

BOOKS OF INTEREST

by Eben Lehman and James G. Lewis

The influential American conservationist Gifford Pinchot began his career as the forester for George Vanderbilt's Biltmore estate, where in the early 1890s Pinchot formulated the first large-scale forest management plan in the United States. His successor, Carl Schenk, opened the country's first forestry school there in 1898. But the forest history legacy is only part of the narrative in *The Last Castle: The Epic Story of Love, Loss, and American Royalty in the Nation's Largest Home* (Touchstone, 2017). Denise Kiernan tells the larger-than-life story of three generations of the Vanderbilt family and their lavish home in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina. The youngest son of one of the richest men in the country, Vanderbilt could afford to collect art and rare books, travel extensively, and think pensively. On a visit to the growing city of Asheville in 1888, he fell in love with the view of Mount Pisgah and decided to build a home from which he could gaze upon it. He

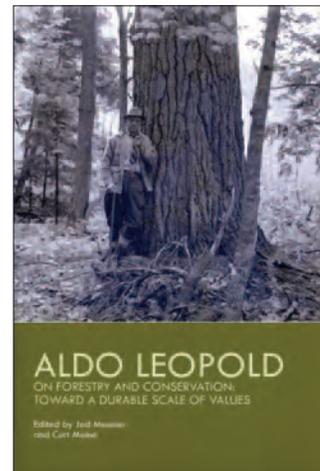


would eventually come to own the mountain and the land surrounding it. He commissioned Richard Morris Hunt, the foremost architect of the Gilded Age, to design a mansion that ultimately exceeded 170,000 square feet of floor space. Desiring that the surrounding land, which eventually totaled 125,000 acres, match the splendor of the residence, Vanderbilt tapped another family friend, the renowned landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted,

for his expertise. Olmsted gave Vanderbilt the parklike setting around the mansion he wanted, but he also gave the young man a greater purpose: to turn large portions of the estate into a demonstration forest that would show Americans how a managed forest could provide a steady profit from timber and many other benefits as well. Kiernan weaves together a tale of the home and its occupants and colorful visitors, the influence of George and Edith Vanderbilt on the city of Asheville, and the constant struggle—inherited along with the estate by their daughter Cornelia and her children—to hold on to the property as operating expenses and taxes piled up. Although Biltmore has been a popular tourist destination since the family first admitted paying visitors in 1930, it didn't turn its first profit until 1968, which is where Kiernan ends the story. Now the estate's many businesses (which include tours of the house and gardens, a winery, a dairy, a farm, and two hotels) demonstrate how to operate on an environmentally sustainable basis. By doing so, the family continues to write new chapters in the history of this celebrated home. (JL)

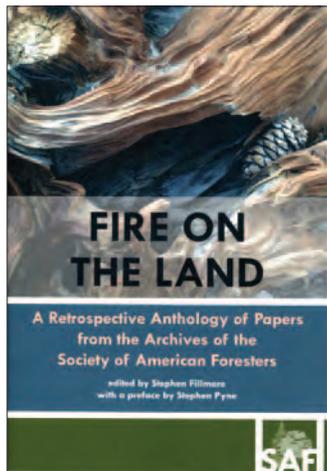
The Society of American Foresters has recently published three edited volumes drawn from its own archives and publications. Each book covers a topic of interest to professional foresters and others, and each could be adopted into college or professional training courses.

