

# Environmental Reading

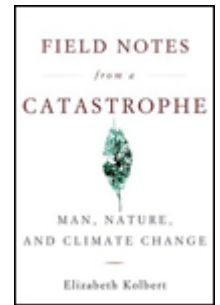
## Global Warming

### Field Notes From a Catastrophe, by Elizabeth Kolbert

Review by Rosemarie Stupel - Environmental Defense Public service director

Based on her eye-opening series in *The New Yorker*, Elizabeth Kolbert's book on climate change brings the science to life. In lucid prose, she describes how global warming threatens the traditional way of life in a small Alaskan village, forcing its residents to relocate.

She vividly distills the stories of scientists who have unraveled the meaning of ice core samples, the evolving timing of mosquito larvae hatching and the shifting ranges of butterflies in England. Drawing disturbing analogies between today's crisis and the fall of ancient Babylon, Kolbert challenges us with the enormity of what will be required to avert global warming's most dangerous consequences.

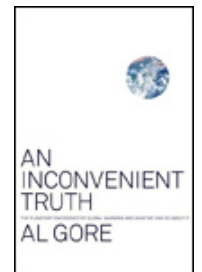


### An Inconvenient Truth, by Al Gore

Review by [Mark Brownstein](#) - Environmental Defense Managing director of Business Partnerships, Climate and Air

An Inconvenient Truth is really two books in one. The first is a compelling compendium of pictures and text laying out the science and consequences of climate change. The second, interspersed through the first, is a set of personal essays by Al Gore connecting the climate change issue to the arc of his life.

Through these vignettes, the former vice president illustrates how he came to discover what is important and true, offering his life as a parable to awaken our conscience. Gore makes a complicated and critical issue entertaining and easy to understand, but his real objective is to call you to action.

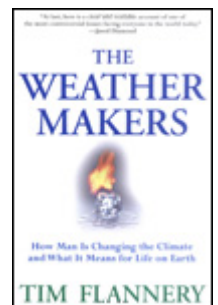


### The Weather Makers, by Tim Flannery

Review by Bill Chameides - Environmental Defense Chief scientist, Climate and Air

The Weather Makers, a parable about who controls the weather, develops along three major narrative lines. It begins with the story of Gaia, a synonym for Earth used to convey its interconnected biological, atmospheric, oceanic and geological systems. The second story line explains how humanity and our profligate fossil fuel use have usurped Gaia's rightful, weather-making role.

Here, author Tim Flannery, an extraordinary scientist and engaging writer, details our growing understanding of great climatic shifts over the past 65 million years. He explodes arguments that past climate change has yet to be explicated and that we are therefore helpless to recognize people's role in current changes. The third story line presents two contrasting futures. In one, Earth's climate passes a tipping point that leads to disastrous consequences. In the alternate, optimistic future humanity frees itself of fossil fuels and Gaia again assumes control of Earth's climate. Though his discussion here gets a little muddled, such minor flaws do not detract from the book's tour de force.



### The Carbon War: Global Warming and the End of the Oil Era, by Jeremy K. Leggett

Review from Publishers Weekly

While explaining the science behind global warming in a manner easily accessible to the nonspecialist, Leggett originally a petroleum geologist, then a Greenpeace director and now a solar energy entrepreneur takes us on a whirlwind eight-year personal journey through the world's climate negotiations. From the first major meeting of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 1990 through the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 to the historic Kyoto Climate Summit in 1997, Leggett provides an insider's perspective on the negotiations and many of the key players. As compelling as a good thriller, the book deftly describes the machinations of what Leggett calls "the carbon club" or "the foot soldiers for the fossil-fuel industries." Working behind the scenes, these lobbyists have been successful in stalling and diluting every agreement reached to date. All the while, as Leggett explains, the world warms and climatic disasters increase. Most readers will find it impossible to



doubt the reality of global warming and its likely consequences after reading Leggett's account of the past decade. The book's only fault is that since its warmly received publication two years ago in Great Britain, nothing more than a short epilogue written in February 2000 has been added to update readers.

## High Tide : The Truth About Our Climate Crisis, by Mark Lynas

*Review by Erik D. Curren*



Mark Lynas traveled around the world to find tangible symptoms of global warming. He found them indeed, and some of them are truly heartbreaking. From the Pacific islanders who are preparing to abandon their island home, to the Alaskans in crazy, tilting houses over a foundation of melting permafrost, to the author's own flooding England, the stories hit home. It's hard to deny global warming after this.

*Review from Publishers Weekly*

Deeply disturbed by unprecedented rain and catastrophic flooding in his native England, journalist Lynas set out on a three-year journey to bear witness to global climate change. Traveling to Alaska to see vanishing tundra, to the growing deserts of Inner Mongolia, to a tiny Pacific island nation facing devastation from rising ocean levels and finally to disappearing glaciers in Peru, Lynas vividly describes the physical and human toll our fossil fuel-based culture takes on the planet. Not a scientist himself, Lynas bolsters his case with abundant footnoted scientific references. This is both personal journey and fierce polemic. Much of his political argument and ire is directed squarely at the U.S. In Lynas's view, the U.S., through its domestic and foreign policy, has undermined the valiant efforts of a coalition of developed and developing countries to control and even reduce the emission of greenhouse gases.

