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Review of *Conservation of Great Plains Ecosystems: Current Science, Future Options*, edited by S. R. Johnson and Aziz Bouzaher

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BOOK REVIEWS

Conservation of Great Plains Ecosystems: Current Science, Future Options. Edited by S. R. Johnson and Aziz Bouzaher. Dordrecht, Boston, and London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995. xvii+433 pp. Maps, tables, notes, references, and index. \$192.50 cloth (ISBN 0-7923-3747-6).

This book stems from a symposium entitled "Conservation of Great Plains Ecosystems: Current Science, Future Options" held in Kansas City in April of 1993, the purpose of which was to forge a "Great Plains regional environmental initiative." The editors explain what this means in an introduction that also summarizes the book's contents and offers recommendations: only with integrated community-based management of identifiable ecosystems, they argue, can the Great Plains avoid further severe ecological distress. The most highly touted word in the volume is "sustainability," the most castigated, "monoculture." And who could disagree with that?

Conservation of Great Plains Ecosystems is organized into eight sections containing twenty-five chapters altogether. After the first section, which introduces the ecosystem concept, each successive one deals with Great Plains resources—community and economic, biological, land, water, mineral, and agricultural. A final section proposes management initiatives, including detailed recommendations for implementing the new initiative.

There is great variation in the effectiveness of the chapters. The most successful ones—Thomas's strongly argued plea for sustainable rural development, for example, or Knopf and Samson's analysis of threats to the biotic integrity of the Great Plains—are not only informative but also persuasive narratives. The less successful ones are technical reports or rather lifeless recitations of formulaic method (this is what we are going to do, this is how we will do it, and this is what we found). The frequency of such chapters ensures that this is not a book to be read for pleasure. It is instead a source book for facts, ideas, and additional references. As such, it is worth having in your library, though the acquisitions officer might balk at the hefty price tag.

There are other drawbacks detracting from the book's value. The way the Great Plains region is defined varies from chapter to chapter, and sometimes Midwest states such as Iowa, Missouri, even Wisconsin are incorporated. The Prairie Provinces of Canada are rightly included in the Great Plains region, but very little attention is paid to them. The maps and other figures, of which there are many, are not always effective, partly because of

the heavy black cartography, but also because some of them lack complete legends. And then there are some startling statements such as “[m]anaged agriculture started in the Great Plains about 150 years ago,” which news certainly would have surprised Pawnee, Omaha, or Mandan women farmers. Still, the book’s objective is a good one, its recommendations are well thought out, and it offers a wealth of factual information. **David Wishart**, *Department of Geography, University of Nebraska-Lincoln*.