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## Review of *Saving the Best of Texas: A Partnership Approach to Conservation* by Richard C. Bartlett

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**Saving the Best of Texas: A Partnership Approach to Conservation.** Richard C. Bartlett. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995. xviii+221 pp. Photos and index. (ISBN 0-292-70835-1) \$19.95 paper.

This is a book of one basic idea: that conservation succeeds best on a “partnership” approach. The opposite of a partnership approach is confrontational environmental politics, which the author regards as on a par—both in its tenor and its results—with a dog fight. The author’s central idea is developed with such detail, however, that the reader immediately becomes absorbed not in the unity of the message but in the sheer diversity of details. This diversity falls into three headings: the problems of the area’s streams (a land of rivers, Texas has only one natural lake), the necessity of developing a personal environmental ethics, and a survey of the “best places” of the state—some saved, some to be saved, others hanging by a thread.

Texas has been described, perceptively, as a large geographic accident. The author simplifies the accident by dividing it into seven regions: Piney Woods, Post Oak Savanna, Blackland Prairie and Cross Timbers (one region), Rolling and High Plains, Gulf Prairies and Marshes, South Texas Plains, Edwards Plateau (the “Hill Country”), and the Trans-Pecos. One thus moves, circuitously, from the mossed cypress-tupelo swamps of the Deep South to the baked stones of the Chihuahua Desert, step by step. Tours through the “best places” in these regions include accounts of geological, native American, as well as European settler history, and descriptions (highly abbreviated) of past environmental abuse. Beautiful photographs (largely color, occasionally black and white) by Leroy Williamson accompany the author’s descriptive prose.

It is no accident that Bartlett, Chair of The Nature Conservancy of Texas, should concentrate his attention on those areas which have been protected through private efforts, particularly by The Nature Conservancy (TNC). But it is not simply that The Nature Conservancy fits the author's conservationist philosophy. Put bluntly, the successes of TNC have been remarkable, and deserved to be known. In a state in which the stirrings of ecological conscience are weak (or often absent) TNC currently owns and protects preserves totaling 300,000 acres. In the moist Big Thicket region of Southeast Texas, for example, TNC owns the 6,000 acre Roy E. Larson Sandyland Sanctuary along 8.5 miles of Village Creek. In the Post Oak-Blackland Prairie country it owns/protects 311 acres of rare never-plowed blackland prairie called the Clymer Meadow. In the Hill Country, at its far western border on the Devils River, TNC owns the 18,552 Dolan Falls Ranch, home to many rare, scarce and endangered species and directly adjacent to the Texas State Parks and Wildlife Devils River State Natural Area. This jointly managed preserve is one of four (possibly six) "core preserves" planned for the Hill Country.

The idea of systematic or quasi-systematic protection for entire regions (an idea drawing on the lessons of both biogeography and restoration ecology) is extended by the author from the Hill Country to other areas. Partnership and semi-partnership approaches to regional preservation, the author shows, are being attempted in the Longleaf Pine-Bluesystem range of East Texas and Western Louisiana, the tropical jungles of the lower Rio Grande Valley, the Gulf Prairies and Marshes, and the long upper Rio Grande border with Mexico. One thus sees that conservation ends neither at regional or state or national borders.

This is a beautiful book, which belongs both on the coffee table or in any vehicle whose occupants set out to explore "the best" of Texas. If it is marred at all, it is by the author's evident distaste for any approach to conservation but his own. Yet in conservation as in any ecosystem diversity seems inescapable and necessary. Without those doubtless unhinged radicals in the Sierra Club (and similar ilk), who build public pressures and seek purely political solutions, the Nature Conservancy would be able to do far less. **Pete A. Y. Gunter**, *Department of Philosophy and Religion Studies, University of North Texas*