## Red Sky at Morning: America and the Crisis of the Global Environment, by James Gustave Speth

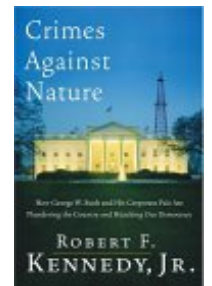
*Review from The New Yorker*



In the past two decades, the world's population has grown by thirty-five per cent, energy use by forty per cent, and automobile production by forty-five per cent. The level of carbon dioxide in the air is the highest it has been in nearly half a million years—and CO2 emissions are projected to climb sixty per cent by 2025. Laying out the grim facts, Speth, who was an adviser to Presidents Carter and Clinton, and is the dean of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, sounds almost nostalgic for the days when the environmental crisis was all about aerosol sprays, factory smokestacks, and PCBs in the riverbed. Today, as he stresses, the crisis is global. But, rather than wait for grand international treaties, Speth thinks that individuals, N.G.O.s, corporations, and other groups ought to start their own initiatives to protect the environment and prevent an irreversible shift in climate. Forty years after "Silent Spring," we may be facing a long, hot summer.

## Crimes Against Nature: How George W. Bush and His Corporate Pals Are Plundering the Country and Hijacking Our Democracy by Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

*Review by Ellen Thierry on Amazon*



RFK writes a persuasive book about the appalling environmental record of the Bush Administration. He does a good job of convincing the reader that he is an environmental advocate first, a Democrat second. He thinks environmentalism should be a nonpartisan issue, and he supports either party's good-faith attempts to improve the environment. I don't know how ANYBODY, a Republican or Democrat, could have access to this information and still support the President. I assume most Republicans simply don't know all this. As demonstrated by this book, the environment alone—leaving aside Iraq and the economy—was reason enough not to vote for Bush. Too bad enough people didn't read it.

Of note: RFK's Afterword in the paperback edition. He debunks the values divide as explanation for Bush's victory and instead reminds us of the PIPA poll that demonstrated just how misinformed Bush voters were. If you're not going to buy the book, at least stand in the bookstore and read his Afterword. If you're a Bush supporter, you might be surprised at the statistics on the "values" record of red vs. blue states.

*Review by Tom Lauer on Amazon*

I keep buying this book and handing it out to friends. The first couple of chapters start out slow but then it becomes gripping and totally compelling. He speaks to many seemingly disparate concerns like stars in a galaxy and draws a line through them and shows you that they are truly all part of a single constellation. You come to understand the forces of evil that are lined up against patriotic Americans, and other concerned earth

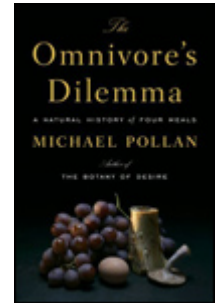
dwellers. From the Coors connection to the devastation of the Superfund you will start to understand how well thought out the attack against our values and resources are. This is an amazing book and very readable. This should be required reading for every 8th, 10th, and 12th grade reader and everyone of voting age.

## Food

### The Omnivore's Dilemma, By Michael Pollan

Review by Ashley Rood - Environmental Defense Program assistant, Ecosystems

"What am I eating? And where in the world did it come from?" These questions instigated Michael Pollan's new book, Omnivore's Dilemma. Taking a naturalist's point of view, Pollan follows the journey of four meals from farm to table: the corn-addicted path of McDonald's take-out, a home-cooked dinner of Whole Foods organics, dining off the grid with a sustainably grown supper and a modern hunter-gatherer's feast. Weaving together literature, science, and some serious hands-on investigation, this book illustrates not only the pleasures of eating the food you know but the serious environmental and health consequences of the way we eat.



### Eat Here, by Brian Halwell

Review by Renate Haeckler "Organic Gardener"

This book is very well done. He not only describes the problems in the American food system, but does a fantastic job of describing international problems, something that is lacking in many books published in the US. The writing is easy to understand even though it broaches some complicated issues. If there were any weaknesses, I think it's that he doesn't cover the nutritional losses of old food enough.



## Ecology

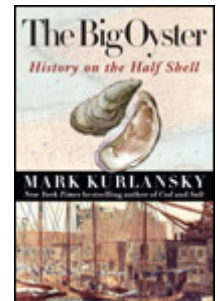
### The Big Oyster, by Mark Kurlansky

Review by [Tim Fitzgerald](#) - Environmental Defense Scientist, Oceans

*The Big Oyster* is a 400-year ecological tour of the New York estuary through the eyes of a once prolific and valuable inhabitant: the oyster.

Kurlansky begins with Henry Hudson's arrival, when bears roamed the land and 6-foot lobsters and 12-inch oysters filled the seas. The thriving industry that followed soon supplied half of the world's oysters and fed the gluttonous habits of rich and poor New Yorkers alike.

