**Wallace Stegner Lectures**

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**Debunking Creation Myths about America’s Public Lands By John D. Leshy (2018)**

In recent times several “creation myths” have gained currency about how the United States government came to own and manage—for broad, mostly protective purposes—nearly one-third of the nation’s land. Controversies such as President Trump’s shrinking the boundaries of Grand Staircase–Escalante and Bears Ears National Monuments and the armed takeover of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon by a ragtag militia group protesting U.S. ownership have brought these myths to the forefront, suggesting that public lands are a kind of centrifugal force driving Americans apart. Over the nation’s long history, however, the opposite has nearly always been the case. In this essay, John Leshy debunks the myths that have contributed to the often polarized character of contemporary discussions of public lands. Recounting numerous episodes throughout American history, he demonstrates how public lands have generally served to unify the country, not divide it. Steps to safeguard these lands for all to enjoy have almost always enjoyed wide, deep, bipartisan support. Leshy argues that America’s vast public lands are priceless assets, a huge success story, and a credit to the workings of our national government. But because these lands remain fully subject to the political process, each generation of Americans must effectively decide upon their future.  
 

**Water, Community, and the Culture of Owning By Eric T. Freyfogle (2017)**

In this timely work, Eric Freyfogle probes the long-simmering struggles in the American West to address water-related problem. The big challenge is to resolve water shortages and meet high-valued water needs while also improving river ecosystems. These water conflicts, he suggests, have less to do with our contentious political differences than they do with longstanding core elements of American culture—inherited, shared ways of understanding our place in nature that no longer make good sense. Particularly troublesome are the ways we fragment it, valuing its parts as discrete commodities. Also at play is our cultural inability to think clearly about how best to draw the line between the legitimate use of nature and the abuse of it.   
   
Building on these cultural critiques, Freyfogle takes up the issue of private property rights, highlighting the longstanding flexibility of this key American institution as well as the moral imperative to ensure that property rights aren’t used in ways that harm communities. Outdated understandings about private property, he concludes, have further confused our understanding and made sensible solutions to water problems even harder to imagine. Water-policy reform won’t happen, Freyfogle argues, until we reconsider how we understand nature and take charge of the institution of ownership, recasting it so as to increase the benefits it generates for everyone. If we can do that, solutions to water troubles could prove easier than we expect. The work concludes with an original, sweeping policy proposal to resolve the West’s water shortages and meet environmental needs in ways fair to all.  
 

**Managing Climate Risk in Resilient Cities By Lawrence Susskind (2016)**Discussions on climate change generally focus on the necessity of reducing carbon emissions, while recognizing that such action will take a long time to materialize. MIT professor Lawrence Susskind contends that communities can take action to combat climate change now, through steps that have the co-benefit of moderating the effects of flooding, heat waves, and drought—events already occurring with increasing frequency. Measures such as strengthening basic utilities and infrastructure so they are less vulnerable to high winds and flooding will provide short-term and long-term advantages.

But such changes will happen only with widespread public engagement. Public education and public opinion surveys are not enough. Susskind and colleagues have been facilitating workshops with role-playing sessions where people consider how what they want and need can be meshed with the different wants and needs of others. Dialogue focuses not on worldwide climate change but on localized weather catastrophes. Climate risk is thereby translated into public health risk and people emerge with ideas for change rather than a mere summary of problems and disagreements. Susskind’s discourse serves as a blueprint for ways that government agencies and citizens can work together toward building climate-resilient communities.

**Against All Odds: How America's Century-Old Quest for Clean Air May Spur a New Era of Global Environmental Cooperation By Robert V. Percival (2015)**

Achieving healthy air quality is a growing global concern, and Robert Percival discusses the critical junctures in U.S. environmental history that have led to the emergence of global environmental regulation, particularly in relation to China. According to a 2013 World Health Organization report, more than one million people die every year in China from exposure to air pollution. By referencing historical U.S. tragedies and air quality achievements, particularly the Clean Air Act, Percival uses his conversations with Chinese officials to point toward a turning point in China’s legislation and attitude towards this environmental issue.

