

Restoring Natural Capital: Science, Business, and Practice

Edited by James Aronson, Suzanne J. Milton & James N. Blignaut (2007) Island Press, Washington, DC. £54.95 (hbk)

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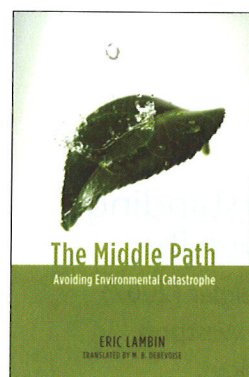
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Natural capital is defined as all those elements of the environment from species and ecosystems to soils and the atmosphere, as well as the non-renewable assets like oil and minerals. The authors assume that conservation alone will never be enough to keep our global system running. Their objective is to show how current practices can be harnessed to provide active restoration to damaged areas in ways that make both ecological and economic sense. The book aims first to establish a common language and agreed concepts between ecologists and economists, before moving on to consider how this has been applied in 19 case studies from many different countries. The third part of the book looks at tactics and strategies – how to value the natural capital, how to approach restoration and then how to make institutions and financial mechanisms work for you. The final part of the book is two short synthesis chapters discussing how to inject the ideas into planning and policy at all scales and in all cultures. The authors all take the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment published in 2003 as a key baseline against which to measure progress. This is an exciting text because the arguments show how a common cause between the two disciplines is not only possible but an essential element of future survival. Where else could you read about the restoration of the Sacramento River alongside the value of lotteries in restoration of natural capital? Or how land tenure and property rights are a crucial part of the package needed to restore degraded forests? Many of the examples may be familiar to those involved in ecological restoration but I am certain others will not be. And the discussion of economic tools like contingent valuation, discounting, cost-benefit analysis and option cost are all in accessible terms for ecologists. Whilst the general premise is that we are already too far for comfort down the asset-squandering road the

book does provide some encouraging examples of what has already been achieved – like the Montreal Protocol to repair the ozone layer. This is truly an international book with 71 contributors from 14 countries providing us with 35 chapters and some important ideas and examples. This book is strong on facts with extensive references and, given the range of authors, an extremely well edited text. Any ecologist, conservationist, environmentalist who cares about the global future will find ideas and facts in this book on how we can restore our basic systems.

 David Walton



The Middle Path: Avoiding Environmental Catastrophe

Eric Lambin (2007) University of Chicago Press, Chicago. £14.00 (hbk)

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Lambin considers climate change by contrasting the different approaches that he says characterise optimists and pessimists. In more familiar terms the former could be regarded as free market traders, focused on short termism and profits and convinced that technological fixes will cure everything. The latter on the other hand could be typified as socially concerned, conservationists interested in a long term future and the common good. He surveys a wide variety of evidence from each of these view points and concludes that the route forward is the middle way, using elements from both sides. None of the data used are new but his arguments do present some nice syntheses and there are very clear descriptions of systems theory, non-linearity and feedbacks that non-modellers will be grateful for. His approach to solutions is pragmatic in recognising that technological innovation alone, however clever, will not solve the problem. What is also needed in his view is the creation of an improved institutional environment that can harness private funds and initiatives for long term good, as well as a change in cultures across the world, to recognising the need for equity in consumption and quality of life. As he says 'each person must learn to see