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Review of *The Grasslands of the United States: An Environmental History*. By James E. Sherow

Francis Moul

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The Grasslands of the United States: An Environmental History. By James E. Sherow. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2007. xv + 389 pp. Maps, figures, tables, photographs, references, bibliography, index. $85.00 cloth.

Environmental history is a fairly new and complex method of study. It is, according to historian Richard White, the history of consequences of human actions on the environment, and the reciprocal consequences of an altered nature on human society. This interaction thus combines natural history with social, economic, and political history, along with many more subspecies of study.

James Sherow's environmental history of America's grasslands is quite welcome. Although grass covers much of the earth's surface (12 billion of 29 billion acres), it may be the least studied or popularized of plants. The National Grasslands of the U.S. are among the least known and used of all public lands (or even mentioned in this volume).

As a textbook for upper level high school classes and college students, this work does not have to meet the strict requirements of more academic studies. It offers interesting photos, charts, and maps; bigger type; anecdotes; and a major emphasis on environmental problems facing grasslands, rather than a scientific exploration of the makeup of grasses, though that is not ignored. It is, in short, highly readable and appealing.

Sherow tells the story of grasslands in the first 155 pages, with a close look at the mother lode of prairies, the Great Plains. As a more recent arrival on earth (about 60 million years ago), grass has a fascinating natural history, and it is well told here. The history of human contact with these lands is documented, including the devastating first contact between Native Americans and Europeans. The issues of water and irrigation, including an in-depth look at the Ogallala Aquifer, are thoroughly explored, and the grasslands ecosystem is viewed as the most endangered on earth.

The rest of the book is taken up with three case studies of Zebulon Pike, wetlands, and John Wesley Power; numerous documents starting with Coronado's report to the King of Spain; and a short encyclopedia of important people, events, and concepts. These are followed by a chronology, bibliography, and index. In addition, each chapter in the text has a long list of supporting references.

One shortcoming is that some of the encyclopedic entries are worded exactly the same as passages in the earlier chapters, making for wasteful repetition. Otherwise, this is a welcome and encouraging addition to a long-neglected library of works on our important grasslands. **Francis Moul**, *Independent Historian, Lincoln, Nebraska.*

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