history. The conference site, hard by the Mississippi River, is a perfect setting in which to discuss the role of water in defining landscapes, natural and built, and their intersection and evolution. The committee encourages the formation of panels that might focus on the following broad themes:

- *Water and watersheds* - The Mississippi's impact on the development of North America has been immense, and other river systems here and abroad have profoundly influenced the course of life within their bioregions.
- *Cross geographical and transnational boundaries* - Landscapes do not necessarily recognize political boundaries but are often determined by them. Issues such as pollution, wildlife, global climate, population, among others, ought to be discussed across boundaries and borders
- *Land-use and landscape histories* - Land-use histories are some of the most useful points of reference that inform present decision-making. A growing international focus on valuing historical landscapes is sure to affect political discussions.
- *Cross-disciplinary landscapes* - Environmental history is a product of a transforming intellectual landscape. From the first it has experienced changes in shifts in scholarly emphasis, intensified interactions with other disciplines, from cultural and urban studies to the natural and social sciences, each of which has helped reinvigorate this still-young field.

Individual papers are welcome, but they are more difficult to accommodate. To maximize the number of papers yet maintain opportunities for creative interaction between panelists and the audience, the committee also requests that panel proposals be limited either to three papers (commentator optional), or four papers and no commentator. Participants may only present one formal paper, but they may also engage in roundtable, chairing, or commenting duties.

To submit a proposal for a paper or a poster, see ASEH's website at <www.aseh.net> and click on "conferences."

Should you have questions, please contact any member of the program committee:

Char Miller, Chair, Trinity University (<fmiller@trinity.edu>)
Steve Anderson, Forest History Society (<stevena@duke.edu>)
John Anfinson, National Park Service (<John_Anfinson@nps.gov>)
Kathryn Morse, Middlebury College (<kmorse@middlebury.edu>)
Adam Sowards, University of Idaho (<asowards@uidaho.edu>)
Gerald Williams, USDA Forest Service (<gwilliams02@fs.fed.us>)

In this issue ...
President Steve Pyne's Initiatives
ASEH Awards
St. Paul Conference Call for Papers

ASEH News 

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