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Review of *The Great Plains: Perspectives and Prospects* Edited by Merlin P. Lawson and Maurice E. Baker

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Great Plains: Perspectives and Prospects.

Edited by Merlin P. Lawson and Maurice E. Baker. Lincoln: Center for Great Plains Studies; distributed by the University of Nebraska Press, 1981. Tables, figures, maps, references, index. ix + 284 pp. \$9.95.

Most policies and institutions that seem to be successful in the humid eastern United States have been and often still are inadequate for the Great Plains in dealing with the unpredictable changes in the rigorous environment and the external demands from outside the regions. These inadequacies were analyzed at the third annual symposium of the Center for Great Plains Studies, held on March 2 and 3, 1979. In the papers that make up this book, participants identified available resources in the Great Plains and provided information that might assist policy-makers in anticipating future conditions. The papers treat the impact of drought, urban and industrial influences, agricultural practices, land ownership, and changing population size on the people and communities of the Great Plains.

A major weakness of this book is that it tends to focus on resources that have been highly visible to the Great Plains people, but it does not consider renewable energy resources such as wind and solar energy, which are just as available as coal, uranium, and oil shale. Thus the volume presents a rather limited and conventional vision for policy-makers who may use this book. The omission of renewable energy resources is just as serious as the omission of coal deposits would be in the consideration of the future of the Great Plains.

One might expect that the subject of soil would receive much attention, since topsoil is, in the long run, the most important resource in the Great Plains. Yet, an examination of the pages listed for "soil erosion" in the index re-

veals that the historical aspect of the Dust Bowl is covered by William Lockeretz, but the present seriousness of soil erosion in the Great Plains receives little mention.

Despite its shortcomings, the book raises many salient points. Richard Warrick and Martyn Bowden propose two hypotheses related to the unpredictable climate of the Great Plains. The "lessening" hypothesis states that adaptive societies, through technology and social organization, lessen the impact of drought upon the resident population. The "catastrophe" hypothesis states that success in insulating a livelihood system from drought increases the vulnerability to catastrophe from both natural and social perturbations of rare frequency. Ivan Schmedemann points out that widely fluctuating product prices and unpredictable climatic and biological conditions require quick management response, which is a unique capability of the agricultural system in the United States compared with other agricultural systems of the world.

Dean Rugg and Donald Rundquist note that a major weakness of urban fields (cities and their urban peripheries in the rural areas) is political fragmentation. Furthermore, the people of the Great Plains don't perceive regional planning as being necessary.

Paul Gessaman ends the book by pointing out that the image of people in the Great Plains as independent is in reality a myth because of their continued desire for government intervention to alleviate problems. When Great Plains citizens become aware of the limits of fossil energy and of land and water resources, they can begin to control what happens in the Great Plains.

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