Aldo Leopold on Forestry and Conservation: Toward a Durable Scale of Values (2018) is a collection of selected writings by the titular forester and conservationist. It is edited by Jed Meunier, an ecologist and research scientist with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources studying forest and fire ecology, and Curt Meine, senior fellow for the Center for Humans & Nature and the Aldo Leopold Foundation. Meine, Leopold's preeminent biographer, had previously edited the definitive collection of Leopold's writings, *Aldo Leopold: A Sand County Almanac & Other Essays on Ecology and Conservation* (2013)



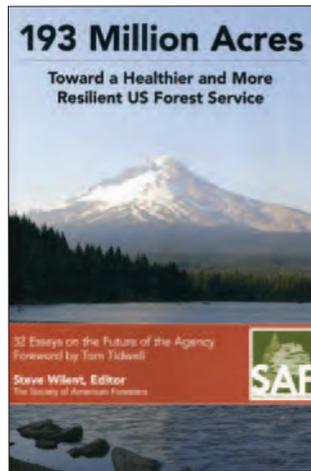
for the Library of America. Unlike that 800-plus-page publication, which includes Leopold's writings on game management and wilderness and his most famous book, this collection focuses on his forestry and forest conservation writings. Meunier and Meine have done readers a great service by returning Leopold to the forest, if you will, giving both practitioners and historians access to his more relatable (and useful) writings. For those not familiar with Leopold, the book's introduction lays out the intellectual and professional paths he took, from working in the American Southwest for the U.S. Forest Service through his career teaching game management and restoring land in Wisconsin. The book is broken into two sections, with each entry containing a brief introductory note to contextualize it. The first section contains twenty-two articles, reviews, and reports Leopold published in the *Journal of Forestry* between 1918 and 1946. The second includes articles published elsewhere along with unpublished essays and letters. One can follow the evolution of his thoughts on forestry and conservation and see how he came to form his "land ethic" philosophy. The helpful bibliography lists all the works Leopold published on forestry both in the *Journal of Forestry* and elsewhere, and those published about Leopold and forestry.

Fire on the Land: A Retrospective Anthology of Selected Papers from the Archives of



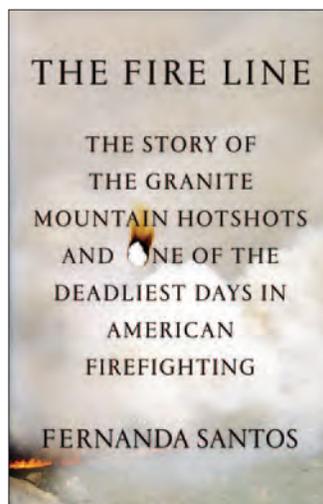
the Society of American Foresters (2017), edited by Stephen Fillmore, with a preface by historian Stephen Pyne that summarizes America’s wildfire history, draws nearly all twenty-five of its chapters from the *Journal of Forestry*. Fillmore has chosen “seminal papers,” which nonforesters may find fairly technical. They are grouped into five sections—“Wildfire Policy,” “Fire Control to Fire Management,” “Fuels Management,” “Fire Education, Training, and Research Needs,” and “The Utilization of Fire”—each introduced by a subject matter expert who offers a historical overview and summary of the articles contained within. The anthology provides a good historical overview of wildfire science and policy as these topics have been presented to professional foresters over the past 110 years, demonstrating how history can inform present work.

Fire is just one of the six subjects of *193 Million Acres: Toward a Healthier and More Resilient US Forest Service* (2018). The others are leadership and management challenges, the legal and regulatory framework, discrimination and sexual harassment, the agency’s legacy, and its future. The thirty-two essays in this collection are not primarily research-oriented articles; rather, most are position papers drawn from a variety of sources, including blogs and regional newspapers, and written by an impressive lineup of people, including journalists, historians, conservationists, and former Forest Service employees. Steve Wilent, who is editor of the Society of American Foresters’ monthly newspaper, *The Forestry Source*, notes in the book’s introduction that contributors wrote not to disparage the Forest Service but to offer constructive criticism that might aid its leadership in the coming years. In light of the recent news about discrimination and sexual



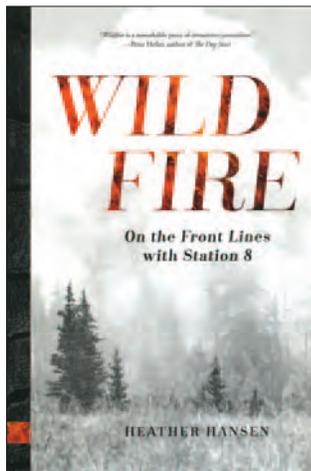
harassment in the agency, the inclusion of a section on this topic can be seen as a potentially helpful step. Over the past several years, that issue and wildfires have arguably had the greatest effect on the agency’s ability to manage those 193 million acres. (JL)

