

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and
Social Sciences

Great Plains Studies, Center for

Spring 2002

Review of *Biodiversity and Democracy: Rethinking Society and Nature* by Paul M. Woods

Richard K. Baydack
University of Manitoba

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Baydack, Richard K., "Review of *Biodiversity and Democracy: Rethinking Society and Nature* by Paul M. Woods" (2002). *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*. 605.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch/605>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Biodiversity and Democracy: Rethinking Society and Nature. Paul M. Woods. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000. xvi+237 pp. Notes, references, index. C\$75.00 cloth, \$29.95 paper.

Biodiversity and Democracy is a well-written book about the challenges of conserving biological diversity within the democratic societies of North America. Paul Woods espouses a novel and innovative viewpoint on the need to conserve biological diversity over the long haul, a concept not generally well-refined in democratic societies. Woods argues that a new paradigm—The Priority of Biodiversity Principle—needs to take precedence in decision-making. In short, Woods recommends that in public land-use decisions, the conservation of biological diversity should take priority over short-term public interest. Though exactly how decision-makers can ascertain if the Principle has been adhered to is a question the reader is left to ponder, the intent of the message is clear. Specific examples relating to the Great Plains are not evident, since the book focuses primarily on forested landscapes, but extrapolation to prairie landscapes is obvious.

Well laid out in a series of eight chapters formulating the author's "long argument," as he describes his intent, borrowing a phrase from Charles Darwin, the book more or less reaches a climax in chapter six, where Woods concludes that the Priority of Biodiversity Principle is justified in liberal democratic societies and should be a goal for future decision-makers. The impact on future generations from decisions made in the present is a strong and compelling argument to adopt the Principle that Woods suggests.

Chapter 1, in which the author clearly documents the importance of the morality of political decisions, impressed me immensely. Woods shows that science and applied science, including economics, are generally insufficient to render practical decisions about land use. Chapter 2 provides a novel view of biodiversity—seen as an environmental condition—that supports the argument for maintaining biological resources upon which humans depend. Chapters 3 through 5 describe the concepts of utility maximization, economic efficiency, and consensus among negotiating stakeholders. None of these, Woods concludes, can ensure that biodiversity will in fact be con-

served into the future. This leads the reader in chapter 6 to the core arguments for the Priority of Biodiversity Principle. In short, the present generation *must* ensure that sufficient biodiversity is conserved into the future. Chapter 7 provides counterarguments to doubting Thomases who may judge that the conservation of biodiversity will prove too costly. Lastly, chapter 8 explores some constitutional and legal implications, primarily from a Canadian perspective, to ensuring strengthened legislative processes are in place.

Assessing the book's usefulness for students as well as for natural resource practitioners, I find it more appropriate for the former, since the details of its linkage to real-world situations are rather abstract. The book does not offer a practical guide to resource managers trying to put forward a strong rationale for using biodiversity conservation arguments in their daily activities.

Biodiversity and Democracy is a necessary addition to the toolbox of practicing academics and, with careful reading, to natural resource managers. It will serve as a good reference to the policy implications of natural resource decision-making processes. Although all of the answers may not be contained within its pages, the book is a welcome addition to this complex area of biological investigation. **Richard K. Baydack**, *Natural Resources Institute, University of Manitoba*.