

the 1920s. By the 1950s, wetlands, now valued for recreation and wildlife, returned throughout the upper Midwest, while the corn belt still flourished. Prince's analysis of current attitudes is a ringing conclusion to this important book. The farm crisis of the mid-1980s, devastating floods in 1993, and an escalating "technological treadmill"—all uncovered flaws in family farming based upon drained prairies. Faced with rising bankruptcies, increased flooding, and a capricious global economy, corn belt farmers now welcome the return of potholes and wetlands as harbingers of a diversified economy. Although attitudes remain ambiguous, many midwesterners (inadvertently remindful of their Native predecessors) now see watery lands as a resource rather than a hindrance.

Hugh Prince's belief that "wetlands were culturally constructed; they were representations of reality" is valuable for geohistorians. Cultural perceptions created these chameleon landscapes, and one hopes that this insight will influence the growing field of environmental history.

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*Oyster Wars and the Public Trust: Property, Law, and Ecology in New Jersey History.* By Bonnie J. McCay. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998. xxii, 246 pp. \$45.00, ISBN 0-8165-1804-1.)

This book is a difficult slog through the muck of tidewater fisheries litigation in New Jersey from the colonial period to the present. But the effort is worthwhile. Bonnie J. McCay unfolds the historical and anthropological development of fishery law and shows how precedents created in that area were used by capitalists in the industrial development of New Jersey. (Ironically, the oyster business, which built many of these precedents, still remains a mostly pre-capitalist activity in the mid-Atlantic region.)

Oyster planting and harvesting galvanized most of the maritime conflicts of this period, and McCay traces the evolution of "common property" or "open access" utilization of estuarine and beach resources. Although scientists and resource managers in this century have

made an excellent case for the economic efficiency of privately owned fishery property (leased bottoms) as superior to open access or the commons idea, they have ignored what McCay calls the "embeddedness" of economic processes in culture and society. People do not necessarily follow their economic interests when they are focused more on protecting a way of life than on generating income.

She concludes that the so-called tragedy of the commons, when applied to the New Jersey fishery, was more a case of the "tragedy of the commoners." Class and economic power determined who benefited most from the state's marine resources. Further, overexploitation of the commons did less damage to the New Jersey fishery than did pollution and shoreline development. The Raritan Bay, once one of the mid-Atlantic's most productive oyster fisheries, is now an artery for the effluent of New York City.

Scholars interested in the history of resource conservation and the alienation of "the public trust" will find this book particularly illuminating. Often, in the name of protecting and regulating the environment, states have sold public resource rights to industrialists and real estate developers to stimulate economic growth. New Jersey, Virginia, Maryland, and Illinois have been notorious in this regard. Although the writing is at times prolix, this book is a major contribution to the study of environmental doctrine in the United States.

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*Snow in America.* By Bernard Mergen. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997. xxii, 321 pp. \$24.95, ISBN 0-56098-780-4.)

Bernard Mergen's *Snow in America* is a wonderful book whose merits, like the qualities of snow he describes so meticulously, may be lost on scholars looking for (or embarrassed by) a social historical narrative of American ideas about and responses to snow. So we should be clear: this is not a history. It is, rather, an album of acute, literate observation, a model for looking. Intentionally, the book mimics characteristics of its subject. The text sparkles with