**Past and Future Yellowstone: Finding our Way in Wonderland By Paul Schullery (2014)**Drawing on historical perspectives, personal excursions, and decades of professional research and work in the field, Paul Schullery illuminates many of the possible truths embedded within the natural and cultural reality that is Yellowstone National Park. By varying the scale of observation—from a single encounter between a cow elk and a grizzly bear to the sweeping forces of evolution—Schullery celebrates the park’s history and future potential as a laboratory of ideas. It is, as he states, a place with “layers of meaning waiting to be explored . . . many possible truths to be weighed.” He thus invites us all to participate in the “Yellowstone conversation.”

According to Schullery, national parks allow for the study of relatively unmanipulated ecological processes even amidst civilization’s increasing influence. They act as reservoirs for water, wildlife, and essential wildness. The uncertainties inherent in wild landscapes and in the unfolding idea of Yellowstone allow scholarly and popular dialogues to advance management practices and public understanding. Through this inquiry, Schullery establishes a framework for approaching the conservation and the experience of America’s great wildlands.

**The Emerging Alliance of Religion and Ecology by Mary Evelyn Tucker (2013)**

The environmental crisis is most frequently viewed through the lens of science, policy, law, and economics. In recent years the moral and spiritual dimensions of this crisis are becoming more visible. Indeed, world religions are bringing their texts and traditions, along with their ethics and practices, into dialogue with environmental problems. In a lecture delivered at the University of Utah, Tucker explores this growing movement and highlights why it holds great promise for long term changes for the flourishing of the Earth community.

**Little Fish in a Pork Barrel: The Classic American Story of the Endangered Snail Darter and the Tennesse Valley Authority’s Final Dam by Zygmunt J.B. Plater (2011)**

The “snail darter story” has become an iconic episode in modern American history—a classic case regularly voted one of the top three Supreme Court environmental decisions but also enjoying dubious public notoriety as the “Most Extreme Environmental Case Ever.” Behind the fish marched a bedraggled coalition: farmers whose land was being condemned for resale to private developers, Cherokee Indians, fishermen, local conservationists, and Zygmunt Plater and his students. They carried the campaign through federal agencies, a succession of skeptical courtrooms, two White House administrations, repeated struggles with lobbyists in House and Senate battles, and frustrations with the vagaries of the national press.

**Dance, Don’t Drive: Resilient Thinking for Turbulent Times by Chip Ward (2010)**

Warnings regarding our unsustainable lifestyles have become so commonplace that eyes glaze over at the mere mention of the topic. Chip Ward aims to change that. Seeking to convey the importance of living sustainably, he reframes the discourse to point out the consequences we face and the choices we make. Ward says we must recognize that we are bounded by the limits of a finite natural realm, that “after years of driving economies, we must learn to dance with ecosystems.” The dancing lessons he offers are eloquent, original, and compelling. Urging us to build resilient communities, he concludes: “When we practice that awkward dance of mutuality that is the very signature of a democratic culture—the dance where we share, learn, listen, reconcile, invite, reciprocate, step towards one another and embrace—we may be received with rough hands and a tenuous grasp. But if we have the courage to engage honestly and if we take our dancing lessons to heart, we may become not only resilient but grateful, humble, and reverent.”

**Ownership, Property, and Sustainability by Joseph L. Sax (2010)**

What is a landowner’s responsibility to habitat preservation? In the past, owning land meant arranging it for one’s own use, but this in turn generally resulted in destroyed or degraded habitat. In today’s world, loss of biodiversity has become a public concern. Does the landowner now have an obligation to manage his land differently? Can habitat protection be superimposed on a private landowner? Joseph Sax explores these questions in his lecture on the interconnections of ownership, property, and sustainability.

**The Fourth West by Charles Wilkinson (2009)**

Charles Wilkinson views the history of the American West as being divided into three periods. The First West existed when only the American Indians occupied the land. The Second West began with the California Gold Rush and the rapid settlement of the region. The Third West began at the end of World War II when the American West experienced explosive growth that transformed the region from a largely rural environment to an urban environment. In this lecture, Wilkinson explores the question of whether the region is about to enter a new period, the Fourth West, when “we finally do know what we have and what we have to lose.”

**The Twilight of Self Reliance: Frontier Values and Contemporary America by Wallace Stegner**

The occasions of the centennial of Wallace Stegner’s birth on February 18, 1909, and the University of Utah Press’s announcement of the Wallace Stegner Publication Prize in Environmental and American Western History have provided the impetus for the re-publication of The Twilight of Self-Reliance: Frontier Values and Contemporary America, which was originally delivered as a Tanner Lecture at the University of Utah on February 25, 1980.