On a hot dry day in June 2013, the twenty members of the Granite Mountain Hotshots were transported from their base in Prescott, Arizona, to the nearby town of Yarnell. The crew immediately got to work on the routine task of cutting a fire line to halt an advancing blaze. In an instant things took a tragic turn. A thunderstorm blew in from the north, with tremendous wind gusts pushing the fire to groundspeeds of fifteen miles per hour. By that evening nineteen members of the Granite Mountain Hotshots crew had perished in the fire—the greatest single loss of firefighters in more than a century. Fernanda Santos tells the crew’s story in *The Fire Line: The Story of the Granite Mountain Hotshots and One of the Deadliest Days in American Firefighting*



(Flatiron Books, 2016). The reader gets to know each of the men from the Granite Mountain Hotshots before accompanying the crew as they battle the Yarnell Hill Fire. The gripping narrative follows the team as they fight to reestablish control of the growing fire, ultimately revealing that miscommunications resulted in needless death. A bureau chief for the *New York Times*, Santos brings a reporter’s attention to detail and in-depth research to her book. She drew on hundreds of hours of interviews with the firefighters’ families, co-workers, and state and federal officials. Understanding the Yarnell Hill wildfire events is even more important in light of what has occurred since that fire. The continued ex-urban growth and development in fire-prone areas around the country, along with climate change, mean that wildfires are routinely reaching levels of destruction not seen in this country since the introduction of modern firefighting techniques in the mid-twentieth century. Death counts once unimaginable now occur with increasing regularity. Incidents like the 2018 Camp Fire in northern California, the deadliest wildfire in more than a century, are becoming normal. Understanding and learning from these catastrophes may help us better face future wildfires and the resulting losses. (EL)

The Granite Mountain Hotshots are just one of many elite firefighting crews that have recently been established by municipalities to fight fires in the wildland-urban interface. Heather Hansen embedded for more than a year with a wildland fire division of Boulder, Colorado. The result is *Wild Fire: On the Front Lines with Station 8* (Mountaineers Books, 2018). Boulder, where development continues making deeper incursions into natural areas, offers an excellent case study to examine local firefighting practices and broader fire policy debates. Hansen does that and much more, discussing the past, present, and future of fire science in the greater American West. She places the work of the Station 8 team in a broad historical context of the U.S. Forest Service’s firefighting policy and practices over the past century. Hansen opens with a detailed look at the daily lives of Station 8’s team, sharing what goes into their training to maintain firefighter readiness. The last third of the book is where the reader sees that training put into action through a gripping day-by-day narrative of the crew’s efforts to control



the Cold Springs Fire in July 2016, near Nederland, Colorado. It's a fascinating ground-level view of the work of wildland firefighters as they create a temporary command center, order air attacks, dig fire lines, battle a growing blaze through the night, and conduct mop-up work in the fire's aftermath. Hansen's and Santos's books provide new insights into the challenging work of wildland firefighters in the American West. (EL)

"Most Americans have a fondness for the log cabin, but not many understand why," writes Andrew Belonsky. *The Log Cabin: An Illustrated History* (Countryman Press, 2018) details how this simple wood structure became a uniquely American symbol, ingrained in our national psyche and identity. Belonsky explores the log cabin in American life, from the early seventeenth century through the present, looking at the log cabin's origins in the United States, America's love affair with the cabin as seen through art and literature, and the cabin in modern times and how it perpetuates misconceptions about American history. Belonsky delves into topics like the myth surrounding Abraham Lincoln's birth cabin



