

BOOK REVIEW 2005 - #5

Jordan, III, W R. *The Sunflower Forest: Ecological Restoration and the New Communion with Nature*. 2003. 256 pages; notes; selected readings; index. University of California Press, Berkeley, California. ISBN: 0-520-23320-4. Hard Cover. US \$27.50. Available from the University of California Press, 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, CA 94704-1012.

In his book, *The Sunflower Forest*, William Jordan III examines ecological restoration and discusses its place in today's society. This book is an outgrowth of an experience of a friend of the author, who became frustrated at a meeting on natural areas when the speaker could not inform the audience of ways to save these important biological remnants. Without answers, the audience left the meeting filled with frustration and despair. After he learned about his friend's experience, Jordan began to assemble his notes and thinking regarding ecological restoration.

It will not take readers long to realize that the author has researched the subject matter extensively and that he has given considerable thought to the development of each chapter. The literature sources used are very diverse, and the author has analyzed and presented them very well. Indeed, it took considerable thought and effort to demonstrate in writing how such diverse disciplines as poetry and critical thinking could be combined to be supportive of the science of ecological restoration.

The author has many years of experience in the science of ecological restoration, but this is not a cookbook filled with useful bits of information to guide aspiring restorationists. Instead, it is a book of serious environmental philosophy that will provide thought provoking moments to all who have a strong interest in the environment. The author draws from his own knowledge and views of authors that represent a wide diversity of disciplines, to illustrate the value and position of ecological restoration in societies throughout the world. The unique combination of writings at the fringes of ecology may cause individuals to shun the book. However, this diversity is one of its greatest strengths and will cause serious-minded restorationists to think through their own actions, perhaps causing them to change their restoration methodologies.

Ecological restorationists sometimes believe that their works are proper and beyond scrutiny, particularly projects involving the removal of invasive exotic species or the monitoring of rare organisms, but others may interpret their works differently. This is why Jordan stresses the necessity of involving other persons and recognizing their diversities of opinions and values. The actions of a single person can affect many others in today's world.

As I continued to read the book, I couldn't help but think of situations or individuals that fit snugly into Jordan's points. One is his view that some persons regard the land as "colonial" (Chapter 2, Page 28) or simply for the taking. With this philosophy, the land is for profit and only a few selected species of high economic value are managed. Then there are those who regard classic landscapes, such as natural areas, as "sacred places" (Chapter 2, Page 29), and are not willing to do anything with them. Nature knows best and man is merely an interloper who must let the natural processes proceed, regardless of the consequences.

William Jordan proposes a different plan revealed in his concept of the New Communion with Nature. Work with nature to return all restorable systems back to the landscape. Do not focus on just those parts that are of special interest, such as rare plants or animals. All things must be included and man must interact with nature to achieve desired goals. These goals must include those organisms that Jordan regards as socially unacceptable because they are ugly or potentially harmful to humans. The list would also include less spectacular organisms such as fungi or micro-invertebrates.

In addition, Jordan proposes that ecological restoration is not a task just for a small, select group of persons. It should be a community affair. To accomplish this goal, individuals can work with the land where they live, whether in cities, villages, or rural areas. The work may be tiring at times, such as planting or brush cutting, and it can be spiritually invigorating. Jordan believes that this level of involvement causes a person to feel involved and connected to the land. At this stage Jordan's vision for restoration will begin to emerge as the primary means of protecting historic landscapes and our only hope of enlarging sites to sustain species with large habitat requirements.

The author draws extensively from personal experience, and he has assembled a remarkable amount of material from many very distinguished individuals. If you want to gain some new perspectives on ecological restoration, *The Sunflower Forest* is a book that may help you. However, take time to read it carefully, giving thought to points made by the author. It is not light reading. However, it is reading that may lead the way to solutions to problems facing the troubled ecological systems in societies throughout today's world.

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