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Review of *Battle Against Extinction: Native Fish Management in the American West* by W. L. Minckley and James E. Deacon

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Battle Against Extinction: Native Fish Management in the American West. W. L. Minckley and James E. Deacon, eds. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1991. xviii + 517 pp. Maps, photos, and references. \$40.00 cloth.

If you enjoy the West or are interested in or angry about conservationists and conservation biology, this book is a must. The book consists of the papers presented at a conference celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the Desert Fishes Council and emphasizes fish conservation in the

Colorado River and desert southwest. Before water development (and even now) the West was dry and the image of fishes living in the desert an impossible one. Nevertheless, across the spread of the West, one finds canyon-bound rivers, isolated lakes (some with interesting chemistries), wet meadows, and spring heads. In these improbable settings in that arid land, one found some 170 species of freshwater fishes (v. 600 or so east of the Rockies). Most of the thirty extirpated fishes of the U.S. lived in the West and more than half of the surviving western fishes are in some danger of extinction. Western fishes are peculiar because there are so many trouts, suckers, minnows (up to six feet long), and curious little desert pupfishes. By way of contrast, the East abounds with catfishes, bass and sunfish, perches, and pikes. Today, the West has many eastern fishes (imported) competing for scarce resources with a reduced native fauna.

This book reads easily because much of it can be viewed as an environmental murder mystery with panoramic as well as up-close and personal chapters. The book consists of twenty well-written and well-integrated chapters forming an engaging whole.

The extinction and near-extinction of western fishes are recent phenomena. Hence, the book includes chapters by persons who lived and worked in relatively pristine times as well as those who initially perceived threats and those who attempted to turn the tide of history and to save species from extinction. The photos show, sometimes starkly, some changes wrought in those environments over the past half century. Juxtaposed with the text, some photos are poignant and subtle appeals for a conservation ethic.

There is much despair and much hope in this volume. Much of the land of the West is in the public domain and one might believe, naively, that endangered species would be more secure there than elsewhere. However, as documented repeatedly in this book, agencies having the authority seem(ed) reluctant to exercise it in the face of political and private pressures against restraint of exploitation.

Fishes, especially minnows and suckers, are seen by most people as having no value. As a people, we value fishes for their recreational benefit first and as a protein source second. Only after deep thought and long argument are we willing to assign a value as 'bait for game fish' to the little-appreciated minnows. Suckers are too large for bait and are denigrated as 'trash fish'. The threats to western fishes include mining of water, contamination of water with effluents, fertilizers, herbicides, insecticides, and soil particles, and the introduction of alien fish species to satisfy some immediate human interest. These threats are hardly unique to the West and readers from

the Great Plains should be able to see some of their possible futures in this account of an aspect of the West's past and present. **John D. Lynch**, *School of Biological Sciences, University of Nebraska-Lincoln*.