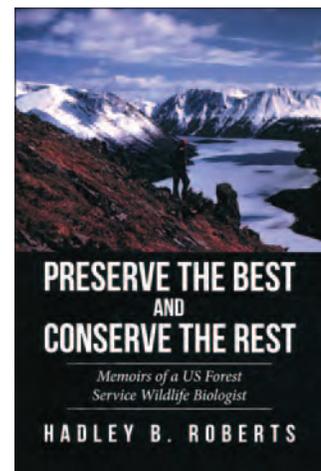
and the various hucksters who profited off this legend following his assassination, and the cultural influence of Disney's *Davy Crockett* television program in the 1950s and the frontier motif on a generation of American children. The use of the log cabin to promote classic American rags-to-riches tales is explored, as are the ongoing appeal of vacationing in log cabin-themed resorts and hotels and the use of log cabins in branding and advertising. Even the log cabin as a setting in horror films comes under examination. More complicated topics and themes include the log cabin as a symbol of colonization and the role of cabins in the destruction, dislocation, and attempted assimilation of Native Americans. In Belonsky's hands, the cultural history of the log cabin is a lens through which to view the entirety of the history of the United States, warts and all. And as he unpacks its many myths, the cabin becomes an avatar for the American experience itself. "It's a prism that reflects and refracts the American story," he writes. Filled with historical photos and illustrations (some provided by the Forest History Society), the book serves as a surprisingly entertaining view of an overlooked yet important American icon. (EL)

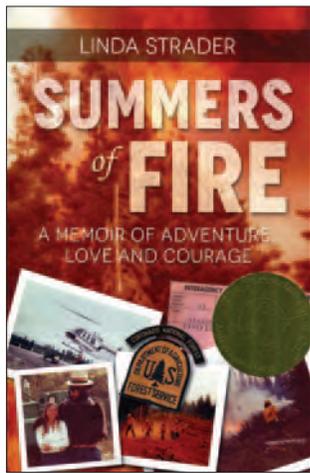
Fires have burned on Earth for hundreds of millions of years, and it is that lengthy, or deep, history that Andrew C. Scott examines in *Burning Planet: The Story of Fire Through Time* (Oxford University Press, 2018). An emeritus professor of geology in the Department of Earth Sciences at Royal Holloway University of London, Scott has studied fire, and its crucial role in evolution and ecology, from a geologic perspective for more than 40 years. Fire shaped the planet in many ways long before the earliest human-fire interactions. For a deeper understanding of fire's ecological effects, he sought to study fossil charcoal, which holds the key to determining where and when fires occurred and also provide information on the interaction of fire and vegetation, climate conditions, postfire erosion, and much more. His passion for an otherwise obscure topic makes for a compelling read (a glossary of geology terms is provided for newcomers to the subject). The book concludes with a chapter looking to the future, discussing the increase in destructive wildfires and the growing threats of climate change and invasive plants. How we use climate and vegetation models to plan for the future will be crucial,



as will applying lessons from history. It's no overstatement to say that adapting our fire policies and learning to live with fire will be essential to our survival. (EL)

Hadley B. Roberts's *Preserve the Best and Conserve the Rest: Memoirs of a US Forest Service Wildlife Biologist* (self-published, 2016), and Linda Strader's *Summers of Fire: A Memoir of Adventure, Love and Courage* (Bedazzled Ink Publishing, 2018) are just two of the recent spate of memoirs published by former federal land-management agency employees. Roberts was born and raised in New York City, but as a child he fell in love with wildlife and wilderness. In the late 1950s he defied his Gotham-centric parents' wishes by becoming a wildlife biologist, then worked for the Idaho Department of Fish and Game for a few years and the U.S. Forest Service for three decades. Over the course of his career, he writes, he was a staunch defender of wildlife who viewed himself as a team player, except that he was on the "wildlife team," which frequently put him at odds with the "Forest Service team"—those whom he believed wanted to advance their



