

Gunter, Michael M. Jr. 2004. *Building the Next Ark*. Lebanon, NH: Dartmouth College Press

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Just as during the biblical floods, the earth is facing a critical point for the survival of species. As the United Nations' estimate of fifty thousand species extinctions a year makes clear, protecting biodiversity is a problem that requires immediate action. The issue is further complicated by the conflict and self-interest inherent in the political arena. As states continue in their path of ineffectiveness at protecting endangered species, the world must find new strategies to deal with species extinction before it is too late. According to Michael M. Gunter's *Building the Next Ark*, that solution may be the rise of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). NGOs can be influential in particular by fostering a series of linkages: domestic-international, ecological-economic and short term-long term. He argues that these fundamental linkages are required for transnational biodiversity protection.

The book is organized around types of strategies that NGOs use to foster these three categories of linkages. Gunter uses the concept of linkages as the primary analytical measure of NGO effectiveness. He first considers a set of strategies, identified as "mainstream," that include lobbying, litigation, scientific/technical research, property acquisition/maintenance and monitoring. He argues that majority of mainstream strategies concentrate on domestic-international linkages and ecological-economic linkages, though only the latter are successful. The failure of NGOs to establish a short-long linkage, he argues, is as much a factor of the difficulty of long-term planning in the policy process as it is any failure on the part of NGOs.

Strategies identified as "participatory" can be constructive for NGOs as well. These strategies help NGOs personalize the story of species extinction in ways that most mainstream strategies cannot. Gunter provides an extensive discussion of how the internet has changed the way NGOs operate, at the same time simplifying and broadening their work. Through these strategies NGOs have achieved a fair measure of success in making ecological-economic and short term-long term linkages. None of the NGOs studied, however, have been able to successfully use participatory strategies to achieve domestic-international linkages.

Gunter argues that characteristics of NGOs influence their level of success in the strategies they choose. He looks at five key characteristics of these organizations, including general demographics, decision-making style, willingness to engage in partnerships, targeting of constituencies, and internal support for the specific strategies they decide use. He examines how these characteristics can both support and constrain NGOs. For example, while partnerships enable NGOs to share resources and focus on a strategic niche, they also require a significant investment of time and money, and force NGOs to share credit.

Gunter draws on existing literature on sovereignty and international regimes, domestic links to international relations, and the vast literature on NGOs, as theoretical background to the project. The research is based on case studies of eleven NGOs active in the biodiversity policy arena (Biodiversity Action Network, Conservation International, Defenders of Wildlife, Earthjustice Legal Defense Fund, Earthwatch Institute, Environmental Defense, The Nature Conservancy, The Ocean Conservancy, Sierra Club, World Resources Institute and World Wildlife Fund).

Although there is brief mention of NGO conflicts such as that between The Nature Conservancy and Conservation International, and the more benign separation of the Sierra Club and Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund (renamed Earthjustice), the work is by and large optimistic about the role of NGOs and their position within the biodiversity movement. Gunter argues that we must examine the strategies followed by NGOs in order to understand how they can be most effective at protecting transnational biodiversity: "Such an analysis allows NGOs to become better storytellers, to continue developing their status as the conveyors of knowledge and expertise" (p. 182). This analysis proceeds from the assumption that NGOs are a force for good in the conflict over biodiversity, and glosses over failures, the possible role of bias and self-interest, the conflicts and competition over scarce resources, and issues of blame-avoidance and credit-claiming that NGOs also face. Indeed, this criticism of Gunter's work applies to the general state of the NGO literature. This approach may not reflect misleading optimism so much as desperate hope for the resolution to a problem that the author clearly cares about passionately.

The real contribution of this book is in the framework it develops to keep the book focused without becoming repetitive. It also does a good job of emphasizing how NGOs work within the system, how NGOs work with people, and how NGOs can work on themselves to more effectively save species from the threat of extinction. The rich detail and examples make this volume a lively read that would be an excellent addition to any library on NGOs or biodiversity.

Ribot, Jesse C., and Anne M. Larson, eds. 2005. *Democratic Decentralisation through a Natural Resources Lens*. London: Routledge.

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Decentralization, which involves the transfer of power from central government to lower tiers in a political-administrative and territorial hierarchy, is occurring in one form or another in the vast majority of developing countries. Initially touted as a miracle drug to reform inefficient and corrupt political systems, decentralization has been fraught with difficulties in practice. *Democratic Decentralisation through a Natural Resource Lens* sheds light on the experiences of developing countries with decentralization in the management of natural resources.