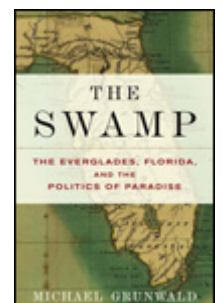
Historical icons like Robert Fulton, Diamond Jim Brady and Typhoid Mary all had intriguing ties to the city's oyster industry. However, New York's appetite proved insatiable. The growing city's disregard for its waterways ultimately led to the oyster's local demise, but present-day restoration efforts aim to restore the Hudson River to its former glory.



### The Swamp, by Michael Grunwald

Review by Margaret McMillan - Environmental Defense Endangered species specialist, Ecosystem Restoration

Half of the Everglades ecosystem is gone. Whether an \$8 billion rescue plan will succeed and be a model for future landscape-scale restoration remains to be seen. Washington Post reporter Michael Grunwald's well-researched history chronicles the fabled "river of grass" from discovery through ecological devastation, to the present ambitious restoration program.



The Everglades is unlike any other place on earth—home to a rich, diverse flora and fauna that includes millions of water birds and dozens of endangered and threatened species. The area's human life is also unique: outrageous real estate scammers, greedy entrepreneurs, Army Corps of Engineer follies, and passionate conservationists, making for a colorful and harrowing tale.

## **A Walk in the Woods: Rediscovering America on the Appalachian Trail, by Bill Bryson**

*Review by Michelle Bicek, Environmental Defense Living Cities program associate*

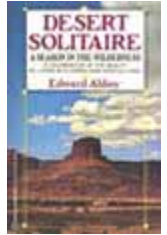
If you're an avid hiker, pack this hilarious adventure in your beach bag or backpack this summer. The book tracks the trek of two 40-ish, out-of-shape men attempting to hike the 2,100-mile Appalachian Trail, which stretches from Georgia to Maine. This account of their foibles is sprinkled with fascinating details of the trail's wildlife and history, including tales of famous and not-so-famous hikers. In his more serious moments, Bill Bryson argues for the protection of this fragile strip of wilderness



## **Desert Solitaire, by Edward Abbey**

*Review by Dr. James Wang, Environmental Defense climate scientist*

This wonderfully entertaining novel packs a strong environmental message. Edward Abbey masterfully depicts the Southwest's stark beauty -- from the smallest wildflowers to the largest rock arches. Interludes of whitewater rafting down the Colorado, snow-field glissading down high mountain peaks, and rappelling in the rocky maze of the Canyonlands area are classic versions of adventure-sporting that's so popular today. And Abbey fires up the environmentalist in us with his visionary critique of the car culture that has blighted our national parks and the dam that destroyed the wondrous Glen Canyon.

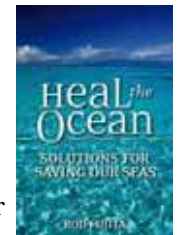


## **Oceans and Fish**

### **Heal the Ocean: Solutions for Saving Our Seas, by Rod Fujita**

*Review by Leslie Valentine, Environmental Defense staff writer*

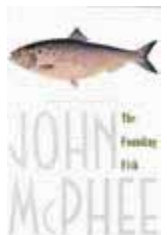
A must-read for anyone who visits a beach, lives near a coast or loves the ocean (and who doesn't?). A marine ecologist at Environmental Defense, Rod Fujita unravels the mystery of the sea, revealing its web of life and how we humans are woven into it -- and have shaped it, for better and worse. At the heart of this beautifully-written book lies Fujita's belief in the ocean's resiliency and unwavering faith that we can turn the tide against ocean decline. He shapes the complex science of ocean ecosystems into a tale as mesmerizing as the ocean itself.



### **The Founding Fish, by John McPhee**

*Review by Dr. Jake Kritzer, Environmental Defense Puleston fellow*

Here's a fun fish fact: Like salmon, many fish migrate annually from the open ocean into waterways along the Atlantic coast. Pulitzer-prize winner John McPhee takes us on the journey of the world's largest herring species, the American shad. There is more to a seemingly simple fish than meets the eye. McPhee tracks its life cycle, acquaints us with the fly-fishermen and ichthyologists who know it intimately, and explains how over-fishing and dams threaten the fish. Casting us back in time, McPhee visits Thomas Jefferson fishing for shad in Virginia, and conjectures that the fish might have helped Washington's army survive the treacherous Valley Forge winter. McPhee lets the fish's story make its own case for conservation in this engaging book.



## **Sustainable Design**

### **Cradle to Cradle, by Bill McDonough and Michael Braungart**

*Review by Andy Darrell, Environmental Defense Living Cities program director*

Architect Bill McDonough teams up with chemist Michael Braungart to create a blueprint for eliminating waste in all aspects of design, from the industrial scale to consumer products. The book's ideas are best expressed in its real-world examples, which show how public and private sector leaders can help their bottom line, the natural world and their communities. Simple choices like the synthetic "paper" on which the book is published demonstrate that taking care of the environment makes economic and practical sense. This approach works if it is built in up front -- and if designers are given the freedom to innovate. While the book is a great read for all environmentalists, I recommend it especially to municipal leaders, architects and corporate leaders.