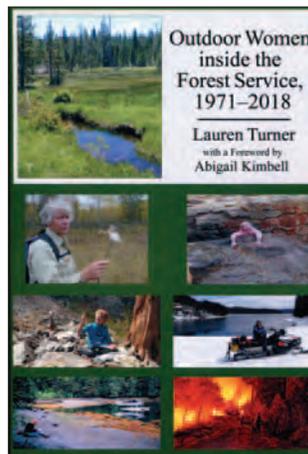


careers by embracing industrial forestry at the height of the agency's timber-harvesting program in the 1960s and 1970s. His breezy memoir offers some insider perspective on what the Forest Service was like when timber management and logging topped the agency's priority list, and the lengths to which some went to keep it there. About a year before retiring from the Salmon National Forest in 1983, he and a local environmental group to which he belonged challenged possibly illegal plans to build a logging road for a timber sale that would adversely affect a wilderness area. He continued fighting after retirement, finally prevailing a few years later.

Summers of Fire captures the brief fire-fighting career of a pioneer in the profession. Linda Strader was twenty years old when in 1976 she became one of the first women hired on a Forest Service fire crew, a career that ended in 1982 when an injury forced her to resign. Strader is an excellent memoirist, conveying equally well her harrowing experiences fighting fires in the woods in Arizona and elsewhere and the sexual harassment and discrimination in the fire camps and offices of the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. Her attempts to advance her career were undermined or thwarted at nearly every turn by those who believed women did not belong in firefighting. She left the agency, married a member of her original crew, and became a landscape architect. But the challenge of pleasing a resentful husband while having a career took its toll; it took her years to find a sense of purpose and resilience, as well as the courage alluded to in the subtitle. Although it might be easy to characterize the book as being for women because of its inspirational message about trying to make it in "a man's world," men would greatly benefit from reading it, too, if only

to learn that it takes more courage to fight for respect and dignity than it does to fight a wall of flames. (JL)

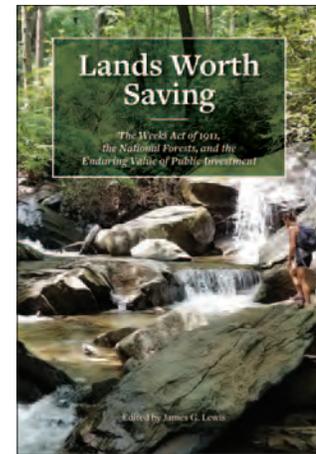
Though not everyone is willing to put in the time to write a memoir, many people in U.S. land-management agencies nonetheless have careers and experiences worth sharing. Lauren Turner, a former career U.S. Forest Service employee, has done a great service for historians and others interested in the history of women in the Forest Service by interviewing 41 women who worked outdoor jobs at some point in their careers at every level of the agency. She asked each woman the same core questions, which they answered either by email or in telephone conversations. Instead of reprinting edited transcripts, Turner wove the answers into biographical sketches in which each woman's personality comes through, making *Outdoor Women Inside the Forest Service, 1971–2018* (McDonald & Woodward Publishing, 2018) an engaging and revelatory book. The chapters follow



the agency's basic organizational chart, grouping the careers of technicians, district-level natural resource professionals, forest-level natural resource professionals, and so forth, up through the line officers. In her concluding chapter, "Retrospective and Prospect," Turner recaps the history these women lived through and made, using their own words. She then summarizes the pros and cons of working for the Forest Service from the perspective of the women interviewed, offering some hints as to why working for the agency may not be an attractive career option for many of today's young women. Turner more explicitly discusses the issues facing the agency today, such as sexual harassment, declining budgets, and institutionalized racial and gender bias, and their effects on women in

the agency—and on the agency itself. And yet the majority of the women interviewed expressed support for those contemplating a career with the agency because of their deeply held belief in its mission. (JL)

