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BOOK REVIEW

***Ever Green: Saving Big Forests to Save the Planet*, by John W. Reid and Thomas E. Lovejoy, New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 2022, 302 pp., \$30 (hbk), ISBN: 978-1-324-00603-9.**

This is a rather optimistic book, as well as constructive and inspiring. The authors are an economist (Reid) and a biologist (Lovejoy). They are clearly driven by the spiritual values of the large forests but are wise or realistic enough to see that the forests can not be saved by idealism alone. Their book contains many sound arguments for why saving the forests is also useful to humanity on an Earth under pressure.

For example, it is both simple and cheap to save large quantities of carbon in remote, intact forests. “Keeping carbon in tropical forests costs a fifth as much as reducing emissions from energy and industry in the United States and Europe. And it’s more affordable by a factor of at least seven than regrowing forests once they’ve been felled. This opportunity is still, astonishingly, overlooked and unmentioned in most national climate plans.”

The optimism stems from the fact the growth of protected areas is “the greatest environmental success story in the history of modern nations. In 1990, 4 percent of Earth’s land was protected. Over the last three decades, governments have collectively quadrupled this figure to 17 percent. Most nations are agreeing to nearly double that global total to protect 30 percent of all land by 2030.” Brazil has led the way with 46 percent of the Brazilian Amazon protected as at 2021.

The most valuable forests are the “Intact Forest Landscapes” of at least 500 square km minimally untouched by human activity. Especially important is the absence of roads which are the facilitators of all other activity. Most of the forest is being cut down along roads, in Congo 20 percent is being shorn to a distance of 2 km along roads, and wildlife is much disturbed by roads, e.g. forest elephants prefer to stay at least about 24 km away from them. It will only cost \$2 billion per year to save the unprotected IFLs, and the authors compare

that to the worldwide spending of pet food, \$94 billion. Even if saving the IFLs would cost \$20 billion it is still just 0.002 percent of the 2019 global GDP.

The IFLs are divided into the North woods, in Alaska and Canada, and from Northern Scandinavia across Russia and Siberia, by far the largest being the Siberian taiga; and the tropical IFLs. These, mostly in Brazil and Congo, with smaller areas in New Guinea, are very different from the North woods. The authors take the reader on journeys to these destinations to meet some of the people living there or working to save the forests, and the particular challenges for each place are discussed.

The book offers alternative ideas for development rather than building roads and settlements in new areas which is often seen as the definition of “progress”. It is clearly argued, however, that roads in sparsely populated areas are too difficult and expensive to maintain relative to their usefulness, and the authors wonder why the World Bank is still supporting projects for building roads with nearly non-existent traffic. At present China in particular seems to be less sensitive to pristine forests in their projects.

A 2019 study of 12,000 km of proposed roads in the Amazon found that 45 percent could be discarded already on economic grounds. Each dollar of transportation benefits in the projects would cost more than a dollar in construction and maintenance. It was concluded that the best 10 percent of projects could be built with minimal disruption to forests while delivering 77 percent of the total economic advantages. Generally, air transport would be more rational in many places, but keeping populations (other than indigenous peoples) in more central cities rather than in more scattered settlements should also be encouraged.

The mentioned logic for settlement also applies to agriculture. Intense exploitation of smaller areas leaves more room for entirely untouched nature than extensive agriculture. This is also true for logging. As the head of Greenpeace-Russia is quoted in the book: “The only way to save some biodiversity is to polarize logging. Leave most areas wild and use some areas in an intensive way.” Technological innovation of recent years has meant a lot for this productiveness as well as for managing valuable nature. It is now possible to track changes on every acre of Brazil from 1985 to the present.

Whatever the utilitarian arguments for saving the large forests, the interviews with local residents, activists and experts make it clear that the overwhelming motivating force must

be a love for the forests and trees, and luckily the majority of the public, also in the countries with megaforests, side with the authors. The forests are a “natural resource” but also so much else, beautifully illustrated in the book’s stories and photographs from the authors’ visits in the forests. And importantly in an age which panics, perceives short time horizons and demands quick solutions, they stress that forest saving and recovery is a project that most of all requires patience, a spiritual journey of learning for several generations to come. Ill-suited for the political agendas of the day. We have all had our part in the exploitation of the forests, and we can all make small changes in our lives to be part of the solution.

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pnbuhl@hotmail.com

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