In 1911, Congress passed the Weeks Act, one of the most transformative conservation laws in U.S. history. The law had two purposes: to give the federal government a way to establish national forests throughout the Appalachian Mountains, and to create a cooperative framework through which the Forest Service, the states, and private landowners could fight forest fires. In its more than one hundred years, the Weeks Act has enabled the agency to restore more than 24 million acres around the country, mostly through the purchase of heavily logged private lands. Its cooperative framework is used today for combating climate change, protecting endangered species, and even managing urban forests. Today, with America's forests again under threat from invasive species, wildfires, and



anticonservationists, the Weeks Act and the lands it has saved face an uncertain future. *Lands Worth Saving: The Weeks Act of 1911, the National Forests, and the Enduring Value of Public Investment* (Forest History Society, 2018), edited by James Lewis, editor of this magazine, updates articles first published in the magazine *Forest History Today* in 2011. Leading historians, conservationists, and legal experts explore and reflect on the history, benefits, and future of natural resource management under the law. By examining what the Weeks Act has done for America and the challenges conservationists still face, this book might help us better understand what is at stake for the nation's public and private forests in the century to come. (JL) □

New from the Forest History Society

Lands Worth Saving

by James G. Lewis

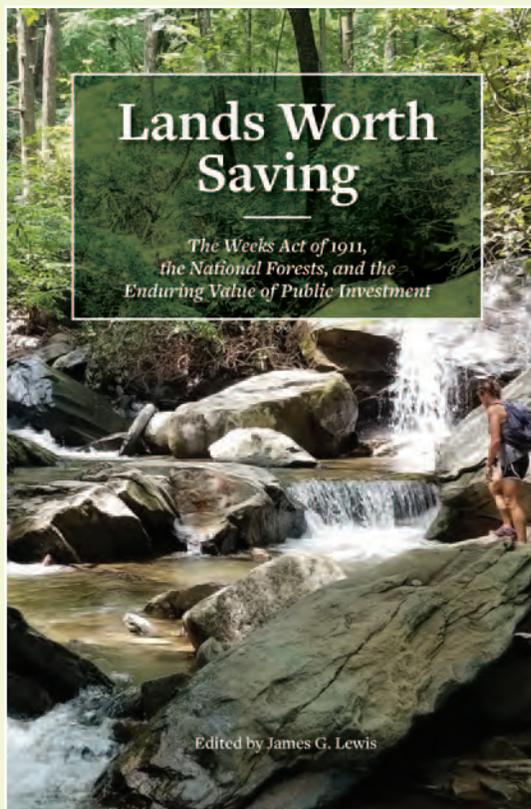
As a new century unfolds, catastrophic wildfires and destructive pests and diseases ravage forests across the country. The U.S. Forest Service lacks proper funding to conduct needed projects. Conservation groups petition the president and a divided Congress to protect the nation's remaining forests from further harm before it's too late. The year is 1911.

Twenty years earlier, a law establishing national forests in the West had failed to protect any lands in the East. From the Atlantic coast to the Mississippi River, forests were rapidly falling to wildfires and the axe, leaving behind fields of tree stumps and rivers choked from erosion. Some saw such lands as disposable. But conservationists saw potential. If safeguarded and reforested by the government, these places could offer timber, water, and recreation for all. They were lands worth saving.

In 1911, Congress passed the Weeks Act, one of the most transformative conservation laws in U.S. history. Designed to establish national forests in the East, the Weeks Act has helped restore more than 24 million acres around the country. The law also provided a cooperative agreement between the Forest Service, the states, and private landowners to fight forest fires. This framework is also used today for combating climate change, protecting endangered species, and managing urban forests.

Today, with America's forests again under threat, the Weeks Act and the lands it has saved face an uncertain future. In this collection, drawn from the pages of the magazine *Forest History Today* and newly updated, leading historians, conservationists, and legal experts explore the history, impact, and future of natural resource management under the law. By examining what the Weeks Act has done for America, they can help us better understand what's at stake for the nation's public and private forests in the century to come.

James G. Lewis is the author of *The Forest Service and the Greatest Good: A Centennial History* and has served as editor of *Forest History Today* since 2007.



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